A Short History of French Literature



GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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A SHORT HISTORY

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GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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PREFACE.

An attempt to present to students a succinct history of the course of French literature compiled from an examination of that literature itself, and not merely from previous accounts of it is, I believe, a new one in English. There will be observed in the parts of this Short History a considerable difference of method; and as such a difference is not usual in works of the kind, it may be well to state the reasons which have induced me to adopt it. Early French literature is to a great extent anonymous. Moreover, even where it is not, the authors were usually more influenced by certain prevalent styles or forms than by anything else. Into these forms they threw without considerations of congruity whatever they had to say. Nothing, for instance, can be less suitable for historical or scientific disquisition than the octosyllabic metre of a satiric poem. But Jean de Meung and one at least of the authors of *Renart le Contrefait*[1] do not think of composing prose diatribes. At one moment and place the form of the

Chanson de Geste is all-absorbing, at another the form of the Roman d'Aventures, at another the form of the Fabliau. In Book I. I shall therefore proceed by these forms, giving an account of each separately.

After Villon the case changes. Instead of classes of chroniclers, trouvères, jongleurs, we get individual authors of eminence and individuality striking out their own way and saying their own say in the manner not that is fashionable but that seems best to them. During this time, therefore, and especially during that brilliant age of French literature, the sixteenth century, I shall proceed by authors, taking the most remarkable individually, and grouping their followers around them.

From the time of Malherbe the system of schools begins, divided according to subjects. The poet, the dramatist, the historian, have their predecessors, and either intentionally copy them or intentionally innovate upon them. Malherbe and Delille, Corneille and Lemercier, Sarrasin and Rulhière, whatever the difference of merit, stand to one another in a definite relation, and the later writers represent more or less the accepted traditions each of his school. In this part, therefore, I shall proceed by subjects, taking historians, poets, dramatists, etc., together. One difference will be noticed between the third and fourth Books, dealing respectively with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It has seemed unnecessary to allot a special chapter to theological and ecclesiastical writing in the latter, or to scientific writing in the former.

Almost all writers who have attempted literary histories in a small compass have recognised the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of treating

contemporary or recent work on the same scale as older authors. In treating, therefore, of literature subsequent to the appearance of the Romantic movement, I shall content myself with giving a rapid sketch of the principal literary developments and their exponents.

There are doubtless objections to this quadripartite arrangement; but it appears to me better suited for the purpose of laying the foundations of an acquaintance with French literature than a more uniform plan.

The space at my disposal does not admit of combining full information as to the literature with elaborate literary comment upon its characteristics, and there can be no doubt that in such a book as this, destined for purposes of education chiefly, the latter must be sacrificed to the former. As an instance of the sacrifice I may refer to Bk. I. Ch. II. There are some forty or fifty Chansons de Gestes in print, all of which save two or three I have read, and almost every one of which presents points on which it would be most interesting to me to comment. But to do this in the limits would be impossible. Nor is it easy to enter upon disputed literary questions, however tempting they may be. On such points as the relations of Northern to Provençal poetry, the origin of the Chansons and the Arthurian romances, the successive versions of Froissart, the authenticity of the last book of Rabelais, it is only possible here to indicate the most probable conclusions. Generally speaking, the scale of treatment will be found to be adjusted to the system of division already stated. In the middle ages, where the importance of the general form surpasses that of the individual practitioners, comparatively small space is given to these

individuals, and little attempt is made to follow up the scanty and often conjectural particulars of their lives. In the later books I have endeavoured (departing in this respect from the system of my two former sketches of the subject, the article on 'French Literature' in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Primer* which has preceded this work in the Clarendon Press Series) to deal more fully with the greater names whose work is most instructive, and as to whom most curiosity is likely to be felt.

If, as seems very likely, these explanations should not content some of my critics, I can only say that the passages which they may miss here would have been far easier and far pleasanter for me to write than the passages which they will here find. This volume attempts to be, not a series of *causeries* on the literary history of France, but a Short History of French Literature. Two things only I have uniformly aimed at, accuracy as absolute as I could secure, and completeness as thorough as space would allow. In the pursuit of the former object I have thought it well to take no fact or opinion at second-hand where the originals were accessible to me. Manuscript sources I do not pretend to have consulted; but any judgment which is passed in this book may be taken as founded on personal acquaintance with the book or author unless the contrary be stated. Some familiarity with the subject has convinced me that nowhere are opinions of doubtful accuracy more frequently adopted and handed on without enquiry than in the history of literature.

Those who read this book for purposes of study will, it is hoped, be already acquainted with the *Primer*, which is, in effect, an introduction to it, and which

contains what may be called a bird's-eye view of the subject. But, lest the wood should be lost sight of for the trees, notes or interchapters have been inserted between the several books, indicating the general lines of development followed by the great literature which I have attempted to survey. To these I have for the most part confined generalisations as distinct from facts.

I have, I believe, given in the notes a sufficient list of authorities which those who desire to follow up the subject may consult. I have not been indiscriminately lavish in indicating editions of authors, though I believe that full information will be found as to those necessary for a scholarly working knowledge of French literature. I had originally hoped to illustrate the whole book with extracts; but I discovered that such a course would either swell it to an undesirable bulk, or else would provide passages too short and too few to be of much use. I have therefore confined the extracts to the mediaeval period, which can be illustrated by selections of moderate length, and in which such illustration, from the general resemblance between the individuals of each class, and the comparative rarity of the original texts, is specially desirable. To avoid the serious drawback of the difference of principle on which old French reprints have been constructed, as many of these extracts as possible have been printed from Herr Karl Bartsch's admirable *Chrestomathie*. But in cases where extracts were either not to be found there, or were not, in my judgment, sufficiently characteristic, I have departed from this plan. The illustration, by extracts, of the later literature, which requires more space, has been reserved for a separate volume.

I had also intended to subjoin some tabular views of

the chief literary forms, authors, and books of the successive centuries. But when I formed this intention I was not aware that such tables already existed in a book very likely to be in the hands of those who use this work, M. Gustave Masson's *French Dictionary*. Although the plan I had formed was not quite identical with his, and though the execution might have differed in detail, it seemed both unnecessary and to a certain extent ungracious to trespass on the same field. With regard to dates the Index will, it is believed, be found to contain the date of the birth and death, or, if these be not obtainable, the *floruit* of every deceased author of any importance who is mentioned in the book. It has not seemed necessary invariably to duplicate this information in the text. I have also availed myself of this Index (for the compilation of which I owe many thanks to Miss S. A. Ingham) to insert a very few particulars, which seemed to find a better place there than in the body of the volume, as being not strictly literary.

In conclusion, I think it well to say that the composition of this book has, owing to the constant pressure of unavoidable occupations, been spread over a considerable period, and has sometimes been interrupted for many weeks or even months. This being the case, I fear that there may be some omissions, perhaps some inconsistencies, not improbably some downright errors. I do not ask indulgence for these, because that no author who voluntarily publishes a book has a right to ask, nor, perhaps, have critics a right to give it. But if any critic will point out to me any errors of fact, I can promise repentance, as speedy amendment as may be, and what is more, gratitude.

(1882.)

Preface to the Second Edition.—In the second edition the text has been very carefully revised. All corrections of fact indicated by critics and private correspondents, both English and French (among whom I owe especial thanks to M. A. Beljame), have, after verification, been made. A considerable number of additional dates of the publication of important books have been inserted in the text, and the Index has undergone a strict examination, resulting in the correction of some faults which were due not to the original compiler but to myself. On the suggestion of several competent authorities a Conclusion, following the lines of the Interchapters, is now added. If less deference is shown to some strictures which have been passed on the plan of the work and the author's literary views, it is due merely to the conviction that a writer must write his own book in his own way if it is to be of any good to anybody. But in a few places modifications of phrases which seemed to have been misconceived or to be capable of misconception have been made. I have only to add sincere thanks to my critics for the very general and, I fear, scarcely deserved approval with which this Short History of a long subject has been received, and to my readers for the promptness with which a second edition of it has been demanded.

(1884.)

Preface to the Third Edition.—In making, once more, an examination of this book for the purposes of a third edition I have again done my best to correct such mistakes as must (I think I may say inevitably) occur in a very large number of compressed statements about matter often in itself of great

minuteness and complexity. I have found some such mistakes, and I make no doubt that I have left some.

In the process of examination I have had the assistance of two detailed reviews of parts of the book by two French critics, each of very high repute in his way. The first of these, by M. Gaston Paris, in *Romania* (XII, 602 *sqq.*), devoted to the mediæval section only, actually appeared before my second edition: but accident prevented my availing myself of it fully, though some important corrections suggested by it were made on a slip inserted in most of the copies of that issue. The assistance thus given by M. Paris (whose forbearance in using his great learning as a specialist I have most cordially to acknowledge) has been supplemented by the appearance, quite recently, of an admirable condensed sketch of his own[2], which, compact as it is, is a very storehouse of information on the subject. If in this book I have not invariably accepted M. Paris' views or embodied his corrections, it is merely because in points of opinion and inference as opposed to ascertained fact, the use of independent judgment seems to me always advisable.

The other criticism (in this case of the later part of my book), by M. Edmond Scherer, would not seem to have been written in the same spirit. M. Scherer holds very different views from mine on literature in general and French literature in particular; he seems (which is perhaps natural) not to be able to forgive me the difference, and to imagine (which if not unnatural is perhaps a little unreasonable, a little uncharitable, and even, considering an express statement in my preface, a little impolite) that I cannot have read the works on which we differ. I am however grateful to him for showing that a decidedly

hostile examination, conducted with great minuteness and carefully confined to those parts of the subject with which the critic is best acquainted, resulted in nothing but the discovery of about half a dozen or a dozen misprints and slips of fact[3]. One only of these (the very unpardonable blunder of letting Madame de Staël's *Considérations* appear as an early work, which I do not know how I came either to commit or to overlook) is of real importance. Such slips I have corrected with due gratitude. But I have not altered passages where M. Scherer mistakes facts or mistakes me. I need hardly say that I have made no alterations in criticism, and that the passage referring to M. Scherer himself (with the exception of a superfluous accent) stands precisely as it did.

Some additions have been made to the latter part of the book, but not very many: for the attempt to 'write up' such a history to date every few years can only lead to confusion and disproportion. I have had, during the decade which has passed since the book was first planned, rather unusual opportunities of acquainting myself with all new French books of any importance, but a history is not a periodical, and I have thought it best to give rather grudging than free admittance to new-comers. On the other hand, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to obliterate chronological references which the effluxion of time has rendered, or may render, misleading. The notes to which it seemed most important to attract attention, as modifying or enlarging some statement in the text, are specially headed 'Notes to Third Edition': but they represent only a small part of the labour which has been expended on the text. I have also again overhauled and very considerably enlarged the index; while the amplification of the 'Contents' by subjoining to each chapter-heading a

list of the side-headings of the paragraphs it contains, will, I think, be found an advantage. And so I commend the book once more to readers and to students[4].

FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Note to Third Edition.*—M. Gaston Paris expresses some surprise at my saying 'one of the authors,' and attributes both versions to the Troyes clerk (see pp. 52, 53). I can only say that so long as *Renart le Contrefait* is unpublished, if not longer, such a question is difficult to decide: and that the accepted monograph on the subject (that of Wolf) left on my mind the impression of plural authorship as probable.

[2] *La Littérature Française du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1888).

[3] A preface is but an ill place for controversy. As however M. Scherer, thanks chiefly to the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, enjoys some repute in England, I may give an example of his censure. He accuses me roundly of giving in my thirty dates of Corneille's plays 'une dizaine de fausses,' and he quotes (as I do) M. Marty-Laveaux. As since the beginning, years ago, of my Cornelian studies, I have constantly used that excellent edition, though, now as always, reserving my own judgment on points of opinion, I verified M. Scherer's appeal with some alarm at first, and more amusement afterwards. The eminent critic of the *Temps* had apparently contented himself with turning to the half-titles of the plays and noting the dates given, which in ten instances do differ from mine. Had his patience been equal to consulting the learned editor's *Notices*,

he would have found in every case but one the reasons which prevailed and prevail with me given by M. Marty-Laveaux himself. The one exception I admit. I was guilty of the iniquity of confusing the date of the publication of *Othon* with the date of its production, and printing 1665 instead of 1664. So dangerous is it to digest and weigh an editor's arguments, instead of simply copying his dates. Had I done the latter, I had 'scaped M. Scherer's tooth.

[4] The remarks on M. Scherer in this preface (and I need hardly say still more those which occur in the body of the book with reference to a few others of his criticisms) were written long before his fatal illness, and had been sent finally to press some time before the announcement of his death. I had at first thought of endeavouring to suppress those which could be recalled. But it seemed to me on reflection that the best compliment to the memory of a man who was himself nothing if not uncompromising, and towards whom, whether alive or dead, I am not conscious of having entertained any ill-feeling, would be to print them exactly as they stood, with the brief addition that I have not known a critic more acute within his range, or more honest according to what he saw, than M. Edmond Scherer. (March 20, 1889.)

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BOOK I.

MEDIAEVAL LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ORIGINS.

Relation of French to Latin.

Of all European literatures the French is, by general consent, that which possesses the most uniformly fertile, brilliant, and unbroken history. In actual age it may possibly yield to others, but the connection between the language of the oldest and the language of the newest French literature is far closer than in these other cases, and the fecundity of mediaeval writers in France far exceeds that of their rivals elsewhere. For something like three centuries England, Germany, Italy, and more doubtfully and to a smaller extent, Spain, were content for the most part to borrow the matter and the manner of their literary work from France. This brilliant literature was however long before it assumed a regularly organized form, and in order that it might do so a previous literature and a previous language had to be dissolved and precipitated anew. With a few exceptions, to be presently noticed, French literature is not to be found till after the year 1000, that is to say until a greater lapse of time had passed since Caesar's campaigns than has passed from the later date to the present day. Taking the earliest of all monuments, the Strasburg Oaths, as starting-point, we may say that French language and French literature were nine hundred years in process of

formation. The result was a remarkable one in linguistic history. French is unquestionably a daughter of Latin, yet it is not such a daughter as Italian or Spanish. A knowledge of the older language would enable a reader who knew no other to spell out, more or less painfully, the meaning of most pages of the two Peninsular languages; it would hardly enable him to do more than guess at the meaning of a page of French. The long process of gestation transformed the appearance of the new tongue completely, though its grammatical forms and the bulk of its vocabulary are beyond all question Latin. The history of this process belongs to the head of language, not of literature, and must be sought elsewhere. It is sufficient to say that the first mention of a *lingua romana rustica* is found in the seventh century, while allusions in Latin documents show us its gradual use in pulpit and market-place, and even as a vehicle for the rude songs of the minstrel, long before any trace of written French can be found.

Influence of Latin Literature.

Meanwhile, however, Latin was doing more than merely furnishing the materials of the new language. The literary faculty of the Gauls was early noticed, and before their subjection had long been completed they were adepts at using the language of the conquerors. It does not fall within our plan to notice in detail the Latin literature of Gaul and early France, but the later varieties of that literature deserve some little attention, because of the influence which they undoubtedly exercised on the literary forms of the new language. In early French

there is little trace of the influence of the Latin forms which we call classical. It was the forms of the language which has been said to have 'dived under ground with Naevius and come up again with Prudentius' that really influenced the youthful tongue. Ecclesiastical Latin, and especially the wonderful melody of the early Latin hymn-writers, had by far the greatest effect upon it. Ingenious and not wholly groundless efforts have been made to trace the principal forms of early French writing to the services and service-books of the church, the chronicle to the sacred histories, the lyric to the psalm and the hymn, the mystery to the elaborate and dramatic ritual of the church. The *Chanson de Geste*, indeed, displays in its matter and style many traces of Germanic origin, but the metre with its regular iambic cadence and its rigid caesura testifies to Latin influence. The service thus performed to the literature was not unlike the service performed to the language. In the one case the scaffolding, or rather the skeleton, was furnished in the shape of grammar; in the other a similar skeleton, in the shape of prosody, was supplied. Important additions were indeed made by the fresh elements introduced. Rhyme Latin had itself acquired. But of the musical refrains which are among the most charming features of early French lyric poetry we find no vestige in the older tongue.

Early Monuments.

The history of the French language, as far as concerns literature, from the seventh to the eleventh century, can be rapidly given. The earliest mention of the Romance tongue as distinguished from Latin

and from German dialect refers to 659, and occurs in the life of St. Mummolinus or Momolenus, bishop of Noyon, who was chosen for that office because of his knowledge of the two languages, Teutonic and Romanic[5]. We may therefore assume that Mummolinus preached in the *lingua Romana*. To the same century is referred the song of St. Faron, bishop of Meaux[6], but this only exists in Latin, and a Romance original is inferred rather than proved. In the eighth century the Romance eloquence of St. Adalbert is commended[7], and to the same period are referred the glossaries of Reichenau and Cassel, lists containing in the first case Latin and Romance equivalents, in the second Teutonic and Romance[8]. By the beginning of the ninth century it was compulsory for bishops to preach in Romance, and to translate such Latin homilies as they read[9]; and to this same era has been referred a fragmentary commentary on the Book of Jonah[10], included in the latest collection of 'Monuments[11].' In 842 we have the Strasburg Oaths, celebrated alike in French history and French literature. The text of the MS. of Nithard which contains them is of the tenth century.

We now come to documents less shapeless. The tenth century itself gives us the song of St. Eulalie, a poem on the Passion, a life of St. Leger, and perhaps a poem on Boethius. These four documents are of the highest interest. Not merely has the language assumed a tolerably regular form, but its great division into Langue d'Oc and Langue d'Oil is already made, and grammar, prosody, and other necessities or ornaments of bookwriting, are present. The following extracts will illustrate this part of French literature. The Romance oaths and the 'St. Eulalie' are given in full, the 'Passion' and the 'St. Leger' in extract; it will be observed that the interval between

the first and the others is of very considerable width. This interval probably represents a century of active change, and of this unfortunately we have no monuments to mark the progress accurately.

Les Serments de Strasbourg de 842.

Pro deo amur et pro christian poblo et nostro commun salvament, d'ist di in avant, in quant deus savir et podir me dunat, si salvarai eo cist meon fradre Karlo et in aiudha et in cadhuna cosa, si cum on per dreit son fradra salvar dist, in o quid il mi altresi fazet, et ab Ludher nul plaid nunqua prindrai, qui meon vol cist meon fradre Karle in damno sit.

Si Lodhuvigs sagrament, quæ son fradre Karlo jurat, conservat, et Karlus meos sendra de sua part nun los tanit, si io returnar nun l'int pois, ne io ne nëuls, cui eo returnar int pois, in nulla aiudha contra Lodhuwig nun li iv er.

Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie.

Buona pulcella fut Eulalia,
bel auret corps, bellezour anima.
Voldrent la veintre li deo inimi,
voldrent la faire dïaule servir.
Elle non eskoltet les mals conselliers,
qu'elle deo raneiet, chi maent sus en ciel,
Ne por or ned argent ne paramenz,
por manatce regiel ne preiement.
Nïule cose non la pouret omque pleier,
la polle sempre non amast lo deo

menestier.
E poro fut presentede Maximiien,
chi rex eret a cels dis sovre pagiens
El li enortet, dont lei nonque chielt.
qued elle fuiet lo nom christiien.
Ell' ent adunet lo suon element,
melz sostendreiet les empedementz,
Qu'elle perdesse sa virginitet:
poros furet morte a grand honestet.
Enz enl fou la getterent, com arde tost.
elle colpes non auret, poro nos coist.
A ezo nos voldret concreidre li rex
pagiens;
ad une spede li roveret tolir lo chief.
La domnizelle celle kose non contredist,
volt lo seule lazsier, si ruovet Krist.
In figure de colomb volat a ciel.
tuit orem, que por nos deguet preier,
Qued auuisset de nos Christus mercit
post la mort et a lui nos laist venir
Par souue clementia.

La Passion Du Christ.

Christus Jhesus den s'en leved,
Gehsesmani vil' es n'anez.
toz sos fidels seder rovet,
avan orar sols en anet.
Grant fu li dois, fort marrimenz.
si condormirent tuit adés.
Jhesus cum veg los esveled,
trestoz orar ben los manded.
E dunc orar cum el anned,
si fort sudor dunques suded,
que cum lo sangs a terra curren
de sa sudor las sanctas gutas.

Als sos fidels cum repadred,
tam benlement los conforted
li fel Judas ja s'aproismed
ab gran cumpannie dels judeus.
Jhesus cum vidra los judeus,
zo lor demandet que querént.
il li respondent tuit adun
'Jhesum querem *Nazarenum*.'
'Eu soi aquel,' zo dis Jhesus.
tuit li felun cadegren jos.
terce ves lor o demanded,
a totas treis chedent envers.

Vie de Saint Léger.

Domine deu devemps lauder
et a sus sancz honor porter;
in su' amor cantomps dels sanz
quæ por lui augrent granz aanz;
et or es temps et si est biens
quæ nos cantumps de sant Lethgier.
Primos didrai vos dels honors
quie il auuret ab duos seniors;
apres ditrai vos dels aanz
que li suos corps susting si granz,
et Evvruïns, cil deumentiz,
qui lui a grand torment occist.
Quant infans fud, donc a ciels temps
al rei lo duistrent soi parent,
qui donc regnevet a ciel di:
cio fud Lothiers fils Baldequi.
il le amat; deu lo covit;
rovat que *litteras* apresist.

Dialects and

Provincial Literatures.

Considering the great extent and the political divisions of the country called France, it is not surprising that the language which was so slowly formed should have shown considerable dialectic variations. The characteristics of these dialects, Norman, Picard, Walloon, Champenois, Angevin, and so forth, have been much debated by philologists. But it so happens that the different provinces displayed in point of literature considerable idiosyncrasy, which it is scarcely possible to dispute. Hardly a district of France but contributed something special to her wide and varied literature. The South, though its direct influence was not great, undoubtedly set the example of attention to lyrical form and cadence. Britanny contributed the wonderfully suggestive Arthurian legends, and the peculiar music and style of the *lai*. The border districts of Flanders seem to deserve the credit of originating the great beast-epic of Reynard the Fox; Picardy, Eastern Normandy, and the Isle of France were peculiarly rich in the *fabliau*; Champagne was the special home of the lighter lyric poetry, while almost all northern France had a share in the Chansons de Gestes, many districts, such as Lorraine and the Cambrésis, having a special *geste* of their own.

Beginning of Literature proper.

It is however with the eleventh century that the history of French literature properly so called begins.

We have indeed few Romance manuscripts so early as this, the date of most of them not being earlier than the twelfth. But by the eleventh century not merely were laws written in French (charters and other formal documents were somewhat later), not merely were sermons constantly composed and preached in that tongue, but also works of definite literature were produced in it. The *Chanson de Roland* is our only instance of its epic literature, but is not likely to have stood alone: the mystery of *The Ten Virgins*, a medley of French and Latin, has been (but perhaps falsely) ascribed to the same date; and lyric poetry, even putting aside the obscure and doubtful *Cantilènes*, was certainly indulged in to a considerable extent. From this date it is therefore possible to abandon generalities, and taking the successive forms and developments of literature, to deal with them in detail.

Before however we attempt a systematic account of French literature as it has been actually handed down to us, it is necessary to deal very briefly with two questions, one of which concerns the antecedence of possible ballad literature to the existing Chansons de Gestes, the other the machinery of diffusion to which this and all the early historical developments of the written French language owed much.

Cantilenae.

It has been held by many scholars, whose opinions deserve respect, that an extensive literature of *Cantilenae*[12], or short historical ballads, preceded the lengthy epics which we now possess, and was to a certain extent worked up in these compositions. It is hardly necessary to say that this depends in part

upon a much larger question—the question, namely, of the general origins of epic poetry. There are indeed certain references[13] to these Cantilenae upon which the theories alluded to have been built. But the Cantilenae themselves have, as one of the best of French literary historians, the late M. Paulin Paris, remarks of another debated product, the Provençal epic, only one defect, 'le défaut d'être perdu,' and investigation on the subject is therefore more curious than profitable. No remnant of them survives save the already-mentioned Latin prose canticle of St. Faron, in which vestiges of a French and versified original are thought to be visible, and the ballad of Saucourt, a rough song in a Teutonic dialect[14]. In default of direct evidence an argument has been sought to be founded on the constant transitions, repetitions, and other peculiarities of the Chansons, some of which (and especially *Roland*, the most famous of all) present traces of repeated handlings of the same subject, such as might be expected in work which was merely that of a *diaskeuast*[15] of existing lays.

Trouvères and Jongleurs.

It is however probable that the explanation of this phenomenon need not be sought further than in the circumstances of the composition and publication of these poems, circumstances which also had a very considerable influence on the whole course and character of early French literature. We know nothing of the rise or origin of the two classes of *Trouveurs* and *Jongleurs*. The former (which it is needless to say is the same word as *Troubadour*, and *Trobador*, and *Trovatore*) is the term for the

composing class, the latter for the performing one. But the separation was not sharp or absolute, and there are abundant instances of Trouvères[16] who performed their own works, and of Jongleurs who aspired to the glories if not of original authorship, at any rate of alteration and revision of the legends they sang or recited. The natural consequence of this irregular form of publication was a good deal of repetition in the works published. Different versions of the legends easily enough got mixed together by the copyist, who it must be remembered was frequently a mere mechanical reproducer, and neither Trouvère nor Jongleur; nor should it be forgotten that, so long as recitation was general, repetitions of this kind were almost inevitable as a rest to the reciter's memory, and were scarcely likely to attract unfavourable remark or criticism from the audience. We may therefore conclude, without entering further into the details of a debate unsuitable to the plan of this history, that, while but scanty evidence has been shown of the existence previous to the *Chansons de Gestes* of a ballad literature identical in subject with those compositions, at the same time the existence of such a literature is neither impossible nor improbable. It is otherwise with the hypothesis of the existence of prose chronicles, from which the early epics (and *Roland* in particular) are also held to have derived their origin. But this subject will be better handled when we come to treat of the beginnings of French prose. For the present it is sufficient to say that, with the exception of the scattered fragments already commented upon, there is no department of French literature before the eleventh century and the *Chansons de Gestes*, which possesses historical existence proved by actual monuments, and thus

demands or deserves treatment here.

FOOTNOTES:

[5] 'Fama bonorum operum, quia praevalebat non tantum in Teutonica sed in Romana lingua, Lotharii regis ad aures usque perveniente,' says his life. The chronicler Sigebert confirms the statement that he was made bishop 'quod Romanam non minus quam Teutonicam calleret linguam.' *Lingua Latina* and *Lingua Romana* are from this time distinguished.

[6] The Latin form of the song is given by Helgaire, Bishop of Meaux, who wrote a life of St. Faron, his predecessor, towards the end of the ninth century. Helgaire uses the words 'juxta rusticitatem,' 'carmen rusticum;' and *Lingua Rustica* is usually if not universally synonymous with *Lingua Romana*.

[7] 'Si vulgari id est romana lingua loqueretur omnium aliarum putares inscium.'

[8] The Reichenau Glossary is at Carlsruhe. It was published in 1863 by Holtzmann. The Cassel Glossary, which came from Fulda, was published in the last century (1729).

[9] Ordered by the Councils of Tours, Rheims, and Arles (813-851).

[10] In the Library at Valenciennes.

[11] *Les plus anciens Monuments de la Langue Française.* Paris, 1875.

[12] The subject of the Cantilenae is discussed at great length by M. Léon Gautier, *Les Epopées Françaises*, Ed. 2, vol. i. caps. 8-13. Paris, 1878.

[13] These, which are for the most part very

vague and not very early, will be found fully quoted and discussed in Gautier, l. c.

[14] Published by Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1837).

[15] This word (= arranger or putter-in-order) is familiar in Homeric discussion, and therefore seems appropriate. M. Gaston Paris speaks with apparent confidence of the pre-existing *chants*, and, in matter of authority, no one speaks with more than he: but it can hardly be said that there is proof of the fact.

[16] The older and in this case more usual form.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHANSONS DE GESTES.

The earliest form which finished literature took in France was that of epic or narrative poetry. Towards the middle of the eleventh century certainly, and probably some half-century earlier, poems of regular construction and considerable length began to be written. These are the *Chansons de Gestes*, so called from their dealing with the *Gestes*[17], or heroic families of legendary or historical France. It is remarkable that this class of composition, notwithstanding its age, its merits, and the abundant examples of it which have been preserved, was one of the latest to receive recognition in modern times.

The matter of many of the Chansons, under their later form of verse or prose romances of chivalry, was indeed more or less known in the eighteenth century. But an appreciation of their real age, value, and interest has been the reward of the literary investigations of our own time. It was not till 1837 that the oldest and the most remarkable of them was first edited from the manuscript found in the Bodleian Library[18]. Since that time investigation has been constant and fruitful, and there are now more than one hundred of these interesting poems known.

Origin of Chansons de Gestes.

The origin and sources of the *Chansons de Gestes* have been made a matter of much controversy. We have already seen how, from the testimony of historians and the existence of a few fragments, it appears that rude lays or ballads in the different vernacular tongues of the country were composed and sung if not written down at very early dates. According to one theory, we are to look for the origin of the long and regular epics of the eleventh and subsequent centuries in these rude compositions, first produced independently, then strung together, and lastly subjected to some process of editing and union. It has been sought to find proof of this in the frequent repetitions which take place in the Chansons, and which sometimes amount to the telling of the same incident over and over again in slightly varying words. Others have seen in this peculiarity only a result of improvisation in the first place, and unskilful or at least uncritical copying in the second. This, however, is a question rather interesting than

important. What is certain is that no literary source of the Chansons is now actually in existence, and that we have no authentic information as to any such originals. At a certain period—approximately given above—the fashion of narrative poems on the great scale seems to have arisen in France. It spread rapidly, and was eagerly copied by other nations.

Definition.

The definition of a *Chanson de Geste* is as follows. It is a narrative poem, dealing with a subject connected with French history, written in verses of ten or twelve syllables, which verses are arranged in stanzas of arbitrary length, each stanza possessing a distinguishing assonance or rhyme in the last syllable of each line. The assonance, which is characteristic of the earlier Chansons, is an imperfect rhyme, in which identity of vowel sound is all that is necessary. Thus *traitor*, *felon*, *compaingnons*, *manons*, *noz*, the first, fourth, and fifth of which have no character of rhyme whatever in modern poetry, are sufficient terminations for an assonanced poem, because the last vowel sound, o, is identical. There is moreover in this versification a regular caesura, sometimes after the fourth, sometimes after the sixth syllable; and in a few of the older examples the stanzas, or as they are sometimes called *laisses*, terminate in a shorter line than usual, which is not assonanced. This metrical system, it will be observed, is of a fairly elaborate character, a character which has been used as an argument by those who insist on the existence of a body of ballad literature anterior to the Chansons. We shall see in the following chapters how this double definition of a *Chanson de Geste*, by matter and by form, serves to exclude from the title

other important and interesting classes of compositions slightly later in date.

Period of Composition.

The period of composition of these poems extended, speaking roughly, over three centuries. In the eleventh they began, but the beginnings are represented only by *Roland*, the *Voyage de Charlemagne*, and perhaps *Le Roi Louis*. Most and nearly all the best date from the twelfth. The thirteenth century also produces them in great numbers, but by this time a sensible change has come over their manner, and after the beginning of the fourteenth only a few pieces deserving the title are written. They then undergo transformation rather than neglect, and we shall meet them at a later period in other forms. Before dealing with other general characteristics of the early epics of France it will be well to give some notion of them by actual selection and narrative. For this purpose we shall take two Chansons typical of two out of the three stages through which they passed. *Roland* will serve as a sample of the earliest, *Amis et Amiles* of the second. Of the third, as less characteristic in itself and less marked by uniform features, it will be sufficient to give some account when we come to the compositions which chiefly influenced it, namely the romances of Arthur and of antiquity.

Chanson de Roland.

The *Chanson de Roland*, the most ancient and characteristic of these poems, though extremely popular in the middle ages[19], passed with them

into obscurity. The earliest allusion to the Oxford MS., which alone represents its earliest form, was made by Tyrwhitt a century ago. Conybeare forty years later dealt with it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1817, and by degrees the reviving interest of France in her older literature attracted French scholars to this most important monument of the oldest French. It was first published as a whole by M. F. Michel in 1837, and since that time it has been the subject of a very great amount of study. Its length is 4001 decasyllabic lines, and it concludes with an obscure assertion of authorship, publication or transcription by a certain Turoldus[20]. The date of the Oxford MS. is probably the middle of the twelfth century, but its text is attributed by the best authorities to the end of the eleventh. There are other MSS., but they are all either mutilated or of much later date. The argument of the poem is as follows:—

Charlemagne has warred seven years in Spain, but king Marsile of Saragossa still resists the Christian conqueror. Unable however to meet Charlemagne in the field, he sends an embassy with presents and a feigned submission, requesting that prince to return to France, whither he will follow him and do homage. Roland opposes the reception of these offers, Ganelon speaks in their favour, and so does Duke Naimes. Then the question is who shall go to Saragossa to settle the terms. Roland offers to go himself, but being rejected as too impetuous, suggests Ganelon—a suggestion which bitterly annoys that knight and by irritating him against Roland sows the seeds of his future treachery. Ganelon goes to Marsile, and at first bears himself truthfully and gallantly. The heathen king however undermines his faith, and a treacherous assault on

the French rearguard when Charlemagne shall be too far off to succour it is resolved on and planned. Then the traitor returns to Charles with hostages and mighty gifts. The return to France begins; Roland is stationed to his great wrath in the fatal place, the rest of the army marches through the Pyrenees, and meanwhile Marsile gathers an enormous host to fall upon the isolated rearguard. There is a long catalogue of the felon and miscreant knights and princes that follow the Spanish king. The pagan host, travelling by cross paths of the mountains, soon reaches and surrounds Roland and the peers. Oliver entreats Roland to sound his horn that Charles may hear it and come to the rescue, but the eager and inflexible hero refuses. Archbishop Turpin blesses the doomed host, and bids them as the price of his absolution strike hard. The battle begins and all its incidents are told. The French kill thousands, but thousands more succeed. Peer after peer falls, and when at last Roland blows the horn it is too late. Charlemagne hears it and turns back in an agony of sorrow and haste. But long before he reaches Roncevaux Roland has died last of his host, and alone, for all the Pagans have fallen or fled before him.

The arrival of Charlemagne, his grief, and his vengeance on the Pagans, should perhaps conclude the poem. There is however a sort of afterpiece, in which the traitor Ganelon is tried, his fate being decided by a single combat between his kinsman Pinabel and a champion named Thierry, and is ruthlessly put to death with all his clansmen who have stood surety for him. Episodes properly so called the poem has none, though the character of Oliver is finely brought out as contrasted with Roland's somewhat unreasoning valour, and there is

one touching incident when the poet tells how the Lady Aude, Oliver's sister and Roland's betrothed, falls dead without a word when the king tells her of the fatal fight at Roncevaux. The following passage will give an idea of the style of this famous poem. It may be noticed that the curious refrain *Aoi* has puzzled all commentators, though in calling it a refrain we have given the most probable explanation: —

Rollanz s'en turnet, par le camp vait tut suls
cercet les vals e si cercet les munz;
iloec truvat Ivorie et Ivun,
truvat Gerin, Gerer sun cumpaignun,
iloec truvat Engeler le Gascun
e si truvat Berenger e Orun,
iloec truvat Anseïs e Sansun,
truvat Gérard le veill de Russillun:
par un e un les ad pris le barun,
al arcevesque en est venuz atut,
sis mist en reng dedevant ses genuilz.
li arcevesque ne poet muër n'en plurt;
lievet sa main, fait sa beneïçun;
aprés ad dit 'mare fustes, seignurs!
tutes voz anmes ait deus li glorïus!
en pareïs les mete en seintes flurs!
la meie mort me rent si anguissus,
ja ne verrai le riche emperëur.'
Rollanz s'en turnet, le camp vait recercer;
desoz un pin e folut e ramer
sun cumpaignun ad truved Oliver,
cuntre sun piz estreit l'ad enbracet.
si cum il poet al arcevesque en vent,
sur un escut l'ad as altres culchet;

e l'arcevesque l'ad asols e seignet.
idonc agreget le doel e la pitet.
ço dit Rollanz 'bels cumpainz Oliver,
vos fustes filz al bon cunte Reiner,
ki tint la marche de Genes desur mer;
pur hanste freindre e pur escuz pecier
e pur osberc e rompre e desmailler,
[pur orgoillos veintre e esmaier]
e pur prozdomes tenir e conseiller
e pur glutuns e veintre e esmaier
en nule terre n'ot meillor chevaler.'
Li quens Rollanz, quant il veit morz ses pers
e Oliver, qu'il tant poeit amer,
tendrur en out, cumencet a plurer,
en sun visage fut mult desculurez.
si grant doel out que mais ne pout ester,
voeillet o nun, a terre chet pasmet.
dist l'arcevesques 'tant mare fustes, ber.'
Li arcevesques quant vit pasmer Rollant,
dunc out tel doel, unkes mais n'out si grant;
tendit sa main, si ad pris l'olifan.
en Rencesvals ad une ewe curant;
aler i volt, si'n durrat a Rollant.
tant s'esforçat qu'il se mist en estant,
sun petit pas s'en turnet cancelant,
il est si fieble qu'il ne poet en avant,
nen ad vertut, trop ad perdut del sanc.
einz que om alast un sul arpent de camp,
fait li le coer, si est chaeit avant:
la sue mort li vait mult angoissant.
Li quenz Rollanz revient de pasmeisuns,
sur piez se drecet, mais il ad grant dulur;
guardet aval e si guardet amunt:
sur l'erbe verte, ultre ses cumpaignuns,

la veit gesir le nobilie barun,
ço est l'arcevesque que deus mist en sun num;
cleimet sa culpe, si reguardet amunt,
cuntre le ciel amsdous ses mains ad juinz,
si prïet deu que pareïs li duinst.
morz est Turpin le guerreier Charlun.
par granz batailles e par mult bels sermons
cuntre paiens fut tuz tens campïuns.
deus li otreit seinte beneïçun! Aoi.
Quant Rollanz vit l'arcevesque qu'est morz,
senz Oliver une mais n'out si grant dol,
e dist un mot que destrenche le cor:
'Carles de France chevalce cum il pot;
en Rencesvals damage i ad des noz;
li reis Marsilie ad sa gent perdut tot,
cuntre un des noz ad ben quarante morz.'
Li quenz Rollanz veit l'arcevesque a terre,
defors sun cors veit gesir la buëlle,
desuz le frunt li buillit la cervelle.
desur sun piz, entre les dous furcelles,
cruisiedes ad ses blanches mains, les belles.
forment le pleint a la lei de sa terre.
'e, gentilz hom, chevaler de bon aire,
hoi te cumant al glorïus celeste:
ja mais n'ert hume plus volenters le serve.
des les apostles ne fut honc tel prophete
pur lei tenir e pur humes atraire.
ja la vostre anme nen ait doel ne sufraite!
de pareïs li seit la porte uverte!'

Amis et



As *Roland* is by far the most interesting of those Chansons which describe the wars with the Saracens, so *Amis et Amiles*[21] may be taken as representing those where the interest is mainly domestic. *Amis et Amiles* is the earliest vernacular form of a story which attained extraordinary popularity in the middle ages, being found in every language and in most literary forms, prose and verse, narrative and dramatic. This popularity may partly be assigned to the religious and marvellous elements which it contains, but is due also to the intrinsic merits of the story. The Chanson contains 3500 lines, dates probably from the twelfth century, and is written, like *Roland*, in decasyllabic verse, but, unlike *Roland*, has a shorter line of six syllables and not assonanced at the end of each stanza. Its story is as follows:—

Amis and Amiles were two noble knights, born and baptized on the same day, who had the Pope for sponsor, and whose comradeship was specially sanctioned by a divine message, and by the miraculous likeness which existed between them. They were however brought up, the one in Berri, the other in Auvergne, and did not meet till both had received knighthood. As soon as they had joined company, they resolved to offer their services to Charles, and did him great service against rebels. Here the action proper begins. The friends arouse the jealousy of Hardré, a felon knight, of Ganelon's lineage and likeness. Hardré engages Gombaud of Lorraine, an enemy of the Emperor, to attack the two friends; but the treason does not succeed, and the traitor, to escape unpleasant enquiries, recommends Charles to bestow his own niece Lubias on Amiles. The latter declares that Amis deserves her better, and

to Amis she is married, bearing however no good-will to Amiles for his resignation of her and for his firm hold on her husband's affection. Meanwhile, the daughter of Charles, Bellicent, conceives a violent passion for Amiles, and the traitor Hardré unfortunately becomes aware of the matter. He at once accuses Amiles of treason, and the knight is too conscious of the dubiousness of his cause to be very willing to accept the wager of battle. From this difficulty he is saved by Amis, who comes to Paris from his distant seignory of Blaivies (Blaye), and fights the battle in the name and armour of his friend, while the latter goes to Blaye and plays the part of his preserver. Both ventures are made easier by the extraordinary resemblance of the pair. Amis is successful; he slays Hardré, and then has no little difficulty in saving himself from a forced marriage with Bellicent. This embroglio is smoothed out, and Amiles and Bellicent are happily united. The generous Amis however has not been able to avoid forswearing himself while playing the part of Amiles; and this sin is punished, according to a divine warning, by an attack of leprosy. His wife Lubias seizes the opportunity, procures a separation from him, and almost starves him, or would do so but for two faithful servants and his little son. At last a means of cure is revealed to him. If Amiles and Bellicent will allow their two sons to be slain the blood will recover Amis of his leprosy. The stricken knight journeys painfully to his friend and tells him the hard condition. Amiles does not hesitate, and the following passage tells his deed:—

> Li cuens Amiles un petit s'atarja,
> vers les anfans pas por pas en ala,
> dormans les treuve, moult par les

resgarda,
s'espee lieve, ocirre les voldra;
mais de ferir un petit se tarja.
li ainznés freres de l'effroi s'esveilla
que li cuens mainne qui en la chambre
entra,
l'anfes se torne, son pere ravisa,
s'espee voit, moult grant paor en a,
son pere apelle, si l'en arraisonna:
'biax sire peres, por deu qui tout forma,
que volez faire? nel me celez vos ja.
ainz mais nus peres tel chose ne pensa.'
'biaux sire fiuls, ocirre vos voil ja
et le tien frere qui delez toi esta;
car mes compains Amis qui moult m'ama,
dou sanc de vos li siens cors garistra,
que gietez est dou siecle.'
'Biax tres douz peres,' dist l'anfes
erramment,
'quant vos compains avra garissement,
se de nos sans a sor soi lavement,
nos sommes vostre de vostre engenrement,
faire en poëz del tout a vo talent.
or nos copez les chiés isnellement;
car dex de glorie nos avra en present,
en paradis en irommes chantant
et proierommes Jhesu cui tout apent
que dou pechié vos face tensement,
vos et Ami, vostre compaingnon gent;
mais nostre mere, la bele Belissant,
nos saluëz por deu omnipotent.'
li cuens l'oït, moult grans pitiés l'en prent
que touz pasmez a la terre s'estent.
quant se redresce, si reprinst hardement.
or orroiz ja merveilles, bonne gent,
que tex n'oïstes en tout vostre vivant.

li cuens Amiles vint vers le lit esrant,
hauce l'espee, li fiuls le col estent.
or est merveilles se li cuers ne li ment.
la teste cope li peres son anfant,
le sanc reciut et cler bacin d'argent:
a poi ne chiet a terre.

No sooner has the blood touched Amis than he is cured, and the knights solemnly visit the church where Bellicent and the people are assembled. The story is told and the mother, in despair, rushes to the chamber where her dead children are lying. But she finds them living and in full health, for a miracle has been wrought to reward the faithfulness of the friends now that suffering has purged them of their sin.

This story, touching in itself, is most touchingly told in the Chanson. No poem of the kind is more vivid in description, or fuller of details of the manners of the time, than *Amis et Amiles*. Bellicent and Lubias, the former passionate and impulsive but loving and faithful, the latter treacherous, revengeful, and cold-hearted, give perhaps the earliest finished portraits of feminine character to be found in French literature. Amis and Amiles themselves are presented to us under so many more aspects than Roland and Oliver that they dwell better in the memory. The undercurrent of savagery which distinguished mediæval times, and the rapid changes of fortune which were possible therein, are also well brought out. Not even the immolation of Ganelon's hostages is so striking as the calm ferocity with which Charlemagne dooms his wife and son as well as his daughter to pay with their lives the penalty of Bellicent's fault; while the sudden lapse of Amis from his position of feudal lordship at Blaye to that of a

miserable outcast, smitten and marked out for public scorn and ill-treatment by the visitation of God, is unusually dramatic. *Amis et Amiles* bears to *Roland* something not at all unlike the relation of the Odyssey to the Iliad. Its continuation, *Jourdains de Blaivies*, adds the element of foreign travel and adventure; but that element is perhaps more characteristically represented, and the representation has certainly been more generally popular, in *Huon de Bordeaux*.

Other principal Chansons.

Of the remaining Chansons, the following are the most remarkable. *Aliscans* (twelfth century) deals with the contest between William of Orange, the great Christian hero of the south of France, and the Saracens. This poem forms, according to custom, the centre of a whole group of Chansons dealing with the earlier and later adventures of the hero, his ancestors, and descendants. Such are *Le Couronnement Loys*, *La Prise d'Orange*, *Le Charroi de Nimes*, *Le Moniage Guillaume*. The series formed by these and others[22] is among the most interesting of these groups. *Le Chevalier au Cygne* is a title applied directly to a somewhat late version of an old folk-tale, and more generally to a series of poems connected with the House of Bouillon and the Crusades. The members of this bear the separate headings *Antioche*[23], *Les Chétifs*, *Les Enfances Godefroy*, etc. *Antioche*, the first of these, which describes the exploits of the Christian host, first in attacking and then in defending that city, is one of the finest of the Chansons, and is probably in its original form not much later than the events it

describes, being written by an eye-witness. The variety of its personages, the vivid picture of the alternations of fortune, the vigour of the verse, are all remarkable. This group is terminated by *Baudouin de Sebourc*[24], a very late but very important Chanson, which falls in with the poetry of the fourteenth century, and the *Bastart de Bouillon*[25]. *La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*[26] is the oldest form in which the adventures of one of the most popular and romantic of Charlemagne's heroes are related. *Fierabras* had also a very wide popularity, and contains some of the liveliest pictures of manners to be found in these poems, in its description of the rough horse-play of the knights and the unfilial behaviour of the converted Saracen princess. This poem is also of much interest philologically[27]. *Garin le Loherain*[28] is the centre of a remarkable group dealing not directly with Charlemagne, but with the provincial disputes and feuds of the nobility of Lorraine. *Raoul de Cambrai*[29] is another of the Chansons which deal with 'minor houses,' as they are called, in contradistinction to the main Carlovingian cycle. *Gérard de Roussillon*[30] ranks as a poem with the best of all the Chansons. *Hugues Capet*[31], though very late, is attractive by reason of the glimpses it gives us of a new spirit supplanting that of chivalry proper. In it the heroic distinctly gives place to the burlesque. *Macaire*[32], besides being written in a singular dialect, in which French is mingled with Italian, supplies the original of the well-known dog of Montargis. *Huon de Bordeaux*[33], already mentioned, was not only more than usually popular at the time of its appearance, but has supplied Shakespeare with some of the dramatis personae of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Wieland and Weber with the plot of a well-known poem and opera.

Jourdains de Blaivies, the sequel to *Amis et Amiles*, contains, besides much other interesting matter, the incident which forms the centre of the plot of *Pericles*. *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* or *Renaut de Montauban*[34] is the foundation of one of the most popular French chap-books. *Les Saisnes*[35] deals with Charlemagne's wars with Witekind. *Berte aus grans Piés*[36] is a very graceful story of womanly innocence. *Doon de Mayence*[37], though not early, includes a charming love-episode. *Gérard de Viane*[38] contains the famous battle of Roland and Oliver. The *Voyage de Charlemagne à Constantinople*[39] is semi-burlesque in tone and one of the earliest in which that tone is perceptible.

Social and Literary Characteristics.

In these numerous poems there is recognisable in the first place a distinct family likeness which is common to the earliest and latest, and in the second, the natural difference of manners which the lapse of three hundred years might be expected to occasion. There is a sameness which almost amounts to monotony in the plot of most Chansons de Gestes: the hero is almost always either falsely accused of some crime, or else treacherously exposed to the attacks of Saracens, or of his own countrymen. The agents of this treachery are commonly of the blood of the arch-traitor Ganelon, and are almost invariably discomfited by the good knight or his friends and avengers. The part[40] which Charlemagne plays in these poems is not usually dignified: he is represented as easily gulled, capricious, and almost ferocious in temper, ungrateful, and ready to accept bribes and gifts. His

good angel is always Duke Naimes of Bavaria, the Nestor of the Carlovingian epic. In the earliest Chansons the part played by women is not so conspicuous as in the later, but in all except *Roland* it has considerable prominence. Sometimes the heroine is the wife, daughter, or niece of Charlemagne, sometimes a Saracen princess. But in either case she is apt to respond without much delay to the hero's advances, which, indeed, she sometimes anticipates. The conduct of knights to their ladies is also far from being what we now consider chivalrous. Blows are very common, and seem to be taken by the weaker sex as matters of course. The prevailing legal forms are simple and rather sanguinary. The judgment of God, as shown by ordeal of battle, settles all disputes; but battle is not permitted unless several nobles of weight and substance come forward as sponsors for each champion; and sponsors as well as principal risk their lives in case of the principal's defeat, unless they can tempt the king's cupidity. These common features are necessarily in the case of so large a number of poems mixed with much individual difference, nor are the Chansons by any means monotonous reading. Their versification is pleasing to the ear, and their language, considering its age, is of surprising strength, expressiveness, and even wealth. Though they lack the variety, the pathos, the romantic chivalry, and the mystical attractions of the Arthurian romances, there is little doubt that they paint, far more accurately than their successors, an actually existing state of society, that which prevailed in the palmy time of the feudal system, when war and religion were deemed the sole subjects worthy to occupy seriously men of station and birth. In giving utterance to this warlike and religious sentiment, few periods and classes of

literature have been more strikingly successful. Nowhere is the mere fury of battle better rendered than in *Roland* and *Fierabras*. Nowhere is the valiant indignation of the beaten warrior, and, at the same time, his humble submission to providence, better given than in *Aliscans*. Nowhere do we find the mediæval spirit of feudal enmity and private war more strikingly depicted than in the cycle of the Lorrainers, and in *Raoul de Cambrai*. Nowhere is the devout sentiment and belief of the same time more fully drawn than in *Amis et Amiles*.

Authorship.

The method of composition and publication of these poems was peculiar. Ordinarily, though not always, they were composed by the Trouvère, and performed by the Jongleur. Sometimes the Trouvère condescended to performance, and sometimes the Jongleur aspired to composition, but not usually. The poet was commonly a man of priestly or knightly rank, the performer (who might be of either sex) was probably of no particular station. The Jongleur, or Jongleresse, wandered from castle to castle, reciting the poems, and interpolating in them recommendations of the quality of the wares, requests to the audience to be silent, and often appeals to their generosity. Some of the manuscripts which we now possess were originally used by Jongleurs, and it was only in this way that the early Chanson de Geste was intended to be read. The process of hawking about naturally interfered with the preservation of the poems in their original purity, and even with the preservation of the author's name. In very few cases[41] is the latter known to us.

The question whether the Chansons de Gestes were

originally written in northern or southern French has often been hotly debated. The facts are these. Only three Chansons exist in Provençal. Two of these[42] are admitted translations or imitations of Northern originals. The third, *Girartz de Rossilho*, is undoubtedly original, but is written in the northernmost dialect of the Southern tongue. The inference appears to be clear that the Chanson de Geste is properly a product of northern France. The opposite conclusion necessitates the supposition that either in the Albigensian war, or by some inexplicable concatenation of accidents, a body of original Provençal Chansons has been totally destroyed, with all allusions to, and traditions of, these poems. Such a hypothesis is evidently unreasonable, and would probably never have been started had not some of the earliest students of Old French been committed by local feeling to the championship of the language of the Troubadours. On the other hand, almost all the dialects of Northern French are represented, Norman and Picard being perhaps the commonest[43].

Style and Language.

The language of these poems, as the extracts given will partly show, is neither poor in vocabulary, nor lacking in harmony of sound. It is indeed, more sonorous and stately than classical French language was from the seventeenth century to the days of Victor Hugo, and abounds in picturesque terms which have since dropped out of use. The massive castles of the baronage, with their ranges of marble steps leading up to the hall, where feasting is held by day and where the knights sleep at night, are often

described. Dress is mentioned with peculiar lavishness. Pelisses of ermine, ornaments of gold and silver, silken underclothing, seem to give the poets special pleasure in recording them. In no language are what have been called 'perpetual' epithets more usual, though the abundance of the recurring phrases prevents monotony. The 'clear countenances' of the ladies, the 'steely brands' of the knights, their 'marble palaces,' the 'flowing beard' of Charlemagne, the 'guileful tongue' of the traitors, are constant features of the verbal landscape. From so great a mass of poetry it would be vain in any space here available to attempt to arrange specimen 'jewels five words long.' But those who actually read the Chansons will be surprised at the abundance of fresh striking and poetic phrase.

Later History.

Before quitting the subject of the Chansons de Gestes, it may be well to give briefly their subsequent literary history. They were at first frequently re-edited, the tendency always being to increase their length, so that in some cases the latest versions extant run to thirty or forty thousand lines. As soon as this limit was reached, they began to be turned into prose, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries being the special period of this change. The art of printing came in time to assist the spread of these prose versions, and for some centuries they were almost the only form in which the Chansons de Gestes, under the general title of romances of chivalry, were known. The verse originals remained for the most part in manuscript, but the prose romances gained an enduring circulation among the

peasantry in France. From the seventeenth century their vogue was mainly restricted to this class. But in the middle of the eighteenth the Comte de Tressan was induced to attempt their revival for the *Bibliothèque des Romans*. His versions were executed entirely in the spirit of the day, and did not render any of the characteristic features of the old Epics. But they drew attention to them, and by the end of the century, University Professors began to lecture on old French poetry. The exertions of M. Paulin Paris, of M. Francisque Michel, and of some German scholars first brought about the re-editing of the Chansons in their original form about half a century ago; and since that time they have received steady attention, and a large number have been published—a number to which additions are yearly being made. Rather more than half the known total are now in print.

FOOTNOTES:

[17] *Gesta* or *Geste* has three senses: (*a*) the *deeds* of a hero; (*b*) the *chronicle* of those deeds; and (*c*) the *family* which that chronicle illustrates. The three chief gestes are those of the King, of Doon de Mayence, and of Garin de Montglane. Each of these is composed of many poems. Contrasted with these are the 'petites gestes,' which include only a few Chansons.

[18] *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Fr. Michel, Paris, 1837. The MS. is in the Bodleian Library (Digby 23). Another, of much later date in point of writing but representing the same text, exists at Venice. Of later versions there are six manuscripts extant. The Chanson de Roland has since its *editio princeps* been repeatedly re-edited, translated, and

commented. The most exact edition is that of Prof. Stengel, Heilbronn, 1878, who has given the Bodleian Manuscript both in print and in photographic facsimile. The best for general use is that of Léon Gautier (seventh edition), 1877.

[19] Wace (Roman de Rou, iii. 8038 Andresen) speaks of the Norman Taillefer as singing at Hastings 'De Karlemaigne et de Rollant.' It has been sought, but perhaps fancifully, to identify this song with the existing *chanson*.

[20] 'Ci falt la geste que Turoldus declinet.' The sense of the word *declinet* is quite uncertain, and the attempts made to identify Turoldus are futile.

[21] *Amis et Amiles*, ed. Hoffmann. Erlangen, 1852.

[22] This series is given, sometimes in whole, sometimes in extracts, by Dr. Jonckbloet, *Guillaume d'Orange*. The Hague, 1854.

[23] Ed. P. Paris. Paris, 1848.

[24] Ed. Boca. Valenciennes, 1841.

[25] Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1877.

[26] Ed. Barrois. Paris, 1842.

[27] There exists a Provençal version of it, evidently translated from the French. The most convenient edition is that of Kroeber and Servois, Paris, 1860. There is an English fourteenth-century version published by Mr. Herrtage for the Early English Text Society, 1879.

[28] Published partially by MM. P. Paris and E. du Méril and by Herr Stengel.

[29] Ed. Le Glay. Paris, 1840.

[30] Ed. Michel. Paris, 1856.

[31] Ed. La Grange. Paris, 1864.

[32] Ed. Guessard. Paris, 1866.

[33] Ed. Guessard et Grandmaison. Paris, 1860.

[34] Ed. Michelant. Stuttgart, 1862.

[35] Ed. Michel. Paris, 1839.

[36] Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1874.

[37] Ed. Pey. Paris, 1859.

[38] Ed. Tarbé. Rheims, 1850.

[39] Ed. Michel. London, 1836.

[40] It is very commonly said that this feature is confined to the later Chansons. This is scarcely the fact, unless by 'later' we are to understand all except *Roland*. In *Roland* itself the presentment is by no means wholly complimentary.

[41] The Turoldus of *Roland* has been already noticed. Of certain or tolerably certain authors, Graindor de Douai (revisions of the early crusading Chansons of 'Richard the Pilgrim,' *Antioche*, &c.), Jean de Flagy (*Garin*), Bodel (*Les Saisnes*), and Adenès le Roi, a fertile author or adapter of the thirteenth century, are the most noted.

[42] *Ferabras* and *Betonnet d'Hanstone*. M. Paul Meyer has recently edited this latter poem under the title of *Daurel et Beton* (Paris, 1880). To these should be added a fragment, *Aigar et Maurin*, which seems to rank with *Girartz*.

[43] There has been some reaction of late

years against the scepticism which questioned the 'Provençal Epic.' I cannot however say, though I admit a certain disqualification for judgment (see note at beginning of next chapter), that I see any valid reason for this reaction.

CHAPTER III.

PROVENÇAL LITERATURE.

Langue d'Oc.

The Romance language, spoken in the country now called France, has two great divisions, the Langue d'Oc and the Langue d'Oil[44], which stand to one another in hardly more intimate relationship than the first of them does to Spanish or Italian. In strictness, the Langue d'Oc ought not to be called French at all, inasmuch as those who spoke it applied that term exclusively to Northern speech, calling their own Limousin, or Provençal, or Auvergnat. At the time, moreover, when Provençal literature flourished, the districts which contributed to it were in very loose relationship with the kingdom of France; and when that relationship was drawn tighter, Provençal literature began to wither and die. Yet it is not possible to avoid giving some sketch of the literary developments of Southern France in any history of French literature, as well because of the

connection which subsisted between the two branches, as because of the altogether mistaken views which have been not unfrequently held as to that connection. Lord Macaulay[45] speaks of Provençal in the twelfth century as 'the only one of the vernacular languages of Europe which had yet been extensively employed for literary purposes;' and the ignorance of their older literature which, until a very recent period, distinguished Frenchmen has made it common for writers in France to speak of the Troubadours as their own literary ancestors. We have already seen that this supposition as applied to Epic poetry is entirely false; we shall see hereafter that, except as regards some lyrical developments, and those not the most characteristic, it is equally ill-grounded as to other kinds of composition. But the literature of the South is quite interesting enough in itself without borrowing what does not belong to it, and it exhibits not a few characteristics which were afterwards blended with those of the literature of the kingdom at large.

Range and characteristics.

The domain of the Langue d'Oc is included between two lines, the northernmost of which starts from the Atlantic coast at or about the Charente, follows the northern boundaries of the old provinces of Perigord, Limousin, Auvergne, and Dauphiné, and overlaps Savoy and a small portion of Switzerland. The southern limit is formed by the Pyrenees, the Gulf of Lyons, and the Alps, while Catalonia is overlapped to the south-west just as Savoy is taken in on the north-east. This wide district gives room for not a few dialectic varieties with which we need not here busy

ourselves. The general language is distinguished from northern French by the survival to a greater degree of the vowel character of Latin. The vocabulary is less dissolved and corroded by foreign influence, and the inflections remain more distinct. The result, as in Spanish and Italian, is a language more harmonious, softer, and more cunningly cadenced than northern French, but endowed with far less vigour, variety, and freshness. The separate development of the two tongues must have begun at a very early period. A few early monuments, such as the Passion of Christ[46] and the Mystery of the Ten Virgins[47], contain mixed dialects. But the earliest piece of literature in pure Provençal is assigned in its original form to the tenth century, and is entirely different from northern French[48]. It is arranged in *laisses* and assonanced. The uniformity, however, of the terminations of Provençal makes the assonances more closely approach rhyme than is the case in northern poetry. Of the eleventh century the principal monuments are a few charters, a translation of part of St. John's Gospel, and several religious pieces in prose and verse. Not till the extreme end of this century does the Troubadour begin to make himself heard. The earliest of these minstrels whose songs we possess is William IX, Count of Poitiers. With him Provençal literature, properly so called, begins.

Periods of Provençal Literature.

The admirable historian of Provençal literature, Karl Bartsch, divides its products into three periods; the first reaching to the end of the eleventh century, and comprising the beginnings and experiments of the

language as a literary medium; the second covering the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the most flourishing time of the Troubadour poetry, and possessing also specimens of many other forms of literary composition; the third, the period of decadence, including the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and remarkable chiefly for some religious literature, and for the contests of the Toulouse school of poets. In a complete history of Provençal literature notice would also have to be taken of the fitful and spasmodic attempts of the last four centuries to restore the dialect to the rank of a literary language, attempts which have never been made with greater energy and success than in our own time[49], but which hardly call for notice here.

First Period.

The most remarkable works of the first period have been already alluded to. This period may possibly have produced original epics of the Chanson form, though, as has been pointed out, no indications of any such exist, except in the solitary instance of *Girartz de Rossilho*. The important poem of Auberi of Besançon on Alexander is lost, except the first hundred verses. It is thought to be the oldest vernacular poem on the subject, and is in a mixed dialect partaking of the forms both of north and south. Hymns, sometimes in mixed Latin and Provençal, sometimes entirely in the latter, are found early. A single prose monument remains in the shape of a fragmentary translation of the Gospel of St. John. But by far the most important example of this period is the *Boethius*. The poem, as we have it, extends to 238 decasyllabic verses arranged on the

fashion of a Chanson de Geste, and dates from the eleventh century, or at latest from the beginning of the twelfth, but is thought to be a rehandling of another poem which may have been written nearly two centuries earlier. The narrative part of the work is a mere introduction, the bulk of it consisting of moral reflections taken from the *De Consolatione*.

Second Period.

It is only in the second period that Provençal literature becomes of real importance. The stimulus which brought it to perfection has been generally taken to be that of the crusades, aided by the great development of peaceful civilisation at home which Provence and Languedoc then saw. The spirit of chivalry rose and was diffused all over Europe at this time, and in some of its aspects it received a greater welcome in Provence than anywhere else. For the mystical, the adventurous, and other sides of the chivalrous character, we must look to the North, and especially to the Arthurian legends, and the Romans d'Aventures which they influenced. But, for what has been well called 'la passion souveraine, aveugle, idolâtre, qui éclipse tous les autres sentiments, qui dédaigne tous les devoirs, qui se moque de l'enfer et du ciel, qui absorbe et possède l'âme entière[50],' we must come to the literature of the south of France. Passion is indeed not the only motive of the Troubadours, but it is their favourite motive, and their most successful. The connection of this predominant instinct with the elaborate and unmatched attention to form which characterises them is a psychological question very interesting to discuss, but hardly suitable to these pages. It is

sufficient here to say that these various motives and influences produced the Troubadours and their literature. This literature was chiefly lyrical in form, but also included many other kinds, of which a short account may be given.

Girartz de Rossilho belongs in all probability to the earliest years of the period, though the only Provençal manuscript in existence dates from the end of the thirteenth century. In the third decade of the twelfth Guillem Bechada had written a poem on the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, which, however, has perished, though the northern cycle of the Chevalier au Cygne may represent it in part. Guillem of Poitiers also wrote a historical poem on the Crusades with similar ill fate. But the most famous of historical poems in Provençal has fortunately been preserved to us. This is the chronicle of the Albigensian War, written in Alexandrines by William of Tudela and an anonymous writer. We also possess a rhymed chronicle of the war of 1276-77 in Navarre, by Guillem Anelier. In connection with the Arthurian cycle there exists a Provençal Roman d'Aventures, entitled *Jaufré*. The testimony of Wolfram von Eschenbach would appear to be decisive as to the existence of a Provençal continuation of Chrestien's *Percevale* by a certain Kiot or Guyot, but nothing more is known of this. *Blandin de Cornoalha* is another existing romance, and so is the far more interesting *Flamenca*, a lively picture of manners dating from the middle of the thirteenth century. In shorter and slighter narrative poems Provençal is still less fruitful, though Raimon Vidal, Arnaut de Zurcasses, and one or two other writers have left work of this kind. A very few narrative poems of a sacred character are also found, and vestiges of

drama may be traced. But, as we have said, the real importance of the period consists in its lyrical poetry, the poetry of the Troubadours. The names of 460 separate poets are given, and 251 pieces have come down to us without the names of their writers. We have here no space for dwelling on individual persons; it is sufficient to mention as the most celebrated Arnaut Daniel, Bernart de Ventadorn, Bertran de Born, Cercamon, Folquet de Marseilha, Gaucelm Faidit, Guillem of Poitiers, Guillem de Cabestanh, Guiraut de Borneilh, Guiraut Riquier, Jaufre Rudel, Marcabrun, Peire Cardenal, Peire Vidal, Peirol, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, Sordel.

Forms of Troubadour Poetry.

The chief forms in which these poets exercised their ingenuity were as follows. The simplest and oldest was called simply *vers*; it had few artificial rules, was written in octosyllabic lines, and arranged in stanzas. From this was developed the *canso*, the most usual of Provençal forms. Here the rhymes were interlaced, and the alternation of masculine and feminine by degrees observed. The length of the lines varied. Both these forms were consecrated to love verse; the Sirvente, on the other hand, is panegyrical or satirical, its meaning being literally 'Song of Service.' It consisted for the most part of short stanzas, simply rhyme, and corresponding exactly to one another. The *planh* or Complaint was a dirge or funeral song written generally in decasyllabics. The *tenson* or debate is in dialogue form, and when there are more than two disputants is called *torneijamens*. The narrative Romance existed in Provençal as well as the *balada* or three-stanza poem, usually with refrain.

The *retroensa* is a longer refrain poem of later date, but in neither is the return of the same rhyme in each stanza necessarily observed, as in the French *ballade*. The *alba* is a leave-taking poem at morning, and the *serena* (if it can be called a form, for scarcely more than a single example exists) a poem of remembrance and longing at eventide. The *pastorela*, which had numerous sub-divisions, explains itself. The *descort* is a poem something like the irregular ode, which varies the structure of its stanzas. The *sextine*, in six stanzas of identical and complicated versification, is the stateliest of all Provençal forms. Not merely the rhymes but the words which rhyme are repeated on a regular scheme. The *breu-doble* (double-short) is a curious little form on three rhymes, two of which are repeated twice in three four-lined stanzas, and given once in a concluding couplet, while the third finishes each quatrain. Other forms are often mentioned and given, but they are not of much consequence.

The prose of the best period of Provençal literature is of little importance. Its most considerable remains, besides religious works and a few scientific and grammatical treatises, are a prose version of the *Chanson des Albigeois*, and an interesting collection of contemporary lives of the Troubadours.

Third Period.

The productiveness of the last two centuries of Provençal literature proper has been spoken of by the highest living authority as at most an aftermath. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Arnaut Vidal wrote a Roman d'Aventures entitled *Guillem de la Barra*. This poet, like most of the other literary

names of the period, belongs to the school of Toulouse, a somewhat artificial band of writers who flourished throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, held poetical tournaments on the first Sunday in May, invented or adopted the famous phrase *gai saber* for their pursuits, and received, if they were successful, the equally famous Golden Violet and minor trinkets of the same sort. The brotherhood directed itself by an art of poetry in which the half-forgotten traditions of more spontaneous times were gathered up.

To this period, and to its latter part, the Waldensian writings entitled *La Nobla Leyczon*, to which ignorance and sectarian enthusiasm had given a much earlier date, are now assigned. There is also a considerable mass of miscellaneous literature, but nothing of great value, or having much to do with the only point which is here of importance, the distinctive character of Provençal literature, and the influence of that literature upon the development of letters in France generally. With a few words on these two points this chapter may be concluded.

Literary Relation of Provençal and French.

Defects of Provençal Literature.

It may be regarded as not proven that any initial influence was exercised over northern French literature by the literature of the South, and more than this, it may be held to be unlikely that any such

influence was exerted. For in the first place all the more important developments of the latter, the Epic, the Drama, the Fabliau, are distinctly of northern birth, and either do not exist in Provençal at all, or exist for the most part as imitations of northern originals. With regard to lyric poetry the case is rather different. The earliest existing lyrics of the North are somewhat later than the earliest songs of the Troubadours, and no great lyrical variety or elegance is reached until the Troubadours' work had, by means of Thibaut de Champagne and others, had an opportunity of penetrating into northern France. On the other hand, the forms which finished lyric adopted in the North are by no means identical with those of the Troubadours. The scientific and melodious figures of the Ballade, the Rondeau, the Chant-royal, the Rondel, and the Villanelle, cannot by any ingenuity be deduced from Canso or Balada, Retroensa or Breu-Doble. The Alba and the Pastorela agree in subject with the Aubade and the Pastourelle, but have no necessary or obvious connection of form. It would, however, be almost as great a mistake to deny the influence of the spirit of Provençal literature over French, as to regard the two as standing in the position of mother and daughter. The Troubadours undoubtedly preceded their Northern brethren in scrupulous attention to poetical form, and in elaborate devices for ensuring such attention. They preceded them too in recognising that quality in poetry for which there is perhaps no other word than elegance. There can be little doubt that they sacrificed to these two divinities, elegance and the formal limitation of verse, matters almost equally if not more important. The motives of their poems are few, and the treatment of those motives monotonous. Love, war, and personal enmity, with a certain

amount of more or less frigid didactics, almost complete the list. In dealing with the first and the most fruitful, they fell into the deadly error of stereotyping their manner of expression. Objection has sometimes been taken to the 'eternal hawthorn and nightingale' of Provençal poetry. The objection would hardly be fatal, if this eternity did not extend to a great many things besides hawthorn and nightingales. In the later Troubadours especially, the fault which has been urged against French dramatic literature just before the Romantic movement was conspicuously anticipated. Every mood, every situation of passion, was catalogued and analysed, and the proper method of treatment, with similes and metaphors complete, was assigned. There was no freshness and no variety, and in the absence of variety and freshness, that of vigour was necessarily implied. It may even be doubted whether the influence of this hot-house verse on the more natural literature of the North was not injurious rather than beneficial. Certain it is that the artificial poetry of the Trouvères went (in the persons of the Rondeau and Ballade-writing Rhétoriqueurs of the fifteenth century) the same way and came to the same end, that its elder sister had already trodden and reached with the competitors for the Violet, the Eglantine, and the Marigold of Toulouse.

FOOTNOTES:

[44] *Oc* and *oil* (*hoc* and *hoc illud*), the respective terms indicating affirmation. In this chapter the information given is based on a smaller acquaintance at first hand with the subject than is the case in the chapters on French proper. Herr Karl Bartsch has been the guide chiefly followed.

[45] Essay on Ranke's History of the Popes.

[46] See chap. i.

[47] See chap. x.

[48] The poem on Boethius. See chap. i.

[49] By the school of the so-called *Félibres*, of whom Mistral and Aubanel are the chief.

[50] Moland and Héricault's Introduction to *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Paris, 1856.

CHAPTER IV.

ROMANCES OF ARTHUR AND OF ANTIQUITY.

The Tale of Arthur. Its Origins.

The passion for narrative poetry, which at first contented itself with stories drawn from the history or tradition of France, took before very long a wider range. The origin of the Legend of King Arthur, of the Round Table, of the Holy Graal, and of all the adventures and traditions connected with these centres, is one of the most intricate questions in the history of mediaeval literature. It would be beyond the scope of this book to attempt to deal with it at length. It is sufficient for our purpose, in the first place, to point out that the question of the actual

existence and acts of Arthur has very little to do with the question of the origin of the Arthurian cycle. The history of mediaeval literature, as distinguished from the history of the Middle Ages, need not concern itself with any conflict between the invaders and the older inhabitants of England. The question which is of historical literary interest is, whether the traditions which Geoffrey of Monmouth, Walter Map, Chrestien de Troyes, and their followers, wrought into a fabric of such astounding extent and complexity, are due to Breton originals, or whether their authority is nothing but the ingenuity of Geoffrey working upon the meagre data of Nennius[51]. As far as this question concerns French literature, the chief champions of these rival opinions were till lately M. de la Villemarqué and M. Paulin Paris. In no instance was the former able to produce Breton or Celtic originals of early date. On the other hand, M. Paris showed that Nennius is sufficient to account for Geoffrey, and that Geoffrey is sufficient to account for the purely Arthurian part of subsequent romances and chronicles. The religious element of the cycle has a different origin, and may possibly not be Celtic at all. Lastly, we must take into account a large body of Breton and Welsh poetry from which, especially in the parts of the legend which deal with Tristram, with King Mark, &c., amplifications have been devised. It must, however, still be admitted that the extraordinary rapidity with which so vast a growth of literature was produced, apparently from the slenderest stock, is one of the most surprising things in literary history. Before the middle of the twelfth century little or nothing is heard of Arthur. Before that century closed at least a dozen poems and romances in prose, many of them of great length, had elaborated the whole legend as it

was thenceforward received, and as we have it condensed and Englished in Malory's well-known book two centuries and a half later.

Order of French Arthurian Cycle.

The probable genesis of the Arthurian legend, in so far as it concerns French literature, appears to be as follows. First in order of composition, and also in order of thought, comes the Legend of Joseph of Arimathea, sometimes called the 'Little St. Graal.' This we have both in verse and prose, and one or both of these versions is the work of Robert de Borron, a knight and *trouvère* possessed of lands in the Gâtinais[52]. There is nothing in this work which is directly connected with Arthur. By some it has been attributed to a Latin, but not now producible, 'Book of the Graal,' by others to Byzantine originals. Anyhow it fell into the hands of the well-known Walter Map[53], and his exhaustless energy and invention at once seized upon it. He produced the 'Great St. Graal,' a very much extended version of the early history of the sacred vase, still keeping clear of definite connection with Arthur, though tending in that direction. From this, in its turn, sprang the original form of *Percevale*, which represents a quest for the vessel by a knight who has not originally anything to do with the Round Table. The link of connection between the two stories is to be found in the *Merlin*, attributed also to Robert de Borron, wherein the Welsh legends begin to have more definite influence. This, in its turn, leads to *Artus*, which gives the early history of the great king. Then comes the most famous, most extensive, and finest of all the romances, that of *Lancelot du Lac*, which is pretty certainly in part, and perhaps in great part,

the work of Map; as is also the mystical and melancholy but highly poetical *Quest of the Saint Graal*, a quest of which Galahad and Lancelot, not, as in the earlier legends, Percival, are the heroes. To this succeeds the *Mort Artus*, which forms the conclusion of the whole, properly speaking. This, however, does not entirely complete the cycle. Later than Borron, Map, and their unknown fellow-workers (if such they had), arose one or more *trouvères*, who worked up the ancient Celtic legends and lays of Tristram into the Romance of *Tristan*, connecting this, more or less clumsily, with the main legend of the Round Table. Other legends were worked up into the *omnium gatherum* of *Giron le Courtois*, and with this the cycle proper ceases. The later poems are attributed to two persons, called Luce de Gast and Hélie de Borron. But not the slightest testimony can be adduced to show that any such persons ever had existence[54].

These prose romances form for the most part the original literature of the Arthurian story. But the vogue of this story was very largely increased by a *trouvère* who used not prose but octosyllabic verse for his medium.

Chrestien de Troyes.

As is the case with most of these early writers, little or nothing is known of Chrestien de Troyes but his name. He lived in the last half of the twelfth century, he was attached to the courts of Flanders, Hainault, and Champagne, and he wrote most of his works for the lords of these fiefs. Besides his Arthurian work he translated Ovid, and wrote some short poems.

Chrestien de Troyes deserves a higher place in literature than has sometimes been given to him. His versification is so exceedingly easy and fluent as to appear almost pedestrian at times; and his *Chevalier à la Charrette*, by which he is perhaps most generally known, contrasts unfavourably in its prolixity with the nervous and picturesque prose to which it corresponds. But *Percevale* and the *Chevalier au Lyon* are very charming poems, deeply imbued with the peculiar characteristics of the cycle—religious mysticism, passionate gallantry, and refined courtesy of manners. Chrestien de Troyes undoubtedly contributed not a little to the popularity of the Arthurian legends. Although, by a singular chance, which has not yet been fully explained, the originals appear to have been for the most part in prose, the times were by no means ripe for the general enjoyment of work in such a form. The reciter was still the general if not the only publisher, and recitation almost of necessity implied poetical form. Chrestien did not throw the whole of the work of his contemporaries into verse, but he did so throw a considerable portion of it. His Arthurian works consist of *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*, a very close rendering of an episode of Map's *Lancelot*; *Le Chevalier au Lyon*, resting probably upon some previous work not now in existence; *Erec et Énide*, the legend which every English reader knows in Mr. Tennyson's *Enid*, and which seems to be purely Welsh; *Cligès*, which may be called the first Roman d'Aventures; and lastly, *Percevale*, a work of vast extent, continued by successive versifiers to the extent of some fifty thousand lines, and probably representing in part a work of Robert de Borron, which has only recently been printed by M. Hucher. *Percevale* is, perhaps, the best example of Chrestien's

fashion of composition. The work of Borron is very short, amounting in all to some ninety pages in the reprint. The *Percevale le Gallois* of Chrestien and his continuators, on the other hand, contains, as has been said, more than forty-five thousand verses. This amplification is produced partly by the importation of incidents and episodes from other works, but still more by indulging in constant diffuseness and what we must perhaps call commonplaces.

Spirit and Literary value of Arthurian Romances.

From a literary point of view the prose romances rank far higher, especially those in which Map is known or suspected to have had a hand. The peculiarity of what may be called their atmosphere is marked. An elaborate and romantic system of mystical religious sentiment, finding vent in imaginative and allegorical narrative, a remarkable refinement of manners, and a combination of delight in battle with devotion to ladies, distinguish them. This is, in short, the romantic spirit, or, as it is sometimes called, the spirit of chivalry; and it cannot be too positively asserted that the Arthurian romances communicate it to literature for the first time, and that nothing like it is found in the classics. In the work of Map and his contemporaries it is clearly perceivable. The most important element in this—courtesy—is, as we have already noticed, almost entirely absent from the Chansons de Gestes, and where it is present at all it is between persons who are connected by some natural or artificial relation of comradeship or kin. Nor are there many

traces of it in such fragments and indications as we possess of the Celtic originals, which may have helped in the production of the Arthurian romances. No Carlovingian knight would have felt the horror of Sir Bors when the Lady of Hungerford exercises her undoubted right by flinging the body of her captive enemy on the camp of his uncle. Even the chiefs who are presented in the *Chanson d'Antioche* as joking over the cannibal banquet of the Roi des Tafurs, and permitting the dead bodies of Saracens to be torn from the cemeteries and flung into the beleaguered city, would have very much applauded the deed. Gallantry, again, is as much absent from the Chansons as clemency and courtesy. The scene in *Lancelot*, where Galahault first introduces the Queen and Lancelot to one another, contrasts in the strongest manner with the downright courtship by which the Bellicents and Nicolettes of the Carlovingian cycle are won. No doubt Map represents to a great extent the sentiments of the polished court of England. But he deserves the credit of having been the first, or almost the first, to express such manners and sentiments, perhaps also of having being among the first to conceive them.

These originals are not all equally represented in Malory's English compilation. Of Robert de Borron's work little survives except by allusion. *Lancelot du Lac* itself, the most popular of all the romances, is very disproportionately drawn upon. Of the youth of Lancelot, of the winning of Dolorous Gard, of the war with the Saxons, and of the very curious episode of the false Guinevere, there is nothing; while the most charming story of Lancelot's relations with Galahault of Sorelois disappears, except in a few passing allusions to the 'haughty prince.' On the other hand, the *Quest of the Saint Graal*, the *Mort*

Artus, some episodes of *Lancelot* (such as the *Chevalier à la Charrette*), and many parts of *Tristan* and *Giron le Courtois*, are given almost in full.

It seems also probable that considerable portions of the original form of the Arthurian legends are as yet unknown, and have altogether perished. The very interesting discovery in the Brussels Library, of a prose *Percevale* not impossibly older than Chrestien, and quite different from that of Borron, is an indication of this fact. So also is the discovery by Dr. Jonckbloet in the Flemish *Lancelot*, which he has edited, of passages not to be found in the existing and recognised French originals. The truth would appear to be that the fascination of the subject, the unusual genius of those who first treated it, and the tendency of the middle ages to favour imitation, produced in a very short space of time (the last quarter or half of the twelfth century) an immense amount of original handling of Geoffrey's theme. To this original period succeeded one of greater length, in which the legends were developed not merely by French followers and imitators of Chrestien, but by his great German adapters, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried of Strasburg, Hartmann von der Aue, and by other imitators at home and abroad. Lastly, as we shall see in a future chapter, come Romans d'Aventures, connecting themselves by links more or less immediate with the Round Table cycle, but independent and often quite separate in their main incidents and catastrophes.

The great number, length, and diversity of the Arthurian romances make it impossible in the space at our command to abstract all of them, and useless to select any one, inasmuch as no single poem is (as in the case of the Chansons) typical of the group. The

style, however, of the prose and verse divisions may be seen in the following extracts from the *Chevalier à la Charrette* of Map, and the verse of Chrestien:—

> Atant sont venu li chevalier jusqu'au pont: lors commencent à plorer top durement tuit ensamble. Et Lanceloz lor demande porquoi il plorent et font tel duel? Et il dient que c'est por l'amor de lui, que trop est perillox li ponz. Atant esgarde Lanceloz l'ève de çà et de là: si voit que ele est noire et coranz. Si avint que sa véue torna devers la cité, si vit la tor où la raïne estoit as fenestres. Lanceloz demande quel vile c'est là?—'Sire, font-il, c'est le leus où la raïne est.' Si li noment la cité. Et il lor dit: 'Or n'aiez garde de moi, que ge dont mains le pont que ge onques mès ne fis, nè il n'est pas si périlleux d'assez comme ge cuidoie. Mès moult a de là outre bele tor, et s'il m'i voloient hébergier il m'i auroient encor ennuit à hoste.' Lors descent et les conforte toz moult durement, et lor dit que il soient ausinc tout asséur comme il est. Il li lacent les pans de son hauberc ensenble et li cousent à gros fil de fer qu'il avoient aporté, et ses manches méesmes li cousent dedenz ses mains, et les piez desoz; et à bone poiz chaude li ont péez les manicles et tant d'espès comme il ot entre les cuisses. Et ce fu por miauz tenir contre le trenchant de l'espée.
>
> Quant il orent Lancelot atorné et bien et bel si lor prie que il s'en aillent. Et il s'en vont, et le font naigier outre l'ève, et il enmainent son cheval. Et il vient à la planche droit: puis esgarde vers la tor où la raïne estoit en

> prison, si li encline. Après fet le signe de la verroie croiz enmi son vis, et met son escu derriers son dos, qu'il ne li nuise. Lors se met desor la planche en chevauchons, si se traïne par desus si armez comme il estoit, car il ne li faut ne hauberc ne espée ne chauces ne heaume ne escu. Et cil de la tor qui le véoient en sont tuit esbahï, ne il n'i a nul ne nule qui saiche veroiement qui il est; mès qu'il voient qu'il traïne pardesus l'espée trenchant à la force des braz et à l'enpaignement des genouz; si ne remaint pas por les filz de fer que des piez et des mains et des genous ne saille li sanz. Mès por cel péril de l'espée qui trenche et por l'ève noire et bruiant et parfonde ne remaint que plus ne resgart vers la tor que vers l'ève, ne plaie ne angoisse qu'il ait ne prise naient; car se il à cele tor pooit venir il garroit tot maintenant de ses max. Tant s'est hertiez et traïnez qu'il est venuz jusqu'à terre.

This becomes in the poem a passage more than 100 lines long, of which the beginning and end may be given:—

> Le droit chemin vont cheminant,
> Tant que li jors vet déclinant,
> Et vienent au pon de l'espée
> Après none, vers la vesprée.
> Au pié del' pont, qui molt est max,
> Sont descendu de lor chevax,
> Et voient l'ève félenesse
> Noire et bruiant, roide et espesse,
> Tant leide et tant espoantable
> Com se fust li fluns au déable;
> Et tant périlleuse et parfonde

Qu'il n'est riens nule an tot le monde
S'ele i chéoit, ne fust alée
Ausi com an la mer betée.
Et li ponz qui est an travers
Estoit de toz autres divers,
Qu'ainz tex ne fu ne jamès n'iert.
Einz ne fu, qui voir m'an requiert,
Si max pont ne si male planche:
D'une espée forbie et blanche
Estoit li ponz sor l'ève froide.
Mès l'espée estoit forz et roide,
Et avoit deus lances de lonc.
De chasque part ot uns grant tronc
Où l'espée estoit cloffichiée.
Jà nus ne dot que il i chiée.
Porce que ele brist ne ploit.
Si ne sanble-il pas qui la voit
Qu'ele puisse grant fès porter.
Ce feisoit molt desconforter
Les deus chevaliers qui estoient
Avoec le tierz, que il cuidoient
Que dui lyon ou dui liepart
Au chief del' pont de l'autre part
Fussent lié à un perron.
L'ève et li ponz et li lyon
Les metent an itel fréor
Que il tranblent tuit de péor.

* * * * * *

Cil ne li sèvent plus que dire,
Mès de pitié plore et sopire
Li uns et li autres molt fort.
Et cil de trespasser le gort
Au mialz que il set s'aparoille,
Et fet molt estrange mervoille,
Que ses piez désire et ses mains.

N'iert mie toz antiers nè sains
Quant de l'autre part iert venuz.
Bien s'iert sor l'espée tenuz,
Qui plus estoit tranchanz que fauz,
As mains nues et si deschauz
Que il ne s'est lessiez an pié
Souler nè chauce n'avanpié.
De ce guères ne s'esmaioit
S'ès mains et ès piez se plaioit;
Mialz se voloit-il mahaignier
Que chéoir el pont et baignier
An l'ève dont jamès n'issist.
A la grant dolor con li sist
S'an passe outre et à grant destrece:
Mains et genolz et piez se blece.
Mès tot le rasoage et sainne
Amors qui le conduist et mainne:
Si li estoit à sofrir dolz.
A mains, à piez et à genolz
Fet tant que de l'autre part vient.

Romances of Antiquity. Chanson d'Alixandre.

About the same time as the flourishing of the Arthurian cycle there began to be written the third great division of Jean Bodel, 'la matière de Rome la grant[55].' The most important beyond all question of the poems which go to make up this cycle (as it is sometimes called, though in reality its members are quite independent one of the other) is the Romance of *Alixandre*. Of the earliest French poem on this subject only a few fragments exist. This is supposed to have been a work of the eleventh or very early

twelfth century, composed in octosyllabic verses, and in the mixed dialect common at the time in the south-east, by Alberic or Auberi of Besançon or Briançon. The *Chanson d'Alixandre* is, however, in all probability a much more important work than Alberic's. It is in form a regular Chanson de Geste, written in twelve-syllabled verse, of such strength and grace that the term Alexandrine has cleaved ever since to the metre. Its length, as we have it[56], is 22,606 verses, and it is assigned to two authors, Lambert the Short[57] and Alexander of Bernay, though doubt has been expressed whether any of the present poem is due to Lambert; if we have any of his work, it is not later than the ninth decade of the twelfth century. Lambert, Alexander, and perhaps others, are thought to have known not Alberic, but a later ten-syllabled version into Northern French by Simon of Poitiers. The remoter sources are various. Foremost among them may undoubtedly be placed the Pseudo-Callisthenes, an unknown Alexandrian writer translated into Latin about the fourth century by Julius Valerius, who fathered upon the philosopher a collection of stories partly gathered from Plutarch, Quintus Curtius, and a hundred other authorities, partly elaborated according to the fashion of Greek romancers. Some oriental traditions of Alexander were also in the possession of western Europe. Out of all these, and with a considerable admixture of the floating fables of the time, Lambert and Alexander wove their work. There is, of course, not the slightest attempt at antiquity of colour. Alexander has twelve peers, he learns the favourite studies of the middle ages, he is dubbed knight, and so forth. Many interesting legends, such as that of the Fountain of Perpetual Youth, make their first appearance in the poem, and it is altogether one of

extraordinary merit. A specimen *laisse* may be given:—

En icele forest, dont vos m'oëz conter,
nesune male choze ne puet laianz entrer.
li home ne les bestes n'i ozent converser,
onques en nesun tans ne vit hon yverner
ne trop froit ne trop chaut ne neger ne geler.
ce conte l'escripture que hom n'i doit entrer,
se il nen at talent de conquerre ou d'amer.
les deuesses d'amors i doivent habiter,
car c'est lor paradix ou el doivent entrer,
li rois de Macedoine en a oï parler,
qui cercha les merveilles dou mont et de la mer,
et ce fist il meïsmes enz ou fons avaler
en un vessel de voirre, ce ne puet n'on fausser,
qu'il fist faire il meïsmes fort et rëont et cler
et enclorre de fer qu'il ne pëust quasser,
s'il l'estëust a roche ou aillors ahurter,
et si que il poet bien par mi outre esgarder,
por vëoir les poissons tornoier et joster
et faire lor agaiz et sovent cembeler.
et quant il vint a terre, nou mist a oublïer:
la prist la sapïence dou mont a conquester
et faire ses agaiz et sa gent ordener
et conduire les oz et sagement mener,
car ce fust toz li mieudres qui ainz pëust monter
en cheval por conquerre ne de lance joster,

li gentiz et li larges et ii prex por doner.
la forest des puceles ot oï deviser,
cil qui tot volt conquerre i ot talent d'aler:
souz ciel n'a home en terre qui l'en pëust
torner.

While the figure of Alexander served as centre to one group of fictions, most of which were composed in Chanson form, the octosyllabic metre, which had made the Arthurian romances its own, was used for the versification of another numerous class, most of which dealt with the tale of Troy divine.

Roman de Troie.

Here also the poems were neither entirely fictitious, nor on the other hand based upon the best authorities. Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, with some epitomes of Homer, were the chief sources of information. The principal poem of this class is the *Roman de Troie* of Benoist de Sainte More (*c.* 1160). This work[58], which extends to more than thirty thousand verses, has the redundancy and the long-windedness which characterise many, if not most, early French poems written in its metre. But it has one merit which ought to conciliate English readers to Benoist. It contains the undoubted original of Shakespeare's Cressida. The fortunes of Cressid (or Briseida, as the French trouvère names her) have been carefully traced out by MM. Moland, Héricault[59], and Joly, and form a very curious chapter of literary history. Nor is this episode the only one of merit in Benoist. His verse is always fluent and facile, and not seldom picturesque, as the following extract (Andromache's remonstrance with Hector) will show:—

Quant elle voit qe nëant iert,
o ses dous poinz granz cous se fiert,
fier duel demaine e fier martire,
ses cheveus trait e ront e tire.
bien resemble feme desvee:
tote enragiee, eschevelee,
e trestote fors de son sen
court pour son fil Asternaten.
des eux plore molt tendrement,
entre ses braz l'encharge e prent.
vint el palés atot arieres,
o il chauçoit ses genoillieres.
as piez li met e si li dit
'sire, por cest enfant petit
qe tu engendras de ta char
te pri nel tiegnes a eschar
ce qe je t'ai dit e nuncié.
aies de cest enfant pitié:
jamés des euz ne te verra.
s'ui assembles a ceux de la,
hui est ta mort, hui est ta fins.
de toi remandra orfenins.
cruëlz de cuer, lous enragiez,
par qoi ne vos en prent pitiez?
par qoi volez si tost morir?
par qoi volez si tost guerpir
et moi e li e vostre pere
e voz serors e vostre mere?
par qoi nos laisseroiz perir?
coment porrons sens vos gerir?
lasse, com male destinee!'
a icest not chaï pasmee
a cas desus le paviment.
celle l'en lieve isnelement
qi estrange duel en demeine:
c'est sa seroge, dame Heleine.



Other Romances on Classical subjects.

The poems of the Cycle of Antiquity have hitherto been less diligently studied and reprinted than those of the other two. Few of them, with the exception of *Alixandre* and *Troie*, are to be read even in fragments, save in manuscript. *Le Roman d'Enéas*, which is attributed to Benoist, is much shorter than the *Roman de Troie*, and, with some omissions, follows Virgil pretty closely. Like many other French poems, it was adapted in German by a Minnesinger, Heinrich von Veldeke. *Le Roman de Thèbes*, of which there is some chance of an edition, stands to Statius in the same relation as *Enéas* to Virgil. And *Le Roman de Jules César* paraphrases, though not directly, Lucan. To these must be added *Athis et Prophilias* (Porphyrias), or the Siege of Athens, a work which has been assigned to many authors, and the origin of which is not clear, though it enjoyed great popularity in the middle ages. The *Protesilaus* of Hugues de Rotelande is the only other poem of this series worth the mentioning.

Neither of these two classes of poems possesses the value of the Chansons as documents for social history. The picture of manners in them is much more artificial. But the Arthurian romances disclose partially and at intervals a state of society decidedly more advanced than that of the Chansons. The *bourgeois*, the country gentleman who is not of full baronial rank, and other novel personages appear.

Note to Third Edition.—Since the second edition was published M. Gaston Paris has sketched in *Romania* and summarised in his *Manuel*, but has not developed in book form, a view of the Arthurian romances different from his father's and from that given in the text. In this view the importance of 'Celtic' originals is much increased, and that of Geoffrey diminished, Walter Map disappears almost entirely to make room for divers unknown French trouvères, the order of composition is altered, and on the whole a lower estimate is formed of the literary value of the cycle. The 'Celtic' view has also been maintained in a book of much learning and value, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail* (London, 1888), by Mr. Alfred Nutt. I have not attempted to incorporate or to combat these views in the text for two reasons, partly because they will most probably be superseded by others, and partly because the evidence does not seem to me sufficient to establish any of them certainly. But having given some years to comparative literary criticism in different languages and periods, I think I may be entitled to give a somewhat decided opinion against the 'Celtic' theory, and in favour of that which assigns the special characteristics of the Arthurian cycle and all but a very small part of its structure of incident to the literary imagination of the trouvères, French and English, of the twelfth century. And I may add that as a whole it seems to me quite the greatest literary creation of the Middle Ages, except the *Divina Commedia*, though of course it has the necessary inferiority of a collection by a great number of different hands to a work of individual genius.

FOOTNOTES:

[51] Nennius, a Breton monk of the ninth century, has left a brief Latin Chronicle in which is the earliest authentic account of the Legend of Arthur. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *circa* 1140, produced a *Historia Britonum*, avowedly based on a book brought from Britanny by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. No trace of this book, unless it be Nennius, can be found. *See note at end of chapter.*

[52] Department of Seine-et-Marne, near Fontainebleau.

[53] Map as a person belongs rather to English than to French history. He lived in the last three quarters of the twelfth century.

[54] These various Romances are not by any means equally open to study in satisfactory critical editions. To take them chronologically, M. Hucher has published Robert de Borron's *Little Saint Graal* in prose, his *Percevale*, and the *Great Saint Graal*, with full and valuable if not incontestable notes, 3 vols.; Le Mans, 1875-1878. The verse form of the *Little Saint Graal* was published by M. F. Michel in 1841. An edition of *Artus* was promised by M. Paulin Paris, but interrupted or prevented by his death. The great works of Map, *Lancelot* and the *Quest*, as well as the *Mort Artus*, have never been critically edited in full; and the sixteenth-century editions being rare and exceedingly costly, as well as uncritical, they are not easily accessible, except in M. Paris' Abstract and Commentary, *Les Romans de la Table Ronde*, 5 vols., 1869-1877. *Tristan* was published partially forty years ago by M. F. Michel. *Merlin* was edited in 1886 by M. G. Paris and M. Ulrich. A complete edition of Chrestien de Troyes has been undertaken by Dr. Wendelin Förster and has preceded to its second volume

(*Yvain*). This under its second title of *Le Chevalier au Lyon* has also been edited by Dr. Holland (third edition 1886). Besides this there is the great Romance of *Percevale* (continued by others, especially a certain Manessier), of which M. Potvin has given an excellent edition, 6 vols., Mons, 1867-1872, including in it a previously unknown prose version of the Romance of very early date; *Le Chevalier à la Charrette*, continued by Godefroy de Lagny, and edited, with the original prose from *Lancelot du Lac*, by Dr. Jonckbloet (The Hague, 1850); and *Erec et Énide*, by M. Haupt (Berlin, 1860). This piecemeal condition of the texts, and the practical inaccessibility of many of them, make independent judgment in the matter very difficult. What is wanted first of all is a book on the plan of M. Léon Gautier's *Epopées Françaises*, giving a complete account of all the existing texts—for the entire editing of these latter must necessarily take a very long time. The statements made above represent the opinions which appear most probable to the writer, not merely from the comparison of authorities on the subject, but from the actual study of the texts as far as they are open to him. (*See note at end of Chapter.*)

[55] This expression occurs in the *Chanson des Saisnes*, i. 6. 7: 'Ne sont que iij matières a nul home atandant, De France et de Bretaigne et de Rome la grant.'

[56] Ed. Michelant. Stuttgart, 1846.

[57] *Li Cors*, otherwise *li tors* 'the crooked.' Since this book was first written M. Paul Meyer has treated the whole subject of the paragraph in an admirable monograph, *Alexandre le Grand dans la Littérature Française du Moyen Age*, 2 vols. Paris, 1886.

[58] Ed. Joly. Rouen, 1870.

[59] Moland and Héricault's *Nouvelles du XIV^ème^ Siècle*. Paris, 1857. Joly, *Op. cit.* See also P. Stapfer, *Shakespeare et l'Antiquité*. 2 vols. Paris, 1880.

CHAPTER V.

FABLIAUX. THE *ROMAN DU RENART*.

Foreign Elements in Early French Literature.

Singular as the statement may appear, no one of the branches of literature hitherto discussed represents what may be called a specially French spirit. Despite the astonishing popularity and extent of the Chansons de Gestes, they are, as is admitted by the most patriotic French students, Teutonic in origin probably, and certainly in genius. The Arthurian legends have at least a tinge both of Celtic and Oriental character; while the greater number of them were probably written by Englishmen, and their distinguishing spirit is pretty clearly Anglo-Norman rather than French. On the other hand, Provençal poetry represents a temperament and a disposition which find their full development rather in Spanish and Italian literature and character than in the

literature and character of France. All these divisions, moreover, have this of artificial about them, that they are obviously class literature—the literature of courtly and knightly society, not that of the nation at large. Provençal literature gives but scanty social information; from the earlier Chansons at least it would be hard to tell that there were any classes but those of nobles, priests, and fighting men; and though, as has been said, a more complicated state of society appears in the Arthurian legends, what may be called their atmosphere is even more artificial.

The Esprit Gaulois makes its appearance.

It is far otherwise with the division of literature which we are now about to handle. The Fabliaux[60], or short verse tales of old France, take in the whole of its society from king to peasant with all the intervening classes, and represent for the most part the view taken of those classes by each other. Perhaps the *bourgeois* standpoint is most prominent in them, but it is by no means the only one. Their tone too is of the kind which has ever since been specially associated with the French genius. What is called by French authors the *esprit gaulois*—a spirit of mischievous and free-spoken jocularity—does not make its appearance at once, or in all kinds of work. In most of the early departments of French literature there is a remarkable deficiency of the comic element, or rather that element is very much kept under. The comedy of the Chansons consists almost entirely in the roughest horse-play; while the knightly notion of *gabz* or jests is exemplified in the

Voyage de Charlemagne à Constantinople, where it seems to be limited to extravagant, and not always decent, boasts and gasconnades. More comic, but still farcical in its comedy, is the curious running fire of exaggerated expressions of poltroonery which the Red Lion keeps up in *Antioche*, while the names and virtues of the Christian leaders are being catalogued to Corbaran. In the Arthurian Romances also the comic element is scantily represented, and still takes the same form of exaggeration and horse-play. At the same time it is proper to say that both these classes of compositions are distinguished, at least in their earlier examples, by a very strict and remarkable decency of language.

In the Fabliaux the state of things is quite different. The attitude is always a mocking one, not often going the length of serious satire or moral indignation, but contenting itself with the peculiar ludicrous presentation of life and humanity of which the French have ever since been the masters. In the Fabliaux begins that long course of scoffing at the weaknesses of the feminine sex which has never been interrupted since. In the Fabliaux is to be found for the first time satirical delineation of the frailties of churchmen instead of adoring celebration of the mysteries of the Church. All classes come in by turns for ridicule—knights, burghers, peasants. Unfortunately this freedom in choice of subject is accompanied by a still greater freedom in the choice of language. The coarseness of expression in many of the Fabliaux equals, if it does not exceed, that to be found in any other branch of Western literature.

Definition of Fabliaux.

The interest of the Fabliaux as a literary study is increased by the precision with which they can be defined, and the well-marked period of their composition. According to the excellent definition of its latest editor, the Fabliau[61] is 'le récit, le plus souvent comique, d'une aventure réelle ou possible, qui se passe dans les données moyennes de la vie humaine,' the recital, for the most part comic, of a real or possible event occurring in the ordinary conditions of human life. M. de Montaiglon, to be rigidly accurate, should have added that it must be in verse, and, with very rare, if any, exceptions, in octosyllabic couplets. Of such Fabliaux, properly so called, we possess perhaps two hundred. They are of the most various length, sometimes not extending to more than a score or so of lines, sometimes containing several hundreds. They are, like most contemporary literature, chiefly anonymous, or attributed to persons of whom nothing is known, though some famous names, especially that of the Trouvère Rutebœuf, appear among their authors. Their period of composition seems to have extended from the latter half of the twelfth century to the latter half of the fourteenth, no manuscript that we have of them being earlier than the beginning of the thirteenth century, and none later than the beginning of the fifteenth. If, however, their popularity in their original form ceased at the latter period, their course was by no means run. They had passed early from France into Italy (as indeed all the oldest French literature did), and the stock-in-trade of all the Italian *Novellieri* from Boccaccio downwards was supplied by them. In England they found an illustrious copyist in Chaucer, whose Canterbury Tales are perfect Fabliaux, informed by greater art and more poetical spirit than were possessed by their

original authors. In France itself the Fabliaux simply became farces or prose tales, as the wandering reciter of verse gave way to the actor and the bookseller. They appear again (sometimes after a roundabout journey through Italian versions) in the pages of the French tale-tellers of the Renaissance, and finally, as far as collected appearance is concerned, receive their last but not their least brilliant transformation in the *Contes* of La Fontaine. In these the cycle is curiously concluded by a return to the form of the original.

Subjects and character of Fabliaux.

Until MM. de Montaiglon and Raynaud undertook their edition, which has been slowly completed, the study of the Fabliaux was complicated by the somewhat chaotic conditions of the earlier collections. Barbazan and his followers printed as Fabliaux almost everything that they found in verse which was tolerably short. Thus, not merely the mediaeval poems called *dits* and *débats*, descriptions of objects either in monologue or dialogue, which come sometimes very close to the Fabliau proper, but moral discourses, short romances, legends like the *Lai d'Aristote*, and such-like things, were included. This interferes with a comprehension of the remarkably characteristic and clearly marked peculiarities of the Fabliau indicated in the definition given above. As according to this the Fabliau is a short comic verse tale of ordinary life, it will be evident that the attempts which have been made to classify Fabliaux according to their subjects were not very happy. It is of course possible to take such

headings as Priests, Women, Villeins, Knights, etc., and arrange the existing Fabliaux under them. But it is not obvious what is gained thereby. A better notion of the *genre* may perhaps be obtained from a short view of the subjects of some of the principal of those Fabliaux whose subjects are capable of description. *Les deux Bordeors Ribaux* is a dispute between two Jongleurs who boast their skill. It is remarkable for a very curious list of Chansons de Gestes which the clumsy reciter quotes all wrong, and for a great number of the sly hits at chivalry and the chivalrous romances which are characteristic of all this literature. Thus one Jongleur, going through the list of his knightly patrons, tells of Monseignor Augier Poupée—

> 'Qui à un seul coup de s'espee
> Coupe bien à un chat l'oreille;'

and of Monseignor Rogier Ertaut, whose soundness in wind and limb is not due to enchanted armour or skill in fight, but is accounted for thus—

> 'Quar onques ne ot cop feru' (for that
> never has he struck a blow).

Le Vair Palefroi contains the story of a lover who carries off his beloved on a palfrey grey from an aged wooer. *La Housse Partie*, a great favourite, which appears in more than one form, tells the tale of an unnatural son who turns his father out of doors, but is brought to a better mind by his own child, who innocently gives him warning that he in turn will copy his example. *Sire Hain et Dame Anieuse* is one of the innumerable stories of rough correction of scolding wives. *Brunain la Vache au Prestre* recounts a trick played on a covetous priest. In *Le Dit des*

Perdrix, a greedy wife eats a brace of partridges which her husband has destined for his own dinner, and escapes his wrath by one of the endless stratagems which these tales delight in assigning to womankind. *Le sot Chevalier*, though extremely indecorous, deserves notice for the Chaucerian breadth of its farce, at which it is impossible to help laughing. *The two Englishmen and the Lamb* is perhaps the earliest example of English-French, and turns upon the mistake which results in an ass's foal being bought instead of the required animal. *Le Mantel Mautaillié* is the famous Arthurian story known in English as 'The Boy and the Mantle.' *Le Vilain Mire* is the original of Molière's *Médecin malgré lui*. *Le Vilain qui conquist Paradis par Plaist* is characteristic of the curious irreverence which accompanied mediaeval devotion. A villein comes to heaven's gate, is refused admission, and successively silences St. Peter, St. Thomas, and St. Paul, by very pointed references to their earthly weaknesses. As a last specimen may be mentioned the curiously simple word-play of *Estula*. This is the name of a little dog which, being pronounced, certain thieves take for 'Es tu là?'

Sources of Fabliaux.

Such are a very few, selected as well as may be for their typical character, of these stories. It is not unimportant to consider briefly the question of their origin. Many of them belong no doubt to that strange common fund of fiction which all nations of the earth indiscriminately possess. A considerable number seem to be of purely original and indigenous growth: but an actual literary source is not wanting in many cases. The classics supplied some part of

them, the Scriptures and the lives of the saints another part; while not a little was due to the importation of Eastern collections of stories resulting from the Crusades. The chief of these collections were the fables of Bidpai or Pilpai, in the form known as the romance of 'Calila and Dimna,' and the story of Sendabar (in its Greek form Syntipas). This was immensely popular in France under the verse form of *Dolopathos*, and the prose form of *Les sept Sages de Rome*. The remarkable collection of stories called the *Gesta Romanorum* is apparently of later date than most of the Fabliaux; but the tales of which it was composed no doubt floated for some time in the mouths of Jongleurs before the unknown and probably English author put them together in Latin.

The Roman du Renart.

Closely connected with the Fabliaux is one of the most singular works of mediaeval imagination, the *Roman du Renart*[62]. This is no place to examine the origin or antiquity of the custom of making animals the mouthpieces of moral and satirical utterance on human affairs. It is sufficient that the practice is an ancient one, and that the middle ages were early acquainted with Aesop and his followers, as well as with Oriental examples of the same sort. The original author, whoever he was, of the epic (for it is no less) of 'Reynard the Fox,' had therefore examples of a certain sort before his eyes. But these examples contented themselves for the most part with work of small dimension, and had not attempted connected or continuous story. A fierce battle has been fought as to the nationality of Reynard. The facts are these. The oldest form of the story now extant is in Latin. It

is succeeded at no very great interval by German, Flemish, and French versions. Of these the German as it stands is apparently the oldest, the Latin version being probably of the second half of the twelfth century, and the German a little later. But (and this is a capital point) the names of the more important beasts are in all the versions French. From this and some minute local indications, it seems likely that the original language of the epic is French, but French of the Walloon or Picard dialect, and that it was written somewhere in the district between the Seine and the Rhine. This, however, is a matter of the very smallest literary importance. What is of great literary importance is the fact that it is in France that the story receives its principal development, and that it makes its home. The Latin, Flemish, and German Reynards, though they all cover nearly the same ground, do not together amount to more than five-and-twenty thousand lines. The French in its successive developments amounts to more than ninety thousand in the texts already published or abstracted; and this does not include the variants in the Vienna manuscript of *Renart le Contrefait*, or the different developments of the *Ancien Renart*, recently published by M. Ernest Martin.

The Ancien Renart.

The order and history of the building up of this vast composition are as follows. The oldest known 'branches,' as the separate portions of the story are called, date from the beginning of the thirteenth century. These are due to a named author, Pierre de Saint Cloud. But it is impossible to say that they were

actually the first written in French: indeed it is extremely improbable that they were so. However this may be, during the thirteenth century a very large number of poets wrote pieces independent of each other in composition, but possessing the same general design, and putting the same personages into play. In what has hitherto been the standard edition of *Renart*, Méon published thirty-two such poems, amounting in the aggregate to more than thirty thousand verses. Chabaille added five more in his supplement, and M. Ernest Martin has found yet another in an Italianised version. This last editor thinks that eleven branches, which he has printed together, constitute an 'ancient collection' within the *Ancien Renart*, and have a certain connection and interdependence. However this may be, the general plan is extremely loose, or rather non-existent. Everybody knows the outline of the story of Reynard; how he is among the animals (Noble the lion, who is king, Chanticleer the cock, Firapel the leopard, Grimbart the badger, Isengrin the wolf, and the rest) the special representative of cunning and valour tempered by discretion, while his enemy Isengrin is in the same way the type of stupid headlong force, and many of the others have moral character less strongly marked but tolerably well sustained. How this general idea is illustrated the titles of the branches show better than the most elaborate description. 'How Reynard ate the carrier's fish;' 'how Reynard made Isengrin fish for eels;' 'how Reynard cut the tail of Tybert the cat;' 'how Reynard made Isengrin go down the well;' 'of Isengrin and the mare;' 'how Reynard and Tybert sang vespers and matins;' 'the pilgrimage of Reynard,' and so forth. Written by different persons, and at different times, these branches are of course by no means uniform in

literary value. But the uniformity of spirit in most, if not in all of them, is extremely remarkable. What is most noticeable in this spirit is the perpetual undertone of satirical comment on human life and its affairs which distinguishes it. The moral is never obtrusively put forward, and it is especially noteworthy that in this *Ancien Renart*, as contrasted with the later development of the poem, there is no mere allegorising, and no attempt to make the animals men in disguise. They are quite natural and distinct foxes, wolves, cats, and so forth, acting after their kind, with the exception of their possession of reason and language.

Le Couronnement Renart.

The next stage of the composition shows an alteration and a degradation. *Renart le Couronné*, or *Le Couronnement Renart*[63], is a poem of some 3400 lines, which was once attributed to Marie de France, for no other reason than that the manuscript which contains it subjoins her *Ysopet* or fables. It is, however, certainly not hers, and is in all probability a little later than her time. The main subject of it is the cunning of the fox, who first reconciles the great preaching orders Franciscans and Dominicans; then himself becomes a monk, and inculcates on them the art of *Renardie*; then repairs to court as a confessor to the lion king Noble who is ill, and contrives to be appointed his successor, after which he holds tournaments, journeys to Palestine, and so forth. It is characteristic of the decline of taste that in the list of his army a whole bestiary (or list of the real and fictitious beasts of mediaeval zoology) is thrust in; and the very introduction of the abstract term

Renardie, or foxiness, is an evil sign of the abstracting and allegorising which was about to spoil poetry for a time, and to make much of the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tedious and heavy. The poem is of little value or interest. The only chronological indication as to its composition is the eulogy of William of Flanders, killed ('jadis,' says the author) in 1251.

Renart le Nouvel.

The next poem of the cycle is of much greater length, and of at least proportionately greater value, though it has not the freshness and *verve* of the earlier branches. *Renart le Nouvel* was written in 1288 by Jacquemart Giélée, a Fleming. This poem is in many ways interesting, though not much can be said for its general conception, and though it suffers terribly from the allegorising already alluded to. In its first book (it consists of more than 8000 lines, divided into two books and many branches) Renart, in consequence of one of his usual quarrels with Isengrin, gets into trouble with the king, and is besieged in Maupertuis. But the sense of verisimilitude is now so far lost, that Maupertuis, instead of being a fox's earth, is an actual feudal castle; and more than this, the animals which attack and defend it are armed in panoply, ride horses, and fight like knights of the period. Besides this the old familiar and homely personages are mixed up with a very strange set of abstractions in the shape of the seven deadly sins. All this is curiously blended with reminiscences and rehandlings of the older and simpler adventures. Another remarkable feature about *Renart le Nouvel* is that it is full of songs,

chiefly love songs, which are given with the music. Its descriptions, though prolix, and injured by allegorical phrases, are sometimes vigorous.

Renart le Contrefait.

The cycle was finally completed in the second quarter of the fourteenth century by the singular work or works called *Renart le Contrefait*. This has, unfortunately, never been printed in full, nor in any but the most meagre extracts and abstracts. Its length is enormous; though, in the absence of opportunity for examining it, it is not easy to tell how much is common to the three manuscripts which contain it. Two of these are in Paris and one in Vienna, the latter being apparently identical with one which Ménage saw and read in the seventeenth century. One of the Parisian manuscripts contains about 32,000 verses, the other about 19,000; and the Vienna version seems to consist of from 20,000 to 25,000 lines of verse, and about half that number of prose. The author (who, in so far as he was a single person, appears to have been a clerk of Troyes, in Champagne) wrote it, as he says, to avoid idleness, and seems to have regarded it as a vast commonplace book, in which to insert the result not merely of his satirical reflection, but of his miscellaneous reading. A noteworthy point about this poem is that in one place the writer expressly disowns any concealment of his satirical intention. His book, he says, has nothing to do with the kind of fox that kills pullets, has a big brush, and wears a red skin, but with the fox that has two hands and, what is more, two faces under one hood[64]. Notwithstanding this, however, there are many

passages where the old 'common form' of the epic is observed, and where the old personages make their appearance. Indeed their former adventures are sometimes served up again with slight alterations. Besides this there is a certain number of amusing stories and *fabliaux*, the most frequently quoted of which is the tale of an ugly but wise knight who married a silly but beautiful girl in hopes of having children uniting the advantages of both parents, whereas the actual offspring of the union were as ugly as the father and as silly as the mother. Combined with these things are numerous allusions to the grievances of the peasants and burghers of the time against the upper classes, with some striking legends illustrative thereof, such as the story of a noble dame, who, hearing that a vassal's wife had been buried in a large shroud of good stuff, had the body taken up and seized the shroud to make horsecloths of. This original matter, however, is drowned in a deluge not merely of moralising but of didactic verse of all kinds. The history of Alexander is told in one version by Reynard to the lion king in 7000 verses, and is preluded and followed by an account of the history of the world on a scarcely smaller scale. This proceeding, at least in the Vienna version, seems to be burdensome even to Noble himself, who, at the reign of Augustus, suggests that Reynard should exchange verse for prose, and 'compress.' The warning cannot be said to be unnecessary: but works as long as *Renart le Contrefait*, and, as far as it is possible to judge, not more interesting, have been printed of late years; and it is very much to be wished that the publication of it might be undertaken by some competent scholar.

Fauvel.

Renart is not the only bestial personage who was made at this time a vehicle of satire. In the days of Philippe le Bel a certain François de Rues composed a poem entitled *Fauvel*, from the name of the hero, a kind of Centaur, who represents vice of all kinds. The direct object of the poem was to attack the pope and the clergy.

Some extracts from the *Fabliau* of the Partridges and from *Renart* may appropriately now be given:—

Por ce que fabliaus dire sueil,
en lieu de fable dire vueil
une aventure qui est vraie,
d'un vilain qui delés sa haie
prist deus pertris par aventure.
en l'atorner mist moult sa cure;
sa fame les fist au feu metre.
ele s'en sot bien entremetre:
le feu a fait, la haste atorne.
et li vilains tantost s'en torne,
por le prestre s'en va corant.
mais au revenir targa tant
que cuites furent les pertris.
la dame a le haste jus mis,
s'en pinça une pelëure,
quar molt ama la lechëure,
quant diex li dona a avoir.
ne bëoit pas a grant avoir,
mais a tos ses bons acomplir.
l'une pertris cort envaïr:
andeus les eles en menjue.
puis est alee en mi la rue
savoir se ses sires venoit.
quant ele venir ne le voit,
tantost arriere s'en retorne,
et le remanant tel atorne

mal du morsel qui remainsist.
adonc s'apenssa et si dist
que l'autre encore mengera.
moult tres bien set qu'ele dira,
s'on li demande que devindrent:
ele dira que li chat vindrent,
quant ele les ot arrier traites;
tost li orent des mains retraites,
et chascuns la seue en porta.

* * * * * *

Tant dura cele demoree
que la dame fu saoulee,
et li vilains ne targa mie:
a l'ostel vint, en haut s'escrie
'diva, sont cuites les pertris?'
'sire,' dist ele. 'ainçois va pis,
quar mengies les a li chas.'
li vilains saut isnel le pas,
seure li cort comme enragiés.
ja li ëust les iex sachiés,
quant el crie 'c'est gas, c'est gas.
fuiiés,' fet ele, 'Sathanas!
couvertes sont por tenir chaudes.'

(He accepts the excuse; bids her lay the table, and goes to sharpen his knife. The priest arrives. She tells him that her husband is plotting outrage against him, and as a proof shows him sharpening his knife. The priest flies, and she tells her husband that he has run off with the partridges. The husband pursues, but in vain, and the Fabliau thus concludes:—)

A l'ostel li vilains retorne,
et lors sa feme en araisone:
'diva,' fait il, 'et quar me dis

coment tu perdis les pertris?'
cele li dist 'se diex m'aït,
tantost que li prestres me vit,
si me prïa, se tant l'amasse,
que je les pertris li moustrasse,
quar moult volentiers les verroit
et je le menai la tout droit
ou je les avoie couvertes.
il ot tantost les mains ouvertes,
si les prist et si s'en fuï.
mes je gueres ne le sivi,
ains le vous fis moult tost savoir.'
cil respont 'bien pués dire voir
or le laissons a itant estre.'
ainsi fu engingniés le prestre
et Gombaus qui les pertris prist.
par example cis fabliaus dist:
fame est faite por decevoir.
mençonge fait devenir voir
et voir fait devenir mençonge.
cil n'i vout metre plus d'alonge
qui fist cest fablel et ces dis.
ci faut li fabliaus des pertris.

(*Reynard and Isengrin go a-fishing.*)

Ce fu un poi devant Noël
que l'en metoit bacons en sel,
li ciex fu clers et estelez,
et li vivier fu si gelez,
ou Ysengrin devoit peschier,
qu'on pooit par desus treschier,
fors tant c'un pertuis i avoit,
qui des vilains faiz i estoit,
ou il menoient lor atoivre
chascune nuit juër et boivre:
un seel i estoit laissiez.

la vint Renarz toz eslaissiez
et son compere apela.
'sire,' fait il, 'traiiez vos ça:
ci est la plenté des poissons
et li engins ou nos peschons
les anguiles et les barbiaus
et autres poissons bons et biaus.'
dist Ysengrins 'sire Renart,
or le prenez de l'une part,
sel me laciez bien a la qeue.'
Renarz le prent et si li neue
entor la qeue au miex qu'il puet.
'frere,' fait il, 'or vos estuet
moult sagement a maintenir
por les poissons avant venir.'
lors s'est en un buisson fichiez:
si mist son groing entre ses piez
tant que il voie que il face.
et Ysengrins est seur la glace
et li sëaus en la fontaine
plains de glaçons a bone estraine.
l'aive conmence a englacier
et li sëaus a enlacier
qui a la qeue fu noëz:
de glaçons fu bien serondez.
la qeue est en l'aive gelee
et en la glace seelee.

This chapter would be incomplete without a reference to the *Ysopet* of Marie de France[65], which may be said to be a link of juncture between the Fabliau and the *Roman du Renart*. *Ysopet* (diminutive of Aesop) became a common term in the middle ages for a collection of fables. There is one known as the *Ysopet of Lyons*, which was published not long ago[66]; but that of Marie is by far the most

important. It consists of 103 pieces, written in octosyllabic couplets, with moralities, and a conclusion which informs us that the author wrote it 'for the love of Count William' (supposed to be Long-Sword), translating it from an English version of a Latin translation of the Greek. Marie's graceful style and her easy versification are very noticeable here, while her morals are often well deduced and sharply put. The famous 'Wolf and Lamb' will serve as a specimen.

Ce dist dou leu e dou aignel,
qui beveient a un rossel:
li lox a lo sorse beveit
e li aigniaus aval esteit.
irieement parla li lus
ki mult esteit cuntralïus;
par mautalent palla a lui:
'tu m'as,' dist il, 'fet grant anui.'
li aignez li ad respundu
'sire, eh quei?' 'dunc ne veis tu?
tu m'as ci ceste aigue tourblee:
n'en puis beivre ma saolee.
autresi m'en irai, ce crei,
cum jeo ving, tut murant de sei.'
li aignelez adunc respunt
'sire, ja bevez vus amunt:
de vus me vient kankes j'ai beu.'
'qoi,' fist li lox, 'maldis me tu?'
l'aigneus respunt 'n'en ai voleir.'
lous li dit 'jeo sai de veir:
ce meïsme me fist tes pere
a ceste surce u od lui ere,
or ad sis meis, si cum jeo crei.'
'qu'en retraiez,' feit il, 'sor mei?
n'ere pas nez, si cum jeo cuit.'

'e cei pur ce,' li lus a dit:
'ja me fais tu ore cuntraire
e chose ke tu ne deiz faire.'
dunc prist li lox l'engnel petit,
as denz l'estrangle, si l'ocit.

Moralité.

Ci funt li riche robëur,
li vesconte e li jugëur,
de ceus k'il unt en lur justise.
fausse aqoison par cuveitise
truevent assez pur eus cunfundre.
suvent les funt as plaiz semundre,
la char lur tolent e la pel,
si cum li lox fist a l'aingnel.

FOOTNOTES:

[60] The first collection of Fabliaux was published by Barbazan in 1756. This was re-edited by Méon in 1808, and reinforced by the same author with a fresh collection in 1823. Meanwhile Le Grand d'Aussy had (1774-1781) given extracts, abstracts, and translations into modern French of many of them. Jubinal, Robert, and others enriched the collection further, and in vol. xxiii. of the *Histoire Littéraire* M. V. Le Clerc published an excellent study of the subject. A complete collection of Fabliaux has, however, only recently been attempted, by M. M. A. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud (6 vols., Paris, 1872-1888).

[61] *Fabliau* is, of course, the Latin *fabula*. The genealogy of the word is *fabula*, *fabella*, *fabel*, *fable*, *fablel*, *fableau*, *fabliau*. All these last five forms exist.

[62] It should be noticed that this title, though consecrated by usage, is a misnomer. It should be *Roman* de *Renart*, for this latter is a proper name. The class name is *goupil* (vulpes). The standard edition is that of Méon (4 vols., Paris, 1826) with the supplement of Chabaille, 1835. This includes not merely the *Ancien Renart*, but the *Couronnement* and *Renart le Nouvel*. *Renart le Contrefait* has never been printed. Rothe (Paris, 1845) and Wolf (Vienna, 1861) have given the best accounts of it. Recently M. Ernest Martin has given a new critical edition of the *Ancien Renart* (3 vols., Strasburg and Paris, 1882-1887).

[63] The necessary expression of the genitive by *de* is later than this. Mediaeval French retained the inflection of nouns, though in a dilapidated condition. Properly speaking *Renars* is the nominative, *Renart* the general inflected case.

[64] This is a free translation of the last line of the original, which is as follows:—

> Pour renard qui gelines tue,
> Qui a la rousse peau vestue,
> Qui a grand queue et quatre piés,
> N'est pas ce livre communiés;
> Mais pour cellui qui a deux mains
> Dont il sont en ce siècle mains,
> Qui ont sous la chappe Faulx
> Semblant.
>
> Wolf, *Op. cit.* p. 5.

The final allusion is to a personage of the *Roman de la Rose*.

[65] Ed. Roquefort, vol. ii. See next chapter.

[66] By Dr. W. Förster. Heilbronn, 1882.

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY LYRICS.

Early and Later Lyrics.

The lyric poetry of the middle ages in France divides itself naturally into two periods, distinguished by very strongly marked characteristics. The end of the thirteenth century is the dividing point in this as in many other branches of literature. After that we get the extremely interesting, if artificial, forms of the Rondeau and Ballade, with their many varieties and congeners. With these we shall not busy ourselves in the present chapter. But the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are provided with a lyric growth, less perfect indeed in form than that which occupied French singers from Machault to Marot, but more spontaneous, fuller of individuality, variety, and vigour, and scarcely less abundant in amount.

Origins of Lyric.

Romances and Pastourelles.

Before the twelfth century we find no traces of genuine lyrical work in France. The ubiquitous *Cantilenae* indeed again make their appearance in the speculations of literary historians, but here as elsewhere they have no demonstrable historical existence. Except a few sacred songs, sometimes, as

in the case of Saint Eulalie, in early Romance language, sometimes in what the French call *langue farcie*, that is to say, a mixture of French and Latin, nothing regularly lyrical is found up to the end of the eleventh century. But soon afterwards lyric work becomes exceedingly abundant. This is what forms the contents of Herr Karl Bartsch's delightful volume of *Romanzen und Pastourellen*[67]. These are the two earliest forms of French lyric poetry. They are recognised by the Troubadour Raimon Vidal as the special property of the Northern tongue, and no reasonable pretence has been put forward to show that they are other than indigenous. The tendency of both is towards iambic rhythm, but it is not exclusively manifested as in later verse. It is one of the most interesting things in French literary history to see how early the estrangement of the language from the anapaestic and dactylic measures natural to Teutonic speech began to declare itself[68]. These early poems bubble over with natural gaiety, their refrains, musical though semi-articulate as they are, are sweet and manifold in cadence, but the main body of the versification is either iambic or trochaic (it was long before the latter measure became infrequent), and the freedom of the ballad-metres of England and Germany is seldom present. The Romance differs in form and still more in subject from the Pastourelle, and both differ very remarkably from the form and manner of Provençal poetry. It has been observed by nearly all students, that the love-poems of the latter language are almost always at once personal and abstract in subject. The Romance and the Pastourelle, on the contrary, are almost always dramatic. They tell a story, and often (though not always in the case of the Pastourelle) they tell it of some one other than the singer. The

most common form of the Romance is that of a poem varying from twenty lines long to ten times that length and divided into stanzas. These stanzas consist of a certain number (not usually less than three or more than eight) of lines of equal length capped with a refrain in a different metre. By far the best, though by no means the earliest, of them are those of Audefroy le Bastard, who, according to the late M. Paulin Paris, may be fixed at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Audefroy's poems are very much alike in plan, telling for the most part how the course of some impeded true love at last ran smooth. They rank with the very best mediaeval poetry in colour, in lively painting of manners and feelings, and in grace of versification. Unfortunately they are one and all rather too long for quotation here. The anonymous Romance of 'Bele Erembors' will represent the class well enough. The rhyme still bears traces of assonance, which is thought to have prevailed till Audefroy's time:—

Quant vient en mai, que l'on dit as lons
jors,
Que Frans en France repairent de roi cort,
Reynauz repaire devant el premier front
Si s'en passa lez lo mes Arembor,
Ainz n'en designa le chief drecier a mont.
E Raynaut amis!

Bele Erembors a la fenestre au jor
Sor ses genolz tient paile de color;
Voit Frans de France qui repairent de cort,
E voit Raynaut devant el premier front:
En haut parole, si a dit sa raison.
E Raynaut amis!

'Amis Raynaut, j'ai ja veu cel jor
Se passisoiz selon mon pere tor,
Dolanz fussiez se ne parlasse a vos.'
'Ja mesfaistes, fille d'Empereor,
Autrui amastes, si obliastes nos.'
E Raynaut amis!

'Sire Raynaut, je m'en escondirai:
A cent puceles sor sainz vos jurerai,
A trente dames que avuec moi menrai,
C'onques nul hom fors vostre cors n'amai.
Prennez l'emmende et je vos baiserai.'
E Raynaut amis!

Li cuens Raynauz en monta lo degre,
Gros par espaules, greles par lo baudre;
Blonde ot lo poil, menu, recercele:
En nule terre n'ot so biau bacheler.
Voit l'Erembors, so comence a plorer.
E Raynaut amis!

Li cuens Raynauz est montez en la tor,
Si s'est assis en un lit point a flors,
Dejoste lui se siet bele Erembors.

* * * * * *

Lors recomencent lor premieres amors.
E Raynaut amis!

The Pastourelle is still more uniform in subject. It invariably represents the knight or the poet riding past and seeing a fair shepherdess by his road-side. He alights and woos her with or without success. In this class of poem the stanzas are usually longer, and consist of shorter lines than is the case with the Romances, while the refrains are more usually

meaningless though generally very musical. It is, however, well to add that the very great diversity of metrical arrangement in this class makes it impossible to give a general description of it. There are Pastourelles consisting merely of four-lined stanzas with no refrain at all. The following is a good specimen of the class:—

De Saint Quentin a Cambrai
Chevalchoie l'autre jour;
Les un boisson esgardai,
Touse i vi de bel atour.
La colour
Ot freche com rose en mai.
De cuer gai
Chantant la trovai
Ceste chansonnete
'En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

Vers la pastoure tornai
Quant la vi en son destour;
Hautement la saluai
Et di 'deus vos doinst bon jour
Et honour.
Celle ke ci trove ai,
Sens delai
Ses amis serai.'
Dont dist la doucete
'En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

Deles li seoir alai
Et li priai de s'amour,
Celle dist 'Je n'amerai

Vos ne autrui par nul tour,
Sens pastour,
Robin, ke fiencie l'ai.
Joie en ai,
Si en chanterai
Ceste chansonnete:
En non deu, j'ai bel ami,
Cointe et joli,
Tant soie je brunete.'

So various, notwithstanding the simplicity and apparent monotony of their subjects, are these charming poems, that it is difficult to give, by mere citation of any one or even of several, an idea of their beauty. In no part of the literature of the middle ages are its lighter characteristics more pleasantly shown. The childish freedom from care and afterthought, the half unconscious delight in the beauty of flowers and the song of birds, the innocent animal enjoyment of fine weather and the open country, are nowhere so well represented. Chaucer may give English readers some idea of all this, but even Chaucer is sophisticated in comparison with the numerous, and for the most part nameless, singers who preceded him by almost two centuries in France. As a purely formal and literary characteristic, the use of the burden or refrain is perhaps their most noteworthy peculiarity. Herr Bartsch has collected five hundred of these refrains, all different. There is nothing like this to be found in any other literature; and, as readers of Béranger know, the fashion was preserved in France long after it had been given up elsewhere.

Thirteenth Century.

Changes in Lyric.

After the twelfth century the early lyrical literature of France undergoes some changes. In the first place it ceases to be anonymous, and individual singers—some of them, like Thibaut of Champagne, of very great merit and individuality—make their appearance. In the second place it becomes more varied but at the same time more artificial in form, and exhibits evident marks of the communication between troubadour and trouvère, and of the imitation by the latter of the stricter forms of Provençal poetry. The Romance and the Pastourelle are still cultivated, but by their side grow up French versions, often adapted with considerable independence, of the forms of the South[69]. Such, for instance, is the *chanson d'amour*, a form less artfully regulated indeed than the corresponding canzon or sestine of the troubadours, but still of some intricacy. It consists of five or six stanzas, each of which has two interlaced rhymes, and concludes with an *Envoi*, which, however, is often omitted. *Chansonnettes* on a reduced scale are also found. In these pieces the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes, which was ultimately to become the chief distinguishing feature of French prosody, is observable, though it is by no means universal. To the Provençal *tenson* corresponds the *jeu parti* or verse dialogue, which is sometimes arranged in the form of a Chanson. The *salut d'amour* is a kind of epistle, sometimes of very great length and usually in octosyllabic verse, the decasyllable being more commonly used in the Chanson. Of this the *complainte* is only a variety. Again, the Provençal *sirvente* is represented by the northern *serventois*, a

poem in Chanson form, but occupied instead of love with war, satire, religion, and miscellaneous matters. It has even been doubted whether the *serventois* is not the forerunner of the *sirvente* instead of the reverse being the case. Other forms are *motets*, *rotruenges*, *aubades*. Poems called *rondeaux* and *ballades* also make their appearance, but they are loose in construction and undecided in form. The thirteenth century is, moreover, the palmy time of the Pastourelle. Most of those which we possess belong to this period, and exhibit to the full the already indicated characteristics of that graceful form. But the lyric forms of the thirteenth century are to some extent rather imitated than indigenous, and it is no doubt to the fact of this imitation that the common ascription of general poetical priority to the Langue d'Oc, unfounded as it has been sufficiently shown to be, is due in the main. The most courageous defenders of the North have wished to maintain its claims wholly intact even in this instance, but probability, if not evidence, is against them.

Traces of Lyric in the Thirteenth Century.

Quesnes de Bethune.

Thibaut de Champagne.

It has been said that the number of song writers from the end of the twelfth century to the end of the

thirteenth is extremely large. M. Paulin Paris, whose elaborate chapter in the *Histoire Littéraire* is still the great authority on the subject, has enumerated nearly two hundred, to whose work have to be added hundreds of anonymous pieces. It would seem indeed that during a considerable period the practice of song writing was almost as incumbent on the French gentleman of the thirteenth century as that of sonnetteering on the English gentleman of the sixteenth. There are, however, not a few names which deserve separate notice. The first of these in point of time, and not the last in point of literary importance, is that of Quesnes de Bethune, the ancestor of Sully, and himself a famous warrior, statesman, and poet. His epitaph by a poet not usually remarkable for eloquence[70] is a very striking one. It gives us approximately the date of his death, 1224; and the word *vieux* is supposed to show that Quesnes must have been born at least as early as the middle of the twelfth century. He took part in two crusades, that of Philip Augustus and that which Villehardouin has chronicled. His poems[71] are of all classes, historical, satirical, and amorous, some of last being addressed to Marie, Countess of Champagne; and his Chansons are, in the technical sense, some of the earliest we possess. Contemporary with Quesnes apparently was the personage who is known under the title of Châtelain de Coucy, and whose love for the Lady of Fayel resulted in an interchange of very tender and beautiful verse; the poem known as the lady's own is one of the very best of its kind. Long afterwards lover and lady became the hero and heroine of a romance, which has led some persons to throw doubt upon their historical existence, and the Lady of Fayel has even been deprived of her poem by a well-known kind of

criticism. Of more importance is Thibaut de Champagne, King of Navarre, who is indeed the most important single figure of early French lyrical poetry. He was born in 1201, and died in 1253. His high position as a feudal prince in both north and south, the minority of St. Louis, and the intimate relations which existed between the King's mother, Blanche of Castille, and Thibaut, made him the mark for a good deal of satirical invective. There is a tradition that he was Blanche's lover, the only objection to which is that the Queen was thirty years his senior. Thibaut's poems have been more than once reprinted, the last edition being that of M. Tarbé[72]; this contains eighty-one pieces, not a few of which, however, are probably the work of others. The majority of them are Chansons d'Amour, of the kind just defined. There are, however, a good many Jeux-Partis, and a certain number of nondescript poems on miscellaneous subjects. There is more reason for the common opinion which attributes to Thibaut the marriage of the poetical qualities of northern and southern France, than the mere fact of his having been both Count of Champagne and King of Navarre. His poems have in reality something of the freshness and the individuality of the Trouvères, mixed with a great deal of the formal grace and elegance of the Troubadours. The following may serve as an example:—

Contre le tens qui desbrise
Yvers, et revient este,
Et la mauvis se desguise,
Qui de lonc tens n'a chante
Ferai chanson. Car a gre
Me vient que j'aie en pense
Amor, qui en moi s'est mise.

Bien m'a droit son dart gete.

Douce dame, de franchise,
N'ai je point en vos trove:
S'ele ne s'i est puis mise
Que je ne vos esgarde,
Trop avez vers moi fierte.
Mais ce fait vostre biaute,
Ou il n'i a pas de devise,
Tant en i a grand plante.

En moi n'a point d'astenance
Que je puisse aillors penser,
Pors que la, ou conoissance
Ne merci ne puis trover.
Bien fui fait por li amer;
Car ne m'en puis saoler.
Et quant plus aurai cheance,
Plus la me convendra douter.

D'une riens sui en doutance,
Que je ne puis plus celer,
Qu'en li n'ait un po d'enfance.
Ce me fait deconforter,
Que s'a moi a bon penser
Ne l'ose ele desmontrer.
Si feist qu'a sa semblance
Le poisse deviner.

Des que je li fis priere
Et la pris a esgarder,
Me fist amors la lumiere
Des iels par le cuer passer.
Cil conduit me fait grever:
Dont je ne me soi garder:
Ne ne puet torner arriere
Mon cuer; miex voudrait crever.

Dame, a vos m'estuet clamer,
Et que merci vos requiere.
Diex m'i laist pitie trover!

Minor Singers.

Adam de la Halle.

Besides Thibaut there are not a few other song writers of the thirteenth century, who rise out of the crowd named by M. Paulin Paris. Some of these, as might be expected, are famous for their achievements in other departments of literature. Such are Adam de la Halle, Jean Bodel, Guyot de Provins. There are, however, two, Gace Brulé and Colin Muset, who survive solely but worthily as song writers. Gace Brulé was a knight of Champagne, Colin Muset a professed minstrel. The former chiefly composed sentimental work; the latter, with the proverbial or professional gaiety of his class, drew nearer to the satirical tone of the Fabliau writers. His best-known and most usually quoted work describes the different welcome which he receives from his family on his return from professional tours, according to the success or ill-success with which he has met. Two other poets, Adam de la Halle and Rutebœuf, are far more prominent in literary history. Adam de la Halle[73] bore the surname 'Le Bossu d'Arras,' from his native town, though the term hunchback seems to have had no literal application to him. His exact date is not known, but it must probably have been from the fourth to the ninth decade of the thirteenth century. His dramatic works, which are of signal importance, will be noticed

elsewhere. But besides these he has left some seventy or eighty lyrical pieces of one kind or another. Adam's life was not uneventful; he was at first a monk, but left his convent and married. Then he proved as faithless to his temporal as he had been to his spiritual vows. He lampooned his wife, his family, his townsmen, and, shaking the dust of Arras from his feet, retired first to Douai and then to the court of Robert of Artois, whom he accompanied to Italy. He died in that country about 1288. The style of Adam de la Halle varies from the coarsest satire to the most graceful tenderness. Of the latter the following song is a good specimen:—

Diex!
Comment porroie
Trouver voie
D'aler a chelui
Cui amiete je sui?
Chainturelle, va-i
En lieu de mi;
Car tu fus sieue aussi,
Si m'en conquerra miex.

Mais comment serai sans ti?
Dieus!
Chainturelle, mar vous vi;
Au deschaindre m'ochies;
De mes grietes a vous me confortoie,
Quant je vous sentoie,
Ai mi!
A le saveur de mon ami.
Ne pour quant d'autres en ai,
A cleus d'argent et de soie,
Pour men user.
Mais lasse! comment porroie
Sans cheli durer

Qui me tient en joie?

Canchonnete, chelui proie
Qui le m'envoya,
Puis que jou ne puis aler la.
Qu'il en viengne a moi,
Chi droit,
A jour failli,
Pour faire tous ses boins,
Et il m'orra,
Quant il ert joins,
Canter a haute vois:
Par chi va la mignotise,
Par chi ou je vois.

Rutebœuf

Rutebœuf (whose name appears to be a nickname only) has been more fortunate than most of the poets of early France in leaving a considerable and varied work behind him, and in having it well and collectively edited[74]. Little or nothing, however, is known about him, except from allusions in his own verse. He was probably born about 1230; he was certainly married in 1260; there is no allusion in his poems to any event later than 1285. By birth he may have been either a Burgundian or a Parisian. His work which, as has been said, is not inconsiderable in volume, falls into three well-marked divisions in point of subject. The first consists of personal and of comic poems; the second of poems sometimes satirical, sometimes panegyrical, on public personages and events; the third, which is apparently with reason assigned to the latest period of his life, of devotional poems. In the first division *La Pauvreté Rutebœuf*, *Le Mariage Rutebœuf*, etc., are complaints

of his woeful condition; complaints, however, in which there is nearly as much satire as appeal. Others, such as *Renart le Bestourné*, *Le Dit des Cordeliers*, *Frère Denise*, *Le Dit de l'Erberie*, are poems of the Fabliau kind. In all these there are many lively strokes of satire, and not a little of the reckless gaiety, chequered here and there with deeper feeling, which has always been a characteristic of a certain number of French poets. Rutebœuf's sarcasm is especially directed towards the monastic orders. The second class of poems, which is numerous, displays a more elevated strain of thought. Many of these poems are *complaintes* or elaborate elegies (often composed on commission) for distinguished persons, such as Geoffroy de Sargines and Guillaume de Saint Amour. Others, such as the *Complainte d'Outremer*, the *Complainte de Constantinople*, the *Dit de la Voie de Tunes*, the *Débat du Croisé et du Décroisé*, are comments on the politics and history of the time, for the most part strongly in favour of the crusading spirit, and reproaching the nobility of France with their degeneracy. 'Mort sont Ogier et Charlemagne' is an often-quoted exclamation of Rutebœuf in this sense. The third class includes *La Mort Rutebœuf*, otherwise *La Repentance Rutebœuf*, *La Voie de Paradis*, various poems to the Virgin, the lives of St. Mary of Egypt and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and the miracle play of *Théophile*. Rutebœuf's favourite metres are either the continuous octosyllabic couplet, or else a stanza composed of an octosyllabic couplet and a line of four syllables, the termination of the latter being caught up by the succeeding couplet. In this the *Mariage* is written, of which a specimen may be given:—

En l'an de l'incarnacïon,

VIII jors aprés la nascïon
Jhesu qui soufri passïon,
en l'an soissante,
qu'arbres n'a foille, oisel ne chante,
fis je toute la rien dolante
que de cuer m'aime:
nis li musarz musart me claime.
or puis filer, qu'il me faut traime;
mult ai a faire.
deus ne fist cuer tant de pute aire,
tant li aie fait de contraire
ne de martire,
s'il en mon martire se mire,
qui ne doie de bon cuer dire
'je te claim cuite.'
envoier un home en Egypte,
ceste dolor est plus petite
que n'est la moie;
je n'en puis mais se je m'esmoie.
l'en dit que fous qui ne foloie
pert sa saison:
sui je marïez sanz raison?
or n'ai ne borde ne maison.
encor plus fort:
por plus doner de reconfort
a ceus qui me heent de mort,
tel fame ai prise
que nus fors moi n'aime ne prise,
et s'estoit povre et entreprise,
quant je la pris.
a ci marïage de pris,
c'or sui povres et entrepris
ausi comme ele,
et si n'est pas gente ne bele.
cinquante anz a en s'escuële,
s'est maigre et seche:

n'ai pas paor qu'ele me treche.
despuis que fu nez en la greche
deus de Marie,
ne fu mais tele espouserie.
je sui toz plains d'envoiserie:
bien pert a l'uevre.

Though he has less of the 'lyrical cry' than some others, Rutebœuf is perhaps the most vigorous poet of his time.

Lais. Marie de France.

There is one division of early poetry which may also be noticed under this head, though it is sometimes dealt with as a kind of miniature epic. This is the *lai*, a term which is used in old French poetry with two different significations. The Trouvères of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries made of it a regular lyrical form. But the most famous of its examples, those which now pass under the name of Marie de France, are narrative poems in octosyllabic verse and varying in length considerably. It is agreed that the term and the thing are of Breton origin; and the opinion which seems most probable is that the word originally had reference rather to the style of music with which the harper accompanied his verse, than to the measure, arrangement, or subject of the latter. As to Marie herself[75], nothing is known about her with certainty. She lived in England in the reign of Henry III, and often gives English equivalents for her French words. The *lais* which we possess, written by her and attributed to her, are fourteen in number. They bear the titles of *Gugemer*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Le Bisclaveret*, *Lanval*, *Les Deux Amants*, *Ywenec*, *Le Laustic*, *Milun*, *Le Chaitivel*, *Le*

Chèvrefeuille, *Eliduc*, *Graalent* and *L'Espine*. Mr. O'Shaughnessy has paraphrased several of these in English[76]; they are all narrative in character. Their distinguishing features are fluent and melodious versification, pure and graceful language—among the purest and most graceful, though decidedly Norman in character, of the time—true poetical feeling, and a lively faculty of invention and description. After Marie there was a tendency to approximate the *lai* to the Provençal *descort*, and at last, as we have said, it acquired rules and a form quite alien from those of its earlier examples. There is a general though not a universal inclination to melancholy of subject in the early lays, a few of which are anonymous.

Note to Third Edition.—M. Gaston Paris has expressed some surprise at my remarks on metre (p. 63). This from so accomplished a scholar is a curious instance of the difficulty which Frenchmen seem to feel in appreciating quantity. To an English eye and ear which have been trained to classical prosody the trochaic rhythm of, for instance, the Pastourelle quoted on p. 65, is unmistakable, and there are anapaestic metres to be found here and there in early poems of the same kind. Indeed, all French poetry is easily scanned quantitatively, though the usual authorities protest against such scansion. Voltaire, it is said, took Turgot's hexameters for prose, and the significance of this is the same whether the mistake, as is probable, was mischievous or whether it was genuine.

FOOTNOTES:

[67] Leipsic, 1870.

[68] See note at end of chapter.

[69] This miscellaneous lyric for the most part awaits collection and publication. M. G. Raynaud has given a valuable *Bibliographie des Chansonniers Français des XIII^e^ et XIV^e^ siècles*. 2 vols., Paris, 1884. Also a collection of *motets*. Paris, 1881.

[70] Philippe Mouskès. This is it:

> La terre fut pis en cest an
> Quar li vieux Quesnes estoit mors.

[71] The best edition is in Schéler's *Trouvères Belges*. Brussels, 1876.

[72] Rheims, 1851.

[73] The most convenient place to look for Adam's history and work is *Le Théâtre Français au Moyen Age*. Par Monmerqué et Michel. Paris, 1874. There are also separate editions of him by Coussemaker, and more recently by A. Rambeau. Marburg, 1886.

[74] By A. Jubinal. 2nd edition. 3 vols. Paris, 1874.

[75] Ed. Roquefort. 2 vols. Paris, 1820. The first volume contains the lays; the later the fables, which have been noticed in the last chapter. Later edition, Warnke. Halle, 1885. Marie also wrote a poem on the Purgatory of St. Patrick. Three other lays, *Tidorel*, *Gringamor*, and *Tiolet* have been attributed to her, and are printed in *Romania*, vol. viii.

[76] *Lays of France*, London, 1872.

CHAPTER VII.

SERIOUS AND ALLEGORICAL POETRY.

In consequence of the slowness with which prose was used for any regular literary purpose in France, verse continued to do duty for it until a comparatively late period in almost all departments of literature. By the very earliest years of the twelfth century, and probably much earlier (though we have no certain evidence of this latter fact), documents of all kinds began to be written in verse of various forms. Among the earliest serious verse that was written rank, as we might expect, verse chronicles. It was not till 1200 at soonest that long translations from the Latin in French prose were made, but such translations, and original works as well, were written in French verse long before.

Verse Chronicles.

The rhymed Chronicles were numerous, but, with rare exceptions, they cannot be said to be of any very great literary importance. Whether they were imitated directly from the Chansons de Gestes, or *vice versa*, is a question which, as it happens, can be settled without difficulty. For they are almost all in octosyllabic couplets, a metre certainly later than the assonanced decasyllabics of the earliest Chansons. The latter form and the somewhat later dodecasyllable or Alexandrine are rarely used for Verse Chronicles, the most remarkable exception being the spirited *Combat des Trente*[77], which is however very late, and the *Chronique de du Guesclin* of the same date. There are earlier examples of

history in Alexandrines (some are found in the twelfth century, such as the account of Henry the Second's Scotch Wars by Jordan Fantome, Chancellor of the diocese of Winchester), but they are not numerous or important. It is not unworthy of notice that the majority of the early Verse Chronicles are English or Anglo-Norman. The first of importance is that of Geoffrey Gaymar, whose Chronicle of English history was written about 1146. Gaymar was followed by a much better known writer, the Jerseyman Wace[78], who not only, as has been mentioned, versified Geoffrey of Monmouth into the *Brut*[79], but produced the important *Roman de Rou*[80], giving the history of the Dukes of Normandy and of the Conquest of England. The date of the *Brut* is 1155, of the *Rou* 1160. This latter is the better of the two, though Wace was not a great poet. It consists chiefly of octosyllabics, with a curious insertion of Alexandrines in rhymed not assonanced *laisses*. Wace was followed by Benoist de Sainte-More, who extended his Chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy to more than forty thousand verses. The 'Life of St. Thomas' (Becket), by Garnier de Pont St. Maxence, also deserves notice, as does an anonymous poem on the English wars in Ireland. But the most interesting of this group is probably the history[81] of William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, who died in 1219 and who during his life played a great part in England. It abounds in passages of historical interest and literary value. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the practice of writing history in verse gradually died out, yet some of the most important examples date from this time. Such are the Chronicles of Philippe Mouskès[82], a Fleming, in more than thirty thousand verses, extending from the Siege of Troy to the year 1243. Mouskès is of some

importance in literary history, because of the great extent to which he has drawn on the Chansons de Gestes for his information. In 1304 Guillaume Guiart, a native of Orleans, wrote in twelve thousand verses a Chronicle of the thirteenth century, including a few years earlier and later. There are a large number of other Verse Chronicles, but few of them are of much importance historically, and fewer still of any literary interest.

History, however, was by no means the only serious subject which took this incongruous form in the middle ages. The amount of miscellaneous verse written during the period between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the fifteenth century is indeed enormous. Only a very small portion of it has ever been printed, and the mere summary description of the manuscripts which contain it is as yet far from complete. If it be said generally that, during the greater part of these three hundred years, the first impulse of any one who wished to write, no matter on what subject, was to write in verse, and that the popular notion of the want of literary tastes in the middle ages is utterly mistaken, some idea may be formed of the vast extent of literature, poetical in form, which was then produced. Much no doubt of this literature is not in the least worthy of detailed notice; much, whether worthy or not, must from mere considerations of space and proportion remain unnoticed here. What is possible, is to indicate briefly the chief forms, authors, and subjects, which fall under the heading of this chapter, and to give a somewhat detailed account of the great serious poem of mediæval France, the *Roman de la Rose*. Peculiarities of metre and so forth will be indicated where it is necessary, but it may be

said generally that the great mass of this literature is in octosyllabic couplets.

Miscellaneous Satirical Verse.

It has already been observed in discussing the Fabliaux that the first enquirers into old French literature were led to include a very miscellaneous assortment of poems under that head; and it may now be added that this miscellaneous assortment with much else constitutes the *farrago* of the present chapter. The two great poems of the *Roman du Renart* and the *Roman de la Rose* stand as representatives of the more or less serious poetry of the time, and everything else may be said to be included between them. Beginning nearest to the *Roman du Renart* and its kindred Fabliaux, we find a vast number of half-satirical styles of poetry, many, if not most of them, known (according to what has been noted in the preface as characteristic of mediaeval literature) by distinctive form-names. Of these *dits* and *débats* have already been noticed, but it is not easy to give a notion of the number of the existing examples, or of the extraordinary diversity of subjects to which both, and especially the *dits*, extend. Perhaps some estimate may be formed from the fact that the *dits* of three Flemish poets alone, Baudouin de Condé, Jean de Condé, and Watriquet de Couvin, fill four stout octavo volumes[83]. The subjects of these and of the large number of *dits* composed by other writers and anonymous are almost innumerable. The earliest are for the most part simple enumerations of the names of streets, of street cries, of guilds, of coins, and such-like things. By degrees they become more definitely didactic, and at last allegorical moralising masters

them as it does almost every other kind of poetry in the fourteenth century. The *débat*, sometimes called *dispute*, or *bataille*, is an easily understood variety of the *dit*. Rutebœuf's principal *débat* has been named; another in a less serious spirit is that between *Charlot et le Barbier*. There is a *Bataille des Vins*, a *Bataille de Caréme et de Charnage*, a *Débat de l'Hiver et l'Été*, etc., etc. Another name much used for half-satirical, half-didactic verse was that of *Bible*, of which the most famous (probably because it was the first known) is that of Guyot de Provins,—a violent onslaught on the powers that were in Church and State by a discontented monk. An extract from it will illustrate this division of the subject as well as anything else:—

Des fisicïens me merveil:
de lor huevre et de lor conseil
rai ge certes mont grant merveille,
nule vie ne s'apareille
a la lor, trop par est diverse
et sor totes autres perverse.
bien les nomme li communs nons;
mais je ne cuit qu'i ne soit hons
qui ne les doie mont douter.
il ne voudroient ja trover
nul home sanz aucun mehaing.
maint oingnement font e maint baing
ou il n'a ne senz ne raison,
cil eschape d'orde prison
qui de lor mains puet eschaper.
qui bien set mentir et guiler
et faire noble contenance,
tout ont trové fors la crëance
que les genz ont lor fait a bien.
tiex mil se font fisicïen
qui n'en sevent voir nes que gié.

li plus maistre sont mont changié
de grant ennui, n'il n'est mestiers
dont il soit tant de mençongiers.
il ocïent mont de la gent:
ja n'ont ne ami ne parent
que il volsissent trover sain;
de ce resont il trop vilain.
mont a d'ordure en ces lïens.
qui en main a fisicïens,
se met par els. il m'ont ëu
entre lor mains: onques ne fu,
ce cuit, nule plus orde vie.
je n'aim mie lor compaignie,
si m'aït dex, qant je sui sains:
honiz est qui chiet en lor mains.
par foi, qant je malades fui,
moi covint soffrir lor ennui.

Testaments of the satirical kind, chiefly noteworthy for the brilliant use which Villon made of the tradition of composing them, *resveries* and *fatrasies* (nonsense poems with a more or less satirical drift), parodies of the offices of the Church, of its sermons, of the miracle plays, are the chief remaining divisions of the poetry which, under a light and scoffing envelope, conceals a serious purpose.

Didactic verse. Philippe de Thaun.

Such things have at all times been composed in verse, and the reason is sufficiently obvious. In the first place, the intention of the writers is to a certain extent masked, and in the second, the reader's attention is attracted. But the middle ages by no

means confined the use of verse to such cases. Downright instruction was, as often as not, the object of the verse writer in those days. The earliest, and as such the most curious of didactic poems, are those of Philippe de Thaun, an Englishman of Norman extraction, who wrote in the first quarter of the twelfth century. His two works are a *Comput*, or Chronological Treatise, dedicated to an uncle of his, who was chaplain to Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, and a *Bestiary*, or Zoological Catalogue, dedicated to Adela of Louvain, the wife of Henry the First. Written before the vogue of the versified Arthurian Romances had consecrated the octosyllable, these poems are in couplets of six syllables. Their great age, and to a certain extent their literary merit, deserve an extract:—

Monosceros est beste,
un corn ad en la teste,
pur çeo ad si a nun.
de buc ele ad façun.
par pucele eat prise,
or oëz en quel guise,
quant hom le volt cacer
et prendre et enginner,
si vent horn al orest
u sis repaires est;
la met une pucele
hors de sein sa mamele,
e par odurement
monosceros la sent;
dune vent a la pucele,
si baiset sa mamele,
en sun devant se dort,
issi vent a sa mort;
li hom survent atant,

ki l'ocit en dormant,
u trestut vif le prent,
si fait puis sun talent.
grant chose signefie,
ne larei nel vus die.
Monosceros griu est,
en franceis un-corn est:
beste de tel baillie
Jhesu Crist signefie;
un deu est e serat
e fud e parmaindrat;
en la virgine se mist,
e pur hom charn i prist,
e pur virginited,
pur mustrer casteed,
a virgine se parut
e virgine le conceut.
virgine est e serat
e tuz jurz parmaindrat.
ores oëz brefment
le signefïement.
Ceste beste en verté
nus signefie dé;
la virgine signefie,
sacez, sancte Marie;
par sa mamele entent
sancte eglise ensement;
e puis par le baiser
çeo deit signefïer,
que hom quant il se dort
en semblance est de mort:
dés cum home dormi,
ki en cruiz mort sufri,
ert sa destructïun
nostre redemptïun,
e sun traveillement

nostre reposement.
si deceut dés dïable
par semblant cuvenable;
anme e cors sunt un,
issi fud dés et hum,
e içeo signefie
beste de tel baillie.

Bestiaries and *Computs* (the French title of the Chronologies) were for some time the favourites with didactic verse writers, but before long the whole encyclopædia, as it was then understood, was turned into verse. Astrology, hunting, geography, law, medicine, history, the art of war, all had their treatises; and latterly *Trésors*, or complete popular educators, as they would be called nowadays, were composed, the best-known of which is that of Walter of Metz in 1245.

Moral and Theological verse.

All, or almost all, these works, written as they were in an age sincerely pious, if somewhat grotesque in its piety, and theoretically moral, if somewhat loose in its practice, contained not only abundant moralising, but also more or less theology of the mystical kind. It would therefore have been strange if ethics and theology themselves had wanted special exponents in verse. Before the middle of the twelfth century Samson of Nanteuil (again an Englishman by residence) had versified the Proverbs of Solomon, and in the latter half of the same century vernacular lives of the saints begin to be numerous. Perhaps the most popular of these was the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, of which the fullest poetical form has been

left us by an English trouvère of the thirteenth century named Chardry, by whom we have also a verse rendering of the 'Seven Sleepers,' and some other poems[84]. Somewhat earlier, Hermann of Valenciennes was a fertile author of this sort of work, composing a great *Bible de Sapience* or versification of the Old Testament, and a large number of lives of saints. Of books of Eastern origin, one of the most important was the *Castoiement d'un Père à son Fils*, which comes from the *Panchatantra*, though not directly. The translated work had great vogue, and set the example of other *Castoiements* or warnings. The monk Helinand at the end of the twelfth century composed a poem on 'Death,' and a vast number of similar poems might be mentioned. The commonest perhaps of all is a dialogue *Des trois Morts et des trois Vifs*, which exists in an astonishing number of variants. Gradually the tone of all this work becomes more and more allegorical. *Dreams, Mirrors, Castles*, such as the 'Castle of Seven Flowers,' a poem on the virtues, make their appearance.

Allegorical verse.

The Roman de la Rose.

The question of the origin of this habit of allegorising and personification is one which has been often incidentally discussed by literary historians, but which has never been exhaustively treated. It is certain that, at a very early period in the middle ages, it makes its appearance, though it is not in full flourishing until the thirteenth century. It seems to have been a reflection in light literature of the same

attitude of mind which led to the development of the scholastic philosophy, and, as in the case of that philosophy, Byzantine and Eastern influences may have been at work. Certain it is that in some of the later Greek romances[85], something very like the imagery of the *Roman de la Rose* is discoverable. Perhaps, however, we need not look further than to the natural result of leisure, mental activity, and literary skill, working upon a very small stock of positive knowledge, and restrained by circumstances within a very narrow range of employment. However this may be, the allegorising habit manifests itself recognisably enough in French literature towards the close of the twelfth century. In the *Méraugis de Portlesguez* of Raoul de Houdenc, the passion for arguing out abstract questions of lovelore is exemplified, and in the *Roman des Eles* of the same author the knightly virtues are definitely personified, or at least allegorised. At the same time some at all events of the Troubadours, especially Peire Wilhem, carried the practice yet further. *Merci*, *Pudeur*, *Loyauté*, are introduced by that poet as persons whom he met as he rode on his travels. In Thibaut de Champagne a still further advance was made. The representative poem of this allegorical literature, and moreover one of the most remarkable compositions furnished by the mediaeval period in France, is the *Roman de la Rose*[86]. It is doubtful whether any other poem of such a length has ever attained a popularity so wide and so enduring. The *Roman de la Rose* extends to more than twenty thousand lines, and is written in a very peculiar style; yet it maintained its vogue, not merely in France but throughout Europe, for nearly three hundred years from the date of its commencement, and for more than two hundred from that of its conclusion. The

history of the composition of the poem is singular. It was begun by William of Lorris, of whom little or nothing is known, but whose work must, so far as it is easy to make out, have been done before 1240, and is sometimes fixed at 1237. This portion extends to 4670 lines, and ends quite abruptly. About forty years later, Jean de Meung, or Clopinel, afterwards one of Philippe le Bel's paid men of letters, continued it without preface, taking up William of Lorris' cue, and extended it to 22,817 verses, preserving the metre and some of the personages, but entirely altering the spirit of the treatment. The importance of the poem requires that such brief analysis as space will allow shall be given here. Its general import is sufficiently indicated by the heading,—

> Ci est le Rommant de la Rose
> Où l'art d'amors est tote enclose;

though the rage for allegory induced its readers to moralise even its allegorical character, and to indulge in various far-fetched explanations of it. In the twentieth year of his age, the author says, he fell asleep and dreamed a dream. He had left the city on a fair May morning, and walked abroad till he came to a garden fenced in with a high wall. On the wall were portrayed figures, Hatred, *Félonnie*, *Villonie*, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sadness, Old Age, *Papelardie* (Hypocrisy), Poverty—all of which are described at length. He strives to enter in, and at last finds a barred wicket at which he is admitted by Dame Oiseuse (Leisure), who tells him that Déduit (Delight) and his company are within. He finds the company dancing and singing, Dame Liesse (Enjoyment) being the chief songstress, while Courtesy greets him and invites him to take part in the festival. The god of love himself is then

described, with many of his suite—Beauty, Riches, etc. A further description of the garden leads to the fountain of Narcissus, whose story is told at length. By this the author, who is thenceforth called the lover, sees and covets a rosebud. But thorns and thistles bar his way to it, and the god of love pierces him with his arrows. He does homage to the god, who accepts his service, and addresses a long discourse to him on his future duties and conduct. The prospect somewhat alarms him, when a new personage, Bel Acueil (Gracious Reception), comes up and tenders his services to the lover, the god having disappeared. Almost immediately, however, Dangier[87] makes his appearance, and drives both the lover and Bel Acueil out of the garden. As the former is bewailing his fate, Reason appears and remonstrates with him. He persists in his desire, and parleys with Dangier, both directly and by ambassadors, so that in the end he is brought back by Bel Acueil into the garden and allowed to see but not to touch the rose. Venus comes to his aid, and he is further allowed to kiss it. At this, however, Shame, Jealousy, and other evil agents reproach Dangier. Bel Acueil is immured in a tower, and the lover is once more driven forth.

Here the portion due to William of Lorris ends. Its main characteristics have been indicated by this sketch, except that the extreme beauty and grace of the lavish descriptions which enclose and adorn the somewhat commonplace allegory perforce escape analysis. It is in these descriptions, and in a certain tenderness and elegance of general thought and expression, that the charm of the poem lies, and this is very considerable. The deficiency of action, however, and the continual allegorising threaten to make it monotonous had it been much longer

continued in the same strain.

It is unlikely that it was this consideration which determined Jean de Meung to adopt a different style. In his time literature was already agitated by violent social, political, and religious debates, and the treasures of classical learning were becoming more and more commonly known. But prose had not yet become a common literary vehicle, save for history, oratory, and romance, nor had the duty of treating one thing at a time yet impressed itself strongly upon authors. Jean de Meung was satirically disposed, was accomplished in all the learning of his day, and had strong political opinions. He determined accordingly to make the poem of Lorris, which was in all probability already popular, the vehicle of his thoughts.

In doing this he takes up the story as his predecessor had left it, at the point where the lover, deprived of the support of Bel Acueil, and with the suspicions of Dangier thoroughly aroused against him, lies despairing without the walls of the delightful garden. Reason is once more introduced, and protests as before, but in a different tone and much more lengthily. She preaches the disadvantages of love in a speech nearly four hundred lines long, followed by another double the length, and then by a dialogue in which the lover takes his share. The difference of manner is felt at once. The allegory is kept up after a fashion, but instead of the graceful fantasies of William of Lorris, the staple matter is either sharp and satirical views of actual life, or else examples drawn indifferently from sacred and profane history. One speech of Reason's, a thousand lines in length, consists of a collection of instances of this kind showing the mobility of fortune. At length she leaves

the lover as she found him, 'melancolieux et dolant,' but unconvinced. Amis (the friend), who has appeared for a moment previously, now reappears, and comforts him, also at great length, dwelling chiefly on the ways of women, concerning which much scandal is talked. The scene with Reason had occupied nearly two thousand lines; that with Amis extends to double that length, so that Jean de Meung had already excelled his predecessor in this respect. Profiting by the counsel he has received, the lover addresses himself to Riches, who guards the way, but fruitlessly. The god of love, however, takes pity on him (slightly ridiculing him for having listened to Reason), and summons all his folk to attack the tower and free Bel Acueil. Among these Faux Semblant presents himself, and, after some parley, is received. This new personification of hypocrisy gives occasion to some of the author's most satirical touches as he describes his principles and practice. After this, Faux Semblant and his companion, Contrainte Astenance (forced or feigned abstinence), set to work in favour of the lover, and soon win their way into the tower. There they find an old woman who acts as Bel Acueil's keeper. She takes a message from them to Bel Acueil, and then engages in a singular conversation with her prisoner, wherein the somewhat loose morality of the discourses of Amis is still further enforced by historical examples, and by paraphrases of not a few passages from Ovid. She afterward admits the lover, who thus, at nearly the sixteen-thousandth line from the beginning, recovers through the help of False Seeming the 'gracious reception' which is to lead him to the rose. The castle, however, is not taken, and Dangier, with the rest of his allegorical company, makes a stout resistance to 'Les Barons de L'Ost'—the lords of Love's

army. The god sends to invoke the aid of his mother, and this introduces a new personage. Nature herself, and her confidant, Genius, are brought on the scene, and nearly five thousand verses serve to convey all manner of thoughts and scraps of learning, mostly devoted to the support, as before, of questionably moral doctrines. In these five thousand lines almost all the current ideas of the middle ages on philosophy and natural science are more or less explicitly contained. Finally, Venus arrives and, with her burning brand, drives out Dangier and his crew, though even at this crisis of the action the writer cannot refrain from telling the story of Pygmalion and the Image at length. The way being clear, the lover proceeds unmolested to gather the longed-for rose.

Popularity of the Roman de la Rose.

It is impossible to exaggerate, and not easy to describe, the popularity which this poem enjoyed. Its attacks on womanhood and on morality generally provoked indeed not a few replies, of which the most important came long afterwards from Christine de Pisan and from Gerson. But the general taste was entirely in favour of it. Allegorical already, it was allegorised in fresh senses, even a religious meaning being given to it. The numerous manuscripts which remain of it attest its popularity before the days of printing. It was frequently printed by the earliest typographers of France, and even in the sixteenth century it received a fresh lease of life at the hands of Marot, who re-edited it. Abroad it was praised by Petrarch and translated by Chaucer[88]; and it is on the whole not too much to say that for fully two centuries it was the favourite book in the vernacular literature of Europe. Nor was it unworthy of this popularity. As has been pointed out, the grace of the part due to William of Lorris is remarkable, and the satirical vigour of the part due to Jean de Meung perhaps more remarkable still. The allegorising and the length which repel readers of to-day did not disgust generations whose favourite literary style was the allegorical, and who had abundance of leisure; but the real secret of its vogue, as of all such vogues, is that it faithfully held up the mirror to the later middle ages. In no single book can that period of history be so conveniently studied. Its inherited religion and its nascent free-thought; its thirst for

knowledge and its lack of criticism; its sharp social divisions and its indistinct aspirations after liberty and equality; its traditional morality and asceticism, and its half-pagan, half-childish relish for the pleasures of sense; its romance and its coarseness, all its weakness and all its strength, here appear.

Imitations.

The imitations of the *Roman de la Rose* were in proportion to its popularity. Much of this imitation took place in other kinds of poetry, which will be noticed hereafter. Two poems, however, which are almost contemporary with its earliest form, and which have only recently been published, deserve mention. One, which is an obvious imitation of Guillaume de Lorris, but an imitation of considerable merit, is the *Roman de la Poire*[89], where the lover is besieged by Love in a tower. The other, of a different class, and free from trace of direct imitation, is the short poem called *De Venus la Déesse d'Amors*[90], written in some three hundred four-lined stanzas, each with one rhyme only. Some passages of this latter are very beautiful.

Three extracts, two from the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, and one from the second, will show its style:—

En iceli tens déliteus,
Que tote riens d'amer s'esfroie,
Sonjai une nuit que j'estoie,
Ce m'iert avis en mon dormant,
Qu'il estoit matin durement;
De mon lit tantost me levai,
Chauçai-moi et mes mains lavai.
Lors trais une aguille d'argent

D'un aguiller mignot et gent,
Si pris l'aguille à enfiler.
Hors de vile oi talent d'aler,
Por oïr des oisiaus les sons
Qui chantoient par ces boissons
En icele saison novele;
Cousant mes manches à videle,
M'en alai tot seus esbatant,
Et les oiselés escoutant,
Qui de chanter moult s'engoissoient
Par ces vergiers qui florissoient,
Jolis, gais et pleins de léesce.
Vers une rivière m'adresce
Que j'oï près d'ilecques bruire.
Car ne me soi aillors déduire
Plus bel que sus cele rivière.
D'un tertre qui près d'iluec ière
Descendoit l'iaue grant et roide,
Clere, bruiant et aussi froide
Comme puiz, ou comme fontaine,
Et estoit poi mendre de Saine,
Mès qu'ele iere plus espandue.
Onques mès n'avoie véue
Tele iaue qui si bien coroit:
Moult m'abelissoit et séoit
A regarder le leu plaisant.
De l'iaue clere et reluisant
Mon vis rafreschi et lavé.
Si vi tot covert et pavé
Le fons de l'iaue de gravele;
La praérie grant et bele
Très au pié de l'iaue batoit.
Clere et serie et bele estoit
La matinée et atemprée:
Lors m'en alai parmi la prée
Contreval l'iaue esbanoiant,

Tot le rivage costoiant.

* * * * * *

Une ymage ot emprès escrite,
Qui sembloit bien estre ypocrite,
Papelardie ert apelée.
C'est cele qui en recelée,
Quant nus ne s'en puet prendre garde,
De nul mal faire ne se tarde.
El fait dehors le marmiteus,
Si a le vis simple et piteus,
Et semble sainte créature;
Mais sous ciel n'a male aventure
Qu'ele ne pense en son corage.
Moult la ressembloit bien l'ymage
Qui faite fu à sa semblance,
Qu'el fu de simple contenance;
Et si fu chaucie et vestue
Tout ainsinc cum fame rendue.
En sa main un sautier tenoit,
Et sachiés que moult se penoit
De faire à Dieu prières faintes,
Et d'appeler et sains et saintes.
El ne fu gaie ne jolive,
Ains fu par semblant ententive
Du tout à bonnes ovres faire;
Et si avoit vestu la haire.
Et sachiés que n'iere pas grasse.
De jeuner sembloit estre lasse,
S'avoit la color pale et morte.
A li et as siens ert la porte
Dévéée de Paradis;
Car icel gent si font lor vis
Amegrir, ce dit l'Évangile,
Por avoir loz parmi la vile,
Et por un poi de gloire vaine,

Qui lor toldra Dieu et son raine.

* * * * * *

Comment le traistre Faulx-Semblant
Si va les cueurs des gens emblant,
Pour ses vestemens noirs et gris,
Et pour son viz pasle amaisgris.
'Trop sai bien mes habiz changier,
Prendre l'un, et l'autre estrangier.
Or sui chevaliers, or sui moines,
Or sui prélas, or sui chanoines,
Or sui clers, autre ore sui prestres,
Or sui desciples, or sui mestres,
Or chastelains, or forestiers:
Briément, ge sui de tous mestiers.
Or resui princes, or sui pages,
Or sai parler trestous langages;
Autre ore sui viex et chenus,
Or resui jones devenus.
Or sui Robers, or sui Robins,
Or cordeliers, or jacobins.
Si pren por sivre ma compaigne
Qui me solace et acompaigne,
(C'est dame Astenance-Contrainte),
Autre desguiséure mainte,
Si cum il li vient à plesir
Por acomplir le sien désir.
Autre ore vest robe de fame;
Or sui damoisele, or sui dame,
Autre ore sui religieuse,
Or sui rendue, or sui prieuse,
Or sui nonain, or sui abesse,
Or sui novice, or sui professe;
Et vois par toutes régions
Cerchant toutes religions. Mès de religion,
sans faille,

G'en pren le grain et laiz la paille;
Por gens avulger i abit,
Ge n'en quier, sans plus, que l'abit.
Que vous diroie? en itel guise
Cum il me plaist ge me desguise;
Moult sunt en moi mué li vers,
Moult sunt li faiz aux diz divers.
Si fais chéoir dedans mes piéges
Le monde par mes priviléges;
Ge puis confesser et assoldre,
(Ce ne me puet nus prélas toldre,)
Toutes gens où que ge les truisse;
Ne sai prélat nul qui ce puisse,
Fors l'apostole solement
Qui fist cest establissement
Tout en la faveur de nostre ordre.'

FOOTNOTES:

[77] This is an account of the battle of thirty Englishmen and thirty Bretons in the Edwardian wars.

[78] There is, it appears, no authority for the Christian name of Robert which used to be given to Wace.

[79] Wace's *Brut* is not the only one. The title seems to have become a common name.

[80] The old edition of the *Roman de Rou*, by Pluquet, has been entirely superseded by that of Dr. Hugo Andresen. 2 vols. Heilbronn, 1877-1879.

[81] Discovered recently in the Middlehill collection, and known chiefly by an article in *Romania* (Jan. 1882), giving an abstract and specimens.

[82] Ed. Reiffenberg. Brussels, 1835-1845.

[83] Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1866-1868.

[84] Well edited by Koch. Heilbronn, 1879.

[85] See especially *Hysminias and Hysmine*.

[86] Ed. F. Michel. 2 vols. Paris, 1864.

[87] *Dangier* is not exactly 'danger.' To be 'en dangier de quelqu'un' is to be 'in somebody's power.' *Dangier* is supposed to stand for the guardian of the beloved, father, brother, husband, etc. This at least has been the usual interpretation, and seems to me to be much the more probable. M. Gaston Paris, however, and others, see in *Dangier* the natural coyness and resistance of the beloved object, not any external influence.

[88] Chaucer's authorship of the existing translation has been denied. It is, however, certain that he did translate the poem.

[89] Ed. Stehlich. Halle, 1881.

[90] Ed. Förster. Berne, 1880.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROMANS D'AVENTURES.

Distinguishing features of Romans d'Aventures.

The remarkable fecundity of early French literature in narrative poetry on the great scale was not limited to the Chanson de Geste, the Arthurian Romance, and the classical story wrought into the likeness of one or the other of these. Towards the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century a new class of narrative poems arose, derived from each and all of these kinds, but marked by important differences. The new form immediately reacted on the forms which had given it birth, and produced new Chansons de Gestes, new Arthurian Romances, and new classical stories fashioned after its own image. This is what is called the Roman d'Aventures, of which the first and main feature is open and almost avowed fictitiousness, and the second the more or less complete abandonment of any attempt at cyclic arrangement or subordination to a central theme.

Looser application of the term.

Classes of Romans d'Aventures.

Until quite recently it was not unusual to apply the term Roman d'Aventures with less strictness, and to make it include the Romances of the Round Table. There can, however, be no doubt that it is far better to adopt Jean Bodel's three classes as distinguishing into separate groups the epic poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and to restrict the title Romans d'Aventures to the later narrative developments of the thirteenth and fourteenth. For the second distinguishing mark which we have just indicated is

striking and of more or less universal application. In these later poems the ambition of the writer to class his work under and with some precedent work is almost entirely absent. He allows himself complete freedom, though he may sometimes, in order to give his characters greater interest, connect them nominally with some famous personage or event of the earlier cycles. This tendency to shake off the shackles of cyclicism is early apparent. There are episodes even in the Chansons de Gestes which have little or no reference to Charlemagne or his peers: the Arthurian Romances in prose and verse contain long digressions, holding but very loosely to the Table Round, such as the adventures of Tristram and Percivale, and still more the singular episode of Grimaud in the *Saint Graal*. As for the third class, the Trouvères almost from the beginning assumed the greatest licence in their handling of the classical legends. These accordingly were less affected than any others by the change. It is possible to divide the Romans d'Aventures themselves under the three headings. It is further possible to indicate a large class of Chansons de Gestes over which the influence of the Roman d'Aventures has passed. But the Chanson having a special formal peculiarity—the assonanced or rhymed tirade—survived the new influence better than the other two, and keeps its name, and to some extent its character, while the Romances of Arthur and antiquity are simply lost in the general body of tales of adventure. These tales are for the most part written in octosyllabic couplets on the model of Chrestien, but a very few, such as *Brun de la Montaigne*, imitate the exterior characteristics of the Chanson.

It is further to be noticed that while the earlier poems are mostly anonymous, the Romans

d'Aventures are generally, though not always, signed, and bear characteristics of particular authorship. In some cases, notably in those of Adenès le Roi and Raoul de Houdenc, we have a body of work signed or otherwise identified, which enables us to attribute a definite literary character and position to its authors. This, as we have noted, is impossible in the case of the national epics, and not too easy in that of the Arthurian Romances. Until quite recently however the Roman d'Aventures has had less of the attention of editors than its forerunners, and the works which compose the class are still to some extent unpublished.

Adenès le Roi.

Adenès or Adans le Roi perhaps derived his surname from the function of king of the minstrels, if he performed it, at the court of Henry III, duke of Brabant. He was, most likely, born in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and the last probable allusion to him which we have occurs in the year 1297. The events of his life are only known from his own poems, and consist chiefly of travels in company with different princesses and princes of Flanders and Brabant. His literary work is however of great importance. It consists partly of refashionings of three Chansons de Gestes, *Les enfances Ogier*, *Berte aus grans Piés*, and *Bueves de Commarchis*[91]. In these three poems Adenès works up the old epics into the form fashionable in his time, and as we possess the older versions of the first and last, the comparison of the two forms affords a literary study of the highest interest. His last, longest, and most important work is the Roman d'Aventures

of *Cléomadès*[92], a poem extending to 20,000 verses, and not less valuable for its intrinsic merit than as a type of its class. Its popularity in the middle ages was immense. Froissart gives it the place occupied in the *Inferno* by *Lancelot* in his description of his declaration of love to his mistress, and allusions to it under its second title of *Le Cheval de Fust*[93] are frequent. The most prominent feature in the story is the introduction of a wooden horse, like that known to everybody in the Arabian Nights, which, started and guided by means of pegs, transports its rider whithersoever he will. Its great length allows of a very long series of adventures, all of which are told in spirited and flowing verse, though with considerable prolixity and a certain abuse of stock descriptions. These two faults characterise all the Romans d'Aventures and the Chansons which were remodelled in their style. The merits of *Cléomadès* are not so universally found, but its extreme length is not common. Few other Romans d'Aventures exceed 10,000 lines. An extract from this poem will well illustrate the manner of this important class of composition:—

Cleomadés vit un chastel
encoste un plain, tres fort et bel,
ou il ot mainte bele tour.
bos et rivieres vit entour,
vignes et praieries grans.
mult fu li chastiaus bien sëans.
la façon dou castel deïsse,
mais je dout mult que ne meïsse
trop longement au deviser:
pour ce m'en voel briément passer.
Du chastel vous dirai le non:
miols sëant ne vit aine nus hom,

lors l'apieloit on Chastel-noble.
n'ot tel dusque en Constantinoble,
ne de la dusque en Osterice
n'ot plus bel, plus fort ne plus rice.
carmans a cel point i estoit
que Cleomadés vint la droit.
forment li sambloit li chastiaus
de toutes pars riches et biaus.
Cleomadés lors s'avisa
que viers le chastel se trera.
bien pensoit qu'en tel liu manoient
gent qui de grant afaire estoient.
che fu si qu'apriés l'ajournee
mult faisoit bele matinee,
car mais estoit nouviaus entrés:
c'est uns tans ki mult est amés
et de toutes gens conjoïs;
pour çou a non mais li jolis.
une tres grant tour haute et forte
avoit asés priés de la porte,
ki estoit couverte de plon,
plate deseure, car adon
les faisoit on ensi couvrir
pour engins et pour assallir.
Cleomadés a avisee
la tour ki estoit haute et lee;
lors pense qu'il s'arestera
sor cele tour tant qu'il savra,
se il puet, la certainité
quel païs c'est la verité.
lors a son cheval adrechié
viers la tour de marbre entaillié.
les chevilletes si tourna
que droit sour la tour aresta.
si coiement s'est avalés
que sour aighe coie vait nés.



Raoul de Houdenc.

Raoul de Houdenc is an earlier poet than Adenès, and represents the Roman d'Aventures in its infancy, when it still found it necessary to attach itself to the great cycle of the Round Table. His works, besides some shorter poems[94], consist of the *Roman des Eles* (Ailes), a semi-allegorical composition, describing the wings and feathers of chivalry, that is to say, the great chivalrous virtues, among which Raoul, like a herald as he was, gives Largesse the first place; of *Méraugis de Portlesguez*, an important composition, possessing some marked peculiarities of style; and possibly also of the *Vengeance de Raguidel*, in which the author works out one of the innumerable unfinished episodes of the great epic of *Percevale*. Thus Raoul de Houdenc occupies no mean place in French literature, inasmuch as he indicates the starting-point of two great branches, the Roman d'Aventures and the allegorical poem, and this at a very early date. This date is not known exactly; but it was certainly before 1228, when the Trouvère Huon de Méry alludes to him, and classes him with Chrestien as a master of French verse. He has in truth some very noteworthy peculiarities. The chief of these, which must soon strike any reader of *Méraugis*, is his tendency to *enjambement* or overlapping of couplets. It is a curious feature in the history of French verse that the isolation of the couplet has constantly recurred in its history, and that as constantly reformers have striven to break up the monotony so produced by this process of *enjambement*. Perhaps Raoul is the earliest who thus, as an indignant critic put it at the first representation of *Hernani*, 'broke up verses, and threw them out of window.' Besides this metrical characteristic, the

thing most noteworthy in his poems (as might indeed have been expected from his composition of the *Roman des Eles*) is a tendency to allegorising, and to scholastic disquisitions on points of amatory casuistry. The whole plot of *Méraugis* indeed turns on the enquiry whether physical or metaphysical love is the sincerest, and on the quarrel which a difference on this point brings on between the hero and Gorvein Cadrus his friend and his rival in the love of the fair Lidoine.

Chief Romans d'Aventures.

Many other Romans d'Aventures deserve mention, both for their intrinsic merits and for the immense popularity they once enjoyed. Foremost among these must be mentioned *Partenopex de Blois*[95] and *Flore et Blanchefleur*[96]. The former (formerly ascribed to Denis Pyramus and now denied to him, but said to date from the twelfth century) is a kind of modernised *Cupid and Psyche*, except that Cupid's place is taken by the fairy Melior, and Psyche's by the knight Parthenopeus or Parthenopex. This poem has great elegance and freshness of style, and though the author is inclined to moralise (as a near forerunner of the *Roman de la Rose* was bound to do), his moralisings are gracefully and naively put. *Flore et Blanchefleur* is perhaps even superior. Its theme is the love of a young Christian prince for a Saracen girl-slave, who has been brought up with him. She is sold into a fresh captivity to remove her from him, but he follows her and rescues her unharmed from the harem of the Emir of Babylon. The delicacy of the handling is very remarkable in this poem, and it has some links of connection with *Aucassin et*

Nicolette. *Le Roman de Dolopathos*[97] has a literary history of great interest which we need not touch upon here. Its versification has more vigour than that of almost any other Roman d'Aventures. *Blancandin et l'Orgueilleuse d'Amour*[98] is more promising at the beginning than in the sequel. A young knight, hearing of the pride and coyness of a lady, accosts and kisses her as she rides past with a great following of knights. Her coldness is of course changed to love at first sight, and the audacious suitor afterwards delivers her from her enemies; but the working out of the story is rather dully managed. *Brun de la Montaigne*[99], as has been already mentioned, is written in Chanson form, and deals with the famous Forest of Broceliande in Britanny. *Guillaume de Palerne*[100] is a still more interesting work. It introduces the favourite mediaeval idea of lycanthropy, the hero being throughout helped and protected by a friendly were-wolf, who is before the end of the poem freed from the enchantment to which he is subjected. This Romance was early translated into English. Of the same class is the *Roman de l'Escouffle*, where a hawk carries away the heroine's ring, as in a well-known story of the Arabian Nights. *Amadas et Idoine*[101] is one of the numerous histories of the success of a squire of low degree, but is distinguished from most of them by the originality of its conception and the vigour of its style. The scenes where the hero is recovered of his madness by his beloved, and where, keeping guard over her tomb, he fights with ghostly enemies, after a time of trial of his fidelity, and rescues her from death, are unusually brilliant. *Le Bel Inconnu*[102], which (from a curious misunderstanding of its older form *Li Biaus Desconnus*) occurs in English form as *Lybius Diasconus*, tells the story of a son of Gawain

and the fairy with the white hands, and thus is one of the numerous secondary Romances of the Round Table. So also is the long and interesting *Roman du Chevalier as Deux Espées*[103]; this extends to more than 12,000 lines, and, though the adventures recorded are of the ordinary Round Table pattern, there is noticeable in it a better faculty of maintaining the interest and a completer mastery over episodes than usual. A still longer poem (also belonging to what may be called the outer Arthurian cycle) is *Durmart le Gallois*[104], which contains almost 16,000 verses. The loves of the hero and Fenise, the Queen of Ireland, are somewhat lengthily handled; but there are passages of merit, especially one most striking episode in which the hero, riding through a forest by night, comes to a tree covered from top to bottom with burning torches, while a shining naked child is enthroned on the summit. These touches of mystical religion are rarer in the later Romans d'Aventures than in the Arthurian Romances proper, but with them one of the most remarkable elements of romance disappears. Philippe de Rémy, Seigneur de Beaumanoir (who has other claims to literary distinction) is held to be author of two Romans d'Aventures[105], *La Manekine* (the story of the King of Hungary's daughter, who cut off her hand to save herself from her father's incestuous passion) and *Blonde d'Oxford*, where a young French squire carries off an English heiress. *Joufrois de Poitiers*[106], which has not come down to us complete, is chiefly remarkable for the liveliness of style with which adventures, in themselves tolerably hackneyed, are handled. Other Romans d'Aventures, which are either as yet in manuscript or of less importance, are *Ille et Galeron* and *Eracle*, both by Gautier d'Arras, *Cristal et Larie*, *La Dame à la Licorne*,

Guy de Warwike, *Gérard de Nevers* or *La Violette*[107], *Guillaume de Dole*, *Elédus et Séréna*, *Florimont*.

General Character.

Like most kinds of mediaeval poetry, these Romans d'Aventures have a very considerable likeness the one to the other. It may indeed be said that they possess a 'common form' of certain incidents and situations, which reappear with slight changes and omissions in all or most of them. Their besetting sins are diffuseness and the recurrence of stock descriptions and images. On the other hand, they have their peculiar merits. The harmony of their versification is often very considerable; their language is supple, picturesque, and varied, and the moral atmosphere which they breathe is one of agreeable refinement and civilisation. In them perhaps is seen most clearly the fanciful and graceful side of the state of things which we call chivalry. Its mystical and transcendental sides are less vividly and touchingly exhibited than in the older Arthurian Romances; and its higher passions are also less dealt with. The Romans d'Aventures supply once more, according to the Aristotelian definition, an Odyssey to the Arthurian Iliad; they are complex and deal with manners. Nor ought it to be omitted that, though they constantly handle questions of gallantry, and though their uniform theme is love, the language employed on these subjects is almost invariably delicate, and such as would not fail to satisfy even modern standards of propriety. The courtesy which was held to be so great a knightly virtue, if it was not sufficient to ensure a high standard of morality in conduct, at any rate secured such a standard in

matter of expression. In this respect the Court literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries stands in very remarkable contrast to that which was tolerated, if not preferred, from the time of Louis the Eleventh until the reign of his successor fourteenth of the name.

Last Chansons. Baudouin de Sebourc.

Reference has already been made to the influence which these poems had on the Chansons de Gestes. Few of the later developments of these are worth much attention, but what may be called the last original Chanson deserves some notice. *Baudouin de Sebourc*[108] and its sequel the *Bastard of Bouillon*[109] worthily close this great division of literature, and, setting as they do a finish to the sub-cycle of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, hardly lose except in simplicity by comparison with its magnificent opening in the *Chanson d'Antioche*. They contain together some 33,000 verses, and the scene changes freely. It is sometimes in Syria, where the Crusaders fight against the infidel, sometimes in France and Flanders, where Baudouin has adventures of all kinds, comic and chivalrous, sometimes on the sea, where among other things the favourite mediaeval legend of St. Brandan's Isle is brought in. Not a little of its earlier part shows the sarcastic spirit common at the date of its composition, the beginning of the fourteenth century. The length of the two poems is enormous, as has been said; but, putting two or three masterpieces aside, no poem of mediaeval times has a more varied and livelier interest than *Baudouin de Sebourc*, and few breathe the genuine Chanson spirit

of pugnacious piety better than *Le Bastart de Bouillon*.

FOOTNOTES:

[91] Ed. Schéler. Brussels, v. d.

[92] Ed. van Hasselt. Brussels, 1866.

[93] *The wooden horse.*

[94] The *Songe d'Enfer* and the *Voie de Paradis*, published by Jubinal, as the *Roman des Eles* has been by Schéler, *Méraugis* by Michelant, and the *Vengeance de Raguidel* by Hippeau.

[95] Ed. Crapelet. Paris, 1834.

[96] Ed. Du Méril. Paris, 1856.

[97] Ed. Brunet et Montaiglon. Paris, 1856.

[98] Ed. Michelant. Paris, 1867.

[99] Ed. Meyer. Paris, 1875.

[100] Ed. Michelant. Paris, 1876.

[101] Ed. Hippeau. Paris, 1863.

[102] Ed. Hippeau. Paris, 1860.

[103] Ed. Förster. Halle, 1877.

[104] Ed. Stengel. Tübingen, 1873.

[105] Both edited in extract by Bordier. Paris, 1869. Complete edition begun by Suchier. Paris, 1884.

[106] Ed. Hofmann and Muncker. Halle, 1880.

[107] Ed. Michel.

[108] Ed. Boca. 2 vols. Valenciennes, 1841.

[109] Ed. Schéler. Brussels, 1877.

CHAPTER IX.

LATER SONGS AND POEMS.

The Artificial Forms of Northern France.

Not the least important division of early French literature, in point of bulk and peculiarity, though not always the most important in point of literary excellence, consists of the later lyrical and miscellaneous poems of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By the end of the thirteenth century the chief original developments had lost their first vigour, while, on the other hand, the influence of the regular forms of Provençal poetry had had time to make itself fully felt. There arose in consequence, in northern France, a number of artificial forms, the origin and date of which is somewhat obscure, but which rapidly attained great popularity, and which continued for fully two centuries almost to monopolise the attention of poets who did not devote themselves to narrative. These forms, the Ballade, the Rondeau, the Virelai, etc., have already been alluded to as making their appearance among the later growths of early lyrical poetry. They must now be treated in the abundant development which they received at the hands of a series of poets from Lescurel to Charles d'Orléans.

General Character. Varieties.

The principle underlying all these forms is the same, that is to say, the substitution for the half-articulate refrain of the early Romances, of a refrain forming part of the sense, and repeated with strict regularity at the end or in the middle of stanzas rigidly corresponding in length and constitution. In at least two cases, the *lai* and the *pastourelle*, the names of earlier and less rigidly exact forms were borrowed for the newer schemes; but the more famous and prevailing models[110], the Ballade, with its modification the Chant Royal, and the Rondel, with its modifications the Rondeau and the Triolet, are new. It has been customary to see in the adoption of these forms a sign of decadence; but this can hardly be sustained in face of the fact that, in Charles d'Orléans and Villon respectively, the Rondel and the Ballade were the occasion of poetry far surpassing in vigour and in grace all preceding work of the kind, and also in presence of the service which the sonnet —a form almost if not quite as artificial—has notoriously done to poetry. It may be admitted, however, that the practitioners of the Ballade and the Rondeau soon fell into puerile and inartistic over-refinements. The forms of Ballade known as Équivoquée, Fratrisée, Couronnée, etc., culminating in the preposterous Emperière, are monuments of tasteless ingenuity which cannot be surpassed in their kind, and they have accordingly perished. But both in France and in England the Ballade itself and a few other forms have retained popularity at intervals, and have at the present day broken out into fresh and vigorous life.

Jehannot de Lescurel.

Guillaume de Machault.

Eustache Deschamps

The chief authors of these pieces during the period we are discussing were Jehannot de Lescurel, Guillaume de Machault, Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, Christine de Pisan, Alain Chartier, and Charles d'Orléans. Besides these there were many others, though the epoch of the Hundred Years' War was not altogether fertile in lighter poetry or poetry of any kind. Jehannot de Lescurel[111] is one of those poets of whom absolutely nothing is known. His very name has only survived in the general syllabus of contents of the manuscript which contains his works, and which is in this part incomplete. The thirty-three poems—sixteen Ballades, fifteen Rondeaus[112], and two nondescript pieces—which exist are of singular grace, lightness, and elegance. They cannot be later and are probably earlier than the middle of the fourteenth century, and thus they are anterior to most of the work of the school. Guillaume de Machault was a person sufficiently before the world, and his work is very voluminous. As usual with all these poets, it contains many details of its author's life, and enables us to a certain extent to construct that life out of these indications. Machault was probably born about 1284, and may not have died till 1377. A native of Champagne and of noble birth, he early entered, like most of the lesser nobility of

the period, the service of great feudal lords. He was chamberlain to Philip the Fair, and at his death became the secretary of John of Luxembourg, the well-known king of Bohemia. After the death of this prince at Cressy, he returned to the service of the court of France and served John and Charles V., finally, as it appears, becoming in some way connected with Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus. His works were very numerous, amounting in all to some 80,000 lines, of which until recently nothing but a few extracts was in print. In the last few years, however, *La Prise d'Alexandrie*[113], a rhymed chronicle of the exploits of Lusignan, and the *Voir Dit*[114], a curious love poem in the style of the age, have been printed. Besides these his works include numerous ballades, etc., and several long poems in the style of those of Froissart, shortly to be described. On the other hand, the works of Eustache Deschamps, which are even more voluminous than those of Machault, his friend and master, are almost wholly composed of short pieces, with one notable exception, the *Miroir de Mariage*, a poem of 13,000 lines[115]. Deschamps has left no less than 1175 ballades, and as the ballade usually contains twenty-four lines at least, and frequently thirty-four, this of itself gives a formidable total. Rondeaus, virelais, etc., also proceeded in great numbers from his pen; and he wrote an important 'Art of Poetry,' a treatise rendered at once necessary and popular by the fashion of artificial rhyming. The life of Deschamps was less varied than that of Machault, whose inferior he was in point of birth, but he held some important offices in his native province, Champagne. Both Deschamps and Machault exhibit strongly the characteristics of the time. Their ballades are for the most part either moral or occasional in subject, and

rarely display signs of much attention to elegance of phraseology or to weight and value of thought. In the enormous volume of their works, amounting in all to nearly 200,000 lines, and as yet mostly unpublished, there is to be found much that is of interest indirectly, but less of intrinsic poetical worth. The artificial forms in which they for the most part write specially invite elegance of expression, point, and definiteness of thought, qualities in which both, but especially Deschamps, are too often deficient. When, for instance, we find the poet in his anxiety to discourage swearing, filling, in imitation of two bad poets of his time, one, if not two ballades[116] with a list of the chief oaths in use, it is difficult not to lament the lack of critical spirit displayed.

Froissart.

Froissart, though inferior to Lescurel, and though far less remarkable as a poet than as a prose writer, can fairly hold his own with Deschamps and Machault, while he has the advantage of being easily accessible[117]. The later part of his life having been given up to history, he is not quite so voluminous in verse as his two predecessors. Yet, if the attribution to him of the *Cour d' Amour* and the *Trésor Amoureux* be correct, he has left some 40,000 or 50,000 lines. The bulk of his work consists of long poems in the allegorical courtship of the time, interspersed with shorter lyrical pieces in the prevailing forms. One of these poems, the *Buisson de Jonece*, is interesting because of its autobiographical details; and some shorter pieces approaching more nearly to the *Fabliau* style, *Le Dit du Florin*, *Le Débat du Cheval et du Lévrier*, etc., are sprightly and agreeable enough. For

the most part, however, Froissart's poems, like almost all the poems of the period, suffer from the disproportion of their length to their matter. If the romances of the time, which are certainly not destitute of incident, be tedious from the superabundance of prolix description, much more tedious are these recitals of hyperbolical passion tricked out with all the already stale allegorical imagery of the *Roman de la Rose* and with inappropriate erudition of the fashion which Jean de Meung had confirmed, if he did not set it.

Christine de Pisan.

Christine de Pisan, who was born in 1363, was a pupil of Deschamps, as Deschamps had been a pupil of Machault. She was an industrious writer, a learned person, and a good patriot, but not by any means a great poetess. So at least it would appear, though here again judgment has to be formed on fragments, a complete edition of Christine never having been published, and even her separate poems being unprinted for the most part, or printed only in extract. Besides a collection of Ballades, Rondeaux, and so forth, she wrote several *Dits* (the *Dit de la Pastoure*, the *Dit de Poissy*, the *Dittié de Jeanne d'Arc*, and some *Dits Moraux*), besides a *Mutation de Fortune*, a *Livre des Cent Histoires de Troie*, etc., etc.

Alain Chartier.

Alain Chartier, who was born in or about 1390, and who died in 1458, is best known by the famous story of Margaret of Scotland, queen of France, herself an industrious poetess, stooping to kiss his poetical lips

as he lay asleep. He also awaits a modern editor. Like Froissart, he devoted himself to allegorical and controversial love poems, and like Christine to moral verse. In the former he attained to considerable skill, and a ballade, which will presently be given, will show his command of dignified expression. On the whole he may be said to be the most complete example of the scholarliness which tended more and more to characterise French poetry at this time, and which too often degenerated into pedantry. Chartier is the first considerable writer of original work who Latinises much; and his practice in this respect was eagerly followed by the *rhétoriqueur* school both in prose and verse. He himself observed due measure in it; but in the hands of his successors it degraded French to an almost Macaronic jargon.

In all the earlier work of this school not a little grace and elegance is discoverable, and this quality manifests itself most strongly in the poet who may be regarded as closing the strictly mediaeval series, Charles d'Orléans[118]. The life of this poet has been frequently told. As far as we are concerned it falls into three divisions. In the first, when after his father's death he held the position of a great feudal prince almost independent of royal control, it is not recorded that he produced any literary work. His long captivity in England was more fruitful, and during it he wrote both in French and in English. But the last five-and-twenty years of his life, when he lived quietly and kept court at Blois (bringing about him the literary men of the time from Bouciqualt to Villon, and engaging with them in poetical tournaments), were the most productive. His undoubted work is not large, but the pieces which compose it are among the best of their kind. He is fond, in the allegorical language of the time, of

alluding to his having 'put his house in the government of Nonchaloir,' and chosen that personage for his master and protector. There is thus little fervency of passion about him, but rather a graceful and somewhat indolent dallying with the subjects he treats. Few early French poets are better known than Charles d'Orléans, and few deserve their popularity better. His Rondeaux on the approach of spring, on the coming of summer and such-like subjects, deserve the very highest praise for delicate fancy and formal skill.

Of poets of less importance, or whose names have not been preserved, the amount of this formal poetry which remains to us is considerable. The best-known collection of such work is the *Livre des Cent Ballades*[119], believed, on tolerably satisfactory evidence, to have been composed by the famous knight-errant Bouciqualt and his companions on their way to the fatal battle of Nicopolis. Before, however, the fifteenth century was far advanced, poetry of this formal kind fell into the hands of professional authors in the strictest sense, *Grands Rhétoriqueurs* as they were called, who, as a later critic said of almost the last of them, 'lost all the grace and elegance of the composition' in their elaborate rules and the pedantic language which they employed. The complete decadence of poetry in which this resulted will be treated partly in the summary following the present book, partly in the first chapter of the book which succeeds it.

Meanwhile this frail but graceful poetry may be illustrated by an irregular *Ballade* from Lescurel, a *Chanson Balladée* from Machault, a *Virelai* from Deschamps, a *Ballade* from Chartier, and a *Rondel* from Charles d'Orléans.

Jehannot de Lescurel.

Amour, voules-vous acorder
Que je muire pour bien amer?
Vo vouloir m'esteut agreer;
Mourir ne puis plus doucement;
Vraiement,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Trop de mauvais portent endurer
Pour celi que j'aim sanz fausser
N'est pas par li, au voir parler,
Ains est par mauparliere gent.
Loiaument,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Dous amis, plus ne puis durer
Quant ne puis ne n'os regarder
Vostre doue vis, riant et cler.
Mort, alegez mon grief torment;
Ou, briefment,
Amours, faciez voustre talent.

Guillaume de Machault.

Onques si bonne journee
Ne fu adjournee,
Com quant je me departi
De ma dame desiree
A qui j'ay donnee
M'amour, & le cuer de mi.

Car la manne descendi
Et douceur aussi,
Par quoi m'ame saoulee
Fu dou fruit de Dous ottri,

Que Pite cueilli
En sa face coulouree.
La fu bien l'onnour gardee
De la renommee
De son cointe corps joli;
Qu'onques villeine pensee
Ne fu engendree
Ne nee entre moy & li.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Souffisance m'enrichi
Et Plaisance si,
Qu'onques creature nee
N'ot le cuer si assevi,
N'a mains de sousci,
Ne joie si affinee.
Car la deesse honnouree
Qui fait l'assemblee
D'amours, d'amie & d'ami,
Coppa le chief de s'espee
Qui est bien tempree,
A Dangier, mon anemi.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Ma dame l'enseveli
Et Amours, par fi
Que sa mort fust tost plouree.
N'onques Honneur ne souffri
(Dont je l'en merci)
Que messe li fu chantee.
Sa charongne trainee
Fu sans demouree
En un lieu dont on dit: fi!
S'en fu ma joie doublee,
Quant Honneur l'entree
Ot dou tresor de merci.
Onques si bonne journee, &c.

Eustache Deschamps.

Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?
Il me semble, a mon avis,
Que j'ay beau front et doulz viz,
Et la bouche vermeilette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay vers yeulx, petit sourcis,
Le chief blont, le nez traitis,
Ront menton, blanche gorgette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle, etc.

J'ay dur sain et hault assis,
Lons bras, gresles doys aussis,
Et, par le faulx, sui greslette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay piez rondes et petiz,
Bien chaussans, et biaux habis,
Je sui gaye et foliette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

J'ay mantiaux fourrez de gris,
J'ay chapiaux, j'ay biaux proffis,
Et d'argent mainte espinglette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

J'ay draps de soye, et tabis,
J'ay draps d'or, et blanc et bis,
J'ay mainte bonne chosette;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

Que quinze ans n'ay, je vous dis;
Moult est mes tresors jolys,
S'en garderay la clavette;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Bien devra estre hardis
Cilz, qui sera mes amis,
Qui ora tel damoiselle;
Dictes moy se je sui belle?

Et par dieu, je li plevis,
Que tres loyal, se je vis,
Li seray, si ne chancelle;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Se courtois est et gentilz,
Vaillains, apers, bien apris,
Il gaignera sa querelle;
Dictes moy se je sui belle.

C'est uns mondains paradiz
Que d'avoir dame toudiz,
Ainsi fresche, ainsi nouvelle;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Entre vous, acouardiz,
Pensez a ce que je diz;
Cy fine ma chansonnelle;
Sui-je, sui-je, sui-je belle?

Alain Chartier.

O folz des folz, et les folz mortelz hommes,
Qui vous fiez tant es biens de fortune
En celle terre, es pays ou nous sommes,
Y avez-vous de chose propre aucune?
Vous n'y avez chose vostre nes-une,
Fors les beaulx dons de grace et de nature.
Se Fortune donc, par cas d'adventur
Vous toult les biens que vostres vous tenez,

Tort ne vous fait, aincois vous fait
droicture,
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes
nez.

Ne laissez plus le dormir a grans
sommes
En vostre lict, par nuict obscure et brune,
Pour acquester richesses a grans sommes.
Ne convoitez chose dessoubz la lune,
Ne de Paris jusques a Pampelune,
Fors ce qui fault, sans plus, a creature
Pour recouvrer sa simple nourriture.
Souffise vous d'estre bien renommez,
Et d'emporter bon loz en sepulture:
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes
nez.

Les joyeulx fruictz des arbres, et les
pommes,
Au temps que fut toute chose commune,
Le beau miel, les glandes et les gommes
Souffisoient bien a chascun et chascune:
Et pour ce fut sans noise et sans rancune.
Soyez contens des chaulx et des froidures,
Et me prenez Fortune doulce et seure.
Pour vos pertes, griefve dueil n'en menez,
Fors a raison, a point, et a mesure,
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes
nez.

Se Fortune vous fait aucune injure,
C'est de son droit, ja ne l'en reprenez,
Et perdissiez jusques a la vesture:
Car vous n'aviez riens quant vous fustes
nez.

Charles D'orléans.

Le temps a laissie son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye,
Et s'est vestu de brouderie,
De soleil luyant, cler et beau.
Il n'y a beste, ne oyseau,
Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crie:
Le temps a laissie son manteau
De vent, de froidure et de pluye.
Riviere, fontaine et ruisseau
Portent, en livree jolie,
Gouttes d'argent d'orfavrerie,
Chascun s'abille de nouveau:
Le temps a laissie son manteau.

FOOTNOTES:

[110] The following is an account of these forms, in their more important developments. The *ballade* consists of three stanzas, and an *envoy*, or final half-stanza, which is sometimes omitted. The number of the lines in each stanza is optional, but it should not usually be more than eleven or less than eight. The peculiarity of the poem is that the last line of every stanza is identical, and that the rhymes are the same throughout and repeated in the same order. The examples printed at the end of this chapter from Lescurel and Chartier will illustrate this sufficiently. There is no need to enter into the absurdity of *ballades équivoquées*, *emperières*, etc., further than to say that their main principle is the repetition of the same rhyming word, in a different sense, it may be twice or thrice at the end of the line, it may be at the end and in the middle, it may be at the end of one line and the beginning of the next.

The *chant royal* is a kind of major ballade having five of the longest (eleven-lined) stanzas and an envoy of five lines. The *rondel* is a poem of thirteen lines (sometimes made into fourteen by an extra repetition), consisting of two quatrains and a five-lined stanza, the first two lines of the first quatrain being repeated as the last two of the second, and the first line of all being added once more at the end. The *rondeau*, a poem of thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen lines, is arranged in stanzas of five, four, and four, five, or six lines, the last line of the second and third stanzas consisting of the first words of the first line of the poem. The *triolet* is a sort of rondel of eight lines only, repeating the first line at the fourth, and the first and second at the seventh and eighth. Lastly, the *villanelle* alternates one of two refrain lines at the end of each three-lined stanza. These are the principal forms, though there are many others.

[111] Ed. Montaiglon. Paris, 1855.

[112] The Rondeau is not in Lescurel systematised into any regular form.

[113] Ed. L. de Mas Latrie. Société de l'Orient Latin, Geneva, 1877. This is a poem not much shorter than the *Voir Dit*, but continuously octosyllabic and very spirited. The final account of the murder of Pierre (which he provoked by the most brutal oppression of his vassals) is full of power.

[114] Ed. P. Paris. Société des Bibliophiles, Paris, 1875. This is a very interesting poem consisting of more than 9000 lines, mostly octosyllabic couplets, with ballades, etc. interspersed, one of which is given at the end of this chapter. It is addressed either to Agnes of Navarre, or, as M. P. Paris thought, to

Péronelle d'Armentières, and was written in 1362, when the author was probably very old.

[115] Deschamps is said to have been also named Morel. A complete edition of his works has been undertaken for the Old French Text Society by the Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire.

[116] Ballades, 147, 149. Ed. Queux de St. Hilaire.

[117] Ed. Schéler. 3 vols. Brussels, 1870-1872.

[118] Ed. Héricault. 2 vols. Paris, 1874. Charles d'Orléans was the son of the Duke of Orleans, who was murdered by the Burgundians, and of Valentina of Milan. He was born in 1391, taken prisoner at Agincourt, ransomed in 1449, and he died in 1465. His son was Louis XII.

[119] Ed. Queux de St. Hilaire. Paris, 1868.

CHAPTER X.

THE DRAMA.

Origins of Drama.

The origins of the drama in France, like most other points affecting mediaeval literature, have been made the subject of a good deal of dispute. It has been attempted, on the one hand, to father the

mysteries and miracle-plays of the twelfth and later centuries on the classical drama, traditions of which are supposed to have been preserved in the monasteries and other homes of learning. On the other hand, a more probable and historical source has been found in the ceremonies and liturgies of the Church, which in themselves possess a considerable dramatic element, and which, as we shall see, were early adapted to still more definitely dramatic purposes. Disputes of this kind, if not exactly otiose, are not suited to these pages; and it is sufficient to say that while Plautus and Terence at least retained a considerable hold on mediaeval students, the natural tendencies to dramatic representation which exist in almost every people, assisted by the stimulus of ecclesiastical traditions, ceremonies, and festivals, are probably sufficient to account for the beginnings of dramatic literature in France.

Earliest Vernacular Dramatic Forms.

Mysteries and Miracles.

Miracles de la Vierge.

It so happens too that such historical evidence as we have entirely bears out this supposition. The earliest compositions of a dramatic kind that we possess in French, are arguments and scraps interpolated in Latin liturgies of a dramatic character. Earlier still

these works had been wholly in Latin. The production called 'The Prophets of Christ' is held to date from the eleventh century, and consists of a series of utterances of the prophets and patriarchs, who are called upon in turn to bear testimony in reference to the Messiah, according to a common patristic habit. By degrees other portions of Old Testament history were thrown into the dramatic or at least dialogic form. In the drama or dramatic liturgy of *Daniel*, fragments of French make their appearance, and the Mystery of *Adam* is entirely in the vulgar tongue. Both these belong to the twelfth century, and the latter appears to have been not merely a part of the church services, but to have been independently performed outside the church walls. It is accompanied by full directions in Latin for the decoration and arrangement of stage and scenes. Another important instance, already mentioned, of somewhat dubious age, but certainly very early, is the Mystery of *The Ten Virgins*. This is not wholly in French, but contains some speeches in a Romance dialect. These three dramas, *Daniel*, *Adam*, and *The Ten Virgins*, are the most ancient specimens of their kind, which, from the thirteenth century onward, becomes very numerous and important. By degrees a distinction was established between mystery and miracle-plays, the former being for the most part taken from the sacred Scriptures, the latter from legends and lives of the Saints and of the Virgin. Early and interesting specimens of the miracle are to be found in the *Théophile* of Rutebœuf and in the *Saint Nicholas* of Jean Bodel d'Arras, both belonging to the same (thirteenth) century[120]. But the most remarkable examples of the miracle-play are to be found in a manuscript which contains forty miracles of the Virgin, dating from the fourteenth century.

Selections from these have been published at different times, and the whole is now in course of publication by the Old French Text Society[121]. As the miracles were mostly concerned with isolated legends, they did not lend themselves to great prolixity, and it is rare to find them exceed 2000 lines. Their versification is at first somewhat licentious, but by degrees they settled down into more or less regular employment of the octosyllabic couplet. Both in them and in the mysteries the curious mixture of pathos and solemnity on the one side, with farcical ribaldry on the other, which is characteristic of mediaeval times, early becomes apparent. The mysteries, however, as they became more and more a favourite employment of the time, increased and grew in length. The narrative of the Scriptures being more or less continuous, it was natural that the small dramas on separate subjects should by degrees be attracted to one another and be merged in larger wholes. It was another marked characteristic of mediaeval times that all literary work should be constantly subject to *remaniement*, the facile scribes of each day writing up the work of their predecessors to the taste and demands of their own audience. In the case of the mysteries, as in that of the *Chansons de Gestes*, each *remaniement* resulted in a lengthening of the original. It became an understood thing that a mystery lasted several days in the representation; and in many provincial towns regular theatres were constructed for the performances, which remained ready for use between the various festival times. In the form which these representations finally assumed in the fifteenth century, they not only required elaborate scenery and properties, but also in many cases a very large troop of performers. It is from this century that most

of the mysteries we possess date, and they are all characterised by enormous length. The two most famous of these are the *Passion*[122] of Arnould Grében, and the *Viel Testament*[123], due to no certain author. The *Passion*, as originally written in the middle of the fifteenth century, consisted of some 25,000 lines, and thirty or forty years later it was nearly doubled in length by the alterations of Jean Michel. The *Mystère du Viel Testament*, of which no manuscript is now known, but which was printed in the last year of the fifteenth century, is now being reprinted, and extends to nearly 50,000 verses. Additions even to this are spoken of; and Michel's *Passion*, supplemented by a *Résurrection*, extended to nearly 70,000 lines, which vast total is believed to have been frequently acted as a whole. In such a case the space of weeks rather than days, which is said to have been sometimes occupied in the performance of a mystery, cannot be thought excessive.

Heterogeneous Character of Mysteries.

The enormous length of the larger mysteries makes analysis of any one of them impossible; but as an instance of the curious comedy which is intermixed with their most serious portions, and which shocked critics even up to our own time, we may take the scene of the Tower of Babel in the *Mystère du Viel Testament*[124]. Here the author is not content with describing Nimrod's act in general terms, or by the aid of the convenient messenger; he brings the actual masons and carpenters on the stage. *Gaste-Bois* (Spoilwood), *Casse-Tuileau* (Breaktile), and their mates talk before us for nearly 200 lines, while

Nimrod and others come in from time to time and hasten on the work. The workmen are quite outspoken on the matter. They do not altogether like the job; and one of them says,

> On ne peut en fin que faillir.
> Besongnons; mais qu'on nous paie bien.

A little further on and they are actually at work. One calls for a hod of mortar, another for his hammer. The labourers supply their wants, or make jokes to the effect that they would rather bring them something to drink. So it goes on, till suddenly the confusion of tongues falls upon them, and they issue their orders in what is probably pure jargon, though fragments of something like Italian can be made out. In the very middle of this scene occurs a really fine and reverently written dialogue between Justice and Mercy pleading respectively to the Divinity for vengeance and pardon. Instances such as this abound in the mysteries, which are sometimes avowedly interrupted in order that the audience may be diverted by a farcical interlude.

Argument of a Miracle Play.

Of the miracles, that of *St. Guillaume du Désert* will serve as a fair example. It is but 1500 lines in length, yet the list of *dramatis personae* extends to nearly thirty, and there are at least as many distinct scenes. William, count of Poitiers and duke of Aquitaine, has rendered himself in many ways obnoxious to the Holy See. He has recognised an anti-pope, has driven a bishop from his diocese for refusing to do likewise,

and has offended against morality. An embassy, including St. Bernard, is therefore sent from Rome to warn and correct him. William is not proof against their eloquence, and soon becomes deeply penitent. He quits his palaces, and retires to the society of hermits in the wilderness. These enjoin penances upon him. He is to have a heavy hauberk immovably riveted on his bare flesh, and with sackcloth for an overcoat to visit Rome and beg the Pope's forgiveness. He does this, and the Pope sends him to the patriarch of Jerusalem, William taking the additional penance as a proof of the heinousness of his sin. After this he retires by himself into a solitary place. Here, however, a knight of his country seeks him out, represents the anarchy into which it has fallen in his absence, and implores him to return. But this is not William's notion of duty. He refuses, and to be free from such importunities in future, retires to the island of Rhodes, and there lives in solitude. Irritated at the idea of his escaping them, Satan and Beelzebub attack him and beat him severely; but he recovers by the Virgin's intervention, and serves as a model to young devotees who seek his cell, and like him become hermits. At last a chorus of saints descends to see his godly end, which takes place in the presence of the neophytes. The events, of which this is a very brief abstract, are all clearly indicated in the short space of 1500 verses, many of which are only of four syllables[125]. There is of course no attempt at drawing any figure, except that of the saint, at full length, and this is characteristic of the class. But as dramatised legends, for they are little more, these miracles possess no slight merit.

The general literary peculiarities of the miracle and mystery plays do not differ greatly from those of other compositions in verse of the same time which

have been already described. Their great fault is prolixity. In the collection of the *Miracles de la Vierge*, the comparative brevity of the pieces renders them easier to read than the long compositions of the fifteenth century, and the poetical beauty of some of the legends which they tell is sufficient to furnish them with interest. Even in these, however, the absence of point and of dignity in the expression frequently mars the effect; and this is still more the case with the longer mysteries. Of these latter, however, the work of the brothers Gréban—for there were two, Arnould and Simon, concerned—contains passages superior to the general run, and in others lines and even scenes of merit occur.

Profane Drama.

Adam de la Halle.

Although the existence of the drama as an actual fact was for a long time due to the performance and popularity of the mysteries and miracles, specimens of dramatic work with purely profane subjects are to be found at a comparatively early date. Adam de la Halle, so far as our present information goes, has the credit of inventing two separate styles of such composition[126]. In *Li Jus de la Feuillie* he has left us the earliest comedy in the vulgar tongue known; in the pastoral drama of *Robin et Marion* the earliest specimen of comic opera. Independently of the improbability that the drama, once in full practice, should be arbitrarily confined to a single class of subject, there were many germs of dramatic composition in mediaeval literature which wanted

but a little encouragement to develop themselves. The verse dialogues and *débats*, which both troubadours and trouvères had favoured, were in themselves incompletely dramatic. The *pastourelles*, an extremely favourite and fashionable class of composition, must have suggested to others besides the Hunchback of Arras the idea of dramatising them; and the early and strongly-marked partiality of the middle ages for pageants and shows of all kinds could hardly fail to induce those who planned them to intersperse dialogue.

The plot of *Robin et Marion* is simple and in a way regular. The ordinary incidents of a *pastourelle*, the meeting of a fair shepherdess and a passing knight, the wooing (in this case an unsuccessful one) and the riding away, are all there. The piece is completed by a kind of rustic picnic, in which the neighbouring shepherds and shepherdesses join and disport themselves. Marion is a very graceful and amiable figure; Robin a sheepish coward, who is not in the least worthy of her. In Adam's other and earlier drama he is by no means so partial to the feminine sex, and his work, though equally fresh and vigorous, is more complex and less artistically finished. It is in part autobiographic, and introduces Adam confessing to friends with sufficient effrontery his intention of going to Paris and deserting his wife. This part contains a very pretty though curiously unsuitable description of the wooing, which has such an unlucky termination. Suddenly, however, the author introduces his father, an old citizen, who is quite ready to encourage his son in his evil ways provided it costs him nothing, and the piece loses all regularity of plot. Divers citizens of Arras, male and female, are introduced with a more or less satiric intention, and the last episode brings in the personages of Morgue

la Fée and of the *mesnie* (attendants) of a certain shadowy King Hellequin. There is a doctor, too, whose revelations of his patients' affairs are sufficiently comic, not to say farcical. Destitute as it is of method, and approaching more nearly to the Fabliau than to any other division of mediaeval literature in the coarseness of its language, the piece has great interest, not merely because of its date and its apparent originality, but because of numerous passages of distinct literary merit. The picture of the neglected wife in her girlhood is inferior to nothing of the kind even in the thirteenth century, that fertile epoch of early French poetry. The father, too, Maître Henri, the earliest of his kind on the modern stage, has traits which the great comic masters would not disown.

The classes of later secular drama may be thus divided,—the monologue, the farce, the morality, the *sotie*, the profane mystery. The first four of these constitute one of the most interesting divisions of early French literature; and it is to be hoped that before long easy access will be afforded to the whole of it. The last is only interesting from the point of view of literary history.

Monologues.

The monologue is the simplest form of dramatic composition and needs but little notice, though it seems to have met with some favour from playgoers of the time. By dint also of adroit changes of costume and assistance from scenery, etc., the monologue was sometimes made more complicated than appears at first sight possible, as for instance, in the *Monologue du Bien et du Mal des Dames*, where the speaker plays successively the parts of two advocates and of a

judge. The monologue, however, more often consisted in a dramatisation of the earlier *dit*, in which some person or thing is made to declare its own attributes. Of very similar character is the so-called *sermon joyeux*, which, however, preserves more or less the form of an address from the pulpit, of course travestied and applied to ludicrous subjects.

Farces.

The farce, on the other hand, is one of the most important of all dramatic kinds in reference to French literature. It is a genuine product of the soil, and proved the ancestor of all the best comedy of France, on which foreign models had very little influence. Until the discovery and acquisition by the British Museum of a unique collection of farces the number of these compositions known to exist was not large, and such as had been printed were difficult of access. It is still not easy to get together a complete collection, but the reimpression of the British Museum pieces in the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne*[127] with M. Ed. Fournier's *Théâtre avant la Renaissance*[128] contains ample materials for judgment. In all, we possess about a hundred farces, most of which are probably the composition of the fifteenth century, though it is possible that some of them may date from the end of the fourteenth. The most famous of all early French farces, that of *Pathelin*, belongs, it is believed, to the middle or earlier part of the fifteenth, and speaking generally, this century is the most productive of theatrical work, at least of such as remains to us. The subjects of these farces are of the widest possible diversity. In their general character they at once recall the

Fabliaux, and no one who reads many of them can doubt that the one *genre* is the immediate successor of the other. The farce, like the Fabliau, deals with an actual or possible incident of ordinary life to which a comic complexion is given by the treatment. The length of these compositions is very variable, but the average is perhaps about five hundred lines. Their versification is always octosyllabic and regular. But a curious peculiarity is found in most of them as well as in a few contemporary dramas of the serious kind. From time to time the speeches of the characters are dovetailed into one another so as to make up the Triolet (or rondeau of eight lines with triple repetition of the first and double repetition of the second), a form which in the fifteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries has been a favourite with French poets of the lighter kind. The number of personages is never large; it sometimes falls as low as two (in which case the farce might in strictness be called, as it sometimes is, a *débat* or dialogue), and rarely, if ever, rises above four or five. From what has already been said it will be seen that it is not easy to give any general summary of the subjects of this curious composition. Conjugal differences of one kind and another make up a very large part of them, but by no means the whole, and there are few aspects of contemporary bourgeois life which do not come in for treatment. As an example we may take the *Farce du Pasté de la Tarte*[129]. The characters are two thieves, a pastry-cook, and his wife. The farce opens with a lamentable Triolet, in which the two thieves bewail their unhappy state. Immediately afterwards, the pastry-cook, in front of whose shop the scene is laid, calls to his wife and tells her that an eel-pie is to be kept for him, and that he will send for it later, as he intends to dine

abroad. The two thieves overhear the conversation, and the token which is to be given by the messenger, and after trying in vain to beg a dinner, determine to filch one. Thief the second goes to the pastry-cook's wife, gives the appointed token, and easily obtains the pie, upon which both feast. Unluckily, however, this does not satisfy them, and the successful thief, remembering a fine tart which he has seen in the shop, decides that the possession of it would much improve their dinner. He persuades his companion to try and secure it. Meanwhile, however, the enraged pastry-cook has come home hungry and demands his eel-pie. His wife in vain assures him that she has sent it by the messenger who brought his token. Her husband disbelieves her; words run high, and are followed by blows. At this juncture the first thief appears and demands the tart, whereupon the irate pastry-cook turns his rage upon him. The stick makes him confess the device, and smarting under the blows, he is easily induced to make his companion a sharer in his own sorrows. This is effected by an obvious stratagem. The pastry-cook thus avenges himself of both his enemies, who however, with some philosophy, console themselves with the fact that, after all, they have had an excellent dinner without paying for it.

This piece serves as a fair example of the more miscellaneous farces, in almost all of which the stick plays a prominent part, a part which it may be observed retained its prominence at least till the time of Molière. Of the farces dealing with conjugal matters, one of the most decent, and perhaps the most amusing of all, is the *Farce du Cuvier*, which has nothing to do with the story under the same title which may be found (possibly taken from Apuleius) in Boccaccio, and in the Fabliaux. In the farce a hen-

pecked husband is obliged by his wife to accept a long list of duties which he is to perform. Soon afterwards she by accident falls into the washing-tub, and to all her cries for help he replies 'cela n'est point à mon rollet' (schedule). Not a few also are directed against the clergy, and these as a rule are the most licentious of all. It is, however, rare to find any one which is not more or less amusing; and students of Molière in particular will find analogies and resemblances of the most striking kind to many of his motives. It is, indeed, pretty certain that these pieces did not go out of fashion until Molière's own time. The titles of some of the early and now lost pieces which his company for so many years played in the provinces are immediately suggestive of the old farces to any one who knows the latter. The farce was moreover a very far-reaching kind of composition. As a rule the satire which it contains is directed against classes, such as women, the clergy, pedants, and so forth, who had nothing directly to do with politics, and it is thus, more or less directly, the ancestor of the comedy of manners. It is never, properly speaking, political, even indirect allusions to politics being excluded from it. It relies wholly upon domestic and personal interests. Not a few farces, such as that of which we have given a sketch, turn upon the same subject as the *Repues Franches* attributed to Villon, and deal with the ingenious methods adopted by persons who hang loose upon society for securing their daily bread. Others attack the fertile subject of domestic service, and furnish not a few parallels to Swift's *Directions*. Every now and then however we come across a farce, or at least a piece bearing the title, in which a more allegorical style of treatment is attempted. Such is the farce of *Folle Bobance*, in which the tendency of various

classes to loose and light living is satirised amusingly enough. A gentleman, a merchant, a farmer, are all caught by the seductive offers of Folle Bobance, and are not long before they repent it. Such again is the *Farce des Théologastres*, in which the students of the Paris theological colleges are ridiculed, the *Farce de la Pippée,* and many others.

Moralities.

In strictness, however, those pieces where allegorical personages make their appearance are not farces but moralities. These compositions were exceedingly popular in the later middle ages, and their popularity was a natural sequence of the rage for allegorising which had made itself evident in very early times, and had in the *Roman de la Rose* dominated almost all other literary tastes. The taste for personification and abstraction has always lent itself easily enough to satire, and in the fifteenth century pieces under the designation of moralities became very common. We do not possess nearly as many specimens of the morality as of the farce, but, on the other hand, the morality is often, though not always, a much longer composition than the farce. The subjects of moralities include not merely private vices and follies, but almost all actual and possible defects of Church and State, and occasionally the term is applied to pieces, the characters of which are not abstractions, but which tell a story with a more or less moral turn. Sometimes these pieces ran to a very great length, and one is quoted, *L'Homme Juste et l'Homme Mondain*, which contains 36,000 lines, and must, like the longer mysteries, have occupied days or even weeks in acting. A morality however, on the average, consisted of about 2000 lines, and its

personages were proportionally more numerous than those of the farce. Thus the *Moralité des Enfans de Maintenant* contains thirteen characters who are indifferently abstract and concrete; Maintenant, Mignotte, Bon Advis, Instruction, Finet, Malduit, Discipline, Jabien, Luxure, Bonté, Désespoir, Perdition, and the Fool. This list almost sufficiently explains the plot, which simply recounts the persistence of one child in evil and his bad end, with the repentance of the other. The moralities have the widest diversity of subject, but most of them are tolerably clearly explained by their titles. *La Condamnation de Banquet* is a rather spirited satire on gluttony and open housekeeping. *Marchebeau* attacks the disbanded soldiery of the middle of the fifteenth century. *Charité* points out the evils which have come into the world for lack of charity. *La Moralité d'une Femme qui avait voulu trahir la Cité de Romme* is built on the lines of a miracle-play. *Science et Asnerye* is a very lively satire representing the superior chances which the followers of *Asnerye*—ignorance—have of obtaining benefices and posts of honour and profit as compared with those of learning. *Mundus, caro, daemonia*, again tells its own tale. *Les Blasphémateurs*, which is very well spoken of, but has not been reprinted, rests on the popular legend upon which *Don Juan* is also based. In short, unless a complete catalogue were given, there is no means of fully describing the numerous works of this class.

Soties.

The Sotie is a class of much more idiosyncrasy. Although we have very few Soties (not at present more than a dozen accessible to the student), although the contents of this class are as a rule duller

even than those of the moralities, and infinitely inferior in attraction to those of the farces, yet the Sotie has the merit of possessing a much more distinct and peculiar form. It is essentially political comedy, and it has the peculiarity of being played by stock personages, like an Italian comedy of the early kind. The Sotie, at least in its purely political form, was, as might be expected, not very long lived. Its most celebrated author was Gringore, and his Sotie, which forms part of *Le Jeu du Prince des Sots et Mère Sotte*, is still the typical example of the kind. Besides these two characters (who represent, roughly speaking, the temporal and spiritual powers), we have in this piece, Sotte Commune, the common people; Sotte Fiance, false confidence; Sotte Occasion, who explains herself; and a good many other allegorical personages, such as the Seigneur de Gayeté, etc. These pieces, however, are for the most part so entirely occasional that their chief literary interest lies in their curious stock personages. It should, however, be observed that of the few Soties which we possess by no means all correspond to this description, some of them being indistinguishable from moralities. A curious detail is that the various pieces we have been mentioning were sometimes, in representation, combined after the fashion of a regular tetralogy. First came a monologue or *cry* containing a kind of proclamation. This was followed by the Sotie itself; then followed the morality, and lastly a farce. The work of Gringore, just noticed, forms part of such a tetralogy.

Profane Mysteries.

The profane mysteries may be briefly despatched.

They were the natural result of the vogue of the mysteries proper, with which they vie in prolixity. Some of them were based on history or romance, such as, for instance, the Mystery of *Troy*. Others corresponded pretty nearly to the history plays of our own dramatists at a later period. Such is the Mystery of the *Siege of Orleans* which versifies and dramatises, at a date very shortly subsequent to the actual events, the account of them already made public in different chronicles.

Societies of Actors.

Of considerable interest and importance in connection with these early forms of drama is the subject of the persons and societies by whom they were represented, a subject upon which it is necessary to say a few words. At first, as we have seen, the actors were members or dependents of the clergy. As the mysteries increased in bulk and demanded larger companies, their representation fell more and more into the hands of the laity, even women in not a few cases acting parts, though this was rather the exception than the rule. It became not unusual for the guilds, which play such an important part in the social history of the middle ages, to undertake the task, and at last regular societies of actors were formed. The most famous of these, the *Confrérie de la Passion* (whose first object was to play the mystery, or rather cycle of mysteries, known by that name), was licensed in 1402, and in the course of the fifteenth century a very large number of rival bodies were more or less formally constituted. The clerks of the Bazoche, or Palace of Justice, had long been dramatically inclined, but it was not till this

time that they were recognised as, so to speak, the patentees of a peculiar form of drama which in their case was the morality. The *Enfants sans Souci*, young men of good families in the city, devoted themselves rather to the Sotie, and the stock personages of that curious form correspond to the official titles of the officers of their guild. Besides these, many other similar but less durable and regularly constituted societies arose, whose heads took fantastic titles, such as Empereur de Galilée, Roi de l'Epinette, Prince de l'Etrille, and so forth. No one of these, however, attained the importance of the Confraternity of the Passion. This was chiefly composed of tradesmen and citizens of Paris, and for a hundred and fifty years it continued to play for the most part mysteries, sacred and profane alike, but the latter, according to its name and profession, less commonly. In 1548 a curious example of the change of times and manners took place, owing in all probability to the influence, direct or indirect, of the Reformation. The Confraternity had its charter renewed, but it was expressly forbidden to play the sacred dramas which it had been originally constituted to perform. Thenceforward secular plays only were lawful in Paris, but the older dramas continued for a long time to be performed in the provinces, and in Britanny have been acted within the last half century. The Confraternity became regular actors of ordinary farces, and as time went on were known under the title of the Comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a name which brings us at once into the presence of Molière. In these last sentences we have a little outstripped the mediaeval period proper, but in dramatic matters there is no gap between the ancient and modern theatre until we arrive at the Pléiade.

It is not very easy to illustrate the manner of the

ancient French drama by citations within ordinary compass; but the following passages, the first from the Mystery of the *Passion*, the second from the original form of *Pathelin*, may serve the purpose:—

Ici deschargent Jesus de la croix.

Simon. or avant donc, puis que ainsi va.
je ferai vostre voulenté;
mais il me poise en verité
de la honte que vous me faictes.
o Jesus, de tous les prophettes
le plus sainct et le plus begnin,
vous venés a piteuse fin,
veue vostre vie vertüeuse
quant vostre croix dure et honteuse
pour vostre mort fault que je porte.
se c'est a tort, je m'en rapporte
a ceulx qui vous ont forjugé.
Ici charge la croix a Simon.

Nembroth. Messeigneurs, il est bien chargé;
cheminons, depeschons la voie.

Salmanazar. j'ai grant désir que je le voie
fiché en ce hault tabernacle,
a sçavoir s'il fera miracle,
quant il sera cloué dessus.

Jéroboam. seigneurs, hastés moi ce Jesus
et ces deux larrons aux coustés.
s'ilz ne vuellent, si les battez
si bien qu'il n'y ait que redire.

Claquedent. a cela ne tiendra pas, sire.
nos en ferons nostre povoir.

Ici porte Simon une partie de la croix et
Jesus l'autre et le battent les sergens.

Dieu le pere. Pitié doit tout cueur
esmouvoir
en lamenter piteusement
le martyre et le gref tourment
que Jesus, mon chier filz, endure.
il porte détresse tant dure,
que, puis que le monde dura,
homme si dure n'endura,
laquelle ne peult plus durer
sans la mort honteuse endurer,
et n'aura son sainct corps duree
tant qu'il ait la mort enduree,
il appert, car plus va durant,
et plus est tourment endurant,
sans quelque confort qui l'alege.
si convient que la mort abrege
et de l'exécuter s'apreste,
pour satiffaire a la requeste
de dame Justice severe,
qui pour requeste ne prïere
ne veult rien de ses drois quitter.
Michel, allés donc conforter
en ceste amere passïon
mon filz, plain de dilectïon,
qui veult dure mort en gré predre
et va sa doulce chair estrandre
ou puissant arbre de la croix.

Sainct Michel. pere du ciel et roi des rois,
humblement a chere assimplie
sera parfaicte et acomplie
vostre voulenté juste et bonne.
Ici descendent les anges de paradis.

* * * * * *

Path. ce bergier ne peut nullement
respondre aux fais que l'on propose,
s'il n'a du conseil; et il n'ose
ou il ne scet en demander.
s'il vous plaisoit moy commander
que je fusse a luy, je y seroye.

Juge. avecques luy? je cuideroye
que ce fust trestoute froidure:
c'est peu d'acquest. *Path.* mais je vous jure
qu'aussi n'en veuil rien avoir:
pour dieu soit. or je voys sçavoir
au pauvret qu'il voudra me dire,
et s'il me sçaura point instruire
pour respondre aux fais de partie.
il auroit dure departie
de ce, qui ne le secourroit.
vien ça, mon amy. qui pourroit
trouver? entens. *Berg.* bee. *Path.* quel bee, dea!
par le sainct sang que dieu crëa,
es tu fol? dy moy ton affaire.

Berg. bee. *Path.* quel bee! oys tu tes brebis braire?
c'est pour ton prouffit; entens y.

Berg. bee. *Path.* et dy ouÿ ou nenny,
c'est bien faict. dy tousjours, feras?

Berg. bee. *Path.* plus haut, ou tu t'en trouveras
en grans depens, ou je m'en doubte.

Berg. bee. *Path.* or est plus fol cil qui boute
tel fol naturel en procés.
ha, sire, renvoyez l'en a ses
brebis; il est fol de nature.

Drapp. est il fol? sainct sauveur d'Esture!
il est plus saige que vous n'estes.

Path. envoyez le garder ses bestes,
sans jour que jamais ne retourne.
que maudit soit il qui adjourne
tels folz que ne fault adjourner.

Drapp. et l'en fera l'en retourner
avant que je puisse estre ouÿ?

Path. m'aist dieu, puis qu'il est foul, ouÿ.
pour quoy ne fera? *Drapp.* he dea, sire,
au moins laissez moy avant dire
et faire mes conclusïons.
ce ne sont pas abusïons
que je vous dy ne mocqueries.

Juge. ce sont toutes tribouilleries
que de plaider a folz ne a folles.
escoutez, a moins de parolles
la court n'en sera plus tenue.

Drapp. s'en iront ilz sans retenue
de plus revenir? *Juge.* et quoy
doncques?

Path. revenir? vous ne veistes oncques
plus fol ne en faict ne en response:
et cil ne vault pas mieulx une once.
tous deux sont folz et sans cervelle:
par saincte Marie la belle,

eux deux n'en ont pas un quarat[130].

FOOTNOTES:

[120] These, as well as *The Ten Virgins* and many other pieces soon to be mentioned, are to be found in Monmerqué and Michel, *Théâtre François au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1874, last ed.; *Adam*, ed. Luzarches, 1854.

[121] Vols. 1-6. Paris, 1876-1881.

[122] Ed. G. Paris and G. Raynaud. Paris, 1878.

[123] Ed. J. de Rothschild. Vols. i-iii. Paris, 1878-1881.

[124] *Mystère du Viel Testament*, i. 259-272.

[125] *Miracles de la Vierge*, ii. 1-54.

[126] See Monmerqué and Michel, *op. cit.*

[127] *Ancien Théâtre Français*, vols. 1-3. Paris, 1854.

[128] Paris, n. d.

[129] *Ancien Théâtre Français*, ii. 64-79.

[130] A history of the mediaeval theatre has been undertaken by M. Petit de Julleville, of which two volumes, containing an excellent account of the Mysteries, have appeared (Paris, 1880). Information on other points is rather scattered, but it will be found well summarised in Aubertin, *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Française au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1876-8), i. 372-570. A complete collection of farces, *soties*, etc. is hoped for from the Old French Text Society.

CHAPTER XI.

PROSE CHRONICLES.

Beginning of Prose Chronicles.

Grandes Chroniques de France.

In all countries the use of prose for literature is chronologically later than the use of poetry, and France is no exception to the rule. The Chansons de Gestes were in their way historical poems, and they were, as we have seen, soon followed by directly historical poems in considerable numbers. It was not, however, till the prose Arthurian romances of Map and his followers had made prose popular as a vehicle for long narratives, that regular history began to be written in the vulgar tongue. The vogue of these prose romances dates from the latter portion of the twelfth century; the prose chronicle follows it closely, and dates from the beginning of the thirteenth. It was not at first original. The practice of chronicle writing in Latin had been frequent during the earlier centuries, and at last the monks of three monasteries, St. Benoit sur Loire, St. Germain des Prés, and St. Denis, began to keep a regular register of the events of their own time, connecting this with earlier chronicles of the past. The most famous and dignified of the three, St. Denis, became specially the home of history. The earliest French prose chronicles do not, however, come from this place. They are two in number; both date from the earliest years of the

thirteenth century, and both are translations. One is a version of a Latin compilation of Merovingian history; the other of the famous chronicle of *Turpin*[131]. These two are composed in a southern dialect bordering on the Provençal, and the first was either written by or ascribed to a certain Nicholas of Senlis. The example was followed, but it was not till 1274 that a complete vernacular version of the history of France was executed by a monk of St. Denis—Primat—in French prose. This version, slightly modified, became the original of a compilation very famous in French literature and history, the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, which was regularly continued by members of the same community until the reign of Charles V, from official sources and under royal authority. The work, under the same title but written by laics, extends further to the reign of Louis XI. The necessity of translation ceased as soon as the example of writing in the vernacular had been set, though Latin chronicles continued to be produced as well as French.

Villehardouin.

Long, however, before history on the great scale had been thus attempted, and very soon after the first attempt of Nicholas of Senlis had shown that the vulgar tongue was capable of such use, original prose memoirs and chronicles of contemporary events had been produced, and, as happens more than once in French literature, the first, or one of the first, was also the best. The *Conquête de Constantinople*[132] of Geoffroy de Villehardouin was written in all probability during the first decade of the thirteenth century. Its author was born at Villehardouin, near Troyes, about 1160, and died, it would seem, in his

Greek fief of Messinople in 1213. His book contains a history of the Fourth Crusade, which resulted in no action against the infidels, but in the establishment for the time of a Latin empire and in the partition of Greece among French barons. Villehardouin's memoirs are by universal consent among the most attractive works of the middle ages. Although no actually original manuscript exists, we possess a copy which to all appearance faithfully represents the original. To readers, who before approaching Villehardouin have well acquainted themselves with the characteristics of the Chansons de Gestes, the resemblance of the *Conquête de Constantinoble* to these latter is exceedingly striking. The form, putting the difference between prose and verse aside, is very similar, and the merits of vigorous and brightly coloured language, of simplicity and vividness of presentation, are identical. At the same time either his own genius or the form which he has adopted has saved Villehardouin from the crying defect of most mediaeval work, prolixity and monotony. He has much to say as well as a striking manner of saying it, and the interest of his work as a story yields in nothing to its picturesqueness as a piece of literary composition. His indirect as well as direct literary value is moreover very great, because he enables us to see that the picture of manners and thought given by the Chansons de Gestes is in the main strictly true to the actual habits of the time—the time, that is to say, of their composition, not of their nominal subjects. Villehardouin is the chief literary exponent of the first stage of chivalry, the stage in which adventure was an actual fact open to every one, and when Eastern Europe and Western Asia offered to the wandering knight opportunities quite as tempting as those which the romances asserted to have been

open to the champions of Charlemagne and Arthur. But, as a faithful historian, he, while putting the poetical and attractive side of feudalism in the best light, does not in the least conceal its defects, especially the perpetual jarring and rivalry inevitable in armies where hundreds of petty kings sought each his own advantage.

Minor Chroniclers between Villehardouin and Joinville.

The Fourth Crusade was fertile in chroniclers. Villehardouin's work was supplemented by the chronicle of Henri de Valenciennes, which is written in a somewhat similar style, but with still more resemblance to the manner and diction of the Chansons, so much so that it has been even supposed, though probably without foundation, to be a rhymed Chanson thrown into a prose form. This process is known to have been actually applied in some cases. Another historian of the expedition whose work has been preserved was Robert de Clari. Baldwin Count of Flanders, who also accompanied it, was not indeed the author but the instigator of a translation of Latin chronicles which, like the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, was continued by original work and attained, under the title of *Chronique de Baudouin d'Avesnes*, very considerable dimensions.

The thirteenth century also supplies a not inconsiderable number of works dealing with the general history of France. Guillaume de Nangis wrote

in the latter part of the century several historical treatises, first in Latin and then in French. An important work, entitled *La Chronique de Rains* (Rheims), dates from the middle of the period, and, though less picturesque in subject and manner than Villehardouin, has considerable merits of style. Normandy, Flanders, and, the Crusades generally, each have groups of prose chronicles dealing with them, the most remarkable of the latter being a very early French translation of the work of William of Tyre, with additions[133]. Of the Flanders group, the already mentioned chronicle called of Baudouin d'Avesnes is the chief. It is worth mentioning again because in its case we see the way in which French was gaining ground. It exists both in Latin and in the vernacular. In other cases the Latin would be the original; but in this case it appears, though it is not positively certain, that the book was written in French, and translated for the benefit of those who might happen not to understand that language.

Joinville.

As Villehardouin is the representative writer of the twelfth century, so is Joinville[134] of the thirteenth, as far as history is concerned. Jean de Joinville, Sénéchal of Champagne, was born in 1224 at the castle of Joinville on the Marne, which afterwards became the property of the Orleans family, and was destroyed during the Revolution. He died in 1319. He accompanied Saint Louis on his unfortunate crusade in 1248, but not in his final and fatal expedition to Tunis. Most of the few later events of his life known to us were connected with the canonisation of the king; but he is known to have taken part in active service when past his ninetieth

year. His historical work, a biography of St. Louis, deals chiefly with the crusade, and is one of the most circumstantial records we have of mediaeval life and thought. It is of much greater bulk than Villehardouin's *Conquête*, and is composed upon a different principle, the author being somewhat addicted to gossip and apt to digress from the main course of his narrative. It has, however, to be remembered that Joinville's first object was not, like Villehardouin's, to give an account of a single and definite enterprise, but to display the character of his hero, to which end a certain amount of desultoriness was necessary and desirable. His style has less vigour than that of his countryman and predecessor, but it has more grace. It is evident that Joinville occasionally set himself with deliberate purpose to describe things in a literary fashion, and his interspersed reflections on manners and political subjects considerably increase the material value of his work. It is unfortunate that nothing like a contemporary manuscript has come down to us, the earliest in existence being one of the late fourteenth century, when considerable changes had passed over the language. With the aid of some contemporary documents on matters of business which Joinville seems to have dictated, M. de Wailly has effected an exceedingly ingenious conjectural restoration of the text of the book, but the interest of this is in strictness diminished by the fact that it is undoubtedly conjectural. The period of composition of Joinville's book was somewhat late in his life, apparently in the first years of the fourteenth century, and about 1310 he presented it to Louis le Hutin, though it does not appear what became of the manuscript.

The period between Joinville and Froissart is

peculiarly barren in chronicles. Besides the serial publications already noticed, the *Chroniques de France* and the *Chroniques de Flandre*, there are perhaps only two which are worth mentioning. The first is a *Chronique des Quatre Premiers Valois*, written with exactness and careful attention to authentic sources of information. The other is the *Chronique* of Jean Lebel, canon of Liège. This is not only a work of considerable merit in itself, but still more remarkable because it was the model, and something more, of Froissart. That historian began by almost paraphrasing the work of Lebel; and though by degrees he worked the early parts of his book into more and more original forms according to the information which he picked up, these parts remained to the last indebted to the author from whom they had been originally compiled.

Froissart.

Froissart was born in 1337 and did not die till after 1409, the precise date of his death being unknown. There are few problems of literary criticism which are more difficult than that of arranging a definitive edition of his famous Chroniques[135]. In most cases the task of the critic is to decide which of several manuscripts, all long posterior to the author's death, deserves most confidence, or how to supply and correct the faults of a single document. In Froissart's case there is, on the contrary, an embarrassing number of seemingly authentic texts. During the whole of his long life, Froissart seems to have been constantly occupied in altering, improving, and rectifying his work, and copies of it in all its states are plentiful. The early printed editions represent merely a single one of these; Buchon's is somewhat

more complete. But it is only within the last few years that the labours of M. Kervyn de Lettenhove and M. Siméon Luce have made it possible (and not yet entirely possible) to see the work in all its conditions. M. Kervyn de Lettenhove's edition is complete and excellent as far as it goes. That of M. Luce is still far from finished. The editor, however, has succeeded in presenting three distinct versions of the first book. This is the most interesting in substance, the least in manner and style. It deals with a period most of which lay outside of Froissart's own knowledge, and in treating which he was at first content to paraphrase Jean Lebel, though afterwards he made this part of the book much more his own. It never, however, attained to the gossiping picturesqueness of the later books (there are four in all), in which the historian relies entirely on his own collections. Although Cressy, Poitiers, and Najara may be of more importance than the fruitless *chevauchée* of Buckingham through France, the gossip of the Count de Foix' court, and the kite-and-crow battles of the Duke de Berri and his officers with Aymerigot Marcel and Geoffrey Tête-Noire, they are much less characteristic of Froissart. The literary instinct of Scott enabled him (in a speech of Claverhouse[136]) exactly to appreciate our author. Some of his admirers have striven to make out that traces of political wisdom are to be found in the later books. If it be so, they are very deeply hidden. A sentence which must have been written when Froissart was more than fifty years old puts his point of view very clearly. Geoffrey Tête-Noire, the Breton brigand, 'held a knight's life, or a squire's, of no more account than a villain's,' and this is said as if it summed up the demerits of the free companion. Beyond knights and ladies, tourneys and festivals,

Froissart sees nothing at all. But his admirable power of description enables him to put what he did see as well as any writer has ever put it. Vast as his work is, the narrative and picturesque charm never fails; and in a thousand different lights the same subject, the singular afterglow of chivalry, which the influence of certain English and French princes kept up in the fourteenth century, is presented with a mastery rare in any but the best literature. He is so completely indifferent to anything but this, that he does not take the slightest trouble to hide the misery and the misgovernment which the practical carrying out of his idea caused. Never, perhaps, was there a better instance of a man of one idea, and certainly there never was any man by whom his one idea was more attractively represented. To this day it is difficult even with the clearest knowledge of the facts to rise from a perusal of Froissart without an impression that the earlier period of the Hundred Years' War was a sort of golden age in which all the virtues flourished, except for occasional ugly outbreaks of the evil principle in the Jacquerie, the Wat Tyler insurrection, and so forth. As a historian Froissart is, as we should expect, not critical, and he carries the French habit of disfiguring proper names and ignoring geographical and other trifles to a most bewildering extent. But there is little doubt that he was diligent in collecting and careful in recording his facts, and his extreme minuteness often supplies gaps in less prolix chroniclers.

Fifteenth-Century Chroniclers.

The last century of the period which is included in this chapter is extremely fertile in historians. These

range themselves naturally in two classes; those who undertake more or less of a general history of the country during their time, and those who devote themselves to special persons as biographers, or to the recital of the events which more particularly concern a single city or district. The first class, moreover, is more conveniently subdivided according to the side which the chroniclers took on the great political duel of their period, the struggle between Burgundy and France.

The Burgundian side was particularly rich in annalists. The study and practice of historical writing had, as a consequence of the Chronicle of Baudouin, and the success of Lebel and Froissart, taken deep root in the cities of Flanders which were subject to the Duke of Burgundy, while the magnificence and opulence of the ducal court and establishments naturally attracted men of letters. Froissart's immediate successor, Enguerrand de Monstrelet, belongs to this party. Monstrelet[137], who wrote a chronicle covering the years 1400-1444, is not remarkable for elegance or picturesqueness of style, but takes particular pains to copy exactly official reports of speeches, treaties, letters, etc. Another important chronicle of the same side is that of George Chastellain[138], a busy man of letters, who was historiographer to the Duke of Burgundy, and wrote a history of the years 1419-1470. Chastellain was a man of learning and talent, but was somewhat imbued with the heavy and pedantic style which both in poetry and prose was becoming fashionable. The memoirs of Olivier de la Marche extend from 1435 to 1489, and are also somewhat heavy, but less pedantic than those of Chastellain. Dealing with the same period, and also written in the Burgundian interest, are the memoirs of Jacques du Clerq,

1448-1467, and of Lefèvre de Saint Rémy, 1407-1436; as also the Chronicle of Jehan de Wavrin, beginning at the earliest times and coming down to 1472. Wavrin's subject is nominally England, but the later part of his work of necessity concerns France also.

The writers on the royalist side are of less importance and less numerous, though individually perhaps of equal value. The chief of them are Mathieu de Coucy, who continued the work of Monstrelet in a different political spirit from 1444 to 1461; Pierre de Fenin, who wrote a history of part of the reign of Charles VI; and Jean Juvenal des Ursins[139], a statesman and ecclesiastic, who has dealt more at length with the whole of the same reign. Of these Juvenal des Ursins takes the first rank, and is one of the best authorities for his period; but from a literary point of view he cannot be very highly spoken of, though there is a certain simplicity about his manner which is superior to the elaborate pedantry of not a few of his contemporaries and immediate successors.

The second class has the longest list of names, and perhaps the most interesting constituents. First may be mentioned *Le Livre des Faits et bonnes Mœurs du sage roi Charles V*. This is an elaborate panegyric by the poetess Christine de Pisan, full of learning, good sense, and sound morality, but somewhat injured by the classical phrases, the foreign idioms, and the miscellaneous erudition, which characterise the school to which Christine belonged. Far more interesting is the *Livre des Faits du Maréchal de Bouciqualt*[140], a book which is a not unworthy companion and commentary to Froissart, exhibiting the kind of errant chivalry which characterised the

fourteenth century, and in part the fifteenth, and which so greatly assisted the English in their conflicts with the French. Joan of Arc was made, as might have been expected, the subject of numerous chronicles and memoirs which have come down to us under the names of Cousinot, Cochon, and Berry. The Constable of Richemont, who had the credit of overthrowing the last remnant of English domination at the battle of Formigny, found a biographer in Guillaume Gruel.

Lastly have to be mentioned three curious works of great value and interest bearing on this time. These are the journals of a citizen of Paris[141] (or two such), which extend from 1409 to 1422, and from 1424 to 1440, and the so-called *Chronique scandaleuse* of Jean de Troyes covering the reign of Louis XI. These, with the already-mentioned chronicle of Juvenal des Ursins, are filled with the minutest information on all kinds of points. The prices of articles of merchandise, the ravages of wolves, etc., are recorded, so that in them almost as much light is thrown on the social life of the period as by a file of modern newspapers. The chronicle of Jean Chartier, brother of Alain, that of Molinet in continuance of Chastellain, and the short memoirs of Villeneuve, complete the list of works of this class that deserve mention.

Examples of the three great French historians of the middle ages follow:—

Villehardouin.

La velle de la saint Martin vindrent devant Gadres en Esclavonie, si virent la cité fermee de halz murs et de haltes torz, et pour noiant demandissiés plus bele ne plus fort ne plus riche. et quant li pelerin la virent, il se merveillerent mult et distrent li uns a l'autre 'coment porroit estre prise tel vile par force, se diex meïsmes nel fait?' Les premieres nés vindrent devant la vile et aëncrerent et atendirent les autres et al matin fist mult bel jor et mult cler, et vinrent les galies totes et li huissier et les autres nés qui estoient arrieres, et pristrent le port par force et rompirent la chaaine qui mult ere forz et bien atornee, et descendirent a terre, si que li porz fu entr'aus et la vile. lor veïssiez maint chevalier et maint serjant issir des nés et maint bon destrier traire des huissiers et maint riche tref et maint pavellon.

Einsine se loja l'oz et fu Gadres assegie le jor de la saint Martin. a cele foiz ne furent mie venu tuit li baron, ear encor n'ere mie venuz li marchis de Montferrat qui ere remés arriere por afaire que il avoit. Estiennes del Perche fu remés malades en Venise et Mahis de Monmorenci, et quant il furent gari, si s'en vint Mahis de Monmorenci aprés l'ost a Gadrez; mes Estienes del Perche ne le fist mie si bien, quar il guerpi l'ost et s'en ala en Puille sejorner. avec lui s'en ala Rotrox de Monfort et Ives de la Ille et maint autre, qui mult en furent blasmé, et passerent au passage de marz en Surie.

L'endemain de la saint Martin issirent de cels

de Gadres et vindrent parler le duc de Venise qui ere en son paveillon, et li distrent que il li rendroient la cité et totes les lor choses sals lor cors en sa merci. et li dus dist qu'il n'en prendroit mie cestui plet ne autre, se par le conseil non as contes et as barons, et qu'il en iroit a els parler.

Endementiers que il ala parler as contes et as barons, icele partie dont vos avez oï arrieres, qui voloient l'ost depecier, parlerent as messages et lor distrent 'por quoi volez vos rendre vostre cité? li pelerin ne vos assaldront mie ne d'aus n'avez vos garde, se vos vos poëz defendre des Venisïens, dont estes vos quites.' et ensi pristrent un d'aus meïsmes qui avoit non Robert de Bove, qui ala as murs de la vile et lor dist ce meïsmes. Ensi entrerent li message en la vile et fu li plais remés. Li dus de Venise com il vint as contes et as barons, si lor dist 'seignor, ensi voelent cil de la dedanz rendre la cité sals lor cors a ma merci, ne je ne prendroie cestui plait ne autre se per voz conseill non' et li baron li respondirent 'sire, nos vos loons que vos le preigniez et si le vos prïon.' et il dist que il le feroit. Et il s'en tornerent tuit ensemble al paveillon le duc por le plait prendre, et troverent que li message s'en furent alé par le conseil a cels qui voloient l'ost depecier. E dont se dreça uns abes de Vals de l'ordre de Cistials, et lor dist 'seignor, je vos deffent de par l'apostoile de Rome que vos ne assailliez ceste cité, quar ele est de crestïens et vos iestes pelerin.' Et quant ce oï li dus, si en fu mult iriez et destroiz et dist as contes et as barons 'seignor, je avoie de ceste

vile plait a ma volonté, et vostre gent le m'ont tolu et vos m'aviez convent que vos le m'aideriez a conquerre, et je vos semoing que vos le façoiz.'

Maintenant li conte et li baron parlerent ensemble et cil qui a la lor partie se tenoient, et distrent 'mult ont fait grant oltrage cil qui ont cest plait desfet, et il ne fu onques jorz que il ne meïssent paine a cest ost depecier. or somes nos honi, se nos ne l'aidons a prendre.' Et il vienent al duc et li dïent 'sire, nos le vos aiderons a prendre por mal de cels qui destorné l'ont.' Ensi fu li consels pris; et al matin alerent logier devant les portes de la vile, et si drecierent lor perrieres et lor mangonials et lor autres engins dont il avoient assez; et devers la mer drecierent les eschieles sor les nés. lor commencierent a la vile a geter les pieres as murz et as lors. Ensi dura cil asals bien por v jors et lor si mistrent lors trenchëors a une tour, et cil commencierent a trenchier le mur. et quant cil dedenz virent ce, si quistrent plait tot atretel com il l'avoient refusé par le conseil a cels qui l'ost voloient depecier.

Joinville.

Au mois d'aoust entrames en nos neis a la Roche de Marseille: a celle journée que nous entrames en nos neis, fist l'on ouvrir la porte de la nef, et mist l'on touz nos chevaus ens, que nous deviens mener outre mer; et puis reclost l'on la porte et l'enboucha l'on bien, aussi comme l'on naye un tonnel. pour ce

que, quant le neis est en la grant mer, toute la porte est en l'yaue. Quant li cheval furent ens, nostre maistres notonniers escrïa a ses notonniers qui estoient ou bec de la nef et lour dist 'est aree vostre besoingne?' et il respondirent 'oïl, sire, vieingnent avant clerc et li provere.' Maintenant que il furent venu, il lour escrïa 'chantez de par dieu'; et il s'escrïerent tuit a une voiz '*veni creator spiritus*.' et il escrïa a ses notonniers 'faites voile de par dieu'; et il si firent. et en brief tens li venz se feri ou voile et nous ot tolu la vëue de la terre, que nous ne veïsmes que ciel et yaue: et chascun jour nous esloigna li venz des païs ou nous avions estei neiz. et ces choses vous moustre je que cil est bien fol hardis, qui se ose mettre en tel peril atout autrui chatel ou en pechié mortel; ear l'on se dort le soir la ou on ne set se l'on se trouvera ou font de la mer au matin.

En la mer nous avint une fiere merveille, que nous trouvames une montaigne toute ronde qui estoit devant Barbarie. nous la trouvames entour l'eure de vespres et najames tout le soir, et cuidames bien avoir fait plus de cinquante lieues, et lendemain nous nous trouvames devant icelle meïsmes montaigne; et ainsi nous avint par dous foiz ou par trois. Quant li marinnier virent ce, il furent tuit esbahi et nous distrent que nos neis estoient en grant peril; ear nous estiens devant la terre aus Sarrazins de Barbarie. Lors nous dist uns preudom prestres que on appeloit doyen de Malrut, ear il n'ot onques persecucïon en paroisse. ne par defaut d'yaue ne de trop pluie ne d'autre persecucïon, que

aussi tost comme il avoit fait trois processïons par trois samedis, que diex et sa mere ne le delivrassent. Samedis estoit: nous feïsmes la premiere processïon entour les dous maz de la nef; je meïsmes m'i fiz porter par les braz, pour ce que je estoie grief malades. Onques puis nous ne veïsmes la montaigne, et venimes en Cypre le tiers samedi.

Froissart.

Je fuis adont infourmé par le seigneur d'Estonnevort, et me dist que il vey, et aussi firent plusieurs, quant l'oriflambe fut desploiee et la bruïne se chey, ung blanc coulon voller et faire plusieurs volz par dessus la baniere du roy; et quant il eut assez volé, et que on se deubt combatre et assambler aux ennemis, il se print a sëoir sur l'une des bannieres du roy; dont on tint ce a grant signiffïance de bien. Or approchierent les Flamens et commenchierent a jetter et a traire de bombardes et de canons et de gros quarreaulx empenez d'arain; ainsi se commença la bataille. Et en ot le roy de France et ses gens le premier encontre, qui leur fut moult dur; ear ces Flamens, qui descendoient orgueilleusement et de grant voulenté, venoient roit et dur, et boutoient en venant de l'espaule et de la poitrine ainsi comme senglers tous foursenez, et estoient si fort entrelachiés tous ensemble qu'on ne les povoit ouvrir ne desrompre. La fuirent du costé des François par le trait des canons, des bombardes et des arbalestres premierement

mort: le seigneur de Waurin, baneret, Morelet de Halwin et Jacques d'Ere. Et adont fut la bataille du roy reculee; mais l'avantgarde et l'arrieregarde a deux lez passerent oultre et enclouïrent ces Flamens, et les misrent a l'estroit. Je vous diray comment sur ces deux eles gens d'armes les commencierent a pousser de leurs roides lances a longs fers et durs de Bourdeaulx, qui leur passoient ces cottes de maille tout oultre et les perchoient en char; dont ceulx qui estoient attains et navrez de ces fers se restraindoient pour eschiever les horïons; ear jamais ou amender le peuïssent ne se boutoient avant pour eulx faire destruire. La les misrent ces gens d'armes a tel destroit qu'ilz ne se sçavoient ne povoient aidier ne ravoir leurs bras ne leurs planchons pour ferir ne eulz deffendre. La perdoient les plusieurs force et alaine, et la tresbuchoient l'un sur l'autre, et se estindoient et moroient sans coup ferir. La fut Phelippe d'Artevelle encloz et pousé de glaive et abatu, et gens de Gand qui l'amoient et gardoient grant plenté atterrez entour luy. Quant le page dudit Phelippe vey la mesadventure venir sur les leurs, il estoit bien monté sur bon coursier, si se party et laissa son maistre, ear il ne le povoit aidier; et retourna vers Courtray pour revenir a Gand.

(A)insi fut faitte et assamblee celle bataille; et lors que des deux costez les Flamens furent astrains et encloz, ilz ne passerent plus avant, ear ilz ne se povoient aidier. Adont se remist la bataille du roy en vigeur, qui avoit de commencement ung petit branslé. La

entendoient gens d'armes a abatre Flamens en grant nombre, et avoient les plusieurs haches acerees, dont ilz rompoient ces bachinets et eschervelloient testes; et les aucuns plommees, dont ilz donnoient si grans horrïons, qu'ilz les abatoient a terre. A paines estoient Flamens chëuz, quant pillars venoient qui entre les gens d'armes se boutoient et portoient grandes coutilles, dont ilz les partüoient; ne nulle pitié n'en avoient non plus que se ce fuissent chiens. La estoit le clicquetis sur ces bacinets si grant et si hault, d'espees, de haches, et de plommees, que l'en n'y ouoit goutte pour la noise. Et ouÿ dire que, se tous les heaumiers de Paris et de Brouxelles estoient ensemble, leur mestier faisant, ilz n'euïssent pas fait si grant noise comme faisoient les combatans et les ferans sur ces testes et sur ces bachinets. La ne s'espargnoient point chevalliers ne escuïers ainchois mettoient la main a l'euvre par grant voulenté, et plus les ungs que les autres; si en y ot aucuns qui s'avancerent et bouterent en la presse trop avant; ear ilz y furent encloz et estains, et par especïal messire Loÿs de Cousant, ung chevallier de Berry, et messire Fleton de Revel, filz au seigneur de Revel; mais encoires en y eut des autres, dont ce fut dommage: mais si grosse bataille, dont celle la fut, ou tant avoit de pueple, ne se povoit parfurnir et au mieulx venir pour les victorïens, que elle ne couste grandement. Car jeunes chevalliers et escuïers qui desirent les armes se avancent voulentiers pour leur honneur et pour acquerre loënge; et la presse estoit la si

grande et le dangier si perilleux pour ceulx qui estoient enclos ou abatus, que se on n'avoit trop bonne ayde, on ne se povoit relever. Par ce party y eut des Françoiz mors et estains aucuns; mais plenté ne fut ce mie; ear quant il venoit a point, ilz aidoient l'un l'autre. La eut ung molt grant nombre de Flamens occis, dont les tas des mors estoient haulx et longs ou la bataille avoit esté; on ne vey jamais si peu de sang yssir a tant de mors.

Quant les Flamens qui estoient derriere veirent que ceulx devant fondoient et chëoient l'un sus l'autre et que ilz estoient tous desconfis, ilz s'esbahirent et jetterent leurs plançons par terre et leurs armures et se misrent a la fuitte vers Courtray et ailleurs. Ilz n'avoient cure que pour eulx mettre a sauveté. Et Franchois et Bretons aprés, quy les chassoient en fossez et en buissons, en aunois et an marés et bruieres, cy dix, cy vingt, cy trente, et la les recombatoient de rechief, et la les occïoient, se ilz n'estoient les plus fors. Si en y eut ung moult grant nombre de mors en la chace entre le lieu de la bataille et Courtray, ou ilz se retraioient a saulf garant. Ceste bataille advint sur le Mont d'Or entre Courtray et Rosebeque en l'an de grace nostre seigneur, mil iij^{c}. iiij^{xx}. et II., le jeudi devant le samedi de l'advent, le xxvij^{e}. jour de novembre, et estoit pour lors le roy Charles de France ou xiiij^{e}. an de son ëage.

FOOTNOTES:

[131] The chronicle of the pseudo-Turpin is of little real importance in the history of French literature, because it is admitted to have been written in Latin. The busy idleness of critics has however prompted them to discuss at great length the question whether the *Chanson de Roland* may not possibly have been composed from this chronicle. The facts are these. Tilpin or Turpin was actually archbishop of Rheims from 753-794, but nobody pretends that the chronicle going under his name is authentic. All that is certain is that it is not later than 1165, and that it is probably not earlier than the middle, or at most the beginning, of the eleventh century, while the part of it which is more particularly in question is of the end of that century. *Roland* is almost certainly of the middle at latest. Curiosity on this point may be gratified by consulting M. Gaston Paris, *De pseudo-Turpino*, Paris, 1865, or M. Léon Gautier, *Epopées Françaises*, Paris, 1878. But, from the literary point of view, it is sufficient to say that, while *Turpin* is of the very smallest literary merit, *Roland* is among the capital works of the middle ages.

[132] Ed. N. de Wailly. Paris, 1874.

[133] Ed. P. Paris. 2 vols., 1879-80. It is characteristic of the middle ages that this work usually bore the title of *Roman d'Eracle*, for no other reason than that the name of Héraclius occurs in the first sentence.

[134] Ed. N. de Wailly. Paris, 1874. Besides the *Histoire de St. Louis*, Joinville has left an interesting *Credo*, a brief religious manual written much earlier in his life.

[135] Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove. 20 vols., Brussels. Ed. S. Luce, Paris, in course of publication. The edition of Buchon, 3 vols.,

Paris, 1855, is still the best for general use. Froissart's poems give many biographical details which are interesting, but unimportant. He wandered all his life from court to court, patronised and pensioned by kings, queens, and princes. He was successively *curé* of Lestines and canon of Chimay. In early life he was much in England, being specially patronised by Edward III. and Philippa.

[136] *Old Mortality*, chap. 35.

[137] Ed. Buchon. Paris, 1858.

[138] Chastellain has been fortunate, like most Flemish writers, in being excellently and completely edited (by M. Kervyn de Lettenhove. 8 vols., Brussels).

[139] Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat.

[140] Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat.

[141] Ed. Michaud et Poujoulat, in whose collection most of the many authors here mentioned will be also found.

CHAPTER XII.

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE.

General use of Prose.

It was natural, and indeed necessary, that, when the

use of prose as an allowable vehicle for literary composition was once understood and established, it should gradually but rapidly supersede the more troublesome and far less appropriate form of verse. Accordingly we find that, from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the amount of prose literature is constantly on the increase. It happens, however, or, to speak more precisely, it follows that this miscellaneous prose literature is of much less importance and of much less interest than the contemporary and kindred literature in verse. For in the nature of things much of it was occupied with what may be called the journey-work of literature,—the stuff which, unless there be some special attraction in its form, grows obsolete, or retains a merely antiquarian interest in the course of time. There was, moreover, still among the chief patrons of literature a preference for verse which diverted the brightest spirits to the practice of that form. Yet again, the best prose composition of the middle ages, with the exception of a few works of fiction, is to be found in its chronicles, and these have already been noticed. A review, therefore, much less minute in scale than that which in the first ten chapters of this book has been given to the mediaeval poetry of France, will suffice for its mediaeval prose, and such a review will appropriately close the survey of the literature of the middle ages.

Prose
Sermons.
St. Bernard.

Maurice de
Sully.

Later Preachers. Gerson.

It has already been pointed out in the first chapter that documentary evidence exists to prove the custom of preaching in French (or at least in *lingua romana*) at a very early date. It is not, however, till many centuries after the date of Mummolinus, that there is any trace of regularly written vernacular discourses. When these appear in the twelfth century the Provençal dialects appear to have the start of French proper. Whether the forty-four prose sermons of St. Bernard which exist were written by him in French, or were written in Latin and translated, is a disputed point. The most reasonable opinion seems to be that they were translated, but it is uncertain whether at the beginning of the thirteenth or the middle of the twelfth century. However this may be, the question of written French sermons in the twelfth century does not depend on that of St. Bernard's authorship. Maurice de Sully, who presided over the See of Paris from 1160 to 1195, has left a considerable number of sermons which exist in manuscripts of very different dialects. Perhaps it may not be illegitimate to conclude from this, that at the time such written sermons were not very common, and that preachers of different districts were glad to borrow them for their own use. These also are thought to have been first written in Latin and then translated. But whether Maurice de Sully was a pioneer or not, he was very quickly followed by others. In the following century the number of preachers whose vernacular work has been preserved is very large; the increase being, beyond all doubt, partially due to the foundation of the two great preaching orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic. The

existing literature of this class, dating from the thirteenth, the fourteenth, and the early fifteenth centuries, is enormous, but the remarks made at the beginning of this chapter apply to it fully. Its interest is almost wholly antiquarian, and not in any sense literary. Distinguished names indeed occur in the catalogue of preachers, but, until we come to the extreme verge of the mediaeval period proper, hardly one of what may be called the first importance. The struggle between the Burgundian and Orleanist, or Armagnac parties, and the ecclesiastical squabbles of the Great Schism, produced some figures of greater interest. Such are Jean Petit, a furious partisan, who went so far as to excuse the murder of the Duke of Orleans, and Jean Charlier, or Gerson, one of the most respectable and considerable names of the later mediaeval literature. Gerson was born in 1363, at a village of the same name in Lorraine. He early entered the Collège de Navarre, and distinguished himself under Peter d'Ailly, the most famous of the later nominalists. He became Chancellor of the University, received a living in Flanders, and for many years preached in the most constantly attended churches of Paris. He represented the University at the Council of Constance, and, becoming obnoxious to the Burgundian party, sought refuge with one of his brothers at Lyons, where he is said to have taught little children. He died in 1429. Gerson, it should perhaps be added, is one of the numerous candidates (but one of the least likely) for the honour of having written the *Imitation*. He concerns us here only as the author of numerous French sermons. His work in this kind is very characteristic of the time. Less mixed with burlesque than that of his immediate successors, it is equally full of miscellaneous, and, as it now

seems, somewhat inappropriate erudition, and far fuller of the fatal allegorising and personification of abstract qualities which were in every branch of literature the curse of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet there are passages of real eloquence in Gerson, though perhaps the chief literary point about him is the evidence he gives of the insufficiency of the language in its then condition for serious prose work.

Moral and Devotional Treatises.

Translators.

Political and Polemical Works.

This is indeed the lesson of most of the writing which we have to notice in this chapter. Next to sermons may most naturally be placed devotional and moral works, for, as may easily be imagined, theology and philosophy, properly so called, did not condescend to the vulgar tongue until after the close of the period. Only treatises for the practical use of the unlearned and ignorant adopted the vernacular. Of such there are manuals of devotion and sketches of sacred history which date from the thirteenth century, besides numerous later treatises, among the authors of which Gerson is again conspicuous. The most popular, perhaps, and in a way the most interesting of all such moral and devotional treatises, is the book of the Chevalier de la Tour Landry[142], written in

the third quarter of the fourteenth century. This book, destined for the instruction of the author's three daughters, is composed of Bible stories, moral tales from ordinary literature and from the writer's experience, precepts and rules of conduct, and so forth; in short, a Whole Duty of Girls. Most however of the works of this sort which were current were, as may be supposed, not original, but translated, and these translations played a very important part in the history of the language. The earliest of all are translations of the Bible, especially of the Psalms and the book of Kings, the former of which may perhaps date from the end of the eleventh century. Translations of the fathers, and of the Lives of the Saints, followed in such numbers that, in 1199, Pope Innocent III. blamed their indiscriminate use. The translation of profane literature hardly begins much before the thirteenth century. In this it becomes frequent; and in the following many classical writers and more mediaeval authors in Latin underwent the process. But it was not till the close of the fourteenth century that the most important translations were made, and that translation began to exercise its natural influence on a comparatively unsophisticated language, by providing terms of art, by generally enriching the vocabulary, and by the elaboration of the peculiarities of syntax and style necessary for rendering the sentences of languages so highly organised as Latin and Greek. Under John of Valois and his three successors considerable encouragement was given by the kings of France to this sort of work, and three translators, Pierre Bersuire, Nicholas Oresme, and Raoul de Presles, have left special reputations. The eldest of these, Pierre Bersuire or Bercheure, a friend of Petrarch, was born in 1290, and towards the end of his life, about 1352,

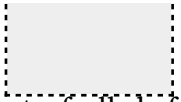
translated part of Livy. Nicholas Oresme, the date of whose birth is unknown, but who entered the Collège de Navarre in 1348, and is likely to have been at that time thirteen or fourteen years old, and who became Dean of Rouen and Bishop of Lisieux, translated, in 1370 and the following years, the *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Economics* of Aristotle (from the Latin, not the Greek). He died in 1382. Oresme was a good writer, and particularly dexterous in adopting neologisms necessary for his purpose. Raoul de Presles executed translations of the Bible and of St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. All these writers furnished an enlarged vocabulary to their successors, the most remarkable of whom were the already mentioned Christine de Pisan and Alain Chartier. The latter is especially noteworthy as a prose writer, and the comments already made on his style and influence as a poet apply here also. His *Quadriloge Invectif* and *Curial*, both satirical or, at least, polemical works, are his chief productions in this kind. Raoul de Presles also composed a polemical work, dealing chiefly with the burning question of the papal and royal powers, under the title of *Songe du Verger*.

Codes and Legal Treatises.

It might seem unlikely at first sight that so highly technical a subject as law should furnish a considerable contingent to early vernacular literature; but there are some works of this kind both of ancient date and of no small importance. England and Normandy furnish an important contingent, the 'Laws of William the Conqueror' and the *Coutumiere Normandie* being the most remarkable: but the most interesting document of this kind is perhaps the

famous *Assises de Jérusalem*, arranged by Godfrey of Bouillon and his crusaders as the code of the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099, and known also as the *Lettres du Sépulcre*, from the place of their custody. The original text was lost or destroyed at the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187; but a new *Assise*, compiled from the oral tradition of the jurists who had seen and used the old, was written by Philippe de Navarre in 1240, or thereabouts, for the use of the surviving Latin principalities of the East. This was shortly afterwards enlarged and developed by Jean d'Ibelin, a Syrian baron, who took part in the crusade of St. Louis. These codes concerned themselves only with one part of the original *Lettres du Sépulcre*, the laws affecting the privileged classes; but the other part, the *Assises des Bourgeois*, survives in *Le Livre de la Cour des Bourgeois*, which has been thought to be older than the loss of the original. These various works contain the most complete account of feudal jurisprudence in its palmy days that is known, for the still earlier Anglo-Norman laws represent a more mixed state of things. It was especially in Cyprus that the Jerusalem codes were observed. The chief remaining works of the same kind which deserve mention are the *Établissements de St. Louis* and the *Livre de Justice et de Plet*, which both date from the time of Louis himself; the *Conseil*, a treatise on law by Pierre de Fontaines, who died in 1289, and the *Coutumes du Beauvoisis* of Philippe de Beaumanoir, who wrote in 1283. The legal literature of the fourteenth century is abundant, but possesses considerably less interest.

Miscellanies and Didactic Works.



Last of all, before coming to prose fiction, a vast if not very interesting class of miscellaneous prose work must be mentioned. The word class has been used, but perhaps improperly, for classification is almost impossible. Books of accounts and domestic economy of all sorts (generally called *livres de raison*) were very common; treatises of all kinds of more general character on household management abounded. We have a *Ménagier de Paris*, a *Viandier de Paris*, both of the fourteenth century. But much earlier the orderly and symmetrical spirit which has always distinguished the French makes itself apparent in literature. The *Livre des Métiers de Paris* of Étienne Boileau, dating from the thirteenth century, gives a complete idea of the organisation of guilds and trades at that time. An innumerable multitude of treatises on the minor morals, on love, on manners, exists in manuscript, and in rare instances in print. The *Trésors*, or compendious encyclopædias, which have already been noticed in verse, began in the thirteenth century to be composed in prose, the most remarkable being that of Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, who avowedly used French as his vehicle of composition, because it was the most commonly read of European languages. This book was written apparently about or before 1270. Nor did the separate arts lack illustration in prose. Medicine and alchemy, astronomy and poetry, war and chess, had their treatises, while Bestiaries and Lapidaries are almost as numerous in prose as in verse. Finally, there is the important category of books of travel. There are a certain number of voyages to the Holy Land[143]; some miscellaneous travels mostly, though not universally, translated from the Latin; and last, but not least, the great book of Marco Polo, which seems

to have been written originally in French, the author, when in captivity at Genoa, having dictated it to Rusticien of Pisa, who also figures as a compiler of late versions of the Arthurian legend, and who thus had some skill in French composition.

Fiction

The prose fiction of the period has been kept to the last, because it expresses a different order of literary endeavour from those divisions which have hitherto been treated. The language of the middle ages was ill-suited for work other than narrative; for narrative work it was supremely well adapted. Yet the prose fiction which we have is not on the whole equal in merit to the poetry, though in one or two instances it is of great value. The medium of communication was not generally known or used until the period of decadence had been reached, and the peculiar defects of mediaeval literature, prolixity and verbiage, show themselves more conspicuously and more annoyingly in prose than in verse. We have, however, some remarkable work of the later periods, and in the latest of all we have one writer, Antoine de la Salle, who deserves to rank with the great chroniclers as a fashioner of French prose.

The French prose fiction of the middle ages resolves itself into several classes: the early Arthurian Romances already noticed; the scattered tales of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which are chiefly to be studied in two excellent volumes of the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne*[144]; the versions of such collections of legends, chiefly oriental in origin, as the *History of the Seven Wise Men* and the *Gesta Romanorum*; the longer classical romances in prose; the late prose *remaniements* of the great verse epics

and romances of the twelfth century; and the more or less original work of the fifteenth century, when prose was becoming an independent and coequal literary exponent. The first class requires no further mention; of the third, the editions of the *Roman des Sept Sages*, by M. Gaston Paris[145], and of the *Violier des Histoires Romaines*, by M. Gustave Brunet[146], may be referred to as sufficient instances; of the fourth a very interesting specimen has been made accessible by the publication of the prose *Roman de Jules César* of Jean de Tuim[147], a free version from Lucan made apparently in the course of the thirteenth century, and afterwards imitated by the author of the verse romance; the fifth, though very numerous, are not of much value, though the great romance of *Perceforest* and a few others may be excepted from this general condemnation. The second and the last deserve a longer mention.

The tales of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as published by MM. Moland and Héricault, are eight in number. Those of the second volume are on the whole inferior in interest to those of the first. They consist of *Asseneth*, a graceful legend of the marriage of Joseph with the daughter of the Egyptian high-priest; *Troilus*, interesting chiefly as a prose version of Benoist de Ste. More's legend of *Troilus and Cressida*, through the channel of Guido Colonna and Boccaccio; and a very curious English story, that of the rebel Fulk Fitzwarine. The thirteenth-century tales consist of *L'Empereur Constant*, the story with which Mr. Morris has made English readers familiar under the title of the 'Man born to be King;' of a prose version of the ubiquitous legend of *Amis et Amiles*; of *Le roi Flore et la belle Jehanne*, a kind of version of *Griselda*, though the particular trial and exhibition of fidelity is quite different; of the

Comtesse de Ponthieu, the least interesting of all; and lastly, of the finest prose tale of the French middle ages, *Aucassin et Nicolette*. In this exquisite story Aucassin, the son of the count of Beaucaire, falls in love with Nicolette, a captive damsel. It is very short, and is written in mingled verse and prose. The theme is for the most part nothing but the desperate love of Aucassin, which is careless of religion, which makes him indifferent to the joy of battle and to everything, except 'Nicolette ma très-douce mie,' and which is, of course, at last rewarded. But the extreme beauty of the separate scenes makes it a masterpiece.

Antoine de la Salle.

Antoine de la Salle is one of the most fortunate of authors. The tendency of modern criticism is generally to endeavour to prove that some famous author has been wrongly credited with some of the work which has made his fame. Homer, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Rabelais, have all had to pay this penalty. In the case of Antoine de la Salle, on the contrary, critics have vied with each other in heaping unacknowledged masterpieces on his head. His only acknowledged work is the charming romance of *Petit Jean de Saintré*[148]. The first thing added to this has been the admirable satire of the *Quinze Joyes du Mariage*[149], the next the famous collection of the *Cent Nouvelles*[150], and the last the still more famous farce of *Pathelin*[151]. There are for once few or no external reasons why these various attributions should not be admitted, while there are many internal ones why they should. Antoine de la Salle was born in 1398, and spent his life in the employment of different kings and princes;—Louis III

of Anjou, King of Naples, his son the good King René, the count of Saint Pol, and Philip the Good of Burgundy, who was his natural sovereign. Nothing is known of him after 1461. Of the three prose works which have been attributed to him—there are others of a didactic character in manuscript—the *Quinze Joyes du Mariage* is extremely brief, but it contains the quintessence of all the satire on that honourable estate which the middle ages had elaborated. Every chapter—there is one for each 'joy' with a prologue and conclusion—ends with a variation on this phrase descriptive of the unhappy Benedict, 'est sy est enclose dans la nasse, et à l'aventure ne s'en repent point et s'il n'y estait il se y mettroit bientot; la usera sa vue en languissant, et finira misérablement ses jours.' The satire is much quieter and of a more humorous and less boisterous character than was usual at the time. The *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* are to all intents and purposes prose *fabliaux*. They have the full licence of that class of composition, its sparkling fun, its truth to the conditions of ordinary human life. Many of them are taken from the work of the Italian novelists, but all are handled in a thoroughly original manner. In style they are perhaps the best of all the late mediaeval prose works, being clear, precise, and definite without the least appearance of baldness or dryness. *Petit Jehan de Saintré* is, together with the *Chronique de Messire Jacques de Lalaing*[152] of Georges Chastellain (a delightful biography, which is not a work of fiction), the hand-book of the last age of chivalry. Jehan de Saintré, who was a real person of the preceding century, but from whom the novelist borrows little or nothing but his name, falls in love with a lady who is known by the fantastic title of 'la dame des belles cousines.' He wins general favour by his

courtesy, true love, and prowess; but during his absence in quest of adventures, his faithless mistress betrays him for a rich abbot. The latter part of this book exhibits something of the satiric intention, which was never long absent from the author's mind; the former contains a picture, artificial perhaps, but singularly graceful, of the elaborate religion, as it may almost be called, of chivalry. Strikingly evident in the book is the surest of all signs of a dying stage of society, the most delicate observation and sympathetic description joined to sarcastic and ironical criticism.

As examples of this prose literature we may take a fragment of one of the sermons attributed to St. Bernard (twelfth century), an extract from *Aucassin et Nicolette* (thirteenth century), and one from the *Curial* of Alain Chartier (early fifteenth century):—

St. Bernard.

> Granz est ceste mers, chier frere, et molt large, c'est ceste presente vie ke molt est amere et molt plaine de granz ondes, ou trois manieres de gent puyent solement trespesseir, ensi k'il delivreit en soient, et chascuns en sa maniere. Troi homme sunt: Noë, Danïel et Job. Li primiers de cez trois trespesset a neif, li seconz par pont et li tierz par weit. Cist troi homme signifient trois ordenes ki sunt en sainte eglise. Noë conduist l'arche par mei lo peril del duluve, en cui je reconois aparmenmes la forme de ceos qui sainte eglise ont a governeir. Danïel, qui apeleiz est bers de desiers, ki abstinens fut et chastes, il est li ordenes des penanz et des

continanz ki entendent solement a deu. Et Job, ki droituriers despensiers fut de la sustance de cest munde, signifïet lo fëaule peule qui est en marïaige, a cuy il loist bien avoir en possessïon les choses terrienes. Del primier et del secont nos covient or parler, ear ci sunt or de present nostre frere, et ki abbeit sunt si cum nos, ki sunt del nombre des prelaiz; et si sunt assi ci li moine ki sunt de l'ordene des penanz dont nos mismes, qui abbeit sommes, ne nos doyens mies osteir, si nos par aventure, qui jai nen avignet, nen avons dons oblïeit nostre professïon por la grace de nostre office. Lo tierz ordene, c'est de ceos ki en marïaige sunt, trescorrai ju or briément, si cum ceos qui tant nen apartienent mies a nos cum li altre. c'est cil ordenes ki a vveit trespesset ceste grant meir; et cist ordenes est molt peneuous et perillous, et ki vait par molt longe voie, si cum cil ki nule sente ne quierent ne nule adrece. En ceu appert bien ke molt est perillouse lor voie, ke nos tant de gent i vëons perir, dont nos dolor avons, et ke nos si poc i vëons de ceos ki ensi trespessent cum mestiers seroit; ear molt est griés chose d'eschuïr l'abysme des vices et les fossés des criminals pechiez entre les ondes de cest seule, nomeyement or en cest tens ke li malices est si enforciez.

AUCASSIN ET NICOLETTE.

Aucasins fu mis en prison si com vos avés, oï et entendu, et Nicolete fu d'autre part en le canbre. Ce fu el tans d'esté, el mois de mai,

que li jor sont caut, lonc et cler, et les nuis coies et series. Nicolete jut une nuit en son lit, si vit la lune luire cler par une fenestre, et si oï le lorseilnol canter en garding, se li sovint d'Aucasin son ami qu'ele tant amoit. ele se comença a porpenser del conte Garin de Biaucaire qui de mort le haoit; si se pensa qu'ele ne remanroit plus ilec, que s'ele estoit acusee et li quens Garins le savoit, il le feroit de male mort morir. ele senti que li vielle dormoit qui aveuc li estoit. ele se leva, si vesti un blïaut de drap de soie que ele avoit molt bon; si prist dras de lit et touailes, si noua l'un a l'autre, si fist une corde si longe conme ele pot, si le noua au piler de le fenestre, si s'avala contreval le gardin, et prist se vesture a l'une main devant et a l'autre deriere; si s'escorça por le rousee qu'ele vit grande sor l'erbe, si s'en ala aval le gardin. Ele avoit les caviaus blons et menus recercelés, et les ex vairs et rïans, et le face traitice et le nés haut et bien assis, et les levretes vermelletes plus que n'est cerisse ne rose el tans d'esté, et les dens blans et menus, et avoit les mameletes dures qui li souslevoient sa vestëure ausi com ce fuissent II nois gauges, et estoit graille parmi les flans, qu'en vos dex mains le pëusciés enclorre; et les flors des margerites qu'ele ronpoit as ortex de ses piés, qui li gissoient sor le menuisse du pié par deseure, estoient droites noires avers ses piés et ses ganbes, tant par estoit blance la mescinete. Ele vint au postic; si le deffrema, si s'en isci par mi les rues de Biaucaire par devers l'onbre, ear la lune luisoit molt clere, et erra tant qu'ele vint

a le tor u ses amis estoit. Li tors estoit faëlé de lius en lius, et ele se quatist delés l'un des pilers. si s'estraint en son mantel, si mist sen cief par mi une crevëure de la tor qui vielle estoit et anciienne, si oï Aucasin qui la dedens pleuroit et faisoit mot grant dol et regretoit se douce amie que tant amoit. et quant ele l'ot assés escouté, si comença a dire.

Alain Chartier.

La court, affin que tu l'entendes, est ung couvent de gens qui soubz faintise du bien commun sont assemblez pour eulx interrompre; ear il n'y a gueres de gens qui ne vendent, achaptent ou eschangent aucunes foiz leurs rentes ou leurs propres vestemens; ear entre nous de la court nous sommes marchans affectez qui achaptons les autres gens et autresfoiz pour leur argent nous leur vendons nostre humanité precïeuse. Nous leur vendons et achaptons autruy par flaterie ou par corrupcïons; mais nous sçavons tres bien vendre nous mesmes a ceulx qui ont de nous a faire. Combien donc y peus tu acquerir qui es certain sans doubte et sans peril? veulx tu aller a la court vendre ou perdre ce bien de vertu, que tu as acquis hors d'icelle court? Certes, frere, tu demandes ce que tu deusses reffuser, tu te fies en ce dont tu te deusses deffier et fiches ton esperance en ce que te tire a peril. Et se tu y viens, la court te servira de tant de mensonges controverses d'une part, et de l'autre de bailler tant de tours et de charges

que tu auras dedans toy mesmes bataille continuëlle et soussiz angoisseux et pour certain homme qui pourra bonnement dire que ceste vie fust bieneuree qui par tant de tempestes est achatee et en tant de contrarïetez esprouvee.

FOOTNOTES:

[142] Ed. Montaiglon. Paris, 1854.

[143] A good example of these is the *Saint Voyage de Jérusalem* of the Seigneur d'Anglure (1385), edited by MM. Bonnardot and Longnon. Paris, 1878.

[144] *Nouvelles du 13^{e} et du 14^{e} siècle.* Ed. Moland et Héricault. 2 vols. Paris, 1856.

[145] Paris, 1876.

[146] Paris, 1858.

[147] Ed. Settegast. Halle, 1881.

[148] Ed. Guichard. Paris, 1843.

[149] Ed. Jannet. Paris, 1853; 2nd ed. 1857.

[150] Ed. Wright. Paris, 1858.

[151] Ed. Fournier, *Théâtre Français avant la Renaissance*. Paris, n. d.

[152] Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, viii. 1-259.

INTERCHAPTER I.

SUMMARY OF MEDIAEVAL LITERATURE.

In the foregoing book a view has been given of the principal developments of mediaeval literature in France. The survey has extended, taking the extremest chronological limits, over some eight centuries. But, until the end of the eleventh, the monuments of ancient French literature are few and scattered, and the actual manuscripts which we possess date in hardly any case further back than the twelfth. In reality the history of mediaeval literature in France is the history of the productions of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with a long but straggling introduction, ranging from the eighth or even the seventh. Its palmy time is unquestionably in the twelfth and the thirteenth. During these two hundred years almost every kind of literature is attempted. Vast numbers of epic poems are written; one great story, that of Arthur, exercises the imagination as hardly any other story has exercised it either in ancient or in modern times; the drama is begun in all its varieties of tragedy, comedy, and opera; lyric poetry finds abundant and exquisite expression; history begins to be written, not indeed from the philosophic point of view, but with vivid and picturesque presentment of fact; elaborate codes are drawn; vernacular homilies, not mere rude colloquial discourses, are composed; the learning of the age, such as it is, finds popular treatment; and in particular a satiric literature, more abundant and more racy if less polished than any that classical antiquity has left us, is committed to writing. It is often wondered at and bewailed that this vigorous growth was succeeded by a period of comparative stagnation in which little advance was made, and in which not a little decided falling off is

noticeable. Except the formal lyric poetry of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and the multiplied dramatic energy of the latter, nothing novel or vigorous appears for some hundred and forty years, until the extreme verge of the period, when the substitution of the prose tale, as exemplified in the work attributed to Antoine de la Salle, for the verse Fabliau, opens a prospect which four centuries of progress have not closed. The early perfection of Italian, a language later to start than French, has been regretfully compared with this, and the blame has been thrown on the imperfection of mediaeval arrangements for educating the people. The complaint is mistaken, and almost foolish. It is not necessary to look much further than Italian itself to see the Nemesis of a too early development. French, like English, which had a yet tardier literary growth, has pursued its course unhasting, unresting, to the present hour. Italian since the close of the sixteenth century has contributed not a single masterpiece to European literature, and not much that can be called good second-rate. It is not impossible that the political troubles of France—the Hundred Years' War especially—checked the intellectual development of the country, but if so, the check was in the long run altogether salutary. The middle ages were allowed to work themselves out—to produce their own natural fruit before the full influx of classical literature. What is more, a breathing time was allowed after the exhaustion of the first set of influences, before the second was felt. Hence the French renaissance was a far more vigorous growth than the renaissance of Italy, which displays at once the signs of precocity and of premature decay. But we are more immediately concerned at the present moment with the literary

results of the middle ages themselves. It is only of late years that it has been possible fully to estimate these, and it is now established beyond the possibility of doubt that to France almost every great literary style as distinguished from great individual works is at this period due. The testimony of Brunetto Latini as to French being the common literary tongue of Europe in the thirteenth century has been quoted, and those who have read the foregoing chapters attentively will be able to recall innumerable instances of the literary supremacy of France. It must of course be remembered that she enjoyed for a long time the advantage of enlisting in her service the best wits of Southern England, of the wide district dominated by the Provençal dialects, and of no small part of Germany and of Northern Italy. But these countries took far more than they gave: the Chansons de Gestes were absorbed by Italy, the Arthurian Romances by Germany; the Fabliaux crossed the Alps to assume a prose dress in the Southern tongue; the mysteries and miracles made their way to every corner of Europe to be copied and developed. To the origination of the most successful of all artificial forms of poetry—the sonnet—France has indeed no claim, but this is almost a solitary instance. The three universally popular books (to use the word loosely) of profane literature in the middle ages, the epic of Arthur, the satire of Reynard the Fox, the allegorical romance of the Rose, are of French origin. In importance as in bulk no literature of these four centuries could dare to vie with French.

This astonishing vigour of imaginative writing was however accompanied by a corresponding backwardness in the application of the vernacular to the use of the exacter and more serious departments of letters. Before Comines, the French chronicle was

little more than gossip, though it was often the gossip of genius. No philosophical, theological, ethical, or political work deserving account was written in French prose before the beginning of the sixteenth century. The very language remained utterly unfitted for any such use. Its vocabulary, though enormously rich in mere volume, was destitute of terms of the subtlety and precision necessary for serious prose; its syntax was hardly equal to anything but a certain loose and flowing narration, which, when turned into the channel of argument, became either bald or prolix. The universal use of Latin for graver purposes had stunted and disabled it. At the same time great changes passed over the language itself. In the fourteenth century it lost with its inflections not a little of its picturesqueness, and had as yet hit upon no means of supplying the want. The loose orthography of the middle ages had culminated in a fantastic redundance of consonants which was reproduced in the earliest printed books. This, as readers of Rabelais are aware, was an admirable assistance to grotesque effect, but it was fatal to elegance or dignity except in the omnipotent hands of a master like Rabelais himself. In the fifteenth century, moreover, the stereotyped forms of poetry were losing their freshness and grace while retaining their stately precision. The faculty of sustained verse narrative had fled the country, only to return at very long intervals and in very few cases. The natural and almost childish outspokenness of early times had brought about in all departments of comic literature a revolting coarseness of speech. The farce and the prose tale almost outdo the more naïf *fabliau* in this. Nothing like a critical spirit had yet manifested itself in matters literary, unless the universal following of

a few accepted models may be called criticism. The very motives of the mediaeval literature, its unquestioning faith, its sense of a narrow circle of knowledge surrounded by a vast unknown, its acceptance of classes and orders in church and state (tempered as this acceptance had been by the sharpest satire on particulars but by hardly any argument on general points), were losing their force. Everything was ready for a renaissance, and the next book will show how the Renaissance came and what it did.

BOOK II.

THE RENAISSANCE.

CHAPTER I.

VILLON, COMINES, AND THE LATER FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Characteristics of Fifteenth-century Literature.

To determine at what period exactly mediaeval literature ceases in France and modern literature begins, is not one of the easiest problems of literary history. It has sometimes been solved by the obvious expedient of making out of the fifteenth century a period of transition, sometimes by continuing the classification of 'mediaeval' until the time when Marot and Rabelais gave unmistakeable evidence of the presence and working of the modern spirit. Perhaps, however, there may, after all, have been something in the instinct which, in words clumsily enough chosen, made Boileau date modern French poetry from Villon[153], and there can hardly be any doubt that, as far as spirit if not form goes, modern French prose dates from Comines. These two contemporary authors, moreover, have in them the characteristic which perhaps more than any other distinguishes modern from mediaeval literature, the predominance of the personal element. In their works, especially if Villon be taken with the immediately preceding and partially contemporary Charles d'Orléans, a difference of the most striking kind is noticeable at once. It is not that the prince who served the god Nonchaloir so piously is deficient in personal characteristics or personal attractiveness, but that his personality is still, so to speak, generic rather than individual. He is still the Trouvère of the nobler class, dallying with half-imaginary woes in the forms consecrated by tradition to the record of them. Not so the vagabond whose words after four centuries appeal directly to the spirit of the modern

reader. That reader is cut off from Charles d'Orléans' world by a gulf across which he can only project himself by a great effort of study or of sympathetic determination. The barriers which separate him from Villon are slight enough, consisting mostly of trifling changes in language and manners which a little exertion easily overcomes.

The latter portion of the fifteenth century, or, to speak more correctly, its last two-thirds, have frequently been described as a 'dead season' in French literature. The description is not wholly just. Even if, according to the plan just explained, we throw Charles d'Orléans and Antoine de la Salle, two names of great importance, back into the mediaeval period, and if we allow most of the chroniclers who preceded Comines to accompany them, there are still left, before the reign of Francis the First witnessed the definite blooming of the Renaissance in France, the two names of consummate importance which stand at the head of this chapter, a few minor writers of interest such as Coquillart, Baude, Martial d'Auvergne, an interesting group of literary or at least oratorical ecclesiastics, and a much larger and, from a literary point of view, more important group of elaborate versifiers, the so-called *grands rhétoriqueurs* who preceded the Pléiade in endeavouring to Latinise the French tongue, and whose stiff verse produced by a natural rebound the easy grace of Clément Marot. Each of these persons and groups will demand some notice, and the mention of them will bring us to the Renaissance of which the subjects of this chapter were the forerunners.

Villon.

François Villon[154], or Corbueil, or Corbier, or de Montcorbier, or des Loges, was certainly born at Paris in the year 1431. Of the date of his death nothing certain is known, some authorities extending his life towards the close of the century in order to adjust Rabelais' anecdotes of him[155], others supposing him to have died before the publication of the first edition of his works in 1489. That Villon was not his patronymic, whichsoever of his numerous aliases may really deserve that distinction, is certain. He was a citizen of Paris and a member of the university, having the status of *clerc*. But his youth was occupied in other matters than study. In 1455 he killed, apparently in self-defence, a priest named Philip Sermaise, fled from Paris, was condemned to banishment in default of appearance, and six months afterwards received letters of pardon. In 1456 a faithless mistress, Catherine de Vausselles, drew him into a second affray, in which he had the worst, and again he fled from Paris. During his absence a burglary committed in the capital put the police on the track of a gang of young good-for-nothings among whom Villon's name figured, and he was arrested, tried, tortured, and condemned to death. On appeal, however, the sentence was commuted to banishment. Four years after he was in prison at Meung, consigned thither by the Bishop of Orleans, but the king, Louis the Eleventh, set him free. Thenceforward nothing certain is known of him. He had at one time relations with Charles d'Orléans. Such are the bare facts of his singular life, to which the peculiar character of his work has directed perhaps disproportionate attention. This work consists of a poem in forty stanzas of eight octosyllabic lines (each rhymed a, b, a, b, b, c, b, c) called the *Petit Testament*[156]; of a poem in 173

similar stanzas called the *Grand Testament*, in which about a score of minor pieces, chiefly ballades or rondeaux, are inserted; of a *Codicil* composed mainly of ballades; of a few separate pieces, and of some ballades in *argot*, collectively called *Le Jargon*. Besides these there are doubtful pieces, including a curious work called *Les Repues Franches*, which describes in octaves like those of the Testaments the swindling tricks of Villon and his companions, an excellent Dialogue between two characters, the Seigneurs de Mallepaye and Baillevent, and a still better Monologue entitled *Le Franc Archier de Bagnolet*. The Little Testament was written after the affair with Catherine de Vausselles, the Great Testament after his liberation from the Bishop's Prison at Meung. Many of the minor poems contain allusions which enable us to fix them to various events in the poet's life. The first edition of his works was, as has been said, published in 1489. In 1533 he had the honour of having Marot for editor, and up to the date of the Bibliophile Jacob's edition of 1854 (since when there have been several editions), the number had reached thirty-two.

The characteristics of Villon may be looked at either technically or from the point of view of the matter of his work. He had an extraordinary mastery of the most artificial forms of poetry which have ever been employed. The rondel, which Charles d'Orléans wrote with so much grace, he did not use, but his rondeaux are generally exquisite. The ballade, however, was his special province. No writer has ever got the full virtue out of the recurrent rhymes and refrains, which are the special characteristics of the form, as Villon has. No one has infused into a mere string of names, such as his famous *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis* and others, such exquisitely

poetical effects by dint of an epithet here and there and of a touching burden. But the matter of his verse is in many ways perfectly on a level with its manner. No one excels him in startling directness of phrase, in simple but infinite pathos of expression. Of the former, the sudden cry of the Belle Heaulmière after the recital of her former triumphs—

Que m'en reste-t-il? honte et péché;

and the despairing conclusion of the lover of La Grosse Margot—

Je suis paillard, paillardise me suit—

are examples in point; of the latter the line in the rondeau to Death—

Deux étions et n'avions qu'un cœur.

No one has bolder strokes of the picturesque, as for instance—

De Constantinoble
L'empérier aux poings dorés;

and no one can render the sombre horror of a scene better than Villon has rendered it in the famous epitaph of the gibbeted corpses—

La pluie nous a debués et lavés,
Et le soleil desséchés et noircis,
Pies, corbeaulx nous out les yeux cavés
Et arrachés la barbe et les sourcils.

These are some of Villon's strongest points. Yet in his comparatively limited work—limited in point of bulk and peculiar in style and subject—he has contrived

to show perhaps more general poetical power than any other writer who has left so small a total of verse. The note of his song is always true and always sweet; and despite the intensely allusive character of most of it, and the necessary loss of the key to many of the allusions, it has in consequence continued popular through all changes of language and manners. Of very few French poets can it be said as of Villon that their charm is immediate and universal, and the reason of this is that his work is full of touches of nature which are universally perceived, as well as distinguished by consummate art of expression. In the great literature which we are discussing, the latter characteristic is almost universally present, the former not so constantly.

Comines.

The literary excellence of Comines[157] is of a very different kind from that of Villon, but he represents the changed attitude of the modern spirit towards practical affairs almost as strongly as Villon does the change in its relations to art and sentiment. Philippe de Comines was born, not at the château of the same name which was then in the possession of his uncle, but at Renescure, not very far from Hazebrouck. His family name was Vandenclyte, and his ancestors (Flemings, as their name implies) had been citizens of Ghent before they acquired seignorial position and rank. The education of Comines was neglected (he never possessed any knowledge of Latin), and his heritage was heavily encumbered. He was born before 1447, and entered the service of Philip of Burgundy and of his son Charles of Charolais, the future Charles le Téméraire. Comines was present at Montlhéry and at the siege of Liège, while he played

a considerable part in the celebrated affair of Péronne, when Louis XI. was in such danger. Before 1471 he had been charged with several important negotiations by Charles, now duke, in France, England, and Spain. But, either personally disobliged by Charles, or, as seems most likely from the Memoirs, presaging with the keen, unscrupulous intelligence of the time the downfall of the headlong prince, he quitted Burgundy and its master in 1472 and entered the service of Louis, from whom he had already accepted a pension. He was richly rewarded, married an heiress in Poitou, and at one time enjoyed the forfeited fief of Talmont, a domain of the first importance, which he afterwards had to restore to its rightful owners, the La Tremouilles. The accession of Charles VIII. was not favourable to him, and, having taken part against the Lady of Beaujeu, he was imprisoned and deprived of Talmont. But with his usual sagacity, he had in the Duke of Orleans, afterwards Louis XII., chosen the representative of the side destined to win in the long run. The Italian wars gave scope to his powers. He was sent to Venice, was present at the battle of Fornovo, and met Machiavelli at Florence. In the reign of Louis XII. he received new places and pensions, and he died in 1511 aged at least sixty-four.

Comines is not a master of style, though at times the weight of his thought and the simplicity of his expression combine to produce an effect not unhappy. He has odd peculiarities of diction, especially inversions of phrase and sudden apostrophes which enliven an otherwise rather awkward manner of writing. Thus, in describing the bad education of the young nobles of his time, he says, 'de nulles lettres ils n'ont connaissance. Un seul

sage homme on ne leur met à l'entour.' And in his account of the operations before the battle of Morat he says, 'Il (the Duke of Burgundy) séjourna à Losanne en Savoie où vous monseigneur de Vienne le servîtes d'un bon conseil en une grande maladie qu'il eut de douleur et de tristesse.' On the whole, however, no one would think of reading Comines for the merit, or even the quaintness of his style, nor can he be commended as a vivid, even if an inelegant describer. The gallant shows which excited the imaginations of his predecessors, the mediaeval chroniclers from Villehardouin to Froissart, find in him a clumsy annalist and a not too careful observer. His interest is concentrated exclusively on the turns of fortune, the successes of statecraft, and the lessons of conduct to be noticed in or extracted from the business in hand. With this purpose he is perpetually digressing. The affairs of one country remind him of something that has happened in another, and he stops to give an account of this. To a certain extent the mediaeval influence is still strong on Comines, though it shows itself in connection with evidences of the modern spirit. He is religious to a degree which might be called ostentatious if it were not pretty evidently sincere; and this religiosity is shown side by side with the exhibition of a typically unscrupulous and non-moral, if not positively immoral, statecraft. Again, his reflexions, though usually lacking neither in acuteness nor in depth, are often appended to a commonplace on the mutability of fortune, the error of anger, the necessity of adapting means to ends, and so forth. Everywhere in Comines is evident, however, the anti-feudal and therefore anti-mediaeval conception of a centralised government instead of a loose assemblage of powerful vassals. The favourite mediaeval ideal, of

which Saint Simon was perhaps the last sincere champion, finds no defence in Comines; and it seems only just to allow him, in his desertion of the Duke of Burgundy, some credit for drawing from the anarchy of the Bien Public, and from his observations of Germany, England, and Spain, the conclusion that France must be united, and that union was only possible for her under a king unhampered by largely appanaged and only nominally dependent princes. It should be said that the Mémoires of Comines are not a continuous history. The first six books deal with the reign of Louis XI. from 1465 to 1483. But the seventh is busied with Charles the Eighth's Italian wars only, the author having passed over the period of his own disgrace. Besides the Memoirs we possess a collection of *Lettres et Négotiations*.[158]

Coquillart.

There are three persons who, while of very much less importance than those just introduced to the reader, deserve a mention in passing as characteristic and at the same time meritorious writers, during the second and third quarters of the fifteenth century, the extreme verge of which the life of all three appears to have touched. These are Guillaume Coquillart, Henri Baude, and Martial d'Auvergne. All three were poets, all three have been somewhat over-praised by the scholars who in days more or less recent have drawn them from their obscurity, but all three made creditable head against what was mistaken and absurd in the literary fashions of the time. In the writings of all of them moreover there is to be found something, if not much, which is positively good, and which deserves the attention, hardly perhaps of the general reader, but of students of literature.

Coquillart[159] was a native, and for great part of his life an inhabitant, of Rheims. The extreme dates given for his birth and death are 1421 and 1510, but there is in reality, as is usual in the case of all men of letters before the sixteenth century, very little solid authority for his biography. It may be mentioned that Marot declares him to have cut short his life by gaming. A life can hardly be said to be cut short at ninety, nor is that an age at which gaming is a frequent ruling passion. All that can be said is that he was certainly, as we should now say, in the civil service of the province of Champagne during the reign of Louis XI., that like many other men of the time he united ecclesiastical with legal functions, being not only a town-councillor but a canon, and that he has left satirical works of some merit and importance. These last alone concern us much. His chief production is a poem entitled *Les Droits Nouveaux*, in octosyllabic verses, not arranged in stanzas of definite length, but, on the other hand, interlacing the rhymes, and not in couplets after the older fashion. The plan of this poem is by no means easy to describe. It is partly a social satire, partly a professional lampoon on the current methods of learning and teaching law, partly a political diatribe on the alterations introduced into provincial and national life and polity under Louis XI. Not very different in character and exactly similar in form, except that it is arranged as the age would have said *par personnages*, that is to say semi-dramatically, is the *Plaidoyer de la Simple et de la Rusée*. The *Blason des Armes et des Dames* takes up a mediaeval theme in a mediaeval style. The *procureurs* (advocates) of arms and of ladies endeavour to show each that his client—war or love—deserves the chief attention of a prince. Here, as elsewhere with Coquillart, though of

course more covertly, satire dominates. But the best of the pieces attributed to Coquillart are his monologues. There are three of these, the *Monologue Coquillart*, the *Monologue du Puys*, and the *Monologue du Gendarme Cassé*. This last is a ferocious satire on its subject, coarse in language, like most of the author's poems, but full of rude vigour. The professional soldier as distinguished from the feudal militia or the train-bands of the towns was odious to the later middle ages.

Baude.

Henri Baude[160] is a still less substantial figure. He seems to have been an *élu* (member of a provincial board) for the province of Limousin, but to have lived mostly at Paris. He was born at Moulins towards the beginning of the second quarter of the century, and formed part of the poetical circle of Charles d'Orléans in his old age. He had troubles with lawless seigneurs and with the police of Paris; he finally succeeded in obtaining the protection of the Duke of Bourbon, and he did not die till the end of the century. Only a selection from his poems has yet been published. The chief thing remarkable about them (they are mostly occasional and of no great length) is the plainness, the directness, and, in not a few cases, the elegance of the diction, which differs remarkably from the cumbrous phrases and obscure allusive conceits of the time. Many of them are personal appeals for protection and assistance, others are satirical. Baude had a peculiar mastery of the rondeau form. His rondeau to the king, expressing a sentiment often uttered by lackpenny bards in the days of patrons, is a good example of his style, though it is hardly as simple and devoid of obscurity

as usual.

Martial d'Auvergne.

Martial d'Auvergne[161], or Martial de Paris (for by an odd chance both of these local surnames are given him, probably from the fact that, like Baude, he was a native of the centre of France and spent his life in the capital), like Coquillart and Baude, was something of a lawyer by profession, and has left work in prose as well as in verse. He certainly died in 1508, and, as he is spoken of as *senio confectus*, he cannot have been born much later than 1420, especially as his poem, the *Vigilles de Charles VII.*, was written on the death of that prince in 1461. This poem is of considerable extent, and is divided into nine 'Psalms' and nine 'Lessons.' The staple metre is the quatrain, but detached pieces in other measures occur. A complete history of the subject is given, and in some of the digressions there are charming passages, notably one (given by M. de Montaiglon) on the country life. Another very beautiful poem, commonly attributed to Martial, is entitled *L'Amant rendu Cordelier au service de l'Amour*, a piece of amorous allegory at once characteristic of the later middle ages, and free from the faults usually found in such work. A prose work of a somewhat similar kind, entitled *Arrêts d'Amour*, is known to be Martial's. In no writer is there to be found more of the better part of Marot, as in the light skipping verses:—

Mieux vault la liesse,
L'accueil et l'addresse,
L'amour et simplesse,
De bergers pasteurs,

Qu'avoir à largesse
Or, argent, richesse,
Ne la gentillesse
De ces grants seigneurs.

Car ils ont douleurs
Et des maulx greigneurs,
Mais pour nos labeurs
Nous avons sans cesse
Les beaulx prés et fleurs,
Fruitages, odeurs
Et joye à nos cœurs
Sans mal qui nous blesse.

There is something of the old *pastourelles* in this, and of a note of simplicity which French poetry had long lost.

The Rhétoriqueurs.

Such verse as this of Martial d'Auvergne was, indeed, the exception at the time. The staple poetry of the age was that of the *grands rhétoriqueurs*, as it has become usual to call them, apparently from a phrase of Coquillart's. Georges Chastellain[162] was the great master of this school. But to him personally some injustice has been done. His pupils and successors, however, for the most part deserve the ill repute in which they are held. This school of poetry had three principal characteristics. It affected the most artificial forms of the artificial poetry which the fourteenth century had seen established, the most complicated modulations of rhyme, such as the repetition, twice or even thrice at the end of a line, of the same sound in a different sense, and all the other puerilities of this particular Ars Poetica.

Secondly, it pursued to the very utmost the tradition of allegorising, of which the *Roman de la Rose* had established the popularity. Thirdly, it followed the example set by Chartier and his contemporaries of loading the language as much as possible with Latinisms, and in a less degree, because Greek was then but indirectly known, Graecisms. These three things taken together produced some of the most intolerable poetry ever written. The school had, indeed, much vitality in it, and overlapped the beginnings of the Renaissance in such a manner that it will be necessary to take note of it again in the next chapter. Some, however, of its greatest lights belonged to the present period. Such were Robertet, a heavy versifier and the author of letters not easily to be excelled in pedantic coxcombry, who enjoyed much patronage, royal and other; Molinet, a direct disciple of Chastellain, and, like him, of the Burgundian party; and Meschinot (died 1509), a Breton, who has left us an allegorical work on the 'Spectacles of Princes,' and poems which can be read in thirty different ways, any word being as good to begin with as any other. Such also was the father of a better poet than himself, Octavien de Saint Gelais (1466-1502), who died young and worn out by debauchery. Jean Marot, the father of Clément, was a not inconsiderable master of the ballade, and has left poems which do not show to great disadvantage by the side of those of his accomplished son. But the leader of the whole was Guillaume Crétin (birth and death dates uncertain), whom his contemporaries extolled in the most extravagant fashion, and whom a single satirical stroke of Rabelais has made a laughing-stock for some three hundred and fifty years. The rondeau ascribed to Raminagrobis, the 'vieux poète français' of *Pantagruel*[163], is Crétin's,

and the name and character have stuck. Crétin was not worse than his fellows; but when even such a man as Marot could call him a *poète souverain*, Rabelais no doubt felt it time to protest in his own way. Marot himself, it is to be observed, confines himself chiefly to citing Crétin's *vers équivoqués*, which of their kind, and if we could do otherwise than pronounce that kind hopelessly bad, are without doubt ingenious. His poems are chiefly occasional verse, letters, *débats*, etc., besides ballades and rondeaux of all kinds.

Chansons du XV^{ème} Siècle.

One charming book which has been preserved to us gives a pleasant contrast to the formal poetry of the time. The *Chansons du XV^{ème} Siècle*, which M. Gaston Paris has published for the Old French Text Society[164], exhibit informal and popular poetry in its most agreeable aspect. They are one hundred and forty-three in number, some of them no doubt much older than the fifteenth century, but certainly none of them younger. There are *pastourelles*, war-songs, love-songs in great number, a few patriotic ditties, and a few which may be called pure folksongs, with the story half lost and only a musical tangle of words remaining. Nothing can be more natural and simple than most of these pieces.

Preachers.

Few of the miscellaneous branches of literature at this time deserve notice. But there was a group of preachers who have received attention, which is said by students of the whole subject of the mediaeval

pulpit in France to be disproportionate, but which they owe perhaps not least to the citations of them in a celebrated and amusing book of the next age, the *Apologie pour Hérodote* of Henri Estienne. These are Menot (1440-1518) and Maillard the Franciscans, and Raulin (1443-1514), a doctor of the Sorbonne. These preachers, living at a time which was not one of popular sovereignty, did not meddle with politics as preachers had done in France before and were to do again. But they carried into the pulpit the habit of satirical denunciation in social as well as in purely religious matters, and gave free vent to their zeal. No illustrations of the singular licence which the middle ages permitted on such occasions are more curious than these sermons. Not merely did the preachers attack their audience for their faults in the most outspoken manner, but they interspersed their discourses (as indeed was the invariable custom throughout the whole middle ages) with stories of all kinds. In Raulin, the gravest of the three, occurs the famous history of the church bells, which reappears in Rabelais, *à propos* of the marriage of Panurge.

FOOTNOTES:

[153]

> Villon sut le premier, dans ces siècles grossiers,
> Débrouiller l'art confus de nos vieux romanciers.
>
> *Art Poét.* Ch. 1.

[154] Ed. P. L. Jacob. Paris, 1854. Villon's life has been the subject of numerous elaborate investigations, the latest and best of which is that of A. Longnon. Paris, 1877. Dr. Bijvanck,

a Dutch scholar, has dealt since with the MSS.

[155] One of these anecdotes makes him patronised by Edward the *Fifth* of England. But the very terms of it are unsuitable to that king.

[156] The reader may be reminded that the *Testament* was a recognised mediaeval style. It was satirical and allegorical, the legacies which it gave being mostly indicative of the legatee's weaknesses or personal peculiarities.

[157] Ed. Chantelauze. Paris, 1881. Also usefully in Michaud et Poujoulat.

[158] Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove. 2 vols. Brussels, 1867-8.

[159] Ed. Héricault. 2 vols. Paris, 1857.

[160] Edited in part by J. Quicherat. Paris, 1856.

[161] Martial d'Auvergne had the exceptional good luck to be reprinted in the 18th century (*Vigilles* 1724, *Arrêts* 1731), but he has not recently found an editor, though an edition of the *Amant rendu Cordelier* has been for some time due from the Société des Anciens Textes. The notice by M. de Montaiglon (the promised editor of the edition just mentioned) in Crepet's *Poètes Français*, i. 427, has been chiefly used here for facts.

[162] Ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, as previously cited. For the remainder of the poets reviewed in this paragraph, few of whom have found modern editors, see Crepet, *Poètes Français*, vol. i.

[163] iii. 21.

[164] Paris, 1876.

CHAPTER II.

MAROT AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

Hybrid School of Poetry.

The beginnings of the Renaissance in France manifest, as we should expect, a mixture of the characteristics of the later middle ages and of the new learning. In those times the influence of reforms of any kind filtered slowly through the dense crust of custom which covered the national life of each people, and there is nothing surprising in the fact that while Italy felt the full influence of the influx of classical culture in the fifteenth century, that influence should be only partially manifest in France during the first quarter of the sixteenth, while it was not until the century was more than half over that it showed itself in England. The complete manifestation of the combined tendencies of mediaeval and neo-pagan thought was only displayed in Shakespeare, but by that time, as is the wont of all such things, it had already manifested itself partially, though in each part more fully and characteristically, elsewhere. It is in the literature of France that we find the most complete exposition of these partial developments. Marot, Ronsard, Rabelais, Calvin, Garnier, Montaigne, will not altogether make up a Shakespeare, yet of the various ingredients which go to make up the greatest of literary productions each of them had shown, before Shakespeare began to write, some complete and remarkable embodiment. It is this fact which gives the French literature of the sixteenth century its especial interest. Italy had

almost ceased to be animated by the genius of the middle ages before her literature became in any way perfect in form, and the survival of the classical spirit was so strong there that mediaeval influence was never very potent in the moulding of the national letters. England had lost the mediaeval differentia, owing to religious and political causes, before the Renaissance made its way to her shores. But in France the two currents met, though the earlier had lost most of its force, and, according to the time-honoured parallel, flowed on long together before they coalesced. In the following chapters we shall trace the history of this process, and here we shall trace the first stage of it in reference to French poetry. In the period of which Marot is the representative name, the earlier force was still dominant in externals; in that of which Ronsard is the exponent, the Greek and Latin element shows itself as, for the moment, all-powerful.

Jean le Maire.

Jehan du Pontalais.

Between the *rhétoriqueurs* proper, the Chastellains and the Crétins and the Molinets on the one hand, and Marot and his contemporaries and disciples on the other, a school of poets, considerable at least in numbers, intervened. The chief of these was Jean le Maire des Belges[165]. He was the nephew of Molinet, and his birth at Belges or Bavia in Hainault, as well as his literary ancestry and predilections, inclined him to the Burgundian, or, as it was now, the Austrian side. But the strong national feeling

which was now beginning to distinguish French-speaking men threw him on the side of the King of Paris, and he was chiefly occupied in his serious literary work on tasks which were wholly French. His *Illustrations des Gaules* is his principal prose work, and in this he displays a remarkable faculty of writing prose at once picturesque and correct. The titles of his other works (*Temple d'Honneur et de Vertu*, etc.) still recall the fifteenth century, and the Latinising tradition of Chartier appears strong in him. But at the same time he Latinises with a due regard to the genius of the language, and his work, pedantic and conceited as it frequently is, stands in singular contrast to the work of some of his models. Something not dissimilar, though in this case the *rhétoriqueur* influence is less apparent, may be said of Pierre Gringore, whose true title to a place in a history of French literature is, however, derived from his dramatic work, and who will accordingly be mentioned later. Nor had the tradition of Villon, overlaid though it was by the abundance and popularity of formal and allegorising poetry, died out in France. At least two remarkable figures, Jehan du Pontalais and Roger de Collérye, represent it in the first quarter of the century. The former indeed[166] owes his place here rather to a theory than to certain information; for if M. d'Héricault's notion that Jehan du Pontalais is the author of a work entitled *Contreditz du Songecreux* be without foundation, Jehan falls back into the number of half mythical Bohemians, bilkers of tavern bills and successful outwitters of the officers of justice, who possess a shadowy personality in the literary history of France. *Les Contreditz du Songecreux* ranks among the most remarkable examples of the liberty which was accorded to the press under the reign of Louis XII., a

king who inherited some affection for literature from his father, Charles d'Orléans, and a keen perception of the importance of literary co-operation in political work from his ancestor, Philippe le Bel, and his cousin Louis XI. In precision and strikingness of expression Jehan recalls Villon; in the boldness of his satire on the great and the bitterness of his attacks on the character of women he recalls Antoine de la Salle and Coquillart. A trait illustrating the former power may be found in the line descriptive of the hen-pecked man's condition—

Tous ses cinq sens lui fault retraire.

while his attacks on the nobility are almost up to the level of Burns—

Noblesse enrichie Richesse ennoblie
Tiennent leurs estatz,
Qui n'a noble vie Je vous certifie Noble
n'est pas.

Roger de Collérye.

Minor Predecessors of Marot.

Roger de Collérye[167] was a Burgundian, living at the famous and vinous town of Auxerre, and he has celebrated his loves, his distress, his amiable tendency to conviviality, in many rondeaux and other poems, sometimes attaining a very high level of excellence. 'Je suis Bon-temps, vous le voyez' is the second line of one of his irregular ballades, and the nickname expresses his general attitude well enough.

Mediaeval legacies of allegory, however, supply him with more unpleasant personages, Faute d'Argent and Plate-Bourse, for his song, and his mistress, Gilleberte de Beaurepaire, appears to have been anything but continuously kind. Collérye has less perhaps of the *rhétoriqueur* flavour than any poet of this time before Marot, and his verse is very frequently remarkable for directness and grace of diction. But like most verse of the kind it frequently drops into a conventionality less wearisome but not much less definite than that of the mere allegorisers. Jehan Bouchet[168], a lawyer of Poitiers (not to be confounded with Guillaume Bouchet, author of the *Sérées*), imitated the *rhétoriqueurs* for the most part in form, and surpassed them in length, excelling indeed in this respect even the long-winded and long-lived poets of the close of the fourteenth century. Bouchet is said to have composed a hundred thousand verses, and even M. d'Héricault avers that he read two-thirds of the number without discovering more than six quotable lines. Such works of Bouchet as we have examined fully confirm the statement. Still, he was an authority in his way, and had something of a reputation. His fanciful *nom de plume* 'Le Traverseur des Voies Périlleuses' is the most picturesque thing he produced, and is not uncharacteristic of the later middle age tradition. Rabelais himself, who was a fair critic of poetry when his friends were not concerned, but who was no poet, and was even strikingly deficient in some of the characteristics of the poet, admired and emulated Bouchet in heavy verse; and a numerously attended school, hardly any of the pupils being worth individual mention, gathered round the lawyer. Charles de Bordigné is only remarkable for having, in his *Légende de Pierre Faifeu*, united the *rhétoriqueur* style with a kind of

Villonesque or rather pseudo-Villonesque subject. The title of the chief poems of Symphorien Champier, *Le Nef des Dames Amoureuses*, sufficiently indicates his style. But Champier, though by no means a good poet, was a useful and studious man of letters, and did much to form the literary *cénacle* which gathered at Lyons in the second quarter of the century, and which, both in original composition, in translations of the classics, and in scholarly publication of work both ancient and modern, rendered invaluable service to literature. Gratien du Pont[169] continued the now very stale mediaeval calumnies on women in his *Controverses des Sexes Masculin et Féminin*. Eloy d'Amerval, a Picard priest, also fell into mediaeval lines in his *Livre de la Déablerie*, in which the personages of Lucifer and Satan are made the mouthpieces of much social satire. Jean Parmentier, a sailor and a poet, combined his two professions in *Les Merveilles de Dieu*, a poem including some powerful verse. A vigorous ballade, with the refrain *Car France est Cymetièreaux Anglois*, has preserved the name of Pierre Vachot. But the remaining poets of this time could only find a place in a very extended literary history. Most of them, in the words of one of their number, took continual lessons *ès œuvres Crétiniques et Bouchetiques*, and some of them succeeded at last in imitating the dulness of Bouchet and the preposterous mannerisms of Crétin. Perhaps no equal period in all early French history produced more and at the same time worse verse than the reign of Louis XII. Fortunately, however, a true poet, if one of some limitations, took up the tradition, and showed what it could do. Marot has sometimes been regarded as the father of modern French poetry, which, unless modern French poetry is limited to La Fontaine and

the poets of the eighteenth century, is absolutely false. He is sometimes regarded as the last of mediaeval poets, which, though truer, is false likewise. What he really was can be shown without much difficulty.

Clément Marot.

Clément Marot[170] was a man of more mixed race than was usual at this period, when the provincial distinctions were still as a rule maintained with some sharpness. His father, Jean Marot, a poet of merit, was a Norman, but he emigrated to Quercy, and Marot's mother was a native of Cahors, a town which, from its Papal connections, as well as its situation on the borders of Gascony, was specially southern. Clément was born probably at the beginning of 1497, and his father educated him with some pains in things poetical. This, as times went, necessitated an admiration of Crétin and such like persons, and the practice of rondeaux, and of other poetry strict in form and allegorical in matter. As it happened, the discipline was a very sound one for Marot, whose natural bent was far too vigorous and too lithe to be stiffened or stunted by it, while it unquestionably supplied wholesome limitations which preserved him from mere slovenly facility. It is evident, too, that he had a sincere and genuine love of things mediaeval, as his devotion to the *Roman de la Rose* and to Villon's poems, both of which he edited, sufficiently shows. He 'came into France,' an expression of his own, which shows the fragmentary condition of the kingdom even at this late period, when he was about ten years old. His father held an appointment as 'Escripvain' to Anne of

Brittany, and accompanied her husband to Genoa in 1507. The University of Paris, and a short sojourn among the students of law, completed Clément's education, and he then became a page to a nobleman, thus obtaining a position at court or, at least, the chance of one. It is not known when his earliest attempt at following the Crétinic lessons was composed; but in 1514, being then but a stripling, he presented his *Jugement de Minos* to François de Valois, soon to be king. A translation of the first Eclogue of Virgil had even preceded this. Both poems are well written and versified, but decidedly in the *rhétoriqueur* style. In 1519, having already received or assumed the title of 'Facteur' (poet) to Queen Claude, he became one of the special adherents of Marguerite d'Angoulême, the famous sister of Francis, from whom, a few years later, we find him in receipt of a pension. He also occupied some post in the household of her husband, the King of Navarre. In 1524 he went to Italy with Francis, was wounded and taken prisoner at Pavia, but returned to France the next year. Marguerite's immediate followers were distinguished, some by their adherence to the principles of the Reformation, others by free thought of a still more unorthodox description, and Marot soon after his return was accused of heresy and lodged in the Châtelet. He was, however, soon transferred to a place of mitigated restraint, and finally set at liberty. About this time his father died. In 1528 he obtained a post and a pension in the King's own household. He was again in difficulties, but again got out of them, and in 1530 he married. But the next year he was once more in danger on the old charge of heresy, and was again rescued from the *chats fourrés* by Marguerite. He had already edited the *Roman de la Rose*, but no

regular edition of his own work had appeared. In 1533 came out not merely his edition of Villon, but a collection of his own youthful work under the pretty title *Adolescence Clémentine*. In 1535 the Parliament of Paris for a fourth time molested Marot. Marguerite's influence was now insufficient to protect him, and the poet fled first to Béarn and then to Ferrara. Here, under the protection of Renée de France, he lived and wrote for some time, but the persecution again grew hot. He retired to Venice, but in 1539 obtained permission to return to France. Francis gave him a house in the Faubourg Saint Germain, and here apparently he wrote his famous Psalms, which had an immense popularity; these the Sorbonne condemned, and Marot once more fled, this time to Geneva. He found this place an uncomfortable sojourn, and crossed the Alps into Piedmont, where, not long afterwards, he died in 1544.

Marot's work is sufficiently diverse in form, but the classification of it adopted in the convenient edition of Jannet is perhaps the best, though it neglects chronology. There are some dozen pieces of more or less considerable length, among which may specially be mentioned *Le Temple de Cupido*, an early work of *rhétoriqueur* character for the most part, in dizains of ten and eight syllables alternately, a Dialogue of two Lovers, an Eclogue to the King; *L'Enfer*, a vigorous and picturesque description of his imprisonment in the Châtelet, and some poems bearing a strong Huguenot impression. Then come sixty-five epistles written in couplets for the most part decasyllabic. These include the celebrated *Coq-à-l'Âne*, a sort of nonsense-verse, with a satirical tendency, which derives from the mediaeval *fatrasie*, and was very popular and much imitated. Another mediaeval

restoration of Marot's, also very popular and also much imitated, was the *blason*, a description, in octosyllables. Twenty-six elegies likewise adopt the couplet, and show, as do the epistles, remarkable power over that form. Fifteen ballades, twenty-two songs in various metres, eighty-two rondeaux, and forty-two songs for music, contain much of Marot's most beautiful work. His easy graceful style escaped the chief danger of these artificial forms, the danger of stiffness and monotony; while he was able to get out of them as much pathos and melody as any other French poet, except Charles d'Orléans and Villon. Numerous *étrennes* recall the *Xenia* of Martial, and funeral poems of various lengths and styles follow. Then we have nearly three hundred epigrams, many of them excellent in point and elegance, a certain number of translations, the Psalms, fifty in number, certain prayers, and two versified renderings of Erasmus' *Colloquies*.

It will be seen from this enumeration that the majority of Marot's work is what is now called occasional. No single work of his of a greater length than a few hundred lines exists; and, after his first attempts in the allegorical kind, almost all his works were either addressed to particular persons, or based upon some event in his life. Marot was immensely popular in his lifetime; and though after his death a formidable rival arose in Ronsard, the elder poet's fame was sustained by eager disciples. With the discredit of the Pléiade, in consequence of Malherbe's criticisms, Marot's popularity returned in full measure, and for two centuries he was the one French poet before the classical period who was actually read and admired with genuine admiration by others besides professed students of antiquity. Since the great revival of the taste for older

literature, which preceded and accompanied the Romantic movement, Marot has scarcely held this pride of place. The Pléiade on the one hand, the purely mediaeval writers on the other, have pushed him from his stool. But sane criticism, which declines to depreciate one thing because it appreciates another, will always have hearty admiration for his urbanity, his genuine wit, his graceful turn of words; and his flashes of pathos and poetry.

It is, as has been said, one of the commonplaces of the subject to speak of Marot as the father of modern French poetry; the phrase is, like all such phrases, inaccurate, but, like most such phrases, it contains a certain amount of truth. To the characteristics of the lighter French poetry, from La Fontaine to Béranger, which has always been more popular both at home and abroad than the more ambitious and serious efforts of French poets, Marot does in some sort stand in a parental relation. He retained the sprightliness and sly fun of the Fabliau-writers, while he softened their crudity of expression, he exchanged clumsiness and horse-play for the play of wit, and he emphasised fully in the language the two characteristics which have never failed to distinguish it since, elegance and urbanity. His style is somewhat pedestrian, though on occasion he can write with exquisite tenderness, and with the most delicate suggestiveness of expression. But as a rule he does not go deep; ease and grace, not passion or lofty flights, are his strong points. Representing, as he did, the reaction from the stiff forms and clumsily classical language of the *rhétoriqueurs*, it was not likely that he should exhibit the tendency of his own age to classical culture and imitation very strongly. He and his school were thus regarded by their immediate successors of the Pléiade as rustic and

uncouth singers, for the most part very unjustly. But still Marot's work was of less general and far-reaching importance than that of Ronsard. He brought out the best aspect of the older French literature, and cleared away some disfiguring encumbrances from it, but he imported nothing new. It would hardly be unjust to say that, given the difference of a century in point of ordinary progress, Charles d'Orléans is Marot's equal in elegance and grace, and his superior in sentiment, while Marot is not comparable to Villon in passion or in humour. His limitation, and at the same time his great merit, was that he was a typical Frenchman. A famous epigram, applied to another person two centuries later, might be applied with very little difficulty or alteration to Marot. He had more than anybody else of his time the literary characteristics which the ordinary literary Frenchman has. We constantly meet in the history of literature this contrast between the men who are simply shining examples of the ordinary type, and men who cross and blend that type with new characters and excellences. Unquestionably the latter are the greater, but the former cannot on any equitable scheme miss their reward. It must be added that the positive merit of much of Marot's work is great, though, as a rule, his longer pieces are very inferior to his shorter. Many of the epigrams are admirable; the Psalms, which have been unjustly depreciated of late years by French critics, have a sober and solemn music, which is almost peculiar to the French devotional poetry of that age; the satirical ballade of *Frère Lubin* is among the very best things of its kind; while as much may be said of the rondeaux 'Dedans Paris' in the lighter style, and 'En la Baisant' in the graver. Perhaps the famous line—

Un doux nenny avec un doux sourire,

supposed to have been addressed to the Queen of Navarre, expresses Marot's poetical powers as well as anything else, showing as it does grace of language, tender and elegant sentiment, and suppleness, ease, and fluency of style.

The School of Marot.

Marot formed a very considerable school, some of whom directly imitated his mannerisms, and composed *blasons*[171] and *Coq-à-l'Âne* in emulation of their master and of each other, while others contented themselves with displaying the same general characteristics, and setting the same poetical ideals before them. Among the idlest, but busiest literary quarrels of the century, a century fertile in such things, was that between Marot and a certain insignificant person named François Sagon, a belated *rhétoriqueur*, who found some other rhymers of the same kind to support him. One of Marot's best things, an answer of which his servant, Fripelipes, is supposed to be the spokesman, came of the quarrel; but of the other contributions, not merely of the principals, but of their followers, the *Marotiques* and *Sagontiques*, nothing survives in general memory, or deserves to survive. Of Marot's disciples, one, Mellin de Saint Gelais, deserves separate mention, the others may be despatched in passing. Victor Brodeau, who, like his master, held places in the courts both of Marguerite and her brother, wrote not merely a devotional work, *Les Louanges de Jésus Christ notre Seigneur*, which fairly illustrates the devotional side of the Navarrese literary coterie, but also epigrams and rondeaux of no small merit. Étienne Dolet, better

known both as a scholar and translator, and as the publisher of Marot and (surreptitiously) of Rabelais, composed towards the end of his life poems in French, the principal of which was taken in title and idea from Marot's *Enfer*, and which, though very unequal, have passages of some poetical power. Marguerite herself has left a considerable collection of poems of the most diverse kind and merit, the title of which, *Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses*[172], is perhaps not the worst thing about them. Farces, mysteries, religious poems, such as *Le Triomphe de l'Agneau*, and *Le Miroir de l'Âme Pécheresse*, with purely secular pieces on divers subjects, make up these curious volumes. Not a few of the poems display the same nobility of tone and stately sonorousness of verse, which has been and will be noticed as a characteristic of the serious poetry of the age, and which reached its climax in Du Bartas, D'Aubigné, and the choruses of Garnier and Montchrestien. Bonaventure des Périers, an admirable prose writer, was a poet, though not a very strong one. François Habert, 'Le Banni de Liesse,' must not be confounded with Philippe Habert, author of a remarkable *Temple de la Mort* in the next century. Gilles Corrozet, author of fables in verse, who, like many other literary men of the time, was a printer and publisher as well, Jacques Gohorry, a pleasant song writer, Gilles d'Aubigny, Jacques Pelletier, Étienne Forcadel, deserve at least to be named. Of more importance were Hugues Salel, Charles Fontaine, Antoine Héroet, Maurice Scève. All these were members of the Lyonnese literary coterie, and in connection with this Louise Labé also comes in. Salel, famous as the first French translator of the Iliad, or rather of Books I-XII thereof, distinguished himself as a writer of *blasons* in imitation of Marot,

as well as by composing many small poems of the occasional kind. Charles Fontaine exhibited the fancy of the time for conceits in the entitling of books by denominating his poems *Ruisseaux de la Fontaine*, and was one of the chief champions on Marot's side in the quarrel with Sagon, while he afterwards defended the *style Marotique* against Du Bellay's announcement of the programme of the Pléiade. But perhaps he would hardly deserve much remembrance, save for a charming little poem to his new-born son, which M. Asselineau has made accessible to everybody in Crepet's *Poètes Français*[173]. He also figures in a literary tournament very characteristic of the age. La Borderie, another disciple of Marot, had written a poem entitled *L'Amye de Cour*, which defended libertinism, or at least worldly-mindedness in love, in reply to the *Parfaite Amye* of Antoine Héroet, which exhibits very well a certain aspect of the half-amorous, half-mystical sentiment of the day. Fontaine rejoined in a *Contr'Amye de Cour*. Maurice Scève is also a typical personage. He was, it may be said, the head of the Lyonnese school, and was esteemed all over France. He was excepted by the irreverent champions of the Pléiade from the general ridicule which they poured on their predecessors, and was surrounded by a special body of feminine devotees and followers, including his kinswomen Claudine and Sibylle Scève, Jeanne Gaillarde, and above all Louise Labé. Scève's poetical work is strongly tinged with classical affectation and Platonic mysticism; and his chief poem, *De l'Objet de la plus haute Vertu*, consists of some four hundred and fifty dizains written in what in England and later has been, not very happily, called a metaphysical style. Last of all comes the just-mentioned Louise Labé, 'La belle Cordière,' one of the

chief ornaments of Lyons, and the most important French poetess of the sixteenth century. Louise was younger, and wrote later than most of the authors just mentioned, and in some respects she belongs to the school of Ronsard, like her supposed lover, Olivier de Magny. But the Lyons school was essentially *Marotique*, and much of the style of the elder master is observable in the writings of Louise[174]. She has left a prose *Dialogue d'Amour et de Folie*, three elegies, and a certain number of sonnets. Her poems are perhaps the most genuinely passionate of the time and country, and many of the sonnets are extremely beautiful. The language is on the whole simple and elegant, without the over-classicism of the Pléiade, or the obscurity of her master Scève. Strangely enough the poems of this young Lyonnese lady have in many places a singular approach to the ring of Shakespeare's sonnets and minor works, and that not merely by virtue of the general resemblance common to all the love poetry of the age, but in some very definite traits. Her surname of 'La belle Cordière' came from her marriage with a rich merchant, Ennemond Perrin by name, who was by trade a ropemaker. Her poems have had their full share of the advantages of reprints, which have of late years fallen to the lot of sixteenth-century authors in France.

Mellin de St. Gelais.

Mellin de Saint Gelais[175], the last to be mentioned but the most important of the school of Marot, has been very variously judged. The mere fact that he was probably the introducer of the sonnet into France (the counter claim of Pontus de Tyard seems

to be unfounded) would suffice to give him a considerable position in the history of letters. But Mellin's claims by no means rest upon this achievement. He was a man of higher position than most of the other poets of the time, being the reputed son of Octavien de Saint Gelais, and himself enjoying a good deal of royal favour. In his old age, as the representative of the school of Marot, he had to bear the brunt of the Pléiade onslaught, and knew how to defend himself, so that a truce was made. He was born in 1487, and died in 1558. His name is also spelt Merlin, and even Melusin, the Saint Gelais boasting descent from the Lusignans, and thus from the famous fairy heroine Mélusine. In his youth he spent a good deal of time in Italy, at the Universities of Bologna and Padua. On returning to France, he was at once received into favour at court, and having taken orders, obtained various benefices and appointments which assured his fortune. It is remarkable that though he violently opposed Ronsard's rising favour at court, both the Prince of Poets and Du Bellay completely forgave him, and pay him very considerable compliments, the latter praising his 'vers emmiellés,' the former speaking, even after his death, of his proficiency in the combined arts of music and poetry. Saint Gelais was a good musician, and an affecting story is told of his swan-song, for which, as for other anecdotes, there is no space here. His work, though not inconsiderable in volume, is, even more than that of Marot and other poets of the time and school, composed for the most part of very short pieces, epigrams, rondeaux, dizains, huitains, etc. These pieces display more merit than most recent critics have been disposed to allow to them. The style is fluent and graceful, free from puns and other faults of taste common at the

time. The epigrams are frequently pointed, and well expressed, and the complimentary verse is often skilful and well turned. Mellin de Saint Gelais is certainly not a poet of the highest order, but as a court singer and a skilful master of language he deserves a place among his earlier contemporaries only second to that of Marot.

Miscellaneous Verse. Anciennes Poésies Françaises.

Something of the same sort may be said of all the writers in verse of the first half of the century. Their importance is chiefly relative. Few of their works are conceived or executed on a scale sufficient to entitle them to the rank of great poets, and, saving always Marot, the excellence even of the trifling compositions to which they confined themselves is very unequal and intermittent. But all are evidences of a general diffusion of the literary spirit among the people of France, and most of them in their way, and according to their powers, helped in perfecting the character of French as a literary instrument. The advance which the language experienced in this respect is perhaps nowhere better shown than in the miscellaneous and popular poetry of the time, a vast collection of which has been made accessible by the reprinting of rare or unique printed originals in the thirteen volumes of MM. de Montaiglon and de Rothschild's *Anciennes Poésies Françaises*, published in the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne*[176]. This flying literature, as it is well called in French, lacks in most cases the freshness and spontaneity of mediaeval folk-song. But it has in exchange gained in point of

subject a wide extension of range, and in point of form a considerable advance in elegance of language, absence of commonplace, and perfection of literary form and style. The stiffness which characterises much mediaeval and almost all fifteenth-century work has disappeared in great measure. The writers speak directly and to the point, and find no difficulty in so using their mother tongue as to express their intentions. The tools in short are more effective and more completely under the control of the worker. A certain triviality is indeed noticeable, and the tendency of the middle ages to perpetuate favourite forms and models is by no means got rid of. But much that was useless has been discarded, and of what is left a defter and more distinctly literary use is made. Had French remained as Marot left it, it would indeed have been unequal to the expression of the noblest thoughts, the gravest subjects, to the treatment and exposition of intricate and complicated problems of life and mind. But in his hands it attained perhaps the perfection of usefulness as an exponent of the pure *esprit gaulois*, to use a phrase which has been tediously abused by French writers, but which is expressive of a real fact in French history and French literature. It had been suppled and pointed: it remained for it to be weighted, strengthened, and enriched. This was not the appointed task of Marot and his contemporaries, but of the men who came after them. But what they themselves had to do they did, and did it well. To this day the lighter verse of France is more an echo of Clément Marot than of any other man who lived before the seventeenth century, and, with the exception of his greater follower, La Fontaine, of any man who came after him at any time[177].



FOOTNOTES:

[165] *De* Belges, though the less usual, is the more accurate form. We are at length promised a complete edition of him in the admirable series of the Belgian Academy, one of the best in appearance and editing, and by far the cheapest of all such series. He was born in 1475, held posts in the household of the Governors of the Netherlands, was historiographer to Louis XII., and died either in 1524 or in 1548.

[166] See *Poètes Français*, i. 532. It is perhaps well to say that M. C. d'Héricault, though a very agreeable as well as a very learned writer, is particularly open to the charge that his geese are swans.

[167] Ed. C. d'Héricault. Paris, 1855.

[168] See *Poètes Français*, vol. i. *ad fin.*, for the poets mentioned in this paragraph and others of their kind.

[169] He was in his old age conspicuous among the enemies of Étienne Dolet. See *Étienne Dolet*, by R. C. Christie. London, 1880.

[170] Ed Jannet et C. d'Héricault. 4 vols. Paris, 2nd ed. 1873. M. d'Héricault has prefixed a much larger study of Marot than is to be found here to his edition of the 'beauties' of the poet, published by Messrs. Garnier. The late M. Guiffrey published two volumes of a costly and splendid edition, which his death interrupted.

[171] The *blason* (description) was a child of the mediaeval *dit*. Marot's examples, *Le beau Tétin* and *Le laid Tétin*, were copied *ad infinitum*. The first is panegyric, the second abuse.

[172] Ed. Frank. 4 vols. Paris, 1873-4.

[173] i. 651.

[174] Ed. Tross. Paris, 1871.

[175] Ed. Blanchemain, 3 vols. Paris, 1873.

[176] This great collection, which awaits its completion of glossary, etc., was published between 1855 and 1878, and is invaluable to any one desiring to appreciate the general characteristics of the poetical literature of the time.

[177] Much help has been received in the writing of this chapter, and indeed of this book, from the excellent work of MM. Hatzfeld and Darmesteter, *Le Seizième Siècle en France* (Paris, 1878), one of the best histories extant in a small compass of a brief but important period of literature. We may hope for a still more elaborate study of the same subject in English from Mr. Arthur Tilley, of King's College, Cambridge. An introductory volume to this study appeared in 1885.

CHAPTER III.

RABELAIS AND HIS FOLLOWERS.

Fiction at the beginning of the

Sixteenth Century.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century prose fiction in France was represented by a considerable mass of literature divided sharply into two separate classes of very different nature and value. On the one hand the prose versions of the Chansons de Gestes and the romances, Arthurian and adventurous, which had succeeded the last and most extensive verse rehandlings of these works in the fourteenth century, made up a considerable body of work, rarely possessing much literary merit, and characterised by all the faults of monotony, repetition, and absence of truthful character-drawing which distinguish late mediaeval work. On the other hand, there was a smaller body of short prose tales[178] sometimes serious in character and of not inconsiderable antiquity, more frequently comic and satirical, and corresponding in prose to the Fabliaux in verse. It has been pointed out that in the hands, real or supposed, of Antoine de la Salle this latter kind of work had attained a high standard of perfection. But it was as yet extremely limited in style, scope, and subject. Valour, courtesy, and love made up the list of subjects of the serious work, and the stock materials for satire, women, marriage, priests, etc., that of the comic. Although we have some lively presentment of the actual manners of the time in Antoine de la Salle, it is accidental only, and of its thoughts on any but the stock subjects we have nothing. There was thus room for a vast improvement, or rather for a complete revolution, in this particular class of work, and this revolution was at a comparatively early period of the new century effected by the greatest man and the greatest book of the French Renaissance.

Rabelais.

François Rabelais[179] was born at Chinon about 1495 (the alternative date of 1483 which used to be given is improbable if not impossible), and at an early age was destined to the cloister. He not only became a full monk, but also took priest's orders. Before he was thirty he acquired the reputation of a good classical scholar, and this seems to have brought him into trouble with his brethren the Cordeliers or Franciscans, who were at this time among the least cultivated of the monastic orders. With the consent of the Pope he migrated to a Benedictine convent, and became canon at Maillezais. This migration, however, did not satisfy him, and before long he quitted his new convent without permission and took to the life of a wandering scholar. The tolerance of the first period of the Renaissance however still existed in France, and he suffered no inconvenience from this breach of rule. After studying medicine and natural science under the protection of Geoffrey d'Estissac, Bishop of Maillezais, he went to Montpellier to continue these studies, and in the early years of the fourth decade of the century practised regularly at Lyons. He was attached to the suite of Cardinal du Bellay in two embassies to Rome, returned to Montpellier, took his doctor's degree, and again practised in several cities of the South. Towards 1539 Du Bellay again established him in a convent, probably as a safeguard against the persecution which was then threatening. But the conventual life as then practised was too repugnant to Rabelais to be long endured, and he once more set out on his travels, this time in Savoy and Italy, the personal protection of the king guaranteeing him from danger. He then returned to

France, taking however the precaution to soften some expressions in his books. At the death of Francis he retired first to Metz, and then to Rome, still with Du Bellay. The Cardinal de Chatillon, soon after gave him the living of Meudon, which he held with another in Maine for a year or two, resigning them both in 1551, and dying in 1553. Such at least are the most probable and best ascertained dates and events in a life which has been overlaid with a good deal of fiction, and many of the facts of which are decidedly obscure. Rabelais did not very early become an author, and his first works were of a purely erudite kind. During his stay at Lyons he seems to have done a good deal of work for the printers, as editor and reader, especially in reference to medical works, such as Galen and Hippocrates. He edited too, and perhaps in part re-wrote, a prose romance, *Les Grandes et Inestimables Chroniques du Grant et Énorme Géant Gargantua*. This work, the author of which is unknown, and no earlier copies of which exist, gave him no doubt at least the idea of his own famous book. The next year (1532) followed the first instalment of this—*Pantagruel Roi des Dipsodes Restitué en Son naturel avec ses Faicts et Proueses Espouvantables*. Three years afterwards came *Gargantua* proper, the first book of the entire work as we now have it. Eleven years however passed before the work was continued, the second book of *Pantagruel* not being published till 1546, and the third six years later, just before the author's death, in 1552. The fourth or last book did not appear as a whole until 1564, though the first sixteen chapters had been given to the world two years before. This fourth book, the fifth of the entire work, has, from the length of time which elapsed before its publication and from certain variations which exist

in the MS. and the first printed editions, been suspected of spuriousness. Such a question cannot be debated here at length. But there is no external testimony of sufficient value to discredit Rabelais' authorship, while the internal testimony in its favour is overwhelming[180]. It may be said, without hesitation, that not a single writer capable of having written it, save Rabelais himself, is known to literary history at the time. It has been supposed, with a good deal of probability, that the book was left in the rough. The considerable periods which, as has been mentioned, intervened between the publications of the other books seem to show that the author indulged a good deal in revision; and, as the third book was only published just before his death, he could have had little time for this in the case of the fourth. This would account for a certain appearance of greater boldness and directness in the satire as well as for occasional various readings. In genius both of thought and expression this book is perhaps superior to any other; and, if it were decided that Rabelais did not write it, much of what are now considered the Rabelaisian characteristics must be transferred to an entirely unknown writer who has left not the smallest vestige of himself or his genius. It is not possible to give here a detailed abstract of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*: indeed, from the studied desultoriness of the work, any such abstract must of necessity be nearly as long as the book itself[181]. It is sufficient to say that both Gargantua and his son Pantagruel are the heroes of adventures, designedly exaggerated and burlesqued from those common in the romances of chivalry. The chief events of the earlier romance are, first, the war between Grandgousier, Gargantua's father, the pattern of easy-going royalty, and Picrochole, king of Lerne, the

ideal of an arbitrary despot intent only on conquest; and, secondly, the founding of the Abbey of Thelema, a fanciful institution, in which Rabelais propounds as first principles everything that is most opposed to the forced abstinence, the real self-indulgence, the idleness and the ignorance of the debased monastic communities he knew so well and hated so much. Pantagruel is Gargantua's son, and, like him, a giant, but the extravagances derived from his gianthood are not kept up in the second part as they are in the first. A very important personage in *Pantagruel* is Panurge, a singular companion, whom Pantagruel picks up at Paris, and who is perhaps the greatest single creation of Rabelais. Some ideas may have been taken for him from the Cingar of Merlinus Coccaius, or Folengo, a Macaronic Italian poet[182], but on the whole he is original, and is hardly comparable to any one else in literature except Falstaff. The main idea of Panurge is the absence of morality in the wide Aristotelian sense with the presence of almost all other good qualities. After a time, in which Pantagruel and his companions (among whom, as in the former romance, Friar John is the embodiment of hearty and healthy animalism, as Panurge is of a somewhat diseased intellectual refinement) are engaged in wars of the old romance kind, a whim of Panurge determines the conclusion of the story. He desires to get married; and an entire book is occupied by the various devices to which he resorts in order to determine whether it is wise or not for him to do so. At last it is decided that a voyage must be made to the oracle of the Dive Bouteille. The last two books are occupied with this voyage, in which many strange countries are visited, and at last, the oracle being reached, the word *Trinq* is vouchsafed, not only, it would seem, to solve

Panurge's doubts, but also as a general answer to the riddle of the painful earth.

Besides his great work, Rabelais was the author of a few extant letters, and probably of a good many that are not extant, of a little burlesque almanack called the *Pantagrueline Prognostication*, which is full of his peculiar humour, of a short work entitled *Sciomachie*, describing a festival at Rome, and of a few poems of no great merit. In *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, however, his whole literary interest and character are concentrated. Few books have been the subject of greater controversy as to their meaning and general intention. The author, as if on purpose to baffle investigation, mixes up real persons mentioned by their real names, real persons mentioned in transparent allegory, and entirely fictitious characters, in the most inextricable way. Occasionally, as in his chapters on education, he is perfectly serious, and allows no touch of humour or satire to escape him. Elsewhere he indulges in the wildest buffoonery. Two of the most notable characteristics of Rabelais are, first, his extraordinary predilection for heaping up piles of synonymous words, and huge lists of things; secondly, his habit of indulging in the coarsest allusions and descriptions. Both of these were to some extent mere exaggerations of his mediaeval models, but both show the peculiar characteristics of their author. The book as a whole has received the most various explanations as well as the most various appreciations. It has been regarded as in the main a political and personal satire, in every incident and character of which some reference must be sought to actual personages and events of the time; as an elaborate pamphlet against the Roman Catholic Church; as a defence of mere epicurean materialism,

and even an attack on Christianity itself; as a huge piece of mischief intended to delude readers into the belief that something serious is meant, when in reality nothing of the kind is intended. Even more fantastic explanations than these have been attempted; such, for instance, as the idea that the voyage of Pantagruel is an allegorical account of the processes employed in the manufacture of wine. The true explanation, as far as there is any, of the book seems, however, to be not very difficult to make out, provided that the interpreter does not endeavour to force a meaning where there very probably is none. The form of it was pretty well prescribed by the old romances of adventure, and must be taken as given to Rabelais, not as invented by him for a special purpose; a war, a quest, these are the subjects of every story in verse and prose for five centuries, and Rabelais followed the stream. But when he had thus got his main theme settled, he gave the widest licence of comment, allusion, digression, and adaptation to his own fancy and his own intellect. Both of these were typical, and, except for a certain deficiency in the poetical element, fully typical of the time. Rabelais was a very learned man, a man of the world, a man of pleasure, a man of obvious interest in political and ecclesiastical problems. He was animated by that lively appetite for enjoyment, business, study, all the occupations of life, which characterised the Renaissance in its earlier stages, in all countries and especially in France. Nor had science of any kind yet been divided and subdivided so that each man could only aspire to handle certain portions of it. Accordingly, Rabelais is prodigal of learning in season and out of season. But independently of all this, he had an immense humour, and this pervades the whole book, turning

the preposterous adventures into satirical allegories or half allegories, irradiating the somewhat miscellaneous erudition with lambent light, and making the whole alive and fresh to this day. The extreme coarseness of language, which makes Rabelais difficult to read now-a-days, seems to have arisen from a variety of causes. The essence of his book was exaggeration, and he exaggerated in this as in other matters. His keen appetite for the ludicrous, and a kind of shamelessness which may have been partly due to individual peculiarity, but had not a little also to do with his education and studies, inclined him to make free with a department of thought where ludicrous ideas are, as it has been said, to be had for the picking up by those whom shame does not trouble at the expense of those whom it does. But besides all this, there was in Rabelais a knowledge of human nature, and a faculty of expressing that knowledge in literary form, in which he is inferior to Shakespeare alone. Caricatured as his types purposely are, they are all easily reducible to natural dimensions and properties; while occasionally, though all too rarely, the author drops his mask and speaks gravely, seriously, and then always wisely. These latter passages are, it may be added, unsurpassed in mere prose style for many long years after the author's death.

Altogether, independently of the intrinsic interest of Rabelais' work, we go to him as we can go to only some score or half score of the greatest writers of the world, for a complete reflection of the sentiment and character of his time. As with all great writers, what he shows is in great part characteristic of humanity at all times and in all places, but, as also with all great writers except Shakespeare, more of it is local

and temporary merely. This local and temporary element gives him his great historical importance. Rabelais is the literary exponent of the earlier Renaissance, with its appetite for the good things of the world as yet unblunted. Yet even in him there is a foretaste of satiety, and the Oracle of the Bottle has something, for all its joyousness, of the conclusion of the Preacher.

The popularity of Rabelais was immense, and of itself sufficed to protect him against the enmity which his hardly veiled attacks on monachism, and on other fungoid growths of the Church, could not have failed to attract. In such a case imitation was certain, and, long before the genuine series of the Pantagrueline Chronicles was completed, spurious supplements and continuations appeared, all of them without exception worthless. A more legitimate imitation coloured the work of many of the fiction writers of the remaining part of the century, though the tradition of short story writing, on the model of the Fabliaux and of the Italian tales borrowed from them, continued and was only indirectly affected by Rabelais. In this latter class one mediocre writer and two of the greatest talent—of talent amounting almost to genius—have to be noticed. In 1535, Nicholas of Troyes, a saddler by trade, produced a book entitled *Grand Parangon de Nouvelles Nouvelles*, in which he followed rather, as his title indicates, the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* than any other model. His sources seem to have been the *Decameron* and the *Gesta Romanorum* principally, though some of his tales are original. Very different books are the *Contes* of Marguerite de Navarre, usually termed the 'Heptameron,' and the *Contes et Joyeux Devis* of her servant Bonaventure des Périers. Neither of these books was published till a considerable period after

the death, not merely of Rabelais, but of their authors.

Bonaventure des Périers.

There are few persons of the time of whom less is known than of Bonaventure des Périers[183], and, by no means in consequence merely of this mystery, there are few more interesting. He must have been born somewhere about the beginning of the sixteenth century, and his friend Dolet calls him *Aeduum poetam*, which would seem to fix his birth somewhere in the neighbourhood at least of Autun. He was undoubtedly one of the literary courtiers of Marguerite d'Angoulême. Finally, it seems that in the persecution which, during the later years of Francis I.'s reign, came upon the Protestants and freethinkers, and which the influence of Marguerite was powerless to prevent, he committed suicide to escape the clutches of the law. Henri Estienne, however, attributes the act to insanity or delirium. However this may be, there is no doubt that Des Périers was a remarkable example of a humanist. He was certainly a good scholar, and he was also a decided freethinker. He has left poems of some merit, but not great perhaps, some translations and minor prose pieces, but certainly two works of the highest interest, the *Cymbalum Mundi* (1537) and the *Nouvelles Récréations et Joyeux Devis* (1558). The *Cymbalum Mundi* betrays the influence of Lucian, which was also very strong on Rabelais. It is a work in dialogue, satirising the superstitions of antiquity with a hardly dubious reference to the religious beliefs of Des Périers' own day. The *Nouvelles Récréations et Joyeux Devis* are compact of less perilous stuff, while they exhibit equal and perhaps greater literary skill. They consist of a hundred and

twenty-nine short tales, similar in general character to those of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* and other collections. Although, however, a great licence of subject is still allowed, the language is far less coarse than in the work of Antoine de la Salle, while the literary merits of the style are very much greater. Des Périers was beyond all doubt a great master of half-serious and half-joyous French prose. Nor is his matter much less remarkable than his style. Like Rabelais, but with the difference that his was a more poetical temperament than that of his greater contemporary, he has sudden accesses of seriousness, almost of sentiment. At these times the spirit of the French Renaissance, in its more cultivated and refined representatives, comes out in him very strongly. This spirit may be defined as a kind of cultivated sensuality, ardently enamoured of the beautiful in the world of sense, while fully devoted to intellectual truth, and at the same time always conscious of the nothingness of things, the instant pressure of death, the treacherousness of mortal delights. The rare sentences in which Des Périers gives vent to the expression of this mental attitude are for the most part admirably written, while as a teller of tales, either comic or romantic, he has few equals and fewer superiors.

The Heptameron.

The same spirit which has just been described found even fuller expression, with greater advantages of scale and setting, in the *Heptameron*[184] of Marguerite of Navarre. The exact authorship of this celebrated book is something of a literary puzzle. Marguerite was a prolific author, if all the works

which were published under her name be unhesitatingly ascribed[185] to her. Besides the poems printed under the pretty title of *Les Marguerites de la Marguerite*, she produced many other works, as well as the *Heptameron* which was not given to the world until after her death (1558). The House of Valois was by no means destitute of literary talent. But that which seems most likely to be the Queen's genuine work hardly corresponds with the remarkable power shown in the *Heptameron*. On the other hand, Marguerite for years maintained a literary court, in which all the most celebrated men of the time, notably Marot and Bonaventure des Périers, held places. If it were allowable to decide literary questions simply by considerations of probability, there could be little hesitation in assigning the entire *Heptameron* to Des Périers himself, and then its unfinished condition would be intelligible enough. The general opinion of critics, however, is that it was probably the result of the joint work of the Queen, of Des Périers, and of a good many other men, and probably some women, of letters. The idea and plan of the work are avowedly borrowed from Boccaccio, but the thing is worked out with so much originality that it becomes nothing so little as an imitation. A company of ladies and gentlemen returning from Cauterets are detained by bad weather in an out-of-the-way corner of the Pyrenees, and beguile the time by telling stories. The interludes, however, in which the tale-tellers are brought on the stage in person, are more circumstantial than those of the Decameron, and the individual characters are much more fully worked out. Indeed, the mere setting of the book, independently of its seventy-two stories (for the eighth day is begun), makes a very interesting tale,

exhibiting not merely those characteristics of the time and its society which have been noticed in connection with the *Contes et Joyeux Devis*, but, in addition, a certain religiosity in which that time and society were also by no means deficient, though it existed side by side with freethinking of a daring kind and with unbridled licentiousness. The head of the party, Dame Oisille, is the chief representative of this religious spirit, though all the party are more or less penetrated by it. The subjects of the tales do not differ much from those of Boccaccio, though they are, as a rule, occupied with a higher class of society, and of necessity display a more polished condition of manners. They are much longer than the anecdotes of the *Contes et Joyeux Devis*, and generally, though not always, deal with something like a connected story instead of with mere isolated traits or apophthegms. The best of them are animated by the same spirit of refined voluptuousness which animates so much of the writing and art of the time, and which may indeed be said to be its chief feature. But this spirit has seldom been presented in a light so attractive as that which it bears in the *Heptameron*.

Noel du Fail.

G. Bouchet.

Cholières.

The influence of Rabelais on the one hand, of the *Heptameron* on the other, is observable in almost all the work of the same kind which the second half of the sixteenth century produced. The fantastic buffoonery and the indiscriminate prodigality of

learning, which were to the outward eye the distinguishing characteristics of *Pantagruel*, found however more imitators than the poetical sentiment of the *Heptameron*. The earliest of the successors of Rabelais was Noel du Fail, a gentleman and magistrate of Britanny, who, five years before the master's death, produced two little books, *Propos Rustiques*[186] and *Baliverneries*, which depict rural life and its incidents with a good deal of vividness and colour. The imitation of Rabelais is very perceptible, and sometimes a little irritating, but the work on the whole has merit, and abounds in curious local traits. The *Propos Rustiques*, too, are interesting because they underwent a singular travesty in the next century, and appeared under a new and misleading title. Much later, near forty years afterwards in fact, Du Fail produced the *Contes d'Eutrapel*[187], which are rather critical and satirical dialogues than tales. There is a good deal of dry humour in them. The provinciality to be noticed in Du Fail was still a feature of French literature; and in this particular department it long continued to be prominent, perhaps owing to the example of Rabelais, who, wide as is his range, frequently takes pleasure in mixing up petty local matters with his other materials. Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Guillaume Bouchet (to be carefully distinguished from Jean Bouchet, the poet of the early sixteenth century) wrote a large collection of *Serées*[188] (Soirées), containing gossip on a great variety of subjects, mingled with details of Angevin manners; and Tabourot des Accords composed his *Escraignes Dijonnaises*. A singular book, or rather two singular books[189], *Les Matinées* and *Les Après-Dinées*, were produced by a person, the Seigneur de Cholières, of whom little else is known.

Cholières is a bad writer, and a commonplace if not stupid thinker; but he tells some quaint stories, and his book shows us the deep hold which the example of Rabelais had given to the practice of discussing grave subjects in a light tone.

Apologie pour Hérodote.

Moyen de Parvenir.

There remain two books of sufficient importance to be treated separately. The first of these is the *Apologie pour Hérodote*[190] (1566) of the scholar Henri Estienne. In the guise of a serious defence of Herodotus from the charges of untrustworthiness and invention frequently brought against him Estienne indulges in an elaborate indictment against his own and recent times, especially against the Roman Catholic clergy. Much of his book is taken from Rabelais, or from the *Heptameron*; much from the preachers of the fifteenth century. Its literary merit has been a good deal exaggerated, and its extreme desultoriness and absence of coherence make it tedious to read for any length of time, but it is in a way amusing enough. Much later (1610) the last—it may almost be said the first—echo of the genuine spirit of Rabelais was sounded in the *Moyen de Parvenir*[191] of Béroalde de Verville. This eccentric work is perhaps the most perfect example of a *fatrasie* in existence. In the guise of guests at a banquet the author brings in many celebrated persons of the day and of antiquity, and makes them talk from pillar to post in the strangest possible

fashion. The licence of language and anecdote which Rabelais had permitted himself is equalled and exceeded; but many of the tales are told with consummate art, and, in the midst of the ribaldry and buffoonery, remarks of no small shrewdness are constantly dropped as if by accident. There seems to have been at the time something not unlike a serious idea that the book was made up from unpublished papers of Rabelais himself. All external considerations make this in the highest degree unlikely, and the resemblances are obviously those of imitation rather than of identical authorship. But undoubtedly nothing else of the kind comes so near to the excellences of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*.

FOOTNOTES:

[178] Among these may be mentioned the charming story of *Jehan de Paris* (ed. Montaiglon, Paris, 1874), which M. de Montaiglon has clearly proved to be of the end of the fifteenth century. It is a cross between a Roman d'aventures and a nursery tale, telling how the King of France as 'John of Paris' outwitted the King of England in the suit for the hand of the Infanta of Spain.

[179] Ed. Jannet and Moland. 7 vols. (2nd ed.) Paris, 1873. Also ed. Marty-Laveaux, vols. 1-4. Paris, 1870-81.

[180] The question has been again discussed since the text was written by M. Paul Lacroix (Paris, 1881), whose facts and arguments fully bear out the view taken here. The other side is taken, though not very decidedly, in the fourth volume of M. Marty-Laveaux' edition. The two contain a tolerably complete survey of the question.

[181] The best general commentary on Rabelais is that of M. J. Fleury. 2 vols. St. Petersburg, 1876-7.

[182] For an excellent account of Folengo, see Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, vol. v. chap. 14.

[183] Ed. Lacour. 2 vols. Paris, 1866.

[184] Ed. Leroux de Lincy. 3 vols. Paris, 1855.

[185] She was born in 1492, and was thus two years older than her brother Francis I. She married first the Duke d'Alençon, then Henri d'Albert King of Navarre. Her private character has been most unjustly attacked. She died in 1549. Marguerite is spoken of by four surnames; de Valois from her family; d'Angoulême from her father's title; d'Alençon from her first husband's; and de Navarre from that of her second. In literature, to distinguish her from her great-niece, the first wife of Henri IV., Marguerite d'Angoulême is the term most commonly used.

[186] Ed. La Borderie. Paris, 1878. The bibliography of this book is very curious.

[187] Ed. Hippeau. 2 vols. Paris, 1875.

[188] Ed. Roybet. Paris. In course of publication.

[189] Ed. Tricotel. 2 vols. Paris, 1879.

[190] Ed. Ristelhuber. 2 vols. Paris, 1879.

[191] Ed. Jacob. Paris, 1868. It is possibly not Béroalde's.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLÉIADE.

Character and Effects of the Pléiade Movement.

Almost exactly at the middle of the sixteenth century a movement took place in French literature which has no parallel in literary history, except the similar movement which took place, also in France, three centuries later. The movement and its chief promoters are indifferently known in literature by the name of the *Pléiade*, a term applied by the classical affectation of the time to the group of seven men[192], Ronsard, Du Bellay, Belleau, Baïf, Daurat, Jodelle, and Pontus de Tyard, who were most active in promoting it, and who banded themselves together in a strict league or *coterie* for the attainment of their purposes. These purposes were the reduction of the French language and French literary forms to a state more comparable, as they thought, to that of the two great classical tongues. They had no intention (though such an intention has been falsely attributed to them both at the time and since) of defacing or destroying their mother-tongue. On the contrary, they were animated by the sincerest and, for the most part, the most intelligent love for it. But the intense admiration of the severe beauties of classical literature, which was the dominant literary note of the Renaissance, translated itself in their active minds into a determination to make, if it were possible, French itself more able to emulate the

triumphs of Greek and of Latin. This desire, even if it had borne no fruit, would have honourably distinguished the French Renaissance from the Italian and German forms of the movement. In Italy the humanists, for the most part, contented themselves with practice in the Latin tongue, and in Germany they did so almost wholly. But no sooner had the literature of antiquity taken root in France than it was made to bear *novas frondes et non sua poma* of vernacular literature. There were some absurdities committed by the Pléiade no doubt, as there always are in enthusiastic crusades of any kind: but it must never be forgotten that they had a solid basis of philological truth to go upon. French, after all, despite a strong Teutonic admixture, was a Latin tongue, and recurrence to Latin, and to the still more majestic and fertile language which had had so much to do in shaping the literary Latin dialect, was natural and germane to its character. In point of fact, the Pléiade made modern French—made it, we may say, twice over; for not only did its original work revolutionise the language in a manner so durable that the reaction of the next century could not wholly undo it, but it was mainly study of the Pléiade that armed the great masters of the Romantic movement, the men of 1830, in their revolt against the cramping rules and impoverished vocabulary of the eighteenth century. The effect of the change indeed was far too universal for it to be possible for any Malherbe or any Boileau to overthrow it. The whole literature of the nation, at a time when it was wonderfully abundant and vigorous, 'Ronsardised' for nearly fifty years, and such practice at such a time never fails to leave its mark. The actual details of the movement cannot better be given than by going through the list of its chief participators.



Ronsard.

The Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française.

Pierre de Ronsard[193], Prince of Poets[194], was born at La Poissonnière, in the Vendômois, or, as it was then more often called, the Gâtinais, on the banks of the river Loir, in 1524. He died in his own country in the year 1585, acknowledged, not merely in France but out of it, as the leader of living poets. His early life, however, was rather that of a man of action than of a poet, and one of the most studious of poets. His father was an old courtier and servant of Francis I., whose companion in captivity he had been, and Ronsard entered upon court life when he was a boy of ten years old. He visited Scotland and England in the suite of French ambassadors, and remained for some considerable time in Great Britain. He was also attached to embassies in Flanders, Holland, and Germany. But before he was of age he fell ill, and though he recovered, it was at the cost of permanent deafness, which incapacitated him for the public service. He threw himself on literature for a consolation, and under the direction of Daurat, a scholar of renown, studied for years at the Collège Coqueret. Here Du Bellay, Belleau, Baïf, were his fellow-students, and the four with their master, with Étienne Jodelle, and with Pontus de Tyard, afterwards bishop of Chalon, formed, as has been said, the Pléiade according to the most orthodox computation. The idea conceived and carried out in these studious years (by Ronsard himself and Du

Bellay beyond all doubt in the first place) was the reformation of French language and French literature by study and imitation of the ancients. In 1549 the manifesto of the society issued, in the shape of Du Bellay's *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*, and in 1550 the first practical illustration of the method was given by Ronsard's *Odes*. The principles of the *Défense et Illustration* may be thus summarised. The author holds that the current forms of literature, dizains, rondeaus, etc., are altogether too facile and easy, that the language used is too pedestrian, the treatment wanting in gravity and art. He would have Odes of the Horatian kind take the place of Chansons, the sonnet, *non moins docte que plaisante invention Italienne*, of dizains and huitains, regular tragedy and comedy of moralities and farces, regular satires of Fatrasies and Coq-à-l'âne. He takes particular pains to demonstrate the contrary proposition to Wordsworth's, and to prove that merely natural and ordinary language is not sufficient for him who in poesy wishes to produce work deserving of immortality. He ridicules the mediaeval affectations and conceits of some of the writers of his time, who gave themselves such names as 'Le Banni de Liesse,' 'Le Traverseur des Voies Périlleuses,' etc. He speaks, indeed, not too respectfully of mediaeval literature generally, and uses language which probably suggested Gabriel Harvey's depreciatory remarks about the *Fairy Queen* forty years later. In much of this there is exaggeration, and in much more of it mistake. By turning their backs on the middle ages—though indeed they were not able to do it thoroughly—the Pléiade lost almost as much in subject and spirit as they gained in language and formal excellence. The laudation of the sonnet, while the ballade and chant

royal, things of similar nature and of hardly less capacity, are denounced as *épiceries*, savours of a rather Philistine preference for mere novelty and foreign fashions. But, as has been already pointed out, Du Bellay was right in the main, and it must especially be insisted on that his aim was to strengthen and reform, not to alter or misguide, the French language. The peroration of the book in a highly rhetorical style speaks of the writer and his readers as having 'échappé du milieu des Grecs et par les escadrons Romains pour entrer jusqu'au sein de la tant désirée France.' That is to say, the innovators are to carry off what spoils they can from Greece and Rome, but it is to be for the enrichment and benefit of the French tongue. Frenchmen are to write French, not Latin and Greek; but they are to write it not merely in a conversational way, content as Du Bellay says somewhere else, 'n'avoir dit rien qui vaille aux neuf premiers vers, pourvu qu'au dixième il y ait le petit mot pour rire.' They are to accustom themselves to long and weary studies, 'ear ce sont les ailes dont les escripts des hommes volent au ciel,' to imitate good authors, not merely in Greek and Latin, but in Italian, Spanish, or any other tongue where they may be found. Such was the manifesto of the Pléiade; and no one who has studied French literature and French character, who knows the special tendency of the nation to drop from time to time into a sterile self-admiration, and an easy confidence that it is the all-sufficient wonder of the world, can doubt its wisdom. Certainly, whatever may be thought of it in the abstract, it was justified of its children. The first of these was, as has been said, Ronsard's *Odes*, published in 1550. These he followed up, in 1552, by *Les Amours de Cassandre*, in 1553 by a volume of *Hymnes*, as well as by *Le Bocage*

Royal, *Les Amours de Marie*, sonnets, etc., all of which were, in 1560, republished in a collected edition of four volumes. From the first Ronsard had been a very popular poet at court, where, according to a well-known anecdote, Marguerite de Savoie, the second of the Valois Marguerites, snatched his first volume from Mellin de Saint Gelais, who was reading it in a designed tone of burlesque, and reading it herself to her brother Henry II. and the court, obtained a verdict at once for the young poet. The accession of Charles IX. brought Ronsard still more into favour, and during the next ten years he produced many courtly poems of the occasional kind, besides others to suit his own pleasure. In 1572 the first part of his most ambitious, but perhaps least successful, work appeared. This was the *Franciade*, a dull epic. At the death of Charles, Ronsard retired to his native province, where he had an abbacy, Croix-Val. Here all his poetical powers returned, and in his last *Amours, Sonnets to Hélène*, and other pieces, some of his very best work is to be found. The year before his death he produced an edition of his works much altered, but by no means invariably improved.

There are few poets to whose personal merits there is more unanimity of trustworthy testimony than there is to those of Ronsard. From the time of his betaking himself to literary work, he seems to have been wholly given to study, and to the contemplation of natural beauty. Although jealous of his own great reputation, and liable to be nettled when it was imperilled, as it was by Du Bartas, he was as a rule singularly placable in literary quarrels. The story of his quarrelling with Rabelais is late, unsupported, and to all appearance fabulous; while, on the other hand, the passages which have been supposed to reflect on the Pléiade in the writings of Rabelais can,

for chronological reasons, by no possibility refer to Ronsard or his friends. Lastly, the poet appears to have had no thought of writing for gain, and though, like all his contemporaries, he did not scruple to solicit favours from the king, he was in no way importunate or servile. But while his personal character, as well as the extraordinary esteem in which he was held by all his contemporaries, has never been seriously contested, critical estimates of his literary work have strangely varied. To his own age he was the 'Prince of Poets.' His successor, Malherbe, behaved to him as certain popes are reported to have behaved to their predecessors, excommunicating him in the literary sense. Boileau, with his usual ignorance of French literature before his own day, described his work in lines which French schoolboys long learnt by heart, and which are as false in fact as they are imbecile in criticism. Fénelon was almost the only sincere partisan he had for two centuries. But when the Romantic movement began Ronsard was for a while almost restored to the position he held in his lifetime, and his works became a kind of Bible to the disciples of Sainte-Beuve and the followers of Hugo. The strong mediaeval revival which accompanied the movement was however unfavourable to Ronsard, and he has again sunk, though not very low, in the general estimation of French critics. The history is curious, and as a literary phenomenon instructive. But it is not difficult for an impartial judge to place Ronsard in his true position. His main defects are two: he was too much a poet of malice prepense, and yet he wrote on the whole too fluently. The mass of his work is great, and it is not always, nor perhaps very often, animated by those unmistakable and universal poetical touches which in the long run will alone

suffice to induce posterity to keep a writer on its shelf of great poets. Yet these touches are by no means wanting in Ronsard. Many of his sonnets, especially the famous and universally admired 'Quand vous serez bien vieille,' not a few of his odes, especially the equally famous 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose,' rank among those poems of which it can only be said that they could not be better, and detached passages innumerable deserve hardly lower praise. But it is when Ronsard is viewed from the standpoint of a thoroughly instructed historical criticism that his real greatness appears. It is when we look at the poets that came before him and at those who came after him that we see the immense benefit he conferred upon his successors, and upon the language which those successors illustrated. The result of his classical studies was little less than the introduction of an entirely new rhythm into French poetry: let it be observed that a new rhythm, and not merely new metre, is what is spoken of. Since the disuse of the half-inarticulate but sweet rhythmical varieties of the mediaeval pastourelles and romances a great monotony had come upon French poetry. The fault of the artificial forms of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, the *épiceries* of Du Bellay's scornful allusion, was that they induced their writers to concentrate their attention on the arrangement of the rhymes and stanzas, to the neglect of the individual line, the rhythm of which was but too frequently lame, stiff, and prosaic in the extreme. With Marot and Saint Gelais the introduction of less formal patterns, dizains, huitains, etc., had had the additional drawback of making the individual verse even more prosaic and pedestrian, though it may be somewhat less stiff. Now the line is, after all, the unit of poetry, and all reform must start

with it. It is the great glory of Ronsard that his reform did so start. From his time French poetry reads quite differently. Perhaps this was due to his study of the Horatian quantity-metres, where every syllable has to give its quota to the effect of the line as well as every line its quota to the effect of the stanza. But whether it was this or something else, the effect is indisputable. To this must be added a liberal, though in Ronsard's own case not excessive, importation of new words from Greek and Latin, a bold and striking mode of expression, the retention of many picturesque old words which the senseless folly of the seventeenth-century reformers banished, and, above all, a great indulgence in diminutives, which give a most charming effect to the lighter verse of Ronsard and his friends, and which also were cut off by the indiscriminate and 'desperate hook' of Malherbe and Boileau. So great were the formal changes and improvements thus introduced, that French poetry takes a new colour from the age of Ronsard, a colour which in its moments of health it has ever since displayed.

Du Bellay.

Next to Ronsard, and perhaps above him, if uniform excellence rather than bulk and range of work is considered, ranks Joachim du Bellay[195]. He was a connection, though it does not seem quite clear what connection, of the Cardinal du Bellay to whom Rabelais was so long attached, and whose house included other illustrious members. Probably he was a cousin of the cardinal and of his two brothers the memoir writers. His youth was rendered troublesome by illness and law difficulties, but at last he was able with Ronsard, whose junior he was by a little, to give

himself up to study under Daurat. His prose manifesto has already been dealt with, and almost immediately afterwards he in some sort anticipated Ronsard's poetical carrying out of his principles by a volume of *Sonnets to Olive*, the anagram of a certain Mademoiselle de Viole. The sonnet, however, was not such an absolute novelty as the ode, having been introduced already by Mellin de Saint Gelais. Shortly afterwards he went to Italy with the Cardinal du Bellay, a proceeding which did not bring him good luck. The intriguing diplomacy of the papal court displeased him, and he soon lost his cousin's favour. A volume of sonnets entitled *Regrets*, full of vigour and poetry, dates from this time. But Du Bellay, deprived of the protection of the most powerful member of his family, again fell into difficulties, and finally died in 1560 at the age of thirty-five. His Roman sojourn has given birth to perhaps the finest of his works, *Les Antiquités de Rome*, Englished by Spenser under the slightly altered title of 'The Ruins of Rome.' Du Bellay's works are not extensive, and indeed they could hardly be so, considering the shortness of his life and the interruptions of business and study which even that short life underwent. But he is undoubtedly the member of the group whose work keeps at the highest level. Nor is his excellence limited to one or two tones. For grace and simplicity his *Vanneur*, his *Épitaphe d'un Chat*, and several others of his *Jeux Rustiques* challenge comparison. He had a strong vein of satire, which he showed in denouncing fawning poetasters as well as the corrupt and intriguing hangers on of the Papal court. His sonnets to Olive have the finest flavour of the peculiarly cultivated and graceful voluptuousness which has been noted as one of the distinguishing marks of the French Renaissance. His *Antiquités de*

Rome exhibit even more strongly another of those distinguishing marks, the melancholy sense of death, destruction, and nothingness; indeed, as the *Heptameron* is the typical prose work of this period, so Du Bellay's poems may be taken as its typical poetry. He has been called the Apollo of the Pléiade, but he should with justice be called its Mercury as well, for, as he was perhaps its best poet, so he was certainly its best prose writer. It is unlucky that he was less favoured by fate and fortune than any other of the greater writers of the century.

Belleau.

The position of best poet of the Pléiade—Ronsard, the greatest, having mingled a good deal of alloy with his gold—has been sometimes disputed for Rémy Belleau[196]. It is certain that his 'Avril' holds with Du Bellay's 'Vanneur' and Ronsard's already-mentioned 'Quand vous serez bien vieille,' the rank of the best known and best liked poems of the school. Belleau, whose life was extremely uneventful, was born at Nogent-le-Rotrou in 1528, and was attached during nearly the whole of his life to the household of Rémy de Lorraine, Marquis d'Elbeuf, and his son Charles, Duc d'Elbeuf, whose education he superintended and in whose house he spent his days. He died in 1577 and received an elaborate funeral, being carried to the grave by his brother stars, Ronsard and Baïf, and by two of the younger disciples of the Pléiade, Desportes and Jamyn. Belleau was the chief purely descriptive poet and the chief poetical translator of the Pléiade. He began by a collection of poems entitled *Petites Inventions* (short descriptive pieces), and by a translation of Anacreon. In 1565 a more ambitious work, the *Bergerie*, made

its appearance. This is a mixture of prose and poetry, describing country life and its attractions. It is in this that the famous 'Avril' occurs, and there are other detached pieces not much inferior. In 1566 another rather curiously conceived work made its appearance, the *Amours et Nouveaux Échanges de Pierres Précieuses*. As a whole this is perhaps his best book. Besides these, Belleau also translated or paraphrased the *Phenomena* of Aratus, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Solomon*. He deserves to rank with not a few poets who have often attained a fair secondary position in the art, and whose special faculty disposes them to patient and ingenious description in more or less poetical verse. The stately and at the same time flexible rhythm, the brilliant and varied vocabulary which the Pléiade used, lent themselves not ill to this task, and Belleau's talent, learning, and industry enabled him to give an unusually equable charm to his work. But he is altogether too occasional, too void of the higher poetical sentiment, and too limited in range, to be ranked with Ronsard or with Du Bellay. His peculiar quality of patient labour stood him in good stead in composing a Macaronic poem on the Huguenots, which is by no means without value.

Baïf.

Jean Antoine de Baïf[197] was a man of more varied talent than Belleau, and his history and personality are more interesting. He was the natural son of Lazare de Baïf, French ambassador at Venice, and of a noble lady of that city. Marriage was impossible, for Lazare de Baïf, who was himself a man of letters, was in orders; but he did his best for his son, and in 1547, when he was still very young, left him a

considerable fortune. Baïf was, except Jodelle, the youngest member of the Pléiade, but he early distinguished himself by his expertness in the classical languages. He began in French, like the majority of his school, with a collection of sonnets and other pieces, entitled *Les Amours de Méline*, and he followed them up with the *Amours de Francine*. Francine is said to have had over her predecessor the advantage or disadvantage of existing. Baïf then turned to the new theatre, which his comrade Jodelle had introduced, and translated or adapted several plays of Plautus, Terence, and Sophocles, but these will be noticed elsewhere. He returned to poetry proper in *Les Passe-Temps*, a poetical miscellany of merit. Lastly, in 1581, appeared a curious work, entitled *Les Mimes*, composed of octosyllabic dizains, half-moral, half-satirical in tone and subject. Baïf, who was thought by some of his contemporaries to write even better in Latin than in French, was a chief defender of the often-mooted though preposterous plan of adjusting modern languages to the exact metres of the ancients. This idea, which somewhat later seduced no less a man than Spenser for a time, and with him many of the brightest wits in England, is perhaps almost more hopeless in French than in our own tongue, owing to the omnipotence of accent and the habit of slurring almost all the syllables of a word except one. But it was frequently entertained at different times through the century, and is said by Agrippa d'Aubigné to have been started as early as 1530 by a certain Mousset, of whom there is no other trace. Baïf, who was also a spelling reformer, wrote a good deal of verse in the metres he advocated, but with no greater success than the other adventurous persons who have attempted the same *tour de force*. He is also said to have conceived the

idea of an Academy, and to have in many other ways shown himself an active and ardent reformer of letters. It is for this alertness of spirit and general proficiency in literary craftsmanship that Baïf is memorable, rather than for supreme or even remarkable poetical power. His epitaphs are among his best work, probably owing to his careful study of the hardly-to-be-surpassed examples of this kind of composition which the classical languages afford. He was a diligent panegyrist of country life and country ways, but no single work of his in this class comes up to the masterpieces of Ronsard, Du Bellay, and Belleau. Range, variety, and inventiveness of spirit are Baïf's chief merits.

Daurat, Jodelle, Pontus de Tyard.

The three remaining members of the group may be disposed of more rapidly. Daurat, the eldest, and in a sense the master of all, was, as far as regards French composition, the dark star of the Pléiade, for he wrote nothing of importance in the vernacular. Jodelle was a voluminous writer, but his dramatic importance so far exceeds his merely poetical value that he will be best treated of when we come to discuss the Theatre of the Renaissance. A somewhat curious instance of his poetical energy is to be found in his unfinished, indeed hardly begun, *Contre-Amours*. All the rest had started with a volume of verse in praise of some real or imaginary mistress, so Jodelle determined to write one against an unkind lady. The seventh member of the Pléiade, Pontus de Tyard, was the eldest save Daurat, the longest-lived and the highest in station, while he was also in a way

the most original, having published his first book before the appearance of the *Défense et Illustration*. He was born at Bissy, near Macon, and, having been appointed Bishop of Chalon, died in 1603, last of the group. Poetry was only part of his literary occupations, and literary work itself by no means absorbed him. But his *Erreurs Amoureuses*, addressed to a certain Pasithée, and other works, give him fair rank in the school. He has been erroneously credited with the introduction of the sonnet into France, an honour which is probably due, as has been more than once observed, to Saint Gelais. But if he did not introduce the form, he at least contributed one of its most striking examples in his beautiful Sonnet to 'Sleep,' a favourite subject of the age both in France and England.

The Pléiade proper by no means monopolised all the poetical talent of the period. Indeed, there can be no surer testimony to the real strength of the movement than the universal adherence which was given to its methods by those who were in no sense bound to it by personal connection. A second Pléiade might be made up of members who had almost as much poetical talent as the actual titular stars. Magny, Tahureau, Du Bartas, D'Aubigné, Desportes, Bertaut, had each of them talent not far inferior to that of Du Bellay and of Ronsard, and equal to that of the five minor members. Garnier was immensely Jodelle's superior in his own line. Jamyn, Durant, Passerat, the two La Tailles, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, even La Boëtie, who had, as far as can be made out, far more vocation in poetry than in prose, are names at least equal to those of Pontus de Tyard or Baïf. But they did not form part of the energetic *coterie* who started and pushed the movement, and so they have lacked the reputation which the combined and successful

effort of the Seven has given them. Yet Du Bartas is the one French poet of the sixteenth century who wrote a poem on the great scale with success, and D'Aubigné ranks with Regnier and Victor Hugo in the strength and vigour of his verse.

Magny.

Olivier de Magny[198] was a kind of petted child of the Pléiade. His *Amours* are prefaced by commendatory verses, among which compositions of four out of the seven—Ronsard, Baïf, Belleau and Jodelle—figure, and he was as strenuous in carrying out the recommendations of Du Bellay's *Illustration* as any of the seven themselves. His *Amours* just mentioned, his *Odes*, his *Gayetés* even, testify to the obedient admiration which young verse-writers often show for the leading poets of their day. But there is no servile imitation in Magny. His life was short, and the dates of its beginning and ending are not exactly known, though he died in 1560. He was a lover of Louise Labé, and was worthy of her, poetically speaking. He was born, like Marot, at Cahors; he went to Rome, like many other literary men of his time, on a diplomatic errand; and his works were all published between 1553 and his death. The *Odes* are the best of them; the *Gayetés* are light and lively enough; and in both his volumes of sonnets, but especially in the *Soupirs*, excellent examples of the form are to be found. Magny had a strong feeling for the formal art of poetry, and it was thus natural that he should eagerly embrace the gospel of Ronsard. But besides this, he had a true poetical imagination, and a real command of poetical language. A sonnet in dialogue, which greatly attracted the admiration of Colletet, the historian of French poetry in the next

age, is perhaps not much more than a *tour de force*. But many of his other pieces show real feeling, and have a certain youthfulness about them which suits well with the sentiments they express, and the ardour of literary as well as amatory devotion which the poet endeavours to convey.

Tahureau.

Still younger and probably still more short-lived, but superior as a poet, was Jacques Tahureau[199]. He was born at Le Mans of a noble family, and died at the age of twenty-eight. But his life, if short, was a happy one, and, like most of his contemporaries, he published a volume of amatory sonnets under the title, gracefully affected even for that age of graceful affectation, of *Mignardises Amoureuses de l'Admirée*. Unlike many of the heroines of the Pléiade and their satellites, who are either known or shrewdly suspected to have been imaginary, the *Admirée* of Tahureau was a real person. What is more, he married her, and they lived together for three years before his early death. Before the *Mignardises*, he had published a *Premier Recueil*, and after them he produced a third volume of odes, sonnets, etc. All three display the same peculiarities, and these peculiarities are sufficiently remarkable. Tahureau was named by the flattery and the classical fancies of his contemporaries the French Catullus, and the parallel is not so rash as might be thought. It is true that it came originally from Du Bellay in one of his satirical veins. But a later poetical critic, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, is more precise in his description, and oddly enough uses the very term which was afterwards applied in England to Shakespeare's youthful sonnets. Tahureau, he says:—

Nous affrianda tous au sucre de cet art.

The author of the *Mignardises* is indeed somewhat 'sugared' in his style of writing; but there are genuine passion and genuine poetical feeling as well in his verse. Of the minor poets of the time he is probably the best.

Minor Ronsardists.

Before noticing the four remaining poets who have been mentioned as occupying the highest places next to the Pléiade itself, a brief review of the minor poets until the end of the century may be given. Étienne de la Boëtie wrote poems which, though they have some of the stiffness and a little of the hollowness of his *Contre-un,* possess a certain grandeur of sentiment and a knack of diction other than commonplace, which explain Montaigne's admiration. Claude Buttet is chiefly remarkable for having made a curious attempt to combine the classicism of the new school with the romanticism of the old. He wrote Sapphics in rhyme, an idea sufficiently ingenious, but hardly successful. Yet it is fair to remember that some of the varieties of Leonine verse lacked neither force nor elegance. The truth is, that these classic metres are so alien to all modern tongues, that, rhymed or unrhymed, they are doomed to failure. Jean de la Péruse was, like Magny and Tahureau, a poet who died before he had reached his term. At twenty-five few men have left lasting works. Yet La Péruse not only produced a tragedy of some merit, but minor poems promising more. Jean Doublet was a much older man, and is chiefly noticeable as an example of the writers who, beginning with Marot, or even with Crétin, and the Rhétoriqueurs for models, bowed to

the overmastering influence of the Pléiade. Docility of this kind, however, rarely promises much poetical worth, and Doublet was not a great poet; but his poems, which have had better fortune in the way of reprints than those of greater men, show power of versification.

Amadis Jamyn was a somewhat more distinguished poet than those who have just been mentioned. Born in 1540, he came to Paris, when the triumph and supremacy of Ronsard was completely assured, and was taken under the protection of the Prince of Poets. He was also honoured, as we have seen, by being allowed to stand by the side of Ronsard, of Baïf, of Desportes, at the funeral of Rémy Belleau. He translated the last twelve books of the Iliad to complete Salel, and began a translation of the Odyssey; besides which he wrote a poem on the Chase, another on Generosity, and, like everybody else at the time, abundance of miscellaneous pieces. He was a good scholar, and there was more ease in his verse than is usually to be found in his contemporaries (save the greatest of them), who too often allowed their classical studies to stiffen and starch their verse. Another admirable poet, though of no great compass, was the dramatist Grévin. His *Villanesques*, a modified form of the favourite Villanelle, which had survived the other *épiceries* condemned by Du Bellay, are singularly graceful and tender, epithets which are also applicable to his *Baisers*. The brothers La Taille also, like Grévin, are chiefly known as dramatists. Jean de la Taille, though but a boy of ten years old when the *style Marotique* was swept out of fashion, had sufficient independence to compose *blasons* (and very pretty ones) of the daisy and the rose. Others of his poems have mediaeval forms or settings, but he imitated

Ronsard in his *Mort de Paris*, and Du Bellay in his *Courtisan Retiré*. The works of Jacques de la Taille, who died young, were chiefly epigrams. Guy du Faur de Pibrac wrote moral quatrains, which had a great vogue, and which in a way deserved it. Nicolas Rapin was, with the exception of Passerat, the chief of the poets of the *Ménippée*, a remarkable group, who will be noticed further when we come to that singular production. But Passerat himself deserves more notice than simply as a political satirist and a famous Latin scholar. Of all the poets of the sixteenth century before Regnier and after Marot, Passerat was the one who possessed most comic talent. His works are full of little touches which exhibit this, while at the same time he was a master of the graceful love of poetry which imitation of the ancients had made fashionable. His Villanelle 'J'ai perdu ma Tourterelle' is probably the most elegant specimen of a poetical trifle that the age produced, and has of late years attracted great admiration. Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, a lawyer, the author of an Art of Poetry, and of the first satires, so called, in French, had a good deal of poetical power, which he expended chiefly on pastoral subjects; but unfortunately his command of language and style was by no means always equal to his command of fresh and agreeable imagery and sentiment.

Du Bartas.

Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas[200], the 'Protestant Ronsard,' was born in 1544 at Montfort, near Auch, served Henry of Navarre in war and diplomacy, was wounded at Ivry, and died of his wounds in 1590. His first work was *Judith*; then followed *La Première Semaine*, and next *Uranie*, *Le Triomphe de la Foi*, and

the *Seconde Semaine*. He also wrote numerous smaller poems, including one on the battle of Ivry. The 'First Week of Creation' is his greatest and most famous work. It went through thirty editions in a few years; was translated into English by Sylvester, gave not a little inspiration to Milton, and was warmly admired by Goethe. Ronsard at first eagerly welcomed Du Bartas; but his jealousy being aroused by the pretensions of the Calvinist party to set up their poet as a rival to himself, he resented this in an indignant and vigorous address to Daurat, which contains some very just criticisms on Du Bartas. Nevertheless the merits of the latter are extremely great, and his personage and work very interesting. It has been said of him that he represents, in the first place, the extreme development of the Ronsardising innovation; in the second place, the highest literary culture attained by the French Calvinists. Inferior to D'Aubigné in knowledge of the world, in the choice of subjects perennially interesting, and in terse vigour of expression, Du Bartas was the superior of the great Protestant satirist in picturesqueness, in imagination, and in facility of descriptive power. The stately and gorgeous abundance of the vocabulary with which the Hellenising and Latinising innovations of the Pléiade enriched the French language supplied him with colours and material to work with, and his own genius did the rest. His attempt to naturalise Greek compounds, such as 'Aime-Lyre,' 'Donne-Âme,' and the rest, has done him more harm than anything else; but his combination of classical learning, with the varied colour and vivid imagination of the middle age and the Renaissance, often results in extraordinarily striking expressions. *L'Eschine azurée*, for instance, is a singularly picturesque, if also somewhat barbaric, reminiscence

of ευρεα νωτα θαλασσης: the enforcement of the idea of *hora novissima tempora pessima* in the four following lines is admirable:—

> Nos exécrables mœurs, dedans Gomorrhe
> apprises,
> Les troublées saisons, les civiles fureurs,
> Les menaces du ciel, sont les avant-
> coureurs
> De Christ, qui vient tenir ses dernières
> assises.

In such a passage again as the following, the power and simplicity of the diction can escape no reader; the piling up of the strokes is worthy of Victor Hugo:—

> Les étoiles cherront. Le désordre, la nuict,
> La frayeur, le trespas, la tempeste, le bruit,
> Entreront en quartier.

All that was wanting to make Du Bartas a poet of the first rank was some faculty of self-criticism; of natural *verve* and imagination as well as of erudition he had no lack, but in critical faculty he seems to have been totally deficient. His beauties, rare in kind and not small in amount, are alloyed with vast quantities of dull absurdity.

D'Aubigné.

Desportes.

Agrippa d'Aubigné[201] was a few years Du Bartas' junior, and long outlived him. He was an important prose-writer as well as poet, and his long life was as full of interesting events as of literary occupations.

At six years old he read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; a year or two later his father made him swear, in presence of the gibbeted corpses of the unsuccessful conspirators of Amboise, to revenge their death. Shortly afterwards he narrowly escaped the stake. For a time he dwelt with Henry of Navarre at the court of Charles IX., and there thoroughly imbued himself with the Ronsardising tradition. But he soon escaped with his master, and for years was a Calvinist irreconcileable, always for war to the knife, and as rude and bold in the council chamber as in the field. The death of his master was unfortunate for D'Aubigné; but, though he at first opposed the regency of Marie de Medicis, he made terms for himself. The publication, however, of his 'History' brought enemies on him, and he fled to Geneva, finishing his days there. His prose works are too numerous to mention separately: the chief besides his histories are the *Confession de Sancy* and the *Aventures du Baron de Fœneste*, both satirical in character and full of vigour. He began as a poet by poems in the lighter Pléiade style, but his masterpiece is the strange work called *Les Tragiques*. This consists of seven books, amounting to not much less than ten thousand lines, and entitled *Misères*, *Princes*, *La Chambre Dorée*, *Les Feux*, *Les Fers*, *Vengeance*, *Jugement*. The poem is half historical and half satirical, dealing with the religious wars, the persecution of the Huguenots, the abuses of the administration, and of contemporary manners, etc. Nothing equal to the best verses of this singular book had yet been seen in France, and not much equal to them has been produced since. The tone of sombre and impressive declamation had been to some extent anticipated by Du Bartas, but chiefly for purposes of description. D'Aubigné turned it to its natural use in

invective, and the effect is often extraordinarily fine. Very copious citation would be necessary to show its excellence: but before Victor Hugo there is nothing in French equal to D'Aubigné at his best in point of clangour of sound and impetuosity of rhythm. It is noteworthy that Du Bartas' *Semaine*, with the *Tragiques* and the tragedies of Garnier, finally established the Alexandrine as the indispensable metre for serious and impassioned poetry in France. Hitherto the decasyllable and the dodecasyllable had been used indiscriminately, and Ronsard's *Franciade* is written in the former. But after the three poets just mentioned, the Alexandrine became invariable; the decasyllable being left for light and occasional work, as a sort of medium in usage as in bulk between the Alexandrine and the octosyllable. The truth is that, until the improvements of language and style which the Pléiade had introduced, the Alexandrine couplet had not had either suppleness or dignity enough for the work. It was lumbering and disjointed. As soon, however, as the classical turn, inseparable from a specially classical metre, had been given to the language, it at once took its place and has ever since kept it, though in the century succeeding it was deprived of much of its force by arbitrary rules. The lines of Boileau condemning Ronsard[202] have inseparably connected Desportes and Bertaut, and have given them a position in literary history which is as intrinsically inaccurate as it is unduly high. Neither approaches Du Bartas or D'Aubigné in poetical excellence or in adroit carrying out of Ronsardism. But neither was in the least made *retenu* by Ronsard's failure, and it did not enter the head of themselves or any of their contemporaries, till their last days, that Ronsard had failed. Philippe Desportes[203] was a very unclerical cleric, a

successful courtier and diplomatist, a great favourite with the ladies of the court. He was also a poet of little vigour, but of great sweetness, much elegance of style and form, and extraordinary neatness, if not originality, of expression. With Jamyn he was the most prominent of Ronsard's own particular disciples. His poetical works are sharply divided, like those of Herrick and Donne and some other poets, on the one hand, into poems of a very mundane character, collections of sonnets after the Pléiade fashion to real or imaginary heroines, celebrations of the ladies and the *mignons* of the court of Henri III., imitations of Italian verse, and the like; on the other, into devotional poems, which include some translations of the Psalms of not a little merit. Personally Desportes appears to have been a self-seeker and a sycophant; not without good nature, but covetous, intriguing, corrupt, given to base compliances. He was Du Bellay's *poëte courtisan* in the worst sense of the phrase[204]. But working at leisure and with care, and undistracted by any literary or sentimental enthusiasm, he found means to give to his work a polish and correctness which many of his contemporaries of greater talent did not, or could not, give. In this fact the explanation of Boileau's commendation—for it is no doubt meant, relatively speaking, for commendation—is probably to be found.

Bertaut.

Jean Bertaut was, to use a metaphor frequently employed in literary history, the 'moon' of Desportes. Like him, he is a poet rather elegant than vigorous, rather correct than spirited. Like him, he wrote light verse and devotional poems, and, as in the case of

Desportes, the religious poems are—rather contrary to the reader's expectation—the best of the two. His work, however, was even more limited in amount than that of his contemporary.

FOOTNOTES:

[192] The list is sometimes given rather differently; instead of Jodelle and Pontus de Tyard, Scévole de St. Marthe and Muretus are substituted. But the enumeration in the text is the accepted one.

[193] Ed. Blanchemain. 8 vols. Paris, 1857-67.

[194] The term usually applied to him by contemporaries.

[195] Ed. Marty-Laveaux. 2 vols. Paris, 1866-7.

[196] Ed. Gouverneur. 3 vols. Paris, 1866.

[197] Not recently re-edited in full. In selection by Becq de Fouquières. Paris, 1874.

[198] Recently edited in 5 vols. by Courbet. Paris, v. d.

[199] Ed. Blanchemain. 2 vols. Geneva, 1869.

[200] Du Bartas, always unjustly treated in France, probably from a curious tradition of mingled sectarian and literary jealousy, has not been reprinted of late years. The edition used is that of 1610-1611. Paris, 2 vols, folio.

[201] Ed. Réaume and de Caussade. Vols. 1-4. Paris, 1873-7. There is another volume to follow.

[202] Here are these celebrated lines:—

Ronsard, qui le suivit, par une autre méthode
Réglant tout, brouilla tout, fit un art à sa mode,
Et toutefois longtemps eut un heureux destin.
Mais sa muse en Français parlant Grec et Latin
Vit dans l'âge suivant, par un retour grotesque,
Tomber de ses grands mots le faste pédantesque.
Ce poète orgueilleux, trébuché de si haut,
Rendit puis retenus Desportes et Bertaut.

Art Poét., Chant i.

[203] Ed. Michiels. Paris, 1858.

[204] He was not a courtier for nothing. He held numerous abbacies, and Charles IX. is said to have given him 800 gold pieces, Henri III. 10,000 crowns of silver, in each case for a poetical offering of very small bulk.

CHAPTER V.

THE THEATRE FROM GRINGORE TO GARNIER.

Gringore.

It so happened that the mediaeval theatre closed, as far as its exclusive possession of the stage is concerned, with one of the most remarkable of all its writers. Pierre Gringore[205], who towards the close of his career preferred the spelling Gringoire, was a Norman by birth. His poetical and dramatic capacity has been considerably exaggerated by the learned but crotchety scholar who was at first charged with the joint editorship of his works in the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne. But, when the hyperboles of M. Charles d'Héricault are reduced to their simplest terms, Gringore remains a remarkable figure. It is to him that we owe the only complete and really noteworthy tetralogy, composed of *cry*, sotie, morality, and farce, which exists to show the final result of the mediaeval play—the *Jeu du Prince des Sots*. To him is also due the most remarkable of the sixteenth-century mysteries, that of *Saint Louis*; and his miscellaneous poems, as yet not fully collected, show us a man of letters possessed of no small faculty for miscellaneous work. Gringore first emerges as a pamphleteer in verse, on the side of the policy of Louis XII. He held the important position of *mère sotte* in the company of persons who charged themselves with playing the sotie, and Louis perceived the advantages which he might gain by enlisting such a writer on his side. Gringore's early works are allegorical poems of the kind which the increasing admiration of the *Roman de la Rose*, joined to the practice of the Rhétoriqueurs, had made fashionable in France; but they are directly political in tone, and an undercurrent of dramatic intention is always manifest in them. *Les folles Entreprises* is a very remarkable work. It might be described as a series of monologues of the kind usual and already described, but continuous, and having the

independent parts bound to each other by speeches of the author *in propria persona*. The titles of the separate sections—*L'Entreprise des folz Orgueilleux*, *Réflexions de l'Auteur sur la Guerre d'Italie*, *le Blason de Pratique*, *Balade et Supplication à la Vierge Marie* (*et se peult Interpréter sur la Royne de France*), etc.—explain the plan of this curious book as well as any laboured analysis could do. The author takes what he considers to be the chief grievances in Church and State, and dilates upon them in the manner, half moralising, half allegoric, which was popular. An argument of *Les folles Entreprises* would, however, require considerable space. It enters into the most recondite theological questions, and of its general tone the heading of the last chapter tells as good a story as anything else can do: 'Comme le très-chrestien roy et Justice relevent Foy qui estait abattu par Richesse et Papelardise.' Other works of the same semi-dramatic, semi-poetical kind are even more directly political in substance: *Les Entreprises de Venise*; *La Chasse du Cerf des Cerfs* (Pope Julius), etc. Sometimes, as in *La Coqueluche*, the author becomes a simple chronicler describing incidents of his time. Indeed it would hardly be an exaggeration to describe Gringore's work as the result of a kind of groping after journalism condemned by the circumstances of the time to the most awkward and inappropriate form. In his definitely dramatic work the same practical tendency reappears. The tetralogy is of a directly politico-social kind. The *cry*, a summons in ironical terms to *sots* of all kinds to come and hear their lesson; the sotie, an audacious satire on the state of things; the morality, in which the very names of the personages—Peuple François, Peuple Italique, Divine Pungnicion, etc.—speak for themselves, all show this tendency; and even the

bonne bouche at the end, the farce (which is altogether too Rabelaisian in subject for description here), seems to illustrate the motto—a very practical one—'Il faut cultiver son jardin.' Less directly the same purpose can be traced in the *Mystère de Monseigneur Saint Loys*. This is a picture of the ideal patriot king doing judgment and justice, and serving God by his voyages over sea, and his punishments of blasphemers and loose livers at home.

The last Age of the Mediaeval Theatre.

The first two quarters, and especially the first quarter, of the century contributed plentifully to the list of mysteries, moralities, and farces. The dates of the latter are not easy to ascertain, and it is probable that most of them are older than the present period. The taste for very lengthy mysteries and moralities, however, had by no means died out, and some of the mysteries, notably those of Antoine Chevallet, are of considerable merit. To the sixteenth century too belongs what is probably the longest of all moralities, that on *The Just and Unjust Man*, which contains 36,000 lines, besides the *Mundus*, *Caro*, *et Daemonia*, and the *Condamnation de Banquet* already described.

This school was continued, though under some difficulties, until a late period of the century. It had two things in its favour; it was extremely popular, and it lent itself, far more than the stately rival soon to be discussed, to the political and social uses which had long been associated with the stage in the mind of audiences. In Beza's tragedy of *Abraham Sacrifiant*,

a kind of union takes place between the two styles. But even the triumph of the Pléiade did not at once abolish the mysteries which were still legal in the provinces, which had a strong hold on the fancy of the populace, and which some men of letters who were themselves much indebted to the new movement, notably Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, upheld with pen as well as with tongue. Thomas Le Coq, a beneficed clerk of Falaise, wrote a really remarkable play, *Cain*, of the purest mystery kind, in 1580; and the troubles of the League brought forth a large number of pieces which approached much nearer to the mediaeval drama, and especially to the mediaeval drama in the form which Gringore had given it, than to the model of Jodelle.

Beginnings of the Classical Drama.

It was, however, this model which had the seeds of life in it, and which was destined to serve as the pattern for the French drama of the future. In the manifesto of the Pléiade Du Bellay gave especial prominence to the drama among the literary kinds, in which French had need of strengthening from classical sources. The classical tragedy in the classical language, and even in translation, was already no stranger to French audiences, and the principle of constructing modern vernacular plays on the same model had become familiar to the upper and learned classes by the practice of the Italians, with which they had become acquainted, partly through the numerous visits, friendly and hostile, paid by Frenchmen to Italy in the early years of the sixteenth century, partly through the reproduction of

these Italian plays at the courts of Francis I. and Henri II. This reproduction of foreign work was not confined to the court, for in 1548 the town of Lyons greeted Catherine de Medicis with an Italian play acted by an Italian company. As for translations of classical drama, Lazare de Baïf translated the *Electra* as early as 1537, and Buchanan, Muretus, and others composed Latin plays for their pupils to act. In all these plays, Latin, Italian, and French-translation, the influence of the tragedian Seneca was paramount, and this influence made an enduring mark on the future drama of France. Greek, though it was ardently studied, was, from the purely literary point of view, little comprehended by the French humanists, and of the three tragedians Euripides was the only one who made much impression upon them. Seneca, as the only extant Latin tragedian, had a monopoly of the classical language which they understood best and revered most heartily. His model was also peculiarly imitable. The paucity of action, the strict observation of certain easily observable rules, the regular and harmonious but easily comprehensible system of his choruses, the declamatory style and strong ethical temper of his sentiments, all appealed to the French Renaissance. Within a year or two from the time when Du Bellay had sounded the note of innovation, Jodelle answered the summons with a tragedy and a comedy at the same time.

Jodelle.

Étienne Jodelle[206], Seigneur de Lymodin, was one of the youngest of Ronsard's fellows. He was born at Paris in 1532, and was thus barely twenty years old when, in 1552, he founded at once modern French

tragedy with his *Cléopâtre*, and modern French comedy with his *Eugène*. The representation was a great success, and obtained for the author from the King, Henri II., besides many compliments, the sum of five hundred crowns. The success of the plays also brought about an incident famous in French literary history of the anecdotic kind. The seven determined to celebrate the occasion by a country excursion, and on the way to Arcueil they unluckily met a flock of goats. Deeply imbued as they all were with classical fancies, it was almost inevitable that the idea of a Dionysiac festival should strike them, and a goat was caught, crowned with flowers and solemnly paraded, Ronsard himself officiating as the god. This harmless freak was represented by the zealots of the time as an impious pagan orgie, in which the goat had been actually sacrificed to a false god, and the reputation of the brotherhood sank almost equally with Catholics and Protestants. Six years after, Jodelle produced his second tragedy, *Didon*, also with great success. But he was not a fortunate person. The miscarriage of a pageant of which he had the direction alienated the favour of the court from him, and he was too proud or too careless to solicit its grace. He was a loose and reckless liver, and receives from Pierre de l'Estoile a character which very probably is unduly harsh. However this may be, he died at the age of forty, indigent and ruined in constitution. His literary activity was great, but only a small part of his work survives, and his three plays are the only important portion of this.

The comedy has some impression of classical study, though very much less than the two tragedies. It is, unlike the indigenous farce, divided regularly into acts and scenes; it is much longer than the native comedy, and some of the characters show, though

faintly and at a distance, some traces of a reading of Terence. But it retains the octosyllabic metre, and its general scheme, despite a somewhat greater involution of plot and multiplicity of characters, is that of a farce. Eugène, the hero, a rich and luxurious churchman, is in love with Alix, whom, to save appearances, he has married to a wittol of the name of Guillaume. Alix, however, has several other lovers, among whom is Florimond a soldier, the rejected suitor of Hélène, Eugène's sister. These personages are completed by Maître Jean, the abbé's chaplain and general factotum, a creditor of Guillaume's, some servants of the soldier Florimond, etc. The plot is very simple, consisting of hardly anything but the return of Florimond from the wars, and his wrath at discovering Alix's relations not merely with Guillaume but with Eugène. He is finally made happy with Hélène. Alix takes the wise resolution to be less prodigal of her affections, and the play ends. Some detached passages, especially the opening scene, in which the lazy, dissolute life of wealthy churchmen is very pointedly satirised, are amusing enough, and the characters of the chaplain and the husband are not far from *la vraie comédie*. The tragedies are indirectly of more importance, but intrinsically much duller reading. Instead, however, of cleaving, as *Eugène* does, closely to the lines of the existing drama, the innovation in them is of the boldest kind. The octosyllabic verse, hitherto sacred to drama, is exchanged in *Cléopâtre* for a mixture of the decasyllabic and the Alexandrine, some scenes being written in the one, others in the other. Nor is the tentative character of the work only thus indicated; for the rhymes follow different systems in the different scenes. In *Didon*, however, Jodelle settled down to the unbroken Alexandrine with

alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes, which has remained the standard vehicle of French tragedy ever since. His general scheme follows that of Seneca closely, and his choruses are written in stanzas of short verses regularly arranged. The matter of both plays is taken with tolerable exactness, in the one case from Plutarch, in the other from Virgil; but a somewhat full analytic description of the first French tragedy must be given. *Didon* is something of an advance in versification, as has been pointed out, but in other respects it is perhaps inferior to *Cléopâtre*.

The piece begins with a prologue to the king, and then the first act opens with a long soliloquy from the ghost of Antony. Long speeches, it should be said, are the bane of this early French tragedy, and for nearly a century the evil increased instead of diminishing. Cleopatra, Charmium, and Eras then appear, for the play follows Plutarch strictly enough. The queen expresses her despair, and announces her intention to die. The first act is concluded by a long chorus of Alexandrian women, who bewail the shortness of life in six-syllable quatrains. The second act, like the first (unless the monologue of the ghost is counted in this latter), consists of only a single scene and a chorus. The scene is between Octavian, Agrippa, and Proculeius, who argue about the probable fate of Cleopatra. The conqueror is disposed to mercy and to regret for Antony's death, but his officers are less amiably minded. They agree, however, that Cleopatra will have to be watched for fear of suicide. The chorus now is nominally divided into strophes and antistrophes, but these are really only uniform stanzas of six six-syllable lines each, with the rhymes arranged a, b, a, b, c, c, and there is no epode. The third act contains the interview of Octavian with Cleopatra, the surrender of the

treasures, and the treachery of Seleucus. The chorus takes part in this scene both by a short song and a longer one in couplets, but arranged in eight-line stanzas, which is preceded by a dialogue with Seleucus. The act thus consists of two scenes. In the fourth act Cleopatra repeats and regularly matures her resolve of death. It contains two choric pieces of some beauty. The first is an undivided song in sixes and fours; the second has a regular arrangement of strophe, antistrophe, and epode three times repeated, consisting of five-syllable lines, of which the strophe and antistrophe contain eleven each and the epode eight, arranged—strophe and antistrophe a, b, a, b, c, c, d, d, e, e, d, epode a, b, a, b, c, c, d, d. The fifth act is very short, containing a recital by Proculeius of the Queen's death, and a choric lament in quatrains. It will thus be seen that the action in the piece is very small, except in the brawl with Seleucus; that the chorus has the full importance which it possessed in the classical tragedy; and that, owing to the few changes of scene and the other restrictions imposed upon himself by the poet, the dramatic capabilities of the plan are not a little limited. The same state of things continued to be the case during the whole duration of the school whose master Jodelle was. Style and versification were sometimes better, sometimes worse than his; but, with comparatively few exceptions, the general conception was the same, long monologues, few characters, an almost total defect of action, which is conducted by the aid of messengers, etc.

Minor Pléiade Dramatists.

The fervent spirit of imitation which characterised

the satellites of the Pléiade has already been noticed more than once. But in no department was it more marked than in that of drama. Jean de la Péruse, who, like many of the Pléiade poets, died very young, produced a *Medea* imitated from Seneca, and Charles Toustain an *Agamemnon,* also taken from the same author. Jacques de la Taille at a very early age wrote a *Darius* and an *Alexander*, besides a *Didon*, which is lost. These pieces have some merit, and it is noteworthy that the metre varies, as in Jodelle's model. A slight eccentricity of realism, however, has been Jacques de la Taille's chief passport to a place in the history of French literature. The death of Darius occurs in the middle of the word *recommandation*,

> Mes enfants et ma femme aie en
> recommanda ...
> Il ne put achever, ear la mort l'en garda.

It is perhaps not insignificant that the verse is completed if the word is not.

Of this immediate group of Jodelle's followers, however, the most remarkable before Garnier was Jacques Grévin, who was noteworthy both as a dramatist and as a poet. Grévin was a Protestant and a practitioner of medicine, in which capacity he accompanied Marguerite de France, Duchess of Savoy, to Turin, and died there, at the age of thirty. Before he was twenty he wrote a tragedy, *La Mort de César,* which has considerable merit, and two comedies, *Les Esbahis* and *La Trésorière*, which are perhaps better still. Jean de la Taille, the brother of Jacques, but a better poet and a better dramatist, wrote *Saul Furieux* and *Les Gabaonites*, two of the numerous sacred tragedies which have always found

favour in France, and the tradition of which it has been sought to revive even in our own day. The theatre, like the pulpit, was used as an engine by the Leaguers, but nothing of much value resulted from this.

Garnier.

Although many of the practitioners of this classical tragedy, notably Jodelle, Grévin, and Jean de la Taille, produced work of interest and merit, it contributed only one name which can properly be called great to literary history. This was that of Robert Garnier[207], who brought the form to the highest perfection of which it was capable in its earliest state. Garnier was born at La Ferté Bernard in 1545, and died, apparently in his native province of Maine, in 1601. He was a lawyer of some distinction, being a member of the Paris bar, then Lieutenant Criminel at Le Mans, and finally Councillor of State. He was an immediate disciple and favourite of Ronsard, who has spoken of him in those terms of magnificent eulogy of which he was liberal, but which here, if somewhat exaggerated, are by no means altogether misplaced. His dramatic works, extending to eight plays, were all composed in his earlier manhood, between 1568 and 1580. There is, however, a wide difference between the first six plays and the last two. The former, *Porcie*, *Cornélie*, *Marc-Antoine*, *Hippolyte*, *La Troade*, and *Antigone*, are all, as their titles show clearly, tragedies of antiquity closely modelled on Seneca and Euripides, especially Seneca. The *Cornélie*, it may be observed, was translated into English by Kyd. They do not differ much in arrangement from each other, or from Jodelle's *Cléopâtre*. In his two last

plays, however, produced in 1580, much greater power and originality appear. These were *Les Juives*, a Biblical tragedy on the fate of Zedekiah and Jerusalem, and *Bradamante*, a romantic tragi-comedy on a subject taken from Ariosto. The latter was apparently the first of its kind, dramatists having hitherto confined themselves to classical, contemporary, and Biblical subjects. There is, moreover, a curious incident connected with it. It contains no choruses, and in the preface of the published edition the manager is requested to have the want supplied in case of its being acted. Here too appears the confidant, a dubious present to the French theatre, but one of no small importance. The play is a remarkable one. The mixture of comic with tragic models gives the author much more liberty, of which he duly avails himself; the scenes are more numerous, the action more lively and complicated, the interest in every way greater. Yet it would seem, from the remark made above, that there was some doubt in the mind of the author whether it would ever be acted. Nor does it seem to have had much, if any, effect on the general character of stage plays. These continued to follow the Jodelle model until Hardy brought in the influence of Spain. Of that model *Les Juives* is assuredly the masterpiece. The choruses are of great beauty, admirably diversified in metre and rhythm, and occasionally all but equalling the best lyrics of the Pléiade. There is interest in the story, which deals with the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar on the Jewish king, and its chief drawback is its unrelieved gloom. The first act too, which consists of a monologue by the Prophet (unnamed) relieved only by the chorus, is justly open to that charge of monotony and absence of action, which is the great drawback of this class of drama.

Subsequently, however, a real interest is created in the question whether the conqueror will or will not give up his sanguinary purposes in consequence of the remonstrances of his general, Nebuzaradan, and the entreaties of Zedekiah's mother and his own Queen. The stiffness of the dialogue, which is remarkable in most of the tragedies of the period, is here a good deal softened. The speeches are still sometimes too long—Garnier was indeed a great offender in this way, and in his *Hippolyte* has inflicted an unbroken monologue of nearly two hundred lines on the hapless spectators. But very frequently the dialogue is fairly kept up, and sufficiently varied by the avoidance of the practice of concluding the speeches uniformly at the end of lines.

Defects of the Pléiade Tragedy.

On the whole, however, despite the literary excellence of at least some of the work composing it, it is impossible to give high rank as drama to the model of Jodelle. Although the unities were not by any means followed with the strictness which prevailed afterwards, the caution of Horace about awkward transactions on the stage was rigidly observed, and, with the usual illegitimate inference, carried out so as almost to exclude all action whatever. The personages were generally few, the acts divided into but a scene or two at most, the set *tirades* mercilessly long, and the whole thing, as it would appear to a modern spectator, dull and spiritless.

Pléiade

Comedy.

Larivey.

The dramatists of the Pléiade school, though they chiefly cultivated tragedy, did not by any means neglect comedy, their leader, Jodelle, having, as has been shown, set them the example in both kinds. Their comedy was, however, for some time a somewhat indeterminate kind of composition, and did not for the most part show much sign of the extraordinary excellence which French comedy was to attain in the next century. They seem to have hesitated between three models, the indigenous farce, the Italian comedy, which was a graft on the Latin, and the Latin comedy of Plautus and Terence itself. Yet *Eugène*, as has been said, is a great deal better as a play than either *Didon* or *Cléopâtre*. Its manner was closely imitated in the already-mentioned comedies of Grévin. The *Reconnue* of Belleau is a work of merit. Baïf turned the *Miles Gloriosus* into French under the title of *Taillebras*, which was acted with the curious accompaniment of choruses composed by, among others, Desportes, Belleau, and Ronsard himself. All these pieces kept the octosyllabic verse which the farce had consecrated. Afterwards it became fashionable to write comedies in prose. Jean de la Taille thus gave *Les Corrivaux*, Odet de Turnèbe *Les Mécontents*, François d'Amboise *Les Napolitaines*. But the chief comic author of the century, a better playwright than Garnier himself, was Pierre Larivey, who also wrote in prose[208]. He was born at Troyes about 1540, and died probably in the second decade of the seventeenth century. His father was an Italian, of the famous printer family of the Giunti, and on settling

in France he had dubbed himself L'Arrivé, which soon took the less recognisable form under which the dramatist is known. Pierre Larivey held a canonry at Troyes, and translated many Italian books of the most diverse kinds into French. Among these were numerous comedies, and the genius of the translator for his task in this case produced what are in effect as original compositions as most plays which call themselves original. Larivey took the utmost liberties with his models, adding, dropping, altering, exactly as he pleased, and writing his adaptations in a style excellent for the purpose. He produced twelve plays, of which nine are extant, *Le Laquais*, *La Veuve*, *Les Esprits*, *Le Morfondu*, *Les Jaloux*, *Les Escoliers*, published in 1579, and *Constance*, *Le Fidèle*, *Les Tromperies*, published in 1611. Each of these has an Italian original. But, as the originals themselves are frequently derived from classical sources, Larivey very often seems to be imitating these latter. A nearly complete idea of the character of his best piece, *Les Esprits*, may be obtained by those who know the *Aulularia* and *Andria*, and, on the other hand, the *École des Maris* and *L'Avare*, for he stands about midway between the classical comedies of Latin and French. Molière found a good deal of his property in Larivey, and so did other French comic authors.

FOOTNOTES:

[205] Ed. Héricault, Montaiglon, and Rothschild. 2 vols. Paris. 1858-1877.

[206] *Ancien Théâtre Français*, vol. iv.

[207] A good modern edition has appeared by Förster. Heilbronn, 1882.

[208] *Ancien Théâtre Français*, vol. vi. vii.

CHAPTER VI.

CALVIN AND AMYOT.

Prose Writers of the Renaissance.

It has been pointed out that Rabelais, in his capacity of representative author of the French Renaissance, exhibits all the characteristics of that Renaissance—its interest, half-enthusiastic and half-sceptical, in religious and philosophical questions, its devotion to ancient literature and learning, and the ardent zest with which it attacked at once the business and the pleasures of the world. The four most remarkable of the remaining prose authors of the century illustrate these characteristics as vividly but less universally. Montaigne indeed is almost as complete a representative of the entire character for the last half of the century as Rabelais is of the first. But even in him one note, the note of sceptical philosophy, is more dominant than any to be found in Rabelais. In the same way Calvin was the first, if not the most distinguished, of theologians who wrote modern French prose; Amyot the representative of erudition; and Brantôme of that attention to mundane business and pleasure which produced so many admirable

memoir-writers. Round each of the four, but especially round Amyot and Brantôme, numerous figures, sometimes of hardly less magnitude, have to be grouped. Chronological reasons, and the convenience of subdividing the subject, make it, however, advisable to take Calvin and Amyot first, leaving the authors of the *Essais* and the *Dames Galantes* with their train for another chapter.

Calvin.

Jean Calvin[209] was born in 1509, at Noyon, in Picardy, where his father held the post of procurator-fiscal to the bishop. He took orders very early, and obtained some preferment. Before long, by a transition very usual in that age, he exchanged divinity for law; but his interest was still in the former study, and he eagerly embraced the Reformed doctrines. Like other French reformers, he was at first rewarded by the favour of Francis and his sister Marguerite, but the tide soon turned, and he left France in 1534 for Basle. It is said that it was not till then that he learnt Hebrew. At Basle his *Institution* was published. After a year or two he went to Italy, where he was received by the Duchess of Ferrara, Renée of France, the steadiest of all the royal patrons of the French reformers. At last he established himself at Geneva, where, as is well known, he succeeded in setting up a kind of theocratic tyranny, which was for centuries the model and pattern of his faithful followers the Scotch Presbyterians. He was once banished, but recalled, and exercised his sway for about a quarter of a century. Into the too famous and much argued matters of his relations with Servetus, his intrigues with the French inquisitors to establish a kind of *Zollverein* of persecution and the

like, there is no need to enter here. He died in 1564. Calvin's greatest work in literature, as in theology, is the *Institution of the Christian Religion*, which, as has been said, was published at Basle in 1536. It was written in Latin, but four years later was republished in French, the author himself being the translator. The minor works of Calvin, both in Latin and French, are very numerous, but from the point of view of literary history they may be neglected, except certain satirical pamphlets wherein the writer displayed a considerable command of vigorous, if occasionally clumsy, satire and invective. The scurrility with which the debates of the Reformation were carried on on both sides is but too well known. Calvin was not so guilty in this respect as Luther, but he must bear a considerable portion of the blame. What is really valuable in Calvin's satiric style may be found more worthily represented in the less abstract passages of the *Institution*, notably the Address to the King.

The *Institution* itself is beyond all question the first serious work of great literary merit, not historical, in the history of French prose. It is strongly Latinised in form and construction, as might indeed be expected considering the circumstances of its production. But the point in which it differs from preceding works in which the classical influence is prominent, is that the author no longer attempts to give his classical colour by means of wholesale importations of terms. The vocabulary, though rich and varied, is still in the main genuine French, and the Latinism is more observable in occasional constructions and in the architecture of the clauses than in the mere selection of words. This clause-architecture was a matter of the last importance, for it was exactly in this respect that French, like most of the vernacular tongues, was

deficient. The entirely artless and mainly conversational array of the sentence which, out of verse, had hitherto been common, served for narrative well enough, but not at all for argument or discussion. Calvin threw his French clauses into the mould in which his Latin had been cast, and without unduly stiffening them produced a regularity of form which was entirely novel. Even when his sentences are of considerable length, there is clearness and simplicity in them, which in some languages, English for instance, was not generally reached in prose till much later. It is remarkable, too, that the besetting sin of serious French prose, its tendency to the declamatory, is well kept under by Calvin. Next to the graceful stateliness of his phrase, its extreme sobriety, not rejecting legitimate ornament, but seldom or never trespassing into the rhetorical, has to be observed. Considering that the whole of it was written before the author was seven-and-twenty, it is perhaps the most remarkable work of its particular kind to be anywhere found—the merits being those of full maturity and elaborate preparation rather than of youthful exuberance. The book consists of four parts; the first on God, the second on the Atonement, or rather on the Mediatorial Office of Christ, the third on the results of that Office, the fourth on Church Government. Its end, it need hardly be said, is double—the establishment in the most rigorous form of the doctrine of predestination and original sin, and the destruction of the sacramental and sacerdotal doctrines of the Catholic Church.

Minor Reformers and Controversialists.

Despite the fervid interest taken in religious disputation and the masterly example which Calvin had set both to friends and foes, theology proper did not contribute very much of value to literature during the period. Beza wrote chiefly in Latin, his *Histoire des Églises Réformées* being the chief exception. Pierre Viret, a Swiss by birth, who passed the last twenty years of his life at various towns in the south of France as a preacher and theological teacher, wrote a considerable number of treatises, both serious and satirical. The titles of some of the latter, *L'Alchimie du Purgatoire*, *La Cosmographie Infernale*, etc., are characteristic of the time. But Viret's literary merit was not remarkable. This kind of theological pasquinading was in great favour throughout the period, and authors of very various merit, such as Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde, Doré, Claude de Saintes, Arthus Désiré, and others, contributed plentifully to it. But the interest of their work is for the most part historical and antiquarian only. The title of 'Protestant Rabelais' has been absurdly given to Marnix. It is only so far deserved that the scurril language and gross images which with the master were but accessories, were with the pupil the main point. In the latter part of the century, after the quieting of the troubles of the League, two more serious disputants arose, each of considerable literary eminence. These were on the Protestant side, Philippe de Mornay, better known as Duplessis-Mornay, who distinguished himself equally as a soldier, a diplomatist, and a man of letters, and the still more famous Cardinal Du Perron, a converted Calvinist, who was supposed to be the most expert controversialist of a time which was nothing if not controversial. The chief theological work of Duplessis-Mornay was his *Traité de la Vérité*

de la Religion Chrétienne. The chief written theological work of Du Perron was a *Traité du Sacrement de l'Eucharistе*, in reply to a work on the same subject by Mornay.

Preachers of the League.

Between the controversies of the earlier part of the century and those of the latter, preaching, if not dogmatic theology, held an important place because of its political bearing. The pulpit style of the sixteenth century was for the most part an aggravation of that (already described) of the fifteenth, the acrimony of sectarian and factious partisanship leading the preachers to indulge in every kind of verbal excess. During the League the partisans of that organisation, especially in Paris, were perpetually excited against Henri III. and his successor by the most atrocious pulpit diatribes, the chief artists in which were Boucher, Rose, Launay, Feuardent, and Génébrard. The literary value of these furious outpourings however is very small. After their cessation a reaction set in, and for some time before the splendid period of pulpit eloquence, which lasted from St. Francis de Sales to Massillon, the general style of French homiletics was dull and laboured.

Amyot.

Jacques Amyot[210] was born at Melun in 1513, and belonged to the lowest class. He was educated as a servitor at the famous Collège de Navarre, and took his degree in arts at the age of nineteen. He then held various tutorships and attracted the notice of

Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, the constant patroness of men of letters, who gave him a Readership at Bourges. After some years of University teaching in the classics, he began his series of translations with the *Theagenes and Chariclea* in 1546. This was three years in advance of Du Bellay's manifesto, and though not a few translations had already appeared, none had even approached Amyot's in elegance. As usual at the time his literary reputation was rewarded by Church preferment and employment in the diplomatic service. He was also made tutor to Charles IX. and Henri of Anjou. His elder pupil, when he came to the throne, made him, first, Grand Almoner of France, and then Bishop of Auxerre, while Henri III. added the honour of a commandership in the order of the Holy Ghost. For a time, in the midst of the troubles of the League, Amyot was driven from his palace, but he returned and died, at the full age of fourscore, in 1594.

Besides the work of Heliodorus, Amyot translated Diodorus Siculus (1554), *Daphnis and Chloe*, Plutarch's *Lives* (1559), and Plutarch's *Morals* (1574). It may seem at first sight that his selection of authors to translate was somewhat peculiar. It was however, either by accident or design, singularly well suited to the age which he addressed. The positive merit of Heliodorus, and still more of Longus, is certainly greater than is usually admitted nowadays. But for that time they were peculiarly suited (and especially Longus) by their combination of romantic and adventurous description with graceful pictures of nature and amatory interludes. Plutarch, on the other hand, expressed, more than any other author, the practical and moralising spirit which accompanied this taste for romance. Montaigne confessed that he could not do without Plutarch, and it may be

doubted whether any other single author of antiquity, after the Ciceronian mania was over, exercised such an influence as Plutarch, through Amyot, North, and Shakespeare (a direct succession of channels), upon France and England.

The merit of the translator had not a little to do with the success of the books. Here is the testimony of the greatest in a literary sense of Amyot's readers. 'I give,' says Montaigne, 'and I think I am right in doing so, the palm to Jacques Amyot over all French writers, not only for the simplicity and purity of his vocabulary, in which he surpasses all others, nor for his industry in so long a task, nor for the depth of his learning which has enabled him to expound so happily a writer so thorny and crabbed. I am above all grateful to him for having selected and chosen a book so worthy and so suitable as a present to his country. We dunces were lost had not this book plucked us out of the mire. Thanks to it, we dare to speak and to write. By it ladies are in a position to give lessons to schoolmasters. It is our very breviary.' This praise, which is not exaggerated in itself, and still less when taken as an expression of the feeling of the time, refers of course to the 'Plutarch,' and in estimating it it is necessary to take account of Montaigne's especial affection for the author translated. But if we take in the lighter work, and especially the *Daphnis and Chloe*, Amyot will stand higher, not lower. His merit is not so much that he has known how to adjust himself and his style to two very different authors, but that in rendering both those authors he has written French of a most original model and of the greatest excellence. The common fault of translation, the insensible adoption of a foreign idiom—especially difficult to avoid at a time when no classical standards or models of the

tongue used by the translator exist—is here almost entirely overcome. The style of Amyot, who had little before him, if Calvin and Rabelais be excepted, but the clumsy examples of the *rhétoriqueur* school, is, as Montaigne justly says, perfectly simple and pure; and so little is it tinged either with archaism or with classicism that the seventeenth century itself, unjust as it was for the most part towards its predecessors, acknowledged its merit.

Minor Translators.

Dolet.

Although Amyot was by far the most considerable of the French translators of the sixteenth century, he was not by any means the first. Claude de Seyssel translated many Greek authors, Pierre Saliat produced a version of Herodotus, Lefèvre d'Étaples was the author of the first complete French translation of the Bible, and a cluster of learned writers, some of them remarkable for other work, such as Bonaventure des Périers, devoted themselves to Plato. Among these latter there is one who was in many ways a typical representative of the time. Étienne Dolet[211] was born at Orleans in 1509, lived a stormy life diversified by many quarrels, literary and theological, did much service to literature both in Latin and French, and, falling out with the powers that were, was burnt (having first been, as a matter of grace and in consequence of a previous recantation, hanged) in the Place Maubert, at Paris, on his birthday, August 3, 1554. Dolet had written many Latin speeches and tractates in the Ciceronian style—that of a curious section of humanists who

entertained an exclusive and exaggerated devotion to Cicero. Then, becoming himself a master-printer, he wrote several small treatises on French grammar, some poems, a short history of Francis the First, and finally, a translation of the Platonic or Pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus*, which was the proximate cause of his death. He was one of the earliest of the French humanist students to devote himself to the vernacular, and, though his short and troubled life did not enable him to perfect his French style, he is very interesting as a specimen. His friendship with Marot and Rabelais had in each case an unhappy end. In the latter this was due to a pirated edition of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, which reproduced expressions that Rabelais, in the rising storm of persecution, had been anxious to modify. As a Latin scholar Dolet was accurate and sound. His translations suffer somewhat from the want of a sufficiently definite and flexible French style, but the striving after such a style is apparent in them.

Dolet and the other persons just mentioned had translated for the most part prose into prose. Sanxon, Hugues Salel, Lazare de Baïf, Sibilet, and others, translated verse into verse; but the theory of French versification had not as yet been sufficiently studied to make the attempt really profitable. After the innovations of the Pléiade many of Ronsard's followers bent themselves to the same task with a better equipment and with more success. Almost all the poets mentioned elsewhere executed translations of more or less merit.

Fauchet.

From a literary point of view, however, the exercises of the century, in what may be called applied

scholarship, were, leaving out of sight for the moment Amyot's work, and also that, presently to be mentioned, of Herberay, of greater merit than its pure translations. All the mediaeval legends, assigning classical or semi-classical origins to the populations of France, were resumed and amplified by Jean Lemaire de Belges, in the first years of the century, in his *Illustrations des Gaules*. Lemaire belongs, as has been said elsewhere, for the most part to the earlier school of the Rhétoriqueurs, but his literary power was considerable. The style of research, mingling as it did antiquarian and historical elements with a strong infusion of what was purely literary, was illustrated during the period by three persons who deserve special mention. Claude Fauchet is a name of great importance in French literary history. So long as mediaeval literature actually flourished we should expect to find, and we do find, no attention paid to its history and development. Fauchet was the first person, so far as is known, who devoted himself to something like a critical examination of its results; and as many of the materials which he had at his disposal have perished, his work, with all its drawbacks, is still very valuable. His *Antiquités Gauloises et Françoises* are purely historical, but display a sound spirit of criticism. His *Recueil de l'Origine de la Langue et Poésie Françoise, Ryme et Romans, plus les Noms et Sommaires des Œuvres de CXXVII Poètes François vivans avant l'an MCCC*, is a work for its period (1581) almost unique. Philologically, of course, Fauchet is far from infallible, as, for instance, in his theory, obviously indefensible, that French is a cross between the tongues of the Gauls and the Romans. But his 'Noms et Sommaires' are actually taken from the study of manuscripts; and, as the works of the Trouvères had,

with few exceptions, long dropped out of sight, except in late fifteenth-century prose versions, the attempt to make them known was as salutary as it was bold.

Pasquier.

Fauchet unfortunately was not a good writer. This cannot be said of his principal rival, or rather successor, Étienne Pasquier. Pasquier was born at Paris in 1529, and early devoted himself to legal studies, which he pursued all through his life. His most famous performance as an advocate was his speech for the University of Paris against the Jesuits in 1565. He afterwards took a vigorous part in the Royalist polemic against the League. He did not die till 1615. His works, as yet unpublished in a complete form, are in modern times accessible chiefly in the selection of M. Léon Feugère[212]. They are voluminous, but by far the most important (with the exception perhaps of the valuable *Letters*) is the *Recherches de la France*. This is a somewhat desultory but very interesting collection of remarks on politics, history, social changes, and last, not least, literature. To us the most attractive part of Pasquier's literary history is the account he gives of the great poetical and literary movement of his own day, the revolution of the Pléiade, or, as he describes it picturesquely, 'De la Grande Flotte de Poètes que produisit le Règne du Roi Henry Deuxième.' But his notes on the previous history of literature in France, though necessarily based on somewhat imperfect knowledge, are full of interest, and not destitute of instruction, such, for instance, as his chapters on the farce of *Pathelin*, on Provençal poetry, on the formal measures of the fourteenth century, etc. Pasquier's

style is very delightful. Despite his erudition, and even what may be called his Ronsardising, he does not aim at the new severity and classicism. But his manner is exceedingly picturesque, perfectly clear, and distinguished by a sort of gossiping ingenuousness without any lack of dignity, the secret of which the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in France and England seem to have possessed and carried off with them.

Henri Estienne.

The third of three not dissimilar names is that of Henri Estienne. His remarkable *Apologie pour Hérodote*, like not a few other works of the same kind, would be less remarkable if it were stripped of borrowed plumes; but his three treatises on French linguistics, the *Traité de la Conformité du Français avec le Grec*, the *Précellence de la Langue Française*, and the *Nouveaux Dialogues de Langage Français Italianisé*, would give him a considerable place in the history of French literature if he had written no *Apologie* and published no *Thesaurus*. All three works are more or less directed against the Italianising mania of the day.

Herberay.

Here, perhaps, better than elsewhere, may be mentioned the name of one of the best, if not the best, purely narrative writer of French prose during the century, Herberay des Essarts. It is to Herberay that the famous romance of *Amadis of Gaul* owes most of its fame. According to the most probable story, the *Amadis* was originally translated by the

Spaniard Montalvo from a lost Portuguese original of the fourteenth century. There is absolutely no trace of a French original, the existence of which has been assumed by French critics. In form the *Amadis* is a long prose Roman d'Aventures, distinguished only from its French companions and predecessors by a somewhat higher strain of romantic sentiment, and by a greater abundance of giants, dwarfs, witches, and other condiments, which, even in its most luxuriant day, the simpler and more academic French taste had known how to do without, or at most, to apply moderately. It had been continued in the Spanish by more than one author, and was a very voluminous work when, in 1540, Herberay undertook to give a French version of it. He, in his turn, had continuators, but none who equalled his popularity or power. Readers of the Spanish complain that Herberay has not been a faithful translator, and, in particular, that he has been guilty of no few anachronisms. He probably troubled himself very little about exact fidelity or strict local and temporal colour. But he ranks, in order of time, second only to Calvin in the production of a clear, elegant, and scholarly French prose style. The book became immensely popular. It is said that it was the usual reading book for foreign students of French for a considerable period, and it was highly thought of by the best critics (such as Pasquier) of its own and the next generation. It had moreover a great influence on what came after it. To no single book can be so clearly traced the heroic romances of the early seventeenth century.

Palissy.

It may seem somewhat premature to speak of

scientific writers in the sixteenth century. Yet there are three who usually and deservedly hold a place in French literary history, and who cannot be conveniently classed under any other head. There are few better known names of the time than Bernard Palissy. His famous enamels are no doubt partly the cause of this, but other artists as great or greater are not nearly so living to us as this maker of pottery. He was born in or about 1510, at a village, Chapelle Broin, near Agen, and he died in the Bastile, in 1589, a prisoner for his Protestantism. Catherine de Medicis had saved him from the massacre of St. Bartholomew. His long life was occupied mainly in art and scientific researches, partly also in lecturing on natural history and physics, and in writing accounts of his investigations, which are not very voluminous, but which possess an extraordinary vividness of style and description. His treatise on pottery, the *Art de la Terre*, contains the passage which has become classical, describing his desperate efforts to discover the secret of the Italian enamellers. He also wrote a *Recepte véritable par laquelle tous les hommes de la France pourront apprendre à multiplier et à augmenter leurs Trésors*, and, some ten years before his death, a *Discours admirable de la Nature des Eaux et Fontaines*. His literary work is an almost unique mixture of research with genuine literary fancy.

Paré.

Ambroise Paré, also a famous name, was born about the same time as Palissy, and died the year after him. A freethinker in his way, he escaped all temptation to embrace the dangerous heresy which was so fatal, or, at least, so inconvenient, to many other men of

science and letters, and for the last forty years of his life he was court-surgeon. His literary work is not inconsiderable in amount, consisting, as might be expected, chiefly of professional treatises. The most interesting of his books, however, from a general point of view, and, as it happens, also by far the best written, is his *Apologie et Voyages*, a kind of autobiography which contains a large collection of anecdotes and details, not unimportant for the history of the time, as well as of much personal interest. The style of this book is often vivid and picturesque, as well as clear and precise.

Olivier de Serres.

It was fitting that agriculture, which is the staple industry of France, should contribute to her literature at this period—the most genuine and exuberant period of its history, if not that which produced the most minutely finished work. The *Théâtre de l'Agriculture et du Ménage des Champs* of Olivier de Serres was published in the last year of the century. The author was a native of the town of Villeneuve du Berg, in the present department of Ardèche. He was a Protestant and a great favourite of Henri IV., to whom he was useful in developing Sully's plans of internal economy. The *Théâtre de l'Agriculture* was long the classic book on the subject, and the author has been honoured, in quite recent times, by statues and other demonstrations. Like most books of the kind, it is much overlaid with erudition, but this only adds to its picturesqueness; and, as the author's precepts were founded on a life's experience of his subject, it certainly cannot be reproached with a want of practical knowledge and

aim.

Not a few other authors would require notice, if space permitted, in this class of scientific and erudite authors, particularly in the class of linguistics and literature. Such is Geoffroy Tory, a printer, grammarian, and prose-writer of merit in the early part of the century, who anticipated Rabelais in his protest against the indiscriminate Latinisation of the later Rhétoriqueurs. Not a few other writers, such as Pelletier and Fontaine, busied themselves during the period with grammar and prosody; while towards the close of it, the first French bibliographers of eminence, La Croix du Maine, and Du Verdier, made their appearance. But the works of all these, as rather ancillary to literature than actually literary, must here be passed over.

FOOTNOTES:

[209] Cauvin or Chauvin is the more correct form, but the Latinised Calvinus made Calvin more usual. Calvin's works are voluminous. The *Institution* was published in convenient shape at Paris in 1859.

[210] Most of Amyot is accessible only in the old editions. A beautiful edition of the *Daphnis and Chloe* has been published by L. Glady. London, 1878.

[211] Dolet's works are not easily to be found except in public libraries. The standard book on him is that of Mr. R. C. Christie (London, 1880), one of the best monographs on French literary history to be found in any language.

[212] 2 vols. Paris, 1849.

CHAPTER VII.

MONTAIGNE AND BRANTÔME.

Disenchantment of the late Renaissance.

A period of enthusiasm passes naturally and almost necessarily into one of scepticism, and it is in no way surprising that the prominent literary figure of the second half of the sixteenth century in France should have taken for his motto rather 'Que sais-je?' than, like Rabelais, 'Sursum Corda.' The early hopes of the Renaissance had been curiously disappointed. The Reformation had resulted not merely in cruel and destructive civil war, but in the formation, in too many cases, of a Protestantism not less imperious and far more illiberal than the Catholicism against which it protested. The economic and social effects of the discovery of the New World had been equally discouraging, and even the recovery of classical learning had produced a race of pedants almost as trifling as the last doting defenders of scholasticism. The evils of the civil state of France, moreover, drove nearly all the best men into the sect of *Politiques*, or Trimmers, who avowedly regarded high questions of truth and faith as subordinate to a politic opportunism. The age had not lost its power of enjoyment of affairs and of pleasure, but its appetite for higher things was somewhat blunted. In this state of matters a few persons, of whom Montaigne was

incomparably the most important, philosophised sceptically about life, and a great many, of whom Brantôme is the most typical, took pleasure in describing the ways and acts of an aristocracy which combined extraordinary luxury and corruption with great love of wit, singular intellectual ability, and a keen interest in war and business.

Montaigne.

Michel Eyquem, Sieur de Montaigne[213], was born, 'between eleven and twelve o'clock of the day' (the detail is characteristic), on the 28th of February, 1533, at the *château* from which he derived his name, and which he has made illustrious. Montaigne is situated in the old province of Perigord, or, according to modern nomenclature, in the department of Dordogne and the arrondissement of Bergerac. It is at no great distance from Bordeaux. The family was long believed from a phrase of Montaigne's own to have been of English extraction, introduced during the long tenure of Aquitaine by our sovereigns. But recent and industrious researches have shown that it may with greater probability have been of local origin and yeoman *status*. Pierre Eyquem, the father, had filled many important municipal offices at Bordeaux. Michel was his third son among nine children, but by the death of his elder brothers he inherited the family estate. He was educated early, and after the manner of a time when education was a subject on which almost all men of independent thought rode hobbies. Latin he learnt by conversation at a very early age, Greek as a kind of amusement. At the mature age of six he was placed at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, not the least famous of the famous schools of the time, for there it

was that Buchanan, Muretus, and Guérente, by the Latin plays which they wrote for their scholars to act, introduced the Senecan drama into France and showed the way to the French tragedy of the Pléiade. Seven years of study completed Montaigne's school education at the age of thirteen, when nowadays boys quit their preparatory cradles. He was set to work at law, but little positive is known of him for many years. In 1554, being then twenty-one, he was made counsellor in the Bordeaux *Parlement*, and in 1566 he married Françoise de la Chassaigne, daughter of one of his colleagues. Except casual references in the *Essays*, which are seldom precise, all we know of him during these years is his friendship with Étienne de la Boëtie. He almost certainly served one or more campaigns; but the most positive thing that can be said of his middle life is that, according to an existing inscription of his own, he finally retired, in 1571, on his thirty-eighth birthday, to the *château* which had become his by his father's death two years previously. He had already translated the *Theologia Naturalis* of Raymond de Sebonde. In the year of his retirement he edited the works of La Boëtie. But he now began a much more important task. The first two books of the *Essais* appeared in 1580; and immediately afterwards Montaigne, who suffered from severe internal disorders, undertook a long journey into Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, which occupied nearly a year and a-half. While sojourning at the baths of Lucca, he received the news of his appointment as mayor of Bordeaux, and hastened home. In 1588 he published the third Book of the *Essays*, and had troubles with the Leaguers in Paris. Four years afterwards, on the 13th September, 1592, he died of quinsy. Although Montaigne's municipal and legal

appointments at Bordeaux are all that we know him to have enjoyed, he is styled 'gentleman in ordinary to the king,' and letters extant from and to Charles IX., Henri III., and Henri IV., show him to have enjoyed a considerable social as well as literary position. He was a knight of the Order of St. Michael. By his wife he had several children, but all died young, except one daughter, who survived him and left offspring. His adopted daughter, however, Mademoiselle de Gournay, a celebrated character of the next age, and the first editor of his complete works after his death, is better known.

A complete abstract of Montaigne's work cannot be here attempted, and indeed no such thing is possible, because the work itself is absolutely destitute of general plan and exhibits no unity but a unity of spirit and treatment. Whether Montaigne himself invented the famous title *Essays* or not, is a matter of the very smallest importance. It is certain that he was the first to give the word its modern meaning, though he dealt with his subjects in a spirit of audacious desultoriness, which many of his successors have endeavoured to imitate, but which few have imitated successfully. His nominal subject is, as a rule, merely a starting-point, or at the most a text. He allows himself to be diverted from it by any game which crosses his path, and diverges as readily from his new direction. Abundant citation from the classics is one of his chief characteristics; but the two main points which differentiate him are, first, the audacious egotism and frankness with which he discourses of his private affairs and exhibits himself in undress; secondly, the flavour of subtle scepticism which he diffuses over his whole work. Both these are susceptible of a good deal of misconstruction, and both no doubt have been a good deal

misconstrued. His egotism, like most egotism, is a compound of frankness and affectation, and its sincerity is not, as an attraction, equal to the easy garrulity for which it affords an occasion of display. His scepticism, however, is altogether *sui generis*. It is not exuberant, like that of Rabelais, nor sneering, like that of Voltaire, nor despairing, like that of Pascal, nor merely inquisitive and scholarly, like that of Bayle. There is no reason for disbelieving Montaigne's sincere and conscious orthodoxy in the ecclesiastical sense. But his own temperament, assisted no doubt by the political and ecclesiastical circumstances already described, by indifferent bodily health, and by the period, if not exactly of excess, at any rate of free living, in his younger days, to which he so constantly alludes, had produced in him a general feeling that the *pros* and *cons* of different opinions and actions balance each other more evenly than is generally thought. He looks on life with a kind of ironical enjoyment, and the three books of his *Essays* might be described as a vast gallery of pictures illustrating the results of his contemplations.

There are some considerable differences between the earlier and later *Essays*, one of the most obvious of which concerns the point of length. Thus the first book consists of fifty-seven essays, occupying rather more than 500 pages[214], or an average of less than ten pages each. The second (exclusive of the long 'Apologie de Raymond Sebonde,' which occupies 300 pages by itself) contains thirty-six essays, of nearly 500 pages in all, or about twelve pages each. These books were published together, and may be presumed to have been written more or less at the same time. But the third and last book, though it contains full 550 pages, has only thirteen essays,

which thus average more than forty pages each, though their length is very unequal. Montaigne had, no doubt, found that his pillar-to-post method of discourse was sufficiently attractive to make fresh starting-points and definite titles unnecessary; thus in the third book, his subjects (at least his professed subjects) are sometimes much wider, and sometimes much more whimsical, than in the two first. Oedipus himself could hardly divine the actual subject of the essay 'Sur des Vers de Virgile,' or guess that a paper 'Sur les Coches' would in reality busy itself with the question what virtues are most proper to a sovereign. On the other hand, such large titles as 'De la Vanité de l'Expérience,' etc. give room for almost any and every excursion. All these are in the last book; the shorter essays of the two first for the most part deal more definitely with their nominal subjects, which are most frequently moral brocards: such as 'Le Profit de l'Un est Dommage de l'Autre,' 'Par Divers Moyens on arrive à Pareille Fin,' etc.

In a literary history, however, of the scale and plan of this present, the question of Montaigne's subjects and sentiments, interesting as it is, must not be allowed to obscure the question of the expression which he gave to these sentiments. His book is of the greatest importance in the history of French style, of an importance indeed which has been by no means invariably recognised by French literary historians themselves. It must be remembered that he at once attained, and never lost, an immense popularity. Thus the comparative oblivion which, owing to the reforms of the early seventeenth century and the brilliant period of production which followed them, overtook most of the men of the Renaissance, did not touch Montaigne. He, with Rabelais, remained a well of undefiled French, which all the artificial filtering

of Malherbe and Boileau could not deprive of its refreshing and fertilising power. Writing, too, at a period subsequent, instead of anterior to the innovations of the Pléiade, Montaigne was able to incorporate, and thus to save, not a few of the neologisms which, valuable as they were, the purists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries neglected. Many words which his immediate contemporaries, and still more his successors, condemned, have made good their footing in the language, owing beyond all doubt to his influence. His style, too, was valuable for something else besides its vocabulary. It entered so seldom into the plan of Rabelais to write in any other than a burlesque tone, that he was rarely able to display his own incomparable faculty of writing ordinary French, pure, vigorous, graceful, and flexible at once. The tale-tellers and memoir-writers of the time matured an excellent narrative style, but one less suited for other forms of writing. The theologians often obeyed the Latinising influence too implicitly. But Montaigne, with his wide variety of subject, required and wrought out for himself a corresponding variety of style. His very discursiveness and the constant flow of new thoughts that welled up in him helped him to avoid the great curse of all the vulgar tongues in the Renaissance—the long jointed sentence; the easy colloquial manner at which he aimed reflected itself in a style less familiar indeed than avowed burlesque, but at the same time more familiar than any writer had before used in treating of similar subjects. Yet no one was more capable than Montaigne, on the rare occasions when he judged it proper, of showing his mastery of sustained and lofty eloquence. The often-quoted passage in which he rebukes the vanity of man (who,

without letters patent or privilege, assumes to himself the honour of being the only created being cognisant of the secret of the universe) yields to nothing that had been written or was to be written for many years, fertile as the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were in both its characteristics, solemnity and dignity of expression. That a book which was thus rich in vocabulary, richer still in idiosyncrasy of expression, gracefully familiar in general style, and admirably eloquent in occasional passages, should at once become popular, and should remain so, could not be without a happy effect on the general standard of literary taste and the general acquaintance with the capabilities of the French language. That Montaigne himself was a sound critical judge and not merely a lucky practitioner of style, may be judged from his singling out Amyot as the great master of it among his own immediate predecessors. In so far, indeed, as prose style goes, master and scholar must undoubtedly take rank at the head of all the writers of the century when bulk and variety of examples are taken into account.

Charron.

Although, as has been already noted, Montaigne has many sides, his most striking peculiarity may be said to be the mixture of philosophical speculation, especially on ethical and political topics, with attention to the historical side of human life both in the past and in the present. He was, however, by no means the only teacher of ethics and political philosophy in his century. His own mantle was taken up, or attempted to be taken up, by Pierre Charron[215]. Born at Paris in 1541, he was thoroughly educated; studied law, in which he proceeded to a doctor's degree, and was called to the Paris bar, but then suddenly entered the Church, and became renowned as a preacher. He even thought of embracing the monastic life—a waste of ability which the ecclesiastical authorities, conscious of their need of eloquent advocates, did not permit. Charron belonged rather to the moderate or *politique* party than to the fanatics of Catholicism, and he directly attacked the League in his *Discours Chrétiens*, published in 1589. Five years later appeared a regular theological treatise entitled *Les Trois Vérités*, affirming, first, the unity of God, and consequently of orthodox religion; secondly, the sole authority of Christianity among religions; thirdly, the sole authority of Catholicism among Christian churches and sects. He held various preferments, and was a member of the special synod held to admit Henri IV. to the Roman communion. The only work by which he is generally remembered, the treatise *De la Sagesse*, was published in 1601. Charron died two years later, after preparing a second and somewhat

altered edition of the book. Charron was a personal friend of Montaigne, was undoubtedly his disciple, and borrowed largely, and in many cases verbally, from the *Essais*. His book, however, is far inferior both in style and matter to his master's, and Pope's praise of 'more wise Charron' can be due only to the fact that it is much more definitely sceptical. In curious contrast to its author's dogmatically theological treatise, *De la Sagesse* goes to prove that all religions are more or less of human origin, and that they are all indebted one to the other. The casuistry of the Renaissance on these points was, however, peculiar; and it has been supposed, with great show of reason, that Charron regarded orthodoxy as a valuable and necessary condition for the common run of men, while the elect would prefer a refined Agnosticism.

Du Vair.

These sceptical opinions were by no means the invention of Montaigne; they were part of the new learning grafted by the study of the classics on the thought of the middle ages, and had been long anticipated, not merely in Italy but in France itself. The poet and tale-teller, Bonaventure des Périers, had, as has been said, almost directly satirised Christianity in the *Cymbalum Mundi*, which created so great a scandal. On the other hand, Guillaume du Vair, a lawyer and speaker of eminence, sought, by combining Stoicism and Christianity, to oppose this sceptical tendency. Du Vair was a writer of great merit, who exactly reversed the course of Charron, beginning with theology and ending with law, though he died in double harness, as keeper of the Seals and bishop of Lisieux. His moral works[216]

were numerous: *Sainte Philosophie*, *De la Philosophie des Stoiques*, *De la Constance et Consolation des Calamités Publiques*. He translated, not merely Epictetus, which may be regarded as part of his ethical work, but numerous speeches of the Greek and Latin orators. He was himself a great speaker, and his best work is his *Discours sur la Loi Salique*, which contributed powerfully to the overthrow of the project for recognising the Infanta as Queen of France. He also wrote a regular treatise on French oratory. The style of Du Vair is modelled with some closeness on his classical patterns, but without any trace of pedantry.

Bodin and other Political Writers.

A greater name than Du Vair's in purely philosophical politics is that of Jean Bodin[217], the author of the only work of great excellence on the science of politics before the eighteenth century. Bodin was born at Angers in 1530, became a lawyer, was king's procureur at Laon, and died there in 1596. His great work, entitled after Plato *La République*, appeared in 1578. It was first published in French, but afterwards enlarged and reissued by the author in Latin. Bodin follows both Plato and Aristotle to some extent, but especially Aristotle, in his approach and treatment of his subject. But, unlike his masters, Bodin declares for absolute monarchy, of course wisely and temperately administered. The general literary sentiment was perhaps the other way. The affection of Montaigne, and a certain fertility of rhetorical commonplace which has always seduced Frenchmen in political matters, have given undue

reputation to the *Contre-un* or *Discours de la Servitude volontaire* of Étienne de la Boëtie[218]. In reality it is but a schoolboy theme, recalling the silly chatter about Harmodius and Brutus which was popular at the time of the Revolution. Many other political works were published in the course of the religious wars, but having been for the most part written in Latin, or translated by others than their authors, they do not concern us. The excellent Michel de l'Hospital, however, published many speeches, letters, and pamphlets on the side of conciliation, for the most part better intended than written; and the famous Protestants La Noue and Duplessis-Mornay were frequent writers on political subjects.

Brantôme.

The complement and counterpart of this moralising on human business and pleasure is necessarily to be found in chronicles of that business and that pleasure as actually pursued. In these the sixteenth century is extraordinarily rich. Correspondence had hardly yet attained the importance in French literature which it afterwards acquired, but professed history and, still more, personal memoirs were largely written. The name of Brantôme[219] has been chosen as the central and representative name of this section of writers, because he is on the whole the most original and certainly the most famous of them. His work, moreover, has more than one point of resemblance to that of the great contemporary author with whom he is linked at the head of this chapter. Brantôme neither wrote actual history nor directly personal memoirs. His work rather consists of desultory biographical essays, forming a curious pendant to the desultory moral essays of Montaigne. But around him

rank many writers, some historians pure and simple, some memoir-writers pure and simple, of whom not a few approach him in literary genius, and surpass him in correctness and finish of style, while almost all exceed him in whatever advantage may be derived from uniformity of plan, and from regard to the decencies of literature.

Pierre de Bourdeilles (who derived the name by which he is, and indeed was during his lifetime, generally known from an abbacy given to him by Henri II. when he was still a boy) was born about 1540, in the province of Perigord, but the exact date and place of his birth have not been ascertained. He was the third son of François, Comte de Bourdeilles, and his mother, Anne de Vivonne de la Chataigneraie, was the sister of the famous duellist whose encounter with Jarnac his nephew has described in a well-known passage. In the court of Marguerite d'Angoulême, the literary nursery of so great a part of the talent of France at this time, he passed his early youth, went to school at Paris and at Poitiers, and was made Abbé de Brantôme at the age of sixteen. He was thus sufficiently provided for, and he never took any orders, but was a courtier and a soldier throughout the whole of his active life. Indeed almost the first use he made of his benefice was to equip himself and a respectable suite for a journey into Italy, where he served under the Maréchal de Brissac. He accompanied Mary Stuart to Scotland, served in the Spanish army in Africa, volunteered for the relief of Malta from the Turks, and again for the expedition destined to assist Hungary against Soliman, and in other ways led the life of a knight-errant. The religious wars in his own country gave him plenty of employment; but in the reigns of Charles IX. and Henri III. he was more

particularly attached to the suite of the queen dowager and her daughter Marguerite. He was, however, somewhat disappointed in his hopes of recompense; and after hesitating for a time between the Royalists, the Leaguers, and the Spaniards, he left the court, retired into private life, and began to write his memoirs, partly in consequence of a severe accident. He seems to have begun to write about 1594, and he lived for twenty years longer, dying on the 15th of July, 1614.

The form of Brantôme's works is, as has been said, peculiar. They are usually divided into two parts, dealing respectively with men and women. The first part in its turn consists of many sub-divisions, the chief of which is made up of the *Vies des Grands Capitaines Étrangers et Français*, while others consist of separate disquisitions or essays, *Des Rodomontades Espagnoles*, 'On some Duels and Challenges in France' and elsewhere, 'On certain Retreats, and how they are sometimes better than Battles,' etc. Of the part which is devoted to women the chief portion is the celebrated *Dames Galantes*, which is preceded by a series of *Vies des Dames Illustres*, matching the *Grands Capitaines*. The *Dames Galantes* is subdivided into eight discourses, with titles which smack of Montaigne, as thus, 'Qu'il n'est bien séant de parler mal des honnestes dames bien qu'elles fassent l'amour,' 'Sçavoir qui est plus belle chose en amour,' etc. These discourses are, however, in reality little but a congeries of anecdotes, often scandalous enough. Besides these, his principal works, Brantôme left divers *Opuscula*, some of which are definitely literary, dealing chiefly with Lucan. None of his works were published in his lifetime, nor did any appear in print until 1659. Meanwhile manuscript copies had, as usual, been multiplied, with the result,

also usual, that the text was much falsified and mutilated.

The great merit of Brantôme lies in the extraordinary vividness of his powers of literary presentment. His style is careless, though it is probable that the carelessness is not unstudied. But his irregular, brightly coloured, and easily flowing manner represents, as hardly any age has ever been represented, the characteristics of the great society of his time. It is needless to say that the morals of that time were utterly corrupt, but Brantôme accepts them with a placid complacency which is almost innocent. No writer, perhaps, has ever put things more disgraceful on paper; but no writer has ever written of such things in such a perfectly natural manner. Brantôme was in his way a hero-worshipper, though his heroes and heroines were sometimes oddly coupled. Bayard and Marguerite de Valois represent his ideals, and a good knight or a beautiful lady *de par le monde* can do no wrong. This unquestioning acceptance of, and belief in, the moral standards of his own society, give a genuineness and a freshness to his work which are very rare in literature. Few writers, again, have had the knack of hitting off character, superficially it is true, yet with sufficient distinction, which Brantôme has. There is something individual about all the innumerable characters who move across his stage, and something thoroughly human about all, even the anonymous men and women, who appear for a moment as the actors in some too frequently discreditable scene. With all this there is a considerable vein of moralising in Brantôme which serves to throw up the relief of his actual narratives. He has sometimes been compared to Pepys, but, except in point of garrulity and of readiness to set down on paper anything that

came into their heads, there is little likeness between the two. Brantôme was emphatically an *écrivain* (unscholarly and Italianised as his phrase sometimes appears, if judged by the standards of a severer age), and some of the best passages from his works are among the most striking examples of French prose.

Montluc.

Next to Brantôme, and in some respects above him, though of a somewhat less remarkable idiosyncrasy, come Montluc, La Noue, and D'Aubigné, with Marguerite de Valois not far behind. Blaise de Lasseran-Massencôme, Seigneur de Montluc[220], was a typical *cadet de Gascogne*, though he was not, strictly speaking, a cadet, being the eldest son of a fortuneless house. He became page to Antoine of Lorraine, and made his first campaign under the orders of Bayard, fighting through the whole of the Italian war, and being knighted on the field at Cérisoles. In the next reign he was promoted to high command, and held Sienna against the Imperialists with distinguished gallantry and skill. When the civil war broke out he was made Governor of Guyenne, where he maintained order with the strong hand, 'heading and hanging' Catholics and Protestants alike, if they showed signs of disloyalty. Ruthless as he was, he was one of the few great officers who refused to participate in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. He was made a marshal in 1574, and died three years later. Montluc's Memoirs are purely military, and the most famous description of them is that of Henri IV., who called them the soldier's Bible. His style is concise, free from the slightest attempt at elaborate ornament, but admirably picturesque and clear. His account of his exploit at Sienna is one of

the capital chapters of French military history. But almost any page of Montluc possesses eminently the characteristics which great generals from Cæsar downwards have almost uniformly displayed, when they possess any literary talent at all. The words and sentences are marshalled and managed like an army; everything goes straight to the point; there is no confusion, and the whole complicated scene is as clear as a geometrical diagram.

La Noue.

The Memoirs of La Noue are usually spoken of separately, though in reality they form a part of his *Discours Politiques et Militaires*. François de la Noue, called Bras-de-Fer (a surname which he deserved not metaphorically, but literally, having had to replace one of his arms shot off during a siege), was a Breton, and of a good family. He was born in 1531, fought through the religious wars, escaped St. Bartholomew by being Alva's prisoner in Flanders, took an active part against the League, and died at the siege of Lamballe, Aug. 4, 1591. His defence of La Rochelle was one of the chief of his many feats of arms. The 'Discourses' were published during his life. They are of a more reflective character than those of Montluc, and display much greater mental cultivation. The style is not quite so vivid, the sentences are longer and more charged with thought. La Noue, in short, is a philosophical soldier and a politician. His style is perhaps less archaic than that of any of his contemporaries, and is distinguished by a remarkable strength, sobriety, and precision. He was very highly thought of by both political parties, and was not unfrequently employed in schemes of mediation. It is a pleasant story, and not irrelevant in

a history of literature, that a scheme for his assassination during one of his visits to Paris was discovered by Brantôme, who warned his future craftsfellow of it.

Agrippa d'Aubigné.

Agrippa d'Aubigné belongs to this section of the subject by his *Vie à ses Enfants*, often called his memoirs, by his *Histoire Universelle*, and by a great number of letters. The same qualities which distinguish D'Aubigné in verse are recognisable in his prose, his passionate and insubordinate temper, the keenness of his satire, the somewhat turbid grandeur of his style and images, the vigour and picturesqueness of occasional traits. The *Histoire Universelle* and the *Vie à ses Enfants* were both works written in old age, but there is hardly any sign of failing power in them. The *Vie* in particular contains many passages, such as the vision of his mother and the passionate charge which his father laid upon him at the sight of the victims of the Amboise conspiracy, which rank very high among the prose of the century. The *Histoire Universelle*, like the book which Raleigh wrote almost at the same time, and under not dissimilar circumstances, is necessarily in great part a compilation, but has many passages worthy of its author at his best.

Marguerite de Valois.

The Memoirs of Marguerite de Valois contain what is perhaps the best-known and oftenest quoted passage of any memoirs of the time, that in which the Princess describes the night of St. Bartholomew.

There are not many such stirring passages in them, but throughout Marguerite gives evidence of the remarkable talent which distinguished the Valois. Her evident object is to justify herself, and this makes the book somewhat artificial. It is dedicated to Brantôme, but shows in its manner rather the influence of Ronsard and the Pléiade by the classical correctness of the style, the absence of archaisms, and the precision and form of the sentences. According to the principles of the school, the vocabulary is simple and vernacular enough, for the Pléiade regarded ornate classicisms of language as proper to poetry.

In a rank not much below those mentioned must be placed the so-called *Mémoires de Vieilleville*, the *Chronologies* of Palma-Cayet, the *Registres-Journaux* of Pierre de l'Estoile, the Letters of Duplessis-Mornay, Cardinal d'Ossat, and Henri IV. himself, and the *Négotiations* of the President Jeannin.

Vieilleville.

The Maréchal de Vieilleville was one of the foremost French generals of the sixteenth century, and, considering the violent and unscrupulous ways of the time, he had a good reputation for moderation, probity, and patriotism, as well as for courage and ability. His Memoirs are not his own work, but that of his secretary and lifelong companion, Vincent Carloix. They have some of the defects of a deliberate panegyric; but Carloix is a vigorous and able writer, who, without completely emancipating himself from the tyranny of the long involved sentence, contrives to write clearly, and often with much picturesque effect.

Palma-Cayet.

Pierre Victor Palma-Cayet was of mean extraction, but received a good education, and was introduced by La Noue to Jeanne d'Albret as a suitable assistant-tutor for her son. After the accession of his pupil, he was appointed to various offices, one of which, that of Chronologer Royal, no doubt occasioned the odd titles of his two principal works, *Chronologie Novénaire* and *Chronologie Septénaire*, which give the history of Henri's reign, dividing it into two portions, the one of nine years, the other of seven. Cayet also wrote several minor works, and divides with D'Aubigné the doubtful honour of being the author of the *Divorce Satirique*, a scurrilous pamphlet against Marguerite. The *Chronologies* are extremely full of matter, and admirably precise in their information, but their literary value is not great.

Pierre de l'Estoile.

From this point of view Pierre de l'Estoile[221] is of a higher class. He was a lawyer of rank and an indefatigable writer. Day by day he put down in his *Tablettes* all sorts of public and private affairs, as well as literary extracts, obituary notices, and, in short, almost the entire material of a modern newspaper. Pierre de l'Estoile, much more than Brantôme, is the French Pepys. Although occasionally prejudiced, the writer seems to have been acute and well-informed, and his manner of dealing with his heterogeneous materials is light and lively.

D'Ossat.

Of the three correspondence-writers just mentioned, though Henri himself is a vigorous and fertile writer, the most important by far is Cardinal D'Ossat. He was born in the south of France in 1536, and had not, unlike many of the diplomatist ecclesiastics of the period, the advantage of high birth. Like many of his contemporaries, he began as a lawyer and only subsequently took orders. He began diplomatic life as Secretary to the Archbishop of Toulouse, who was ambassador at Rome, and later on conducted the negotiations which led to the conversion of Henri IV. He then became Bishop of Rennes and cardinal. His letters are almost entirely devoted to subjects connected with his profession, and have always held a position as one of the earliest models of diplomatic writing. D'Ossat's style, especially in respect of its vocabulary, was long regarded as a pattern, but it has less character than that of some other sixteenth-century writers.

Sully.

The last two books to be named belong, in point of date, to the next century, but were written by, or for, men who were emphatically of the sixteenth. The extraordinary form of Sully's Memoirs is well known. They are neither written as if by himself, nor of him as by a historian of the usual kind. They are directly addressed to the hero in the form of an elaborate reminder of his own actions. 'You then said this;' 'his Majesty thereupon sent you there;' 'when you were two leagues from your halting-place, you saw a courier coming,' etc. It is needless to say that this manner of telling history is in the highest degree unnatural and heavy, and, after the first quaintness of it wears off, it makes the book very hard to read.

It contains, however, a very large number of short memoirs and documents of all kinds, in which the elaborate farce of 'Vous' is perforce abandoned. It shows Sully as he was—a great and skilful statesman: but it does not give a pleasant idea of his character.

Jeannin.

Pierre Jeannin was, like D'Ossat, a diplomatist in the service of Henri IV. He had previously discharged many legal functions of importance, and subsequently he was Controller-General of the Finances. His *Négotiations* contain the record of his proceedings on a mission to the Netherlands to watch over the interests of France. The book consists of letters, despatches, treaties, and such-like documents, very clear, precise, and written in a remarkably simple and natural style.

Minor Memoir-writers.

There were many other writers of memoirs during the period, most of whose works are comprised in the invaluable collections of Petitot, Michaud, Poujoulat, and Buchon. But few of them require a separate mention here. Guillaume and Martin du Bellay, two brothers, have left a history of Francis I.'s reign, of which the part belonging to Guillaume is only a small fragment of an immense work which he entitled *Les Ogdoades*, it being divided into seven batches of eight books each. The imitation of the classics is obvious, and the constant intrusion of classical parallels rather tedious. The Memoirs of the Duke of Guise, composed in great part of what we should call his secretary's letter-book, are very

voluminous, but not of much literary value. François de Rabutin, author of *Commentaires des Guerres de la Gaule Belgique*, has the fault, common to his time, of enormous sentences, but is often lively and picturesque enough, as becomes a member of the family of Madame de Sévigné and of Bussy-Rabutin. The famous Marshal de Tavannes, on whom more than on any single man rests the blood of St. Bartholomew's Day, found a biographer in his son Jean de Tavannes, whose work, though somewhat too elaborate, is interesting. Another son, Guillaume de Saulx-Tavannes, has written his own memoirs on a smaller scale. The memoirs of Michel de Castelnau show more of the tradition of Comines than most of their contemporaries, and are remarkably full of political studies. Boyvin du Villars, of whom little is known, left voluminous memoirs which have some literary merit. The last book of memoirs of some size which needs to be mentioned, is that of Nicholas de Neufville, Seigneur de Villeroy, a politician of eminence and a vigorous writer. Some short pieces may be noticed, such as the Siege of Metz, by Bertrand de Salignac, that of St. Quentin, by Coligny himself, the only literary monument of the Admiral (an excellent specimen of the military writing of the time), and a very curious history of Annonay in the Vivarais by Achille Gamon, which gives perhaps the liveliest idea obtainable of the sufferings of the French provincial towns during the religious wars.

General Historians.

The general histories, which make up a second class of historical writings, are, as a rule, of very much less value than these personal memoirs. Not till the

extreme end of the period did the historical conception take a firm hold in De Thou, and the *Thuana* was written in Latin, which excludes it and its author from detailed notice here. D'Aubigné's *Histoire Universelle* of his own time has been mentioned for convenience' sake already. Lancelot de la Popelinière attempted in the last quarter of the century a general history of France, and incidentally of Europe during his own day. He is said to have spent all his fortune on getting together the materials, but his literary powers were small. About the same time Bernard Girard, Seigneur du Haillan, published a history of France from the earliest times, which an extract of Thierry's, giving the speeches of Charamond and Quadrek, Merovingians of Du Haillan's own creation, who speak on the advantages of different forms of government at the election of Pharamond, has made known to many persons who never saw the original. The source of this grotesque imagination is of course obvious to readers of Herodotus, and similar imitation of classical models is frequent in Du Haillan's work. François de Belleforest also wrote a general history of France, which was long read, and the names of Du Tillet, Jean de Serres, Charron, Dupleix, etc. may be mentioned. But they represent writers of little importance, either from the point of view of history, or from that of literature.

FOOTNOTES:

[213] The standard edition until recently has been that of Le Clerc (4 vols. Paris, 1866). That of Louandre in the Bibliothèque Charpentier is handy and useful. MM. Courbet and Roger have begun a handsome edition.

[214] The references are to the edition of Louandre.

[215] *De la Sagesse.* 2 vols. Paris, 1789.

[216] Ed. 1641.

[217] Ed. 1578.

[218] Ed. Feugère. Paris, 1846.

[219] Ed. Buchon. 2 vols. Paris, 1839. The Société de l'Histoire de France has a voluminous edition on hand. Mérimée, who was a great admirer of Brantôme, began an edition for the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne, but left it unfinished.

[220] Montluc's *Memoirs*, as well as most of those mentioned below, will be found in the collection of Michaud and Poujoulat.

[221] The earlier editions of this writer are not complete. In 1875 a full reprint was begun.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE *SATYRE MÉNIPPÉE*. REGNIER.

Satyre Ménippée.

The period of the Renaissance in France closed with two works (one for the most part in prose and due to various authors, the other wholly in verse and the

work of one only) which exhibit the highest excellence. The *Satyre Ménippée* and the satires of Regnier are separated in point of date of publication by some fifteen years, and the contributors to the first-named work belong for the most part to an earlier generation, and represent a less accomplished state of the language than the great satirist who, after fifteen centuries, took up the traditions of his Roman masters. But both are satirical in substance, though the *Ménippée* is almost wholly political, and Regnier busies himself with social and moral subjects only. Both possess in a high degree the characteristics of the period which they close. Both exhibit a remarkable power of treating ephemeral subjects in a manner calculated to make their interest something more than ephemeral. Both have met with the just reward of continuing to be popular even at times when the most unjust unpopularity rested on work scarcely less excellent but less calculated to please the taste of those who, however much they may sympathise with the fashions of their own day, are unable to sympathise with those of a day which is not theirs.

The *Satyre Ménippée*[222] was a remarkable, and, for those who take an interest both in literature and in politics, a most encouraging instance of the power of literary treatment at certain crises of political matters. It appeared in 1594, at the crucial period of the League. For years there had existed the party known for the most part uncomplimentarily as *Les Politiques*. These persons professed themselves unable to find, in the simple difference of Catholic *v.* Protestant, a *casus belli* for Frenchmen against Frenchmen. Their influence, however, though it occasionally rose to the surface in the days of Charles IX. and Henri III., had never been lasting, and they

laboured under the charge of being Laodiceans, trimmers, men who cared for nothing but hollow peace and material prosperity. The assassination of Henri III., and the open confederation between the Leaguers and the Spanish party, at last gave them their opportunity, and it was seized with an adroitness which would have been remarkable in a single man, but which is still more remarkable in a group of men of very different antecedents, professions, ages, and beliefs. The *Satyre Ménippée* is, in fact, the first and most admirable example of the theory of the modern newspaper—the theory that the combined ability of many men is likely, on the whole, to treat complicated and ephemeral affairs better than the limited, though perhaps individually greater, ability of any one man. The *Ménippée*, prose and verse, was due to the working of a new Pléiade —Leroy, Gillot, Passerat, Rapin, Chrestien, Pithou, and Durant. Most of them were lawyers, a few were more or less connected with the Church. Pierre Leroy, a canon of Rouen, of whom nothing is known, but whose character De Thou praises, is said to have planned the book, and to have acted in some way as editor. Jacques Gillot, clerk-advocate of the Parliament, received the literary conspirators in his house. Passerat and Rapin represented the mixed classical and French culture of the immediate companions of Ronsard. Florent Chrestien was a converted Huguenot, much given to translation of ancient authors. Pithou (the writer of the harangue of Claude d'Aubray, the most important piece of the whole and containing the moral and idea of the book) was, like Chrestien, a convert. He ranks as one of the most distinguished members of the French bar, and had a deserved reputation for every kind of learning in his time. Lastly, Durant, who contributed

rather to the appendix of the book than to the book itself, was an Auvergnat gentleman, who preferred poetry to law, and justified his preference by some capital work, partly of a satirical kind, partly of an elegant and tender gallantry, anticipating, as has been justly said, the eighteenth century in elegance, and excelling it in tenderness.

The plan of the *Ménippée* (the title of which, it is hardly necessary to say, is borrowed from the name of the cynic philosopher celebrated by Lucian) is for the time singularly original and bold; but the spirit in which the subject is treated is more original still. Generally speaking, the piece has the form of a *compte-rendu* of the assembly of the states at Paris. The full title is *De la Vertu du Catholicon d'Espagne et de la Tenue des États de Paris*. The preface contains a sarcastic harangue in orthodox charlatan style on the merits of the new Catholicon or Panacea. Then comes a description (in which, as throughout the work, actual facts are blended inextricably with satirical comment) of the opening procession. To this succeeds a sketch of the tapestries with which the hall of meeting was hung, all of which are, of course, allegorical, and deal with murders of princes, betrayal of native countries to foreigners, etc. Next comes *L'Ordre tenu pour les Séances*, in which the chief personages on the side of the League are enumerated in a long catalogue, every item of which contains some bitter allusion to the private or public conduct of the person named. Seven solemn speeches are then delivered by the Duke de Mayenne as lieutenant, by the legate, by the Cardinal de Pelvé, by the bishop of Lyons, by Rose, the fanatical rector of the University, by the Sieur de Rieux, as representative of the nobility; and, lastly, by a certain Monsieur d'Aubray, for the *Tiers-État*. A

burlesque *coda* concludes the volume, the joints of which are, first, a short verse satire on Pelvé; secondly, a collection of epigrams due to Passerat; and, thirdly, Durant's *Regret Funèbre à Mademoiselle ma Commère sur le Trépas de son Âne*, a delightful satire on the Leaguers, which did not appear in the first edition, but which yields to few things in the book.

It has been said that the plan of the *Ménippée* has of itself not a little originality. Satirical comment and travesty devoted to political affairs had been common enough almost for centuries in France, but no satire of the kind had hitherto flown so high, or with so well-organised a flight. The seven speeches, which form the bulk of the book, display moreover a remarkable variety and a still more remarkable combination of excellences. The first six—those of Mayenne, the legate, Pelvé, the bishop of Lyons, Rose, and Rieux, none of which is long—are, without exception, caricatures, and of that peculiar order of caricature in which the victim is made, without a glaring violation of probability, to render himself vile and ridiculous, and to give utterance to the satire and invective which the author desires to pour upon him. Butler (who beyond all doubt had the *Satyre Ménippée* in his mind when he projected his own immortal travesty of the Puritan party) is the only writer who has ever come near to its authors in this particular department of satire. Treated as they were by different hands, there is a curiously pleasing variety of style in the portraits. Mayenne uses a mixture of aristocratic and somewhat haughty frankness with garrulous digression. The two cardinals indulge in an astounding macaronic jargon, the one of Italian mingled with Latin, the other of Latin mingled with French. The bishop of Lyons, and

Rose the rector, preach sermons, after the fashion of the time, thickly larded with quotations, stories, and so forth. Rieux (he was a noted bandit) expresses with soldierly frankness his extreme surprise that he should have become a gentleman and the representative of the nobility, and mildly reproaches Mayenne and the League for not having given *carte-blanche* to himself and his likes to finish off the *Politiques* bag-and-baggage. But in the last harangue, that of the representative of the *Tiers-État*, Claude d'Aubray, which is, as has been said, the work of Pithou, and which occupies something like half the book, the tone is entirely altered. In this remarkable discourse the whole political situation is treated seriously, and with a mixture of practical vigour and literary skill of which there had hardly been any precedent instance. D'Aubray denounces the condition of Paris first, and the condition of the kingdom afterwards. The foreign garrisons, the sufferings of private persons by the war, the deprivation or suspension of privileges, are all commented upon. A remarkable historical sketch of the religious wars follows, and then turn by turn the speaker attacks those who have spoken before him, and exposes their conduct. A vigorous sketch of 'Le Roy que nous voulons et que nous aurons,' leads up to the announcement that this king is no other than 'Notre vray Roy légitime, naturel et souverain, Seigneur Henry de Bourbon, cy-devant Roy de Navarre.' After this discomposing harangue the assembly breaks up in some confusion.

The *Satyre Ménippée* had an immense effect, and may, perhaps, be justly described as the first example, in modern politics, of a literary work the effect of which was really great and lasting. It is not surprising that such should have been its fortune. For

it is a remarkably happy mixture of the older style of *gaulois* jocularity (in which exaggeration, personal attack, insinuations of a more or less scandalous character and the like, furnished the attraction) and the newer style of chastened and comparatively polished prose. The greater part of the first six speeches are of a more antique cast than Montaigne; and though the speech of D'Aubray exhibits a more elaborate and less familiar style, it too is definitely plain and popular in manner. Although there are the allusions usual at the time to classical subjects, the Pléiade pedantry, with which at least two of the contributors, Passerat and Rapin, were sufficiently imbued, is conspicuously absent. Rabelais is frequently alluded to; and when the style of the book and the obvious intention of appealing to the general, which it exhibits, are considered, no better testimony to the popularity of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* could be produced. The descriptions, too, have a Rabelaisian minuteness and richness about them; and in the burlesque parts the influence of that master is equally perceptible. But the strictly practical point of view is always maintained; and the temptation, always a strong one with French writers of the middle age and Renaissance, to lose sight of this in endless developments of mere amusing buffoonery, is constantly resisted. There is certainly less exaggeration in the *Ménippée* than in *Hudibras*, though the personal weaknesses of the innumerable individual persons satirised contribute more to the general effect than they do in Butler's great satire. The distinguishing trait of the *Satyre Ménippée*, next to those already mentioned, is the constant rain of slight ironical touches contributing to the general effect. Thus the arms of the processioning Leaguers are, 'le tout rouillé par Humilité Catholique;' the

League scholastics and preachers 'forment tous leurs arguments in *ferio*.' The deputies' benches are covered with cloth, 'parsemées de croisettes de Lorraine et de larmes miparties de vair et de faux argent.' These sure and rapid touches distinguish the book strongly from nearly all mediaeval satire, in which the satirists are wont, whenever they make a point, to dwell on it, and expound it, and illustrate it, and make the most of it, until it loses almost all its piquancy. Very different from this over-elaboration is the confident irony of the *Ménippée*, which trusts to the intelligence of the reader for understanding and emphasis. 'Vous prévoyez bien,' says Mayenne, 'les dangers et inconvéniens de la paix qui met ordre à tout, et rend le droit à qui il appartient.' Hardly even Antoine de la Salle, and certainly no other among the authors of the preceding centuries, would have ventured to leave this, obvious as it seems now-a-days, to reach the reader by itself.

Regnier.

A similar but a still more remarkable, because an individually complete, example of the combination of Gallican tradition with classical study was soon afterwards shown by Mathurin Regnier[223]. Regnier was born at Chartres on the 21st of December, 1573, his father being Jacques Regnier, a citizen of position; his mother was Simonne Desportes, sister of the poet. Jacques Regnier desired for his son the ecclesiastical, but not the poetical, eminence of his brother-in-law, and Mathurin was tonsured at nine years old. The boy, however, wished to follow his uncle's steps in the other direction, and early began to write. It is said that he wrote lampoons on the inhabitants of his native town, and, repeating them

to the frequenters of a tennis-court which his father had built, got himself thus into trouble. His father's threats and punishments, however, had no more effect than is usual in such cases, and Regnier soon, but at a date not exactly known, betook himself to his uncle at Paris. By Desportes, who was in favour with many high personages, he was recommended to the Cardinal de Joyeuse, and took part in that prelate's embassy to Rome in 1593. Joyeuse, however, did nothing for him, and in 1601 he again went to Rome in the suite of Philippe de Bethune. He returned before long, and, in 1604, a canonry, to the reversion of which he had been presented long before, fell in. His first collection of satires appeared in 1608. Five years afterwards, in 1613, on the 22nd of October, he died at Rouen, having not quite completed his fortieth year. His way of life had unfortunately been by no means regular, and his early death is said to have been directly caused by his excesses.

In this short sketch almost everything that is known of Regnier, except a few anecdotes, has been included, and the total is, it will be seen, exceedingly meagre. Nor is his work abundant even for a man who died comparatively young. Sixteen satires, three epistles, five elegies, and a few miscellaneous pieces, make it up, and probably the total does not exceed seven or eight thousand lines. The relative excellence of this work is however exceedingly high. Regnier is almost the only French poet before the so-called classical period who has continuously maintained his reputation, and who has only been decried by a few eccentric or incompetent critics. He was an ardent defender of the Ronsardising tradition, yet Malherbe, whom he did not hesitate to attack, thought and spoke highly of him. In the next age Boileau allotted

to him a mixture of praise and blame which is not too apposite, but in which the praise far exceeds the blame, and elsewhere declared him to be the French writer, before Molière, who best knew human nature. The approval of Boileau secured that of the eighteenth century, while Regnier's defence of the Pléiade propitiated the first Romantics. Thus buttressed on either side, he has had nothing to fear from literary revolutions. Nor will any judgment which looks rather at merit than authority arrive at an unfavourable conclusion respecting him. His satires are not indeed absolutely the first of their kind in French. Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, Jean de la Taille, and above all, D'Aubigné, had preceded him. But in breadth as well as, except in the case of D'Aubigné, in force, and above all in even excellence and technical merit, he far surpassed those who in a manner had shown him the way. His satire is exclusively social, and thus it escapes one of the chief drawbacks of political satire, that of dealing with matters of more or less ephemeral existence and interest. He has indeed borrowed considerably from the ancients, but he has almost always made his borrowings his own, and he has in some cases improved on his originals. He has softened the exaggerated air of moral indignation which his English contemporaries, Hall and Marston, borrowed from Juvenal, and which sits so awkwardly on them and on many other satirists. He has avoided such still more awkward followings as that which made Pope upset all English literary history in order to echo Horace's remarks about Rome and Greece. Sometimes he has fallen into the besetting sin of his countrymen, the tendency to represent mere types or even abstractions instead of lifelike individuals embodying the type, but he has more often avoided

it. His descriptive passages are of extraordinary vigour and accuracy of touch, and his occasional strokes are worthy of almost any satiric or didactic poet. He is perhaps weakest, like all poets with the signal exception of Dryden, when he is panegyrical. Yet his first satire—in the order of arrangement not of writing—addressed to the King, Henri IV., has much merit. The second, on poets, has more, and abounds in vigorous strokes, such as that of the courtier bard who

> Méditant un sonnet, médite un évêché;

and as the couplet which concludes a lively sketch of his diplomatic experiences—

> Mais instruit par le temps à la fin j'ai
> connu
> Que la fidélité n'est pas grand revenu.

This poem, which contains some humorous descriptions of the poverty of poets, ends with an eloquent panegyric on Ronsard. The next, on 'La Vie de la Cour,' attacks a very favourite subject of the age, and winds up with an extremely well-told version of the fable of the beast of prey and the mule whose name is written on its hoof. The fourth returns to the subject of the poverty of poets. The fifth argues at some length, and in a spirit not very far removed from that of Montaigne, the thesis that 'Le goût particulier décide de tout.' It contains some of Regnier's finest passages. A subject somewhat similar in kind, 'L'honneur ennemi de la vie,' gives further occasion, in the sixth, for the display of the moralising spirit of the age, which, in Regnier, takes the form of a kind of epicurean pococurantism mingled with occasional bursts of noble sentiment.

The seventh is one of the most personal of all; it is entitled 'L'amour qu'on ne peut dompter,' and is a comment on the text *Video meliora proboque*. The eighth is one of the innumerable imitations of the famous ninth satire of the first book of Horace, *Ibam forte via sacra*, and perhaps the happiest of all such, though it is difficult not to regret that Regnier should have devoted his too rare moments of work to mere imitation. The ninth, however, is open to no such charge. It is entitled *Le Critique outré*, and is an extraordinarily vigorous and happy remonstrance against the intolerant pedantry with which Malherbe was criticising the Pléiade. This satire is addressed to Rapin, the veteran contributor to the *Ménippée*. It is impossible to describe the weak side of the reforms which Malherbe, and after him Boileau, introduced into French poetry, better than in these lines, which deserve citation for their literary importance:—

Cependant leur scavoir ne s'estend
seulement
Qu'à regratter un mot douteux au
jugement,
Prendre garde qu'un qui ne heurte une
diphtongue;
Espier si des vers la rime est brève ou
longue;
Ou bien si la voyelle, à l'autre s'unissant,
Ne rend point à l'oreille un vers trop
languissant.
Ils rampent bassement, foibles
d'inventions,
Et n'osent, peu hardis, tenter les fictions,
Froids à l'imaginer; ear s'ils font quelque
chose
C'est proser de la rime, et rimer de la

prose,
Que l'art lime et relime, et polit de façon,
Qu'elle rend à l'oreille un agréable son.

The tenth satire, with its title 'Le souper ridicule,' seems to return to Horace, but in reality the scene described has little in common with the *Coena* of Nasidienus. It affords Regnier an excellent opportunity for displaying his talent for Dutch painting, but is in this respect inferior to the sequel 'Le mauvais gîte.' The subject of this is sufficiently unsavoury, and the satire is almost the only one which in the least deserves Boileau's strictures on the author's 'rimes cyniques,' but the vigour and skill of the treatment are most remarkable. The twelfth is short, and once more apologetically personal. But the thirteenth is the longest, one of the most famous, and unquestionably on the whole the best work of the author. It is entitled 'Macette,' and describes an old woman who hides vice under a hypocritical mask and corrupts youth with her evil philosophy of the world and its ways. Indebted in some measure to the *Roman de la Rose* for the idea of his central character, Regnier is entirely original in his method of treatment. Nowhere are his verses more vigorous—

Son œil tout pénitent ne pleure qu'eau
béniste.
L'honneur est un vieux saint que l'on ne
chomme plus.
La sage se sait vendre où la sotte se donne.

Nowhere is Regnier so uniformly free from technical defects and from colloquialisms in which he sometimes indulges. The fourteenth returns to general and somewhat vague satire, dealing with the vanity of human reason and conduct, while the

fifteenth is once more personal, 'Le Poète malgré soi.' Lastly, the sixteenth sums up the author's theoretical philosophy in the opening line, 'N'avoir crainte de rien et ne rien espérer.'

The satires are in bulk and in importance so much the larger part of the work of Regnier, and represent such an important innovation in French literature, that it has seemed well to describe them with some minuteness. The miscellaneous poems may be reviewed more rapidly, though the best of them add very considerably to the poet's reputation, because they show him in an entirely different light. Not a few of the elegies are imitated from Ovid, and some of them might perhaps have been left unwritten with advantage. Indeed, Regnier is here much more open to Boileau's censure than in his more famous verse. But some lyrical pieces exhibit his command of other measures besides the Alexandrine, and afford occasion for the expression of a melancholy and genuine sensibility which is not common in French poetry. The poem called 'Plainte' is very beautiful, and is written in a lyric stanza of much more elaboration than any which was to be used in France for two centuries. One of its peculiarities is a hemistich replacing the expected fourth line of the stanza, which is of eight verses, with singularly musical effect. A so-called 'Ode' is almost better, and ends thus:—

> Un regret pensif et confus
> D'avoir esté, et n'estre plus,
> Rend mon âme aux douleurs ouverte;
> A mes despens, las! je vois bien
> Qu'un bonheur comme estoit le mien
> Ne se cognoist que par la perte.

Regnier was in many ways a fitting representative for the close of the great poetical school of the sixteenth century. In manner he represented the fusion of the purely Gallic school of Marot and Rabelais, with the classical tradition of the Pléiade in its best form. His Alexandrines, if not quite so vigorous as D'Aubigné's, have all the polish that could be expected before the administration of Malherbe's rules. His lyric measures have the boldness and harmony which those rules banished from French poetry for full seven generations. In matter he displays a singular mixture of acute observation and philosophic criticism with ardent sensibility both to pleasure and pain. This, as has been repeatedly pointed out, is the dominant temper of the French Renaissance, and though in Regnier it shows something of the melancholy of the decadence as compared with the springing hope of Rabelais and the calm maturity of Montaigne, it is scarcely less characteristic.

FOOTNOTES:

[222] Ed. Labitte. Paris, 1869.

[223] Ed. Courbet. Paris, 1875. In this edition some of the dates and statements in the text, which have been generally accepted, are contested.

INTERCHAPTER II.

SUMMARY OF RENAISSANCE LITERATURE.

The literary movements of the sixteenth century in France and their accomplishments—in other words, the course and result of the French Renaissance—can be traced with greater ease and with more precision than those of any other age of the literature. The movement is double, but, unlike most movements, literary and other, it is not sufficiently described as flux and reflux or action and reaction. The later or Pléiade half of the century was in no sense a reaction against the first or Marot-Rabelais half. If there is an appearance of opposition between the two it is only because, both in Marot and in Rabelais, there was actually a kind of reaction from the movement which faintly and imperfectly foreshadowed that of the Pléiade, the *rhétoriqueur* pedantry of the writers from Chartier to Crétin. In this first half of the century, while something of a protest was made by Rabelais explicitly, and implicitly by Marot, against the indiscriminate Latinising of the French tongue, very much more was done by their contemporaries, and in a manner by Rabelais himself, in the way of importing novelties of subject, style, and language, both from ancient and modern sources. Long before Du Bellay wrote, Calvin had modelled the first serious and scholarly work of French prose very closely on a Latin pattern. The translators, with Étienne Dolet and Amyot at their head, had begun to transfer to the vernacular, in versions or in original work, the principles of style which they had admired and imitated in the classics. On the other hand, Marot, representing the extreme vernacular school, succeeded, tolerably early in the period, in refining and chastening the language of the fifteenth century

to such an extent that his style, transmitted through La Fontaine, and then through the lighter work of the eighteenth century, has retained a certain hold on literature for its particular purpose almost to the present day. The most remarkable writer, from the point of view of style, in this part of the century is perhaps Bonaventure des Périers, who displays both the vernacular purity free from classical mixture, and at the same time the Renaissance admiration and imitation of the classics in a very high degree. Yet the same lesson is taught by the prose of Des Périers as by the verse of Marot. The language had not as yet arrived at its full growth, it had not taken in its full supply of nourishment. It was therefore not equal to the complete duties of a literary tongue. It wanted enriching, strengthening, educating.

This task it was which was performed, and performed on the whole with remarkable skill and success, by the Pléiade movement. It is not easy to fix on any period in the history of any other language in which, at an interval of fifty years, the advance in the capacities, as distinguished from the mere accomplishments of the tongue, is so noticeable as it is in French between 1550 and 1600. It is not merely that between these dates writers of talent and even genius may be mentioned by the dozen, that the language can boast of having added to its stores the odes of Ronsard, the sonnets of Du Bellay, the myriad graceful songs of the lesser poets of the Pléiade, the stately descriptions of Du Bartas, the fiery invective of D'Aubigné, the polished satire of Regnier, the essays of Montaigne, the immortal pasquinades of the Ménippée—it is that the whole constitution and organisation of the language has been strengthened and improved. That the secret of the Alexandrine has at last been mastered means that

the whole future course of French poetry is in a manner mapped out. That lyric measures have been devised, intricate, not merely in arrangement like those of the mediaeval forms, but in harmony, means that at any future time French poets who choose to recur to this storehouse may find the withal to equip themselves. That the vocabulary has been enormously if somewhat indiscriminately increased, means that writers in the future, at whatever loss they may be for thought, need certainly be at no loss for words to express it. But the gain is greater even than this. Not merely have the glossary, the grammar, the prosody of the language been enriched, but entirely new moulds in which literary work can be cast have been added to the literature. The form of drama in which France was to achieve, with but little formal alteration, some of her greatest literary triumphs, has been discovered and acclimatised; the essay has become a recognised thing; attempts at history proper as distinct from mere annals and chronicles have been made. Literature, in short, is organised, and literary labour works in matter roughly at least prepared and shaped. One of the greatest drawbacks of mediaeval literature, the confusion of styles, the handling of science in verse, of theology in terms taken from amatory romances, of politics in 'dreams,' of social satire in clumsy allegories, is cleared away. The form most suitable for every kind of literary work has been more or less made clear to the literary workman, and a plentiful supply of material in the shape of vocabulary is at his disposal.

That this great accomplishment is on the whole the doing of the Pléiade in its larger sense, as designating and including the men of letters of 1550-1600, no impartial student of the period can doubt. But at the

same time there is no doubt either that their work was both incomplete and in some respects open to grave objection. They had, like all reformers, literary as well as political, neglected to preserve the historical continuity, and deliberately turned their backs on the traditions of the language and the literature. Their importations and imitations had been sometimes unnecessary, sometimes awkward, sometimes absurd. The mass of their contributions required examination, arrangement, and no doubt in some cases rejection. Moreover, they had on the whole concentrated their attention too much upon poetry; prose, the less exquisite but the more useful instrument, had been comparatively neglected. Almost all styles had been tried in it, but no general style nor the conditions of any had been elaborated. In drama much remained to be done. The model was there in the rough, but the workmen had been unskilful, and fifty years of practice on the plan of Jodelle had not yet resulted in the composition of one really dramatic play. In short, though the Pléiade movement had begun by being nothing if not critical, it had not kept up the habit of self-criticism. The application of this criticism was what was left for the seventeenth century to supply, and at the same time the elaboration of a complete and workman-like prose style. We shall see how early and how eagerly this task was accepted, and how thoroughly it was carried out; so thoroughly, that the seventeenth century is the age of perfect French prose. But what was gained in prose was lost in poetry, and, putting the dramatists aside, the drop in this respect from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century is immense. The sixteenth is, putting our own days out of question, the palmy time of poetry in France. The urbanity of Marot, the stately grace of Ronsard and

his followers, the majesty of Du Bartas, the fire of D'Aubigné, the nervous and yet effortless strength of Regnier, have never been surpassed, and until the last half century they have rarely been equalled. If to this be added the more irregular and unequal, but hardly inferior merits of the best sixteenth-century prose, the inexhaustible humour of Rabelais, the simplicity and varied colour of the great memoir-writers, the subtle eloquence of Montaigne, it may perhaps seem that the period can contest the primacy with any other. The dispute between it and its successor is, however, only an instance of one which recurs again and again in literature, and which neither need nor should be handled here at length.

BOOK III.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

POETS.

Malherbe.

The history of the poetry of the seventeenth century

in France naturally and necessarily opens with Malherbe, though he was forty-five years old at its beginning, and considerably the senior of Regnier, who has been included among the poets of the Renaissance. François de Malherbe[224] was born at Caen in 1555, being the eldest son of his father, another François de Malherbe, and both on the father's and mother's side of noble family. He was educated at his native town, in Germany and in Paris, and when he was twenty-one he entered the army. He married in 1581, and had three children, two of whom died young—a circumstance not immaterial in connection with his most famous poem, which is a 'Consolation' to a certain M. du Périer, whose daughter Marguerite had died in her youth. He seems to have written verses tolerably early, but, exercising on himself the same rigid principles of criticism which he applied to others, he preserved none or hardly any of them. It was not till he was past forty that his best-known poems were written, and the whole amount of his surviving work is not large. During the first two-thirds of his life he was not rich, for his patrimony was scanty, and the death of the Grand Prior, Henri d'Angoulême, to whom he had attached himself, deprived him of the chances of preferment. But in 1605 he was presented to Henri IV.; he soon afterwards received various places, and for more than twenty years was a court favourite, and in a way the autocrat of poetry. He died in 1628.

It has been said that Malherbe's poetical work is by no means voluminous: a small volume of two hundred pages, not very closely or minutely printed, contains it all; and ingenious persons have calculated that as a rule he did not write more than four or five verses a month. Nor even of this carefully produced,

and still more carefully weeded, result is there much that can be read with pleasure by a modern student of poetry. The verse by which Malherbe is best known,

> Et, rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les
> roses,

is worth all the rest of his work, and it can hardly be said to be more than a very graceful and touching conceit. But Malherbe's position in the history of French poetry is a very important one. He deliberately assumed the functions of a reformer of literature; and whatever may be thought of the result of his reforms, their durability and the almost entire acquiescence with which they were received prove that there must have been something in them remarkably germane to the spirit and taste and genius of the nation. His first attempt was the overthrow of the Pléiade. He ridiculed their phraseology, frowned on their metres, and, being himself destitute of the romantic inspiration which had animated them, set himself to reduce poetry to carefully-worded metrical prose. The story is always told of him that he went minutely through a copy of Ronsard, striking out whatever he disapproved of; and when some one pointed out the mass of lines that were left, that he drew his pen (presumably across the title-page, for it is not obvious how else he could have done it) through the rest at one stroke. The insolent folly of this is glaring enough, for Malherbe is not worthy as a poet to unloose the shoe-latchet of Ronsard. But the critic had rightly appreciated his time. The tendency of the French seventeenth century in poetry proper was towards the restriction of vocabulary and rhythm, the avoidance of original and daring metaphor and

suggestion, the perfecting of a few metres (with the Alexandrine at their head) into a delicate but monotonous harmony, and the rejection of individual licence in favour of rigid rule. The influence of Boileau came rapidly to second that of Malherbe, and the result is that not a single poet—the dramatists are here excluded—of the seventeenth century in France deserves more than fair second-class rank. La Fontaine, indeed, was a writer of the greatest genius, but, though the form which his work takes is metrical, the highest merits of poetry proper are absent. La Fontaine, too, was himself, though an admirer of Malherbe, a rebel to the Malherbe tradition, and delighted both in reading and imitating the work of the Renaissance and the middle ages. But he is always clear, precise, and matter-of-fact in the midst of fancy, never attaining to the peculiar vague suggestiveness which constitutes the charm of poetry proper.

The School of Malherbe.

Vers de Société.

Voiture.

It was, however, impossible that so large a change should accomplish itself at once, and signs of mixed influences appear accordingly in all the poetical work of the first half of the century. Cardinal du Perron, Malherbe's introducer at court, was himself a poet of merit, but rather in the Pléiade style. His *Temple de l'Inconstance*, though rougher in form, is

more poetical in substance than anything, save a very few pieces, of Malherbe's. Chassignet displayed some of the same characteristics with a graver and more elegiac spirit. Gombaud is chiefly remarkable as a sonneteer. The two most famous of the actual pupils of Malherbe were Maynard and Racan. Maynard was a diplomatist and lawyer of rank, who was born at Toulouse in 1582, and died in 1646. His work is miscellaneous, and not very extensive, but it shows that he had learned the secret of polished versification from Malherbe, and that he was able to apply it with a good deal of vigour and of variety. Honorat de Bueil, Marquis de Racan[225], was the author of a pastoral drama, *Les Bergeries*, founded on, or imitated from, the *Astrée* of D'Urfé, of an elaborate version of the Psalms, and of a considerable number of the miscellaneous poems, *stances*, *odes*, *épitres*, etc., which were fashionable. Racan, though his amiable private character and the compliance of his principal work with a fashionable folly of the time have caused him to be somewhat over-estimated traditionally, was a thoroughly pleasing poet, with a great command of fluent and melodious verse, a genuine love of nature, and occasionally a power of producing poetry of a true kind which was shared by few of his contemporaries. The remarkable author of *Tyr et Sidon*, Jean de Schélandre, produced, besides his play, a considerable number of miscellaneous poems; but he was a thorough reactionary, avowed his contempt of Malherbe, and studied, not without success, Ronsard and his own coreligionist Du Bartas as models. One of the most original, though at the same time one of the most unequal poets of the early seventeenth century, was Théophile de Viaud, often called Théophile[226] simply. He, too, was a dramatist, but his dramas do not do him much credit,

their style being exaggerated and 'precious.' On the other hand, his miscellaneous poems, though very unequal, include much work of remarkable beauty. The pieces entitled 'La Solitude,' 'Sur une Tempête,' and the stanzas beginning 'Quand tu me vois baiser tes bras,' have all the fervour and picturesqueness of the Pléiade without its occasional blemishes of pedantic expression. Théophile was a loose liver and an unfortunate man. He was accused, justly or unjustly, of writing indecent verses, was imprisoned, and died young. All the poets hitherto mentioned were writers of miscellaneous verse, who, except in so far as they held to the elder tradition of Ronsard or the new gospel of Malherbe, can hardly be said to have belonged to any school. Towards the middle of the century, however, two well-defined fashions of poetry, with some minor ones, distinguished themselves. There was, in the first place, the school of the *coterie* poets, who devoted themselves to producing *vers de société*, either for the ladies, or for the great men of the period. The chief of this school was beyond all question Voiture[227]. This admirable writer of prose and verse published absolutely nothing during his lifetime, though his work was in private the delight of the salons. That it should be, under the circumstances, somewhat frivolous is almost unavoidable. But, especially after the cessation of the great flow of inspiration which had characterised the sixteenth century, it was of no small importance that the art of perfect expression should be cultivated in French. Voiture was one of those who contributed most to the cultivation of this art. His letters are as correct as those of Balzac, and much less stilted; and of his poetry it is sufficient to say that nothing more charming of the kind has ever been written than the sonnet to Uranie, which stirred

up a literary war, or the rondeau 'Ma foi c'est fait de moi.' This last put once more in fashion a beautiful and thoroughly French form, which it had been one of the worst deeds of the Pléiade to make unfashionable. The chief rival of Voiture was Benserade, a much younger man, whose sonnet on Job was held to excel, though it certainly does not, that to Uranie. Benserade was of higher birth and larger fortune than Voiture, and long outlived him. He was a great writer of ballets or masques, and not unfrequently, like Voiture, showed that a true poet underlay the fantastic disguises he put on. Around these two are grouped numerous minor poets of different merit. Boisrobert, the favourite of Richelieu and the companion of Rotrou and Corneille in that minister's band of 'five poets;' Maleville, who in one of the sonnet-tournaments of the time, that of the *Belle Matineuse*, was supposed to have excelled even Voiture; Colletet, whose poems make him less important in literature than his Lives of the French poets, which unfortunately perished during the Commune before they had been fully printed; Gomberville, more famous as a novelist; Sarrasin, an admirable prose writer, and a clever composer of ballades and other light verse; Godeau, a bishop and a very clever versifier; Blot, who was rather a political than a social rhymer; Marigny, who was also famous for his Mazarinades, but whose satirical power was by no means the only side of his poetical talent; Charleval, whose personal popularity was greater than his literary ability; Maucroix, the friend of La Fontaine; Segrais, an eclogue writer of no small merit; Chapelle, an idle epicurean, who derives most of his fame from the fact of his having been intimate with all the foremost literary men of the time, and from his having composed, in company with

Bachaumont, a *Voyage* in mixed prose and verse, the form of which was long very popular in France and was imitated with especial success by Anthony Hamilton and Voltaire; Pavillon, who deserves a very similar general description, but who gave no such single example of his abilities: all belong to this class.

Epic School. Chapelain.

Side by side with the frivolous school, but in curious contrast with it, there existed a school of ponderous epic writers, the extirpation of which is the best claim of Boileau to the gratitude of posterity. The typical poets of this class are Georges de Scudéry, the author of *Alaric*, and Chapelain, the author of the *Pucelle*. Scudéry was a soldier and a man of considerable talent, who lacked nothing but patience and the power of self-criticism to produce really good work. Like his more famous sister, he had invention and literary facility. His plays are not without merit in parts, and his epic of *Alaric*, amidst astonishing platitudes and extravagances, has occasional good lines. But Chapelain is by far the most remarkable figure of the school. He was bred up to be a poet from his earliest age, and by a stroke of luck, impossible in less anomalous times, he was taken at his own valuation for years. *La Pucelle* was quoted in manuscript, and anxiously expected for half a short lifetime. It only appeared to be hopelessly damned. There are passages in it of merit, but they are associated with lines which read like designed burlesques. The onslaughts of Boileau have created a kind of reaction in favour of Chapelain with some who disagree with Boileau's poetical principles: but he is not defensible. His odes are

indeed tolerable in parts; not so the *Pucelle*, save, as has been said, in occasional lines. The *Clovis* of Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin is worse than the *Pucelle*. On the other hand, the Père le Moyne in his *St. Louis*, taking apparently Du Bartas as his model, produced work which, if not very readable as a whole, manifests real and very considerable poetical talent. Lastly, Saint Amant in the *Moïse Sauvé* showed how far below himself a clever writer may be when he mistakes his style.

Bacchanalian School. Saint Amant.

Saint Amant[228], who, to do him justice, did not call *Moïse Sauvé* an epic but an 'idylle héroique,' is the link between this school and a third composed of purely convivial poets, who even in this century furnished work of remarkable excellence, and who produced a numerous and brilliant progeny in the next. Saint Amant's Anacreontic poems are of great merit. Of the same class was Saint Pavin, who was not merely a free liver, but a member of the small but influential free-thinking sect which preceded and gave birth to the *Philosophes* of the next century. This time, moreover, was the period of a curious literary trick, the resuscitation or forging of the convivial poems of Oliver Basselin by a Norman lawyer of the name of Jean le Houx. A genuine and contemporary Basselin, in the person of a carpenter named Adam Billaut, produced some notable work of the same kind. Unfortunately the Anacreontic poetry of this time suffers from the too frequent coarseness of its language; a fault which indeed was not fully corrected until Béranger's days.

La Fontaine.

The members, however, of all these schools have long lost their hold on all but students of literature, and, with the exception of La Fontaine and Boileau, it is not easy to mention any non-dramatic poet of the seventeenth century who has kept a place in the general memory. Jean la Fontaine[229] was born at Château Thierry in Champagne in the year 1621, and died at Paris in 1695. His father held a considerable post as ranger of the neighbouring forests, an office which passed to his son. La Fontaine seems to have been carelessly educated, but after a certain time literature attracted him, and he began to study in a desultory fashion, without however, as it would appear, being himself tempted to write. At the age of six-and-twenty he married Marie Héricart, a girl of sixteen, who is said to have been both amiable and beautiful, and not long afterwards he was left his own master by his father's death. He was suited very ill by nature either to fill a responsible office or to be head of a house. The well-known stories of his absence of mind, his simplicity, his indifference to outward affairs, have no doubt been exaggerated, but there is, equally without doubt, a foundation of fact in them. On the other hand, though the most serious charges against his wife seem to rest on no foundation, it is certain that she had little aptitude for housewifery. After a time the household was broken up, though there was offspring of the marriage. A division of goods was effected, and husband and wife separated, not to meet again except on visits and for brief spaces of time, though they seem to have remained on perfectly friendly terms. La Fontaine went to Paris, and very soon attracted the notice of Fouquet, the magnificent

superintendent of the finances, who gave him a pension of a thousand livres and made him a member of his literary household. Here La Fontaine began to write. At the downfall of Fouquet he was constant to his friend, and produced the best-known of his miscellaneous poems, the 'Pleurez, Nymphes de Vaux[230].' The misfortune unsettled him for a time, and he travelled about. But returning to his native place, he was taken into favour by the Duchess of Bouillon, and this was the beginning of a series of patronages which lasted till the end of his life. Once more visiting Paris, he became a favourite with many men and women of rank, and began his serious literary work by producing the first part of his *Contes*. The remaining parts and the *Fables* appeared at intervals during the remainder of his life. His second visit to Paris brought about his traditional association with Boileau, Molière, and Racine, the four meeting at regular intervals, either in taverns or at lodgings in the Rue Vieux Colombier. During the later years of his life La Fontaine was a confirmed Parisian. His office at Château Thierry had been sold, and he was the guest of various hospitable persons, the chief of whom was Madame de la Sablière. In 1668 appeared the first part of the *Fables* with universal approval. But the free character of the *Contes*, and still more the association of La Fontaine with some of the freethinkers who were in ill-repute with the king's spiritual advisers, retarded his admission to the Academy. When Colbert died, La Fontaine and Boileau were the two candidates; an awkward accident, considering their friendship, and the fact that the court was as decidedly for Boileau as the Academy itself for La Fontaine. The latter was elected, but the king delayed his assent, and even seemed likely to exercise a veto, when fortunately a

second vacancy occurred, and Boileau being elected, both were approved by the king, Boileau warmly, La Fontaine with the grudging terms 'Vous pouvez recevoir La Fontaine; il a promis d'être sage.' A curious warning of a similar tenor was contained in the 'Discours de Réception.'

La Fontaine's work is considerable, including many miscellaneous poems, the romance of *Psyche*, and various dramatic attempts which were more or less failures. But the *Contes* and the *Fables* are the only works which have held their ground with posterity, and it is upon them that his reputation is justly based. The first part of the *Contes* appeared at the extreme end of 1664[231], the second in 1667, the third in 1671, but the author added pieces in successive editions. The first part of the *Fables* appeared in 1668, dedicated to the Dauphin, the second in 1679, dedicated to Madame de Montespan, the third in 1693, dedicated to the Duc de Bourgogne, who is said to have been taught by Fénelon to delight in La Fontaine, and to have sent him just before his death all the money he had. The two books are complementary to each other, and La Fontaine's genius cannot be judged by either alone. It has been remarked that he was a diligent though apparently a very desultory reader. He read the Italians, and, apparently with still more relish and profit, the works of the old French writers, to whom the Italians owed so much. The spirit of the Fabliaux had been dead, or at any rate dormant, since Marot and Rabelais; La Fontaine revived it. Even purists, like his friend Boileau, admitted a certain archaism in lighter poetry, and La Fontaine would in all probability have troubled himself very little if they had not. His language is, therefore, more supple, varied, and racy than even that of Molière, and this

is his first excellence. His second is a faculty of easy narration in verse, which is absolutely unequalled except perhaps in Pulci and Ariosto, while it is certainly unsurpassed anywhere. His third distinguishing point is his power of insinuating, it may be a satirical point, it may be a moral reflection, which is also hardly equalled and as certainly unsurpassed. In the authors whom La Fontaine followed, either deliberately or unconsciously, the models of his tales and his fables were indiscriminately mingled; but he separated them by so rigid a line that, while there is hardly a phrase in his *Fables* which is not suited *virginibus puerisque*, the *Contes* are not exactly a book for youth. In the latter the author has taken subjects, always amusing but not unfrequently loose, from the old fabulists, from Boccaccio, from the French prose tale-tellers of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* and similar collections, from Rabelais, from a few Italian writers of the Renaissance, and has dressed them up in the incomparable narrative of which he alone has the secret. Where he treads in the steps of the greatest writers he is almost always best. 'Joconde' supplies the opportunity of a remarkable comparison with Ariosto; 'La Fiancée du Roi de Garbe' of a still more remarkable comparison with Boccaccio. In this latter respect the palm of vivid and varied narration is with La Fontaine, but he misses something of the spirit of the original in his portrait of Alaciel; indeed La Fontaine's weakest point is in the comparatively pedestrian character of his treatment. He has little romance, and in translating, not merely the Italians but such countrymen and women of his own as the authors of the Heptameron, he loses the poetical charm which, as has been pointed out, graces and saves the morality or immorality of the Renaissance.

Therefore, despite the wonderful variety and vivid painting of the *Contes*, presenting a series of pictures which for these qualities have few rivals in literature, the disapproval with which censors more rigid than Johnson (whose excuse of Prior will fairly stretch to Prior's original) have visited them is not altogether unjustifiable.

The Fables, with hardly less excellence of the purely literary kind, are fortunately free from the least vestige of any similar fault. La Fontaine, instead of in the smallest degree degrading the beast-fable, has, on the contrary, exalted it to almost the highest point of which it is capable. Not many books have made and kept a more durable and solid reputation. The few dissentient voices in the chorus of eulogy have been those of eccentric crotcheteers like Rousseau, or sentimentalists like Lamartine. It is, indeed, impossible to read the Fables without prejudice and not be captivated by them. As mere narratives they are charming, and the perpetual presence of an undercurrent of sly, good-humoured, satirical meaning relieves them from all charge of insipidity. La Fontaine, like Goldsmith, was with his pen in his hand as shrewd and as deeply learned in human nature as without it he was simple and *naïf*.

Something has to be said of the form and strictly poetical value of these two remarkable books—as remarkable, let it be remembered, for their bulk as for their excellence, for between them they cannot contain much less than 30,000 verses. The measure is almost always an irregular mixture of lines of different lengths, rhyming sometimes in couplets, sometimes in interlaced stanzas, which La Fontaine established as the vehicle of serio-comic narration. For this, in his hands, it is extraordinarily well fitted.

As for the strictly poetic value of the work, it is perhaps significant that though he is, taking quantity and excellence together, the most important non-dramatic writer of verse of the whole century in France, he is rarely thought of (out of France) as a poet. A poet, indeed, in the highest sense of the word he is not. He has hardly any passion, evidences of it being almost confined to the elegy to Fouquet and, perhaps, as M. Théodore de Banville pleads, to the 'Faucon' and 'Courtisane Amoureuse' of the *Contes*. He has no indefinite suggestion of beauty; even his descriptions of nature, though always accurate and picturesque, being somewhat prosaic. He may be said to be a prose writer of the very first class who chose to write in verse, and who justified his choice by a wonderful technical ability in the particular form of verse which he used. There is no greater mistake than the supposition that La Fontaine's verse-writing is mere facile improvisation.

Boileau.

Nicolas Boileau[232], who was long known in France as the 'Law-giver of Parnassus,' and who, perhaps, exercised a more powerful and lasting influence over the literature of his native country than any other critic has ever enjoyed, was born at Paris on All Saints' Day, 1636. His father held the post of registrar of one of the numerous courts of law, and his family had legal connections of wide range and long date. He himself was brought up to the law, but had not the least inclination for it; and at his father's death, which happened exactly when he attained his majority, his inheritance was considerable enough to allow him to do as he pleased. The family was a large one, and, according to a custom of the time, the

brothers, or at least some of them, were distinguished by additional surnames. That which Nicolas took—Despréaux—was, at any rate during his youth, more frequently used than his patronymic, and has continued to be applied to him indifferently, thereby causing some odd blunders on the part of ignorant people. He himself sometimes signed Despréaux and sometimes Boileau-Despréaux. Besides law, he had also studied theology, and, though he never took orders, he enjoyed for a considerable time a priory at Beauvais, the profits of which, however, he returned when he definitely abandoned the idea of the church as a profession. He very early made attempts in literature, and when he was a man of seven- or eight-and-twenty, he joined La Fontaine, Racine, and Molière in the celebrated society of four. Social and literary criticism was even thus early his forte, and his first collections of Horatian satire were published in 1666, though, owing to the influence of Chapelain, the royal privilege was shortly after withdrawn from them. Boileau, however, soon became a great favourite with the king, as, though in actual conversation he retained his natural freedom of speech, he did not hesitate to use the most grovelling flattery of expression in verse. Pensions and places were given to him freely, so that, his own property being not inconsiderable, he was one of the few wealthy men of letters of the day. He was kept out of the Academy for some time by the fact that he had libelled half its members and was unpopular with the other half, but the royal influence at last got him in in 1684. In his later years the morose arrogance, which was his chief characteristic, increased on him, and was doubtless aggravated by the bad health from which he suffered during the whole of his long life. He died

in 1711, having outlived all his friends except Louis himself.

Boileau's works consist of twelve satires, of the same number of epistles, of an *Art Poétique*, of the *Lutrin*, a serio-comic poem, of two odes, and of three or four score epigrams and miscellaneous pieces in verse, with a translation of Longinus on the Sublime, some short critical dissertations, and a number of letters in prose. With the exception of the *Lutrin* it will be observed that almost all his poetical work is very closely modelled on Horace. His satire is extremely clever, but, as necessarily happens when the frame and manner of one time are used for the circumstances of another, it is altogether artificial. The Horatian satire is nothing if not personal, and as Boileau (even more than Pope, who strongly resembles him) had a bad heart, his personalities are unusually reckless and offensive. Thus in a couplet against parasites he inserted at one time the name of Colletet (son of the Colletet mentioned above), at another that of Pelletier, though both were notoriously free from the vice, and guilty of no fault except poverty and a disposition to produce indifferent verse. Boileau's crusade, too, against the minor poets of his day was unfortunately followed by his own production of a ridiculous ode, excellently burlesqued by Prior, on the taking of Namur in 1692 by the French. This, with certain pieces of Young's, is perhaps the most glaring example extant of how a writer of great talent and literary skill may combine the basest flattery with the most abjectly bad verse. But where he confined himself to his proper sphere, Boileau exhibited no small power. He was, in fact, a slashing reviewer in verse, and there has rarely been so effective a practitioner of the craft. Narrow as was his idea of poetry, it was perfectly clear and precise,

and, as his pupil Racine showed, he could teach it to others with the most striking success. *Le Lutrin*, too, is a poem which, in a rather trivial kind, is something of a masterpiece. Its subject, the quarrel of a chapter of ecclesiastics about the position of a *lutrin* (lectern), afforded Boileau plenty of opportunity for introducing that sarcasm on the upper middle classes which was his forte; the verse is polished and correct, the satire, though rather facile and conventional, agreeable enough. His satires and epistles are full of striking traits evidently studied from the life, but he is always personal and almost always artificial, never rising to the large satiric conception of Regnier or of Dryden. So, too, most of the stories which are recorded of him (and they are many) are stories of ill-natured remarks. In his heart of hearts he knew and acknowledged the greatness of Corneille, yet formally and in public he could not refrain from directing unjust satire at the veteran whose masterpieces had been produced when he was in his cradle, in order to exalt his own pupil Racine, whom he privately owned to be simply a very clever and docile rhymester. He himself was very much the same with the exception of the docility. His good sense, his talents, his eye for the ludicrous—except in his own work—were admirable, and the ill-nature of his satires, with their frequent injustice and the strange ignorance they display of all literature except the Latin classics and French and Italian contemporary authors, does not prevent their being excellent examples of French and of the art of polite libelling. It is probable that Boileau might have fared better but for his inconceivable folly in attempting, in the Namur ode, a style for which he had not the least aptitude, and for the parrot-like monotony with which Frenchmen before 1830, and even some of

them since that date, have lauded and quoted him and accepted his dicta. But the most lenient estimate of him can hardly amount to more than that he was an excellent writer of prose and pedestrian verse, a critic of singular acuteness within a narrow range, and a satirist who had a keen eye for the ludicrous aspect of things and persons, and a remarkable skill at reproducing that aspect in words.

Minor Poets of the later Seventeenth Century.

The list of poets of the century has to be completed by some of more or less importance who flourished in the later days of Louis XIV., and, in some few cases, outlived him. Brébeuf might have been mentioned before, as he was Boileau's elder, and, dying young, did not reach even the most brilliant period of the reign. But he is unlike any of the three schools who have been described, and his language is more modern than that of most of the poets who wrote before or during the Fronde. His principal work is a translation of the *Pharsalia*, in which both the defects and the merits of the original are represented with remarkable fidelity. Boileau, who found fault with his *fatras obscur*, allowed him frequent flashes of genius, and these flashes are rather more frequent than might be supposed, being also of a kind which Boileau was not usually inclined to recognise. Brébeuf is decidedly of what may be called the right school of French poets, though he is one of the least of that school. His minor poetry displays the same characteristics as his translation, but is of less importance. Madame Deshoulières, still

more unjustly criticised by Boileau, is unquestionably one of the chief poetesses of France; indeed, with Louise Labé and Marceline Desbordes Valmore, she is almost the only one of importance. Her poems, like those of most of her contemporaries, are of the occasional order, and have too much in them that is artificial, but frequently also they have real pathos and occasionally not a little vigour. 'Le Songe' is a very admirable ode, having some of the characteristics of the English Caroline school. Racine himself, independently of his dramas, and the choruses inserted in them, wrote some poetry, chiefly religious, which has his usual characteristics of refinement in language and versification. Anthony Hamilton has left some verses (notably an exquisite song, beginning 'Celle qu'adore mon cœur n'est ni brune ni blonde') as dainty and original as his prose. At the end of the century two poets, whose names always occur together in literary history, the Abbé de Chaulieu and the Marquis de la Fare, close the record. They were not only alike in their literary work, but were personal friends, and not the worst of Chaulieu's pieces is an elegy on La Fare, whom, though the older man of the two, he survived. They were both members of the libertine society of the Temple, over which the Duke de Vendôme presided, and which, somewhat later, formed Voltaire. The verses of both were strictly occasional. Chaulieu, like many men of letters of the time, published nothing during his long life, though his poems were known to French society in manuscript. Besides the verses on La Fare, Chaulieu's best poem is, perhaps, that 'On a Country Life' (the author being an inveterate inhabitant of towns). La Fare, on the other hand, is best known by his stanzas to Chaulieu on 'La Paresse,' which he was well qualified to sing,

inasmuch as it is said that during many years of his long life he did nothing but sleep and eat. The verses of the two continued to be models of style, and (in a way) of choice of subject, during the whole eighteenth century. Macaulay's rhetorical description of Frederic's verses, as 'hateful to gods and men, the faint echo of the lyre of Chaulieu,' is not quite just in its suggestion. Chaulieu, and still more La Fare, wrote very fair occasional poetry. One curious application of verse during this century requires mention in conclusion. This was the Gazette, or rhymed news-letter, in which the gossip of the day, the diversions of the court, etc., were recorded for the amusement and instruction of great persons in the most pedestrian of octosyllables. The chief writer of these trifles, which are very voluminous, and which have preserved many curious particulars, was Loret, who was succeeded by Robinet, Boursault, Laurent, and others.

FOOTNOTES:

[224] Ed. Lalanne. 5 vols. Paris, 1862 67; also (poems only) conveniently by Jannet. Paris, 1874. Besides his verse Malherbe wrote some translations of Seneca and Livy, and a great number of letters, including many to Peiresc, a savant of the time who is best known from Gassendi's *Life* of him.

[225] Ed. Latour. 2 vols. Paris, 1857.

[226] Ed. Alleaume. 2 vols. Paris, 1855.

[227] Ed. Ubicini. 2 vols. Paris, 1855.

[228] Ed. Livet. 2 vols. Paris, 1855.

[229] This is in reality the beginning of the *second* line of the poem, though it is often

quoted as if it were the first.

[230] Ed. Moland. 7 vols. Paris, 1879. Also ed. Regnier, vol. i. Paris, 1883.

[231] In previous editions this date was, by an oversight, wrongly printed as 1662. M. Scherer in correcting it has himself made a probable mistake in giving '1665.' That date is on the title-page, but the *achevé d'imprimer* is dated Dec. 10, 1664, and as a second edition was finished by Jan. 10, 1665, it is practically certain that the book was out before the end of the year.

[232] Ed. Fournier. Paris, 1873.

CHAPTER II.

DRAMATISTS.

While the influence of Malherbe was thus cramping and withering poetry proper in France, it combined with some other causes to enable drama to attain the highest perfection possible in the particular style practised. In non-dramatic poetry, the only name of the seventeenth century which can be said even to approach the first class is that of La Fontaine, whose verse, except for its technical excellence, is almost as near to prose as to poetry itself. But the names of Corneille, Racine, and Molière stand in the highest rank of French authors, and their works will remain the chief examples of the kind of drama which they

professed. Nor is this difference in any way surprising. It has been already shown that the style of drama introduced into France by the Pléiade, and pursued with but little alteration afterwards, was a highly artificial and a highly limited kind. It lent itself successfully to comparatively few situations; it excluded variety of action on the stage; it gave no opening for the display of complicated character. But these very limitations made it susceptible of very high polish and elaboration within its own limited range, and made such polish and elaboration almost a necessity if it was to be tolerable at all. The correct and cold language and style which Malherbe preached; the regularity and harmony of versification on which he insisted; the strict attention to rule rather than impulse which he urged, all suited a thing in itself so artificial as the Senecan tragedy. They were not so suitable to the more libertine genius of comedy. But here, fortunately for France, the regulations were less rigid, and the abiding popularity of the indigenous farce gave a healthy corrective. The astonishing genius of Molière succeeded in combining the two influences—the lawless freedom of the old farce, and the ordered decency of the Malherbian poetry. Even his theatre shows some sign of the taint with which 'classical' drama is so deeply imbued, but its force and truth almost or altogether redeem the imperfections of its scheme.

Montchrestien.

We have seen that the early tragedy, which was more or less directly reproductive of Seneca, attained its highest pitch in the work of Garnier. This pitch was on the whole well maintained by Antoine de

Montchrestien, a man of a singular history and of a singular genius. The date of his birth is not exactly known, but he was the son of an apothecary at Falaise, and belonged to the Huguenot party. Duels and lawsuits succeed each other in his story, and by some means or other he was able to assume the title of Seigneur de Vasteville. In one of his duels he killed his man, and had to fly to England. Being pardoned, he returned to France and took to commerce. But after the death of Henri IV. he joined a Huguenot rising, and was killed in October 1621. Montchrestien wrote a treatise on Political Economy (he is even said to have been the first to introduce the term into French), some poems, and six tragedies, *Sophonisbe*, or *La Cartaginoise*, *Les Lacènes*, *David*, *Aman*, *Hector*, and *L'Écossaise*. Racine availed himself not a little of *Aman*, but *L'Écossaise* is Montchrestien's best piece. In it he set the example to a long line of dramatists, from Vondel to Mr. Swinburne, who have since treated the story of Mary Queen of Scots. It is not part of the merit of Montchrestien to have improved on the technical defects of the Jodelle-Garnier model. His action is still deficient, his speeches immoderately long. But his choric odes are of great beauty, and his *tirades*, disproportionate as they are, show a considerable advance in the power of indicating character as well as in style and versification. Beyond this, however, the force of the model could no further go, and some alteration was necessary. Indeed it is by no means certain that the later plays of this class were ever acted at all, or were anything more than closet drama.

Hardy.

Minor predecessors of Corneille.

For a not inconsiderable time the fate of French tragedy trembled in the balance. During the first thirty years of the seventeenth century the most prominent dramatist was Alexandre Hardy[233]. He is the first and not the least important example in French literary history of a dramatic author pure and simple, a playwright who was a playwright, and nothing else. Hardy was for years attached to the regular company of actors who had succeeded the *Confrérie* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and wrote or adapted pieces for them at the tariff (it is said) of fifty crowns a play. His fertility was immense; and he is said to have written some hundreds of plays. The exact number is variously stated at from five to seven hundred. Forty-one exist in print. Although not destitute of original power, Hardy was driven to the already copious theatre of Spain for subjects and models. His plays being meant for acting and for nothing else, the scholarly but tedious exercitations of the Pléiade school were out of the question. Yet, while he introduced a great deal of Spanish embroilment into his plots, and a great deal of Spanish bombast into his speeches, Hardy still accepted the general outline of the classical tragedy, and, though utterly careless of unity of place and time, adhered for the most part to the perhaps more mischievous unity of action. His best play, *Mariamne*, is powerfully written, is arranged with considerable skill, and contains some fine lines and even scenes; but, little as Hardy hampered himself with rules, it still has, to an English reader, a certain thinness of interest. A contemporary of Hardy's, Jean de

Schélandre, made, in a play[234] which does not seem ever to have been acted, a remarkable attempt at enfranchising French tragedy with the full privileges rather of the English than of the Spanish drama; but this play, *Tyr et Sidon*, had no imitators and no influence, and the general model remained unaltered. But during the first quarter of the century the theatre was exceedingly popular, and the institution of strolling troops of actors spread its popularity all over France. Nearly a hundred names of dramatic writers of this time are preserved. Most of these, no doubt, were but retainers of the houses or the troops, and did little but patch, adapt, and translate. But of the immediate predecessors of Corneille, and his earlier contemporaries, at least half-a-dozen are more or less known to fame, besides the really great name of Rotrou. Mairet, Tristan, Du Ryer, Scudéry, Claveret, and D'Aubignac, were the chief of these. Mairet has been called the French Marston, and the resemblance is not confined to the fact that both wrote tragedies on the favourite subject of Sophonisba. The chief work of Tristan, who was also a poet of some merit, was *Marianne* (Mariamne), very closely modelled on an Italian original, and much less vigorous, though more polished than Hardy's play on the same subject. Du Ryer had neither Mairet's vigour nor Tristan's tenderness, but he made more progress than either of them had done in the direction of the completed tragedy of Corneille and Racine. Scudéry's *Amour Tyrannique* is vigorous and bombastic. Claveret and D'Aubignac (the latter of whom was an active critic as well as a bad playwright) principally derive their reputation, such as it is, from the acerbity with which they attacked Corneille in the dispute about the Cid; nor should the name of Théophile de Viaud

be passed over in this connection. His *Pyrame et Thisbé* is often considered as almost the extreme example (though Corneille's *Clitandre* is perhaps worse) of the conceited Spanish-French style in tragedy. The passage in which Thisbe accuses the poniard with which Pyramus has stabbed himself of blushing at having sullied itself with the blood of its master is a commonplace of quotation. Yet, like all Théophile's work, *Pyrame et Thisbé* has value, and so has the unrepresented tragedy of *Pasiphaé*.

Rotrou.

Among these forgotten names, and others more absolutely forgotten still, that of Rotrou[235] is pre-eminently distinguished. Jean de Rotrou (the particle is not uniformly allowed him) was born at Dreux in 1609, and was thus three years younger than Corneille. He went earlier to Paris, however, and at once betook himself to dramatic poetry, his *Hypocondriaque* being represented before he was nineteen. He formed with Corneille, Colletet, Bois-Robert, and L'Etoile, the band of Richelieu's 'Five Poets,' who composed tragedies jointly on the Cardinal's plans[236]. He also worked unceasingly at the theatre on his own account. Thirty-five pieces are certainly, and five more doubtfully, attributed to him. For some time he had to work for bread, and the only weakness charged against him, a mania for gambling, left him poor, and perhaps prevented him from devoting to his work as much pains as he might otherwise have given. After a time, however, he was pensioned, and appointed to various legal posts which members of his family had previously held at Dreux. His fidelity to his official duty was the cause of his death. He was at Paris when a violent

epidemic broke out at Dreux. All who could left the town, and Rotrou was strongly dissuaded from returning. But he felt himself responsible for the maintenance of order, likely at such a time to be specially endangered. He returned at once, caught the infection, and died. Rotrou's plays are too numerous for a complete list of them to be here given, and by common consent two of them, *Le Véritable Saint Genest* and *Venceslas*, greatly excel the rest, though vigorous verse and good scenes are to be found in almost all. These plays, it should be observed, were not written until after the publication of Corneille's early masterpieces, though Rotrou had exhibited a play the year before the appearance of *Mélite*. The two poets were friends, and though Corneille in a manner supplanted him, Rotrou was unwavering throughout his life in expressions of admiration for his great rival. Of the two plays just mentioned, *Venceslas* is the more regular, the better adapted to the canons of the French stage, and the more even in its excellence. *Saint Genest* is perhaps the more interesting. The central idea is remarkable. Genest, an actor, performs before Diocletian a part in which he represents a Christian martyr. He is miraculously converted during the study of the piece, and at its performance, after astonishing the audience by the fervour and vividness with which he plays his part, boldly speaks in his own person, and, avowing his conversion, is led off to prison and martyrdom. Many of the speeches in this play are admirable poetry, and the plot is far from ill-managed. The play within a play, of which *Hamlet* and the *Taming of the Shrew* are English examples, was, at this transition period, a favourite stage incident in France. Corneille's *Illusion* is the most complicated example of it, but *Saint Genest* is by far

the most interesting and the best managed.

Corneille.

There is every reason to believe that though, as has been said, Rotrou's best pieces were influenced by Corneille, the greater poet owed something at the beginning of his career to the example of his friend. Pierre Corneille[237] was born at Rouen in 1606. His father, of the same name, was an official of rank in the legal hierarchy; his mother was named Marthe le Pesant. He was educated in the Jesuits' school, went to the bar, and obtained certain small legal preferments which he afterwards sold. He practised, but 'sans goût et sans succès,' says Fontenelle, his nephew and biographer. His first comedy, *Mélite*, is said to have been suggested by a personal experience. It succeeded at Rouen, and the author took it to Paris. His next attempt was a tragedy or a tragi-comedy, *Clitandre*, of a really marvellous extravagance. It was followed by several other pieces, in all of which there is remarkable talent, though the author had not yet found his way. He found it at last in *Médée*, where the famous reply of the heroine 'Que vous reste-t-il?' 'Moi,' struck at once the note which no one but Corneille himself and Victor Hugo has ever struck since, and which no one had ever struck before. Corneille, as has been said above, was one of Richelieu's five poets, but he was indocile to the Cardinal's caprices; and either this indocility or jealousy set Richelieu against *Le Cid*. This great and famous play was suggested by, rather than copied from, the Spanish of Guillem de Castro. It excited an extraordinary turmoil among men of letters, but the public never went wrong about it from the first. Boileau's phrase—

Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de
Rodrigue,

is as sound in fact as it is smart in expression. The *Cid* appeared in 1636, and for some years Corneille produced a succession of masterpieces. *Horace*, *Cinna*, *Polyeucte*, *Le Menteur* (a remarkable comic effort, to which Molière acknowledged his indebtedness), and *Rodogune*, in some respects the finest of all, succeeded each other at but short intervals. Half-a-dozen plays, somewhat inferior in actual merit, and which had the drawback of coming before a public used to the author and his method, followed, and the last and least good of them, *Pertharite*, was damned. Corneille, always the proudest of writers, was deeply wounded by this ill-success, and publicly renounced the stage. He devoted himself for some years to a strange task, the turning of the *Imitation* of A'Kempis into verse. At last Fouquet, the Mæcenas of the day, prevailed on him to begin again. He did so with *Œdipe*, which was successful. It was followed by many other plays, which had varying fates. Racine, with a method refined upon Corneille's own, and a greater sympathy with the actual generation, became the rival of the elder poet, and Corneille did not obey the wise maxim, *solve senescentem*. Yet his later plays have far more merit than is usually allowed to them.

The private life of Corneille was not unhappy, though his haughty and sensitive temperament brought him many vexations. His gains were small, never exceeding two hundred louis for a play, and though this was supplemented by occasional gifts from rich dedicatees and by a scanty private fortune, the total was insufficient. 'Je suis saoul de gloire et affamé d'argent' is one of the numerous sayings of

scornful discontent recorded of him. He had a pension, but it was in his later days very ill paid. Nor was he one of the easy-going men of letters who console themselves by Bohemian indulgence. In general society he was awkward, constrained, and silent: but his home, which was long shared with his brother Thomas—they married two sisters—seems to have been a happy one. He retained till his death in 1684, if not the favour of the King and the general public, that of the persons whose favour was best worth having, such as Saint-Evremond and Madame de Sévigné, and his own confidence in his genius never deserted him.

Corneille's dramatic career may be divided into four parts; the first reaching from *Mélite* to *L'Illusion Comique*; the second (that of his masterpieces), from the *Cid* to *Rodogune*; the third, from *Théodore* to *Pertharite*; the fourth, that of the decadence, from *Œdipe* to *Suréna*. The following is a list of the names and dates (these latter being sometimes doubtful and contentious) of his plays. *Mélite*, 1629, a comedy improbable and confused in incident and overdone with verbal *pointes*, but much beyond anything previous to it. *Clitandre*, 1630, a tragedy in the taste of the time, one of the maddest of plays. *La Veuve*, 1634, a comedy, well written and lively. *La Galerie du Palais* (same year), a capital comedy of its immature kind, bringing in the humours of contemporary Paris. *La Suivante*, a comedy (same year), in which the great character of the soubrette makes her first appearance. *La Place Royale*, a comedy, 1635, duller than the *Galerie du Palais*, which it in some respects resembles. *Médée*, a tragedy (same year), incomparably the best French tragedy up to its date. *L'Illusion Comique*, 1636, a tragi-comedy of the extremest Spanish type,

complicated and improbable to a degree in its action, which turns on the motive of a play within a play, and produces, as the author himself remarks, a division into prologue (Act i), an imperfect comedy (Acts ii-iv), and a tragedy (Act v). *Le Cid*, 1636, the best-known if not the best of Corneille's plays, and, from the mere playwright's point of view, the most attractive. *Horace*, 1639, often, but improperly, called *Les Horaces*, in which the Cornelian method is seen complete. The final speech of Camille before her brother kills her was as a whole never exceeded by the author, and the 'qu'il mourût' of the elder Horace is equally characteristic. *Cinna*, 1639, the general favourite in France, but somewhat stilted and devoid of action to foreign taste. *Polyeucte*, 1640, the greatest of all Christian tragedies. *La Mort de Pompée*, 1641, full of stately verse, but heavy and somewhat grandiose. *Le Menteur*, 1642, a charming comedy, followed by a *Suite du Menteur*, 1643, not inferior, though the fickleness of public taste disapproved it. *Théodore*, 1645, a noble tragedy, which only failed because the prudery of theatrical precisians found fault with its theme—the subjection of a Christian virgin to the last and worst trial of her honour and faith. *Rodogune*, 1646, the *chef-d'œuvre* of the style, displaying from beginning to end an astonishing power of moving admiration and terror. This play marks the climax of Corneille's faculty. In *Héraclius*, 1647, no real falling-off is visible; indeed, the character of Phocas stands almost alone on the French stage as a parallel in some sort to Iago. *Andromède*, 1650, introduced a considerable amount of spectacle and decoration, not unhappily. *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, 1651, *Nicomède*, 1652, and *Pertharite*, 1653 (each of which may possibly be a year older than these respective dates), show what

political economists might call the stationary state of the poet's genius. The first two plays produced after the interval, *Œdipe*, 1659, and *La Toison d'Or*, 1660, both show the benefit of the rest the poet had had, together with certain signs of advancing years. *La Toison d'Or*, like *Andromède*, includes a great deal of spectacle, and is rather an elaborate masque interspersed with regular dramatic scenes than a tragedy. It is one of the best specimens of the kind. In *Sertorius*, 1662, there are occasional passages of much grandeur and beauty, but *Sophonisbe*, 1663, is hardly a success, nor is *Othon*, 1664. *Agésilas*, 1666, and *Attila*, 1667, have been (the latter unfairly) damned by a quatrain of Boileau's. But *Tite et Bérénice*, 1670, must be acknowledged to be inferior to the play of Racine in rivalry with which it was produced. *Pulchérie*, 1672, and *Suréna*, 1674, are last-fruits off an old tree, which, especially the second, are not unworthy of it. Nor was Corneille's contribution to the remarkable opera of *Psyché*, 1671, inconsiderable. This completes his dramatic work, which amounts to thirty pieces and part of another. It should be added that, to all the plays up to *La Toison d'Or*, he subjoined in a collected edition very remarkable criticisms of them, which he calls *Examens*.

The characteristics of this great dramatist are perhaps more uniform than those of any writer of equal rank, and there can be little doubt that this uniformity, which, considering the great bulk of his work, amounts almost to monotony, was the cause of his gradual loss of popularity. We shall not here notice the points which he has in common with Racine, as a writer of the French classical drama. These will come in more suitably when Racine himself has been dealt with. In Corneille the

academic criticism of the time found the fault that he rather excited admiration than pity and terror, and it held that admiration was 'not a tragic passion.' The criticism was clumsy, and to a great extent futile, but it has a certain basis of truth. It is comparatively rare for Corneille to attempt, after his earliest period, to interest his hearers or readers in the fortunes of his characters. It is rather in the way that they bear their fortunes, and particularly in a kind of haughty disdain for fortune itself, that these characters impress us. Sometimes, as in the Cléopâtre of *Rodogune*, this masterful temper is engaged on the side of evil, more frequently it is combined with amiable or at least respectable characteristics. But there is always something 'remote and afar' about it, and the application by La Bruyère of the famous comparison between the Greek tragedians is in the main strictly accurate. It follows that Corneille's demand upon his hearers or readers is a somewhat severe one, and one with which many men are neither disposed nor able to comply. It was a greater misfortune for him than for almost any one else that the French and not the English drama was the Sparta which it fell to his lot to decorate. His powers were not in reality limited. The *Menteur* shows an excellent comic faculty, and the strokes of irony in his serious plays have more of true humour in them than appears in almost any other French dramatist. Had the licence of the English stage been his, he would probably have been able to impart a greater interest to his plays than they already possess, without sacrificing his peculiar faculty of sublime moral portraiture, and certainly without losing the credit of the magnificent single lines and isolated passages which abound in his work. The friendly criticism of Molière on these sudden flashes is well

known. 'My friend Corneille,' he said, 'has a familiar who comes now and then and whispers in his ear the finest verses in the world, but sometimes the familiar deserts him, and then he writes no better than anybody else.' The most fertile familiar cannot suggest fifty or sixty thousand of these finest lines in the world; and the consequence is that, what with the lack of central interest which follows from Corneille's own plan, with the absence of subsidiary interest and relief which is inevitable in the French classical model, and with the drawbacks of his somewhat declamatory style, there are long passages, sometimes whole scenes and acts, if not whole plays of his, which are but dreary reading, and could hardly be, even with the most appreciative and creative acting, other than dreary to witness. It was Corneille's fault that, while bowing himself to the yoke of the Senecan drama, he did not perceive or would not accept the fact that there is practically but one situation, by the working out of which that drama can be made tolerable to modern audiences. This situation is love-making, which in real life necessitates a vast deal of talking, and about which, even on the stage, a vast deal of talking is admissible. The characters of the French classic or heroic play are practically allowed to do nothing but talk, and the author who would make them interesting must submit himself to his fate. Corneille would not submit wholly and cheerfully, though he has, as might be expected, been obliged to introduce love-making into most of his plays.

To a modern reader the detached passages already referred to, and the magnificent versification which is displayed in them, make up the real charm of Corneille except in a very few plays, such as the *Cid*, *Polyeucte*, *Rodogune*, and perhaps a few others. Du

Bartas, D'Aubigné, and Regnier, had indicated the capacities of the Alexandrine; Corneille demonstrated them and illustrated them almost indefinitely. He did not indulge in the pedantry of *rimes difficiles*, by which Racine attracted his hearers, nor was his verse so uniformly smooth as that of his younger rival. But what it lacked in polish and grace it more than made up in grandeur and dignity. The best lines of Corneille, like those of D'Aubigné, of Rotrou, from whom, comparatively stammering as was the teacher, Corneille perhaps learnt the art, and of Victor Hugo, have a peculiar crash of sound which hardly any other metre of any other language possesses. A slight touch of archaism (it is very slight) which is to be discovered in his work assists its effect not a little. The inveterate habit which exists in England of comparing all dramatists with Shakespeare has been prejudicial to the fame of Corneille with us. But he is certainly the greatest tragic dramatist of France on the classical model, and as a fashioner of dramatic verse of a truly poetical kind he has at his best few equals in the literature of Europe.

Racine.

The character, career, and work of Racine were curiously different from those of Corneille. Jean Racine[238] was more than thirty years younger than his greater rival, having been born at La Ferté Milon, at no great distance from Soissons, in 1639. His father held an official position at this place, but he died, as Racine's mother had previously died, in the boy's infancy, leaving him without any fortune. His grandparents, however, were alive, and able to take care of him, and they, with other relatives, willingly

undertook the task. He was well educated, going to school at Beauvais, from 1650 (probably) to 1655, and then spending three years under the care of the celebrated Port Royalists, where he made considerable progress. A year at the Collège d'Harcourt, where he should have studied law, completed his regular education; but he was always studious, and had on the whole greater advantages of culture than most men of letters of his time and country. For some years he led a somewhat undecided life. His relations did their best to obtain a benefice for him, and in other ways endeavoured to put him in the way of a professional livelihood; but ill-luck and probably disinclination on his part stood in the way. He wrote at least two plays at a comparatively early age which were refused, and are not known to exist, and he produced divers pieces of miscellaneous poetry, especially the 'Nymphe de la Seine,' which brought him to the notice of Chapelain. At last, in 1664, he obtained a pension of six hundred livres for an ode on the king's recovery from sickness, and the same year *La Thébaïde* was accepted and produced. For the next thirteen years plays followed in rapid, but not too rapid succession. Racine was the favourite of the king, and consequently of all those who had no taste of their own, as well as of some who had, though the best critics inclined to Corneille, between whom and Racine rivalry was industriously fostered. The somewhat indecent antagonism which Racine had shown towards a man who had won renown ten years before his own birth was justly punished in his own temporary eclipse by the almost worthless Pradon. He withdrew disgusted from the stage in 1677. About the same time he married, was made historiographer to the king, and became more or less

fervently devout. Years afterwards, at the request of Madame de Maintenon, he wrote for her school-girls at St. Cyr the dramatic sketch of *Esther*, and soon afterwards the complete tragedy of *Athalie*, the greatest of his works. Then he relapsed into silence as far as dramatic utterance was concerned. He died in 1699. Thus he presented the singular spectacle, only paralleled by our own Congreve, and that not exactly, of a short period of consummate activity followed by almost complete inaction. That this inaction was not due to exhaustion of genius was abundantly shown by *Esther* and *Athalie*. But Racine was of a peculiar and in many ways an unamiable temper. He was very jealous of his reputation, acutely sensitive to criticism, and envious to the last degree of any public approbation bestowed on others. Having made his fame, he seems to have preferred, in the language of the French gaming table, *faire Charlemagne*, and to run no further risks. He had, however, worse failings than any yet mentioned. Molière gave him valuable assistance, and he repaid it with ingratitude. With hardly a shadow of provocation he attacked in a tone of the utmost acrimony the Port Royal fathers, to whom he was under deep obligations. The charge of hypocrisy in religious matters which has been brought against him is probably gratuitous, and, in any case, does not concern us here. But his character in his literary relations is far from being a pleasant one.

The following is a list of Racine's theatrical pieces. *La Thébaïde*, 1664, indicates with sufficient clearness the lines upon which all Racine's plays, save the two last, were to be constructed—a minute adherence to the rules, very careful versification and subordination of almost all other interests to stately gallantry—but it is altogether inferior to its

successors. In *Alexandre le Grand*, 1665, the characteristics are accentuated, and what Corneille disdainfully called—

> Le commerce rampant de soupirs et de flammes

is more than ever prominent. In *Andromaque*, 1667, an immense advance is perceptible. The characters become personally interesting (Hermione is perhaps more attractive than any of Corneille's women), and a power of passionate invective not unworthy to be compared with Corneille's, but with more of a feminine character about it, appears. This was followed by Racine's only attempt in the comic sock, *Les Plaideurs*, 1668, a most charming trifle which has had, and has deserved, more genuine and lasting popularity than any of his tragedies. He returned to tragedy, and rapidly showed the defects of the stereotyped mannerism inevitably imposed on him by his plan. *Britannicus*, 1669, *Bérénice*, 1670, *Bajazet*, 1672, and *Mithridate*, 1673, with all their perfection of *technique*, announce, as clearly as anything can well do, the fatal monotony into which French tragedy had once more fallen, and in which it was to continue for a century and a half. *Iphigénie*, 1674, has much more liveliness and variety, the deep pathos and terror of the situation making even Racine's interminable love casuistry natural and interesting. But *Phèdre*, 1677, the last of the series, is unquestionably the most remarkable of Racine's regular tragedies. By it the style must stand or fall, and a reader need hardly go farther to appreciate it. *Britannicus* was indeed preferred by eighteenth-century judges; but for excellence of construction, artful beauty of verse, skilful use of the limited means of appeal at the command of the dramatist, no

play can surpass *Phèdre*; and if it still is found wanting, as it undoubtedly is by the vast majority of critics (including nowadays a powerful minority even among Frenchmen themselves), the fault lies rather in the style than in the author, or at least in the author for adopting the style. *Esther*, 1689, and *Athalie*, 1691, on the other hand, while retaining a certain similarity of form and machinery, are radically different from the other plays. It is evident that Racine before writing them had attentively studied the sixteenth-century drama, to the strict form of which with its choruses he returns, and from which he borrows, in some cases directly, the *Aman* of Montchrestien having clearly suggested passages in *Esther*. His great poetical faculty has freer play; he escapes the monotonous 'soupirs et flammes' altogether, and the result is in *Esther* on the whole, in *Athalie* wholly, admirable.

Racine's peculiarities as a dramatist have been already indicated, but may now be more fully described. He was emphatically one of those writers —Virgil and Pope are the other chief notable representatives of the class—who, with an incapacity for the finest original strokes of poetry, have an almost unlimited capacity for writing from models, for improving the technical execution of their poems, and for adjusting the conception of their pieces to their powers of rendering. These writers are always impossible without forerunners, and not usually possible without critics of the pedagogic kind. Racine was extraordinarily fortunate in his forerunner, and still more fortunate in his critic. He was able to start with all the advantages which thirty years of work on the part of his rival, Corneille, gave him; and he had for his trainer, Boileau, one of the most capable, if one of the most limited and prejudiced, of literary

schoolmasters. Boileau was no respecter of persons, and arrogant as he was, he was rather an admirer of Racine than of Corneille; yet, according to a well-known story, he distinguished between the two by saying that Corneille was a great poet, and Racine a very clever man, to whom he himself had taught the knack of easy versification with elaborate rhyming. It is indeed in his versification that both the strength and the weakness of Racine lie, and in this respect he is an exact analogue to the poets mentioned above. He treated the Alexandrine of Corneille exactly as Pope treated the decasyllable of Dryden, and as Virgil treated the hexameter of Lucretius. In his hands it acquired smoothness, softness, polish, and mechanical perfections of many kinds, only to suffer at the same time a compensatory monotony which, when the honied sweetness of it began to cloy, was soon recognised as a terrible drawback. The extraordinary estimation in which Racine is held by those who abide by the classical tradition in France depends very mainly on the melody of his versification and rhymes, but it does not depend wholly upon this. There must also be taken into account the perfection of workmanship with which he carries out the idea of the drama which he practised. What that ideal was must therefore be considered.

It must be remembered that the object of the French drama of Racine's time was not in the least to hold the mirror up to nature. The model which, owing to admiration of the classics, the Pléiade had almost at haphazard followed, rendered such an object simply unattainable. The so-called irregularity of the English stage, which used to fill French critics with alternate wonder and disgust, is nothing but the result of an unflinching adherence to this standard. It is

impossible to reproduce the *subtilitas naturae* in its most subtle example—the character of man—without introducing a large diversity of circumstance and action. That diversity in its turn cannot be produced without a great multiplication of characters, a duplication or triplication of plot, and a complete disregard of pre-established 'common form.' Now this 'common form' was the essence of French tragedy. Following, or thinking that they followed, the ancients, French dramatists and dramatic critics adopted certain fixed rules according to which a poet had to write just as a whist-player has to play the game. There was to be no action on the stage, or next to none, the interest of the play was to be rigidly reduced to a central situation, subsidiary characters were to be avoided as far as possible, the only means afforded to the personages of explaining themselves was by dialogue with confidantes—the curse of the French stage—and the only way of informing the audience of the progress of the action was by messengers. Corneille accepted these limitations partially, and without too much good-will, but he evaded the difficulty by emphasising the moral lesson. The ethical standard of his plays is perhaps higher on the whole than that of any great dramatist, and the wonderful bursts of poetry which he could command served to sugar the pill. But Racine was not a man of high moral character, and he was a man of great shrewdness and discernment. He evidently distrusted the willingness of audiences perpetually to admire moral grandeur, whether he did or did not hold that admiration was not a tragic passion. Probably he would have put it that it was not a passion that would draw. Love-making, on the contrary, would draw, and love-making accordingly is the staple of all his plays. But the defect which has

attended all French literature, which was aggravated enormously by this style of drama, and which is noticeable even in his greater contemporaries, Corneille and Molière, manifested itself in his work almost inevitably. If there is one fault to be found with the creations of French literary art, it is that they run too much into types. It has been well said that the duty of art is to give the universal in the particular. But to do this exactly is difficult. It is the fault of English and of German literature to give the particular without a sufficient tincture of the universal, to lose themselves in mere 'humours.' It is the fault of French literature to give the type only without differentiation. An ill-natured critic constantly feels inclined to alter the lists of Racine's dramatis personae, and instead of the proper names to substitute 'a lover,' 'a mother,' 'a tyrant,' and so forth. So great an artist and so careful a worker as Racine could not, of course, escape giving some individuality to his creations. Hermione, Phèdre, Achille, Bérénice, Athalie, are all individual enough of their class. But the class is the class of types rather than of individuals. After long debate this difference has been admitted by most reasonable French critics, and they now confine themselves to the argument that the two processes, the illustration of the universal by means of the particular, and the indication of the particular by means of the universal, are processes equally legitimate and equally important. The difficulty remains that, by common consent of mankind—Frenchmen not excluded—Hamlet, Othello, Falstaff, Rosalind, are fictitious persons far more interesting to their fellow-creatures who are not fictitious than any personages of the French stage. There is, moreover, a simple test which can be applied. No one can doubt that, if

Shakespeare had chosen to adopt the style, and had accepted the censorship of a Boileau, he could easily have written *Phèdre*. It would be a bold man who should say that Racine could, with altered circumstances but unaltered powers, have written *Othello*.

Minor Tragedians.

The style of tragedy which was likely to be successful in France had been pointed out so clearly by Corneille and by Racine that it could not fail to find imitators. As usual, the weakness of the style was more fully manifested by these imitators than its strength. The best of them was Thomas Corneille, the younger brother of Pierre. A much more facile versifier than his brother, he produced a large number of plays, of which *Camma*, *Laodice*, *Ariane*, *Le Comte d'Essex*, have considerable merit. Thomas Corneille succeeded his brother in the Academy, and died at a great old age. He was an active journalist and miscellaneous writer as well as a dramatist, and his principal misfortune was that he had a brother of greater genius than himself. Pradon, whose success against *Phèdre* so bitterly annoyed Racine, was a dramatist of the third, or even the fourth class, though he enjoyed some temporary popularity. Campistron, a follower rather than a rival of Racine, was a better writer than Pradon, but pushed to an extreme the softness and almost effeminacy of subject and treatment which made Corneille contemptuously speak of his younger rival and his party as 'les doucereux.' Quinault, before writing good operas and fair comedies, wrote bad tragedies. The only other authors of the day worth mentioning are Duché and Lafosse. Lafosse is a man of one play, though as a matter of fact he wrote four. In *Manlius* he gave Roman names and setting to the plot of Otway's *Venice Preserved*, and achieved a decided success.

Development of Comedy.

The history of French comedy is remarkably different from that of French tragedy. In the latter case a foreign model was followed almost slavishly; in the former the actual possessions of the language received grafts of foreign importation, and the result was one of the capital productions of European literature. Whether the popularity of the indigenous farce of itself saved France from falling into the same false groove with Italy it is not easy to say, but it is certain that at the time of the Renaissance there was some danger. At first it seemed as if Terence was to serve as a model for comedy just as Seneca served as a model for tragedy. The first comedy, *Eugène*, is strongly Terentian, though even here a greater freedom of movement, a stronger infusion of local colour is observable than in *Didon* or *Cléopâtre*. So, too, when the Italian Larivey adapted his remarkable comedies the vernacular savour became still stronger. Yet it was very long before genuine comedy was produced in France. The farces continued, and kinds of dramatic entertainment, lower even than the farce, such as those which survive in the work of the merry-andrew Tabarin[239], were relished. The Spanish comedy, with its strong spice of tragi-comedy, was imitated to a considerable extent. A few examples of the *Commedia erudita*, or Terentian play, continued to be produced at intervals; and the stock personages of the *Commedia dell'arte*, Harlequin, Scaramouch, etc., at one time invaded France, and, under cover of the comic opera and the *Foire* pieces, made something of a lodgment. In the earlier years of the seventeenth century, moreover, a considerable number of fantastic experiments were tried. We have a *Comédie des Proverbes*, in which the action is

altogether subordinate to the introduction of the greatest possible number of popular sayings; a *Comédie des Chansons* spun out of a vast and precious collection of popular songs; a *Comédie des Comédies*, which is a cento made up of extracts from Balzac, the moralist and letter-writer; a *Comédie des Comédiens*, in which the famous actors of the day are brought on the stage in their own persons[240], etc., etc. While French comedy was thus endeavouring to find its way in all manner of tentative and sometimes grotesque experiments, dramatists of talent occasionally struck, as if by accident, into some of the side paths of that way, and directed their successors into the way itself. The early comedies of Corneille have been spoken of; despite the improbability of their Spanish plots, they show a distinct feeling after real excellence. The eccentric Cyrano de Bergerac, especially in his *Pédant Joué*, furnished Molière with hints, and displayed considerable comic power. Scarron, a not dissimilar person, whose *Roman Comique* shows the interest he felt in the theatre, also wrote comedies, the chief of which were extremely popular, the character of Jodelet in the play of the same name (1645) becoming for the time a stock one both in name and type. Scarron's other chief pieces were *Don Japhet d'Arménie*, *L'Héritier ridicule*, *La Précaution inutile*. It was in the *Menteur* of Corneille that Molière himself considered that true comedy had been first reached, and it was this play which set him on the track. But French comedy of the seventeenth century, before Molière, is one of the subjects which have hardly any but a historical and antiquarian interest. Although far less artificial than contemporary tragedy, it is inferior as literature. It was attempted by writers of less power, and it is disfigured by too frequent

coarseness of language and incident. It was on the whole the lowest of literary styles during the first half of the century. With Molière it became at one bound the highest.

Molière.

Jean Baptiste Poquelin[241], afterwards called Molière, was born at Paris, probably in January 1622, in the Rue St. Honoré. The Poquelin family seem to have come from Beauvais. Some hypotheses as to a Scotch origin have been disproved. Molière's father was an upholsterer, holding an appointment in the royal household, and of some wealth and position. Molière himself had every advantage of education, being at school at the famous Jesuit Collége de Clermont, and afterwards studying philosophy (under Gassendi) and law. He was, according to some accounts, actually called to the bar. At his majority he seems to have received a considerable share of his mother's fortune, and thus to have become independent. He joined some other young men of fair position in establishing a theatrical company called *L'Illustre Théâtre*, which, however, failed with heavy loss to him, notwithstanding the assistance of a family of professional actors and actresses, one of whom, Madeleine Béjart, figures prominently in his private history. He was not to be thus disgusted with his profession. In 1646 he set out on a strolling tour through the provinces, and was absent from the capital for nearly thirteen years. The notices of this interesting part of his career which exist are unfortunately few, and, like many other points connected with it, have given rise to much controversy. It is sufficient to say that he returned to

Paris in 1658, and on the 24th of October performed with his troupe before the court. He had long been a dramatist as well as an actor, and had written besides minor pieces, most of which are lost, the *Étourdi* and the *Dépit Amoureux*. Molière soon acquired the favour of the king, and the *Précieuses Ridicules*, the first of his really great works, gained for him that of the public. In 1662 he married Armande Béjart, the younger sister of Madeleine—a marriage which brought him great unhappiness, though it was probably not without influence on some of his finest work. The king was godfather to the first child of the marriage, and Molière was a prosperous man. He became valet-de-chambre to Louis, and it was some insolence of his noble colleagues which is alleged, in a late and improbable though famous story, to have occasioned the incident of his partaking of the king's *en cas de nuit*. The highest point of his genius was shortly reached; *Tartuffe*, the *Festin de Pierre*, and *Le Misanthrope* being the work of three successive years, 1664-6. *Tartuffe* brought him some trouble because it was supposed to be irreligious in tendency, or at least to satirise the profession of religion. These, his three greatest comedies, were not all warmly received, and he fell back upon lighter work, producing in rapid succession farce-comedies for the public theatre, and *divertissements* of divers kinds for the court until his death in February 1673, which happened almost on the stage.

The following is a complete list of Molière's work which has come down to us. During his provincial sojourn he had written many slight pieces half-way in kind between the Italian comedy and the native farce. Of these two only survive, *Le Médecin Volant* and *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*. Both have considerable

merit, and Molière subsequently worked up their materials, as no doubt he did those of the lost pieces. *L'Étourdi*, 1653, is a regular comedy in five acts, still strongly Italian in style and somewhat improbable in circumstances, but full of sparkle and lively action and dialogue. *Le Dépit Amoureux*, 1654, is even better and more independent. Nothing had yet been seen on the French stage so good as the quarrels and reconciliation of the quartette of master, mistress, valet, and *soubrette*. But *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, 1659, struck an entirely different note. The stage had been employed often enough for personal satire, but it had not yet been made use of for the actual delineation and criticism of contemporary manners as manners and not as the foibles of individuals. The play was directed against the affectations and unreal language of the members of literary *coteries* which, with that of the Hôtel Rambouillet as the chief, had long been prominent in French society. It has but a single act, but in its way it has never been surpassed either as a piece of social satire or a piece of brilliant dialogue illustrating ludicrous action and character. *Sganarelle*, 1660, relapses into the commonplaces of farce, and has no moral or satirical intention, but is amusing enough. *Don Garcie de Navarre*, 1661, may be called Molière's only failure. He styles it a *comédie héroïque*, and it is in fact a kind of anticipation of Racine's manner, but applied to less serious subjects. The jealousy of the hero is, however, the only motive of the piece, and its exhibition is rather tiresome than anything else. The play is monotonous and unrelieved by action. The genius of the author reappeared in its appropriate sphere in *L'École des Maris* (same date), where a Terentian suggestion is adapted and carried out with the greatest skill. Then, still in the same prolific year, Molière returned to

social satire in *Les Fâcheux*, an audacious lampoon on the forms of fashionable boredom common among the courtiers of the time. In 1662 appeared *L'École des Femmes*, which is generally considered the best of Molière's plays before *Tartuffe*. A certain slyness about the character of Agnes is its only drawback. This gave occasion to the brilliant and most amusing *Critique de L'École des Femmes*, 1663. Here the author is once more the satirist of contemporary society, which he introduces as criticising his own work. *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (same date), according to a curious habit which Molière did not originate, brings the author himself and his troupe in their own names and persons before the spectator. *Le Mariage Forcé*, 1664, a slight piece, was worked up into a ballet for the court. *La Princesse d'Elide* (same date) is Molière's most important court piece, or *comédie-ballet*, and, though necessarily artificial, has great beauty. Next in point of composition came *The Hypocrite*, that is to say *Tartuffe*, but the difficulties which this met with made *Le Festin de Pierre*, 1665, appear first. This is a tragi-comic working up of the Don Juan story, and is of a different class from any other of Molière's comedies. It has been thought, but without sufficient ground, that Molière here gave expression to a modified form of the freethinking which was so common at the time. It may, perhaps, be more truly regarded as an excursion into romantic comedy—the comedy which, like Shakespeare's work, is not directly satiric on society or on individuals, but tells stories poetically and in dramatic form with comic touches. It is noteworthy that Don Juan is of all Molière's heroes least exposed to the charge of being an abstraction rather than a man. The pleasant trifle, *L'Amour Médecin* (same date), was succeeded by *Le Misanthrope*, 1666. Here Molière's special vein of

satire was worked most deeply and to most profit, though the reproach that the handling is somewhat too serious for comedy is not undeserved. Alceste the impatient but not cynical hero, Célimène the coquette, Oronte the fop, Éliante the reasonable woman, Arsinoé the mischief-maker, are all immortal types. The admirable farce-comedy of the *Médecin malgré Lui* (same date), founded upon an old *fabliau*, followed, and this was succeeded almost immediately by the graceful pastoral of *Mélicerte*, the amusing *Pastorale Comique*, and the slight sketch of *Le Sicilien, ou L'Amour Peintre*. At last, in 1667, *Tartuffe* got itself represented. It is a vigorous and almost ferocious satire on religious pretension masking vice, and many of its separate strokes are of the dramatist's happiest. Here however, more than elsewhere, is felt the drawback of the method. Comparing Tartuffe with Iago, we have all the difference between a skilful but not wholly probable presentation of wickedness in the abstract, and a picture of a wicked man. In *Amphitryon*, 1668, Molière measured himself with Plautus and produced an admirable play. *George Dandin* (same date), the working up of *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, is one of the happiest of his sketches of conjugal infelicity. Then came *L'Avare* (same date), in which Molière was once more indebted to the ancients and to his French predecessors, but in which he amply justified his borrowings. At this time he extended his field and brought his knowledge of provincial and bourgeois life to bear. *M. de Pourceaugnac*, 1669, is an ingenious satire, pushed to the verge of burlesque and farce, on the country squires of France. *Les Amants Magnifiques*, 1670, shows the writer once more in his capacity of court playwright. But *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (same date) is the most

audacious and by far the most successful of the wonderful extravaganzas in which a sound and perennial motive of satire on society is wrapped up, the theme this time being the bourgeoisie of Paris, of which the author was himself a member. *Psyché*, 1671, is, perhaps, the most remarkable example of collaboration in literature, Molière, Pierre Corneille, and Quinault, the greatest comic dramatist, the greatest tragic dramatist, and the greatest opera librettist of the day, having joined their forces with a result not unworthy of them. *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (same date) is again farce, but farce such as only Molière could write; and in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* (same date) the theme of *M. de Pourceaugnac* is taken up with a certain heightening of colour and manner. *Les Femmes Savantes*, 1672, brings the reader back to what is as emphatically 'la bonne comédie' as its original *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. The tone and treatment are more serious than in the older piece and deal with a different variety of feminine coxcombry, but the effect is not less happy, and is free from the broader elements of farce. Lastly, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, 1673, the swan-song of Molière, combined both his greatest excellences, the power of raising audacious farce into the region of true comedy and the power of satirising social abuses with a pitiless but good-humoured hand. The main theme here is the absurdity of the current practice of medicine, but as usual the genius of the writer veils the fact of the drama being a drama with a purpose.

The unique individuality and the extraordinary merit of the various pieces which make up Molière's theatre have made it necessary to give a tolerably minute account of them, and that account will to a certain extent dispense us from dealing with his general characteristics at great length, especially as a

few remarks on French comedy of the Molièresque kind as a whole will have to be given at the end of this chapter. Independently of the characters which Molière shares with all the great names of literature, his fertility and justness of thought, the felicity of the expression in which he clothes it, and his accurate observation of human life, there are two points in his drama which belong, in the highest degree, to him alone. One is the extraordinary manner in which he manages to imbue farce and burlesque with the true spirit of refined comedy. This manner has been spoken of by unfriendly critics as 'exaggerated,' but the reproach argues a deficiency of perception. Even the most roaring farces of Molière, even such pieces as *M. de Pourceaugnac* and the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, demand rank as legitimate comedy, owing to his unmatched faculty of intimating a general purpose under the cloak of the merely ludicrous incidents which are made to surround the fortunes of a particular person. This general purpose (and here we come to the second point) is invariably a moral one. Of all dramatists, ancient and modern, Molière is perhaps that one who has borne most constantly in mind the theory that the stage is a lay-pulpit and that its end is not merely amusement, but the reformation of manners by means of amusing spectacles. Occasionally, no doubt, he has pushed this purpose too far and has missed his mark. He has never given us, and perhaps could not have given us, such examples of dramatic poetry of the non-tragic sort as Shakespeare and Calderon have given. Indeed, it seems to be a mistake to call Molière a poet at all, despite his extraordinary creative faculty. He was too positive, too much given to literal transcription of society, too little able to convey the vague suggestion of beauty which, as cannot be too

often repeated, is of the essence of poetry. But, if we are content to regard drama as a middle term between poetry and prose, he, with the two poets just named, must be appointed to the first place in it among modern authors. In brilliancy of wit he is, among dramatists, inferior only to Aristophanes and Congreve. But he took a less Rabelaisian licence of range than Aristophanes, and he never, like Congreve, allows his action to drift aimlessly while his characters shoot pleasantries at one another. If we leave purely poetic merit out of the question and restrict the definition of comedy to the dramatic presentment of the characters and incidents of actual life, in such a manner as at once to hold the mirror up to nature and to convey lessons of morality and conduct, we must allow Molière the rank of the greatest comic writer of all the world. *Castigat ridendo mores* is a motto which no one challenges with such a certainty of victory as he.

Although the number and the diversity of Molière's works were well calculated to encourage imitators, it was some time before the imitators appeared. Unlike Racine, whose method was at once caught up, Molière saw during his lifetime no one who could even pretend to be a rival. Those who are now classed as being in some degree of his time were for the most part in their cradles when his masterpieces were being acted. Regnard, the best of them, was born two years after the appearance of *Le Dépit Amoureux* and only three years before the appearance of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. Baron was his pupil and adoring disciple. Dufresny was but just of age, and Dancourt but ten years old, at his death. Brueys and Palaprat (the Beaumont and Fletcher, *mutatis mutandis*, of the French stage) did not make up their curious association till long after that event,

at the date of which Le Sage was five years old. Quinault, Boursault, and Montfleury alone were in active rivalry with him, and though none of them was destitute of merit, the merit of none of them was in the least comparable to his. He owed this advantage, for such it was, to his relatively early death and to the wonderfully short space of time in which his masterpieces were produced. Molière is identified with the age of Louis XIV., yet *Les Précieuses Ridicules* was written years after the king's nominal accession, and even after his actual assumption of the reins of government from the hands of Mazarin, while *Le Malade Imaginaire* was acted by its dying author more than forty years before the great king's reign ended.

Contemporaries of Molière.

The three authors just mentioned as actually contemporary with Molière require no very lengthy notice. Quinault may almost be said to have founded a new literary school (in which none of his pupils has surpassed him) by the excellence of his operas. Of these *Armida* is held the best. His comedies proper are not quite so good as his operas, but much better than his tragedies. One of them, *L'Amant Indiscret*, supplied Newcastle and Dryden with hints to eke out *L'Étourdi*, and most of them show a considerable command of comic situation, if not of comic expression. Montfleury, whose real name was Antoine Jacob, was, like Molière, an actor. He belonged to the old or rival company of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and was born in 1640. He wrote sixteen comedies, partly on contemporary subjects and partly adaptations of Spanish originals. The two best

are *La Femme Juge et Partie* and *La Fille Capitaine*. They belong to an older style of comedy than Molière's, being both extravagant and coarse, but there is considerable *vis comica* in them. Boursault, who was born in 1638 and died in 1701, had still more merit, though he too was an enemy of Molière. His *Mercure Galant* is his principal play, besides which *Ésope à la Cour*, *Ésope à la Ville*, and *Phaeton* may be mentioned. He was decidedly popular both as a man and a writer. Vanbrugh imitated more than one of his plays. In all these comedies a certain smack of the pre-Molièresque fancy for *Comédies des Chansons* and other *tours de force* may be perceived. Besides these three writers others of Molière's own contemporaries wrote comedies with more or less success. La Fontaine himself was a dramatist, though his dramas do not approach his other work in excellence. Thomas Corneille wrote comedies, but none of importance; and Campistron attained a certain amount of success in comic as in tragic drama. No one of these, however, approached the authors of the younger generation who have been mentioned.

The School of Molière-Regnard.

Jean François Regnard, the second of French comic dramatists in general estimation (though it is doubtful whether any single piece of his equals *Turcaret*), was born at Paris in 1656, and lived a curious life. He was heir to considerable wealth and increased it, singular to say, by gambling. He had also a mania for travelling, and when he was only two-and-twenty was captured by an Algerian corsair and enslaved. After some adventures of a rather

dubious character he was ransomed, but continued to travel for some years. At last he returned to France, bought several lucrative offices and an estate in the country, and lived partly there and partly at Paris, writing comedies and indulging largely in the pleasures of the table. He died at his château of Grillon in 1710, apparently of a fit of indigestion; but various legends are current about the exact cause of his death. He wrote twenty-three plays (including one tragedy of no value) and collaborated with Dufresny in four others. Many of these pieces were comic operas. At least a dozen were represented by the 'Maison de Molière.' The best of them are *Le Joueur*, *Le Distrait*, *Les Ménéchmes*, *Le Légataire*, the first and the last named being his principal titles to fame. Regnard trod as closely as he could in the steps of Molière. He was destitute of that great dramatist's grasp of character and moral earnestness; but he is a thoroughly lively writer, and well merited the retort of Boileau (by no means a lenient critic, especially to the young men who succeeded his old friend), when some one charged Regnard with mediocrity, 'Il n'est pas médiocrement gai.'

Baron the actor was born in 1643 and died in 1729, after having long been the leading star of the French stage. He wrote, though it is sometimes said that he was aided by others, seven comedies. One of these, *L'Andrienne*, is a clever adaptation of Terence, and another, *L'Homme aux Bonnes Fortunes*, has considerable merit in point of writing and of that stage adaptability which few writers who have not been themselves actors have known how to master.

Charles Rivière Dufresny, a descendant of 'La Belle Jardinière,' one of Henri IV.'s village loves, was born in 1648 and died in 1724. He was a great favourite

of Louis XIV. and a kind of universal genius, devoting himself by turns to almost every branch of literature and of the arts. He was, however, incurably desultory, and was besides a man of disorderly life. His comedies were numerous and full of wit and knowledge of the world, but somewhat destitute of finish. Besides those in which Regnard collaborated he was the author of eleven pieces, of which *L'Esprit de Contradiction*, *Le Double Veuvage*, *La Coquette de Village*, and *La Réconciliation Normande* are perhaps the best.

Florent Carton Dancourt was born in 1661 and died in 1725. He too was a favourite of Louis XIV., but, unlike Dufresny, he was an actor as well as an author. Towards the end of his days, having made a moderate fortune, he betook himself to a country life and to the practice of religious duties. His *théâtre* is considerable, extending to twelve volumes. The great peculiarity of his comedies is that they deal almost exclusively with the middle class. *Les Bourgeoises de Qualité* and *Le Chevalier à la Mode*, perhaps also *Le Galant Jardinier* and *Les Trois Cousines*, deserve mention.

The collaboration of Brueys and Palaprat resulted in the modern version of the famous mediaeval farce, *L'Avocat Pathelin*, and in an excellent piece of the Molière-Regnard type, *Le Grondeur*. Some other plays of less merit were written by the friends, while each is responsible for two independent pieces. Both were Provençals, David Augustin de Brueys having been born at Aix in 1640, Jean Palaprat at Toulouse ten years later. Brueys, who, as an abbé converted by Bossuet and engaged actively in propagating his new faith, had some difficulty in appearing publicly as a dramatic author, is understood to have had the chief

share in the composition of the joint dramas.

Characteristics of Molièresque Comedy.

The general characteristics of this remarkable comedy are not hard to define. Based as it was, after Molière had once set the example, on the direct study of the actual facts of society and human nature, it could not fail to appeal to universal sympathy in a very different degree from the artificial tragedy which accompanied it. It was, moreover, far less trammelled by rules than the sister variety of drama. Unities did not press very heavily on the comic dramatist; his choice and number of characters, his licence of action on the stage, and so forth, were unlimited; he could write in prose or verse at his pleasure, and, if he chose verse, he was bound to a much less monotonous kind of it than his tragic brother. Consequently the majority of the objections which lie against the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine, and which make the work of their imitators almost unreadable, leave Molière and his followers unscathed. One drawback only remained, the drawback already commented on in the case of tragedy, and admitted by French critics themselves in some such terms as that Shakespeare took individuals, Molière took types. The advantage of the latter method for enforcing a moral lesson is evident; its literary disadvantages are evident likewise. It leads to an ignoring of the complexity of human nature and to an unnatural prominence of the 'ruling passion.' The highest dramatic triumphs of single character in comedy, Falstaff, Rosalind, Beatrice, become impossible. As it has been

remarked, the very titles of these plays, *Le Misanthrope*, *Le Joueur*, *Le Grondeur*, show their defects. No man is a mere misanthrope, a mere gambler, a mere grumbler; and the dramatist who approaches comedy from the side of Molière is but too apt to forget the fact in his anxiety to enforce his moral and deepen the strokes of his general type.

FOOTNOTES:

[233] Ed. Stengel. 5 vols. Marburg, 1884. Cf. Rigal, *Alexandre Hardy*. Paris, 1889.

[234] This singular work has been published in vol. 8 of the *Ancien Théâtre Français* in the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne. It consists of two parts (or, as the author calls them, days), and fills some two hundred pages. The traditions of the classical drama are thrown to the winds in it, and the liberty of action, the abundance of personages, the bustle and liveliness of the presentation are almost equal to those of the contemporary English theatre.

[235] Ed. Viollet-le-Duc. Also in a convenient selection of his best plays, by L. de Ronchaud. Paris, 1882.

[236] It is pretty generally known that Richelieu himself (besides other dramatic work) composed the whole, or nearly the whole, of a play *Mirame*, which he had sumptuously performed, and which was fathered by Desmarest. It possessed no merit.

[237] Ed. Marty-Laveaux. 12 vols. Paris, 1862-67.

[238] Ed. Mesnard. 8 vols. Paris, 1867.

[239] The work of (or attributed to) this

singular and obscure person has been edited by M. G. Aventin in 2 vols, of the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne (Paris, 1858). The name was certainly assumed, and the date and history of the bearer are quite uncertain. The third decade of the seventeenth century seems to have been his most flourishing time. He was the most remarkable of a class of charlatans, others of whom bore the names of Gaultier-Garguille, Gros-Guillaume, etc., and the work which goes under his name is typical of a large mass of *facetiae*. It consists of dialogues between Tabarin and his master, of farcical adventures in which figure Rodomont (the typical hero of romance) and Isabelle (the typical heroine), etc., etc.

[240] These will be found in the dramatic collection of the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne already cited, as well as other pieces, of which the most remarkable is the *Corrivaux* of Troterel (1612). Saint-Evremond among his earlier works produced a *Comédie des Académistes*, satirising the then young Academy.

[241] Ed. Moland. 7 vols. Paris, 1863. Ed. (in 'Grands Ecrivains' series) Despois, Regnier, and Mesnard. Paris (in progress).

CHAPTER III.

NOVELISTS.

D'Urfé.

Prose fiction, for reasons which it is not at all hard to discover, is in its more complete forms always a late product of literature. Up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, France had known nothing of it except the short prose tales which had succeeded the Fabliaux, and which had been chiefly founded on imitation of the Italians, with the late and inferior prose versions of the romances of chivalry, the isolated masterpiece of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, and the translated and adapted versions of the *Amadis* and its continuations. The imitation of Spanish literature was constant in the early seventeenth century, and the great wave of conceited style which, under the various names of Euphuism, Gongorism, Marinism, invaded all the literary countries of Europe, did not spare France. The result was a very singular class of literature which, except for a few burlesque works, almost monopolised the attention of novelists during the first half of the century. The example of it was in a manner set by Honoré d'Urfé in the *Astrée*, which was, however, rather pastoral than heroic. D'Urfé, who was a man of position and wealth in the district of Forez, imagined, on the banks of the Lignon, a stream running past his home, a kind of Arcadia, the popularity of which is sufficiently shown by the adoption of the name of the hero, Céladon, as one of the stock names in French for a lover. He took, perhaps, some of his machinery from the *Aminta* of Tasso and from the other Italian pastorals, but he emulated the *Amadis* in the interminable series of adventures and the long-windedness of his treatment. He had, however, some literary power, while the necessary verisimilitude was provided for by the

adaptation of numerous personal experiences, and the book has preserved a certain reputation for graceful sentiment and attractive pictures of nature. It was extraordinarily popular at the time and long afterwards, so much so that a contemporary ecclesiastic, Camus de Pontcarré, considered it necessary to supply an antidote to the bane in the shape of a series of Christian pastorals, the name of one of which, *Palombe*, is known, because of an edition of it in the present century.

The Heroic Romances.

D'Urfé belonged as much to the sixteenth as to the seventeenth century, though the *Astrée* was the work of the latter part of his life, and was indeed left unfinished by him. It was shortly afterwards, under the influence chiefly of the growing fancy for literary *coteries*, that the heroic romance properly so called was born. This was usually a narration of vast length, in which sometimes the heroes and heroines of classical antiquity, sometimes personages due more or less to the author's imagination, were conducted through a more than Amadis-like series of trials and adventures, with interludes and a general setting of high-flown gallantry. This latter possessed a complete jargon of its own, and (though the hypothesis of its power over the classical French drama is for the most part exaggerated) continued to exercise a vast influence on literature and on society, even after Molière had poured on its chief practitioners and advocates the undying mockery of his *Précieuses Ridicules*. There were three prominent authors in this style, Mademoiselle de Scudéry, La Calprenède, and Gomberville. Mademoiselle de

Scudéry, known in the *coterie* nomenclature of the time as 'Sapho,' was the sister of Georges de Scudéry, and a woman of considerable talent and more considerable industry. Madeleine de Scudéry was born at Havre in 1607, and died at Paris in 1701, her life thus covering nearly the whole of the century of which she was one of the most conspicuous literary figures. She had no beauty—indeed she was very ugly—but the eccentric military and literary reputation of her brother and her own talents made her the centre and head of an important *coterie* in the capital. Her romances, the earliest of which was *Ibrahim*, were published under her brother's name, but their authorship was well known. She was extremely accomplished, not merely in the accomplishments of a blue-stocking but in art, and even in housewifery. After her series of romances was finished she published many volumes, chiefly condensed or extracted from them, containing *Conversations* of the moral kind, which attracted attention from some persons who had not condescended to the romances themselves. It ought never to be forgotten that among the most fervent admirers of her books and of their fellows was Madame de Sévigné, who was certainly almost as acute in literary criticism as she was skilful in literary composition. Her novels, the most famous of their class, are the *Grand Cyrus*, otherwise *Artamène*, *Clélie*, *Ibrahim*, or the *Illustrious Bassa*, and *Almahide*, the latter being partly, but chiefly in the name of the heroine, the source of Dryden's *Conquest of Granada*. The *Grand Cyrus* is, at least by title, the best remembered, but it is in *Clélie* that the best-known and most characteristic trait appears, the delineation and description namely of the *Carte de Tendre*[242]. Tendre is the country of love, through which flows

the river of Inclination watering the villages of 'Pretty Verses,' 'Gallant Epistles,' 'Assiduity,' etc., while elsewhere in the region are the less cheerful localities of 'Levity,' 'Indifference,' 'Perfidy,' and so forth. La Calprenède, a Gascon by birth, was the author of *Cléopâtre* (which ranks perhaps with *Cyrus* as the chief example of the style), of *Cassandre* and of *Pharamond*. Gauthier de Coste (which was his personal name) figures, like most of the notable persons of the middle of the century, in the *Historiettes* of Tallemant, who says of him, 'Il n'y a jamais eu un homme plus Gascon que celui-ci.' The assertion is supported by some characteristic but not easily quotable anecdotes. The criticism of Tallemant, however, does not apply badly to the whole class of compositions. 'Les héros,' says he, speaking of *Cassandre*, 'se ressemblent comme deux gouttes d'eau, parlent tous *Phébus* (the euphuist jargon of the time), et sont tous des gens à cent mille lieues au dessus des autres hommes.' Marin le Roy, Seigneur de Gomberville, who was something of a Jansenist, attended rather to edification than gallantry in his *Alcidiane*, *Caritée*, *Polexandre*, and *Cythérée*. Though earlier in date he is inferior in power to Mademoiselle de Scudéry and to La Calprenède, the first of whom had some wit and much culture, while La Calprenède possessed a decided grasp of heroic character and some notion of the method of composing historical novels. Gomberville, a man of wealth and position, was also a writer of moral works. Putting the artificiality of the general style out of the question, the chief fault to be found with these books is their enormous length. They fill eight, ten, or even twelve volumes; they consist of five, six, or even seven thousand pages, though the pages are not very large and the

print by no means close. Even the liveliest work—work like Fielding's or Le Sage's—would become tiresome on such a scale as this; and it is still incomprehensible how any one not having some special object to serve by it could struggle through such enormous wastes of verbiage and unreality as form the bulk of these novels. Even when the passion for the heroic style strictly so called began to wane no great improvement at first manifested itself. Catherine Desjardins[243] (who wrote under the name of Madame de Villedieu) produced numerous books (the chief of which is *Le Grand Alcandre*), not indeed so absolutely preposterous in general conception, but even more vapid and destitute of originality and distinction[244].

These impracticable and barren styles of fiction were succeeded in the latter half of the century by something much better. The Picaroon romance of Spain inspired Paul Scarron with the first of a long line of novels which, in the hands of Le Sage, Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett, enriched the literature of Europe with remarkable work. Madame de la Fayette laid the foundation of the novel proper, or story of analysis of character; and towards the close of the century the fairy tale attained, in the hands of Anthony Hamilton, Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy, its most delightful and abundant development.

Scarron.

Paul Scarron was one of the most remarkable literary figures of the century in respect of originality and eccentric talent, though few single works of his possess formal completeness. He was of a family of Piedmontese origin and very well connected, his father, of the same name, being a member of the

Parliament of Paris, and of sufficiently independent humour to oppose Richelieu. Paul Scarron the younger (he had had an elder brother of the same name who had died an infant) was born in 1610, and his mother did not outlive his third year. His father married again; the stepmother did not get on well with Paul, and he was half obliged and half induced to become an abbé. For some years he lived a merry life, partly at Rome, partly at Paris. But when he was still young a great calamity fell on him. A cock-and-bull story of his having disguised himself as a savage in a kind of voluntary tar-and-feather suit, and having been struck with paralysis in consequence of plunging into an ice-cold stream to escape the populace, is usually told, but there seems to be no truth in it. An attack of fever, followed by rheumatism and mismanaged by the physicians of the day, appears to have been the real cause of his misfortune. At any rate, for the last twenty years of his life he was hopelessly deformed, almost helpless, and subject to acute attacks of pain. But his spirit was unconquerable. He had some preferment at Le Mans and a pension from the queen, which he lost on suspicion of writing *Mazarinades*. Besides these he had what he called his 'Marquisat de Quinet,' that is to say, the money which Quinet the bookseller paid him for his wares. In 1652 he astonished Paris by marrying Françoise d'Aubigné, the future Madame de Maintenon, the granddaughter of Agrippa d'Aubigné. The strange couple seem to have been happy enough, and such unfavourable reports as exist against Madame Scarron may be set down to political malice. But Scarron's health was utterly broken, and he died in 1660 at the age of fifty. His work was not inconsiderable, including some plays and much burlesque poetry, the chief piece of which was his

'Virgil travestied,' an ignoble task at best, but very cleverly performed. His prose, however, is of much greater value. Many of his *nouvelles*, mostly imitated from the Spanish, have merit, and his *Roman Comique*[245], though also inspired to some extent from the peninsula, has still more. It is the unfinished history of a troop of strolling actors, displaying extraordinary truth of observation and power of realistic description in the style which, as has been said, Le Sage and Fielding afterwards made popular throughout Europe.

Cyrano de Bergerac.

With Scarron may be classed another writer of not dissimilar character, but of far less talent, whose eccentricities have given him a disproportionate reputation even in France, while they have often entirely misled foreign critics. Cyrano de Bergerac was a Gascon of not inconsiderable literary power, whose odd personal appearance, audacity as a duellist, and adherence, after conversion, to the unpopular cause of Mazarin, gave him a position which his works fail to sustain. They are not, however, devoid of merit. His *Pédant Joué*, a comedy, gave Molière some useful hints; his *Agrippine*, a tragedy, has passages of declamatory energy. But his best work comes under the head of fiction. The *Voyages à la Lune et au Soleil*[246], in which the author partly followed Rabelais, and partly indulged his own fancy for rodomontade, personal satire, and fantastic extravagance, have had attributed to them the great and wholly unmerited honour of setting a pattern to Swift. Cyrano, let it be repeated, was a man of talent, but his powers (he died before he was

thirty-five) had not time to mature, and the reckless boastfulness of his character would probably have disqualified him at all times from adequate study and self-criticism. Personally, he is an amusing and interesting figure in literary history, but he is not much more. In company with him and with Scarron may be mentioned Dassoucy, alternately a friend and enemy of Cyrano, and a light writer of some merit.

Furetière.

Charles Sorel, an exceedingly voluminous author, historiographer of France, deserves mention in passing for his *Histoire Comique de Francion*[247], in which, as in almost all the fictitious work of the time, serious as well as comic, living persons are introduced. The chief remarkable thing about *Francion* is the evidence it gives of an attempt at an early date (1623) to write a novel of ordinary manners. It is a dull story with loose episodes. More interesting is Antoine Furetière, author of the *Roman Bourgeois*[248]. Furetière, who was a man of varied talent, holds no small place in the history of the calamities of authors. He wrote poems, short tales, fables, satires, criticisms. He is said to have given both Boileau and Racine not inconsiderable assistance. Unfortunately for him, though he had been elected an academician in 1662, he conceived and executed the idea of outstripping his tardy colleagues in their dictionary work. He produced a book of great merit and utility, but one which brought grave troubles on his own head. It was alleged that he had infringed the privileges of the Academy; he was expelled from that body, his own privilege for his own book was revoked, and it was not published till after his death, becoming

eventually the well-known *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. Furetière's side has been warmly taken in these days, and it has been sought, not without success, to free him from the charge of all impropriety of conduct, except the impropriety of continuing to be a member of the Academy, while what he was doing could hardly be regarded as anything but a slight on it. The *Roman Bourgeois* is an original and lively book, without any general plot, but containing a series of very amusing pictures of the Parisian middle-class society of the day, with many curious traits of language and manners. It was published in 1666.

Madame de la Fayette.

Of very different importance is the Countess de la Fayette, who has the credit, and justly, of substituting for mere romances of adventure on the one hand, and for stilted heroic work on the other, fiction in which the display of character is held of chief account. In the school, indeed, of which Scarron set the example in France, especially in *Gil Blas*, its masterpiece, the most accurate knowledge and drawing of human motives and actions is to be found. But it is knowledge and drawing of human motives and actions in the gross rather than in particular. Gil Blas, and even Tom Jones, are types rather than individuals, though the genius of their creators hides the fact. It is, perhaps, an arguable point of literary criticism, whether the persevering analysis of individual, and more or less unusual, character does not lead novelists away from the best path—as it certainly leads in the long run to monstrosities of the modern French and English 'realist' type. But this is a detail of criticism into

which there is no need to enter here. It is sufficient that the style has produced some of the most admirable, and much of the most characteristic, work of the last century, and that Madame de la Fayette is on the whole entitled to the credit of being its originator. Her pen was taken up in the next century by the Abbé Prevost and by Richardson, and from these three the novel, as opposed to the romance, may be said to descend. The maiden name of Madame de la Fayette[249] was Marie Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, and she was born at Paris in 1634. Her father was governor of Havre. She was carefully brought up under Ménage and Rapin, among others, and was one of the most brilliant of the *précieuses* of the Hôtel Rambouillet. In 1655 she married the Count de la Fayette, but was soon left a widow. After his death she contracted a kind of Platonic friendship with La Rochefoucauld, who was then in the decline of life, tormented with gout, and consoling himself for the departure of the days when he was one of the most important men in France by the composition of his undying Maxims. She survived him thirteen years, and died herself in 1693. During the whole of her life she was on the most intimate terms with Madame de Sévigné, as well as with many of the foremost men of letters of the time. In particular there are extant a large number of letters between her and Huet, bishop of Avranches, one of the most learned, amiable, and upright prelates of the age. Her first attempt at novel-writing was *La Princesse de Montpensier*. This was followed by *Zaïde*, published in 1670, a book of considerable excellence; and this in its turn by *La Princesse de Clèves*, published in 1677, which is one of the classics of French literature. The book is but a small one, not amounting in size to a single volume of a modern

English novel, and this must of itself have been no small novelty and relief after the portentous bulk of the Scudéry romances. Its scene is laid at the court of Henri II., and there is a certain historical basis; but the principal personages are drawn from the author's own experience, herself being the heroine, her husband the Prince of Clèves, and Rochefoucauld the Duke de Nemours, while other characters are identified with Louis XIV. and his courtiers by industrious compilers of 'keys.' If, however, the interest of the book had been limited to this it would now-a-days have lost all its attraction, or have retained so much at most as is due to simple curiosity. But it has far higher merits, and what may be called its court apparatus, and the multitude of small details about court business, are rather drawbacks to it now. Such charm as it has is derived from the strict verisimilitude of the character drawing, and the fidelity with which the emotions are represented. This interest may, indeed, appear thin to a modern reader fresh from the works of those who have profited by two centuries of progress in the way which Madame de la Fayette opened. But when it is remembered that her book appeared thirty years before *Gil Blas*, forty before the masterpieces of Defoe, and more than half a century before the English novel properly so called made its first appearance, her right to the place she occupied will hardly be contested[250].

The precise origin of the fancy for writing fairy stories, which took possession of polite society in France at the end of the seventeenth century, has been the subject of much discussion, and cannot be said to have been finally settled. Probably the fables of La Fontaine, which are very closely allied to the style, may have given the required impulse. As soon

as an example was set this style was seen to lend itself very well to the still surviving fancy for *coterie* compositions, and the total amount of work of the kind produced in the last years of the seventeenth and the first of the eighteenth century must be enormous. Much of it has not yet been printed, and the names of but few of the authors are generally known, or perhaps worth knowing[251]. Three, however, emerge from the mass and deserve attention—Anthony Hamilton, Madame d'Aulnoy, and above all, Charles Perrault, the master beyond all comparison of the style.

Fairy Tales.

Marie Catherine, Comtesse d'Aulnoy, was born about the middle of the seventeenth century, and died in 1720. It is sufficient to say that among her works are the 'Yellow Dwarf' and the 'White Cat,' stories which no doubt she did not invent, but to which she has given their permanent and well-known form. She wrote much else, memoirs and novels which were bad imitations of the style of Madame de la Fayette, but her fairy tales alone are of value. Anthony Hamilton was one of the rare authors who acquire a durable reputation by writing in a language which is not their native tongue. He was born in Ireland in 1646, and followed the fortunes of the exiled royal family. He returned with Charles II., but adhering to Catholicism, was excluded from preferment in England until James II.'s reign, and he passed most of his time before the Revolution, and all of it afterwards, in France. Hamilton produced (besides many fugitive poems and minor pieces) two books of great note in French, the *Mémoires de Grammont*, his brother-in-law, which perhaps is the standard book

for the manners of the court of Charles II., and a collection of fairy tales, less simple than those of Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy and more subordinated to a sarcastic intention, but full of wit and written in French, which is only more piquant for its very slight touch of a foreign element. Many phrases of Hamilton's tales have passed into ordinary quotation, notably 'Bélier, mon ami, tu me ferais plaisir si tu voulais commencer par le commencement.'

Perrault.

The master of the style was, however, as has been said, Charles Perrault, whose literary history was peculiar. He was born at Paris in 1628, being the son of Pierre Perrault, a lawyer, who had three other sons, all of them of some distinction, and one of them, Claude Perrault, famous in the oddly conjoined professions of medicine and architecture. Charles was well educated at the Collège de Beauvais, and at first studied law, but his father soon afterwards bought a place of value in the financial department, and Charles was appointed clerk in 1662. He received a curious and rather nondescript preferment (as secretary to Colbert for all matters dependent on literature and arts), which, among other things, enabled him to further his brother's architectural career. In 1671 he was, under the patronage of Colbert, elected of the Academy, into the affairs and proceedings of which he imported order almost for the first time. He had done and for some time did little in literature, being occupied by the duties which, under Colbert, he had as controller of public works. But after a few essays in poetry, partly burlesque and partly serious, notably a *Siècle*

de Louis XIV., he embarked on the rather unlucky work which gave him his chief reputation among his own contemporaries, the *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*, in which he took the part of the moderns. The dispute which followed, due principally to the overbearing rudeness of Boileau, has had something more than its proper place in literary history, and there is no need to give an account of it. It is enough to say that while Boileau as far as his knowledge went (and that was not far, for he knew nothing of English, not very much of Greek, and it would seem little of Italian or Spanish) had the better case, Perrault, assisted by his brother, made a good deal the best use of his weapons, Boileau's unlucky 'Ode on Namur' giving his enemies a great hold on him. After six years' fighting, however, the enemies made peace, and, indeed, it does not seem that Perrault at any time bore malice. He produced, besides some memoirs and the charming trifles to be presently spoken of[252], a good many miscellanies in prose and verse of no particular value, and died in 1703.

His first tale, *Griselidis* (in verse, and by no means his best), appeared in 1691, *Peau d'Âne* and *Les Souhaits Ridicules* in 1694, *La Belle au Bois Dormant* in 1696, and the rest in 1697. These are *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, *La Barbe Bleue*, *Le Maître Chat ou le Chat Botté*, *Les Fées*, *Cendrillon*, *Riquet à la Houppe*, and *Le Petit Poucet*. It is needless to say that Perrault did not invent the subjects of them. What he contributed was an admirable and peculiar narrative style, due, as seems very probable, in great part to the example of La Fontaine, but distinguished therefrom by all the difference of verse and prose. The characteristics of this style are an extreme simplicity which does not degenerate into puerility, great directness, and at the same time vividness in telling the story, and a

remarkable undercurrent of wit which is never obtrusive, as is sometimes the case in the verse tales. Perrault's stories deserve their immense popularity, and they found innumerable imitators chiefly among persons of quality, who, as M. Honoré Bonhomme, the best authority on the obscurer fairy-tale writers, observes, probably found an attraction in the style because of the way in which it lent itself to cover personal satire. This, however, is something of an abuse, and little or nothing of it is discernible in Perrault's own work, though later, and especially in the eighteenth century, it was frequently if not invariably present.

NOTE TO THE LAST THREE CHAPTERS.

Although the list of names mentioned here under the respective heads of poets, dramatists, and novelists is considerable, it is very far indeed from being exhaustive. It may, indeed, be said generally that it is only possible in this history, especially as we leave the invention of printing farther and farther behind, to mention those names which have left something like a memory behind them. The dramas and novels of the seventeenth century are extremely numerous, and have been but very partially explored. In regard to the poems there is an additional difficulty. It was a fashion of the time to collect such things in *recueils* —miscellaneous collections—in which the work of very large numbers of writers, who never published their poems separately or obtained after their own day any recognition as poets, is buried. Specimens, published here and there by the laborious editors of the greater classics in illustration of these latter, show that with leisure, opportunity, and critical discernment, this little-worked vein might be followed up not without advantage. But for such a

purpose, as for the similar exploration of many other out-of-the-way corners of this vast literature, conditions are needed which are eminently 'the gift of fortune.' These remarks apply more or less to all the following chapters and books of this history. But they may find an appropriate place here, not merely because it is from this period onwards that they are most applicable, but because this special department of French literary history—the earlier seventeenth century—contains, perhaps, the greatest proportion of this wreckage of time as yet unrummaged and unsorted by posterity.

FOOTNOTES:

[242] Not *du* Tendre, as it is often erroneously cited in French and English works.

[243] The learned editor of Tallemant des Réaux calls her Marie Hortense. She also wrote verses and plays. There were many other romance writers of the period now forgotten, or remembered only for other things, such as the Abbé d'Aubignac.

[244] I cannot boast of an intimate or exhaustive acquaintance with the 'heroic' romances; but I have taken care to satisfy myself of the accuracy of the statements in the text.

[245] Ed. Dillaye. 2 vols. Paris, 1881.

[246] The full title is *Histoire Comique des États de la Lune et du Soleil*. Cyrano's works have been edited by P. L. Jacob. 2 vols. Paris, 1858.

[247] Ed. Colombey. Paris, 1877.

[248] Ed. Jannet. 2 vols. Paris, 1878.

[249] Ed. Garnier. Paris, 1864.

[250] Madame de la Fayette also wrote *La Comtesse de Tende*, and interesting Memoirs of Henrietta of England. *Zaïde* was published under the name of Segrais, who was a *nouvelle*-writer of no great merit, though a pleasant poet.

[251] See H. Bonhomme, *Le Cabinet des Fées*.

[252] Ed. Lefèvre. Paris, 1875. Ed. Lang. Oxford, 1888.

CHAPTER IV.

HISTORIANS, MEMOIR-WRITERS, LETTER-WRITERS.

Although the seventeenth century did not witness the acceptance in France of what may be called a philosophical conception of history, and though few or none of the regular histories of the time (with the exception of that of Mézeray) hold high rank as literature, no period was more fruitful in memoirs, letters, and separate historical sketches of the first merit. The names of Madame de Sévigné, of the Cardinal de Retz, of La Rochefoucauld, and at the extreme end of the period of Saint Simon, rank among those of the most original writers of France, while the historical essay has rarely assumed a more thoroughly literary form than in the short sketches of Retz, Sarrasin, and others. The subject of the present

chapter may, therefore, be divided into four parts, the historians properly so called (the least interesting of the four), the historical essayists, the memoir-writers, and the letter-writers, with an appendix of erudite cultivators of historical science and of miscellaneous authors of historical gossip and other matters.

General Historians. Mézeray.

[253]It is said not unfrequently that the only historical work of this particular period, combining magnitude of subject with elevation and originality of thought and literary excellence of expression, is Bossuet's discourse on universal history. There is not a little truth in the saying. Still there are a few authors whose work deserves mention. The great history of De Thou was written in Latin. But the century produced in Mézeray's History of France the first attempt of merit on the subject. François Eudes de Mézeray was the son of a surgeon, who seems to have been of some means and position. Mézeray was educated at Caen (he was born in 1610), and he early betook himself to historical studies. After beginning by supervising a translated history of the Turks, he set to work on his masterpiece, the *History of France*, which appeared in three huge and splendid folios in 1643, 1646, and 1651. He was accused of treating his predecessors with too great contempt; but this was more than justified by the superiority, not merely in style but in historical conception and attention to documentary evidence, which he showed. Mézeray had been protected and pensioned by Richelieu, but under Mazarin he became a violent pamphleteer and author of *Mazarinades*. Later, when

Louis XIV. was settled on the throne, he published an abridgment of his own history, in which the keen scent of Colbert discovered uncourtly strictures on the fiscal abuses of the kingdom. Mézeray refused to alter them, and was mulcted accordingly of part of his pension. He died in 1683, having earned the title of the first historian, worthy of the name, of France. With due allowance for his period, he may challenge comparison with almost any of his successors, though his style, excellent at its best, is somewhat unequal. Péréfixe (who may have been assisted by Mézeray) is responsible for a history of Henri IV.; Maimbourg for a history of the League which has some interest for Englishmen because Dryden translated it. The same great English writer projected but did not accomplish a translation from a much more worthless historian, Varillas, who is notorious among his class for indifference to accuracy. It is indeed curious that this century, side by side with the most laborious investigators ever known, produced a school of historians who, with some merits of style, were almost deliberately unfaithful to fact. If the well-known saying ('Mon siége est fait') attributed to the Abbé Vertot is not apocryphal[254], he must be ranked in the less respectable class. But his well-known histories, the chief of which is devoted to the Knights of Malta, were not wholly constructed on this principle. Pellisson wrote a history of the Academy, of which he was secretary, and one of the living Louis XIV., which, as might be expected, is little more than an ingenious panegyric. The Père Daniel wrote a history of France, the Père d'Orléans one of the English revolutions; while Rapin de Thoyras, a Huguenot and a refugee, had the glory of composing in a foreign language the first book deserving the title of a History of England. Superior

to all these writers, except to Mézeray, are the ecclesiastical historians Fleury and Tillemont. Fleury was a good writer, very learned and exceedingly fair. Tillemont, with less pretentions to style, is second to no writer of history in learning, industry, accuracy, and judgment.

Historical Essayists.

Saint Réal.

The historical essay, like much else of value at the time, was in great part due to the mania for *coteries*. In these select societies literature was the favourite occupation, and ingenuity was ransacked to discover forms of composition admitting of treatment in brief space and of the display of literary skill. The personal 'portrait,' or elaborate prose character, was of this kind, but the ambition of the competitors soared higher than mere character-drawing. They sought for some striking event, if possible contemporary, which offered, within moderate compass, dramatic unity and scope for something like dramatic treatment. Sometimes, as in the *Relation du Passage du Rhin*, by the Count de Guiche, personal experiences formed the basis, but more frequently passages in the recent history of other nations were chosen. Of this kind was the *Conspiration de Walstein* of Sarrasin, which, though incomplete, is admirable in style. Better still is the *Conjuration de Fiesque* of the Cardinal de Retz, his first work, and one written when he was but seventeen. Not a few of the scattered writings of Saint Evremond may be classed under this head, notably the Letter to Créqui on the Peace of the Pyrenees, which was the cause of his exile, though

this was rather political than historical. Towards the end of the century, the Abbé Vertot preluded his larger histories by a short tract on the revolutions of Portugal, and another on those of Sweden, which had both merit and success. It will be observed that conspiracies, revolutions, and such-like events formed the staple subjects of these compositions. Of this class was the masterpiece of the style—the only one perhaps which as a type at least merits something more than a mere mention—the *Conjuration des Espagnols contre Venise*[255] of Saint Réal, a piece famous in French literature as a capital example of historical narration on the small scale, and not unimportant to English literature as the basis of Otway's principal tragedy. César Vichard, Abbé de Saint Réal, was born at Chambéry in 1631, and died at the same place in 1692. He was sent early to Paris, betook himself to historical studies, and published various works, including certain discourses on history, a piece on Don Carlos, and the *Conjuration des Espagnols* itself, which appeared in 1672. Shortly afterwards he visited London, and was for a time a member of the *coterie* of Saint Evremond and Hortense Mancini. He returned to Paris and thence, in 1679, to his native town, where the Duke of Savoy made him his historiographer and a member of the Academy of Turin. Not long before his death he was employed in political work. Saint Réal's chief characteristics as a historian are the preference before everything else of a dramatic conception and treatment, and the employment of a singularly vivid and idiomatic style, simple in its vocabulary and phrase and yet in the highest degree picturesque. He has been accused of following his master, Varillas, in want of strict accuracy, but in truth strict accuracy was not aimed at by any of these essayists. Their

object was to produce a creditable literary composition, to set forth their subject strikingly and dramatically, and to point a moral of some kind. In all three respects their success was not contemptible.

Memoir-writers.

Rohan

Bassompierre.

The memoir-writers proper, who confine themselves to what they in their own persons have done, heard, or thought, are, as has been said, of far more importance. Their number is very great, and investigations into the vast record treasures which, after revolutionary devastation, France still possesses, is yearly increasing the knowledge of them. Only a brief account can here be attempted of most of them; and where the historical importance of the writer exceeds or equals his importance as a literary figure, biographical details will be but sparingly given, as they are easily and more suitably to be found elsewhere. The earliest writer who properly comes within our century (the order of the collection of Michaud and Poujoulat is followed for convenience sake) is François Duval, Marquis de Fontenay Mareuil. Fontenay was a soldier, a courtier, and a diplomatist, in which last character he visited England. He has left us connected memoirs from 1609 to 1624, and some short accounts of later transactions, such as the siege of La Rochelle, and his own mission to Rome. Fontenay is a simple and straightforward writer, full of good sense, and not destitute of narrative power. To Paul Phélypeaux de

Pontchartrain (1566-1621) we owe a somewhat jejune but careful and apparently faithful account of the minority of Louis XIII. A short and striking relation of the downfall of Concini is supposed to be the work of Michel de Marillac, keeper of the seals (1573-1632), afterwards one of the victims of Richelieu. Henri de Rohan (1579-1638) is very far superior to the writers just named. Of the greatest house, save one or two, in France, he travelled much, distinguished himself in battle, both in foreign and civil war; was once condemned to death, made head for a time against all the strength of Richelieu; was near purchasing the principality of Cyprus from the Venetians, and establishing himself in the east; was recalled, commanded the French forces with brilliant success in the Valtelline, and met his death under Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar at Rheinfeld. Besides his memoirs he wrote a book called the *Parfait Capitaine*, and some others. The memoirs extend from the death of Henri IV. to the year 1629, and have all the vigour and brilliancy of the best sixteenth-century work of the kind. A further account of the Valtelline campaign is also most probably Rohan's, though it is not written in the first person, and has been attributed to others. Of still greater personal interest are the memoirs of François, Maréchal de Bassompierre, another of the adversaries of Richelieu, and who, less fortunate than Rohan, languished twelve years in the Bastille. Few persons played a more active part in the first years of the reign of Louis XIII. than Bassompierre, and no one has left a livelier description, not merely of his own personal fortunes, but of the personality of his contemporaries, the habits and customs of the time, the wars, the loves, the intrigues of himself, his friends and his enemies. He has not the credit of

being very accurate, but he is infinitely amusing. His memoirs were written during his sojourn in the Bastille. This was terminated by the death of Richelieu, but Bassompierre followed his enemy before very long in consequence of an attack of apoplexy.

In singular contrast to Bassompierre's work are the memoirs of another chronicler of the same time, François Annibal, Maréchal d'Estrées, brother of the mistress of Henri IV. D'Estrées excludes all gossip, confines himself strictly to matters of public business, and recounts them apparently with scrupulous accuracy, and in a plain but clear and sufficient style. Among the most curious and not the least interesting of the works of this class are the memoirs of Pontis—one of the famous solitaries of Port Royal in his old age. Pontis died at the age of eighty-seven, and had been for fifty-six years in the army. His memoirs, which are strictly confined to his personal experiences, obtained the approbation of two such undeniably competent judges as Condé and Madame de Sévigné, and are by no means unworthy of the honour. The actual composition of the memoirs is said to be the work of Thomas du Fossé. The memoirs called Richelieu's are different from all these, and, notwithstanding their great extent and the illustrious name they bear, of very inferior interest, at least from the literary point of view. Richelieu's talents, it is sufficiently notorious, were not literary; and even if they had been, but little of these memoirs comes from his own hand. They are the work of secretaries, confidants, and under-strappers of all sorts, writing at most from the cardinal's dictation, and probably in many cases merely constructing *précis* of documents. There is, therefore, no need to dwell on them.

In the memoirs of Arnauld d'Andilly and of his son, the Abbé Arnauld, the personal interest and the abundance of anecdote and character-drawing which characterise the memoir work of the time reappear; the latter are, indeed, particularly full of them. Those of the father are chiefly interesting, as exhibiting the curious mixture of worldly and spiritual motives which played so large a part in the history of the time. For Arnauld who was the fervent friend and disciple of Saint Cyran, the practical founder of Jansenism in France, was also an assiduous courtier of Gaston d'Orléans, and not too well satisfied with the results of his courtiership. There are memoirs attributed to Gaston himself, but they are almost certainly the work of another hand; their historical value is not inconsiderable, but they have little literary interest. Those of Marie, Duchess de Nemours, and daughter of the Duke de Longueville, are short, but among the most interesting of all those dealing with the Fronde, from the vividness and decision of their personal traits.

Madame de Motteville.

More important still among the memoirs of this time are those of Françoise Bertaut, Madame de Motteville, a member of the family of the poet Bertaut. She was introduced by her mother, when very young, to Anne of Austria, and soon became her most intimate confidante. The jealousy of Richelieu banished her for a time from the court, and she married M. de Motteville, a man of wealth and position in the civil service of the province of Normandy. Shortly before Richelieu's death she lost her husband; and as soon as Anne of Austria

succeeded to the regency she was recalled to court, and spent her time there during the queen's life. She survived her mistress many years, and was a member of the society of Madame de Sévigné. She died in 1689. Her memoirs, which were not published till many years after her death, contain many curious revelations of the court history of the time, for she was not only intimate with Anne of Austria, but also with the unfortunate Henrietta Maria of England, and with La Grande Mademoiselle. With the latter she interchanged some curious and characteristic letters on a fantastic project of Mademoiselle's for founding a new abbey of Thelema. The general style of her memoirs is sober and intelligent, but it is injured by the abundance of moral reflections, in matter according to the taste, but in manner lacking much of the piquancy, of the time. These memoirs are somewhat voluminous, and extend to the death of Anne of Austria. Madame de Motteville, notwithstanding her affection for her mistress, is one of the best authorities for the period of the Fronde, because, unlike Retz and La Rochefoucauld, she was only secondarily interested in the events she relates. Some curious details of the later Fronde are found in the short memoirs of Père Berthod, of whom nothing is known. Of the Comte de Brienne, who was a favourite and minister of Anne of Austria, and whose book contains much information on foreign, and especially English affairs; of Montrésor and Fontrailles, both followers of Gaston of Orléans, and the latter the author of a relation of the Cinq Mars conspiracy, short, but minute and striking; of La Châtre, an industrious courtier and intriguer, and a vivid and picturesque writer, whose work, as will presently be mentioned, became entangled in a strange fashion with that of La Rochefoucauld; of the

great Turenne, a worthy follower of Montluc and Rohan in the art of military writing, little more than mention can be made. There are some military memoirs of interest, which go under the name of the Duke of York (James II).

Cardinal de Retz.

The works and personages of some other writers demand a fuller notice. Paul de Gondi[256], Cardinal de Retz, who occupies with Saint Simon, and perhaps La Rochefoucauld, the first place among French memoir-writers of the seventeenth century, was born in 1614, and died in 1679. He was a younger son of an ancient and noble house, uniting French and Italian honours, and was early destined for the church, for which probably no churchman ever had less vocation. He intrigued in society and politics, was a practised duellist, and though he was not more than seven-or eight-and-twenty at Richelieu's death, had already caballed against him. His appointment by Louis XIII., almost on his deathbed, to the coadjutorship (involving the reversion) of the archbishopric of Paris, which was then held by his uncle, a very old man of no personal capacity or influence, put into his hands a formidable political weapon, and he was not long in making use of it. He was more than any other man the instigator of the Fronde, that singular alliance of the privileged bourgeoisie of the great towns with the still more privileged nobility against the royal authority as exercised through ministers. The history of this confused and turbulent period is in great part the biography of Retz. It is not easy to see that he had any definite political views except the jealousy of

Mazarin, which he shared with almost all his order, an inveterate habit of insubordination, and a still more inveterate habit of conspiracy. The Fronde was and could have been but a failure, and Retz was a failure with it. He was for some time in exile, but at last reconciled himself to the inevitable, and even enjoyed some public employments under Louis XIV. His principal occupation, however, was the payment of his enormous debts, which he effected with an honesty not common at the time among his class by rigorously reducing his expenditure, selling and mortgaging his numerous benefices, and, as Madame de Sévigné put it, 'living for his creditors.' He is said thus to have paid off four millions of francs, a vast sum for the time. Meanwhile he was writing the Memoirs which, like the Maxims of his rival and half-enemy, La Rochefoucauld, unexpectedly gained for him a higher reputation in literature than he could have hoped for in politics. When a mere boy he had shown in the *Conjuration de Fiesque* no small literary talent, and his sermons deepened the impression. His Memoirs, however, are different in style from both. They are addressed to a lady friend, and contain a most extraordinary mixture of anecdote, description, personal satire, moral reflection, and political portraiture. In the three points of anecdote, portrait-drawing, and maxim-making, Retz has no rival except in the acknowledged masters of each art respectively.

The Memoirs of Guy Joly, a lawyer and the friend and confidant of Retz, in a manner supplement this latter's work. Joly was faithful to his master even in exile, but at last they quarrelled, and the Memoirs do not always throw a very favourable light on the proceedings of the turbulent cardinal. They are very well written. Claude Joly, the uncle of Guy, an

ecclesiastic, has also left anti-Mazarin writings of less literary worth.

Mademoiselle.

Of very great importance historically, and by no means unimportant as literature, are the Memoirs of Pierre Lenet, a man of business long attached to the house of Condé. These memoirs are, in fact, memoirs of the great Condé himself, until the peace of the Pyrenees. Personal and literary interest both appear in a very high degree in the Memoirs of Anne Marie Louise de Montpensier, commonly called La Grande Mademoiselle. The only daughter of Gaston of Orleans and of the Duchess de Montpensier, she inherited enormous wealth, and a position which made it difficult for her to marry any one but a crowned head. In her youth she was self-willed, and by no means inclined to marriage, and prince after prince was proposed to her in vain. During the Fronde she took an extraordinary part—heading armies, mounting the walls of Orleans by a scaling ladder, and saving the routed troops of Condé, after the battle of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, by opening the gates of Paris to them, and causing the cannon of the Bastille to cover their flight. Mazarin never forgave her this, nor perhaps did Louis XIV. When she was past middle age, Mademoiselle conceived an unfortunate affection for Lauzun, then merely a gentleman of the South named Puyguilhem. By dint of great entreaties she obtained permission from the king to marry him, but the combined efforts of the queen and the princes of the blood caused this to be rescinded, and Lauzun was imprisoned in Pignerol. After many years Mademoiselle purchased his release by making over a great part of her immense

possessions to Louis' bastard, the Duke du Maine, and secretly married her lover, who was not only younger than herself, but a notorious adventurer. He was basely ungrateful, and she separated from him before her death. Her memoirs, which are voluminous, contain a minute history of her singular life, written with not a little egotism, but with all the vivacity and individuality of savour which characterise the best work of the time. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about them is that, although entirely occupied with herself and her fortunes, Mademoiselle does not appear either to exaggerate her own merits, or to disguise her faults. She photographs herself, which is not common. Valentin Conrart, a man of letters, who figures repeatedly in the history of the time, who was the real founder of the Academy, who published but little in his lifetime, and who has only recently been the subject of a sufficient study, left memoirs of no great length, but of value in reference to the Fronde. The Marquis de Montglat, of whom not much is known, wrote important military memoirs of the latter portion of the Thirty Years' War, and of the campaigns between France and Spain, which continued until the peace of the Pyrenees.

La Rochefoucauld.

The Memoirs of La Rochefoucauld[257] would have assured him a considerable place in the history of literature, even had he never written the *Maxims*, and the singular fate of these Memoirs would have deserved notice even had they been far less intrinsically interesting in matter and style than they are. The seventeenth century was the palmy time of

literary piracy, and this piracy was facilitated not merely by the absence of any international copyright, but by the common habit of circulating books in manuscript long before their appearance in print. They were thus copied and re-copied, and the number of unauthorised duplicates made it impossible for the author to protect his work. Not unfrequently the difficulties of authors were increased by the custom (inherited from the middle ages) of simultaneously or rather continuously transcribing different works in the same large notebook, without any very scrupulous attention to their separate origin, plan, and authorship. When La Rochefoucauld, after the conclusion of the Fronde and the triumph of Mazarin, retired in dudgeon and disgrace to his estates, he devoted himself to the writing of memoirs, and the fact soon became known. He succeeded once in preventing an unauthorised publication at Rouen. But the Elzevirs (who were as much princes of piracy as of printing) were beyond his reach, and in 1662 there appeared a book purporting to be the Memoirs of M. L. R. F. This book excited much indignation in the persons commented upon, and La Rochefoucauld hastened to deny its authenticity, alleging that but a fraction was his, and that garbled. His denial was very partially credited, and has remained the subject of suspicion almost to the present day. Probably, however, he was warned by the incident of the danger of this sort of contemporary criticism, and no authentic edition was issued. After his death a new turn of ill-luck befell him. A fresh recension of the Memoirs was published, not indeed quite so incorrect as the first, but still largely adulterated, nor was the injustice repaired until 1817, and then not entirely. It is only within the last few years that the publication of the

Memoirs from a manuscript in the possession of his representatives has finally established the text, and that laborious enquiries have demonstrated the conglomerate character of the early editions (which were made up of the work of La Rochefoucauld, of La Châtre, of Vineuil, and of several other people, even such well-known writers as Saint Evremond being laid under contribution), and the justice of the author's repudiation. The genuine Memoirs are, however, extremely interesting; they are less full, and perhaps less absolutely frank than those of Retz, but they yield to these alone of the Fronde chronicles in piquancy and interest, while their purely literary merit is superior. The strange bird's-eye view of conduct and motives which characterises the Maxims is already visible in them, as well as the profundity of insight which accompanies width of range. The form is less finished, but its capacities are seen.

Jean Hérault de Gourville stood to La Rochefoucauld in something like the relation which Guy Joly bore to Retz, but was far more fortunate. Born at La Rochefoucauld, without any advantages of family or fortune, he began as a domestic of its seigneur. He passed from this service to that of Condé and Mazarin, held public employments which enriched him, became the friend of Fouquet, and escaped the general ruin which fell on the superintendent's friends at his fall, married, it is said, secretly a daughter of the house where he had served in a menial capacity, was recalled honourably to his country, discharged important political and diplomatic offices, lived on equal terms with the greatest nobles of the court, and died full of years, riches, and honours, in 1703. His Memoirs, which were written but a short time before his death, were dictated to a secretary. They are of a somewhat

gossiping character, but full of curious information. The so-called memoirs of Omer Talon are really accounts, written in a stilted and professional style, of the proceedings of the Parliament of Paris. Henri de Guise, the last, the least fortunate, but not the least remarkable of his famous family, has left an account of the wild expedition which he made to Naples at the time of the revolt of Masaniello, which is somewhat too long for the subject. The Memoirs of the Maréchal de Grammont were composed from his papers by his second son, Louvigny, afterwards Duke de Grammont. The eldest son, Count de Guiche, the most accomplished cavalier of the earlier court of Louis XIV., died before his father. Guiche left a brilliant relation (written some say on the spot and at once) of the passage of the Rhine, an exploit much exaggerated by the king's flatterers, but which was really a brilliant feat of arms, and was mainly due to Guiche himself. Like those of Grammont, the Memoirs of the Maréchal du Plessis are not the work of the hero, but in this case a professional man of letters—it is thought Segrais—seems to have been called in. Their somewhat stilted regularity contrasts with the irregular vigour of most of the work mentioned in this chapter. Some anonymous *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire du XVII^{ème} Siècle*, though evidently a compilation, are not destitute of literary merit. They seem to be extracted for the most part from works already mentioned. The Memoirs of La Porte, the valet de chambre of Anne of Austria and the youthful Louis XIV., are rather important to history than to literature. Madame de la Fayette wrote Memoirs of Henrietta, the daughter of Charles I., and the first wife of the Duke of Orleans, but they are not equal to her novels in merit. The poet-Marquis La Fare began memoirs on an extensive

plan, but only completed a small part of them. Those of the Duke of Berwick are justly considered models of simple straightforward writing, of clear judgment, and of accurate statement. The *Souvenirs* of Madame de Caylus had the honour of having Voltaire for their first editor, and deserved it. They are purely personal, and might even be called frivolous, were it not for the interest and historical importance of the society whose manners they depict. The memoirs of Torcy give a clear and lucid account of the negotiations in which that diplomatist was engaged. Last of this long list come three works of value, the memoirs of Villars, Forbin, and Duguay Trouin. The last two are among the somewhat rare records of French prowess on sea. Both are somewhat boastful, and the memoirs of Forbin, which are the longer and the more amusing of the two, are suspected of some inaccuracy. They were not, it appears, the unaided work of their nominal authors. The memoirs of Villars are of greater historical importance, and of much literary interest.

Saint Simon.

A few authors, not included in the collection the order of which has been followed, have now to be mentioned. Bussy Rabutin, cousin of Madame de Sévigné, and one of the boldest, most unscrupulous, and most unlucky of aspirants after fortune, has left a considerable number of letters and memoirs in which he exposes his own projects and wrongs, and, above all, a kind of scandalous chronicle called the *Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules*, in which gossip against all the ladies of the court, not excepting his own relations and friends, is pitilessly recorded. Bussy

had many of the family qualities which show themselves more amiably in the cousin whom he libelled. His literary faculty was considerable, his brain fertile in invention, and his tongue witty in expression; but he made no very good use of his powers. The Marquis de Dangeau[258] has left an immense collection of memoirs, describing in the minutest detail the etiquette of the court of Louis XIV. and all that happened there for years; but he had hardly any faculty of writing, and his work, except for its matter, is chiefly remarkable because of the contrast which it presents to a book which deals with much the same subject, and which has yet to be noticed. This book, with grave defects and inequalities, exhibits in the highest degree the merits of the class and period of literature which is now under review. These are the skill shown by writers in no respect professional, but trained to expression only by literary amusements and the conversation of the salons; the keen insight into motive and character; the intense interest and power of reflection with which contemporary events are taken in and represented.

Louis de Rouvroy, Duke de Saint Simon[259], was born at La Ferté Vidame, the family seat, in 1675. The family was of very great antiquity and unblemished *noblesse*, claiming descent from Charlemagne; the dukedom and the peerage—it is to be remembered that peerage in France has, or rather had under the old régime, an entirely different sense from the modern English sense, referring not in the least to the ennobling of the persons enjoying it, but to their admission into a kind of great council of the kingdom which had indeed long lost its active functions, but retained its dignity—were conferred only on Saint Simon's father, a favourite and a

faithful servant of Louis XIII. His mother was Charlotte de l'Aubespine, of a family which had much distinguished itself for several generations since the days of Francis the First. Saint Simon was brought up by the Jesuits, went to the wars in Flanders at the age of seventeen, and a year later succeeded to the title and estates by the death of his father. Thus at the age of eighteen he found himself in a position theoretically superior to every man in France except the princes of the blood, and his few brother peers—theoretically, for the rule of Louis did not admit of any real exercise of the privileges of the peerage. Saint Simon, however, began at once to show his devotion to the idol of his whole life—the status of his order—by going to law with Luxembourg, the famous Marshal, on a question of precedence and title of the most intricate kind. At the Peace of Ryswick he left the army, to the displeasure of the king; but he was none the less constant at court, though he could hardly be called a courtier, and though his inveterate stickling for precedence frequently brought down the king's wrath on his head. In 1705 he was made ambassador to Rome, but the appointment was almost immediately cancelled. Many years later, however, a similar, but greater, honour fell to his lot. The death of Louis put power into the hands of Philippe d'Orléans, who was a friend of Saint Simon's, and the latter enjoyed the greatest triumph of his life by bringing about the degradation of the 'Bastards' (the illegitimate sons of Louis), on whom, to the indignation of the peers, the king had bestowed the rank and precedence of princes of the blood. In 1721 Saint Simon went on a special embassy to Spain to arrange the double marriage of Louis XV. to the Infanta, and of the Prince of the Asturias to the Regent's granddaughter.

There he was made a grandee of the first class. Soon after his return he gave up interference in public affairs, but he lived for thirty years longer, writing incessantly, and died in 1755.

The history of his enormous literary productions is curious enough. Nothing was published, and, from the personal nature of most of his work, nothing could well be published, during his lifetime. He died intestate, and with no immediate heirs, and opportunity was taken to impound the whole of his manuscripts, amounting to hundreds of volumes. Extracts from the memoirs were surreptitiously published from time to time during the eighteenth century, but it was not till 1839 that the whole was fully and faithfully given to the world. These memoirs, however, form relatively but a small part of the vast mass of Saint Simon's manuscripts, though they fill twenty printed volumes. Until very recently obstacles of a not very intelligible character have been thrown in the way of publication by the French Foreign Office, to which the MSS. belong; but at length these seem to have been overcome, and three different workers, M. de Boislisle, M. Drumont, and M. Faugère, have been engaged in editing or re-editing different parts of the total. The minor works, however, from the specimens already published, would seem to be of less interest than the memoirs; most of them bearing on the, to Saint Simon, inexhaustible subject of the privileges of the peerage, and its place in the hierarchy of government. To discuss these subjects would lead us out of our way. It is sufficient to say that it is a great mistake to regard Saint Simon as a mere selfish aristocrat in the cant sense. He would have had the kingdom justly and wisely governed for the benefit of the whole nation, but he regarded the nobility, and, above all,

the peers, as the pre-destined instruments of government. 'Much for the people, but nothing by the people,' was his political motto.

The importance of Saint Simon in literature is, however, entirely independent of his standpoint as a politician, though that standpoint was not without influence on his literary characteristics. He is valuable to us as, without exception, the most vivid and graphic painter of contemporary history of the anecdotic kind in French or any other language. His style is incorrect, and sometimes barely grammatical, and all his work bears the character of notes, hurriedly dashed off, rather than of a finished and regularly arranged history. Opinions differ as to his trustworthiness in matters of fact, but it is certain, from his positive manner of recounting the incidents and the actual words of interviews at which he could not have been present, and as to which he is not likely to have had more than hearsay information, that his testimony is to be received with caution. His prejudices, too, were extraordinarily strong, and he is in the habit of representing everything and everybody that he does not like in the blackest possible colours. His furious denunciation thus makes a curious contrast to the good-humoured malice of the author with whom he is most likely to be compared—Madame de Sévigné. But all these drawbacks affect only the matter, not the manner of his work. The picture which he has given of the inner life of the court of Versailles during the later years of Louis XIV. is unrivalled in history. Still more extraordinary is the power of single passages, such especially as the famous one describing the Dauphin's death. Saint Simon has often been compared to Tacitus, but his torrent of words very little resembles the laconic incisiveness of the

Roman. A much nearer parallel, though with remarkable differences, might be found in the late Mr. Carlyle.

Some memoirs of great extent and interest, valuable as checking Saint Simon and Dangeau (whom Saint Simon annotated), have recently appeared for the first time, at least in a form that is to be complete. They are the work of the Marquis de Sourches[260], a great court officer, and they cover the last thirty years of Louis's reign. Their chief literary peculiarity is the formal and almost official character of the text contrasted with the greater freedom of the numerous notes.

Madame de Sévigné.

The most famous and remarkable of all the letter-writers of the time—perhaps the most famous and remarkable of all letter-writers in literature—was Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné[261]. She was born at Paris on the 6th of February, 1626, and died at Grignan, of small-pox, on the 10th of August, 1696. Her family was a distinguished one both in war and other ways. Her grandmother was the well-known Sainte Chantal, the pupil of St. François de Sales, and her first cousin, as has been mentioned, was Bussy Rabutin. Her father and mother both died when she was very young, and an uncle, not more than twenty years older than herself, the Abbé de Coulanges, took charge of her, remaining, for the greater part of her life, her chief friend and counsellor. She soon became a great beauty, and something of a scholar, though not of a blue-stocking. Ménage and Chapelain had, among others, much to do with her education, and she was

a member of the celebrated *coterie* of the Hôtel Rambouillet, though her satirical humour saved her from being a *précieuse*. At the age of eighteen she married the Marquis de Sévigné, of a good and wealthy Breton family. Her husband was, however, a selfish profligate, who wasted her substance with Ninon de l'Enclos, and such-like persons,—though Ninon herself, to do her justice, never plundered her lovers,—and did not pretend the slightest return for the affection she gave him. He was killed in a duel in 1651, leaving her with two children, a daughter, Françoise Marguerite, and a son Charles. After a few years of seclusion she returned to the world, being then in the full possession of her beauty, and only twenty-eight years old. She continued for more than forty years to form part of the best society of the capital, without suffering the least stain on her reputation. The selfish vanity of the superintendent Fouquet made him keep certain of her letters; but though they were discovered in a casket which was fatal to many of his friends of both sexes, Madame de Sévigné came scathless out of the ordeal. In 1669 her daughter, then twenty-two years old, married the Count de Grignan, a Provençal gentleman of the noblest birth, of great estate, rank, and fortune, but already twice a widower, past middle age, plain, and of somewhat embarrassed means, considering the great expenses which, as Governor of Provence, he had to meet. He was, however, a man of good sense and probity, and his wife seems to have been sincerely attached to him. The great bulk of Madame de Sévigné's voluminous correspondence was addressed to her daughter, for whom she had an almost frantic fondness; Charles de Sévigné, though apparently far the more lovable of the two, having but an inferior share of his mother's affection. The

letters to Madame de Grignan are for the most part dated either from Paris (in which case they are full of court news and gossip), or from Les Rochers, the country seat of the Sévignés, near Vitré, in which case they are full of social satire and curious details of the provincial life of that time. One very interesting series describes the habits and regimen of Vichy, which Madame de Sévigné visited in consequence of a severe attack of rheumatism. The correspondence thus serves as a minute and detailed history of the author for the last thirty years of her life, except during her rare visits to Grignan, in one of which, as has been mentioned, she caught the illness which proved fatal to her.

It has been said that Madame de Sévigné's letters are very numerous. Those to her daughter especially were garbled in the earlier editions by omissions, and by the substitution of phrases which seemed to the 18th century more suitable than the fresh nature of the originals. The edition cited gives the extant MSS. faithfully. The enthusiastic affection lavished by the mother on the daughter naturally commends itself differently to different persons. It is certain that if it is not tedious, it is only due to the extraordinary literary art of the writer, an art which is at once the most artful and the most artless to be anywhere found. The only other faults of the letters are an occasional crudity of diction (which, however, is, when rightly taken, perfectly innocent and even valuable as exemplifying the manners of the time,) and a decided heartlessness in relating the misfortunes of all those in whom the writer is not personally interested. Madame de Sévigné has been blamed for not sympathising more with the oppression of the French people during her time. This, however, is an unfair charge. In the first place

she simply expresses the current political ideas of her day, and, in the second place, she goes decidedly beyond those ideas in the direction of sympathy. Her treatment of some of her own equals leaves much more to desire. The account of Madame de Brinvilliers' sufferings—unworthy of much pity as the victim was—is callous to brutality, and it seems to be sufficient for any one to have ever offended Madame de Grignan, or to have spoken slightingly of her, to put him, or her, out of the pale of even ordinary human sympathy. But no other fault can be found. For vivid social portraiture the book equals Saint Simon at his best, while it is far more uniformly good. The letters describing the engagement of La Grande Mademoiselle to Lauzun, the death of Vatel, the trial of Fouquet, the Vichy sojourn, the meeting of the states of Britanny, and many others, are not to be surpassed in this respect. Unlike Saint Simon, too, Madame de Sévigné has no fixed idea—except that of Madame de Grignan's perfections, which rarely interferes—to prevent her from taking fresh, original, and acute views of things in general as distinguished from mere court intrigues. Her literary criticism is excellent, and if she somewhat overvalues moralists like Nicole and novelists like Mademoiselle de Scudéry, who ministered to her peculiar tastes, her remarks on the great preachers, on La Fontaine, on Corneille and Racine, display a singular insight as well as a singular power of expression. She is, indeed, except in politics, on which few persons of her class had at the time any clear or distinct ideas, never superficial; and this union of just thought with accurate observation and exceptional power of expression makes her position in literature.

Tallemant



Madame de Sévigné, so to speak, dwarfs all other letter-writers of her time. Yet many of those already mentioned under the head of memoirs left letters which have been preserved, and which are of merit. It is, however, not necessary to specify any except Madame de Maintenon, whose correspondence is voluminous and important both as history and as literature. It has not the charm of Madame de Sévigné, but it displays the great intellectual powers of the writer[262]. Of a very different kind, but not less worthy of notice are the letters of Guy Patin, which are for the most part violent *Mazarinades*, and full of scandalous anecdotes, but full also of lively wit. Scandal, indeed, was very much the order of the day, as appears from the large and curious collection of broadsheets and pamphlets republished by the late M. Fournier in his *Variétés Historiques et Littéraires*[263]. These, most of which refer to the present period, form a kind of appendix to historical and biographical writing of the more serious kind. There is, however, one remarkable work which remains to be noticed, and which, for want of a better place for it, must be noticed here, the *Historiettes* of Tallemant des Réaux[264]. The author of this singular book, Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux, was born at La Rochelle about 1619, and died in 1692. He was of a family not noble but wealthy and well connected, and he himself was able, by marriage with a cousin who was an heiress, to live without any profession, and to purchase an estate and seignory of some importance. Little, however, is known of his life except that he was much at the Hôtel de Rambouillet in his youth, and that in his old age he underwent some not clearly defined

misfortune or disgrace. The *Historiettes* were written in the years immediately preceding 1660, and form an almost complete commentary on the persons most celebrated in society and literature for three quarters of a century before that date. There is no other book to which they can be exactly compared, though they have, with much less literary excellence, a certain resemblance in form to the work of Brantôme. They are, as published by Monmerqué, 376 in number, filling five (nominally ten) stout volumes. Each is as a rule headed with the name of a single person, though there are a few general or subject headings. The articles themselves are not regular biographies, but collections of anecdotes, not unfrequently of the most scandalous kind. Tallemant, though by no means of small ability, appears to have been a somewhat malicious person, and not too careful to examine the value of the stories he tells, especially when they bear heavily on the old nobility, of whom, as a new man, he was very jealous. Yet his sources of information were in many cases good, and his statements are confirmed by independent evidence sufficiently often to show that, if they are in other cases to be accepted with caution, they are not the work of a mere libeller. No one, even in that century of unstinted personal revelations, has taken us so much behind the scenes, and certainly no one has left a more amusing book of its kind or (with the proper precautions) a more valuable one.

Historical Antiquaries.

Du Cange.

The class of learned investigators into the sources of history cannot be omitted in any account of French literature; though their work was chiefly in Latin, and though even when it was not it was rather of value as material for future literature than as literature itself. This century and the earlier part of the succeeding one were the palmy time of really laborious erudition—the work of the Benedictines and Bollandists, and of many isolated writers worthy of being ranked with the members of these famous communities. The individuals composing this class are, however, too numerous, and, from the purely literary view, too unimportant to detain us. Exceptions may be made in favour of André Duchesne, whose collections of French and Norman Chronicles, and his genealogical histories of the houses of Laval and Vergi, are valuable examples of their kind; of Mabillon, famous for his labours in hagiology, in the history of France, and above all in that of Italy; and lastly, of Du Cange. The last-named has a special right to a place here because, both directly and indirectly, he did much towards the rediscovery of old French literature. Du Cange was his seignorial style, his personal name being Charles Dufresne. He devoted himself to the study of the middle ages generally, and particularly of the Byzantine Empire. He edited Joinville, wrote a history of the Latin Empire, and in his most famous work, the *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, contributed not a little to the study of the oldest form of French.

FOOTNOTES:

[253] The following paragraph contains, except as far as Mézeray is concerned, chiefly

second-hand information. I have hitherto been unable to devote the time necessary to enable me to speak at first hand of these books, which are very bulky, not as a rule interesting or important in manner, and for the most part long obsolete in matter.

[254] The legend, familiar probably to most readers, is that Vertot required documents for his account of a certain military operation. Tired with waiting for them, he constructed the history out of his own head, and when they arrived made the ejaculation in the text.

[255] This, with some other of the pieces here mentioned, will be found in two volumes of the *Collection Didot*, entitled *Petits Chefs d'œuvre Historiques*.

[256] Ed. Feillet, Gourdault and Chantelauze. Paris (in progress).

[257] Ed. Gilbert et Gourdault. Paris, 1868-81.

[258] Ed. Feuillet de Conches. 19 vols. Paris, 1854-61.

[259] Memoirs, ed. Chéruel. 20 vols. Paris, 1873. Now being re-edited by M. de Boislisle. Miscellaneous works are also appearing.

[260] Ed. Bertrand et de Cosnac. Vol. i. Paris, 1882.

[261] Ed. Monmerqué. 14 vols. Paris, 1861-66, to which must be added 2 vols. of *Lettres Inédites* discovered and published by M. Capmas.

[262] A full and excellently edited selection has been given by A. Geffroy. 2 vols. Paris, 1887.

[263] 10 vols. Paris, 1855-63.

[264] 10 vols. in 5. Ed. Monmerqué. Third edition. Paris, n. d.

CHAPTER V.

ESSAYISTS, MINOR MORALISTS, CRITICS.

The enormous popularity which the Essays of Montaigne enjoyed could not fail to raise up imitators and followers in the century succeeding their publication. But Montaigne's influence on the production of short pieces, complete in themselves and having for the most part an ethical bearing, was supplemented by the feature of the time so often referred to, the fancy for literary *coteries*, and for wit combats between the members of those *coteries*. For this latter purpose pieces of moderate length in prose, corresponding to the sonnets, the madrigals, and such-like things in verse, were well suited. The Academy, too, with its competitions and its ordinary critical occupations, stimulated literary production in the same direction. The essay was therefore much cultivated in the seventeenth century, and not a few minor styles of composition descended from it. Such were the *Pensée*, a short essay on some definite and briefly handled point; the *Conversation*, an essay or sketch in dialogue; the *Portrait*, a sketch of personal character; the *Maxime*, a condensed *Pensée*, just as the *Pensée* was a condensed essay. In these various styles some of the most excellent work existing in French literature was composed during the time

which we are at present handling; and four names of the first, or almost the first rank in literary history, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, and Saint Evremond, belong to this division, besides not a few others of less importance. Pascal, indeed, might be almost as well treated in either of the two following chapters as in the present; but if the substance of his work is for the most part philosophical or theological, the form of it seems to fall more suitably under the present head. He does not, however, open the series of Essayists.

Balzac.

Something of Montaigne's manner, as well as of his peculiar sceptical doubt, which nevertheless does not transcend the limits of orthodoxy, was continued far into the century by La Mothe le Vayer, a man of talent, but of some deliberate eccentricity and archaism in costume and manners as in style. But the most important name in the history of French prose next after that of Montaigne is that of Jean Guez de Balzac, who occupies nearly the same place in it as Malherbe does in that of French poetry. Balzac was a gentleman of rank and fortune in the province of Angoumois, where he was born towards the end of the sixteenth century, and where he died in 1655. In his younger days he served in some diplomatic employments, then for a long time resided in Paris, and finally retired to his country seat. Balzac's works are almost entirely of the essay character, though they are sufficiently diverse, and for the most part rather artificial in form. The most considerable part of them is composed of letters—not such letters as have been discussed in the preceding chapter, but elaborate epistles written deliberately for the sake of

writing, and with a definite attempt at style. Besides these, which are very numerous, Balzac was also the author of discourses on various subjects and of certain nondescript works of an ethico-political character, the principal and best known of which is the *Socrate Chrétien*. In all, his work was sufficient to fill two folio volumes when it was collected[265]. Balzac is a really remarkable figure in literary history, because he is, in his own tongue and nation, almost the first person who deliberately wrote for the sake of writing, and not because he had anything particular to say. The practice is perhaps not one to be commended to the general run of men at any time, or even to exceptional men, except at a peculiar time. But done as it was, and when it was, Balzac's work was really of importance and advantage to his countrymen. The prose literature of the sixteenth century had been admirable, but it had not resulted in the elaboration of any general style of all work. Each writer had followed his instincts, and when those instincts were under the guidance of genius, as they frequently were, many writers had produced admirable results. But the general use of the printing press, and the adaptation of literature to all sorts of journey-work, made it imperatively necessary that the tools should be put ready fashioned into the hands of ordinary workmen instead of each man having to manufacture them for himself. Various steps had been taken in this direction. Guillaume du Vair had already written a *Traité de l'Éloquence Française*; Vaugelas, a Savoyard by birth, was shortly to undertake some valuable *Remarques* on French grammar and style, which long remained a standard book. But not many examples of deliberate composition had been given. It was these examples of deliberate composition which Balzac

furnished, and which, in a lighter and more graceful fashion, and to a more limited circle, were also given by the letters of the poet Voiture. Balzac, as is natural in the first attempts at a polished prose style, has the drawback of being somewhat rhetorical and occasionally ponderous. But the important point is that the mechanism of the clause, the sentence, and the paragraph has evidently been considered by him, and that he has succeeded in getting it into very tolerable condition. His sentences no longer run on to the interminable length of earlier writers, or finish in the haphazard manner, neglectful of rhythm, balance, and proportion, also noticeable in his predecessors. The substitution of the full stop for the conjunction, which, speaking generally, may be said to be the initiating secret of style (though of course it must not be applied too indiscriminately), is at once apparent in Balzac's best passages, and he rarely falls into the error which waits on this substitution, the error of scrappiness. His style is perhaps better suited to oratory than to writing; a not unlikely result, since his models were pretty obviously the classical orators. But there can be no doubt that to him in no small part is due the extraordinary outburst of rhetorical power which distinguished the preachers of the latter half of the century. Nor was it long before what was faulty in Balzac's style was corrected by the example of very different writers.

Pascal.

Blaise Pascal[266] was born at Clermont, in Auvergne, on the 19th of June, 1623. His father was President of the Court of Aids, but when the boy was eight years old the family moved to Paris. Pascal was one of the small number of extraordinarily

precocious children who have justified their precocity by genius equally extraordinary in after-life; but it does not appear that he was forced by his father (who took the whole charge of his education), and it is said that he did not begin Latin until he was twelve years old—a very late age for the time. Mathematics, however, were his chief study and delight, and he early excelled in them, showing also an extraordinary faculty in applying them to physics. At nineteen he invented a calculating machine. But his application to study did not improve his health. He was but five-and-twenty at the time of his famous experiment with the barometer on the Puy de Dome in his native province. He was soon exposed to the philosophical influence of Descartes on the one hand, and the theological influence of the Jansenists on the other, and he felt both deeply. His greatest work, the *Provinciales*, appeared in 1656. He died on the 19th of August, 1662, having long lived in retirement and asceticism, giving much of his substance to the poor, and abandoning himself almost entirely to religious, mathematical, and philosophical meditation.

We have nothing to do here with his purely mathematical works or those in natural science. The two books by which he belongs to literature, and which have placed him among the foremost writers of his country, are the *Provinciales* and the so-called *Pensées*. The former were regularly published by himself in his lifetime, though they were ostensibly anonymous, or rather pseudonymous. The *Pensées* consist of scattered reflections, which were found in his papers after his death. They were published, but, as has been discovered of late years, with much omission and garbling, and the restoration of them to their authentic form has been effected in comparatively recent times.

The famous title of *Les Provinciales* is only a convenient abbreviation of the original, which is *Lettres Ecrites par Louis de Montalte à un Provincial de ses Amis et aux Révérends Pères Jésuites sur le Sujet de la Morale et de la Politique de ces Pères*. This somewhat cumbrous appellation has at any rate the merit of exactly describing the contents of the book, except that Louis de Montalte is of course a pseudonym. The letters were written at the height of the early struggle (which had not yet been interfered with by the secular arm) of Jansenists and Jesuits, and they inflicted on the famous society a blow from which it has never wholly recovered, and from which it can never wholly recover. The method and style of Pascal are entirely original, except in so far as a slight trace of indebtedness to Descartes may be observed in the first respect, and a slight debt to Montaigne and the *Satire Ménippée* in the second. His great weapon is polite irony, which he first brought to perfection, and in the use of which he has hardly been equalled and has certainly not been surpassed since. The intricate casuistries of the Jesuits are unfolded in the gravest fashion and without the least exaggeration or burlesque, but with a running comment or rather insinuation of sarcasm which is irresistible. The author never breaks out into a laugh, never allows himself to be declamatory and indignant. There is always a smile on his countenance, but never anything more pronounced than a smile. Yet the contempt of this is more crushing than that of the bitterest invective. In the later letters indeed the mask of irony is to a certain extent dropped, and a more serious tone is taken. But effective as these are they are not the most effective part of the *Provinciales*. That part is the earlier one, in which, without dry scholastic argument, without

the coarse abuse which the sixteenth century had regarded as inseparable from theological controversy, and at the same time with almost absolute accuracy of statement—for the misrepresentations which two centuries of eager and able apologists for the Order have been able to detect are insignificant—the author carried the discussion out of the schools into the drawing-room, made every man of fair education and breeding a judge of it, and triumphantly brought the judgment of the vast majority of such men on his side. To this day Pascal, with Swift and Courier, is the greatest example in modern literature of irony, excelling Swift as much in elegance and good-breeding as he falls short of him in sombre force, and having the advantage over his brilliant follower at the beginning of this century in depth and nobility of thought.

The *Pensées* supply the reverse side of Pascal's character, and the supplement to any proper estimate of his literary genius. But from the circumstances already referred to, they are evidence of a less complete though an even more genuine kind than the *Provinciales*. The scepticism which ate so deeply into the heart of the seventeenth century affected Pascal, though he rarely wavered in point of abstract faith. To few men, however, was doubt more painful, and as no clearer or more piercing intellect has ever existed, so to none was doubt more constantly present. The *Pensées* in their genuine form exhibit the thoughts to which this conflict of opinion gave rise in him, and are in remarkable contrast with the polished and sedate badinage of the letters. But few if any of them are finally worked up into the form in which the author would have been likely to present them to the public, and therefore, from the point of view of pure literary criticism, they require less

notice here than the sister volume.

The revolution, as far as style is concerned, which in point of time is already noticeable in Descartes, has entirely accomplished itself in Pascal. The last vestige of archaism, of quaintness of phrase, of clumsiness in the architecture of the sentence or the paragraph, has passed away. Indeed, it can hardly be said that two centuries have added much to the language except in point of richness and adaptation to the more multifarious needs of the describer in modern times. The style is extremely simple, but it has none of the monotony, the lack of colour, and the stereotyped form which are the great drawbacks of French after Boileau as contrasted with French before him. It is extraordinarily graphic, sparkling with epigram at every point, and yet never sacrificing sense to the play of words. The *Pensées* (which it must always be remembered were never finally worked up) yield matter which will compare with the carefully concocted Maxims of La Rochefoucauld or of Joubert, while the *Provinciales* are, as has been said, unsurpassable in their own line. It is probable that most good judges would allot to Pascal in French the place which Dryden occupies in English, that is to say, the place of the writer who combines most of the advantages of the elder and younger manners. But Pascal, who wrote merely to please himself, had this great advantage over Dryden, that his work contains no mere journey-work, and especially nothing unworthy of him. Admirable as it is in style, it is equally admirable in meaning and in adaptation to that meaning, and it has thus both the sources of lasting popularity at command. Dealing, moreover, as it does with subjects of perennial importance and interest, it is almost entirely exempt from the necessity of

comment and explanation which weighs down much admirable work of past ages. No man, however indisposed to serious reading, can put down the *Provinciales* as dull; no man, however unwilling to read anything that is not serious, can complain of levity in the *Pensées*. There are few authors in any language who unite as Pascal does the claims of importance of subject, charm of style, and bulk, without too great voluminousness of production. He has, moreover, the additional merit of being in a high degree representative of his age. That age had grown too complex for one man to reflect the whole of it, but Pascal and Molière (with perhaps Saint Evremond or La Rochefoucauld as thirdsman) supply an almost complete reflection.

Saint Evremond[267], who was thirteen years Pascal's senior, and who outlived him by more than forty years, was, in almost every respect except intellectual vigour and literary faculty, his opposite. He was a Norman by birth (Charles de Marguetel de Saint Denis was his proper name), and was born in 1610. He was educated by the Jesuits, entered the army early, served through the later campaigns of the Thirty Years' War and in the Fronde, was a favourite of Condé's but fell into disgrace with him, and after the fall of Fouquet, which led to the discovery of his very able and very uncourtly letter on the Peace of the Pyrenees, also incurred the king's displeasure. This displeasure is said to have been aggravated by his notorious membership of the freethinking and materialist school which Gassendi, if he had not founded it, had helped to spread. Saint Evremond was practically if not formally banished, and the time of his misfortune coinciding pretty nearly with the Restoration in England, he made his way thither, was well received by the king and his

courtiers, many of whom he had known in their exile, and dwelt in London for almost the whole remainder of his long life. He died in 1703, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. His works are almost entirely occasional, consisting of 'conversations,' letters, 'portraits,' short literary disquisitions and tractates on subjects of historical and ethical interest. They display a placid epicurean philosophy which in its indifference to the assaults of fortune is not destitute of nobility, an extraordinary catholicity and acuteness of literary judgment, and remarkable wit and *finesse*. The *Conversation du Père Canaye*, which is of the same date as the *Provinciales*, is worthy of Pascal for its irony, and possesses a certain air of being written by a 'person of quality,' which Saint Evremond could throw over his writings better almost than any one else. His Portraits, not always flattering, are full of nervous vigour. But his literary remarks are perhaps the most surprising of his works. At a time when English literature was almost unknown in France, and when Boileau ostentatiously pretended never to have heard of Dryden, Saint Evremond, perhaps with some assistance from his friend Waller, drew up some masterly remarks on the humour-comedy of the Jonson school. His criticisms of French plays, as compared with classical tragedy and comedy, are also full of pregnant thought; and some comparative studies of his on Corneille and Racine show a power of detachment and independence which may be due in some part to the cosmopolitanism given by residence abroad, but which is certainly due also to native power. From the point of view of literary history, however, Saint Evremond is perhaps most remarkable as having formed, in conjunction with Pascal and Bayle, a singular trio, which supplied Voltaire with the

models[268] whence he drew his peculiar style of persiflage. As far as form is concerned, it may be fairly said that Saint Evremond was the most influential of the three. Like many other men of his time he rarely published anything in the ordinary way, and it was not till very late in life that he empowered Desmaizeaux to issue an authorised edition of work that had either circulated in manuscript or been piratically printed.

La Rochefoucauld.

François de Marcillac[269], Duke de la Rochefoucauld, was born in 1613 of one of the noblest families of France. His father had just been created duke and peer, the highest honour possible to a French subject, and for many years the son was known under the title of Prince de Marcillac. He was very imperfectly educated, but was early sent to serve in the army and introduced to the court. Young as he was, he was deeply engaged in the various intrigues against Richelieu, chiefly in consequence of his affection for the celebrated Madame de Chevreuse. After Richelieu's death and the comparative effacement of Madame de Chevreuse, he transferred his affections to Madame de Longueville and his aversion to Mazarin. He was one of the chiefs of the Princes' party, and fought all through the Fronde, winning a reputation, not so much for military skill as for the most reckless bravery. The establishment of the royal authority first sent him into retirement, and then reduced him to the position of an ordinary courtier. This last period of his life was distinguished by a third attachment to a lady hardly less celebrated than either of his former loves, Madame de la Fayette, the author of *La Princesse de Clèves*, in which novel he is said to figure under another name. He was also an intimate friend of Madame de Sévigné. In the latter part of his life he suffered terribly from gout, and died of that disease in 1680.

His Memoirs have been already noticed. The more famous and far more remarkable Maxims were

published shortly afterwards, and at once attained a wide popularity. The first edition appeared in 1665, and four others were published, with considerable alterations and additions, during the author's lifetime, in 1666, 1671, 1675, and 1678. After his death a sixth edition was published by Claude Barbin, containing fifty new maxims, the authenticity of which is uncertain but probable.

The fullest authoritative edition of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims contains 504 separate paragraphs, to which, besides the fifty just noticed, about another fifty can be added by restoring those which the author suppressed during his lifetime. The last, which is avowedly a kind of appendix, and on a different plan from the others, extends to a couple of pages. But the average length of the remainder is not more than three or four lines, and many do not contain more than a dozen words. The art of compressing thought and then pointedly expressing it has never been pushed so far except by Joubert, and hardly even by him. All La Rochefoucauld's maxims, without exception, are on ethical subjects, and with a certain allowance they may be said to be generally concerned with the reduction of the motives and conduct of men to the single principle of self-love. In consequence, accusations of misanthropy, of unfairness, of short-sightedness, have been showered upon the author by those who do not like a spade to be called a spade. We have nothing to do with the moral side of the matter here, and it is sufficient to say that La Rochefoucauld is not an advocate of the selfish or any other school of moralists. He is simply an observer, setting down with the utmost literary skill the results of a long life of unusual experience in business and pleasure of every kind. He is a man of science who has got

together a large collection of facts, and who expounds and arranges them on a certain coherent and sufficient hypothesis. As a work of literary art the result of his exposition is unrivalled. The whole of the Maxims, even with the doubtful or rejected ones, need not occupy more than a hundred pages, and they contain matter which in the hands of an ordinary writer would have filled a dozen volumes. Yet there is no undue compression. It is impossible ever to mistake the meaning, though the comprehension of the full application of that meaning depends, of course, on the intellectual equipment and social experience of the reader. The clearness with which Descartes had first endowed French is here displayed in its very highest degree. The style, as was unavoidable in work of the kind, is entirely devoid of ornament. Imagery is wholly absent, and though metaphorical expressions abound, they are of the plainest and simplest kind of metaphor. The philosophical language of the day is present, but in no very prominent measure. The motto of the book (at least in the fourth and fifth editions), 'Nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices déguisés,' is a very fair example of the simple straightforward fashion of La Rochefoucauld's style. Sometimes, but rarely, the author explains his meaning, and slightly lengthens his phrase by repeating the sentiment in a somewhat different form, as thus, 'Le plaisir de l'amour est d'aimer, et l'on est plus heureux par la passion qu'on a que par celle que l'on donne.' But even here it is to be observed that the explanation is in a manner necessary to take off the air of sententious enigma, which the words 'le plaisir de l'amour est d'aimer' might have had by themselves. La Rochefoucauld is never enigmatical, rarely sententious merely, and is

almost indifferent to the production of *mots*. How continually the study of brevity, combined with precision, occupied the author, and how severe he was on any exuberance, can be seen very instructively in the successive alterations of his work. Thus, in the first edition Maxim 295 ran, 'La jeunesse est une ivresse continuelle, c'est la fièvre de la santé, c'est la folie de la raison;' but La Rochefoucauld seems to have thought this unduly pleonastic, and it appears later as 'La jeunesse est une ivresse continuelle, c'est la fièvre de la raison,' the improvement of which in point and freshness is sufficiently obvious. The result of this process is that the best of these Maxims are absolutely unrivalled in their own peculiar style, and that all subsequent writers in the same style have taken their form as a model. French critics have, as a rule, rather under- than over-estimated the purely literary talent of La Rochefoucauld. But this is due to two causes: first, to the supposed antagonism of his spirit to conventional morality; secondly, to the fact that he somewhat anticipated the writers of the particular period which for a century and a half was the idol of academic criticism. His language is rather that of Louis XIII. than of Louis XIV., and in his words and phrases there is a certain archaism, not to say an occasional irregularity, which critics who look only at the stop-watch apparently find it hard to forgive.

La Bruyère.

These critics generally give the palm of style, as concerns writing of this kind, to Jean de la Bruyère[270]. Less is known of the personal history of this author than of that of any contemporary writer of great eminence. He was born at Paris, in August

1645, and his family appears to have been anciently connected with the law. He must have been a man of some means and of good education, for he had just bought himself an important financial post at Caen, when, on the recommendation of Bossuet, he was appointed Historical Preceptor to Duke Louis of Bourbon, the grandson of Condé, in whose household he continued till his death in 1696. He had published his *Caractères* in 1687, and was elected to the Academy in 1693.

The works of La Bruyère consist of the *Caractères* just mentioned, of a translation of Theophrastus, of a few literary discourses, and (probably) of some chapters on Quietism, written on the side of his patron Bossuet during the great controversy with Fénelon, but not published till after the author's death. The *Caractères* alone are of much importance or interest.

The design of this curious and celebrated book is taken, like its title, from Theophrastus, but the plan is very much altered as well as extended. Instead of copying directly the abstract qualities of Theophrastus and his brief, pregnant, but somewhat artificial and jejune description of them, La Bruyère adopted a scheme much better suited to his own age. He took for the most part actual living people, well known to all his readers, and, disguising them thinly under names of the kind which the romances of the middle of the century had rendered fashionable, made them body forth the characters he wished to define and satirise. These portraits he inserted in a framework not altogether unlike that of the Montaigne essay, preserving no very consecutive plan, but passing from moral reflection to literary criticism, and from literary criticism to one of the half-personal, half-moralising portraits just

mentioned, with remarkable ease and skill. The titles of his chapters are rather more indicative of their actual contents than those of Montaigne's essays, but they represent, for the most part, merely very elastic frames, in which the author's various observations and reflections are mounted. The result of this variety, not to say desultoriness, combined as it is with the display of very great literary art, is that La Bruyère's is a book of almost unparalleled interest to take up and lay down at odd moments. Its apparently continuous form and its intermixture of narrative save it from the appearance of severity which the avowed Maxim or Pensée has; while the bond between the different chapters, and even the different paragraphs, is so slight that interruption is not felt to be annoying. Even now, when the zest of personal malice, which, as Malézieux remarked to the author, made him sure beforehand of 'plenty of readers and plenty of enemies,' is past, it is a most interesting book to read; and it is especially interesting to Englishmen, because there is no doubt that the English essayists of the Queen Anne school directly modelled themselves upon it.

It has been objected to La Bruyère that he is less of a thinker than of a clever writer, and there is truth in the objection. He was possessed of a remarkable shrewdness, common sense, and soundness of taste; thus, for instance, he protests energetically against the foolish pedantry which rejected as obsolete many of the most useful and most picturesque words in French, and so sets himself directly against the dominant and very unfortunate literary influence of his time, that of Boileau. Yet he himself wrote in the fashionable style, and in the language rather of Racine than of Corneille. A further objection, also a just one, is that his characters are too much of their

age and not of all time. This objection, indeed, applies to almost all writers after 1660, except Molière, and La Fontaine, and La Rochefoucauld. But La Bruyère (though there are some sarcastic insinuations which seem to hint that his range was wider than he chose to show) is as unwilling to disentangle himself from Versailles and Paris as his English followers are to extend their gaze to something beyond 'the town.' Nor is there the force and vigour about La Bruyère's moral reflections that there is about La Rochefoucauld's. They are frequently commonplace, sometimes even platitudinous, and the author occasionally falls into what is perhaps the most dangerous pitfall for a moralist and social satirist, the adoption of stock butts and types. It is indeed most probable that La Bruyère was one of those who, according to a famous phrase of his enemy and successor, Fontenelle, 'may have their hands full of truth, but may not care to open more than their little finger.' He was not, like La Rochefoucauld, a great noble with the liberty of the Fronde in his mind, but a man of no exalted rank, living in the most absolute period of Louis the Fourteenth's rule. His remark that 'les grands sujets sont défendus' is a pregnant one, especially when it is remembered how near to the 'grands sujets' (as, for instance, in his oblique denunciation of the misery of the French peasantry) he sometimes goes. But his style, though looser than that of his forerunner, and destitute of the character of sharp and enduring sculpture which is impressed on the *Maxims*, is a model of ease, grace, and fluency without weakness[271].

FOOTNOTES:

[265] He has not recently been re-edited, but a selection was published in 1822.

[266] Editions of Pascal are numerous, but a complete and definite one is still wanting. Of the *Pensées*, etc., the editions of Faugère, Havet, and Rocher may be mentioned; of the *Provinciales*, the edition of 1867.

[267] Ed. Giraud. 3 vols. Paris, 1866. (A selection only, but containing almost everything of importance.)

[268] Perhaps Anthony Hamilton should be added, as a channel of communication with Saint Evremond and some of the seventeenth century coterie-writers.

[269] Ed. as before noticed. The *Maxims* have been constantly reprinted by themselves.

[270] Ed. Servois. Paris, 1865-1882.

[271] Under the head of this chapter, in an exhaustive history, not a few classes of writers might be ranged. Such are, besides great numbers of miscellaneous writers of criticism from Corneille in his *Examens* downwards, the classical commentators, editors, and translators. Few of these have left a very enduring reputation. In the earlier part of the century Perrot d'Ablancourt, a fertile translator, may be mentioned. His work was so free that his versions were called 'les belles infidèles,' but Boileau himself admitted that he was a master of French style. In the latter part the best-known and perhaps the most remarkable name is that of the still famous Madame Dacier. Many of the early members of the Academy, and some who never attained to its ranks, have left a reputation more anecdotic than strictly literary, such as Ménage (a representative of the class), Cotin, Costar,

Bautru, etc. But they can only be alluded to here. Law also contributed in the person of Patru, a writer for the most part on professional topics, but occasionally on literature, who is ranked by Boileau with Perrot d'Ablancourt in respect of style.

CHAPTER VI.

PHILOSOPHERS.

The history of literature and the history of philosophy touch each other only at certain points of their course. There are periods (the nineteenth century itself is perhaps an example) when the study of philosophy is almost divorced from style. There are others when the two are intimately wedded. Nowhere is this latter more the case than in the seventeenth century, and in France. Much of the most excellent writing of the time was directed to philosophic subjects. But it so happened that the great reformer of philosophy in France was also the greatest reformer of her prose style, and that his greatest disciple carried philosophical writing, as far as style is concerned, to very nearly, if not quite, the highest pitch which it has yet attained in French. We shall not have to concern ourselves in more than the very slightest degree with the subject of the writings of Descartes and Malebranche, but they have as legitimate a place in the history of French literature as they have in that of European philosophy.

Descartes.

René Descartes[272] was born at La Haye in Touraine on the 31st of March, 1596. His family belonged by descent to the province in which he was born, but by occupation and official position (as well it would seem as by possessions) to Britanny. It was of noble rank, though only of *noblesse de robe*, and possessed enough landed property to leave estates and territorial designations to two sons. Thus René was Seigneur du Perron, though, quite contrary to the wont of the day, he never made use of the title. He was of weak health both at this time and afterwards, and, unlike most of his contemporaries, did not begin his studies very early. In 1604 he was sent to the Jesuit College of La Flèche, and remained there nearly eight years. After a short stay at home he was sent to Paris, where he divided his time between ordinary pursuits and amusements on the one hand, and hard study on the other. In 1617, when he had just attained his majority, he joined the army as a volunteer, and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War soon gave him plenty of employment. He visited various parts of Europe, partly on duty, partly as an ordinary traveller. First he served for two years at Breda under Prince Maurice of Nassau, pursuing the same mixture of study and routine employments. Then he went to Germany, where in his winter quarters his great philosophical idea, as he has told in memorable words, flashed across him. He served in various parts of the empire, and in Hungary and Bohemia, but left the army in 1621 and went to Holland, experiencing on the way a curious and dangerous adventure. After a year at the Hague he went home, and was put in possession of his share of his mother's property. He visited Italy, where he

made a pilgrimage to Loretto, then returned to France, and dwelt in Paris for some time; resuming however his military character for a while, and serving at the siege of La Rochelle. At last, in 1628, being then thirty-two years old, he left the service finally, and gave himself up wholly to the study of philosophy. For this purpose he retired to Holland, where he was still somewhat restless[273]. But his chief centres were successively Amsterdam, Egmond, not far from Alkmaar, and Endegeest, within easy distance of the Hague. He returned to France more than once, and was asked to settle at court, receiving from Mazarin a pension of 3000 livres. But the troubles of the Fronde made Paris a distasteful and unsuitable residence for him. He then accepted, at the end of 1649, an invitation from Queen Christina of Sweden and went to Stockholm, where the severe weather and the gracious habit which the queen had of summoning him for discussion at five o'clock in the morning (he had all his life when not on active service made a point of not rising till eleven), put an end to his life, by inflammation of the lungs, on Feb. 11, 1650.

The works of Descartes are numerous, though few of them are of very great extent. He wrote a treatise (not now extant) on the art of fencing when he was but sixteen; and during the succeeding years small treatises on different points, chiefly of mathematics and natural theology, constantly issued from his pen, though he was not a ready writer. The works which alone concern us here are his famous *Discours de la Méthode*, 1637, and his letters. The *Méditations*, of equal importance philosophically with the *Discours*, and the *Principia Philosophiæ*, a rehandling of the two, were originally published in Latin. No attempt can here be made to give any account of Descartes'

mathematical, physical, and metaphysical speculations, or of the means by which he endeavoured to work out his great principle, that all knowledge springs from certain ideas clearly and distinctly conceived, and is deducible mathematically, or rather logically, from these principles.

Until and including Victor Cousin, who, though his own style has some drawbacks, was a keen judge and a fervent admirer of the best classical French, French writers have always regarded the style of Descartes as one of the most remarkable, and above all the most original in the language. There cannot be the slightest doubt in the mind of any one historically acquainted with that language, and accustomed to judge style critically, that the opinion is a thoroughly sound one. Of late, however, there have been dissidents, and their opinion has been strangely adopted by the latest English biographer of Descartes[274]. Controversy as a rule is out of place in these pages, but on this particular point, involving as it does one of the most important questions in French literary history—the proper distribution of the epochs of style—an exception must be made. According to Mr. Mahaffy's view it is Descartes' few letters to Balzac which have gained him a reputation for style, but he is 'seldom more than clear and correct;' he is 'seldom grand, not often amusing.' The temptation to enlarge on this singular definition of style as that which is grand or amusing must be resisted. Those who have followed the foregoing pages will perceive that the refusal to recognise in a writer who is 'seldom more than clear and correct' (Descartes is a great deal more than this, but no matter) the characteristics of a master of style arises from ignorance of what the characteristics and

drawbacks of French style had hitherto been.

Prose style may be divided, as conveniently as in any other way, into the style of description or narration, and the style of discussion or argument. The former deals with the imagination, with the passions, with outward events, with conversation; the latter with the reason only. The former propounds images, the latter ideas. The former constructs a picture, the latter reduces words to their simplest terms as symbols of thought. French had been making very rapid progress in the former division of style, though there was much left to be done; in the latter it was yet entirely at its rudiments. Before Descartes there are three masters of this latter style, and three only, Rabelais, Calvin, and Montaigne. There is little doubt that Rabelais might have anticipated Descartes, had it not been for the fact, first, that, except on rare occasions, he chose to wrap himself in the grotesque; and, secondly, that he came before the innovations of the Pléiade had enriched the language, and the reaction against the Pléiade had pruned off the superfluity of richness. Calvin was also exposed to this second drawback, and had besides a defect of idiosyncrasy in a certain dryness and heaviness allied with, and partly resulting from, a too close adherence to Latin forms. Montaigne again, like Rabelais, deliberately refuses to be bound by the mere requirements of argument, and expatiates into all sorts of digressions, partaking of the other style, the style of description. If any one will take the famous passage of Descartes already referred to (the passage in which he describes how being in winter quarters, with nothing to do and sitting all day long by a warm stove, he started the train of thought which ended or began in *Cogito ergo sum*), and, having a good acquaintance with the three authors

just mentioned, will imagine how the same facts and arguments would have appeared in their language, he will not find it difficult to realise the difference. The grotesque by-play and the archaic vocabulary of *Gargantua*, the garrulous digression and anecdote of the *Essays*, are not more strikingly absent than the jejune scholasticism which is the worse side of Calvin's grave and noble style. The author does not think it necessary to attract his readers with ornament, nor to repel them with dry and barren marshalling of technicalities. All is simple, straightforward, admirably clear, but at the same time the prose is fluent, modulated, harmonious, and possesses, if not the grace of superadded ornament, those of perfect proportion and unerring choice of words.

As a prose writer Descartes is generally compared to his contemporary, and in some sort predecessor, Balzac, and his advantage over the author of the *Socrate Chrétien* is stated to lie chiefly in the superiority of his matter. This is not quite the fact. Balzac had, indeed, aimed at the simplicity and classical perfection of Descartes, but he had not attained it; he still has much of the quaintness of Montaigne, though it must be remembered that in comparisons of this kind censure bestowed on the authors compared is relative not positive, and that Descartes could no more have written the *Essays* than Montaigne the *Discours*. Descartes has almost entirely discarded this quaintness, which sometimes passed into what is called in French *clinquant*, that is to say, tawdry and grotesque ornament. It is a peculiarity of his that no single description of his sentences fully describes their form. They are always perfectly clear, but they are sometimes very long. Their length, however, as is the case with some English authors of

the same century, is more apparent than real, the writer having chosen to link by conjunctions clauses which are independently finished, and which, by different punctuation even without the omission of the conjunction, might stand alone. The mistake of saying that Descartes is nothing more than clear and correct can only arise from an imperfect appreciation of the language. Let, for instance, his condemnation of scholastic method in the *Discours* be taken. Here the matter is interesting enough, and the comparison with the gorgeous but unphilosophical disdain which Bacon is wont to pour on the studies of the past is interesting also. But we are busied with the form. In the first place, any one must be struck with the modernness of the phrase and style. With insignificant exceptions there is nothing which would not be most excellent French to-day. Further examination of the phrase will show that there is much more in it than mere clearness and correctness, admirably clear and correct as it is. There is no 'spilth of adjectives,' as it has been termed. The words are just so many as are necessary for clear, correct, and elegant expression of the thought. But it is in the selection of them that the master of style appears. The happy phrase, 'La gentillesse des fables réveille l'esprit;' the comparison of the reading of the best authors not merely to a conversation, but a *conversation étudiée*, in which the speakers 'show only their best thoughts;' the contrast between eloquence and poetry (too often forgotten by the writer's countrymen); the ironic touch[275] in the eulogium on philosophy; all these things show style in its very rarest and highest form—the form which enables the writer to say the most, and to say it most forcibly with the least expenditure of the stores of the dictionary. One sees at once that the requirement of

one of the greatest French writers of our time, that the master of style 'shall be able to express at once any idea that presents itself requiring expression,' is fully, and more than fully, met by Descartes; and one sees also how the miracles of expression which Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, were to produce became possible, and who showed them the way. It may be asserted, without the slightest fear, that the more thoroughly Descartes is studied with the necessary apparatus of knowledge, the more firmly will his claims in this direction be established.

It is not superfluous to call attention to the fact that the *Discours de la Méthode* appeared within a few months of the *Cid*. Thus it happened that the first complete models of French classical style in prose and verse, and two of the most remarkable examples of that style which have ever been produced, were given to the public as nearly as possible contemporaneously. This fact, and the brilliant group of imitators who almost immediately availed themselves of the examples, prove satisfactorily how powerful were the influences which produced the change, and over how wide a circle they worked. As the influence of Descartes was thus no less literary than philosophical, it followed naturally enough that his school (which soon included almost all the men of intellectual eminence in France) preserved literary as well as philosophical traditions. This school, so far as it concerns French literature, may be said to have produced two remarkable individuals and one remarkable group. The group was the school of Port Royal; the individuals were Malebranche and Bayle.

Port Royal.

We are not here concerned with the religious

fortunes of the community of Port Royal[276]. It is sufficient to say that it was originally a nunnery at no great distance from Versailles, that it underwent a great religious revival under the influence of St. Francis de Sales and Mère Angélique Arnauld, and that, chiefly owing to the inspiration of the Abbé de St. Cyran, there was engrafted on it a community of *Solitaires* of the other sex, who busied themselves in study, in religious exercises, in manual labour, and in the education of youth. The society was early imbued with Jansenist principles, which brought it into violent conflict with the Jesuits, and eventually led to its persecution and destruction. It was also the head-quarters of a somewhat modified Cartesianism, and this, with its importance as a centre of literary instruction and its intimate connection with many famous men of letters, such as Pascal, Nicole, and Racine, gives it a place in the history of literature. The most remarkable work of an educational kind which proceeded from it was the famous Port Royal Logic, or 'Art of Thinking,' which seems to have been a work of collaboration, Arnauld and Nicole being the chief authors. This, though open to criticism from the point of view of the logician, had a very great influence in making the methodical treatment and clear luminous exposition which were characteristic of the Cartesian school common in French writers. Of the two authors just mentioned, Arnauld was the greater thinker, Nicole by far the better writer. He was, in fact, a sort of minor Pascal, his *Lettres sur les Visionnaires* corresponding to the *Provinciales* of his greater contemporary, while he was the author of *Pensées*, which, unlike Pascal's, were regularly finished, and which, though much inferior to them, have something of the same character. The intellectual activity of Port Royal was very

considerable, but most of it was directed into channels which were not purely literary, owing partly to incessant controversies brought on by the differences between the community and the Jesuits, partly to the cultivation of philosophical subjects. The age was perhaps the most controversial that Europe has ever seen, and the comparative absence of periodicals (which were only in their infancy) threw the controversies necessarily into book form, as letters, pamphlets, or even volumes of considerable size. But no very large portion of this controversial matter deserves the name of literature, and much of it was written in Latin. Thus Gassendi, the upholder of Neo-Epicurean opinions in opposition to Descartes, and beyond all question the greatest French philosopher of the century after Descartes and Malebranche, hardly belongs to French literature, though his Latin works are of great bulk and no small literary merit. The Gassendian school soon gave birth to a small but influential school of materialist freethinkers. What may be called the school of orthodox doubt, which had been represented by Montaigne and Charron, had, as has been said, a representative in La Mothe le Vayer. But this special kind of scepticism was already antiquated, if not obsolete, and it was succeeded, on the one side, by the above-mentioned freethinkers, who were also to a great extent free livers[277], and whose most remarkable literary figure was Saint Evremond; on the other, by a school of learned Pyrrhonists, whose most remarkable representative in every respect was Pierre Bayle.

Bayle.

Bayle was born in the south of France in 1647, and,

like almost all the men of letters of his time, was educated by the Jesuits. He was of a Protestant family, and was converted by his teachers, his conversion being however so little of a solid one that he reverted to Protestantism in less than two years. After this he resided for some time in Switzerland, studying Cartesianism. In 1675 he was made Professor of Philosophy at Sedan, a post which he held for six years, moving thence to Rotterdam. Here he began to write numerous articles and works in the periodicals, which were slowly becoming fashionable, especially in Holland. They were mostly critical, and dealt with scientific, historical, philosophical, and theological subjects. Bayle's utterances on the latter subject, and especially his pleas for toleration, brought him into a troublesome controversy with Jurieu, and in 1693 he was deprived of his professorship, or at least of his right to lecture. He then devoted himself to the famous Dictionary which is identified with his name, and which, though by no means the first encyclopædia of modern times (for Alsten, Moreri, Hoffmann, and others had preceded him within the century), was by far the most influential and most original yet produced. It appeared in 1696, and brought him new troubles, which were not however of a serious character. He died in 1706.

The scepticism of which Bayle was the exponent was purely critical and intellectual. He was not in the least an enemy of the moral system of Christianity, nor even, it would appear, an enemy to Christianity itself. But his intellect was constitutionally disposed to see the objections to all things rather than the arguments in their favour, and to take a pleasure in stating these objections. Thus, though he was after his religious oscillations nominally an orthodox

Protestant, the tendency of his works was to impugn points held by Protestants and Catholics alike, and though he was nominally a Cartesian, he was equally far from yielding an implicit belief to the doctrines of Descartes. His most famous work is the reverse of methodical. The subjects are chosen almost at random, and are very frequently nothing but pegs on which to hang notes and digressions in which the author indulges his critical and dissolvent faculty. Nor is the style by any means a model. But it is lively, clear, and interesting, and no doubt had a good deal to do with the vast popularity of his book in the eighteenth century. Bayle had a strong influence on Voltaire, and though he had less to do with his follower's style than Saint Evremond and Pascal, he is nearer to him in spirit than either. The difference perhaps may be said to be that Bayle's pleasure in negative criticism is almost purely intellectual. There is but little in him of the half-childish mischievousness which distinguishes Voltaire.

Malebranche.

Cartesianism was not less likely than its opposites to lead to philosophical scepticism, but in the main its professors, taking their master's conduct for model, remained orthodox. In that case, however, the Cartesian idealism had a tendency to pass into mysticism. Of those in whom it took this form Nicolas Malebranche[278] was the unquestioned chief. He was born at Paris, where his father held a lucrative office; in 1638, and from his birth had very feeble health. When he was of age he became an Oratorian, and passed the whole of his long life in study and literary work, sometimes being engaged in

controversies on the compatibility of his system—the famous 'Vision in God,' and 'Spiritual Existence in God'—with orthodoxy, but never receiving any formal censure from the Church. Despite his bad health he lived to the age of seventy-seven, dying in 1715. A curious story is told of a verbal argument between him and Berkeley on the eve of his death. He wrote several works in French, such as a *Traité de Morale*, *Conversations Métaphysiques*, etc., but his greatest and most remarkable contribution to French literature is his *Recherche de la Vérité*, published in 1674, which unfolds his system. From the literary point of view the *Recherche* is one of the most considerable books of the philosophical class ever produced. Unlike the various works of Descartes it is of very great length, filling three volumes in the original edition, and a thousand pages of close type in the most handy modern reprint. It also deals with subjects of an exceedingly abstract character, and is not diversified by any elaborate illustrations, any machinery like that of Plato or Berkeley, or any passages of set eloquence. The purity and beauty of the style, however, and its extraordinary lucidity, make it a book of which it is difficult to tire. The chief mechanical difference between the style of Malebranche and that of his master is that his sentences are shorter. They are, however, framed with equal care as to rhythm and to logical arrangement. The metaphor of limpidity is very frequently applied to style, but perhaps there is hardly any to which it may be applied with such propriety as to the style of Malebranche.

FOOTNOTES:

[272] Not fully edited yet. Cousin's edition is

the fullest, but the important French works figure in many popular collections and are easily accessible.

[273] He was 'as restless as a hyæna,' says De Quincey, not unjustly.

[274] Professor Mahaffy, *Descartes*. Blackwood, 1880.

[275] 'La philosophie donne moyen de parler vraisemblablement de toutes choses, et se faire admirer des moins savants.'

[276] Sainte-Beuve, *Port Royal*. 6 vols. Paris, 1859-61.

[277] These men, such as Saint Ibal, Bardouville, Desbarreaux, and others, figure largely in the anecdotic history of the time. In the persons of Théophile and Saint Evremond they touch on literature: but for the most part they were chiefly distinguished by revolting coarseness and blasphemy of expression, and by a childish delight in outraging religious sentiment, which was often changed into abject terror or hypocritical compliance as death approached. They were commonly called *philosophes*, a degradation of the word which was not much mended in the next century, though it then acquired a more strictly literary meaning.

[278] Ed. Simon. 1854.

CHAPTER VII.

THEOLOGIANS AND PREACHERS.

There is no period in the whole course of French literature in which theological writers and orators contribute so much to literary history as in the seventeenth century. The causes of this energy can only be summarily indicated here. They were the various *sequelae* of the Reformation and the counter-reformation, the latter of which was in France extraordinarily powerful; the influence of Richelieu and Mazarin in politics, which assured to the Church a great predominance in the State, while its rival, the territorial aristocracy, was depressed and persecuted; the personal inclination of Louis XIV., who made up for his loose manner of life by the straitest doctrinal orthodoxy; but perhaps most of all the accidental determination of various men of great talents and energy to the ecclesiastical profession. Bossuet, Fénelon, Bourdaloue, Massillon, Fléchier, Mascaron, Claude, Saurin, to name no others, could hardly have failed to distinguish themselves in any department of literature which they had chosen. Circumstances of accident threw them into work more or less wholly theological.

St. François de Sales.

This peculiarity of the century, however, belongs chiefly to its third and fourth quarters. The first preacher and theologian of literary eminence in this period belongs about equally to it and to the preceding, but his most remarkable work dates from this time. François de Sales was born at Annecy in 1567. He was destined for the law, and completed his education for it at Paris, but his vocation for the

church was stronger, and he took orders in 1593. He soon distinguished himself by reconverting a considerable number of persons to the Roman form of faith in the district of Chablais, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century preached at Paris, and latterly at Dijon. He was soon made bishop of Geneva, an episcopate which, it need hardly be said, might almost be described as *in partibus infidelium*. But in the south of France, in Savoy, and in Paris itself, his influence was great. His chief works are the 'Introduction to a Devout Life' (1608), the *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, 'Spiritual Letters' (to Madame de Chantal), and sermons. His style is by no means destitute of archaism, but it is clear, fluent, and agreeable. He and Fenouillet, bishop of Marseilles, with other preachers whose names are now forgotten, were the chief instruments in recovering the art of sacred oratory from the low estate into which it had fallen during the heat of the religious wars and the League, when it had been disgraced alternately by violence and buffoonery. But the Thirty Years' War and the Fronde were again unfavourable to theological discussion, except of a quasi-political kind, and the best spirits of this time threw themselves into the unpopular direction of Jansenism. The 'Siècle de Louis Quatorze' proper, that is the period subsequent to 1660, was the palmy time, from the literary point of view, of theological eloquence and discussion in France.

Bossuet.

Of the authors already named Bossuet deserves precedence in almost every respect except that of private character. Jacques Benigne Bossuet[279] was born at Dijon, in 1627, of a family of distinction in

the middle class. He went to school to the Jesuits in his native town, and finished his education at the Collège de Navarre in Paris, receiving his doctor's degree and a canonry at Metz in 1652. He soon distinguished himself both as an orator and a controversialist, preached before the king in Advent 1661, and in 1669 was appointed to the bishopric of Condom. His subsequent appointment to the post of tutor to the Dauphin made him resign his bishopric; but on the completion of his task (in virtue of which he had been elected to the Academy in 1680) he was made almoner to the prince, and in the following year received the bishopric of Meaux. He was soon after engaged in the Gallican controversy, in which he defended not so much the rights of the Church as the claims of the royal prerogative. The most unfortunate incident of his life was his controversy with Fénelon. Bossuet, though thoroughly learned in some respects, was not a man of the widest culture, and the whole region of mystical theology was unknown to him. He, therefore, mistook certain utterances of the archbishop of Cambray, which were neither new nor alarming, for heterodox innovations, and began a violent polemic against him. Supported by the king, he was able to obtain a nominal victory, but the moral success rested with Fénelon, and still more the advantage in the literary duel. Bossuet died in 1704. His works were very numerous, and of very various kinds. His first reputation was, as has been said, earned as a controversialist (his principal adversaries in this respect were the Protestant ministers Ferri and Claude) and as a preacher on general subjects. On his appointment to the see of Condom, however, he struck out a new line, that of funeral discourses (*oraisons funèbres*), and produced, on the occasions of the death of the two Henriettas of

England, mother and daughter, of the great Condé, of the Princess-Palatine, and of others, works which are undoubtedly triumphs of French eloquence, and which, with the exception of the best passages of Burke, are perhaps the only things of the kind comparable to the masterpieces of antiquity. His controversial work is equal in perfection of execution to his oratory, the *Exposition de la Doctrine de l'Église Catholique*, and still more the *Histoire des Variations des Églises Protestantes*, being deservedly regarded as models of their kind, notwithstanding the obvious fallacy pervading the latter. Of his other works the most remarkable (perhaps the most remarkable of all if originality of conception and breadth of design be taken into account) is his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle jusqu'à l'Empire de Charlemagne*. This has, though not universally, been held to be the first attempt at the philosophy of history, that is to say, the first work in which general history is regarded and expounded from a single comprehensive point of view, and laws of a universal kind drawn from it. In Bossuet's case the point of view is, of course, strictly theological, and the laws are arranged accordingly.

Bossuet's character was unamiable, and, despite the affected frankness with which he spoke to the king, it will always remain a blot on his memory that he did not seriously protest either against the loose life of Louis, or against his ruinous ambition and lawless disregard of the rights of nations. There is, however, no doubt whatever of his perfect sincerity and of the genuineness of his belief in political autocracy, provided that the autocrat was a faithful son of the Church. He was a Cartesian, and was probably not unindebted to Descartes for the force and vigour of his reasonings, though he was hardly so careful as

his master in enlarging the field of his knowledge and assuring the validity of his premises. The extraordinary majesty of his rhetoric, perhaps, brings out by force of contrast the occasionally fallacious character of his reasoning, but it must be confessed that even as a controversialist he has few equals. The rhetorical excellence of the *Oraisons* and the gorgeous sweep, not merely of the language but of the conception, in the *Histoire Universelle*, show him at what is really his best; while many isolated expressions betray at once an intimate knowledge of the human heart, and a hardly surpassed faculty of clothing that knowledge in words. Bossuet no doubt is more of a speaker than a writer. His excellence lies in the wonderful survey, and grasp of the subject (qualities which make his favourite literary nickname of the 'Eagle of Meaux' more than usually appropriate), in the contagious enthusiasm and energy with which he attacks his point, in his inexhaustible metaphors and comparisons. He has not the unfailing charm of Malebranche, nor that which belongs in a less degree, and with more mannerism, to Fénelon; he is very unequal, and small blemishes of style abound in him. Thus, in his most famous passage, the description of the sudden death of Henrietta of Orleans, occurs the phrase 'comme un coup de *tonnerre* cette *étonnante* nouvelle,' a jingle of words as unpleasant as it is easily avoided. But blemishes of this kind (and it is, perhaps, noteworthy that French is more tolerant of them than almost any other language of equal literary perfection) disappear in the volume and force of the torrent of Bossuet's eloquence. It is fair to add that, though he is almost always aiming at the sublime, he scarcely ever oversteps it, or falls into the bombastic and the ridiculous. Even his elaborate eulogy (it would

hardly be fair to call it flattery) of the great is so cunningly balanced by exposition of the nothingness of men and things, that it does not strike the mind's eye with any immediate sense of glaring impropriety. The lack of formal perfection which is sometimes noticeable in him is made up to a greater degree almost than in any other writer by the intense force and conviction of the speaker and the imposing majesty of his manner. It is pretty certain that most attempts to imitate Bossuet would result in a lamentable failure; and it is not a little significant that the only two Frenchmen who in prose have shown themselves occasionally his rivals, Michelet and Lamennais, are among the most unequal of writers.

Fénelon.

The contrast between Bossuet and his chief rival was in all respects great. To begin with, Fénelon was a much younger man than Bossuet, belonging it might be said almost to another generation. He inherited some of the noblest blood in France, while Bossuet was but a *roturier*, and this may have had something to do with the more independent character of Fénelon. Bossuet was a vigorous student of certain defined branches of knowledge, but of general literature he took little heed. Fénelon was a man of almost universal reading, and one of the most original and soundest literary critics of his time. Fénelon felt deeply for the misery of the French people; Bossuet does not appear to have troubled himself about it. Finally Bossuet, with all his merits, had grave faults of moral character, while to Fénelon —quite as justly as to Berkeley—every virtue under heaven may be assigned. François de Salignac de la

Mothe-Fénelon[280] was born at the castle of the same name in the province of Perigord, on August 16th, 1661. He was educated first at home, then at Cahors, and then at the Collége de Plessis at Paris. He finally studied in a theological seminary for some years, and did not formally enter the Church till he was four-and-twenty. He then devoted himself partly to the poor, partly to education, especially of girls, and his treatise on this latter subject was his first work. In 1687 he was appointed preceptor to the Duke de Bourgogne, son of Bossuet's pupil, and heir to the throne. For the duke he wrote a great number of books, among them *Télémaque* (or at least the first sketch of it). In 1697 he was appointed archbishop of Cambray. Into his connection with Madame Guyon, the celebrated apostle of quietism, and his consequent quarrel with Bossuet, there is no need to enter further. Whichever of the two may have been theologically in the right, there are no two opinions on the question that Bossuet was in the wrong, both in the acrimony of his conduct and the violence of his language. In the latter respect, indeed, he brought down upon himself a well-deserved punishment. Fénelon was the mildest of men, but he possessed a faculty of quiet irony inferior to that of no man then living, and he used it with effect in the controversy against Bossuet's declamatory denunciations. When, at last, the matter had been referred to the Pope, and judgment had been given against himself, Fénelon at once bowed to the decision and acknowledged his error. Louis, however, had many more reasons for disliking him than the mere odium theologicum with which Bossuet had inspired him. Fénelon was known to disapprove of much in the actual government of France, and the surreptitious publication of

Télémaque completed his disgrace. He was banished from court and confined to his diocese, in which he accordingly spent the last part of his life, doing his best to alleviate the misery caused on the borders by the war of the Spanish succession, and dying at Cambray in 1715.

Fénelon was an industrious writer. Few of his finished sermons have been preserved; but these are excellent, as are also his fables written for the Duke de Bourgogne, his already-mentioned *Education des Filles*, and his *Dialogues des Morts*, also written for the Duke, in which the form is borrowed from Lucian, but in which moral lessons are substituted for mere satire. Like Bossuet, Fénelon was a Cartesian, and his *Traité de l'Existence de Dieu* is a philosophico-religious work of no small merit. In literary history he is remarkable for having directly opposed the victorious work of Boileau. He has left several exercises in literary criticism, such as his *Lettre sur les Occupations de l'Académie Française*, one of the latest of his works; his *Dialogues sur l'Eloquence*, and a contribution to the famous dispute of ancients and moderns in correspondence with La Motte. He regretted the impoverishment of the language, and the loss of much of the energy and picturesque vigour of the sixteenth century. In his controversy with Bossuet, though the matter is not strictly literary, there is, as has been noticed, much admirable literary work; but his chief claim to a place in literary history is, of course, *Télémaque*, which work he had anticipated by the somewhat similar *Aventures d'Aristonous*. It has often been regretted that classics in any language should be used for purposes of instruction in the rudiments, and hardly any single work has suffered more from this practice than *Télémaque*, for learners of French

are usually set to read it long before they have any power of literary appreciation. A continuous narrative, moreover, is about the least suited of all literary forms to bear that process of cutting up in short pieces which is necessary in education. The pleasure of the story is either lost altogether, or anticipated by surreptitious reading on the part of the pupil, after which the mechanical plodding through matter of which he has already exhausted the interest is disgusting enough. Yet it can hardly be doubted that if *Télémaque* had not, in the case of most readers, this fatal disadvantage, its beauties would be generally acknowledged. Its form is somewhat artificial, and the author has, perhaps, not escaped the error of most moral fiction writers, that of making his hero too much of a model of what ought to be, and too little of a copy of what is. But the story is excellently managed, the various incidents are drawn with remarkable vividness and picturesqueness, the descriptions are uniformly excellent, and the style is almost impeccable. Even were the moral sentiments and the general tendency of the book less excellent than they are, its value as a model of French composition would probably have secured it something like its present place side by side with La Fontaine's Fables as a school-book. It is fair to add that in the character of Calypso, where the need of the author for a 'terrible example' freed him from his restraints, very considerable powers of character-drawing are shown, and the same may be said of not a few of the minor personages.

Massillon.

The third greatest name of the period in this class of men of letters is beyond all question that of

Massillon. He, like Fénelon, belongs to the second, if not the third, generation of the Siècle de Louis Quatorze, being nearly forty years younger than Bossuet. He was a long liver, and his death did not occur till far into the reign of Louis XV., when the reputation of Voltaire was established, and the eighteenth-century movement was in full swing. But his literary and oratorical activity had ceased for nearly a quarter of a century at the time of his death. Jean Baptiste Massillon[281] was a native of Hières, and was born on June 24, 1663. His father was a notary, and he himself was destined for the same profession; but his vocation for the Church was strong, and he was at last permitted to enter the Oratorian Congregation. His aptitude for preaching was soon discovered, and when very young he distinguished himself by *Oraisons Funèbres* on the archbishops of Lyons and Vienne. He was of a retiring disposition, and, wishing to avoid publicity, joined a stricter order than that of the Oratory, but was induced, and indeed ordered, by the Cardinal de Noailles, who heard him preach in his new abode, not to hide his light under a bushel, but to come to Paris and do the Church service. He obeyed, and was established in the capital in 1696. His fame soon became great, and he preached before the king more than one course of sermons. He was appointed bishop of Clermont in 1717, and in the same year preached the celebrated *Petit Caréme*, or course of Lent sermons, before Louis XV. In 1719 he was elected of the Academy. He preached his last sermon at Paris in 1723, and then retired to his diocese, where he spent the last twenty years of his life, dying of apoplexy at the age of eighty, Sept. 28, 1742.

Massillon has usually, and justly, been considered the greatest preacher, in the strict sense of the word,

of France. Only Bossuet and Bourdaloue could contest this position; and though both preceded him, and he owed much to both, he excels both in sermons properly so called. Bossuet was, perhaps, a greater orator, if the finest parts of his work only are taken; but he was, as has been said, unequal, and in the two great objects of the preacher, exposition of doctrine and effect upon the consciences of his hearers, he was admittedly inferior to Massillon. The latter, moreover, has, of all French preachers (for Fénelon, it must be remembered, has left but few sermons), the purest style, and possesses the greatest range. His special function was considered to be persuasion; yet few pulpit orators have managed the sterner parts of their duty more forcibly. Massillon's sermon on the Prodigal Son, and that on the Deaths of the Just and the Unjust, are models of his style. It is, moreover, very much to his credit that he was the most uncompromising, despite his gentleness, of all the great preachers of the time, and, therefore, the least popular at court. Louis the Fourteenth's famous epigram, to the effect that other preachers made him contented with them, but Massillon made him discontented with himself, was somewhat comically illustrated by the fact that, after the second course of sermons preached before him, that of Lent 1704, the preacher, though then in the very height of his powers, was never asked again to preach at court. We are, however, more concerned with the manner than with the matter of his orations. He had (after the example of Bourdaloue, it is true) entirely discarded the frippery of erudition with which most of his predecessors had been wont to load their sermons, as well as the occasional oddities of gesticulation and anecdote which had once been fashionable. His style is simple, straightforward, and

yet extremely elegant. In the commonplaces of French literary history of the old school he is called the Racine of the pulpit, a compliment determined by the extreme purity and elegance of his style, but not otherwise very applicable, inasmuch as one chief characteristic of Massillon is an energy and masculine vigour of expression in which Racine is, for the most part, wanting.

Bourdaloue.

If we have postponed Bourdaloue to Massillon, despite the order of chronology, it has been in accordance with Bourdaloue's own remark when Massillon made his first reputation, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' This remark is characteristic of the disposition of the man, which was as stainless as Massillon's own. Louis Bourdaloue was born at Bourges on the 20th August, 1632, and was thus not many years the junior of Bossuet. He entered the Society of Jesus early, and served it as professor of philosophy and kindred subjects. But his superiors soon discovered his talents as a preacher, and he was sent to make his way before the court, where he became a great favourite, especially with Madame de Sévigné, who was no mean critic. He died in 1704.

The chief characteristic of Bourdaloue's eloquence is a remarkable absence of ornament, and a strict adherence to dialectical order. None of the great French preachers admit of logical abstraction and *précis* so well as he. Another peculiarity is his preference for ethical subjects. More than any of his contemporaries he was an expounder of Christian morality, and his sermons are wont to deal with simple virtues and vices rather than with points of

devotional piety. He was, like Massillon, and even more than Massillon, absolutely fearless and uncompromising, preaching against adultery in the very face of Louis XIV. in his early days, and sparing no vice or folly of the court. But, perhaps owing to the somewhat severe and exclusively intellectual character of his oratory, it does not appear to have produced the effects, salutary doubtless for the hearers, but somewhat inconvenient for the preacher, which attended the more cunningly-aimed attacks of Massillon.

The example of the three great preachers—Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon—raised up many imitators, some of whom, such as De la Rue, Cheminais, and others, were popular in their day. There are, however, four orators—two Roman Catholics, and two belonging to the French Protestant Church—to whom is usually and rightly accorded the second rank, while sectarian partiality sometimes claims even the first for them. These were Fléchier, Mascaron, Claude, and Saurin.

Minor Preachers.

Esprit Fléchier was born at Pesmes in 1632. For a time he was a member of the congregation of the Brothers of Christian Doctrine, which, however, on an alteration of its constitution by a new superior-general (he had been introduced to it by his uncle, who held that office), he quitted. He then went to Paris and tried various methods of gaining a livelihood, such as writing verses in Latin and French, and teaching in a school. In these early days he indulged in various forms of miscellaneous literature. The most curious and interesting of these

works is a little account of the *Grands Jours d'Auvergne*, a sort of provincial assize which he visited. This has much liveliness, and the sketches of character and manners show a good deal of skill. But at length he found his proper sphere in the pulpit. He acquired reputation by his *Oraison Funèbre* on Turenne. He became a member of the Academy (being admitted on the same day as Racine); and he was appointed, first, to the bishopric of Lavaur, then to that of Nîmes, where, in a very difficult position (for the revocation of the edict of Nantes had exasperated the Protestants, who were numerous in the diocese), he made himself universally beloved. He died in 1710. The most famous of Fléchier's discourses are those on Madame de Montausier (the heroine of the *Guirlande de Julie*[282] and the idol of the Hôtel de Rambouillet), that on Madame de Montausier's husband, and that on Turenne. Fléchier represents a somewhat older style of diction and expression than either of his great contemporaries, Bossuet and Bourdaloue; and his style, unlike some other work of this older school, is not characterised by many striking occasional phrases, but his sermons as a whole are vigorous and well expressed.

Jean Mascaron was born at Marseilles in 1634. It is worth noticing that almost all these orators came from the south of France. He preached frequently before the king, and did not hesitate to rebuke his vices, notwithstanding or because of which he was appointed to the bishopric of Tulle, whence he was afterwards translated to Agen. He died in 1703. Mascaron is chiefly remembered for his *Oraison* on that same death of Turenne which gave occasion to so many orators. He is usually reproached with a certain affectation of style, and there is justice in the reproach.

Of the two Protestant divines who have been mentioned Claude was the less distinguished, though he sustained on pretty even terms a public controversy with Bossuet himself. Jacques Saurin was of less political influence with his own sect, but he possessed greater eloquence, and critics of his own persuasion in France and Switzerland have equalled him to Bossuet. His works, moreover, long continued to be the most popular body of household divinity with French Protestants. He was born at Nîmes, 1677, and was thus considerably younger even than Massillon. The revocation of the edict of Nantes (which had formed the subject of some of Claude's most famous discourses) prevented him from making a name for himself in France. He was at first appointed, in 1701, after studying at Geneva, to a Walloon congregation in London, but soon moved, in consequence of weak health, to the Hague. He there became a victim of the petty dissensions which seem to have been more frequent among Dutch Protestant sects than anywhere else, and to the vexation of these is said to have been partly due his comparatively early death in 1730. He left a very considerable number of sermons and some theological treatises. He was admittedly a great orator, excelling in striking pictures and forcible imagery.

It will have been observed that, though this age contributes more to theology of the literary kind than almost any other, its most memorable contributions are almost exclusively oratorical. Incidentally, however, much that was intended to be read, not heard, was of course written. But less of it has been thought worthy the attention of posterity. The chief theological names in this department have already been named in naming those of the other. Of

the school of Port Royal, who preached little but wrote much, J. J. Duguet, a man of great talent and saintly life, deserves mention.

FOOTNOTES:

[279] Bossuet's works are extremely voluminous. The most important of them are easily obtainable in the *Collection Didot* and similar libraries.

[280] There is a fairly representative edition of Fénelon in five vols. large 8vo. Didot. Separate works are easily accessible.

[281] Edition as in Fénelon's case. Selections of all the orthodox sermon-writers are abundant.

[282] This was an album to which the poets of the day, from Corneille downwards, contributed verses, each on a different flower.

INTERCHAPTER III.

SUMMARY OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE.

The tendencies of the period which has been surveyed in the foregoing book must be sufficiently obvious from the survey itself. They had been, as far as the unsatisfactory result of them went, indicated with remarkably prophetic precision by Regnier in

lines quoted above[283]. The work, not merely of Malherbe, which the satirist had directly in view, but of Boileau, who succeeded Malherbe and completed his task, had tended far too much in the direction of substituting a formal regularity for an elastic freedom and of discouraging the more poetical utterances of thought. In prose, however, the operation of not dissimilar tendencies had been almost wholly good. For it is in the nature of prose not to admit of too absolute regulation, and it is at the same time in its nature to require that regulation up to a certain point. If the French vocabulary had been somewhat impoverished, it had been considerably refined. All good authorities admit that the influence of the salon-coteries and the *précieuses* —mischievous as it was in some ways—was of no small benefit in purifying not merely manners but speech. A single book, the *Historiettes* of Tallemant des Réaux, shows sufficiently the need of this double purification. French literature has at no time been distinguished by prudery, but from the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century (for, as has been pointed out, the courtly literature at least of the middle ages is free from this defect) it had added to its liberty in choice and treatment of subjects a liberty which amounted to the extremest licence in the choice of words. It had become in fact exceedingly coarse. The poetry of the Pléiade was not as a rule open to this charge, but the early poetry and prose of the seventeenth century must submit to it. One effect of the process of correction and reform was a decided improvement in this matter.

But the vocabulary was by no means the only thing that underwent revision. Other constituents of literature shared in the same experience, and much more beneficially, for the expurgation of the

dictionary was unfortunately made to involve the weeding out of many terms which were not open to the slightest exception, and the loss of which deprived the tongue of much of its picturesqueness. No such concomitant defect attended the reformations in grammar which, begun by the grammarians of the sixteenth century, were pursued still more systematically by Vaugelas and his followers. There can hardly be too much precision observed in matters of accidence and syntax; while it is desirable that the vocabulary should be as rich as possible, provided that its terms are vernacular or properly naturalised. The same may be said of some at least of the reforms of Malherbe in prosody and the minutiæ of poetical art. So too the advance made to something like a uniform orthography was of no small importance. The result of this general criticism was the group (or rather groups, for they may be divided into at least two, the earlier comprising Descartes, Corneille, Pascal, Saint Evremond, La Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, Madame de Sévigné, La Fontaine, and Molière, in other words, most of the greatest names) illustrating the so-called *Grand Siècle*, or Siècle de Louis Quatorze. The two names that stand first in this list, Descartes and Corneille, represent at once the initial change and in addition the greatest accomplishment in the direction of change effected by any individual. The others worthily followed where they led. This group, as has been more than once pointed out, does not shine in poetry proper. But it has hardly a rival in prose and in that measured and declamatory or easy and pedestrian verse which is half prose, half poetry.

Long, however, before the century ended, the evils which invariably attend upon a critical period, especially—it is paradoxical but true—when it is at

the same time a period of considerable creative power, began to manifest themselves. These evils may be briefly described as the natural results of the drawing up of too straight and definite rules for each department of literature, and the following with too great exactness of the more brilliant examples in each kind. The one practice leads to what is called, in Sterne's well-known phrase, 'looking at the stop-watch;' the other, to an endeavour to be like somebody. It was not till the eighteenth century that these evils were fully patent; and then, though they were somewhat mitigated in departments other than the Belles Lettres by the eager spirit of enquiry and adventure which characterised the time, they are evident enough. The mischief showed itself in various ways. Besides the two which have been already indicated, there was a third and subtler form, which has produced some curious and interesting work, but which is obviously an indication of decadence. Those who did not resign themselves to the mere recasting of old material in the old moulds, or to simple following of the great models, were apt to echo, aloud or silently, La Bruyère's opening sentence, 'tout est dit,' and to draw from this discouraging fact the same conclusion that he did—that the only way to innovate was to vary in cunning fashion the manners of saying. In itself there might be no great harm in the conclusion, especially if it had led to a revolt against the narrow limits imposed by current criticism. But it did not, it only led to an attempt to innovate within those limits, which could only be done by a kind of new 'preciousness'—an affectation in short. This affectation showed itself first (though La Bruyère himself is not quite free from it, enemy of Fontenelle as he was) in Fontenelle, who was a descendant of the old *précieuse*

school itself, and reached a climax in the author from whose name it thenceforward took its name of *Marivaudage*.

Thus the literary produce of the seventeenth century was better than its tendency. The latter has been sufficiently described; a very few words will suffice for the former. In the special characteristics of the genius of French, which may be said to be clearness, polish of form and expression, and a certain quality which perhaps cannot be so well expressed by any other word as by alertness, the best work of the seventeenth century has no rivals. Except in Corneille and Bossuet, it is not often grand, it is still seldomer passionate, or suggestively harmonious, or quaintly humorous, or even picturesquely narrative. But the charm of precision, of elegance, of expressing what is expressed in the best possible manner, belongs to it in a supreme degree. There are not many things in literature more absolutely incapable of improvement in their own style, and as far as they go, than a scene of Molière, a *tirade* of Racine, a maxim of La Rochefoucauld, a letter of Madame de Sévigné, a character of La Bruyère, a peroration of Massillon, when each is at his or her best. The reader may in some cases feel that he likes something else better, but he is incapable of pointing out a blemish. If he objects, he must object to something extra-literary, to the writer's conception of human nature, his political views, his range of thought, his selection of subject. When the one supreme question of criticism formulated by Victor Hugo, 'l'ouvrage est-il bon ou est-il mauvais?' (not 'aimez-vous l'ouvrage?' which is the illegitimate question which nine critics out of ten put to themselves), is set in reference to the best work of this time, the answer cannot be dubious for one moment in the case of any one

qualified to give an answer at all. It is good, and in very many cases it could not possibly be better.

FOOTNOTES:

[283] p. 267.

BOOK IV.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

POETS.

Literary Degeneracy of the Eighteenth Century.

The literature of the eighteenth century, despite the many great names which adorn it, and the extraordinary practical influence which it exercised, is, from the point of view of strict literary criticism, which busies itself with form rather than matter, a period of decadence. In all the departments of Belles

Lettres a servile imitation of the models of the great classical period is observable. The language, according to an inevitable process which the more clearsighted of the men of Louis the Fourteenth's time, such as Fénelon and La Bruyère, themselves foresaw and deprecated, became more and more incapable of expressing deep passion, varied scenery, the intricacies and eccentricities of character. For a time a few survivors of the older class and manner, such as Fontenelle, Saint Simon, Massillon, resisted the tendency of the age more or less successfully. As they one by one dropped off, the militant energy of the great *philosophe* movement, which may be said to coincide with the second and third quarters of the century, communicated a temporary brilliance to prose. But during the reign of Louis XVI., the Revolution and the Empire (for in the widest sense the eighteenth century of literature does not cease till the Restoration, or even later), the average literary value of what is written in French is but small, and, with few exceptions, what is valuable belongs to those who, consciously or unconsciously, were in an attitude of revolt, and were clearing the way for the men of 1830.

especially manifest in Poetry.

Poetry and the drama naturally suffered most from this course of events, and poetry pure and simple suffered even more than the drama. By the opening of the eighteenth century epic and lyric in the proper sense had been rendered nearly impossible by the full and apparently final adoption of the conception of poetry recommended by Malherbe, and finally rendered orthodox by Boileau. The impossibility was

not recognised, and France, in the opinion of her own critics, at last got her epic poem in the *Henriade*, and her perfect lyrists in Rousseau and Lebrun. But posterity has not ratified these judgments. Fortunately, however, the men of the eighteenth century had in La Fontaine a model for lighter work which their principles permitted them to follow, and the irresistible attractions of the song left song-writers tolerably free from the fatal restrictions of dignified poetry. Once, towards the close of the century, a poet of exceptional genius, André Chénier, showed what he might have done under happier circumstances. But for the most part the history of poetry during this time in France is the history of verse almost uninspired by the poetic spirit, and destitute even of the choicer graces of poetic form.

J. B. Rousseau.

For convenience' sake it will be well to separate the graver and the lighter poets, and to treat each in order, with the proviso that in most cases those mentioned in the first division have some claim to figure in the second also, for few poets of the time were wholly serious. The first poet who is distinctively of the eighteenth century, and not the least remarkable, was Jean Baptiste Rousseau[284] (1669-1741). Rousseau's life was a singular and rather an unfortunate one. In the first place he was exiled for a piece of scandalous literature, of which in all probability he was quite guiltless; and, in the second, meeting in his exile with Voltaire, who professed (and seems really to have felt) admiration for him, he offended the irritable disciple and was long the butt of his attacks. Here, however, Rousseau

concerns us as a direct pupil of Boileau, who, with great faculties for the formal part of poetry, and not without some tincture of its spirit, set himself to be a lyric poet after Boileau's fashion. He tried play-writing also, but his dramas are quite unimportant. Rousseau's principal works are certain odes, most of which are either panegyrical after the fashion of the celebrated Namur specimen (though he is seldom so absurd as his master), or else sacred and drawn from the Bible. The *Cantates* are of the same kind as the latter. These elaborate and formal works, which owed much of their popularity to the vogue given to piety at court in the later years of Louis XVI., are curiously contrasted with the third principal division of his poems, consisting of epigrams which allow themselves the full epigrammatic licence in subject and treatment. The contrast is, however, probably due to a very simple cause, the state of demand at the time, and perhaps also to the study of Marot, the only pre-seventeenth century poet of France who was allowed to pass muster in the school of Boileau. Rousseau's merits have been already indicated, and his defects may be easily divined, even from this brief notice. He is almost always adroit, often eloquent, sometimes remarkably clever; but he is seldom other than artificial, never passionate, and only once or twice sublime. Nor is it superfluous to mention that he is more responsible than any other person for the intolerable frippery of classical mythology which loads eighteenth-century verse.

La Motte-Houdart (1672-1731), a successful dramatist, an excellent prose-writer, and an ingenious but paradoxical critic, was at the time considered Rousseau's rival in point of ode-making. His work displays the same defects in a greater and the same merits in a lesser degree, but his fables in

the style of La Fontaine are not unhappy. Lagrange-Chancel, a partisan of the Duchess du Maine, is chiefly famous for his ferocious satires on the Duke of Orleans. Louis Racine (1692—1763), undeterred by his father's reputation and the dissuasion of the redoubtable Boileau, attempted poetry of a serious kind. He was brought up by the Jansenists, and his two chief works are poems on 'Grace' and 'Religion.' The latter is better than the former; but both exhibit a considerable faculty in the style of verse which his father had made fashionable. The 'Sacred Odes' of Louis Racine are, like most French poetry of the kind, stiff with a double mannerism, literary and devotional.

Voltaire.

It would not be easy to give a clearer idea of the strange conception of poetry which prevailed in France at this time than is given in the simple statement that Voltaire was acknowledged to be its greatest poet. It is probable that few Englishmen think of Voltaire as a poet at all; and he has indeed no claim to the title except such as may be derived from his remarkable skill in the mechanism of the art of poetry, and from the extraordinary felicity of his light occasional pieces. It is, however, as a poet that he was chiefly regarded by his contemporaries; and though he will figure in almost every one of the chapters of this book, such brief notice of his life as can alone be attempted in this volume may best be given here. He was born in Paris in 1694, being the younger son of a wealthy notary. The Jesuits had charge of his education, and he very early displayed inclinations towards verse which were not agreeable to his father. His youth seemed destined to scrapes.

He became identified with the party hostile to the Regent, and was twice imprisoned in the Bastile (the second time in consequence of no fault of his own), while he was at least twice bastinadoed by personal enemies. Being sent in the suite of an ambassador to Holland, he became entangled in a foolish love affair, and had to be hastily recalled. But by degrees his literary talent developed itself. His first visit to the Bastile is identified, more or less correctly, with the composition of *Œdipe*, his second with that of the *Henriade*. After his second release he had to go to England, and there the poem was published. He was soon enabled to return to France, and from that time forward was careful to keep himself out of difficulties by residing first with his friend, Madame du Châtelet, at the remote frontier château of Circy, then with Frederick II. at Berlin, then on the neutral territory of Switzerland, or close to its border, at Les Délices and Ferney. During the whole of his long life his literary production was incessant, and the form most congenial to him was poetry, or at least verse. Besides the *Henriade*, his only poem of great bulk is the scandalous burlesque epic of the *Pucelle*, nominally imitated from Ariosto, but destitute of the poetical feeling prominent in the *Orlando*. Voltaire's talent, however, was so much greater in the lighter kinds of poetry than in the severer, that the *Pucelle* is not only more amusing, but actually better as poetry, than the *Henriade*, the latter being stiff in plan and servilely modelled on the classical epics, declamatory in tone, tedious in action, and commonplace in character. Besides these two long poems Voltaire produced an immense quantity of miscellaneous work, tales in verse, epistles in verse, discourses in verse, satires, epigrams, *vers de société* of every possible kind. These are almost invariably

distinguished by the felicity of expression—spoilt only by too close adherence to the mannerism of the time—the brilliant wit, the keen observation which are identified with the name of Voltaire. The number and the small individual size of these works make it impossible to particularise them here. But *Le Pauvre Diable* may be specified as an almost unique example of easy Horatian satire less conventional than most of its kind; and the verses to the Princess Ulrique of Prussia as a model of artificial but exquisitely polished gallantry in verse.

Descriptive Poets. Delille.

Le Franc de Pompignan had the misfortune to incur the enmity of Voltaire, and has consequently borne in France the traditional ignominy which in England hangs on certain victims of Dryden and Pope. He had, however, some poetical talent, which was shown principally in his ode on the death of J. B. Rousseau. The charming poem of *Ver-Vert* (the burlesque history of a parrot, the pet of a convent) made, and not unjustly, the reputation of Gresset. This reputation his other poetical works—though he wrote a comedy of much merit—failed to sustain. Saint Lambert, the rival of Voltaire in love if not in literature, imitated Thomson's *Seasons* very closely in a poem of the same name, which set the fashion of descriptive poetry in France for a considerable time. The three most remarkable of his followers, all considerably superior to himself in power, were Lemierre, Delille, and Roucher. Some paradoxical critics have endeavoured to make Lemierre into a great poet; but his poems (*La Peinture*, *Les Fastes*, etc.), written on ill-selected subjects and in a style

full of conventional mannerism, have at best the occasional striking lines which are to be found in Armstrong and other followers of Young or Thomson in England. Jacques Delille and his extraordinary popularity form, perhaps, the greatest satire on the taste of the eighteenth century in France. His translation of the Georgics was supposed to make him the equal of Virgil, and brought him not merely fame, but solid reward. His principal work was the poem of *Les Jardins*, which he followed up with others of a not dissimilar kind. Though he emigrated he did not lose his fame, and to the day of his death was considered to be the first poet of France, or to share that honour with Lebrun-*Pindare*. Delille has expiated his popularity by a full half-century of contempt, and his work is, indeed, valueless as poetry. But it is interesting as one of the most striking examples of talent, adjusting itself exactly to the demands made on it. The age of Delille wished to see everything described in elegant periphrases, and the periphrases arranged in harmonious verses. Delille did this and nothing more. Chess is 'le jeu réveur qu'inventa Palamède.' Backgammon is 'le jeu bruyant où, le cornet en main, L'adroit joueur calcule un hasard incertain.' Sugar is 'le miel Américain Que du suc des roseaux exprima l'Africain.' In short, poetry becomes an elaborate conundrum; nothing is called by its proper name when a circumlocution is in any way possible. Given the demand, Delille may justly claim the honour of supplying it with unequalled adroitness. Roucher, the author of *Les Mois*, who fell a victim to the guillotine, was a member of this school, possessing not a little vigour, though he was not free from the defects of his predecessors. To these may, perhaps, be joined the pastoral and idyllic poet Léonard.



Lebrun.

It has been said that the glory of Delille as the greatest poet of the last quarter of the century was shared by a writer whom his contemporaries surnamed (absurdly enough) Pindar. Escouchard Lebrun had a strange resemblance to J. B. Rousseau, of whom, however, he was by no means a warm admirer. Like his forerunner, he divided his time between bombastic lyrics and epigrams of very considerable merit. Lebrun was not destitute of a certain force, but his time was too much for him. He was a very long-lived man, and in his old age celebrated by turns the Republic and Bonaparte. His chief rivals as poets of the Republic were M. J. Chénier and the hunchback Desorgues, a voluminous and vigorous but crude and unfinished writer, who died in a madhouse at the age of forty-five.

Two young poets, who lived about the middle of the century, are usually mentioned together, from the fact of the younger of them having used the misfortunes of the elder to point his own complaints. Malfilâtre, a Norman by birth, had the ill-luck to write a piece of verse which gained a provincial success. He at once set out for Paris to make his fortune. He obtained the post of secretary to the Count de Lauraguais, wrote verses not without grace and full of a certain tender melancholy, and died at the age of thirty, his health broken by privations and disappointment. Gilbert, a stronger man, but who has been somewhat honoured by being called the French Chatterton, died still younger, after writing some vigorous satire, and a 'complaint' or elegy which has a good deal of pathos. But he did not, as is generally said, die of want, though he did die in a public hospital, having been carried thither after a fall from

his horse.

Parny.

The places accorded by their contemporaries to Delille and Lebrun really belonged to two writers of very different character and fortune, Parny and André Chénier. Evariste de Parny, a native of the island of Bourbon, was called by the aged Voltaire 'mon cher Tibulle,' and displays, with much of the frivolity and false gallantry of the time, an extraordinary command of simple elegiac verse, and a manner almost antique in its simplicity and sweetness. Parny's best piece, a short epitaph on a young girl, is one of the best things of its kind in literature. His merits, however, are confined to his early works. In his maturer years he wrote long poems, on the model of the *Pucelle*, against England, Christianity, and Monarchism, which are equally remarkable for blasphemy, obscenity, extravagance, and dulness. His friend Bertin, like him a creole, resembled him in the command of graceful elegiac and epistolary verse, but had not what Parny sometimes had, genuine passion.

Chénier.

André Marie de Chénier[285], beyond question the greatest poet of the eighteenth century in France, was born at Constantinople, where his father was consul-general, in 1762. His mother was a Greek. His family returned to France when he was a child; he was educated carefully, and for a short time served in the army, but soon left it. After a time he was attached (in 1787) to the French embassy in London. Here he spent four years. Returning to France he

sympathised, but on the moderate side, with the Revolution. The growth of the Jacobin spirit horrified him, and the excesses of the summer of 1792 decided his attitude and his fate. He wrote frequently in the *Journal de Paris*, the organ of the moderate royalist party. Although he did not in any way put himself forward, he was at last arrested in March, 1794, and was guillotined on the seventh Thermidor, two days only before the event which would have saved him, the fall of Robespierre. His poems were not published till long after his death, and the text of them is even now in an unsatisfactory condition, many having been left unfinished and uncorrected by the author. André Chénier is sometimes considered as a precursor of the Romantic reform, but this is a mistake. His critical comments on Shakespeare and other writers, his favourite studies, which were confined to the Greek and Latin classics and the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, above all his poems themselves, prove the contrary. A Greek by birthplace, and half a Greek by blood, his tastes and standards were wholly classical. But the fire and force of his poetical genius made the blood circulate afresh in the veins of the old French classical tradition, without, however, permanently strengthening or renovating it. The poetry of Chénier is still in the main the poetry of Racine, though with infinitely more glow of colour and variety of harmony. His poems are mostly antique in their titles and plan, eclogues, elegies, and so forth, and are not free from a certain artificiality inseparable from the style. *La Jeune Tarentine*, *La Jeune Captive*, *L'Aveugle*, and some others, are of extreme merit, and all over his work (much of which is in the most fragmentary condition) lines and phrases of extraordinary beauty are scattered. The noble *Iambes*, or political and

satirical poems, which he wrote in prison, just before his death, bear out, perhaps better than anything else, his well-known saying, as he touched his head when sentence had been passed, 'et pourtant il y avait quelque chose là.'

Minor Poets.

A few other poets or verse-makers of merit before the revival of poetry proper must be rapidly noticed. The fable of La Fontaine was cultivated vigorously, in particular by Florian, a favourite pupil of Voltaire, who will reappear in these pages. Florian's fables are graceful copies of his master. Those of Arnault, with less grace, have more originality; often, indeed, Arnault's short moral poems are not so much fables as what used to be called in English 'emblems.' The most famous of these, which of itself deserves to keep Arnault's memory green, is 'La Feuille.' Marie Joseph Chénier, the younger brother of André, and, unlike him, a fervent republican, is chiefly known as a dramatist. He had, however, a vein of satirical verse, which was not commonplace. Another dramatist, Andrieux, also deserves mention in passing. Superior to either of these as a poet, and wanting only the good-fortune of having been born a little later, was Nepomucène Lemercier, a playwright of no small merit, and a poet of extraordinary but unequal vigour. The *Panhypocrisiade*, a kind of satirical epic *par personnages* (to use the old French expression for a dramatic narrative), is his principal work, and a very remarkable one. Last of all have to be mentioned Fontanes and Chênedollé, who are the characteristic poets of the Empire, with the exception of an epic school of no value. The chief importance

of Fontanes in literature is derived not from any performances of his own, but from the fact that he was the appointed intermediary between Napoleon and the men of letters of the time, and was able to exercise a good deal of useful patronage. Chênedollé was in production, if not in publication, for he published late in life, a precursor of Lamartine, much of whose style and manner may be found in him. An amiable appreciation of natural beauty, and a tendency to facile pathos, derived from the contemplation of natural objects, distinguish him from his predecessors.

Light verse. Piron.

Désaugiers.

The vigorous, if not always edifying, work of the song-writers and authors of *vers de société* during this century remains to be noticed. The example of La Fontaine's tales was followed by many writers of more talent than scruple, but their literary value is not sufficient to entitle them to a place here. No history of French literature, however, would be complete without a notice of Piron, the greatest epigrammatist of France, and one of her keenest and brightest wits. Piron's temper was an idle one, and he did little solid work in literature, except his epigrams and one comedy, *La Métromanie*. He wrote many vaudevilles and operettas, and no one, with the possible exception of Catullus, has ever excelled him in the art of packing in a few light and graceful lines the greatest possible quantity of malicious wit. Panard, also a vaudevillist, is remarkable for the number and excellence of his drinking songs, and the

variety and melody of their rhythm. Collé, author of amusing but spiteful memoirs, and, like Piron and Panard, a writer of comic operettas, excelled rather in the political chanson. Gentil Bernard, the Cardinal de Bernis, the Abbé Boufflers, and Dorat, were all writers of *vers de société*, the last being much the best. Their style of writing was frivolous and conventional in the extreme, but long practice and the vogue which it enjoyed in French society had brought it to something like the condition of a fine art. Dorat was surnamed by a contemporary the 'glowworm of Parnassus.' The expression was not an unhappy one, and may be fairly applied to the other authors who have been mentioned in his company. He himself was a rather voluminous author in different styles. The literary baggage of the others is not heavy. Vadé, a writer of light and trifling verse, who died comparatively young, devoted himself to composing poems in the 'poissard' dialect of Paris, which are among the best of such things. At the close of the century, and deserving more particular notice, appeared Désaugiers, the best light song-writer of France, with the single exception of Béranger, and preferred to him by some critics. Désaugiers escaped the revolution by good fortune, had a short but rather adventurous career of foreign travel, and then settled down to vaudeville-writing, song-making, and jovial living in Paris. He was a great frequenter of the Caveau, a kind of irregular club of men of letters which had been instituted by Piron and his friends, and which long continued to be a literary and social rendezvous. Désaugiers was the last of the older class of *Chansonniers*, who relied chiefly on love and wine for their subjects, and who, if they touched on politics at all, touched on them merely from the personal and satirical point of view, with occasional

indulgence in cheap patriotism. His songs have great sweetness and ease, but they contain nothing that can compare with Béranger in his more serious and pathetic mood[286].

This is a sketch, necessarily and designedly rapid, of the poetical history of the eighteenth century in France. The matter thus rapidly treated is of no small interest to professed students of literature; it abounds in curious social indications; it gives frequent instances of the extremest ingenuity applied to somewhat unworthy use. But in the history of the literature as a whole, and to those who have to regard it not as a collection of curiosities, but as a fruitful field of great and noble work, it cannot but be of subordinate interest, and as such requires but cursory treatment here[287].

FOOTNOTES:

[284] Editions of almost all authors of any merit from the beginning of the eighteenth century are common and accessible enough. They will, therefore, not be specially indicated henceforward unless there is some special reason for the citation, such as the peculiar elegance or literary merit of a particular edition, or else the comparative rarity of the book in any form.

[285] Chénier has been somewhat unfortunate in his editors. The only complete and accurate edition (though it is far from perfect) is that of M. Gabriel de Chénier. 3 vols. 1879.

[286] Excellent selections from many of these lighter poets have recently been put forth under the editorship of M. Octave Uzanne.

[287] Rouget de L'Isle, the author of the famous *Marseillaise*, deserves mention for that only. He published poems, but their singular difference from, and inferiority to, his masterpiece were the chief causes of the scepticism (apparently ill-founded) which has sometimes been displayed as to his authorship of it.

CHAPTER II.

DRAMATISTS.

Divisions of Drama.

La Motte.

At the beginning, and indeed during the whole course, of the eighteenth century, the theatre continued to enjoy all the vogue which the extraordinary brilliancy of the authors of the preceding age had conferred on it. There were three tolerably distinct kinds of dramatic work—tragedy, comedy, and opera—the latter either artificial or comic, and subdividing itself into a great many classes, from the dignified opera of the Comédie Française and the Comédie Italienne, down to the vaudevilles and operettas of the so-called 'fair' theatre, *Théâtre de la Foire*. Towards the middle of the century there grew up a fourth class, to which

the not very appropriate and still less definite name of *drame* is applied. This was subdivided, also somewhat arbitrarily, into *tragédie bourgeoise* and *comédie larmoyante*. Thus the dramatic author had considerable liberty of choice except in tragedy proper, where the model of Racine was enforced on him with pitiless rigour. La Motte, who was, as has been said, a brilliant writer of prose, endeavoured to break these bonds, first, by decrying the alleged superiority of the ancients; secondly, by attacking the theory of the unities; and, lastly, by boldly denying the necessity of verse in tragedy, and still more the necessity of rhyme. He was, of course, answered, and the only one of the answers which has much interest for posterity is that which Voltaire prefixed to the second edition of *Œdipe*. This is, as always with its author, lively and ingenious, but ill-informed, destitute of true critical principles, and entirely inconclusive. La Motte himself wrote a tragedy, *Inès de Castro*, in which he did not venture to carry out his own principles, and which had some success. But the justice of his strictures was best shown by the increasing feebleness of French tragedy throughout the century. Were it not for the prodigious genius of Voltaire, not a single tragedy of the age would now have much chance of being read, still less of being performed; and were it not for that genius, and the unequal but still remarkable talent of Crébillon the elder, not a single tragedy of the age would be worth reading for any motive except curiosity, simple or studious.

Crébillon the Elder.

Crébillon was born in 1674, and lived to the age of

eighty-nine. His family name was Jolyot, and the most remarkable thing about his private history is, that, being clerk to a lawyer, he was enthusiastically encouraged by his master in his poetical attempts. His first acted tragedy, *Idoménée*, appeared in 1703; his last, 'The Triumvirate,' more than fifty years later. In the interval he was irregularly busy, and the duel of tragedies, which in his old age his partisans got up between him and Voltaire, was not entirely in favour of the more famous and gifted writer. Crébillon's best works were *Atrée*, 1707, and *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*, 1711, the latter being his masterpiece. He had in the eyes of the minute critics of his time some technical defects of style and construction. But, despite the restraints of the French stage, he succeeded in being truly tragical and truly natural; and not a few of his verses have a grandeur which has been said to be hardly discoverable elsewhere in French tragedy between Corneille and Hugo.

Voltaire and his followers.

Voltaire's own tragedies have been very differently judged by different persons. It has been said that they owed their popularity chiefly to the adroit manner in which, without going too far, the author made them opportunities for insinuating the popular opinions of the time. Yet *Zaïre* at least is still a successful and popular play on the stage; and it is admitted that Voltaire had both a most intimate acquaintance with the objects and methods of the playwright, and an extraordinary affection for the theatre. If to this be added his astonishing dexterity as a literary workman, his acuteness in discerning the taste of the public, and his complete mastery of

the language, and if it be remembered that the classical French tragedy is almost wholly a *tour de force*, it will appear that it would have been very surprising if he had not succeeded in it. His tragedies, however, are by no means of equal merit. The best is, beyond all doubt, the already-mentioned *Zaïre*, 1732, in which Voltaire took just so much from the *Othello* of that Shakespeare whom he was never tired of decrying as would suffice to animate and support his own skilful workmanship. The earlier play, *Œdipe*, 1718, was astonishingly successful, and is still astonishingly clever. *La Mort de César*, another Shakespearian adaptation, is less happy. In *Alzire*, a play written in the time of the poet's greatest intimacy with Madame du Châtelet, and dedicated to her, his extraordinary talent once more appears, as also in *Le Fanatisme*, better known as *Mahomet*, 1742. The best, however, of his plays, next to *Zaïre*, is probably *Mérope*, 1743, which is a prodigy of ingenuity. The author has deliberately eschewed the means whereby both Corneille and Racine respectively alleviated the dryness and dulness of the Senecan model—the heroic virtues of the one, and the sighs and flames of the other. The play probably is the most perfect carrying out of the model pure and simple, and its inferiority is the inferiority of the kind, not of the individual. Indeed it may be questioned whether, on the mere technical merits, Voltaire is not superior to both Corneille and Racine, though he is of course very far inferior to them as a poet, and as a draughtsman of character. Voltaire wrote many other plays, earlier and later, of which *Tancrède* is the only one which requires special mention. Nor, except Crébillon, do the tragic contemporaries and successors of Voltaire require more than very short notice. Le Franc de Pompignan

wrote a respectable *Didon*; Saurin, who was in some sort a follower of Voltaire, a more than respectable *Spartacus*. The subject had perhaps the chief part in the success of the *Siège de Calais* of Pierre Burette, who called himself De Belloy, and who followed it up by other patriotic tragedies or dramas. But he had the merit of attempting, though not with much success, some innovations on the meagreness of the established model. The tragedies of La Harpe are written throughout with the cold correctness (as correctness was then held) which characterised his work generally. Almost all the men of letters of this time wrote plays of this kind, but they are for the most part valueless. Ducis is remarkable for a serious, and to a certain extent successful, attempt to inoculate the French tragedy with Shakespearian force. Versions of *Hamlet*, of *Macbeth*, and other plays appeared from his hands, which were also busy during a long life with dramatic work of all sorts. These versions have naturally been regarded in England as mere travesties, but there seems no reason to doubt that they really operated favourably as schoolmasters to bring their audience somewhat nearer to dramatic truth. The classical tragedy was indeed expiring of simple old age, and most of the names of its practitioners, which emerge during the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first of the nineteenth century, are those of innovators in their measure and degree, whose innovations, however, were obliterated and made forgotten by the great romantic reform. Marie Joseph Chénier followed Voltaire's manner very closely (substituting for Voltaire's bait of insinuated free-thinking that of republicanism more or less violently expressed) in *Charles IX.*, *Cyrus*, *Caius Gracchus*, *Henry VIII.*, *Tibère*, the last a work of some merit. Legouvé dramatised

Gessner's *Death of Abel* on the principles of Boileau. Nepomucène Lemercier, the strange failure of a genius who has been already noticed in the last chapter, produced much more remarkable work. His *Agamemnon*, his *Frédégonde et Brunehault* and some others display his merits, and show that he was striving after something better. But, like most transitional work, they are unsatisfactory as a whole. The *Hector* of Luce de Lancival, the *Templiers* of Raynouard, and many other pieces, were once popular, but are now utterly forgotten.

Lesage.

The list of comic writers, along with whom, for convenience' sake, those of the authors of opera and *drame* may be included, is far longer and more important. It includes two men, Lesage and Beaumarchais, of European reputation, half-a-dozen others, Destouches, Marivaux, Piron, Gresset, Sedaine, who have produced work of remarkable character and merit, and a crowd of clever playwrights who amused their own times, and would amuse ours, if it were not that all comedy, save the very highest, is of its nature ephemeral. The list is worthily opened by Lesage, who, during the greater part of his life, earned by vaudevilles and operettas, composed either alone or in co-operation for the Théâtre de la Foire, the bread which his incomparable novels would hardly have sufficed to procure him. This lighter dramatic work is, it may be observed, among the chief products of the century, and it has continued up to the present day to form one of the staple elements in the journey-work of French literature. Little of it has permanent qualities, yet the remarkable talents of many of the men who

composed it make it, ephemeral as it is, interesting historically and even intrinsically. It derived partly from the indigenous farce, partly from the Italian comedy of stock personages, and partly from the merry-andrew performances already mentioned. The theatres at which it was performed were the object of much jealousy from the Comédie Française, and restrictions of the most annoying kind were placed on it. Once an edict forbade more than a single actor to appear—a condition surmounted by the ingenuity of Piron. Sometimes it was confined to dumb show, illustrated by songs on placards which the audience chanted. Often the audience joined in the chorus, and it may be said generally that singing was always included. Besides this rapid and perishable kind of work Lesage has left two pieces in the true style of Molière. The more extravagant and farcical side of the master's genius is represented by *Crispin Rival de son Maître*, 1707, a lively piece, the subject of which is indicated by its title, and which carries off the extreme and probably intentional improbability of its plot by its brisk and rapid action, its vivid pictures of character, and the shower of wit which the dialogue everywhere pours out. *Turcaret*, 1709, is a regular comedy of the highest merit. It has been found fault with by some French critics, enamoured of the ruling passion and central situation theory; but this is really a testimony to its merit. *Turcaret* is in the strictest sense a criticism of life at the time, and the author shows the true prodigality of genius in filling his canvas. It is often described as a satire on the corruption and vices of the financiers, who were the curse of France at the time; and this it is in part. But there are combined with this satire of the loose morals of the nobility, the follies of provincial coteries, the meanness of the trading classes; while

each character, instead of being an abstraction, is as sharp and individual as Gil Blas himself. Like Lesage, Piron worked much for the theatre; indeed he made his *début*, as has been said, by venturing on a task which even Lesage had declined,—the writing of a comic opera with a single actor only. Like Lesage, too, he has left one comedy of durable reputation, *La Métromanie*, which, if it falls short of *Turcaret* in holding up the mirror to nature, equals it in wit, and has for a French audience the attraction of being written in very good verse, while *Turcaret* is in prose. With perhaps less genius than Piron, and certainly with less than Lesage, Destouches devoted himself to a higher class of work on the whole, and has left more pieces that are remembered. *Le Philosophe Marié*, 1727, and *Le Glorieux*, 1732, are among the classics of French comedy. *Le Dissipateur*, *Le Tambour Nocturne*, *L'Obstacle Imprévu* have also much merit; and if *La Fausse Agnès* has something of the farcical in it, it is farce of the right kind. Destouches wrote seventeen comedies; and, if bulk and general merit of work are taken together, he deserves the first place among the comic dramatists of the century in France.

Comédie Larmoyante. La Chaussée. Diderot.

In contrast to these three writers, who all followed the traditions of the comedy of Molière and Regnard, Nivelle de la Chaussée invented, or at least brought into fashion, what was called *comédie larmoyante*, or *drame*. La Chaussée was a good deal ridiculed by his contemporaries, notably by Piron, who devoted to him some of his most admirable epigrams. But he

was popular, and not altogether undeservedly popular, though his drama occupied in French literary history something of the same place as that of Lillo and Moore in English. La Chaussée was followed by a greater writer, but a worse dramatist, than himself. While La Chaussée was a clever versifier and an adroit playwright, Diderot understood the theory both of poetry and of the theatre much better than he understood the practice. Thus *L'École des Mères*, *La Gouvernante*, *Le Préjugé à la Mode* are better plays than *Le Père de Famille* or *Le Fils Naturel*. It ought to be said that Diderot succeeded better in two small pieces, *La Pièce et le Prologue* and *Est-il Bon? Est-il Méchant?* which were never acted. It should perhaps also be explained that the peculiarity of what was almost indifferently called *tragédie bourgeoise* and *comédie larmoyante* is the choice of possible situations in real life, which neither of the two conventional treatments of heroic tragedy and comedy purely comic can afford. Many writers followed La Chaussée and Diderot. Of these the most important perhaps was Saurin, who, not content with regular tragedy and comedy, obtained much success with *Beverley*, an adaptation of Moore's *Gamester*, of which Diderot wrote an unacted version.

L'École des Bourgeois and *L'Embarras des Richesses*, by D'Allainval, one of the few French writers who experienced the privations of their English contemporaries in Grub Street, are good pieces, and so are the short *La Pupille* and the *Originaux* of Fagan, a clerk in the public service, who, like Lesage and Piron (Collé and Panard may be added), wrote vaudevilles, *parades*, etc. for the Théâtre de la Foire. In the titles of most of these pieces the close following of Molière, which was usual, and wisely usual, during the first half of the century, may be

noticed.

Marivaux.

The same tradition is observed in one of the best comedies of the century, the *Méchant* of Gresset, which, like his poem of *Ver-Vert*, had a great success, and deserved it, being equally good as literature and as drama. Marivaux, without, perhaps, attaining as positive an excellence, was more original, and very much more productive. The fullest edition of his dramatic works contains thirty-two pieces, and even this is not complete. Several of them, *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*, 1730, *Le Legs*, 1736, *Les Fausses Confidences*, 1737, have continued to be popular. All the work of Marivaux, dramatic and non-dramatic, is pervaded more or less by a peculiarity which at the time received the name of Marivaudage. This peculiarity consists partly in the sentiment, and partly in the phraseology. The former is characteristic of the eighteenth century, disguising a considerable affectation under a mask of simplicity, and the latter (sparkling with abundant, if somewhat precious wit) is ingeniously constructed to suit it and carry it off.

Of the three greatest literary names of the time, Diderot, it has been seen, tried the theatre not too happily. Voltaire, as successful in tragedy as his models permitted him to be, was not successful at all in comedy, and, indeed, rarely tried it. His best piece, *Nanine*, a dramatisation of *Pamela*, or at least suggested by it, is chiefly remarkable for being written in decasyllabic verse. The third, Rousseau, who lived to denounce the theatre, wrote a short operetta, *Le Devin du Village*, which is not without merit. Desmahis, a protégé of Voltaire, produced, in

1750, a good comedy, *L'Impertinent*, on a small scale; and La Noue, another of his favourites (for he was as indulgent to his juniors as he was jealous of men of his own standing), the *Coquette Corrigée*. A third member of the same class, Saurin, already twice mentioned, must be mentioned again, and still more deservedly, for *Les Mœurs du Temps*. The best dramatists, however, among the immediate followers of the *Philosophes* were Sedaine and Marmontel. Sedaine is, indeed, with the possible exception of Beaumarchais, the best dramatist of the last half of the century. *Le Philosophe sans le Savoir*, 1765, and *La Gageure Imprévue*, 1768, are both admirable pieces. The author, like many of his predecessors, was a constant worker for the Opéra Comique, and one of the best of the class. Marmontel also adopted this line of composition, to which the musical talent of Grétry gave, at the time, great advantages. His best light dramatic work is a kind of comedy vaudeville, the *Ami de la Maison*.

Beaumarchais.

Beyond all doubt, however, the most remarkable, if not the best, dramatist of the late eighteenth century is Beaumarchais. Some critics have seen in the enormous success of the *Barbier de Séville*, 1775, and the *Mariage de Figaro*, 1784, nothing but a *succès de circonstance* connected with the political ideas which were then fermenting in men's minds. This seems to be unjust, or rather it is unjust not to recognise something very like genius in the manner in which the author has succeeded in shaping his subject, without choosing a specially political one, so as to produce the effect acknowledged. The wit of these two plays, moreover, is indisputable. But it may be

allowed that Beaumarchais' other productions are inferior, and that his *Mémoires*, which are not dramatic at all, contain as much wit as the Figaro plays. As a satirist of society and a contributor of illustrations to history, Beaumarchais must always hold a very high place, higher perhaps than as an artist in literature. Of his life, it is enough to say that he was born in 1731; became music master to the daughters of Louis XV.; engaged in a law-suit, the subject of the *Mémoires*, with some high legal functionaries; made a fortune by speculating and by contracts in the American war, and lost it by further speculations, one of which was the preparation of a sumptuous edition of Voltaire. Besides the Figaro plays, his chief dramatic works are *Eugénie*, *Les Deux Amis*, and lastly, *La Mère Coupable*, in which the characters of his two famous works reappear.

After Beaumarchais, but few comic authors demand mention. Collin d'Harleville, one of the pleasantest writers of light comedies in verse, produced *Les Châteaux en Espagne*, *L'Inconstant*, *L'Optimiste*, and *Le Vieux Célibataire*, 1792, all sparkling pieces, which only need freeing from the restraints of rhyme. Andrieux, the author of *Les Étourdis*, 1787, *Le Trésor*, *Le Vieux Fat*, and others, has something of the same character. Nepomucène Lemercier distinguished himself in comedy, chiefly by *Plaute*, in irregular verse, and by a comedy-drama, *Pinto*, in prose. These have his usual characteristics of somewhat spasmodic genius. Fabre d'Eglantine, the companion of Danton and Camille Desmoulins on the scaffold, is better remembered for his death than for his life. But his *Intrigue Epistolaire* and *Philinte de Molière* shew talent. *Le Sourd*, by Desforges, is an amusing play.

Characteristics

of Eighteenth-century Drama.

It will be seen that the positive achievements of drama during this period were considerably superior to those of poetry. The tragedies of Voltaire are prodigies of literary cleverness. In comedy proper Lesage produced work of enduring value; Destouches, Marivaux, Piron, Gresset, and some others, work which does not require any very great indulgence to entitle it to the name, in the right sense, of classical; Beaumarchais, work which is indissolubly connected with great historical events, and which is not unworthy the connection. Moreover, as a matter of general literary history, the drama during this time displays numerous evidences of life and promise, as well as of decadence. The gradual recognition of the vaudeville as a separate literary kind gave occasion to much work, the ephemeral character of which should not be allowed to obscure its real literary excellence, and founded a school which is still living and flourishing with by no means simulated life. The attempt of La Chaussée and Diderot to widen the range and break down the barriers of legitimate drama was premature, and not altogether well directed; but it was the forerunner of the great and durable reaction of nearly a century later. Still the actual dramatic accomplishment of this period, though in many ways interesting, and to a certain extent positively valuable, is not of the first class. It is made up either of clever imitations and variations of modes which had already been expressed with greater perfection, and with far greater genius, by the preceding century, or of what may be fairly called dramatic pamphleteering, or else

of tentative and immature experiments in reform, which came to nothing, or to very little, for the time being. Even its most gifted practitioners regarded it as a kind of journey-work, which was understood to lead to honour and profit, rather than as an art, in which honour and profit, if not entirely to be ignored, are altogether secondary considerations. Hence, in a lesser degree, the drama of the eighteenth century shares the same disadvantage which has been noted as characterising its poetry. Its value is a value of curiosity chiefly, a relative value. Indeed, as a mere mechanical art, drama sank even lower than poetry proper ever sank; and for fifty years at least before the romantic revival it may be doubted whether a single play was written, the destruction of which need greatly grieve even the most sensitive and appreciative student of French literary history.

CHAPTER III.

NOVELISTS.

The peculiarity of the eighteenth century in France as regards literature——that is to say, the application of great talents to almost every branch of literary production without the result of a distinct original growth in any one department——is nowhere more noticeable than in the department of prose fiction[288]. The names of Lesage, Prévost, Marivaux, Voltaire, Rousseau, are deservedly recorded among

the list of the best novel writers. Yet, with the exception of *Manon Lescaut*, which for the time had no imitators, of the great works of Lesage which, admirable in execution, were by no means original in conception, and of the exquisite but comparatively insignificant variety of the prose *Conte*, of which Voltaire was the chief practitioner, nothing in the nature of a masterpiece, still less anything in the nature of an epoch-making work, was composed. The example of *Manon* was left for the nineteenth century to develop, the others either died out (the adventure romance, after Lesage's model, flourishing brilliantly in England, but hardly at all in France), or else were subordinated to a purpose, the purpose of advocating *philosophe* views, or of pandering to the not very healthy cravings of an altogether artificial society. Yet, so far as merely literary merits are concerned, few branches of literature were more fertile than this during the period.

Lesage.

The first, and on the whole, the most considerable name of the century in fiction is that of the author of *Gil Blas*. Alain René Lesage was born at Sarzeau, near Vannes, on the 8th of May, 1668, and died at Boulogne on the 17th of November, 1747. He was bred a lawyer, and should have had a fair competence, but, being early left an orphan, was deprived of most of his property by the dishonesty of his guardian. He married young, moreover, and, unlike most of the prominent men of letters of his day, never seems to have enjoyed any solid patronage or protection from any powerful man or woman. This is indeed sufficiently accounted for by anecdotes which exist showing his extreme

independence of character. Like most men of talent in such circumstances, he turned, though not very early, to literature, and began by a translation of the 'Letters' of Aristaenetus. No great success could have awaited him in this line, and perhaps the greatest stroke of good-fortune in his life was the suggestion of the Abbé de Lyonne that he should turn his attention to Spanish literature, a suggestion which was not made more unpalatable by the present of a small annuity. He translated the 'New Don Quixote' of Avellaneda (than which he might have found a better subject), and he adapted freely plays from Rojas, Lope de Vega, and Calderon. It was not, however, till he was nearly forty that he produced anything of real merit. The *Diable Boiteux* appeared in 1707, and was at once popular. Still Lesage did not desert the stage, and the production of his admirable comedy *Turcaret* ought to have secured him success there. But the Comédie Française was at that time more under the influence of clique than at any other time of its history; and Lesage, disgusted with the treatment he received from it, gave himself up entirely to writing farces and operettas for the minor theatres, and to prose fiction. *Gil Blas*, his greatest work, originally appeared in 1715, but was not completed till twenty years later. He also wrote —besides one or two bright but trifling minor works of a fictitious character, *La Valise Trouvée* (a letter-bag supposed to be picked up), *Une Journée des Parques*, a keen piece of Lucianic satire, etc.—many other romances in the same general style as his great works, and more or less borrowed from Spanish originals. The chief of these are *Guzman d'Alfarache*, *Estévanille Gonzalez*, *Le Bachelier de Salamanque*, and a curious Defoe-like book entitled *Vie et Aventures de M. de Beauchéne*. In his old age he retired to the

house of his second son, who held a canonry at Boulogne, and resided there for some years, until, in 1747, he died in his eightieth year. His works have hitherto been very insufficiently collected and edited.

Le Diable Boiteux and *Gil Blas* are far the greatest of Lesage's romances, and, as it happens, they are the most original, little except the starting-point being borrowed in the one case, and nothing but a few detached details in the other. Lesage was, however, true to the general spirit of his model, the picaroon romance of Spain, a kind of Roman d'Aventures transported from the days and conventional conditions of chivalry to those of ordinary but still adventurous life in the Peninsula. The directly satirical intention predominates in the *Diable Boiteux*, the more purely narrative faculty in *Gil Blas*. In both the piercing observation of human character, which Lesage possessed in a greater degree perhaps than any other French writer, appears, and so does his remarkable power of making the results of this observation live and move. No French writer is so little of a mere Frenchman as Lesage, and in this point of cosmopolitan humanity he may be compared, without extravagance, in kind if not in degree, to Shakespeare. Besides his skill in character-drawing, and his faculty of spicing his narrative with epigram, Lesage also possessed extraordinary narrative ability. His books are not remarkable for what is called plot, that is to say, the action rather continues indefinitely in a straight line than converges on a given and definite point. But this continuance is so adroitly managed that no break is felt, and the succession very seldom becomes tedious. The novel of Lesage is the immediate parent and pattern of that of Fielding and Smollett in England. It is somewhat remarkable that it had no

successors of importance or merit in France. This is probably to be accounted for by the cosmopolitan tone which has been already remarked upon. Indeed Lesage, as a rule, has had less justice done to him by his countrymen than any other of their great writers. Yet his style, looked at merely from the point of view of art, is excellent, and perhaps superior to that of any of his contemporaries properly so called.

Close in the track of Madame de la Fayette followed Madame de Fontaines (Marie Louise Charlotte de Givri), the date of whose birth is unknown, but who died in 1730. She was a friend of Voltaire's youth, and her best work is named *La Comtesse de Savoie*, the date of the story being the eleventh century. She also wrote a short story of less merit called *Aménophis*. Madame de Tencin (Claudine Alexandrine Guérin), the mother of D'Alembert, the friend of Fontenelle, and one of the most famous salon-holders of the early eighteenth century, was a more fertile and a cleverer writer. She was born in 1681, and died in 1749. She had a bad heart, but an excellent head, and she showed her powers in the *Mémoires du Comte de Comminges* and the *Siége de Calais*, besides some minor works. The fault of almost all romances of the La Fayette school, the habit of throwing the scene into periods about which the writers knew nothing, appears in these works.

Marivaux.

But the first writer of fiction after Lesage who is worthy of separate mention at any length (for in these later centuries of our history there are, as any reader of books will understand, vast numbers of practitioners in every branch of literary art who are entirely unworthy of notice in a compendious history of literature) is Marivaux, an original and remarkable novelist, who, though by no possibility to be ranked among the great names of French literature, occupies a not inconsiderable place among those who are remarkable without being great. Pierre Carlet de Marivaux, whose strict paternal appellation was simply Pierre Carlet, was born at Paris on the 8th of February, 1688. His father was of Norman origin, and held employments in the financial branch of the public service. Very little is known of the son's youth, and indeed not much of his life. He is said to have produced his first play, *Le Père Prudent et Equitable*, at the age of eighteen, and his dramatic industry was thenceforward considerable. As a romancer he worked more by fits and starts. His first attempt at prose fiction is said to have been—for the authenticity of the attribution is not certain—a romance in a kind of pseudo-Spanish style, called *Les Effets surprenants de la Sympathie*, published six years later. Then he took to the sterile and ignoble literature of travesty, attacking Homer and Fénelon in the style of Scarron and Cotton. This brought him, through La Motte, under the influence of Fontenelle, to whom he owed not a little. He made a fortune and lost it in Law's bubble. Then he turned journalist, and after writing social articles in the *Mercure*, started a

periodical himself, the nature of which is sufficiently shown by its borrowed title, *Le Spectateur Français*, 1722. At a later period he began another paper of the same kind, *Le Cabinet du Philosophe*, 1734. His plays, which have been already noticed, were written partly for the Comédie Française, and partly for a very popular Italian company which appeared in France during the second quarter of the century. But for the present purpose his works which concern us are the famous romance of *Marianne*, 1731-1742, and the less-known one of the *Paysan Parvenu*, 1735. His dramas, rather than his fictions, procured him a place in the Academy in 1742, and he died in 1763.

Marianne has been said to be the origin of *Pamela*, which may not be exactly the fact, though it is difficult not to believe that it gave Richardson his idea. But it is certain that it is a remarkable novel, and that it, rather than the plays, gave rise to the singular phrase *Marivaudage*, with which the author, not at all voluntarily, has enriched literature. The plot is simple enough. A poor but virtuous girl has adventures and recounts them, and the manner of recounting is extremely original. A morally faulty but intellectually admirable contemporary, Crébillon the younger, described this manner excellently by saying that the characters not only say everything that they have done and everything that they have thought, but everything that they would have liked to think but did not. This curious kind of mental analysis is expressed in a style which cannot be defended from the charge of affectation notwithstanding its extreme ingenuity and occasional wit. The real importance of *Marianne* in the history of fiction is that it is the first example of the novel of analysis rather than of incident (though incident is still prominent), and the first in which an elaborate style, strongly imbued

with mannerism, is applied to this purpose. The *Paysan Parvenu*, the title of which suggested Restif's novel *Le Paysan Perverti*, and which was probably not without influence on *Joseph Andrews*, is not very different in manner from *Marianne*, and, like it, was left unfinished after publication in parts at long intervals.

Prévost

A third eminent writer of novels was, in point of production, a contemporary of Lesage and Marivaux, though he was nearly thirty years younger than the first, and fully ten years younger than the second, and he more than either of them set the example of the modern novel. The Abbé Prévost, sometimes called Prévost d'Exilles, was born at Hesdin, in Picardy, in April, 1697. He was brought up by the Jesuits, and after a curious hesitation between entering the order and becoming a soldier (he actually served for some time) he joined the famous community of the Benedictines of Saint Maur, the most learned monastic body in the Roman church. When he did this he was four-and-twenty, and he continued for some six years to give himself up to study, not without interludes of professorial work and of preaching. He became, however, disgusted with his order, and unfortunately left his convent before technical permission had been given; a proceeding which kept him an exile from France for several years. It was at this time (1728) that he threw himself into novel-writing, taking his models, and in some cases, his scenes and characters, from England, which he visited, and of which he was a fervent admirer. He obtained permission to return in 1735, and then started a paper called *Le Pour et le*

Contre, something like those of Marivaux, but more like a modern critical review. He received the protection of several persons of position and influence, notably the Prince de Conti and the Chancellor D'Aguesseau, and for nearly thirty years led a laborious literary life, in the course of which he is said to have written nearly a hundred volumes, mostly compilations. His death, which occurred in November, 1763, was perhaps the most horrible in literary history. He was on his way from Paris to his cottage near Chantilly, when he was struck by apoplexy. A stupid village doctor took him for dead, and began a post-mortem examination to discover the cause. Prévost revived at the stroke of the knife, but was so injured by it that he expired shortly afterwards.

His chief works of fiction are the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité*, 1729, *Clèveland*, and the *Doyen de Killérine*, 1735, romances of adventure occupying a middle place between those of Lesage and Marivaux. But he would have been long forgotten had it not been for an episode or rather postscript of the *Mémoires* entitled *Manon Lescaut*, in which all competent criticism recognises the first masterpiece of French literature which can properly be called a novel. Manon is a young girl with whom the Chevalier des Grieux, almost as young as herself, falls frantically in love. The pair fly to Paris, and the novel is occupied with the description of Manon's faithlessness—a faithlessness based not on want of love for Des Grieux, but on an overmastering desire for luxury and comfort with which he cannot always supply her. The story, which is narrated by Des Grieux, and which has a most pathetic ending, is chiefly remarkable for the perfect simplicity and absolute life-likeness of the character-drawing. The

despairing constancy of Des Grieux, conscious of the vileness of his idol, yet unable to help loving her, the sober goodness of his friend Tiberge, the roystering villany of Manon's brother Lescaut, and, above all, the surprising and novel, but strictly practical and reasonable, figure of Manon, who, in her way, loves Des Grieux, who has no objection to deceive her richer lovers for him, but whose first craving is for material well-being and prosperity—make up a gallery which has rarely been exceeded in power and interest.

A novelist of merit, slightly junior to these, was Madame Riccoboni (Marie Jeanne Laboras de Mézières), who was born in 1713, married an actor and dramatic author of little talent, and died at a great age in 1792. Her best works of fiction are *Le Marquis de Cressy*, *Mylady Catesby*, and *Ernestine*, with an exceedingly clever continuation (which, however, stops short of the conclusion) of Marivaux' *Marianne*. All these books are constructed with considerable skill, and are good examples of what may be called the sentimental romance. Duclos, better known now for his historical and historical-ethical work, was also a novel-writer at this period. The *Lettres du Marquis de Roselle*, of Madame Elie de Beaumont, rather resembles the work of Madame Riccoboni.

The works of the three principal writers who have just been discussed belong to the first half of the century, and do not exhibit those characteristics by which it is most generally known. Marivaux is indeed an important representative of the laborious gallantry which descended from the days of the *précieuses*—Fontenelle being a link between the two ages—and Prévost exhibits, in at least its earlier

stage, the sensibility which was one of the great characteristics of the eighteenth century. But neither of them can in the least be called a *philosophe*. On the other hand, the *philosophe* movement, which dominated the middle and latter portions of the age, was not long in invading the department of fiction. Each of the three celebrated men who stood at its head devoted himself to the novel in one or other of its forms; while Montesquieu, in the *Lettres Persanes*, came near to it, and each of the trio themselves had more or fewer followers in fiction.

Voltaire.

No long work of prose fiction stands under the name of Voltaire, but it may be doubted whether any of his works displays his peculiar genius more fully and more characteristically than the short tales in prose which he has left. Every one of them has a moral, political, social, or theological purpose. *Zadig*, 1748, is, perhaps, in its general aim, rather philosophical in the proper sense; *Babouc*, 1746, social; *Memnon*, 1747, ethical. *Micromegas*, 1752, is a satire on certain forms of science; the group of smaller tales, such as *Le Taureau Blanc*, are theological or rather anti-theological. *L'Ingénu*, 1767, and *L'Homme aux Quarante Écus* (same date), are political from different points of view. All these objects meet and unite in the most famous and most daring of all, *Candide*, 1758. Written ostensibly to ridicule philosophical optimism, and on the spur given to pessimist theories by the Lisbon earthquake, *Candide* is really as comprehensive as it is desultory. Religion, political government, national peculiarities, human weakness, ambition, love, loyalty, all come in for the unfailing sneer. The moral, wherever there is a

moral, is, 'be tolerant, and *cultivez votre jardin*,' that is to say, do whatsoever work you have to do diligently. But in all these tales the destructive element has a good deal the better of the constructive. As literature, however, they are almost invariably admirable. There is probably no single book in existence which contains so much wit, pure and simple, as the moderate sized octavo in which are comprised these two or three dozen short stories, none of which exceeds a hundred pages or so in length, while many do not extend beyond two or three. Nowhere is the capacity of the French language for *persiflage* better shown, and nowhere, perhaps, are more phrases which have become household words to be found. Nowhere also, it is true, is the utter want of reverence, which was Voltaire's greatest fault, and the absence of profundity, which accompanied his marvellous superficial range and acuteness, more constantly displayed.

Diderot.

No inconsiderable portion of the extensive and unequal work of Diderot is occupied by prose fiction. He began by a licentious tale in the manner, but without the wit, of Crébillon the younger; a tale in which, save a little social satire, there was no purpose whatever. But by degrees he, like Voltaire, began to use the novel as a polemical weapon. The powerful story of *La Religieuse*, 1760, was the boldest attack which, since the Reformation and the licence of Latin writing, had been made on the drawbacks and dangers of conventual life. *Jacques le Fataliste*, 1766, is a curious book, partly suggested, no doubt, by Sterne, but having a legitimate French ancestry in

the *fatrasie* of the sixteenth century. Jacques is a manservant who travels with his master, has adventures with him, talks incessantly to him, and tells him stories, as also does another character, the mistress of a country inn. One of these stories, the history of the jealousy and attempted revenge of a great lady on her faithless lover by making him fall in love with a girl of no character, is admirably told, and has often since been adapted in fiction and drama. Other episodes of *Jacques le Fataliste* are good, but the whole is unequal. The strangest of all Diderot's attempts in prose fiction—if it is to be called a fiction and not a dramatic study—is the so-called *Neveu de Rameau*, in which, in the guise of a dialogue between himself and a hanger-on of society (or rather a monologue of the latter), the follies and vices, not merely of the time, but of human nature itself, are exposed with a masterly hand, and in a manner wonderfully original and piquant.

Rousseau.

Crébillon the Younger.

Neither Voltaire, however, nor Diderot devoted, in proportion to their other work, as much attention to prose fiction as did Jean Jacques Rousseau. Even the *Confessions* might be classed under this head without a great violation of propriety, and Rousseau's only other large books, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1760, and *Emile*, 1764, are avowed novels. In both of these the didactic purpose asserts itself. In the latter, indeed, it asserts itself to a degree sufficient seriously to impair the literary merit of the story. The second title of

Emile is *L'Education*, and it is devoted to the unfolding of Rousseau's views on that subject by the aid of an actual example in Emile the hero. It had a great vogue and a very considerable practical influence, nor can the race of novels with political or ethical purposes be said to have ever died out since. As a novel, properly so called, it has but little merit. The case is different with *Julie* or *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. This is a story told chiefly in the form of letters, and recounting the love of a noble young lady, Julie, for Saint Preux, a man of low rank, with a kind of afterpiece, depicting Julie's married life with a respectable but prosaic free-thinker, M. de Wolmar. This famous book set the example, first, of the novel of sentiment, secondly, of the novel of landscape painting. Many efforts have been made to dethrone Rousseau from his position of teacher of Europe in point of sentiment and the picturesque, but they have had no real success. It is to *La Nouvelle Héloïse* that both sentimental and picturesque fictions fairly owe their original popularity; yet *Julie* cannot be called a good novel. Its direct narrative interest is but small, its characters are too intensely drawn or else too merely conventional, its plot far too meagre. It is in isolated passages of description, and in the fervent passion which pervades parts of it, that its value, and at the same time its importance in the history of novel-writing, consist.

Some lesser names group themselves naturally round those of the greater *Philosophes* in the department of prose fiction. Voltaire's style was largely followed, but scarcely from Voltaire's point of view, and those who practised it fell rather under the head of *Conteurs* pure and simple than of novelists with a purpose. The prose *Conte* of the eighteenth century forms a remarkable branch of literature, redeemed

from triviality by the exceptional skill expended on it. The master of the style was Crébillon the younger, in whom its merits and defects were both eminently present. Son of the tragic author, Crébillon led an easy but a rather mysterious life, married an Englishwoman, and was supposed by his friends to be dead long before he had actually quitted this world. His works, of which it is unnecessary to mention the names here, exhibit the moral corruption of the times in almost the highest possible degree. But they abound in keen social satire, in acute literary criticism, and in verbal wit. What is more, they show an extraordinary mastery of the art of narrative of the lighter kind. Around Crébillon are grouped a large number of writers, some of whom almost rival him in delicate literary knack, and most of whom equal him in perverse immorality of subject and tone. Much of the formal exercise of this tale literature was a tradition from the slightly earlier school of fairy tale-writing, which has already been noticed. Voisenon, Caylus, Boufflers, Moncrif (the most original and most eccentric of all), La Morlière, are names of this class. Their prose may, on the analogy of Vers de Société, be called Prose de Société, and of a very corrupt society too. But its formal excellence is considerable.

Of exceptional excellence among the short tales of this time, and free from their drawbacks, is the *Diable Amoureux*, 1772, of Cazotte, a singular person, strongly tinged with the 'illuminism,' or belief in occult sciences and arts, which was a natural result of the *philosophe* movement. Cazotte's melancholy story has a place in all histories of the French Revolution, and his name was (probably) borrowed by La Harpe for a bold and striking apologue, the authenticity or spuriousness of which is very much a

matter of guess-work. The *Diable Amoureux* is a singularly powerful story of its kind, uniting, in the fashion so difficult with tales of *diablerie*, literary verisimilitude and exactness of presentation with strangeness of subject.

Voltaire's chief pupils and followers, while taking his own view of the utility of the prose tale for controversial purposes, followed another model for the most part in point of form. The immense influence of *Télémaque* was felt by Voltaire himself, though in his case it resulted in history pure and simple. Marmontel in his *Bélisaire*, and Florian in his *Numa Pompilius* and *Gonsalve de Cordoue*, returned to the historical romance. Something of the same class, though based upon much more solid scholarship, was the *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis* of the Abbé Barthélemy. All these books, like their predecessor, have somewhat passed out of the range of literature proper into that of school books. They are, however, all good examples of the easy, correct, and lucid, if cold and conventional, tongue of the later eighteenth century.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

Rousseau had a far more important disciple in fiction. Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was born at Havre in 1737. He was by profession an engineer, and both professionally and on his private account wandered about the world in a curious fashion. At last he met Rousseau, and the influence of Jean Jacques developed the sentimental morality, the speculative republicanism, and the ardent, if rather affected, love of nature which had already

distinguished him. His best book, *Paul et Virginie*, is perhaps the only one of his works which can properly be called a novel; but *La Chaumière Indienne* deserves to be classed with it, and even the *Études de la Nature* are half fiction. *Paul et Virginie* was written when the author's admiration of nature and of the savage state, imbibed from Rousseau or quickened by his society, had been further inflamed by a three years' residence in Mauritius. Like the books mentioned in the last paragraph, *Paul et Virginie* has lost something by becoming a school-book, but its faults and merits are in a literary sense greater than theirs. The over-ripe sentiment and the false delicacy of it will always remain evidence of the stimulating but unhealthy atmosphere in which it was written. But it cannot be denied that, both here and elsewhere in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, there is a very remarkable faculty of word-painting, and also of influencing the feelings.

Restif de la Bretonne.

The later eighteenth century saw a vast number of novelists and novels, few of which were of much literary value, while most of them displayed the evil influences of the time in more ways than one. Dulaurens, a vagabond and disreputable writer, is chiefly remembered for his *Compère Mathieu*, a book presenting some points of likeness to *Jacques le Fataliste*, and like it inspired partly by Sterne, and partly by Sterne's master, Rabelais. Writers like Louvet and La Clos continued the worst part of Crébillon's tradition without exhibiting either his literary skill or his wit. A much more remarkable name is that of Restif de la Bretonne, who has been

called, and not without reason, the French Defoe. He was born at Sacy in Burgundy in 1734, and died at Paris in 1806. Although of very humble birth, he seems to have acquired an irregular but considerable education, and, establishing himself early in Paris, he became an indefatigable author. About fifty separate works of his exist, some of which are of great extent, and one of which, *Les Contemporaines*, includes forty-two volumes and nearly three hundred separate articles or tales. Restif, whose entire sanity may reasonably be doubted, was a novelist, a philosopher, a social innovator, a diligent observer of the manners of his times, a spelling reformer. His work is for the most part destitute of the most rudimentary notions of decency, but it is apparently produced in good faith and with no evil purpose. His portraiture of manners is remarkably vivid. It is in this, in his earnest but eccentric philanthropy, and in his grasp of character, not seldom vigorous and close, that he chiefly resembles Defoe. He has been called in France the Rousseau of the gutter, which also is a comparison not without truth and instruction, despite the jingle ('Rousseau du ruisseau') by which it was no doubt suggested.

The law which seems to have ordained that, though the eighteenth century in France should produce no masterpiece in fictitious literature, or only one, all the most distinguished literary names should be connected with fiction, extended to the long and, in a literary sense, dreary debateable land between the eighteenth century itself and the nineteenth. Of this period the two dominant names are beyond question those of Chateaubriand and of Madame de Stael. Both attempted various kinds of writing, but some of the most important work of both comes under the heading of the present chapter, and both as literary

figures are best treated here.

Chateaubriand.

François Auguste de Chateaubriand was born at Saint Malo, where he is now buried, in 1768, and died in 1848. He belonged to a family which was among the noblest of Britanny and of France, but which was not wealthy, and he was a younger son. Intended at first for the navy, he was allowed, at the outbreak of the Revolution, to indulge his fancy for travelling, and journeyed to North America. There he learnt the anti-monarchical turn which things had taken in France. He at once returned and joined the emigrants at Coblentz. He was seriously wounded at the siege of Thionville, and had some difficulty in making his way, by Holland and Jersey, to England, where he lived in great poverty. Chateaubriand's acceptance of the Legitimist side had been but half-hearted, and his first published work, *Sur les Révolutions Anciennes et Modernes*, still expresses the peculiar liberalism which—it is sometimes forgotten—was much more deeply rooted in the French noblesse of the eighteenth century than in any other class. This opened the way to his return at the time that Napoleon, then entering on the consulate, endeavoured, by all the means in his power, to conciliate the emigrants. The *Génie du Christianisme*, which had been preceded by *Atala* (a kind of specimen of it), was his first original, and his most characteristic, work. This curious book, which it is impossible to analyse, consists partly of a rather desultory apology for Christian doctrine, partly of a series of historical illustrations of Christian life: it appeared in 1802. It suited the policy of Napoleon, who made Chateaubriand, first, secretary to the

Roman Embassy, and then ambassador to the Valais. But Chateaubriand had never given up his legitimism, and the murder of the Duke d'Enghien shocked him irresistibly. He at once resigned his post, and thenceforward was in more or less covert opposition, though he was not actually banished from France. Pursuing the vein which he had opened in the *Génie*, he made a journey to the East, the result of which was his *Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem*, and the unequal but remarkable prose epic of *Les Martyrs*. This, the story of which is laid in the time of Diocletian, shifts its scene from classical countries to Gaul, where the half-mythical heroes of the Franks appear, and then back to Greece, Rome, and Purgatory. The fall of Napoleon opened once more a political career, of which Chateaubriand had always been ardently desirous. His pamphlet, *De Bonaparte et des Bourbons*, was, perhaps, the most important literary contribution to the re-establishment of the ancient monarchy. During the fifteen years which elapsed between the battle of Waterloo and the Revolution of July, Chateaubriand underwent vicissitudes due to the difficulty of adjusting his liberalism and his legitimism, sentiments which seem both to have been genuine, but to have been quite unreconciled by any reasoning process on the part of their holder. Yet, though he had again and again experienced the most ungracious treatment both from Louis XVIII. and Charles X., the July monarchy had no sooner established itself than he resigned his positions and pensions, and took no further official part in political affairs during the rest of his life. In his latter days he was much with the celebrated Madame Recamier, and completed his affectedly-named but admirable *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*,—an autobiography which, though marred by some of his

peculiarities, contains much of his most brilliant writing. Of the works not hitherto noticed, *René*, *Le Dernier Abencérage*, *Les Natchez*, and some sketches of travels and of French history, are the most remarkable.

For some thirty years, from 1810 to 1840, Chateaubriand was unquestionably the greatest man of letters of France in the estimation of his contemporaries. His fame has since then diminished considerably, and much has been written to account for the change. It is not, however, very difficult to understand it. Chateaubriand is one of the chief representatives in literature of the working of two conditions, which, while they lend for the time much adventitious importance to the man who takes full advantage of them, invariably lead to rapidly-diminished estimates of him when they have ceased to work. He was a representative at once of transition and reaction—of transition from the hard and fast classical standards of the eighteenth century to the principles of the romantic and eclectic schools, of reaction against the *philosophe* era. He was one of the earliest and most influential exponents of the so-called *maladie du siècle*, of what, from his most illustrious pupil, is generally called Byronism. His immediate literary teachers were Rousseau and Ossian. He was not a thoroughly well-educated man, and he was exceptionally deficient in the purely logical and analytic faculty as distinguished from the rhetorical and synthetic. What he could do and did, was to glorify Christianity and monarchism in a series of brilliantly-coloured pictures, which had an immense effect on an age accustomed to the grey tints and monotonous argument of the opposite school, but which, to a posterity which is placed at a different point of view, seem to lack accuracy of

detail and sincerity of emotion. Nevertheless Chateaubriand, if not a very great man, was a very great man of letters. His best passages are not easily to be surpassed in brilliancy of style and vividness of colouring. If the sentiment of his *René* seems hollow now-a-days, it must be remembered that this is almost entirely a matter of fashion and of novelty. The *Génie du Christianisme*, despite many defects of taste, more of insight, and most of mere learning, remains one of the most eloquent pleadings in literature, and not one of the least effective; while the *Itinéraire* is the pattern of all the picturesque travels of modern times. All these works, and most of the rest, are practically novels with a purpose. Even in the autobiography the historic part is entirely subdued and moulded to the exigencies of the dramatic and narrative construction. Regarded merely as an individual writer, Chateaubriand would supply a volume of 'Beauties' hardly inferior to that which could be gathered from any other prose author in France. Regarded as a precursor, he deserves far more than any other single man, and almost more than all others put together, the title of father of the Romantic movement.

Madame de Stael.

His chief rival in the literature of the empire was also essentially, though not wholly or professedly, a novelist. Anne Louise Germaine Necker, who married a Swedish diplomatist, the Baron de Stael Holstein, and is, therefore, generally known as Madame de Stael, was the daughter of the great financier Necker, and of Susanne Curchod, Gibbon's early love. She was introduced young to salon life in Paris, and early

displayed ungovernable vanity, and much of the *sensibilité* of the time, that is to say, an indulgence in sentiment which paid equally little heed to morality and to good sense. Her marriage was one purely of convenience: and while her husband, of whom she seems to have had no reason whatever to complain, obtained some wealth by it, she herself secured a very agreeable position, inasmuch as the king of Sweden pledged himself either to maintain M. de Stael in the Swedish embassy at Paris, or to provide for him in other ways. She approved the early stages of the Revolution, but was shocked at the deposition and death of the king and queen. Whereupon she fled the country. Before she was thirty she had written various books, *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau*, *Défense de la Reine*, *De l'Influence des Passions*, and other pieces of many kinds. When the influence of Napoleon became paramount, Madame de Stael, who had returned to Paris, found herself in an awkward position, for she was equally determined to say what she chose, and to have gallant attentions paid to her, and Napoleon would not comply with either of her wishes. She, therefore, had to leave France, but not before she had published her first romance, *Delphine*, and a book on literature. She now travelled for some years in Germany and Italy in the company of Benjamin Constant, who was the object of one of her numerous accesses of affection. *Corinne*, her principal novel, and her greatest work but one, appeared in 1807, her book *De l'Allemagne* being suppressed in Paris, whither she had returned, but which she soon had to leave again. The Restoration gave her access once more to France, and enabled her to resume possession of property which had been unjustly seized, but she died not long afterwards, in 1817. Her *Dix Années d'Exil* and her *Considérations sur la*

Révolution Française were published posthumously, the latter being one of her chief works. She had married secretly, in 1812, a M. de Rocca, a man more than young enough to be her son.

The personality of Madame de Stael is far from being attractive owing to her excessive vanity, which disgusted all her contemporaries, and the folly which made a woman, who had never been beautiful, continue, long after she had ceased to be young, to give herself in life and literature the airs of a newest Héloïse. But she is a very important figure in French literature. Part of her influence, as represented by the book *De l'Allemagne,* does not directly concern us in this chapter; this part was mainly, but not wholly, literary. It was helped and continued, however, by her other works, especially by her novels, and, above all, by *Corinne*. This influence, put briefly, was to break up the narrowness of French notions on all subjects, and to open it to fresh ideas. Her political and general works led the way to the nineteenth century, side by side with Chateaubriand's, but in an entirely different sense. What Chateaubriand inculcated was the sense of the beauty of older and simpler times, countries, and faiths which the self-satisfaction of the eighteenth century had obscured; what Madame de Stael had to impress were general ideas of liberalism and progress to which the same century, in its crusade against superstition and its rather short-sighted belief in its own enlightenment, was equally blind. *Delphine*, which is in the main a romance of French society only, written before the author had seen much of any other world except a close circle of French emigrants abroad, exhibits this tendency much less than *Corinne*, which was written after that German visit—by far the most important event of Madame de Stael's life. Here, as Rousseau

had inculcated the story of nature and savage life, as Chateaubriand was, at the same time, inculcating the study of Christian antiquity and the middle ages, so Madame de Stael inculcated the cultivation of æsthetic emotions and impulses as a new influence to be brought to bear on life. Her style, though not to be spoken of disrespectfully, is, on the whole, inferior to her matter. It is full of the drawbacks of eighteenth-century *éloges* and academic discourses, now tawdry, now deficient in colour, flexibility, and life, at one time below the subject, at another puffed up with commonplace and insincere declamation. Yet when she understood a subject, which was by no means invariably the case, Madame de Stael was an excellent exponent; and when her feelings were sincere, which they sometimes were, she was a fair mistress of pathos.

A considerable number of names of writers of fiction during the later republic and the empire have a traditional place in the history of literature, and some of their works are still read, but chiefly as school-books. Madame de Genlis, the author of *Les Veillées du Château*, and also of many volumes of ill-natured, and not too accurate, memoirs and reminiscences, continued the moral tale of the eighteenth century, and in *Mlle. de Clermont* produced work of merit. Fiévée, a journalist and critic of some talent, is remembered for the pretty story of the *Dot de Suzette*. Madame de Souza, in her *Adèle de Sénanges* and other works, revived, to a certain extent, the style of Madame de la Fayette. *Ourika* and *Edouard*, especially the latter, preserve the name of Madame de Duras. Madame Cottin, in *Malek Adel*, *Elizabeth* or *Les Exiles de Sibérie*, etc., combined a mild flavour of romance with irreproachable moral sentiments. A vigorous

continuator of the licentious style of novel, with hardly any of the literary refinement of its eighteenth-century contributors, but with more fertility of incident and fancy, was Pigault Lebrun, the forerunner of Paul de Kock. Madame de Krudener, a woman of remarkable history, produced a good novel of sentiment in *Valérie*.

Xavier de Maistre.

Two novelists, singularly different in idiosyncrasy, complete what may be called the eighteenth-century school. Xavier de Maistre, younger brother of the great Catholic polemist, Joseph de Maistre, was born at Chambéry, in 1763. He served in the Piedmontese army during his youth, and his most famous work, the *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, was published in 1794. The national extinction of Savoy and Piedmont, at least the annexation of Savoy and the effacement of Piedmont, made Xavier de Maistre an exile. He joined his brother in St. Petersburg, served in the Russian army, fought, and was wounded in the Caucasus; attained the rank of general, and died at St. Petersburg, in 1852, at the great age of eighty-nine. His work consists of the *Voyage*, an account of a temporary imprisonment in his quarters at Turin, obviously suggested by Sterne, but exceedingly original in execution; *Le Lépreux de la Cité d'Aoste,* in which the same inspiration and the same independent use of it are noticeable; and *Les Prisonniers du Caucase*, a vivid narrative rather in the manner of the nineteenth than of the eighteenth century, with a continuation of the *Voyage* called *Expédition Nocturne*, which has not escaped the usual fate of continuations, and a short version of the

touching story of Prascovia, which contrasts very curiously with Madame Cottin's more artificial handling of the same subject. The important point about Xavier de Maistre is that he unites the sentimentality of the eighteenth century, and not a little of its *Marivaudage*, with an exactness of observation, a general truth of description, and a sense of narrative art which belong rather to the nineteenth. Although he was not a Frenchman, his style has always been regarded as a model of French; and the great authority of Sainte Beuve justly places him and Mérimée side by side as the most perfect tellers of tales in the simple fashion.

Benjamin Constant.

Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, 1815, is a very different work, but an equally remarkable one. It may be a question whether it is not entitled to take rank rather as the first book of the nineteenth-century school than as the last of the eighteenth. But its author (better known as a politician) published no further attempt to pursue the way he had opened; and though he himself denied its application to the persons who were usually identified with its characters, there is every reason to believe that it was rather the record of a personal experience than a deliberate effort of art. It is very short, dealing with the love of a certain Adolphe for a certain Ellénore and his disenchantment. The psychological drawing, though one-sided, is astonishingly true, and though *sensibilité* is still present, it has obviously lost its hold both on the characters represented and their creator. Deliberate analysis appears almost as much as in the work of Beyle himself. It is in every respect a

remarkable book, and many parts of it might have been written at the present day. What distinguishes it from almost all its forerunners is that there is hardly any attempt at incident, far less at adventure. The play of thought and feeling is the sole source of interest. It is true that the situation is one that could not support a long book, and that it is thus rather an essay at the modern analytic novel than a finished example of it. But it is such an essay, and very far from an unsuccessful one.

FOOTNOTES:

[288] The works of fiction written by the great authors of the century are easily obtainable. *Manon Lescaut* has been frequently and satisfactorily reproduced of late years—the two editions of Glady, with and without illustrations, being especially noteworthy. Restif de la Bretonne is a literary curiosity whose voluminous works hardly any collector possesses in their entirety; but the three volumes of the *Contemporaines*, selected and edited for the *Nouvelle Collection Jannet* by M. Assézat, will give a very fair idea of his peculiarities. Of most of the other authors mentioned convenient, handsome, and not too expensive editions will be found in the *Bibliothèque Amusante* of MM. Garnier Frères. This includes Mesdames de Tencin, de Fontaines, Riccoboni, de Beaumont, de Genlis, de Duras, de Souza, as well as Marivaux and Fiévée. Lesage's more remarkable fictions are obtainable at every library. Xavier de Maistre forms a single cheap volume. A handsome little edition of Constant's *Adolphe* has been edited by M. de Lescure for the Librairie des Bibliophiles. Cazotte's *Diable Amoureux* is in the *Nouvelle Collection Jannet*. M. Uzanne's

reproductions of the prose tale-tellers are excellent.

CHAPTER IV.

HISTORIANS, MEMOIR-WRITERS, LETTER-WRITERS.

Characteristics and Divisions of Eighteenth-century History.

In the three branches of literature included in this chapter the interest of the eighteenth century is great, but unequally divided. In history proper, that is to say, the connected survey from documents of a greater or lesser period of the past, the age saw, if not the beginning, certainly the maturing of a philosophical conception of the science. Putting Bossuet out of the question, Vico in Italy, Montesquieu and Turgot in France, are usually and rightly credited with the working out of this great conception. But though pretty fully worked, or at least sketched out, it was not applied in any book of bulk and merit. The writings of Montesquieu and Turgot themselves are not history—they are essays of lesser or greater length in historical philosophy. Nor from the merely literary point of view has France

any historical production of the first rank to put forward at this time. The works of greater extent, such as Rollin's, are of no special literary value; the works of literary value, such as Voltaire's studies, are of but small extent, and rather resemble the historical essay of the preceding century, which still continued to be practised, and which had one special practitioner of merit in Rulhière. But nothing even distantly approaching the English masterpiece of the period, the *Decline and Fall*, was produced; hardly anything approaching Hume's History. Nor again do the memoirs[289] of this time equal those of the seventeenth century in literary power, though they are useful as sources of historical and social information. No man of letters of the first class has left such work, and no one, not by profession a man of letters, has by such work come even near the position of the Cardinal de Retz or the Duke de Saint Simon, the latter of whom, it is fair to remember, actually lived into the second half of the century. On the other hand, the letter-writers of the time are numerous and excellent. Although no one of them equals Madame de Sévigné in bulk and in completeness of merit, the letters of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, of Madame du Deffand, of Diderot to Mademoiselle Volland, and some others, are of very great excellence, and almost unsurpassed in their characterization of the intellectual and social peculiarities of the time. The absence of regular histories of the first merit would be more surprising than it is if it were not fully accounted for by the dominant peculiarity of the day, which is never to be forgotten in studying its history—the absorption, that is to say, of the greater part of the intellect of the time in the *philosophe* polemic. Almost all the histories that were written, except as works of pure

erudition, were in reality pamphlets intended to point, more or less allegorically, some moral as to real or supposed abuses in the social, ecclesiastical, or political state of France. This peculiarity could not fail to detract from their permanent interest, even if it did not (as it too often did) make the authors less careful to give a correct account of their subject than to make it serve their purpose.

Rollin.

The first regular historian who deserves mention is Charles Rollin, who perhaps had a longer and wider monopoly of a certain kind of historical instruction than any other author. He was born at Paris in January, 1661, of the middle class, and, after studying at the Collège du Plessis, he became Professor at the Collége de France, and, in 1694, Rector of the University; a post in which he distinguished himself by introducing many useful and much-needed reforms. He was a Jansenist, but was not much inconvenienced in consequence. Rollin's book (that is to say the only one by which he is remembered) is his extensive *Histoire Ancienne*, 1730-1738, the work of his advanced years, which was the standard treatise on the subject for nearly a century, and was translated into most languages. Although showing no particular historical grasp, written with no power of style, and not universally accurate, it deserves such praise as may be due to a work of great practical utility requiring much industrious labour, and not imitated from or much assisted by any previous book. The *Histoire Romaine*, which followed it, was of little worth, but Rollin's *Traité des Études* was a very useful book in its time.

Dubos.

Boulainvilliers.

Two historians, who hardly deserve the name, are usually ranked together in this part of French history, partly because they represent almost the last of the fabulous school of history-writers, partly because their disputes (for they were of opposite factions) have had the honour to be noticed by Montesquieu. These were Dubos and Boulainvilliers. The Abbé Dubos was a writer of some merit on a great variety of subjects; his *Réflexions sur la Poésie et la Peinture* being of value. His chief historical work is entitled *Histoire Critique de l'Etablissement de la Monarchie Française dans les Gaules*, in which, with a paradoxical patriotism, which has found some echoes among living historians, he maintained that the Frankish invasion of Gaul was the consequence of an amicable invitation, that the Gauls were in no sense conquered, and that all conclusions based on the supposition of such a conquest were therefore erroneous. It is fair to Dubos to say that he had been in a manner provoked by the arguments of the Count de Boulainvilliers. According to this latter, the Frankish conquest had resulted in the establishment of a dominant caste, which alone had full enfranchisement, and which was lineally, or at least titularly, represented by the French aristocracy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These reckless and baseless hypotheses would not require notice, were it not important to show how long it was before the idea of rigid enquiry into documentary facts on the one hand, and philosophical application of general laws on the other, were observed in historical writing.

Voltaire.

Montesquieu himself will come in for mention under the head of philosophers, but Voltaire's ubiquity will be maintained in this chapter. His strictly historical work was indeed considerable, even if what is perhaps the most remarkable of it, the *Essai sur les Mœurs* (which may be described as a treatise, with instances, on the philosophy of history, as applied to modern times), be excluded. Besides smaller works, the histories of Charles XII. and Peter the Great, the *Age of Louis XIV.*, the *Age of Louis XV.*, and the *Annals of the Empire*, belong to the class of which we are now treating. Of these there is no doubt that the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*, 1752, is the best, though the slighter sketches of Charles, 1731, and Peter, 1759, are not undeserving of the position they have long held as little masterpieces. Voltaire, however, was not altogether well qualified for a historian; indeed, he had but few qualifications for the work, except his mastery of a clear, light, and lively style. He had no real conception, such as Montesquieu had, of the philosophy of history, or of the operation of general causes. His reading, though extensive, was desultory and uncritical, and he constantly fell into the most grotesque blunders. His prejudices were very strong, and he is more responsible than any other single person for the absurd and ignorant disdain of the middle ages, which, so long as it lasted, made comprehension of modern history and society simply impossible, because the origins of both were wilfully ignored. These various drawbacks had perhaps less influence on the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze* than on any other of his historical works, and it is accordingly the best. He was well acquainted with the subject, he was much interested in it, it touched few of his

prejudices, and he was able to speak with tolerable freedom about it. The result is excellent, and it deserves the credit of being almost the first finished history (as distinguished from mere diaries like those of L'Estoile) in which not merely affairs of state, but literary, artistic, and social matters generally found a place.

Mably.

The third and fourth quarters of the century are the special period when history was, as has been said, degraded to the level of a party pamphlet, especially in such works as the Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des Indes*. This was a mere vehicle for *philosophe* tirades on religious and political subjects, many if not most of which are known to have proceeded from Diderot's fertile pen. Crevier and Lebeau, however, names forgotten now, continued the work of Rollin; and meanwhile the descendants of the laborious school of historians mentioned in the last book (many of whom survived until far into the century) pursued their useful work. Not the least of these was Dom Calmet, author of the well-known 'Dictionary of the Bible.' But the chief historical names of the later eighteenth century are Mably and Rulhière. Mably, who might be treated equally well under the head of philosophy, was an abbé, and moderately orthodox in religion, though decidedly Republican in politics. He was a man of some learning; but, if less ignorant than Voltaire, he was equally blind to the real meaning and influence of the middle ages and of mediaeval institutions. He looked back to the institutions of Rome, and still more of Greece, as models of political perfection, without making the slightest allowance for the difference of

circumstances; and to him more than to any one else is due the nonsensical declamation of the Jacobins about tyrants and champions of liberty. His works, the *Entretiens de Phocion*, the *Observations sur l'Histoire de France*, the *Droits de l'Europe fondés sur les Traités*, are, however, far from destitute of value, though, as generally happens, it was their least valuable part which (especially when Rousseau followed to enforce similar ideas with his contagious enthusiasm) produced the greatest effect.

Rulhière.

Rulhière, who was really a historian of excellence, and who might under rather more favourable circumstances have been one of the most distinguished, was born about 1735. His Christian names were Claude Carloman. He was of noble birth, was educated at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, and served in the army till he was nearly thirty years old. He then went to St. Petersburg as secretary to the ambassador Breteuil, whom he also accompanied to Sweden. He returned to Paris and began to write the history of the singular proceedings which during his stay in the Russian capital had placed Catherine II. on the throne. The Empress, it is said, tried both to bribe and to frighten him, but could obtain nothing but a promise not to print the sketch till her death. He continued to live in Paris, where he was distinguished for rather ill-natured wit and for polished verse-tales and epigrams. For some reason he devoted himself to the history of Poland. In 1787 he was elected to the Academy. Then he wrote some *Eclaircissements Historiques sur les Causes de la Révocation de l'Édit de Nantes*, and is said to have begun other historical works. He died in 1791. His

'Anecdotes on the Revolution in Russia' did not appear till 1797; his *Histoire de l'Anarchie de Pologne* not till even later. The Polish book is unfinished, and is said to have been garbled in manuscript. But it has very considerable merits, though there is perhaps too much discussion in proportion to the facts given. The Russian anecdotes deserve to rank with the historical essays of Retz and Saint-Réal in vividness and precision of drawing.

These are the chief names of the century in history proper, for Volney, who concludes it in regard to the study of history, is, like many of his predecessors, rather a philosopher busying himself with the historical departments and applications of his subject than a historian proper. Still more may this be said of Diderot in such works as the *Essai sur les Règnes de Claude et de Néron*. The creation of a school of accomplished historians was left for the next century, when the opportunity of such a subject as the French Revolution in the immediate past, the stimulus of the precepts and views of the great writers on the philosophy of history, and lastly the disinterring of the original documents of mediaeval and ancient history, did not fail to produce their natural effect. The number of historians of the first and second class born towards the close of the eighteenth century is remarkable.

Memoirs. Madame de Staal-Delaunay.

Duclos.

Bésenval.

Madame d'Epinay.

The first memoirs, properly so called, which have to be mentioned as belonging to the eighteenth century, are those of Mademoiselle Delaunay, afterwards Madame de Staal. Mademoiselle Delaunay was attached to the household of the Duchess du Maine, the beautiful, impetuous, and highborn wife of one of the stupidest and least interesting of men, who happened also to be the illegitimate son of Louis XIV. The Duke du Maine, or rather his wife, for he himself was nearly as destitute of ambition as of ability, was at the head of the party opposed to that of which the Duke of Orleans (the Regent) was the natural chief, and Saint Simon the ablest partisan. The 'party of the bastards' failed, but the duchess kept up a vigorous literary and political agitation against the Regent. The court (as it may be called) of this opposition was held at Sceaux, and of the doings of this court Madame de Staal has left a very vivid account. The Marquis d'Argenson, a statesman and a man of great intelligence, concealed under a rough and clumsy exterior, has left memoirs which are valuable for the early and middle part of the reign of Louis XV. The memoirs, properly so called, of Duclos are of small extent, but he has left impersonal memoirs of the later reign of Louis XIV. and the beginning of that of his great-grandson, which are among the best historical work of the time. His account of the famous 'system' of Law is one of the principal sources of information on its subject, as is his handling of the Cellamare conspiracy and other affairs of the regency. Duclos was a man not only of considerable

literary talent, but of wide historical reading, which appears amply in his work. The gossiping memoirs, attributed to Madame du Hausset, bedchamber-woman to Madame de Pompadour, give many curious details of the middle period of Louis XV.'s reign; and in the vast collection of tittle-tattle, often scandalous enough, called the *Mémoires de Bachaumont*, much matter of interest, and some that is of value, may be found. Among the most valuable memoirs of this kind are those of Collé, which have been only recently edited in full. Collé, who, though a time-server and an ill-natured man, had much literary talent, was an acute observer, and enjoyed great opportunities, has left important materials for the middle of the century. The Baron de Bésenval, half a Savoyard and half a Pole, who played an important part in the early days of the Revolution, and who had previously encouraged Marie Antoinette in the levities, harmless enough but worse than ill-judged, which had so fatal a result, has left reminiscences of the later years of Louis XV., and a connected narrative of the outbreak of the Revolution. The memoirs concerning the *Philosophes* form a library in themselves, even those which concern Voltaire alone making a not inconsiderable collection. Those of Madame d'Epinay (the friend of Grimm, of Galiani, and of Rousseau), of Marmontel, of Morellet, are perhaps the principal of this group. Marmontel's memoirs are among his best works, and Madame d'Epinay's are among the most characteristic of the period. There is a certain number of interesting memoirs of actors and actresses, which dates from this time, including those of the great actress Mademoiselle Clairon, the tragic actor Le Kain, and others.



Minor Memoirs.

Circumstances rather political than literary have given a place in literary history to the memoirs of Linguet and Latude concerning the Bastile. That celebrated building, however, figures largely in the memoirs of the time, and the experiences of Voltaire, Marmontel, Crébillon, and others show how greatly exaggerated is the popular notion of its dungeons and torments. The so-called memoirs of the Duke de Richelieu (the type, and a very debased type, of the French noblesse of the eighteenth century, as La Rochefoucauld was of that of the seventeenth) are the work of Soulavie, a literary man and unfrocked abbé of very dubious character: but they at least rest upon authentic data, and abound in the most curious information. The President Hénault, a man of probity and learning, has left memoirs of value.

Memoirs of the Revolutionary Period.

As might be expected, the collection of memoirs which have reference to the Revolution and the Empire is very large. The fortunes of the ill-fated royal family are dealt with in three sets of memoirs, on which all historians have been obliged to draw, those of Madame Campan, of Weber, and of Cléry, all three of whom were attendants on Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette. The memoirs of the first-named are supposed to be the least accurate in matters of fact. The ill-natured and factious Madame de Genlis has left two different works of the memoir kind, the one entitled *Souvenirs de Félicie*, which is somewhat

fictitious in form and arrangement, but is believed to be accurate enough in facts; the other, definitely called *Memoirs*, which was written long after date, and is much coloured by prejudice. The Marquis de Bouillé, whose gallant conduct during the Nancy mutiny set an example which the nobility of France were unfortunately slow to follow, and who would have saved Louis XVI. in the Varennes flight but for ill-luck and the king's incredible folly, has also left memoirs of value; and so has Dumouriez. The memoirs of Louvet, of Daunou, of Riouffe, of the Duke de Lauzun, of the Comte de Vaublanc, of the Comte de Ségur, may be mentioned. The unamiable but striking and characteristic figure of Madame Roland lives in memoirs which are among the most celebrated of the time. A group of short but striking accounts of eye-witnesses and narrowly-rescued victims remains to testify to the atrocities of that Second of September, which some recent historians have striven in vain to palliate. Many of the men of the Revolution, of the servants of the Empire and of their wives, have left accounts (of more or less value in point of matter) of the events of the time, some of which have been only very recently published. Among these latter special notice is deserved by the memoirs of Davout, of Madame de Rémusat, and of Count Miot de Melito. But with few exceptions (those of Madame de Rémusat are perhaps the principal) none of these memoirs are of great literary importance or interest. They are often very valuable to the historian, very curious to the student of manners or the mere seeker after interesting and amusing facts; but no one of them, named or unnamed, can be said to rank in literary interest with the work which is so plentiful in the preceding century, and which constitutes so large a part of that

century's claim to a place of first importance in the history of French literature.

Abundance of Letter-writers.

It is otherwise with letters, of which the century contributes to literature some of the most remarkable which we possess. It is impossible even to give a bare list of those which remain from a time when almost every person of quality knew how to correspond either in the natural or the artificial style; but the most remarkable (each of which is in its way typical of a group) may be noticed with some minuteness. Among these the correspondence of Grimm, though one of the bulkiest and most important, may be dismissed with a brief reference; for it will be noticed again in the succeeding chapter, and most of it is not either the work of one man or real correspondence. The flying sheets which Grimm, largely aided by his complaisant friends, and especially by Diderot, sent to his august Russian and German correspondents, were in reality periodical summaries of the state of politics, society, letters, and art in Paris, not different in subject and style from the printed newspaper letters of the present day. They form in the aggregate a very important work, whether looked at from the point of view of history, or from the point of view of literature; but they are not, properly speaking, letters. Of the letter-writers proper three women and three men may be selected,—Mademoiselle Aïssé, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and Madame du Deffand; Voltaire, Diderot, and Galiani.

Mademoiselle Aïssé.



Mademoiselle Aïssé had a singular history. When a child she was carried off by Turkish rovers, and sold at Constantinople to the French ambassador, M. de Ferriol. This was at the beginning of the century. Her purchaser had her brought up carefully at Paris as his property, which no doubt he always considered her. But in his old age he became childish, and Mademoiselle Aïssé was free to frequent society to which she had been early introduced. She met and fell in love with a certain Chevalier d'Aydie, who himself (at a later date, for the most part,) was a letter-writer of some merit. Her letters to him and of him constitute her claim to a position in the history of literature. They display the *sensibilité* of the time in a decided form, but in a milder one than the later letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. But there is something in them more than mere *sensibilité*—a tender and affectionate spirit finding graceful expression and deserving a happier fate. Mademoiselle Aïssé, like most other people of her time, turned devout, but earlier than most. She died in 1733.

Madame du Deffand.

Madame du Deffand was a very different person. She was born in 1697, and she distinguished herself when quite a girl, not merely by her beauty, but by her wit and tendency to freethinking. She was married in 1718 to the Marquis du Deffand, but soon separated from him, and lived for many years the then usual life of gallantry. This merged insensibly into a life of literary and philosophical society. Though Madame du Deffand was not, like the wealthier but more plebeian Madame Geoffrin, and

later Madame Helvétius, a 'nursing mother of the philosophers,' in the sense of supplying their necessities, her salon in the Rue Saint Dominique was long one of the chief resorts of philosophism. In 1753 she became blind, but this made little difference in her appetite for society. She lived like many other great ladies in a monastery. She died in 1780. As a letter-writer Madame du Deffand was the correspondent of most of the greatest men of letters of the time (Voltaire, D'Alembert, Hénault, Montesquieu, etc.). But her most remarkable correspondence, and perhaps her most interesting one, was with Horace Walpole, the most French of contemporary Englishmen. Their friendship, for which it is hard to find an exact name, unless, perhaps, it may be called a kind of passionate community of tastes, belongs to the later part of her long life. Madame du Deffand is the typical French lady of the eighteenth century, as Richelieu is the typical *grand seigneur*. She was perhaps the wittiest woman (in the strict sense of the adjective) who ever lived[290], and an astonishingly large proportion of the best sayings of the time is traced or attributed to her. Nearly seventy years of conversation and a great correspondence did not exhaust her faculty of acute sallies, of ruthless criticism, of cynical but clearsighted judgment on men and things. But she was thoroughly unamiable, purely selfish, jealous, spiteful, destitute of humour, if full of wit. A comparison with Madame de Sévigné shows how the French character had, in the upper ranks at least, degenerated (it is worth remembering that Madame du Deffand was born just after Madame de Sévigné's death), though it must be admitted that the earlier character shows perhaps the germs of what is repulsive in the second.



Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.

The third most remarkable lady letter-writer of the century, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, was closely connected with Madame du Deffand. She was indeed her companion, her coadjutor, and her rival. Julie Jeanne Eléonore de Lespinasse was in reality the illegitimate daughter of a lady of rank, the Countess d'Albon, who lived apart from her husband, and the name Lespinasse was merely a fancy name taken from the D'Albon genealogy. She was born, or at least baptized, at Lyons on the 19th November, 1732. Her mother, who practically acknowledged her, died when she was fifteen, leaving her fairly provided for. But her half-brothers and sisters deprived her of most of her portion, though for a time they gave her a home. In 1754 Madame du Deffand, to whom she had been recommended, and who had just been struck with blindness, invited her to come and live with her, which she did, after some hesitation. For ten years the two presided jointly over their society, but at last Madame du Deffand's jealousy broke out. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse retired, taking with her not a few of the habitués of the salon, with D'Alembert at their head. Madame Geoffrin seems to have endowed her, and she established herself in the Rue de Bellechasse, where D'Alembert before long came to join her. They lived in a curious sort of relationship for more than ten years, until Mademoiselle de Lespinasse died on the 22nd May, 1776. During this time she was a gracious hostess and a bond of union to many men of letters, especially those of the younger *philosophe* school. But this is not what gives her her place here. Her claim rests upon a collection of love-letters, not addressed

to D'Alembert. She was thirty-four when the earliest of her love affairs began, and had never been beautiful. When she died she was forty-four, and her later letters are more passionate than the earlier. Her first lover was a young Spaniard, the Marquis Gonsalvo de Mora; her second, the Count de Guibert, a poet and essayist of no great merit, a military reformer said to have been of some talent, and pretty evidently a bad-hearted coxcomb. To him the epistles we have are addressed. All the circumstances of these letters are calculated to make them ridiculous, yet there is hardly any word which they less deserve. The great defect of the eighteenth century is that its *sensibilité* excludes real passion. The men and women of feeling of the period always seem as if they were playing at feeling; the affairs of the heart, which occupy so large a place in its literature, show only the progress of a certain kind of game which has its rules and stages to which the players must conform, but which, when once over, leaves no more traces than any other kind of game. To this Mademoiselle de Lespinasse is a conspicuous exception. It has been said of her that her letters burn the paper they are written on with the fervency of their sentiment, nor is the expression an exaggerated one. Except in Rousseau and (in a different form) in *Manon Lescaut*, it is in these letters that we must look for almost the only genuine passion of the time. It is no doubt unreal to a certain degree, morbid also in an even greater degree as regards what is real in it. But it is in no sense consciously affected, and conscious affectation was the bane of the period.

Voltaire.

The three examples which have been chosen of the

masculine letter-writing of the period are of somewhat wider range. Mademoiselle Aïssé and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse show in various forms the amiable weaknesses of womankind, Madame du Deffand its unamiable strength. The letters of Voltaire, of Diderot, and of the Abbé Galiani are not so typical of a sex, but are more representative of individuals and at the same time of the age. Voltaire's correspondence is simply enormous in point of bulk. Fresh letters of his are constantly being discovered and edited even now. His long life, his extraordinary industry, his position during nearly half a century as first one of the leading men of letters, and then unquestionably the leading man of letters of Europe, the curious diversity of his interests, even the prosperity in point of fortune which made him command the services of secretaries and under-strappers, while humbler men of letters had to do the mechanical work of composition for themselves, all contributed to bring about this fecundity. The consequence is, that not only is the correspondence of Voltaire of vast extent but it is also of the most various character. We have from him early love-letters, letters to private friends of all dates, business letters, literary letters, letters to great persons, letters intended for publication, letters not intended for publication, flattering letters, insulting letters, benevolent letters, patronising letters, begging letters, letters of almost every sort and kind that the ingenuity of human imagination can conceive or the diversity of human relationships and circumstances require. Partial critics have contended that the singular quality of Voltaire's genius might be sufficiently exemplified from his letters, if no other documents were forthcoming. Without going quite so far as this, it may be allowed that his correspondence

is a remarkable monument of those qualities in literature which enable a man to express himself happily and rapidly on any subject that happens to present itself. The letters of Voltaire do not perhaps supply any ground for disputing Carlyle's sentence on Voltaire (a sentence which has excited the wrath of French critics) that there is not one great thought in all his works. But they enable us, even better than any other division of those works, to appreciate the singular flexibility of his intellect, the extraordinarily wide range of his interests and sympathies, the practical talents which accompanied his literary genius.

Diderot.

Diderot's correspondence is also considerable in bulk, though not in that respect to be compared to Voltaire's. It has several minor divisions, the chief of which is a body of letters addressed to the sculptor Falconnet in Russia. But the main claim of this versatile writer and most fertile thinker to rank in this chapter lies in his letters to Mademoiselle Volland, a lady of mature years, to whom, in his own middle and old age, he was, after the fashion of the time, much attached. These letters were not published till forty or fifty years after his death, and it is not too much to say that they supply not only the most vivid picture of Diderot himself which is attainable, but also the best view of the later and extremer *philosophe* society. Many, if not most of them, are written from that society's head-quarters, the country house of the Baron d'Holbach, at Grandval, where Diderot was an ever welcome visitor. This society had certain drawbacks which made it irksome, not merely to orthodox and sober

persons, but to fastidious judges who were not much burdened with scruples. Horace Walpole, for instance, found himself bored by it. But it was the most characteristic society of the time, and Diderot's letters are the best pictures of it, because, unlike some not dissimilar work, they unite great vividness and power of description with an obvious absence of the least design to 'cook,' that is to say, to invent or to disguise facts and characters. Diderot, who possessed every literary faculty except the faculty of taking pains and the faculty of adroitly choosing subjects, was marked out as the describer of such a society as this, where brilliancy was the one thing never wanting, where eccentricity of act and speech was the rule, where originals abounded and took care to make the most of their originality, and where all restraint of convention was deliberately cast aside. The character and tendencies of this society have been very variously judged, and there is no need to decide here between the judges further than to say that, on the whole, the famous essay of Carlyle on Diderot not inadequately reduces to miniature Diderot's own picture of it. Only the extremest prejudice can deny the extraordinary merit of that picture itself, the vividness and effortless effect with which the men and women dealt with—their doings and their sayings—are presented, the completeness and dramatic force of the presentation.

Galiani.

The last of the epistolers selected for comment, the Abbé Galiani, has this peculiarity as distinguished from Voltaire and Diderot, that he is little except a letter-writer to the present and probably to all future generations of readers. He will indeed appear again,

but his dealings with political economy are of merely ephemeral interest. Galiani was of a noble Neapolitan family, was attached to the Neapolitan Legation in Paris, and made himself a darling of *philosophe* society there. When he was recalled to his native country and endowed with sufficiently lucrative employments, his chief consolation for the loss of Parisian society was to gather as far as he could a copy of it—consisting partly of Italians, partly of foreign and especially English visitors—to Italy, to study classical archæology, in which (and especially in the department of numismatics) he was an expert, and to write letters to his French friends. In his long residence at Paris, Galiani had acquired a style not entirely destitute of Italianisms, but all the more piquant on that account. His letters were published early in this century, but incompletely and in a somewhat garbled fashion. They have recently had the benefit of two different complete editions. They are addressed, the greater part of them to Madame d'Epinay, and the remainder to various correspondents. Galiani had the reputation of being one of the best talkers of his time, and the memoirs and correspondence of his friends (especially Diderot's) contain many reported sayings of his which amply support the reputation. Like many famous talkers, he seems to have been not quite so ready with the pen as with the tongue. But it is only by comparison that his letters can be depreciated. Less voluminous and manifold than Voltaire, less picturesque than Diderot, he is a model of general letter-writing. He is also remarkable as an exponent of the curious feeling of the time towards religion; a feeling which was prevalent in the cultivated classes (with certain differences) all over Europe. Galiani was not, like some of his French friends, a

proselytising atheist. He held some ecclesiastical employments in his own country with decency, and died with all due attention to the rites of the Church. But it is obvious that he was as little of a Christian, in any definite sense of the word, as any humanist of the fifteenth century.

The light thrown in this fashion upon the social, moral, and intellectual characteristics of the time constitutes the chief value of all its historical literature, except the great philosophico-historical works of Montesquieu and Turgot. It has a certain flimsiness about it; it is brilliant journalism rather than literature properly so called; the dialect in which it is written wants the gravity and sonorousness, the colour and the poetry, of the seventeenth and earlier centuries. But it is unmatched in power of social portraiture. Written, as much of it is, by men of the middle class, and more of it by men who, from whatever class they sprang, were deeply interested in social, economical, and political problems, it is free from that ignoring of any life and class except that of the nobility which mars much of the work of earlier times. The picture it gives is very far from being a flattering one. The nature to which the mirror is held up is in most cases a decidedly corrupt nature; but the mirror is held frankly, and the reflection is useful to posterity.

FOOTNOTES:

[289] In studying the history, and especially the memoirs, of the eighteenth century, the reader is at a disadvantage, inasmuch as the admirable collections of MM. Buchon, Petitot, Michaud et Poujoulat, etc., do not extend beyond its earliest years. Their place is very

imperfectly supplied by a collection in twenty-eight small volumes, edited by F. Barrière for MM. Didot. This is useful as far as it goes, but it is very far from complete; much of it is in extract only, and the component parts of it are not selected as judiciously as they might be. Separate editions of the principal memoirs of the century are of course obtainable, and the number is being constantly increased; but such separate editions are far less useful than the collections which enable the memoir-writing of France during five centuries of its history to be studied at an advantage scarcely to be paralleled in the literature of any other nation.

[290] Her earlier contemporary, Madame de Tencin, is her chief competitor.

CHAPTER V.

ESSAYISTS, MINOR MORALISTS, CRITICS.

Occasional Writing in the Eighteenth-century. Periodicals.

What may be, for want of a better word, called occasional writing in prose received a considerable development during the eighteenth century. Some of the forms which it had previously taken, the *Pensée*,

the maxim, and so forth, were less practised, though at the beginning and end of our present period two remarkable men, Vauvenargues and Joubert, distinguished themselves in them, and in the form of satirical aphorism Chamfort and Rivarol, before and during the Revolution, brought them to great perfection. But it was powerfully encouraged by the institution of official *éloges*, pronounced in the French Academy on famous men of the immediate or remoter past, and of prize essays, subjects for which, in ever increasing numbers, were proposed, not merely by that body, but by provincial societies of a similar but humbler kind. More than all this, the growth of periodical literature, though not exactly rapid, was steady, and gave opportunity for the cultivation of the two main branches of occasional writing as it is understood in modern times, namely, social or ethical essays of the Addisonian kind, and critical studies, literary or other. A great impetus was given to this by the novelist Prévost, who, after his return from England, edited, as has been observed, more than one avowed imitation of the English *Spectator* and *Tatler*. At the beginning of the century the chief place among newspapers was occupied by the *Mercure Galant*, which had enjoyed the contempt of La Bruyère, and the management of Visé and Thomas Corneille. Towards the middle and end of the period, the *Gazette de France*, under the management of Suard, held the principal place with a somewhat higher aim; and of non-official publications the Jesuit *Journal de Trévoux* and the anti-*philosophe Année Littéraire* of Fréron were notable. It was not till after the beginning of the Revolution that journalism proper spread and multiplied, and that journalists became a power. A short notice of the chief of these will be found lower

down in this chapter, but a full history of French journalism is impossible here.

Fontenelle.

The first place in point of time, and not the least in point of importance, among the occasional writers of the eighteenth century, is due to Fontenelle. The personal name of this curious writer, who is perhaps the most striking example in literary history of multifarious talent and unwearied industry just stopping short, despite their combination, of genius, was Bernard le Bovier, and his mother was a sister of Corneille, whose life Fontenelle himself wrote. He was educated by the Jesuits and studied for the bar, but was unsuccessful as an advocate, and soon gave up active practice. He came to Paris very young, and soon became distinguished, after a fashion, in society and literature. He was one of the last of the *précieux*, or rather he was the inventor of a new combination of literature and gallantry which at first exposed him to not a little satire. Unfortunately too for him he tried first to emulate his uncles in the drama, for which he had no talent, and one of his plays (*Aspar*), failing completely, gave his enemies abundant opportunity. No one, however, illustrated better than Fontenelle the saying that 'no man was ever written down except by himself.' He was the butt of the four most dangerous satirists of his time—Racine, Boileau, La Bruyère, and J. B. Rousseau; but though the epigrams which Racine and Rousseau directed against him are among the best in the language, and though the 'portrait' of Cydias, in the *Caractères*, at least equals them, Fontenelle received hardly any damage from these. Finding that he was not likely to be a successful dramatic poet, even in opera, he

turned to prose, and wrote 'dialogues of the dead,' in avowed imitation of Lucian, and a kind of romance called '*Lettres du Chevalier d'Her*...,' in which he may be said to have set the example of the elaborate and rather affected style, afterwards called Marivaudage, from his most famous pupil. Even here his success was doubtful, and he again changed his ground. He had paid some attention to science, and he saw that there was an opening in the growing curiosity of educated people for scientific popularising. To this and to literary criticism and history he devoted himself for the remainder of his long life, becoming President of the Academy of Sciences, and virtual dictator of the Académie Française. His *Éloges* and his academic essays generally were highly popular. But his chief single works are the famous *Entretien sur la Pluralité des Mondes*, an example of singularly hardy speculation, and of no contemptible learning, artfully disguised by an easy style, and his *Histoire des Oracles*, of which much the same may be said. With hardly diminished powers Fontenelle achieved an age not often paralleled in literary history, though his contemporary, Saint Aulaire, a minor poet, nearly equalled it. He died in his hundredth year, and almost at the end of it, his long life extending from the very earliest glories of the Siècle de Louis XIV. to the very hottest period of the Encyclopædist battle. The singular variety of his works, and his force of character, disguised under a somewhat frivolous exterior, but enabling him to live down enmity and ridicule which would have crushed most men, would of themselves make Fontenelle a remarkable figure in literature. But his actual work has more merits than that of mere variety. He realised quite as keenly as his enemy La Bruyère the importance of manner in literature, though his taste was hardly so pure. If

not exactly an original thinker, he was an acute and comprehensive one, and forestalled most of his contemporaries in taking the direction consciously which they were pursuing almost without knowing it. He fully appreciated the value of paradox as stimulating men's minds and giving flavour to literature; and his positive wit was very considerable. To not many men are more good sayings attributed, and the goodness of these is not always verbal only. The most famous of them, uttered in defence of his peculiar union of heterodoxy and caution, 'I may have my fist full of truth, and yet only care to open my little finger,' may be immoral or not, but it expressed very early, and with singular force, the intellectual attitude of two whole generations.

La Motte.

Inseparable from Fontenelle's name in literary history, as the two were long closely united in life, is the name of La Motte. La Motte was a much younger man than Fontenelle, and he died more than thirty years before him, but during the first thirty years of the century the pair exercised a kind of joint sovereignty in the Belles Lettres. They revived the quarrel of the ancients and moderns, inclining to the modern side. But La Motte's translation of Homer, or rather his adaptation (for he omitted about half), is not of a nature to inspire much confidence in his ability to judge the matter, though his essays and letters on the subject are triumphs of ingenious word-fence. Unlike Fontenelle, La Motte had one considerable dramatic success with the pathetic subject of *Inès de Castro*, and his fables are not devoid of merit. It was, however, as a prose writer of the occasional kind, and especially as a paradoxical

essayist, that he earned and deserved most fame, his prose style being superior to Fontenelle's own.

Vauvenargues.

The next name deserving of mention belongs to a very different writer. Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues, covered in his brief space of life not a third of the period allotted to Fontenelle, who was nearly sixty when Vauvenargues was born, and outlived him ten years. Nor did he leave any single work of consequence. Yet his scanty writings are far more valuable in matter, if not in form, than those of the witty centenarian. Vauvenargues was born at Aix, in Provence, on the 6th of August, 1715. His family was ancient and honourable, but appears to have been poor, and his education was interrupted by the bad health which continued throughout his short life. Nevertheless he entered the army at the age of eighteen. After this he had scanty opportunities of study, and it is said that he was ignorant not only of Greek but even of Latin. He served at first in Italy, and then for some years was employed on garrison duty. At the outbreak of the war of the Austrian succession his regiment was sent into Germany, and he had a full share of the hardships of the Bohemian campaign. No promotion came to him, his means were almost exhausted, and in 1744 he resigned his commission, after taking the curiously unworldly step of writing directly to the king, asking for a place in the diplomatic service. An application to the minister of foreign affairs was not much more successful, and Vauvenargues, whose evil star pursued him, had no sooner established himself with his family than a bad attack of small-pox destroyed the little health he still had. He set to

work, however, to write, and in the short time before his death actually published some of his works, and left others in a condition ready for publication. He lived in Paris for the last three years of his life, and died in 1747, at the age of thirty-two. Latterly he had made acquaintance with Voltaire, who entertained a very high and generous opinion of his talents, due perhaps partly to the remarkable difference of their respective characters and points of view. Vauvenargues' principal work is an *Introduction à la Connoissance de l'Esprit Humain*, besides which he left a considerable number of maxims, reflections, etc., on points of ethics and of literary criticism. In the last part of his work there is more curiosity than instruction. It is, however, in its way an instructive thing to see that a man of talent and even of genius could object to Molière for having chosen *des sujets trop bas*, while he speaks of Boileau in the most enthusiastic terms. The truth (and in the history of literature it is a very important truth) is that Vauvenargues was too little versed in any language but his own to have the requisite range of comparison necessary for literary criticism, and that his real interest in literature was almost entirely proportioned to its bearing upon conduct. His maxims, his *Connoissance de l'Esprit*, his *Conseils à un Jeune Homme*, etc., are all occupied almost entirely with questions of morality. Vauvenargues (and in this he was remarkable) stood entirely aloof from the sceptical movement of his age. There was, indeed, a certain scepticism in him, as in almost all thinkers, but it was of the stamp of Pascal's, not in the least mocking or polemical, and even, as compared with Pascal's own, much less strictly theological. In most of his writings he shows himself an earnest and upright man, profoundly convinced of the

importance of right conduct, gifted with an acute perception of its usual moving springs and directions, not remarkable for humour or poetical feeling, but serious, sober, and a little stoical. His literary characteristics reflect some of these peculiarities, and also betray something of his neglected education. He is never slovenly in thought, but he sometimes shocked the exact verbal critics of the eighteenth century by such phrases as 'les sens sont flattés d'agir, de galoper un cheval,' whereupon his censor annotates 'négligé. Les sens ne galopent pas un cheval.' A more serious fault is that, in his shorter maxims especially, he does not observe the rule of absolute lucidity which La Rochefoucauld, who was as much his model in point of style as he was his opposite in general views, never breaks through. His sayings (it is a merit as well as a drawback) are often rather suggestive than expressive; they remind the reader of his own curious comparison of Corneille with Racine, 'les héros de Corneille disent souvent de grandes choses sans les inspirer; ceux de Racine les inspirent sans les dire.'

D'Aguesseau.

Contemporary with Fontenelle and La Motte was the Chancellor D'Aguesseau, one of the most prominent figures of the earlier reign of Louis XV., a steady defender of orthodoxy—yet, as was seen in the case of the Encyclopædia, willing to assist enlightenment—a man of irreproachable character, and a writer of some merit. D'Aguesseau was born in 1668, and died in 1751. He early received considerable preferment in the law, and held the seals at intervals for the greater part of the last thirty years of his life. He was a defender of Gallicanism—indeed, he was suspected

of Jansenist leanings—and a man of great benevolence in private life. His legal and historical learning was immense, and he was not without some tincture of science. He deserves a place here chiefly for his speeches on public occasions, which were in effect elaborate moral essays. An important part of them consists of what were called *Mercuriales* (that is to say, discourses pronounced on certain Wednesdays (Die Mercurii) by the first president of the Parliament of Paris) on the abuses of the day, the duties of judges, the nature of justice, and similar subjects.

Duclos.

Another writer, who has been mentioned more than once before, held somewhat aloof from the Encyclopædists, though he was not, like D'Aguesseau, definitely orthodox, or, like Vauvenargues, severely moral. Charles Pinaud Duclos was one of the most miscellaneous of the miscellaneous writers of the time. He held the office of historiographer royal, and produced some remarkable works of the historical kind, one of which has been noticed. He composed novels in a fanciful style midway between Crébillon and Marivaux. He also wrote on grammar, but some of his best work consists of short academic essays, and of a moral study called *Considérations sur les Mœurs de Notre Temps*, which is both well written and shows discernment. Duclos' character has been somewhat variously represented, but the unfavourable reports (which are in the minority) may probably be traced to the studied brusqueness of his manners, and to his unwillingness to make common cause with the *philosophe* coterie, though, if some stories are to be believed, he often conversed

and argued quite in their style.

Marmontel.

Yet another typical figure of the same numerous class is Jean François Marmontel, one of the most eminent professional men of letters of the second class. Marmontel's moral tales, his *Bélisaire*, and his plays have already been noticed, but his main place in literature is that of a journalist and critic. He was born at Bort, in the district of Limoges, in 1723, and obtained some provincial reputation in letters. Introduced to Voltaire in 1746, he began as a dramatist, and, after some failures, acquired the protection of Madame de Pompadour. He was made editor of the *Mercure*, which gave him an influential position and a competence. He afterwards succeeded Duclos as historiographer, notwithstanding the outcry which had been made against his *Bélisaire*. He had contributed almost all the minor articles on literary subjects to the Encyclopædia, and these were collected and published as *Éléments de Littérature* in 1787. He died in 1799. The *Éléments de Littérature* are, with the *Cours de Littérature* of La Harpe, the chief source of information as to eighteenth-century criticism of the fashionable kind in France. They are very voluminous, and, from the circumstances of their original form, deal with a vast number of subjects. The style is for the most part simple and good, destitute alike of the dryness and of the bombast which were the two faults of contemporary writing. But Marmontel's system of criticism will not bear a moment's examination. It consists simply in the assumption that Racine, Boileau (though he was at first recalcitrant to Boileau, and had to be admonished by Voltaire that *ça porte malheur*), and

their contemporaries are infallible models, and in the application of this principle to all other nations. The passion for finding plausible general reasons also leads Marmontel into grotesque aberrations, as where he gives three reasons for English success in poetry as contrasted with our inferiority in the other arts. First, Englishmen, loving glory, saw early that poetry acquired glory for a nation. Secondly, being naturally given to sadness and meditation, they wish for emotions to distract and move them. Thirdly, their genius is proper to poetry. This last remark, the reader should observe, comes from a countryman of Molière, a man who must have read the *Malade Imaginaire*, and who was moreover a man of much more than ordinary talent. Marmontel often has acute remarks, and his blunders and absurdities are rather symptomatic of the false state in which criticism was at the time than of individual shortcomings.

La Harpe.

Somewhat younger than Marmontel was La Harpe, who pursued the same lines of dramatic poetry and literary criticism, the latter with more success in his kind, so much so, that Malherbe, Boileau, and he may be ranked together as the three representatives of the infancy, flourishing, and decadence of the 'classical' theory of literary criticism in France. La Harpe was born at Paris in 1739, was brought up by charity, gained a reputation as a brilliant exhibitioner at the Collége d'Harcourt, and, after the mishap of being imprisoned for a libel, obtained new success at the Academy competitions. He acquired the favour of Voltaire, and fairly launched himself in literature. For many years he furnished tragedies to

the stage, and criticised the literary work of others with a singular mixture of acuteness, pedantry, and ill-temper. He was converted from Republicanism by an imprisonment during the Terror, and became a violent conservative and defender of orthodoxy. He died in 1803. His principal critical work is his *Cours de Littérature*, which was the work chiefly of his later days. La Harpe had very considerable talent, which was however warped by the false and narrow system of criticism he adopted, and by his personal ill-temper and overbearing disposition. He is even more than Boileau the type of the schoolmaster-critic, who marks passages for correction according to cut-and-dried rules instead of attempting to judge the author according to his own standard. Yet, if he is the most typical example of the school, he is also perhaps the best. In dealing with authors of his own century, he is especially worthy of attention, because for the most part they themselves had before them the standards which he used, and his method is therefore relevant as far as it goes. La Harpe wrote well in the fashion of his day.

Thomas.

With Duclos, Marmontel, and La Harpe, Thomas is usually named. This writer, like others of our present subjects, was chiefly a composer of academic *Éloges*, *Mémoires*, *Discours*, and the like. He also wrote a book on *Les Femmes*, a subject which he treated, as he did most things, with seriousness, and with a mixture of declamation and sentimentality. His literary value is but small.

Orthodox Apologists.

Of the definitely orthodox party only two names need be mentioned, that of the Abbé Guénée, who devoted himself to exposing Voltaire's numerous slips in erudition in his *Lettres de Quelques Juifs*, and that of the Abbé Bergier, who is chiefly noteworthy as having held the singular post of official refuter of the Encyclopædists, in virtue of which appointment he received two thousand *livres* per annum from the General Assembly of the clergy for sixteen years. He wrote with assiduity, but was not read, and three years before the Revolution he lost his annuity, which the Assembly struck off. Bergier was a man of learning, industry, and good faith, but unfortunately he did not possess sufficient literary talent to execute the task entrusted to him. The Abbé Guénée, on the contrary, was a fair match even for Voltaire, but he did not attempt, perhaps it was too early to attempt, anything more than skirmishing.

Fréron.

A bitter personal opponent of La Harpe, and a famous man in literary history, was Fréron. Elie Catherine Fréron was born at Quimper in Britanny in 1719, and was educated by the Jesuits. He began a critical journal when he was only seven-and-twenty, under the title (not so strange then as now) of *Lettres de Madame la Comtesse de....* But he had already contributed to the *Observations* and *Jugements* of Desfontaines. The *Lettres* were suppressed in 1749, but continued under another title, and at last, in 1754, became the celebrated *Année Littéraire*, which for twenty years was full of gall and wormwood for Voltaire and all his partisans. Voltaire was never slow to retaliate in such matters, and his retorts culminated in the play of *L'Écossaise*, in which Fréron

was caricatured under the title Frélon (hornet). Every effort was made by the Encyclopædists (who were not in the least tolerant in practice) to procure the suppression of the *Année*. But Fréron had solid supports in high places and held on gallantly. It is said that his death, in 1776, was caused by a report that the suppression had been at last obtained. He certainly suffered both from gout and from heart disease, complaints not unlikely to make a sudden shock fatal. Fréron, like his English prototype John Dennis, has had the disadvantage that his adversaries were numerous, witty, not too scrupulous, and on the winning side. His personal character seems to have been none of the most amiable. But he was more frequently right than wrong in his criticisms on detached points, and his literary standards were decidedly higher and better than those of his enemies. He had moreover abundant wit and an imperturbable temper, which enabled him to turn the laugh against Voltaire in his criticism of the first representation of *L'Écossaise* itself.

Two other adversaries of Voltaire who deserve notice as literary critics were the Abbé Desfontaines (already mentioned) and Palissot. Desfontaines was a man of doubtful character; but it is not certain that he was in the wrong in the dispute which changed him from a friend into an enemy of Voltaire, and, like Fréron, he very frequently hit blots both in the patriarch's works and in those of his disciples. Palissot was the author of a play called *Les Philosophes*, an *Écossaise* on the other side, in which Rousseau, Diderot, and others were outrageously ridiculed. There was no great merit in this, but Palissot was not a bad critic in some ways, and his notes on French classics, especially Corneille, frequently show much greater taste than those of

most contemporary annotators.

Philosophe Criticism. D'Alembert, Diderot.

Les Feuilles de Grimm.

Diderot's Salons

His General Criticism.

The leaders of the *philosophes* themselves gave considerable attention to criticism. Voltaire wrote this, as he wrote everything, his principal critical work being his Commentary on Corneille, in which the constraint of general dramatic and poetic theory which the critic imposes on himself, and the merely conventional opinions in which he too often indulges, do not interfere with much acute criticism on points of detail. D'Alembert distinguished himself by his extraordinarily careful and polished *Éloges*, or obituary notices, which remain among the finest examples of critical appreciation of a certain kind to be found in literature. Although he did not definitely attempt a new theory of criticism, D'Alembert's vigorous intellect and unbiassed judgment enabled him to estimate authors so different as (for instance) Massillon and Marivaux with singular felicity. But the greatest of the Encyclopædists in this respect was unquestionably Diderot. While his contemporaries, bent on innovation in politics and religion, accepted

without doubt or complaint the narrowest, most conventional, and most unnatural system of literary criticism ever known, he, in his hurried and haphazard but masterly way, practically anticipated the views and even many of the *dicta* of the Romantic school. Most of Diderot's criticisms were written for Grimm's 'Leaves,' which thus acquired a value entirely different from and far superior to any that their nominal author could give them. Some of these short notices of current literature are among the finest examples of the review properly so called, though in point of mere literary style and expression they constantly suffer from Diderot's hurried way of setting down the first thing that came into his head in the first words that presented themselves to clothe it. But everywhere there is to be perceived the cardinal principle of sound criticism—that a book is to be judged, not according to arbitrary rules laid down *ex cathedra* for the class of books to which it is supposed to belong, but according to the scheme of its author in the first place, and in the second to the general laws of æsthetics; a science which, if the Germans named it, Diderot, by their own confession, did much to create. Even more remarkable in this respect than his book-criticisms are his *Salons*, criticisms of the biennial exhibitions of pictures in Paris, also written for Grimm. There are nine of these, ranging over a period of twenty-two years, and they have served as models for more than a century. Diderot did not adopt the old plan (as old as the Greeks) of mere description more or less elaborate of the picture, nor the plan of dilating on its merely technical characteristics, though, assisted by artist friends, he managed to introduce a fair amount of technicalities into his writing. His method is to take in the impression produced by the painting on his

mind, and to reproduce it with the associations and suggestions it has supplied. Thus his criticisms are often extremely discursive, and some of his most valuable reflections on matters at first sight quite remote from the fine arts occur in these *Salons*. Of drama Diderot had a formal theory which he illustrated by examples not quite so happy as his precepts. This theory involved the practical substitution of what is called in French *drame* for the conventional tragedy and comedy, and it brought the French theatre (or would have brought it if it had been adopted, which it was not until 1830) much nearer to the English than it had been. Diderot was moreover an enthusiastic admirer of English novels, and especially of Richardson and Sterne, partly no doubt because the sentimentalism which characterised them coincided with his own *sensibilité*, but also (it is fair to believe) because of their freedom from the artificiality and the strict observance of models which pervaded all branches of literature in France. Of poetry proper we have little formal criticism from Diderot. His own verses are few, and of no merit, nor was the poetry of the time at all calculated to excite any enthusiasm in him. But the æsthetic tendency which in other ways he expressed, and which he was the first to express, was that which, some forty years after his death, brought about the revival of poetry in France, through recurrence to nature, passion, truth, vividness, and variety of sentiment.

Newspapers of the Revolution.

The

Influence of Journalism.

So long as the old *régime* lasted journalism was naturally in a condition of suppression, but from the beginning of the Revolution it assumed at once an important position in the state, and a position still more important as a nursery of rising men of letters. At the time of the outbreak only two papers of importance existed, the already mentioned *Gazette de France*, and the *Journal de Paris*, in which Garat, André Chénier, Roucher, and many other men of distinction, won their spurs. 1789, however, saw the birth of numerous sheets, some of which continued almost till our own days. The most important was the *Gazette Nationale* or *Moniteur Universel*, in which not merely Garat and La Harpe, but Ginguené, a literary critic of talent and a republican of moderate principles, together with the future historian Lacretelle, and the comic poet, fabulist, and critic Andrieux, took part. Rivarol, Champcenetz, and Pelletier conducted the Royalist *Actes des Apôtres*, Marat started his ultra-republican *Ami du Peuple*, Camille Desmoulins the *Courier de Brabant*, Durozoy the *Gazette de Paris*. Barrère and Louvet, both notorious, if not famous names, launched for the first time a paper with a title destined to fortune, *Le Journal des Débats*; and Camille Desmoulins changed his oddly-named journal into one named more oddly still, *Les Révolutions de France et de Brabant*. All these, and more, were the growth of the single year 1789. The next saw the avowedly Royalist *Ami du Roi* of Royou, the atrocious *Père Duchêne* of Hébert, the cumbrously-named *Journal des Amis de la Constitution*, on which Fontanes, Clermont-Tonnerre, and other future Bonapartists and Constitutionalists

worked. In 1791 no paper of importance, except the short-lived Girondist *Chronique du Mois*, appeared. In the next year many Terrorist prints of no literary merit were started, and one, entitled *Nouvelles Politiques*, to which the veterans Suard and Morellet, with Guizot, a novice of the time to come, Lacretelle, Dupont de Nemours, and others, were contributors. In the later years of the revolutionary period, the only important newspaper was what was first called the *Journal de l'Empire*, and at the end of Napoleon's reign the *Journal des Débats*, on which Fiévée, Geoffroy, and many other writers of talent worked. In the early days of these various journals political interests naturally engrossed them. But the literary tastes and instincts of Parisians were too strong not to demand attention, and by degrees the critical part of the newspaper became of importance. Under the restoration this importance grew, and the result was the *Conservateur Littéraire* and the *Globe*, in the former of which Victor Hugo was introduced to the public, and in the latter Sainte-Beuve. This sudden uprise of journalism produced a remarkable change in the conditions of literary work, and offered chances to many who would previously have been dependent on individual patronage. But so far as regards literature, properly so called, all its results which were worth anything appeared subsequently in books, and there is therefore no need to refer otherwise than cursorily to the phenomenon of its development. Put very briefly, the influence of journalism on literature may be said to be this: it opens the way to those to whom it might otherwise be closed; it facilitates the destruction of erroneous principles; it assists production; and it interferes with labour and care spent over the thing produced.



Chamfort.

From the crowd of clever writers whom this outburst of journalism found ready to draw their pens in one service or the other, two names emerge as pre-eminently remarkable. Garat and Champcenetz were men of wit and ingenuity, André Chénier was a great poet, and his brother, Marie Joseph, a man of good literary taste and master of an elegant style, Lacretelle a painstaking historian, and many others worthy of note in their way. But Chamfort and Rivarol deserve a different kind of notice from this. They united in a remarkable fashion the peculiarities of the man of letters of the eighteenth century with the peculiarities of the man of letters of the nineteenth, and their individual merit was, though different and complementary, almost unique. Chamfort was born in Auvergne, in 1741. He was the natural son of a person who occupied the position of companion, and legally possessed nothing but his baptismal name of Nicholas. Like his rival, La Harpe, he obtained an exhibition at one of the Paris colleges, and distinguished himself. After leaving school he lived for a time by miscellaneous literature, and at last made his way to society and to literary success by dint of competing for and winning academic prizes. On the second occasion of his competition he defeated La Harpe. Afterwards Madame Helvétius assisted him, and at last he received from Chabanon (a third-rate man of letters, who may be most honourably mentioned here) a small annuity which made him independent. It is said that he married, and that his wife died six months afterwards. He was elected to the Academy, and patronised by all sorts of persons, from the queen downwards. But at the outbreak of the

Revolution he took the popular side, though he could not continue long faithful to it. In the Terror he was menaced with arrest, tried to commit suicide, and died horribly mutilated in 1794. Chamfort's literary works are considerable in bulk, but only a few of them have merit. His tragedies are quite worthless, his comedy, *La Jeune Indienne*, not much better. His verse tales exceed in licentiousness his models in La Fontaine, but fall far short of them in elegance and humour. His academic essays are heavy and scarcely intelligent. But his brief witticisms and his short anecdotes and apophthegms hardly admit a rival. Chamfort was a man soured by his want of birth, health, and position, and spoilt in mental development by the necessity of hanging on to the great persons of his time. But for a kind of tragi-comic satire, a *saeva indignatio*, taking the form of contempt of all that is exalted and noble, he has no equal in literature except Swift.

Rivarol.

The life of Rivarol was also an adventurous one, but much less sombre. He was born about 1750, of a family which seems to have had noble connections, but which, in his branch of it, had descended to innkeeping. Indeed it is said that Riverot, and not Rivarol, was the name which his father actually bore. He himself, however, first assumed the title of Chevalier de Parcieux, and then that of Comte de Rivarol. The way to literary distinction in those days was either the theatre or criticism, and Rivarol, with the acuteness which characterised him, knowing that he had no talent for the former, chose the latter. His translation (with essay and notes) of Dante is an extraordinarily clever book, and his discourse on the

universality of the French tongue, which followed, deserves the same description. It was not, however, in mere criticism that Rivarol's forte lay, though he long afterwards continued to exhibit his acuteness in it by utterances of various kinds. In 1788 (the year before the Revolution) he excited the laughter of all Paris, and the intense hatred of the hack-writers of his time, by publishing, in conjunction with Champcenetz, an *Almanach de nos Grands Hommes*, in which, by a mixture of fiction and fact, he caricatures his smaller contemporaries in the most pitiless manner. When the Revolution broke out Rivarol took the Royalist side, and contributed freely to its journals. He soon found it necessary to leave the country, and lived for ten years in Brussels, London, Hamburg, and Berlin, publishing occasionally pamphlets and miscellaneous works. He died at the Prussian capital in 1801. Not only has Rivarol a considerable claim as a critic, and a very high position as a political pamphleteer, but he is as much the master of the prose epigram as Chamfort is of the short anecdote. Following the example of his predecessors, he put many of his best things in a treatise, *De l'Homme Intellectuel et Moral*, which, as a whole, is very dull and unsatisfactory, though it is lighted up by occasional flashes of the most brilliant wit. His detached sayings, which are not so much *Pensées* or maxims as conversational good things, are among the most sparkling in literature, and, with Chamfort's, occupy a position which they keep almost entirely to themselves. It has been said of him and of Chamfort (who, being of similar talents and on opposite sides, were naturally bitter foes) that they 'knew men, but only from the outside, and from certain limited superficial and accidental points of view. They knew books, too, but their knowledge

was circumscribed by the fashions of a time which was not favourable to impartial literary appreciation. Hence their anecdotes are personal rather than general, rather amusing than instructive, rather showing the acuteness and ingenuity of the authors than able to throw light on the subjects dealt with. But as mere tale-tellers and sayers of sharp things they have few rivals.' It may be added that they complete and sum up the merits and defects of the French society of the eighteenth century, and that, in so far as literature can do this, the small extent of their selected works furnishes a complete comment on that society.

Joubert.

Contemporary with these two writers, though, from the posthumous publication of his works years after the end of his long life, he seems in a manner a contemporary of our own, was Joseph Joubert, the last great *Pensée*-writer of France and of Europe. Joubert's birthplace was Montignac, in Perigord, and the date of his birth 1754, three years after that of Rivarol, and about twelve after that of Chamfort. He was educated at Toulouse, where, without taking regular orders, he joined the Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne, a teaching community, and studied and taught till he was twenty-two years old. Then his health being, as it was all through his life, weak, he returned home, and succeeding before long to a small but sufficient fortune, he went to Paris. Here he became intimate with the second *philosophe* generation (La Harpe, Marmontel, etc.), and is said to have for a time been an enthusiastic hearer of Diderot, the most splendid talker of that or any age. But Joubert's ideals and method of thought were

radically different from those of the *Philosophes*, and he soon found more congenial literary companions, of whom the chief were Fontanes and Chênedollé, while he found his natural home in the salon of two ladies of rank and cultivation, Madame de Beaumont and Madame de Vintimille. Before long he married and established himself in Paris with a choice library, into which, it is said, no eighteenth-century writer was admitted. His health became worse and worse, yet he lived to the age of seventy, dying in 1824. Fourteen years afterwards Chateaubriand, at the request of his widow, edited a selection of his remains, and four years later still his nephew, M. de Raynal, produced a fuller edition.

Joubert's works consist (with the exception of a few letters) exclusively of *Pensées* and maxims, which rank in point of depth and of exquisite literary expression with those of La Rochefoucauld, and in point of range above them. They are even wider in this respect than those of Vauvenargues, which they also much resemble. Ethics, politics, theology, literature, all occupy Joubert. In politics he is, as may be perhaps expected from his time and circumstances, decidedly anti-revolutionary. In theology, without being exactly orthodox according to any published scheme of orthodoxy, Joubert is definitely Christian. In ethics he holds a middle place between the unsparing hardness of the self-interest school and the somewhat gushing manner of the sentimentalists. But his literary thoughts are perhaps the most noteworthy, not merely from our present point of view. All alike have the characteristic of intense compression (he described his literary aim in the phrase 'tormented by the ambition of putting a book in a page, a page into a phrase, and a phrase into a word'), while all have the same lucidity and

freedom from enigma. All are alike polished in form and style according to the best models of the seventeenth century; but whereas study and reflection might have been sufficient to give Joubert the material of his other thoughts, the wide difference between his literary judgments and those of his time is less easily explicable. No finer criticism on style and on poetry in the abstract exists than his, and yet his reading of poetry cannot have been very extensive. He is even just to the writers of the eighteenth century, whose manner he disliked, and whose society he had abjured. He seems, indeed, to have had almost a perfect faculty of literary appreciation, and wherever his sayings startle the reader it will generally be found that there is a sufficient explanation beneath. There is probably no writer in any language who has said an equal number of remarkable things on an equal variety of subjects in an equally small space, and with an equally high and unbroken excellence of style and expression. This is the intrinsic worth of Joubert. In literary history he has yet another interest, that of showing in the person of a man living out of the literary world, and far removed from the operation of cliques, the process which was inevitably bringing about the great revolution of 1830.

Courier.

Like Joubert, Paul Louis Courier had a great dislike and even contempt for the authors of the eighteenth century, but curiously enough this dislike did not in the least affect his theological or political opinions. He was born at Paris, in 1772, being the son of a wealthy man of the middle class. His youth was passed in the country, and he early displayed a great

liking for classical study. As a compromise between business, which he hated, and literature, of which his father would not hear, he entered the army in 1792. He served on the Rhine, and not long after joining broke his leave in a manner rather unpleasantly resembling desertion. His friends succeeded in saving him from the consequences of this imprudence, and he served until Wagram, when he finally left the army, again in very odd circumstances. He then lived in Italy (where his passion for the classics led him into an absurd dispute about an alleged injury he had caused to a manuscript of Longus) until the fall of the Empire. When he was forty-five years old he was known in literature only as a translator of classics, remarkable for scholarship and for careful modelling of his style upon the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rather than upon the eighteenth. Although he had hitherto taken little active part in politics, the so-called 'ideas of 89' had sunk deeply into him. Impelled, not by any wide views on the future of the nation, but apparently by the mere *bourgeois* hatred of titles, old descent, and the other privileges of the aristocracy, he began a series of pamphlets to the success of which there is no rival except that of the Letters of Junius, while Junius falls far short of Courier in intrinsic literary merit. There are, indeed, few authors whose merit resides so wholly in their style and power of expression as Courier's. His thought is narrow in the extreme; even where its conclusions are just it rests rather on the jealousies of the typical *bourgeois* than on anything else. But in irony he has, with the exception of Pascal and Swift, no superior. He began by a *Pétition aux Deux Chambres*. Then he contributed a series of letters to *Le Censeur*, a reform journal; then he published various pamphlets, usually signed

'Paul Louis, Vigneron,' and ostensibly addressed to his neighbours and fellow villagers. He had established himself on a small estate in Touraine, which he farmed himself. But he was much in Paris, and his political writings made him acquainted with the prison of Sainte Pélagie. His death, in April 1825, was singular, and indeed mysterious. He was shot, the murderer escaping. It was suspected to be one of his own servants, to whom he was a harsh and unpopular master, and the suspicion was confirmed some years afterwards by the confession of a game-keeper. His *Simple Discours* against the presentation of Chambord to the Duc de Bordeaux, his *Livret de Paul Louis*, his *Pamphlet des Pamphlets*, are all models of their kind. Nowhere is the peculiar quality which is called in French *narquois* displayed with more consummate skill. The language is at once perfectly simple and of the utmost literary polish, the arguments, whether good or bad, always tellingly expressed. But perhaps he has written nothing better than the *Lettre à M. Renouard*, in which he discusses the mishap with the manuscript of Longus, and the letter to the *Académie des Inscriptions* on their refusal to elect him. The style of Courier is almost unique, and its merits are only denied by those who do not possess the necessary organ for appreciating it.

Sénancour.

This chapter may perhaps be most appropriately concluded by the notice of a singular writer who, although longer lived, was contemporary with Courier. Étienne Pivert de Sénancour may be treated almost indifferently as a moral essayist, or as a producer of the peculiar kind of faintly narrative and strongly ethical work which Rousseau had made

fashionable. The infusion of narrative in his principal and indeed only remarkable work, *Obermann*, is however so slight, that he will come in best here, though in his old age he wrote a professed novel, *Isabella*. Sénancour was born in 1770, his father being a man of position and fortune, who lost both at the Revolution. The son was destined for the Church, but ran away and spent a considerable time in Switzerland, where he married, returning to France towards the end of the century. He then published divers curious works of half-sentimental, half-speculative reflection, by far the most important of which, *Obermann*, appeared in 1804. Then Sénancour had to take to literary hack-work for a subsistence; but in his later years Villemain and Thiers procured pensions for him, and he was relieved from want. He died in 1846. *Obermann* has not been ill described by George Sand as a *René* with a difference; Chateaubriand's melancholy hero feeling that he could do anything if he would but has no spirit for any task, Sénancour's that he is unequal to his own aspirations. No brief epigram of this kind can ever fully describe a book; but this, though inadequate, is not incorrect so far as it goes. The book is a series of letters, in which the supposed writer delivers melancholy reflections on all manner of themes, especially moral problems and natural beauty. Sénancour was in a certain sense a *Philosophe*, in so far that he was dogmatically unorthodox and discarded conventional ideas as to moral conduct; but he is much nearer Rousseau than Diderot. Indeed, he sometimes seems to the reader little more than an echo of the former, until his more distinctly modern characteristics (characteristics which were not fully or generally felt or reproduced till the visionary and discouraged generation of 1820-1850)

reappear. It is perhaps not unfair to say that the pleasure with which this generation recognised its own sentiments in *Obermann* gave rise to a traditional estimate of the literary value of that book which is a little exaggerated. Yet it has considerable merit, especially in the simplicity and directness with which expression is given to a class of sentiments very likely to find vent in language either extravagant or affected. Its form is that of a series of letters, dated from various places, but chiefly from a solitary valley in the Alps in which the hero lives, meditates, and pursues the occupations of husbandry on his small estate.

CHAPTER VI.

PHILOSOPHERS.

The philosophe movement.

The entire literary and intellectual movement of the eighteenth century is very often called the *philosophe* movement, and the writers who took part in it *les philosophes*. The word 'philosopher' is, however, here used in a sense widely different from its proper and usual one. *Philosophie*, in the ordinary language of the middle and later seventeenth century, meant simply freethinking on questions of religion. This freethinking, of which Saint-Evremond was the most

distinguished representative, involved no revolutionary or even reforming attitude towards politics or practical affairs of any kind. As however the next century advanced, the character of French scepticism became altered. Contact with English Deism gave form and precision to its theological or anti-theological side. The reading of Locke animated it against Cartesianism, and the study of English politics excited it against the irresponsible despotism and the crushing system of ecclesiastical and aristocratic privilege which made almost the entire burden of government rest on the shoulders least able to bear it. French 'philosophism' then became suddenly militant and practical. Toleration and liberty of speculation in religion, constitutional government in politics, the equalisation of pressure in taxation, and the removal of privilege, together with reform in legal procedure, were the objects which it had most at heart. In merely speculative philosophy, that is to say, in metaphysics, it was much less active, though it had on the whole a tendency towards materialism, and by a curious accident it was for the most part rigidly conservative in literary criticism. But it was eager in the cultivation of ethics from various points of view, and busy in the study both of the philosophy of history, which may be said to date from that period, and of physical science, in which Newton took the place of Locke as guide. The almost universal presence of this practical and reforming spirit makes it not by any means so easy to subdivide the branches of literature, as is the case in the seventeenth century. La Bruyère had said, in the days of acquiescence in absolutism, that to a Frenchman 'Les grands sujets sont défendus,' meaning thereby theology and politics. The general spirit of the eighteenth century

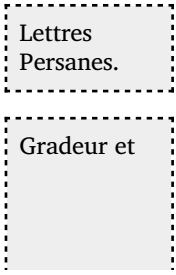
was a vigorous denial of this, and an eager investigation into these 'grands sujets.' This spirit made its appearance in the most unexpected quarters, and in the strangest forms. It converted (in the hands of Voltaire) the stiffest and most conventional form of drama ever known into a pamphlet. It insinuated polemics under the guise of history, and made the ponderous and apparently matter-of-fact folios of a Dictionary of Arts and Manufactures the vehicles of arguments for reform. It overflowed into every department of literary occupation. Some of the chief prose manifestations of this spirit have been discussed and arranged in the two previous chapters under the head of history and essay writing. The rest will be dealt with here. A certain distinction of form, though it is often rather arbitrary than real, renders such a subdivision possible, while it is desirable in the interest of clearness. It will be noticed that while the attack is voluminous and manifold, the defence is almost unrepresented in literature. This is one of the most remarkable facts in literary history. In England, from which the *philosophe* movement borrowed so much, the Deists had not only not had their own way in the literary battle, but had been beaten all along the line by the superior intellectual and literary prowess of the defenders of orthodoxy. The case in France went otherwise and almost by default. The only defender of orthodoxy whose name has survived in literature —for Fréron, despite his power, was little more than a literary critic—is the Abbé Guénée. In so singular a state was the church of France that scarcely a single preacher or theologian, after Massillon's death in 1742, could challenge equality with even third- or fourth-rate men of letters; while, after the death of the Chancellor d'Aguesseau in 1751, no layman of

eminence can be named until Joseph de Maistre, nearly half a century later, who was at once a considerable writer and a declared defender of religion. Indeed no small proportion of the enemies of ecclesiasticism were actually paid and privileged members of the Church itself. Thus little opposition, except that of simple *vis inertiae*, was offered to the new views and the crusade by which they were supported. This crusade, however, had two very different stages. The first, of which the greatest representatives are Montesquieu and in a way Voltaire himself, was critical and reforming, but in no way revolutionary; the second, of whom the Encyclopædists are the representatives, was, consciously or unconsciously, bent on a complete revolution. We shall give an account first of the chief representatives of these two great classes of the general movement, and then of those offshoots or schools of that movement which busied themselves with the special subjects of economics, ethics, and metaphysics, as distinguished from general politics.

Montesquieu.

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu et de la Brède, was born at the *château*, which gave him the last-named title, in the neighbourhood of Bordeaux, on the 18th of January, 1689. His family was not of the oldest, but it had, as he tells us, some two or three centuries of proved *noblesse* to boast of, and had been distinguished in the law. He himself was destined for that profession, and after a youth of laborious study became councillor of the parliament of Bordeaux in 1714, and in a year or two president. In 1721 he produced the *Lettres Persanes*, and four years later the curious little prose poem called the

Temple de Gnide. Some objection was made by the minister Fleury, who was rigidly orthodox, to the satirical tone of the former book in ecclesiastical matters, but Montesquieu was none the less elected of the Academy in 1728. He had given up his position at the Bordeaux Parlement a few years before this, and set out on an extensive course of travel, noting elaborately the manners, customs, and constitution of the countries through which he passed. Two years of this time were spent in England, for which country, politically speaking, he conceived a great admiration. On his return to France he lived partly in Paris, but chiefly at his estate of La Brède, taking an active interest in its management, and in the various occupations of a country gentleman, but also working unceasingly at his masterpiece, the *Esprit des Lois*. This, however, was not published for many years, and was long preceded by the book which ranks second in importance to it, the *Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*, 1734. This was Montesquieu's first serious work, and it placed him as high among serious writers as the *Lettres Persanes* had among lighter authors. The *Esprit des Lois* itself did not appear till 1748. Montesquieu, whose life was in no way eventful, lived for some years longer, dying in Paris on the 10th of February, 1755. Besides the works mentioned he had written several dialogues and other trifles, a considerable number of *Pensées*, and some articles for the earlier volumes of the Encyclopædia.



Décadence des Romains

Montesquieu probably deserves the title of the greatest man of letters of the French eighteenth century, the superior versatility and more superficial brilliancy of Voltaire being compensated in him by far greater originality and depth of thought. His three principal works deserve to be considered in turn. The *Lettres Persanes*, in which the opinions of a foreigner on French affairs are given, is not entirely original in conception; the idea of the vehicle being possibly suggested by the *Amusements Divers* of Dufresny the comic author. The working out, however, is entirely Montesquieu's, and was followed closely enough by the various writers, who, with Voltaire and Goldsmith at their head, have adopted a similar medium for satire and criticism since. It is not too much to say that the entire spirit of the *philosophe* movement in its more moderate form is contained and anticipated in the *Lettres Persanes*. All the weaknesses of France in political, ecclesiastical, and social arrangements are here touched on with a light but sure hand, and the example is thus set of attacking 'les grands sujets.' From a literary point of view the form of this work is at least as remarkable as the matter. Voltaire himself is nowhere more witty, while Montesquieu has over his rival the indefinable but unquestionable advantage of writing more like a gentleman. There is no single book in which the admirable capacity of the French language for jesting treatment of serious subjects is better shown than in the *Lettres Persanes*. Montesquieu's next important work was of a very different character. The *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur et de la Décadence des Romains* is an entirely

serious work. It does not as yet exhibit the magnificent breadth of view and the inexhaustible fertility of explanation which distinguish the *Esprit des Lois*, but it has been well regarded as a kind of preliminary exercise for that great work. Montesquieu here treats an extensive but homogeneous and manageable subject from the point of view of philosophical history, after a method which had been partially tried by Bossuet, and systematically arranged by Vico in Italy, but which was not fully developed till Turgot's time. That is to say, his object is not merely to exhibit, but to explain the facts, and to explain them on general principles applicable with due modifications to other times and other histories. Accordingly, the style of the *Grandeur et Décadence* is as grave and dignified as that of the *Lettres Persanes* is lively and malicious. It is sometimes a little too sententious in tone, and suffers from the habit, induced probably by *Pensée*-writing, of composing in very brief paragraphs. But it is an excellent example of its kind, and especially remarkable for the extreme clearness and lucidity with which the march and sequence of events in the gross is exhibited.

Esprit des Lois.

The *Esprit des Lois* is, however, a far greater book than either of these, and far more original. The title may be thought to be not altogether happy, and indeed rather ambiguous, because it does not of itself suggest the extremely wide sense in which the word law is intended to be taken. An exact if cumbrous title for the book would be 'On the Relation of Human Laws and Customs to the Laws of Nature.' The author begins somewhat formally with the old distinction of politics into democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy. He discusses the principles of each and their bearings on education, on positive law, on social conditions, on military strength, offensive and defensive, on individual liberty, on taxation and finance. Then an abrupt return is made from the effects to the causes of constitutions and polity. The theory of the influence of physical conditions, and especially of climate, on political and social institutions—a theory which is perhaps more than any other identified with the book—receives special attention, and a somewhat disproportionate space is given to the question of slavery in connection with it. From climate Montesquieu passes to the nature of the soil, as in its turn affecting civil polity. He then attacks the subject of manners and customs as distinct from laws, of trade and commerce, of the family, of jurisprudence, of religion. The book concludes with an elaborate examination of the feudal system in France. Throughout it the reader is equally surprised at the varied and exact knowledge of the author, and at his extraordinary fertility in general views. This fertility is indeed sometimes a

snare to him, and leads to rash generalisation. But what has to be remembered is, that he was one of the pioneers of this method of historical exploration, and that hundreds of principles which, after correction by his successors, have passed into general acceptance, were discovered, or at least enunciated, by him for the first time. Nothing is more remarkable in Montesquieu, and nothing more distinguishes him from the common run of his somewhat self-satisfied and short-sighted successors, than the steady hold he keeps on the continuity of history, and his superiority to the shallow view of his day (constantly put forward by Voltaire), according to which the middle ages were a dark period of barbarism, the study of which could be of no use to any one but a mere curiosity hunter. Montesquieu too, almost alone of his contemporaries, had a matured and moderate plan of political and social reform. While some of them indulged in an idle and theoretical Republicanism, and others in the old unpractical *frondeur* spirit, eager to pull down but careless about building up, Montesquieu had conceived the idea of a limited monarchy, not identical with that of England, but in many ways similar to it; an ideal which in the first quarter of the eighteenth century might have been put in practice with far better chance of success than in the first quarter of the nineteenth. The merely literary merits of this great book are equal to its philosophical merits. The vast mass of facts with which the author deals is selected with remarkable judgment, and arranged with remarkable lucidity. The style is sober, devoid of ornament, but admirably proportioned and worked out. There are few greater books, not merely in French but in literature, than the *Esprit des Lois*.



Voltaire.

With Voltaire the case is very different. Very many of his innumerable works have directly philosophical titles, but no one of them is a work of much interest or merit. His 'Philosophic Letters,' 1733, published after his return from England, and the source of much trouble to him, are the lively but not very trustworthy medium of a contrast between English liberty and toleration and French arbitrary government. His 'Discourses on Man,' and other verse of the same kind, are verse-philosophy of the class of Pope's. The pompously named 'Treatise on Metaphysics,' 1734, is very much the same in substance if not in form. The remarks on Pascal's *Pensées* are unimportant contributions to the crusade against superstition; the Philosophical Dictionary, 1764, is a heterogeneous collection of articles with the same object. The *Essai sur les Mœurs*, 1756, composed not improbably in rivalry with Montesquieu, contains much acute reflection on particulars, but is injured by the author's imperfect information as to the subjects of which he was treating, by his entirely unphilosophical contempt for the 'Dark Ages,' and indeed by the absence of any general conception of history which can be called philosophical. Voltaire's real importance, however, in connection with the *philosophe* movement is to be found, not in the merit or value of any one of his professedly philosophical books, but in the fact that all his works, his poems, his plays, his histories, his romances, his innumerable flying essays and papers of all sorts, were invariably saturated with its spirit, and helped to communicate it to others. It cannot be said that Voltaire had any clear conception of the object which he wished to attain, except in so far as

the famous watchword 'Écrasez l'Infâme' goes. This means not, as has been erroneously thought, 'crush Christianity,' but 'crush persecuting superstition.' He was by no means in favour of any political reform, except as far as private rights were concerned. He would have liked the exaggerated political privileges of the Church (which enabled it to persecute dissidents, and inflicted on laymen an unfair share of taxation) to be revoked, the cruel and irrational procedure of the French tribunals to be reformed, Church lands to be in great part secularised, and so forth; but he never seems to have faced the necessity of connecting these reforms with a radical alteration of the whole system of government. The sharp point of his ridicule was, however, always at the service of the aggressive party, especially for what he had most at heart, the overthrow of dogmatic and traditional theology and ecclesiasticism. For this purpose, as has been said already, he was willing to make, and did make, all his works, no matter of what kind (except a few scattered writings on mathematics and physics, pure and simple, in which he took great interest), into more or less elaborate pamphlets, and to put at the service of the movement his great position as the head of French and indeed of European letters. His habitual inaccuracy, and the inferiority of his mind in strictly logical faculty and in commanding range of view, disabled him from really serious contributions to philosophy of any kind. The curious mixture of defects and merits in this great writer is apt to render piecemeal notice of him, such as is necessitated by the plan of this book, apparently unfavourable. But no literary historian can take leave of Voltaire with words of intentional disfavour. The mere fact that it has been necessary to take detailed notice of him in every one of the last six chapters, is

roughly indicative of his unequalled versatility. But, versatile as he is, there is perhaps no department of his work, save serious poetry and criticism, in which from the literary point of view he fails to attain all but the highest rank.

The Encyclopædia.

Montesquieu and Voltaire were, as has been said, precursors rather than members of the *philosophe* group proper, which is identified with the Encyclopædia, and to this group it is now time to come. The history of this famous book is rather curious. The English Cyclopædia of Ephraim Chambers had appeared in 1727. About fifteen years after its publication a translation of it was offered to and accepted by the French bookseller, Le Breton. But Le Breton was not satisfied with a bare translation, and wished the book to be worked up into something more extensive. He applied to different men of letters, and finally to Diderot, who, enlisting the Chancellor d'Aguesseau in the plan, obtaining privilege for the enlarged work, and mustering by degrees a staff of contributors which included almost every man of letters of any repute in France, succeeded in carrying it out. The task was anything but a sinecure. It occupied nearly twenty years of Diderot's life; it was repeatedly threatened and sometimes actually prohibited; and D'Alembert (Diderot's principal coadjutor, and in fact co-editor) actually retired from it in disgust at the obstacles thrown in their way. The book so produced was by no means a mere pamphlet or controversial work, though many of the articles were made polemical by those to whom they were entrusted. The principal of

its contributors however—Voltaire himself was one—became gradually recognised as representing the criticism of existing institutions, many of which, it must be confessed, were so bad at the time that simple examination of them was in itself the severest censure. It becomes necessary, therefore, to mention the names and works of the most remarkable of this group who have not found or will not find a place elsewhere.

Diderot.

Denis Diderot was born at Langres, on the 15th October, 1713. He was brilliantly successful at school, but on being required to choose a profession rejected both church and law. It appears, however, that he studied medicine. His father, a man of affectionate temper but strong will, refused to support him unless he chose a regular mode of life, and Diderot at once set up for himself and attempted literature. Not much is authentically known of his life till, in 1743, he married; but he seems to have lived partly by taking pupils, partly by miscellaneous literary hack-work. After his marriage his household expenses (and others) quickened his literary activity, and before long he received, in the editorship of the Encyclopædia, a charge which, though ridiculously ill paid and very laborious, practically secured him from want for many years, while it gave him a very important position. He made many friends, and was especially intimate with the Baron d'Holbach, a rich and hospitable man, and a great adept in chemistry and atheism. Before this Diderot had had some troubles, being even imprisoned at Vincennes for his *Essai sur les Aveugles*, 1749. Besides his Encyclopædia work Diderot was lavish in contributing, often

without either remuneration or acknowledgment of any kind, to the work of other men, and especially to the correspondence by which his friend Grimm kept the sovereigns of Germany and Russia informed of the course of things in Paris. The most remarkable of these contributions—criticisms of literature and art—have been noticed elsewhere, as have Diderot's historical and fictitious productions. As he grew old his necessities were met by a handsome act of Catherine of Russia, who bought his library, left him the use of it, and gave him a pension nominally as payment for his trouble as caretaker. He made, in 1773, a journey to St. Petersburg to pay his thanks, and on his return stayed for some time in Holland. He died in Paris in 1784. Diderot's miscellaneous works are, like Voltaire's, penetrated by the *philosophe* spirit, but it is less prominent, owing to his greater acquaintance with the individual matters which he handled. His contributions to definite philosophical literature are not unimportant. He began by an 'Essay on Merit and Virtue,' 1745, imitated from Shaftesbury, and by some more original *Pensées Philosophiques*. These pieces were followed by *La Promenade du Sceptique*, written somewhat in the fashion of Berkeley's *Alciphron*, and by some minor treatises, the most important of which are the *Lettres sur les Sourds et Muets*, and by the already mentioned *Lettre sur les Aveugles*, which led to his imprisonment, with some 'Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature.' A singular and characteristic book containing not a few acute but fantastic ideas is *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, which, like an elaborate criticism on Helvétius' *De l'Homme,* was not printed during Diderot's life. The *Essai sur les Règnes de Claude et de Néron* was one of the latest of Diderot's works, and is a kind of historico-

philosophical disquisition. The last piece of any importance which is included in the philosophical works of Diderot is an extensive scheme for a Russian university.

The characteristics of Diderot's philosophical works are the same as the characteristics of those other works of his which have been noticed, and his general position as a writer may well be considered here. There has seldom been an author who was more fertile in ideas. It is impossible to name a subject which Diderot has not treated, and hardly possible to name one on which he has not said striking and memorable things. The peculiarity of his mind was, that it could adjust itself, with hardly any effort, to any subject presented to it, grasp that subject and express thoughts on it in a novel and effective manner. He had moreover, what some other men of his century, notably Voltaire, lacked, a vast supply of positive information on the subjects with which he dealt, and an entire independence of conventional points of view in dealing with them. This independence was in some respects pushed to an unfortunate length, exposing him (whether deservedly or not, is an exceedingly difficult point to resolve) to the charge of atheism, and (beyond all doubts deservedly) to the charge of wilful disregard of the accepted decencies of language. Another and very serious fault, arising partly from temperament and partly from circumstances, was the want of needful pains and deliberation which characterises most of Diderot's work. That work is extremely voluminous, and even as it is, we have not anything like the whole of it in a collected form. Indeed, by far the larger part was never given to the world by the author himself in any deliberate or finished shape, and much of what he did publish was the result of

mere improvisation. The consequence is, that Diderot is accused, not without truth, of having written good passages, but no good book, and that a full appreciation of his genius is only to be obtained by a most laborious process of wading through hundreds and thousands of pages of very inferior work. The result of that process, however, is never likely to be doubtful in the case of competent examiners. It is the conviction that Diderot ranks in point of originality and versatility of thought among the most fertile thinkers of France, and in point of felicity and idiosyncrasy of expression, among the most remarkable of her writers.

D'Alembert.

His coadjutor during the earlier part of his great work was a man curiously different from himself. Diderot was a rapid and careless writer, devoted to general society and conversation, interested in everything that was brought to his notice, passionate, unselfish, frequently extravagant. Jean le Rond d'Alembert (who was really an illegitimate son of Madame de Tencin by an uncertain father) was an extraordinarily careful writer, a man of retired habits, reserved, self-centred and phlegmatic. He was born in 1717, was exposed on the steps of a church, but was brought up carefully by a foster-mother of the lower classes, to whom he was consigned by the authorities, and had a not insufficient annuity settled upon him by his supposed father. He was educated at the Collège Mazarin, and early showed great aptitude for mathematics, in which equally with literature he distinguished himself in after years. He was elected a member of the Academy of Sciences as early as at the age of four-and-twenty. After he had joined Diderot,

he wrote a preliminary discourse for the Encyclopædia—a famous and admirable sketch of the sciences—besides many articles. Of these, one on Geneva brought the book into more trouble than almost any other contribution, though D'Alembert was equally moderate as a thinker and as a writer. D'Alembert, as has been said, retired from the work after this storm, being above all things solicitous of peace and quietness. His refusals of the offers of Frederick II. in 1752 to go to Berlin as President of the Academy, and of Catherine II. to undertake, at what was then an enormous salary, the education of the Grand Duke Paul, have been variously taken as evidence of his disinterestedness, and of his shrewd dislike to possibly false positions, and the chance of such experiences as those of Voltaire. In his later life he and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, as has been mentioned, kept house together. He died shortly before Diderot, in 1783. Perhaps his best literary works are his already mentioned Academic *Éloges*, or obituaries on important men of letters and science. D'Alembert contributed to the movement exactness of thought and precision of style, but his influence was more purely intellectual than that of any other member of the *philosophe* group.

Rousseau.

The connection of Rousseau with the Encyclopædia itself was brief and not important. Yet it is here that his personal and general literary character and achievements may be most conveniently treated. Jean Jacques Rousseau was born at Geneva, on the 28th of June, 1712, of a family which had emigrated from France during the religious troubles. His father was a watchmaker, his mother died when he was

very young. His education was not exactly neglected, but he went to no regular school, which, considering his peculiarities, was perhaps a misfortune. After being introduced to the law and to engraving, in both cases with ill success, he ran away and practically continued a vagabond to the end of his life. He served as a footman, was an inmate of a kind of proselytising almshouse at Turin, and went through many odd adventures, for which there is the dubious authority of his strange *Confessions*. When he was just of age, he was taken in by Madame de Warens, a Savoyard lady of birth and position, who had before been kind to him. With her he lived for some time, chiefly at Les Charmettes, near Chambéry. But being superseded in her good graces, he went to Lyons, where he lived by teaching. Thence he went to Paris, having little to depend on but an imperfect knowledge of music. In 1741 he was attached to the French Embassy at Venice under M. de Montaigu, but (as he did all through his life) he quarrelled in some way with his patron, and returned to Paris. Here he became intimate with Diderot, Grimm, and all the *philosophe* circle, especially with Madame d'Epinay. She established him in a cottage called the Hermitage with his companion Thérèse le Vasseur, whose acquaintance he had made in Paris, and whom he afterwards married. The extraordinary quarrel which took place between Rousseau and Diderot has been endlessly written about. It need only be said that Rousseau showed his usual temper and judgment, that Diderot was to all appearance quite guiltless, and that the chief fault lay elsewhere, probably with Grimm. For a time the Duke of Luxembourg protected him, then he was obliged, or thought himself obliged, to go into exile. Marshal Keith, Governor of Neufchatel for

the King of Prussia, received and protected him, with the inevitable result that Rousseau considered it impossible to continue in this as in every other refuge. David Hume was his next good angel, and carried him to England in 1766. But the same drama repeated itself, as it did subsequently with the Prince de Conti and with Madame d'Enghien. Rousseau's last protector was M. de Girardin, who gave him, after he had lived in Paris in comparative quiet for several years, a home at Ermenonville in 1778. He did not outlive the year, dying in a somewhat mysterious fashion, which has never been fully explained, on the 2nd of July.

Rousseau was a man of middle age before he produced any literary work of importance. He had in his youth been given to music, and indeed throughout his life the slender profits of music copying were almost his only independent source of income. His knowledge of the subject was far from scientific, but he produced an operetta which was not unsuccessful, and, but for his singular temperament, he might have followed up the success. His first literary work of importance was a prose essay for the Dijon Academy on the subject of the effects of civilisation on society. Either of his own motion, or at the suggestion of Diderot, Rousseau took the apparently paradoxical line of arguing that all improvements on the savage life had been curses rather than blessings, and he gained the prize. In 1755 his *Discours sur l'Origine de l'Inégalité* appeared at Amsterdam; in 1760 his famous novel *Julie*, and in 1764 *Emile*, both of which have been spoken of already. Between the two appeared the still more famous and influential *Contrat Social*. Of the other works of Rousseau published during his lifetime, the most famous, perhaps, was his letter to

D'Alembert on the subject of the introduction of theatrical performances into Geneva, a characteristic paradox which made a bitter enemy of the most powerful of French men of letters. Besides these, the *Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire*, the *Lettres de la Montagne*, and above all, the unique *Confessions*, have to be reckoned. The last, like several of Rousseau's other works, did not appear till after his death.

Of all the writers mentioned in this chapter the influence of Rousseau on literature and on life was probably the largest. He was the direct inspirer of the men who made the French Revolution, and the theories of his *Contrat Social* were closer at the root of Jacobin politics than any other. His fervid declamation about equality and brotherhood, and his sentimental republicanism, were seed as well suited to the soil in which they were sown as Montesquieu's reasoned constitutionalism was unsuited to it. Rousseau, indeed, if the proof of the excellence of preaching is in the practice of the hearers, was the greatest preacher of the century. He denounced the practice of putting infants out to nurse, and mothers began to suckle their own children; he recommended instruction in useful arts, and many an *émigré* noble had to thank Rousseau for being able to earn his bread in exile; he denounced speculative atheism, urging the undogmatic but emotional creed of his *Vicaire Savoyard*, and the first wave of the religious reaction was set going to culminate in the Catholic movement of Chateaubriand and Lamennais. But in literature itself his influence was quite as powerful. He was not, indeed, the founder of the school of analysis of feeling in the novel, but he was the populariser of it. He was almost the founder of sentimentalism in general literature, and he was absolutely the first to make word-painting of nature

an almost indispensable element of all imaginative and fictitious writing both in prose and poetry. Some of his characteristics were taken up in quick succession by Goethe in Germany, by Bernardin de St. Pierre and Chateaubriand in France. Others were for the time less eagerly imitated, and though Madame de Stael and her lover Benjamin Constant did something to spread them, it was reserved for the Romantic movement to develop them fully. It was singular, no doubt, and this is not the place to undertake the explanation of the singularity, that Rousseau, who detested most of the conclusions, and almost all the methods of the Encyclopædists, should be counted in with them, and should have undoubtedly helped in the first place to accomplish their result. But such is the case. His peculiar literary characteristics are perhaps better exhibited in the *Confessions* and in the miscellaneous works, than in either of the novels. The *Contrat Social* is a very remarkable piece of pseudo-argument. It is felt from the first that the whole assumption on which it reposes is historically false and philosophically absurd. Yet there is an appearance of speciousness in the arguments, an adroit mixture of logic and rhetoric, of order and method, which is exceedingly seductive. The *Confession du Vicaire Savoyard*, with many passages allied to it in the smaller works, has, despite the staleness of the language (which was hackneyed by a thousand empty talkers during the Revolution), not a little dignity and persuasive force. But it is in the *Confessions* that the literary power of the author appears at its fullest. Never, perhaps, was a more miserable story of human weakness revealed, and the peculiar thing is that Rousseau does not limit his exhibitions of himself to exhibitions of engaging frailty. The acts which he admits are in many cases

indescribably base, mean, and disgusting. The course of conduct which he portrays is at its best that of a man entirely destitute of governing will, petulant, often positively ungrateful, always playing into the hands of the enemies whom his hallucinations supposed to exist, and frustrating the efforts of the friends whom he allows himself, if only for a time, to have possessed. Yet the narrative and dramatic skill with which all this is presented is so great, that there is hardly room for a sense of repulsion which is merged in interest, not necessarily sympathetic interest, but still interest. Of the feeling for natural beauty, which is everywhere present in these remarkable works, it is enough to say that in French prose literature, it may almost be said in the prose literature of Europe, it was entirely original. Part of Rousseau's devotion to nature arose no doubt from his moody and retiring temperament, which led him to rejoice in anything rather than the society of his fellow men. But this would not of itself have given him the literary skill with which he expresses these feelings. It is not so much in set descriptions of particular scenes as in slight occasional thoughts, embodying the emotions experienced at the sight of a flower, a lake-surface, a mountain side, a forest glade, that this mastery is shown. Yet of the more elaborate passages of this kind in other writers few can surpass the best things of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, the *Confessions*, and the *Rêveries*. There is nothing novel to readers of the present day in such things, though they are seldom done so happily. But to the readers of Rousseau's day they were absolutely novel. It is in this that the main literary importance of Rousseau consists, though it must not be forgotten that he is in many ways a master of French prose. His contemporaries made use of his Genevan origin

to find fault with his style; but with a few insignificant exceptions the criticism has no foundation. It has been very frequently renewed, and sometimes with little better reason, in the case of Swiss authors.

Round these chiefs of the Encyclopædic movement were grouped many lesser men, some of whom will be most conveniently noticed here. Marmontel, Morellet, and Saint-Lambert, whose chief importance lay in other directions, were contributors. The Chevalier de Jaucourt, a man of no original power, but a hack-writer of extraordinary aptitude, took considerable part in it. There were others, however, who, partly within and partly without the range of the Encyclopædia, had no small share in the promotion of what has been called the *philosophe* movement. Some of these have found their place under the head of Essayists. There is, however, one remarkable division, which must be treated here—the division of economists—before we pass to the philosophers properly so called, who either continued the metaphysics of Locke in a directly materialist sense, or who, restraining themselves to sensationalism, made the most of the English philosopher in that direction.

Political Economists. Vauban, Quesnay, etc.

The science of 'Political Arithmetic,' as it was first called in England, had a somewhat earlier birth in France than in England itself. It is remarkable that the complete establishment of the royal authority

under Louis XIV. preceded but by a very few years the examination of the economic condition of the kingdom by unsparing examiners. The two chief of these, both of whom fell into disgrace for their doings, were the great engineer Vauban, and the great theologian Fénelon. The latter was attracted to the subject chiefly by compassion for the sufferings of the people, and expressed his opinion in a manner more rhetorical than scientific. Vauban's course was naturally different. In the later years of his life he set himself to the collection of statistical facts as to the economic condition of France, and the result was the two books called *Oisivetés de M. de Vauban* and *La Dîme Royale*, 1707. The former of these contained the facts, the latter the deduction from them, which was, to put it briefly, that the existing system of privilege, exemption, and irregular taxation was a loss to the Crown, and a torment to the people. Vauban received the reward of his labours, attention to which would probably have prevented the French Revolution, in the shape of the royal displeasure, and nothing came immediately of his investigations. In the next century, however, a regular sect of political economists arose. They had, indeed, been preceded by an eccentric man of letters, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, who occupied his life in propounding Utopian schemes of universal peace and general prosperity. But the first and greatest of the economists properly so called was Quesnay. The extreme misery of the common people attracted his attention, and set him upon calculating the causes and remedies of periodical failings. He was himself a frequent contributor to the Encyclopædia. Many others of the *philosophe* set occupied themselves with these and similar subjects, notably the Abbés Morellet and Galiani. The former was a man of a certain vigour

(Voltaire called him 'L'Abbé Mord-Les'), the latter has been noticed already. His *Dialogue sur le Commerce des Blés* acquired for him a great reputation.

Turgot.

Very many writers, among them the father of the great Mirabeau (in his curious and able, though unequal and ill-proportioned *Ami des Hommes*), attacked economical subjects at this time. But Turgot, though not remarkable for the form of his writings, was the most original and influential writer of the liberal school in this department. He was a Norman by birth, and of a good legal family. He was born in 1727, and, being destined for the Church, was educated at the Sorbonne. Turgot, however, shared to the full the *philosophe* ideas of the time as to theological orthodoxy, and did not share the usual *philosophe* ideas as to concealment of his principles for comfort's sake. He refused to take orders, turning his attention to the law and the Civil Service instead of the Church. His family had considerable influence, and at the age of twenty-four he was appointed intendant of Limoges, a post which gave him practical control of the government of a large, though barren and neglected, province. His achievements in the way of administrative reform here were remarkable, and, had they been generally imitated, might have brought about a very different state of things in France. After the death of Louis XV., he was recommended by Maurepas to a far more important office, the controllership of finance. Here, too, he did great things; but his attack on the privileged orders was ill-seconded, and, after holding his post for about two years, he had to resign, partly, it is true, owing to a certain unaccommodating

rigidity of demeanour, which was one of his least amiable characteristics. He died in 1781. Turgot's literary work is not extensive, and it is not distinguished by its style. It consists of certain discourses at the Sorbonne, of memoirs on various political occasions, of some letters on usury, of articles in the Encyclopædia, of which the most noteworthy is one on endowments, etc. All are remarkable as containing the germs of what may be accepted as the modern liberal doctrines on the various points of which they treat, while the second Sorbonne discourse is entitled to the credit of first clearly announcing the principle of the philosophy of history, the doctrine, that is to say, that human progress follows regular laws of development, certain sets of causes invariably tending to bring about certain sets of results.

Condorcet.

With the name of Turgot that of Condorcet is inseparably connected, and though far less important in the history of thought, it is perhaps more prominent in the history of literature, for the pupil and biographer (in both of which relations Condorcet stood to Turgot) was, though a far less original and vigorous thinker, a better writer than his master and subject. Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, styled Marquis de Condorcet, was born in 1743, near St. Quentin, and early distinguished himself both in mathematics and in the belles lettres. He became Secretary of the Academy in 1777, and he afterwards wrote the Life of Turgot, whose method of dealing with economic questions (a more practical and less abstract one than that of the earlier economists) he had already followed. He took a considerable part in

the French Revolution, serving both in the Legislative Assembly and in the Convention. In the latter he became identified with the Girondist party, and shared their troubles. His best known work, the *Esquisse des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*, was written while he was a fugitive and in concealment. He was at last discovered and arrested, but the day after he was found dead in his prison at Bourg la Reine, having apparently poisoned himself (March, 1794). Condorcet's works are voluminous, and partake strongly of the *philosophe* character. He is not remarkable for originality of thought, and may indeed be said to be for the most part a mere exponent of the current ideas of the second stage of the *philosophe* movement. But his style has great merits, being clear, forcible, and correct, suffering only from the somewhat stereotyped forms, and from the absence of flexibility and colour which distinguish the later eighteenth century in France.

Volney.

One more remarkable name deserves to be mentioned in this place as the last of the *Philosophes* proper, that is to say, of those writers who carried out the general principles of the Encyclopædist movement with less reference to specialist departments of literature than to a certain general spirit and tendency. This was Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Comte de Volney, by which latter name he is generally known. Volney was born in 1757, at Caron, in Anjou, and was educated at Angers, and afterwards at Paris. He studied both medicine and law, but having a sufficient fortune, practised neither. In 1783 he set out on his travels and journeyed to the East, visiting Egypt and Syria; an

account of which journey he published four years later. When he returned to France he was from the beginning a moderate partisan of the Revolution, and, like most such persons, he was arrested during the Terror, though he escaped with no worse fate than imprisonment. Immediately after Thermidor, Volney published his most celebrated work, *Les Ruines*, a treatise on the rise and fall of empires from a general and philosophical point of view. Shortly after this he visited the United States, whence he returned in 1798. He had known Napoleon in early days, and on the establishment of the Consulate he was appointed a senator; nor was his resignation accepted, though it was tendered when Bonaparte assumed the crown. His countship was Napoleonic, but he was always an opponent of the emperor's policy. Accordingly, after the Restoration, he was nominated by Louis XVIII. as a member of the new House of Peers. He died in 1820. Besides the books already noticed he published some studies in ancient history and many miscellaneous works, including a project of a universal language. Volney was, as has been said, the last of the *philosophes*, exhibiting, long after a new order of thought had set in, their acute but negative and one-sided criticism, their sterile contempt of Christianity and religion generally, their somewhat theoretic acceptance of generalisations on philosophy and history, and of large plans for dealing with politics and ethics. As a traveller his observation is accurate and his expression vivid; as a philosophical historian his acuteness is perhaps not sufficiently accompanied by real breadth of view.

La Mettrie

Helvétius

Between these philosophers, in the local and temporary sense of the word, who dealt only with what would now be called the sociological side of philosophy in its bearings on politics, religion, ethics, and economics, and the strictly philosophical school of Condillac and his followers, a small but very influential sect of materialists, who were yet not purely philosophical materialists, has to be considered. Three members of this school have importance in literature—La Mettrie, Helvétius, and Holbach. La Mettrie was a native of Britanny: he entered the medical service of the French army, acquired a speedy reputation for heterodoxy and disorderly living, and fled for shelter to the general patron of heterodox Frenchmen, Frederick of Prussia; at whose court he died, at a comparatively early age, it is said in consequence of a practical joke. La Mettrie's chief work is a paradoxical exercise in materialist physics called *L'Homme-Machine*, in which he endeavours to prove the purely automatic working of the human frame, and the absence of any mind in the spiritualist sense. This he followed by a similar but less original work, called *L'Homme-Plante*, and by some other minor publications. La Mettrie was a very unequal thinker and writer, but he has, as Voltaire (who disliked him) expressed it, *traits de flamme* both in thought and style. Claude Adrian Helvétius was of Swiss descent, and of ample fortune. Born in 1715, he was appointed to the high post of Farmer-General when he was little more than twenty-three; but he did not hold this appointment very long, and became Chamberlain to the Queen. He was very popular in society, and was of a benevolent and philanthropic disposition, though he seems to have got into trouble at his country seat of Voré by excessive game preserving. He married, in

1751, the beautiful Mademoiselle de Ligneville, who was long afterwards one of the chief centres of literary society in Paris. In 1758 his book *De l'Esprit* appeared, and made a great sensation, being condemned as immoral, and burnt by the hangman. Helvétius subsequently travelled in England and Germany, dying in 1771. A second treatise, *De l'Homme,* which appeared posthumously, is much inferior to *De l'Esprit* in literary merit. It was even more fiercely assailed than its predecessor, and Diderot himself, the leader of the more active section of the *philosophe* party, wrote an elaborate refutation of it, which, however, has only recently been published. The book *De l'Esprit* is wanting in depth, and too anecdotic in style for a serious work of philosophy, though this very characteristic makes it all the more amusing reading. It endeavours to make out a theory of morals based on what is called the selfish system; and it was the naked manner in which this selfish system of ethics, and the materialist metaphysics which it implies, are manifested in the book which gave occasion to its ill repute. As a mere work of literature, however, it is well, and in parts even brilliantly written, and amid much that is desultory, inconclusive, and even demonstrably unsound, views of extreme shrewdness and originality on social abuses and inconsistencies are to be found.

Système de la Nature.

None of the writers hitherto mentioned made open profession of atheism, and it is doubtful whether even Diderot deserves the appellation of a consistent atheist. There was, however, a large anti-theistic

school among the *philosophes*, which increased in numbers and strength towards the outbreak of the Revolution. The most striking work by far of this school (which included Damilaville, Naigeon, and a few other names of no great distinction in literature) was the *Système de la Nature*, which appeared in 1770. This remarkable book, which even Voltaire and Frederick II. set themselves seriously to refute, contains a complete materialist system in metaphysics and theology. It represents the existence of God as a mere creation of the superstition of men, unable to assign a cause for the evils under which they suffer, and inventing a supernatural entity to satisfy themselves. The book (to consider its literary style only) is extremely unequal, passages of remarkable vigour alternating with long and dreary tracts of inconclusive and monotonous declamation. It appeared under the name of a dead man, Mirabaud, a person of some slight and chiefly official name in science and letters. It is, however, believed, if not certainly known, to be the work of the Baron d'Holbach (who unquestionably wrote various other books of a similar tendency), with the assistance of divers of his friends, and especially of Diderot. The *Système* is a very singular production, animated by a kind of fanatical, and in parts almost poetical aspiration after the annihilation of all supernatural belief, which is hardly to be found elsewhere except in Lucretius. It had great influence, though that influence was one of repulsion as well as of conversion, and it may be said to be, up to the present day, the furthest step taken in the direction of philosophical as opposed to political Nihilism. It should, however, be observed that in parts there is a strong political tinge observable in it.



Condillac.

In all this century of so-called philosophy, France possessed hardly more than one really eminent and considerable metaphysician. This was Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, brother of the Abbé de Mably, who was born in 1715, and died in 1780. Condillac himself was an abbé, and possessing a sufficient benefice, he lived for the most part quietly upon it, and took no part in the political, or even the literary life of the times. In 1746 he published his *Essai sur l'Origine des Connoissances Humaines*; in 1749 his *Traité des Systèmes*, a work critical rather than constructive; and in 1754 the *Traité des Sensations*, his principal work, which completes his theory. The influence of Locke was the most powerful single influence in the *philosophe* movement of France, and Condillac took up Locke's work at exactly the point where his master had faltered. He set to work to show with great plausibility that, according to Lockeian principles, the addition of ideas of reflection to ideas of sensation is unsustainable, and that all ideas without exception are merely transformed sensations. One of the illustrations which he used to support his views, that of a statue supposed to be endowed with a single sense, and successively developing first the others, and then the powers usually classed as reflection, is famous in the history of philosophy. It concerns us only as giving an instance of the method of Condillac, which is remarkable for vividness and adaptation to the ordinary comprehension. Unlike the style of Locke himself, Condillac's style is not in the least slovenly, but polished and lucid, excellently suited to such a public as that of the eighteenth century, which was at once intelligent enough to understand, and

educated enough to demand, finish of manner in discussing abstract points.

After Condillac the history of philosophy in France during the rest of the period is of no great interest to literature. He himself was continued and represented chiefly by Destutt de Tracy. The reaction against the extreme idealist and materialist constructions of Locke respectively, which had been brought about in England by Reid and Stewart, acquired in the last years of the eighteenth century, and the beginning of the nineteenth, a considerable following in France. Its chiefs were Maine de Biran, Royer Collard (who also obtained reputation as an orator and parliamentary politician), and Jouffroy. They belong, however, rather to the history of philosophy than to that of literature.

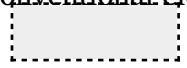
Joseph de Maistre.

After this long list of writers who advocated, more or less openly, revolution in matters political and religious, but especially in the latter, two authors who with Chateaubriand, but in a definitely philosophical manner, set the example of reaction, and who to a great extent indicated the lines which it was to follow, must be mentioned. These are Joseph de Maistre, and Louis de Bonald. Joseph, Count de Maistre, was born at Chambéry, in 1753, of a noble Savoyard family, which is said to have come originally from Languedoc. His father held important employments in the duchy, and Joseph himself entered its civil service. When, after the French Revolution, Savoy was invaded, and in a short time annexed, he returned to Lausanne, and there wrote *Considérations sur la France*, his first work of

importance. For some years he was employed at Turin in the administration of such of his continental dominions as were left to the King of Sardinia; and then, after the practical annexation of Piedmont, he held a similar employ in the island of Sardinia itself. At the beginning of the present century, he was sent to St. Petersburg to plead the cause of his master. Here he remained till after the overthrow of Napoleon, and wrote, though he did not publish, most of his books. In 1816 he returned to Turin, and died a few years afterwards—in 1821. The three chief works of Joseph de Maistre are *Du Pape*, 1817, *De l'Église Gallicane*, and the unfinished *Soirées de St. Pétersbourg*. The two first compose a complete treatise on the power and position of the pope in relation both to the temporal and to the ecclesiastical form of national government. The author is the most uncompromising of ultramontanes. According to him the pope is the source of all authority on earth, and temporal princes are little more than his delegates. Except in relation to religious error, Joseph de Maistre is not hostile to a certain ordered measure of liberty accorded by their rulers to peoples and individuals. But, strongly impressed by the social and moral, as well as the political and religious anarchy brought about first by the *philosophe* movement, and then by the Revolution, he sees the only chance of rescue in the establishment of a hierarchy of government culminating in that from which there is no appeal, the single authority of the pope. He is thus a legitimist with a difference. The *Soirées de St. Pétersbourg*, which are unfinished and not entirely uniform in plan, deal nominally with the providential government of the world, but diverge to a large number of subjects. It is in this book that the author develops the kind of modified terrorism

which is often, though not altogether justly, considered to be his chief characteristic, eulogising the executioner as the foundation of society.

Joseph de Maistre is unquestionably one of the greatest thinkers and writers of the eighteenth century. Paradoxical and strained as his system frequently appears, it is rigorously logical. An ordered theocracy seems to him the only polity capable of giving peace and true prosperity to the world, and he shapes all his theories so as to fit in with this central conception. On detached subjects his thoughts are always vigorous, and often strikingly original. His reading was great, and his skill in polemics of the very highest. No one possesses in larger measure the art of hostile criticism without descending to actual abuse. These merits of themselves imply purely literary accomplishments, clearness, distinctness, forcible expression, in a rare kind and degree. But Joseph de Maistre is more than this as a writer. He possesses, though he only occasionally exercises it, a brilliant faculty of rhetoric. His phrase is more than merely clear and forcible; it has a peculiar incisiveness and sharpness of outline which impress it on the memory, while, sparing as he is of ornament, his rare passages of description and fancy have great merit. The surest testimony to his value is the fact that, though both in his own day and since by far the larger number of writers and thinkers have held views more or less opposed to his, no one whose opinion is itself of the least importance has ever spoken of him without respect and even admiration. Those who, like Lamartine, qualify their admiration with a certain depreciation, show inability to recognise fully the beauty of strength undisguised by conventional elegance and grace of form.



Bonald.

Louis Gabriel Ambroise, Vicomte de Bonald, who is usually named with Joseph de Maistre as the leader of the Catholic-monarchist reaction, was a weaker thinker, and a writer of less accomplishment, though in both respects he has perhaps been somewhat unfairly criticised. Born at Milhaud, in the district of Rouergue, in 1754, he discharged various civil and military employments in his native province during his youth; was elected in 1790 member of the Departmental Assembly, but emigrated next year; served in Condé's army, and then established himself at Heidelberg. His first work was seized by the Directory, but he returned to France soon afterwards, and was not molested. He published a good deal during the first years of the century, and, like many other royalists, received overtures from Napoleon through Fontanes. These he did not exactly reject, but he availed himself of them very sparingly. The Restoration, on the contrary, aroused him to vigour. It was owing to him chiefly that the law of divorce was altered. He entered the Academy, and in 1823 was made a peer; an honour which he resigned at the revolution of July. He died in 1840.

Bonald's principal work is his *Législation Primitive*. He also wrote a book on divorce, and a considerable number of miscellaneous political and metaphysical works. His chief subjects of discussion were, first, the theory of the revelation of language; and secondly, the theory of causality: in respect of both of which he combated the materialist school of the eighteenth century. In politics Bonald was a thoroughgoing legitimist and monarchist of the patriarchal school. Although an orthodox and devout Catholic, he does not lay the stress on the temporal power of the pope

that the author of *Du Pape* does. With him the king is the immediate instrument of God in governing. He has been accused of reducing things too much to formulas, and of repeating his formulas too often. But this itself was in great part the effect of reaction against the vague declamation of the *philosophes*.

CHAPTER VII.

SCIENTIFIC WRITERS.

As the sciences divide and subdivide themselves more and more, the works which treat of them become less and less the subject of strictly literary history. Besides this truth, it is necessary to remember the fact that a large number of treatises, scientific in subject, were in the eighteenth century professedly popularised and addressed to unprofessional audiences. Fontenelle, D'Alembert, and many other authors already mentioned, were *savants*, but their manner of handling their subjects was far from being strictly or wholly scientific. Yet there remain a certain number of writers, who, their reputation being derived wholly or mainly from their treatment of subjects of science and erudition, are better dealt with separately.

Buffon.

The head and chief of these is beyond all question Buffon. George Louis Leclerc, who was made Count

de Buffon by Louis XV., was born at Montbard in Burgundy, on Sept. 7, 1707; his father was a man of wealth and of position in the *noblesse de robe*. Buffon was destined for the law, but early showed an inclination towards science. He became acquainted with a young English nobleman, Lord Kingston, who with his tutor was taking the then usual grand tour, and was permitted by his father to accompany him through France and Italy, and to visit England. On the English language he spent considerable pains, translating Newton, Hales, and Tull the agriculturist. When he returned to France he devoted himself to scientific experiments, and in 1739 he was appointed intendant or director of the Jardin du Roi, which practically gave him command of the national collections in zoology, botany, and mineralogy. He was thus enabled to observe and experiment to his heart's content, and to collect a sufficient number of facts for his vast Natural History. Buffon, however, was only half a man of science. He was at least as anxious to write pompous descriptions and to indulge in showy hypotheses, as to confine himself to plain scientific enquiry. He accordingly left the main part of the hack-work of his *Histoire Naturelle* (a vast work extending to thirty-six volumes) to assistants, of whom the chief was Daubenton, himself contributing only the most striking and rhetorical passages. The book was very remarkable for its time, as the first attempt since Pliny at a collection of physical facts at once exhaustive, and in a manner systematised, and though there was much alloy mixed with its metal, it was of real value. Buffon's life was long, and he outlived all the other chiefs of the *philosophe* party (to which in an outside sort of fashion he belonged), dying at Paris in the year 1788. It is perhaps easier to condemn Buffon's

extremely rhetorical style than to do justice to it. To a modern reader it too frequently seems to verge on the ridiculous, and to do more than verge on the trivial. It is necessary, however, to take the point of view of the time. Buffon found natural science in a position far below that assigned to literary erudition and to the arts in general estimation. He also found it customary that these arts and letters should be treated in pompous *éloges*. His real interest in science led him to think that the shortest way to raise it was to treat it in the same manner, and there is little doubt that his method was effectual in its degree. It is perhaps curious that he, the author of the phrase 'Le style c'est l'homme,' should have so completely exemplified it. Many authors of elaborate prose have been perfectly simple and unpretentious in private life. Buffon was as pompous and inflated as his style. Anecdotes respecting him are numerous; but perhaps the most instructive is that which tells how, having heard some one speak of the style of Montesquieu, he asked, 'Si M. de Montesquieu avait un style?' It is needless to say that from any just standpoint, even of purely literary criticism, the hollow pomp of the *Histoire Naturelle* sinks into insignificance beside the nervous and solid yet graceful vigour of the *Esprit des Lois*.

Lesser Scientific Writers.

No single scientific writer equals the fame of Buffon, but there are not a few who deserve to be mentioned after him. Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, a Breton by birth, who was a considerable mathematician and a physicist of more eccentricity than merit, owes most of his literary celebrity to the

patronage of Frederick the Second, and the pitiless raillery of Voltaire, who quarrelled with him on his visit to Berlin, where Maupertuis was president of the Academy. Maupertuis' chief scientific performance was his mission to Lapland to determine the measurement of a degree of longitude in 1736. Of this mission he published an account. At the same time a similar mission was sent to South America under La Condamine, who underwent considerable hardship, and, like Maupertuis, published his adventures when he came back. Mathematics were indeed the favourite study of the time. Clairaut, De Moivre, Euler, Laplace, all wrote in French, or belonged to French-speaking and French-descended races; while Voltaire's own contributions to the reception of Newton's principles in France were not small, and his beloved Madame du Châtelet was an expert mathematician. Voltaire also devoted much attention to chemistry, which was the special subject of such of the Baron d'Holbach's labours as were not devoted to the overthrow of Christianity. It was not, however, till the eve of the Revolution that the most important discoveries in this science were made by Lavoisier and others. The Empire was a much more favourable time for science than for literature. Bonaparte was fond of the society of men of science, and pleased by their usual indifference to politics. Monge, Berthollet, Champollion, were among his favourites. Geoffroy St. Hilaire and Cuvier were, however, the chief men of science of this period, and Cuvier at least had no mean command of a literary style sufficient for his purposes. His chief work of a literary-scientific character was his discourse *Sur les Révolutions de la Surface du Globe*. Earlier than this the physician Cabanis, in his *Rapports de Physique et de Morale*, composed a semi-materialist work of great

excellence according to eighteenth-century standards. Bichat's *La Vie et la Mort*, the work of an anatomist of the greatest talent, who died young, also belongs to literature.

Voyages and Travels.

Some contributions to letters were also made by the voyages of discovery which formed part of the general scientific curiosity of the time. The chief of them is that of Bougainville, 1771, which, giving the first clear notion to Frenchmen of the South Sea Islands, had a remarkably stimulating effect on the imaginations of the *philosophe* party.

Linguistic and Literary Study.

In works of pure erudition more directly connected with literature, the age was less fruitful than its immediate predecessor. The laborious studies of the Benedictines, however, continued. One work of theirs, important to our subject, was projected and in part carried out under the superintendence chiefly of Dom Rivet. This was the *Histoire Littéraire de la France*—a mighty work, which, after long interruption by the Revolution and other causes, was taken up again, and has proceeded steadily for many years, though it has not yet reached the close of the middle ages. This work was part, and a very important part, of a revival of the study of old French literature. The plan of the Benedictines led them at first into the literature of mediaeval Latin.

But the works of the Trouvères, of their successors in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of the authors of the French Renaissance, also received attention, scattered at first and desultory, but gradually co-ordinating and regulating itself. La Monnoye, Lenglet-Dufresnoy, the President Bouhier, and many others, collected, and in some cases edited, the work of earlier times. The Marquis de Paulmy began a vast *Bibliothèque des Romans*, for which the Comte de Tressan undertook the modernising and reproducing of all the stories of chivalry. Tressan, it is true, had recourse only to late and adulterated versions, but his work was still calculated to spread some knowledge of what the middle ages had actually done in matter of literature. La Curne de Sainte Palaye devoted himself eagerly to the study of the language, manners, and customs of chivalry. Barbazan collected the specially French product of the Fabliau, and, with his successor Méon (who also edited the *Roman du Renart*), provided a great corpus of lighter mediaeval literature for the student to exercise himself upon. By degrees this revived literature forced itself upon the public eye, and before the Republic had given place to the Empire, it received some attention at the hands of official teachers of literature who had hitherto scorned it. M. J. Chénier, Daunou, and others, undertook the subject, and made it in a manner popular; while towards the extreme end of the present period Raynouard and Fauriel added the subject of Provençal literature to that of the literature of Northern France, and helped to propagate the study abroad as well as at home.

In the older fields the renown of France for purely classical scholarship diminished somewhat as compared with the days of Huet, Ménage, Dacier,

and the Delphin classics. The principal work of erudition was either directed towards the so-called philosophy in its wide sense of enquiry and speculation into politics and manners, or else to mathematics and physics. The Benedictines confined themselves for the most part to Christian antiquity. Yet there were names of weight in this department, such as the President Hénault, a writer something after the fashion of Fontenelle, but on classical subjects; and the President de Brosses, also an archæologist of merit, but chiefly noteworthy as having been among the founders of the science which busies itself with the manners and customs of primitive and prehistoric man[291].

FOOTNOTES:

[291] I owe to M. Scherer the indication of a misprint of '*des* Brosses' for 'de' in former editions. M. Scherer says that I 'have never heard' of the President's pleasant *Lettres sur l'Italie*, because I do not mention them. He also says that what I do say of De Brosses is 'également surprenante pour ce qu'elle avance et par ce qu'elle omet.' I am, therefore, justified in supposing that M. Scherer 'has never heard' of the *Lettres sur Herculanum*, the *Navigations aux Terres Australes*, or the *Culte des Dieux Fétiches*.

INTERCHAPTER IV.

SUMMARY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE.

The eighteenth century was pre-eminently the century of academic literature in France: far more so than the seventeenth, which had seen the foundation of the Académie Française. The word 'academy' in this sense was an invention of the Italian humanists, prompted by their Platonic, or perhaps by their Ciceronian, studies. Academies, or coteries of men of letters who united love of society with the cultivation of literature, became common in Italy during the sixteenth century, and from Italy were translated to France. The famous society, which now shares with the original school of Plato the honour of being designated in European language as 'The Academy' without distinguishing epithet, was originally nothing but one of these coteries or clubs, which met at the house of the judicious and amiable, but not particularly learned, Conrart. Conrart's influence with Richelieu, the desire of the latter to secure a favourable tribunal of critics for his own literary attempts, or (to be generous) his foresight and his appreciation of the genius of the French language, determined the Cardinal to establish this society. It was modestly endowed, and was charged with the duty of composing an authoritative Dictionary of the French literary language; a task the slow performance of which has been a stock subject of ridicule for two centuries and a half. The Academy, though it suffered some vicissitudes in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, has survived all changes, and is virtually one of the most ancient existing institutions of France. But, though it from the beginning enjoyed royal and ministerial favour, it was long before it collected a really representative

body of members, and it was subjected at first to a good deal of raillery. One of Saint Evremond's early works was a *Comédie des Académistes*; while one of the most polished and severe of his later prose critical studies is a 'Dissertation on the word "Vaste,"' in which the tendency of the Academy to trifling discussions (the curse of all literary societies), the literary indolence of its members, and the pedagogic limitations of its critical standards, are bitterly, though most politely, ridiculed. It did itself little good by lending its name to be the cover for Richelieu's jealousy of the *Cid*, though there is more justice in its *examen* of that famous play than is sometimes supposed. But the institution was thoroughly germane to the nature, tastes, and literary needs of the French people, and it prospered. Conrart was a tower of strength to it; and in the next generation the methodical and administrative talents of Perrault were of great service, while it so obviously helped the design of Louis XIV. to play the Augustus, that a tradition of royal patronage, which was not afterwards broken, was established. The greatest blots on the Academy were the almost unavoidable servility which rewarded this patronage, and the private rivalries and cliques which have occasionally kept some of the greatest names of French literature out of its lists. Molière and Diderot are the most shining examples among these, but many others keep them company. Nevertheless, by the end of the seventeenth century at least, it became the recognised aim of every Frenchman of letters to belong to the 'forty geese that guard the Capitol' of French literature, as Diderot, not quite a disinterested witness, called them. Throughout the eighteenth century their power was supreme. Competition for the various academic prizes was, in

the infancy of periodicals, the easiest and the commonest method by which a struggling man of letters could make himself known; and literary heresy of any kind was an almost certain cause of exclusion from the body when once the dictatorship of Fontenelle (a benevolent autocrat who, being something of a heretic himself, tolerated freethinking in others) had ceased. Moreover, except in rare cases, chiefly limited to persons of rank who were elected for reasons quite other than literary, it was not usual for an author to gain admission to the Academy until he was well stricken in years, and until, as a natural consequence, his tastes were for the most part formed, and he was impatient of innovation.

At first the influence of the Academy was beyond question salutary in the main, if not wholly. Balzac, whose importance in the history of prose style has been pointed out, was one of its earliest members. It was under its wing that Vaugelas undertook the much-needed enquiry into French grammar and its principles as applied to literature. The majority of the early members were connected with the refining and reforming coteries of the Rambouillet and other salons. It was somewhat slow in electing Boileau, though it is to be feared that this arose from no higher motive than the fact that he had satirised most of its members. But Boileau was the natural guiding spirit of an Academy, and it fell more and more under his influence—not so much his personal influence as that of his principles and critical estimates. In short, during the seventeenth century it played the very useful part of model and measure in the midst of a time when the chief danger was the neglect of measures and of models, and it played it very fairly. But by the time that the eighteenth century began, it was by no means of a restraining

and guiding influence that France had most need. The exuberance of creative genius between 1630 and 1690 had supplied literature with actual models far more valuable than any scheme of cut-and-dried rules, and it was in need rather of a stimulant to spur it on to further development. Instead of serving as this, the Academy served (owing, it must be confessed, in great part to the literary conservatism of Voltaire and the *philosophes* generally) as a check and drag upon the spontaneous instincts all through the century, and in all the departments of Belles Lettres. It contributed more than anything else to the mischievous crystallisation of literary ideas, which during this time offers so strange a contrast to the singular state of solution in which were all ideas relating to religion, politics, and morals. The consequence of the propounding of a set of consecrated models, of the constant competition in imitation of those models, and of the reward of diligent and successful imitation by admission into the body, which in its turn nursed and guided a new generation of imitators, was the reduction of large and important departments of literature to a condition of cut-and-driedness which has no parallel in history. The drama in particular, which was artificial and limited at its best, was reduced to something like the state of a game in which every possible move or stroke is known and registered, and in which the sole novelty consists in contriving some permutation of these moves or strokes which shall be, if possible, not absolutely identical with any former combination. So in a lesser degree, it was in poetry, in history, in prose tales, in verse tales. If a man had a loose imagination, he tried to imitate La Fontaine as well as he could in manner, and outbid him in matter; if he thought himself an

epigrammatist, he copied J. B. Rousseau; if he was disposed to edification, the same poet supplied him with models; if the gods had made him descriptive, he executed variations in the style of Delille, or Saint Lambert, who had themselves copied others; if he wrote in any other style, he had an eye to the work of Voltaire. Neologism in vocabulary was carefully eschewed, and a natural consequence of this was the resort (in the struggle not to repeat merely) to elaborate and ingenious periphrases, such as those which have been quoted in the chapter on eighteenth-century poetry. In short, literature had got into a sort of treadmill in which all the effort expended was expended merely in the repeated production of certain prescribed motions.

It was partly a natural result of this, and partly an effect of other and accidental causes, that the actual composition of the Academy was in the first quarter of the nineteenth century by no means such as to inspire much respect. But it was all the less likely to initiate or to head any movement of reform. The consequence was, that when the reform came, it came from the outside, not from the inside, that it was violently opposed, and that, though it prevailed, and its leaders themselves quickly forced their way into the sacred precincts, it was as victorious rebels, not as welcomed allies. The further consequence of this, and of the changes of which account will be given briefly in the following book, was the alteration to a great extent of the status of the Academy. It still (though with the old reproach of illustrious outsiders) includes most of the leading men of letters of France, and its membership is still, theoretically, the greatest honour that a French man of letters can receive. But its position is far more ornamental than it was. It hardly pretends to be in

any sense legislative: it is an honorary assembly, not a working parliament. The chief circumstance that keeps it before the public is the curious and time-honoured custom which ordains that the academician appointed to receive each new member shall, in the most polished and amiable manner, give the most ironical description he can of the novice's achievements and claims to recognition.

The exact change in literature which has partly caused, and has partly coincided with this change in the relation of the Academy to letters, will shortly be displayed, though in somewhat less detail than those changes which are at a sufficient distance to be estimated by the aid of what has been well called 'the firm perspective of the past.' For cut-and-dried rules of criticism, carefully selected and limited models, narrow range of subject, scanty vocabulary and its corollary periphrasis, stock metaphor and ornament, stiff or fluidly insignificant metre and rhythm, there have been substituted the exact opposites. The gain in poetry is immense, and if it seems to be somewhat exhausted now, it is fair to remember that fifty years is a long flowering time for any special poetic plant, not often equalled in history, and still less often exceeded. The gain in prose has been more dubious. Great prose writers will have to be noticed, but it may perhaps be doubted whether the average value of French prose as prose has not declined. There would be nothing surprising in this, if it be the case; on the contrary, it would be a mere repetition of the experience of the sixteenth century. The language and literature have been flooded with new words, new forms of speech, new ideas, new models. It takes a very long time before the mixture thus produced can settle down (at least in the vessel of the average prose writer) to

clearness and brilliancy. It is otherwise in poetry; in the first place because there is no such thing as an average poet, and in the second, because the peculiar conditions of poetry exercise of themselves a refining influence, which is not present in prose. At present it may be said, and not without truth, that, putting the work of the extraordinary writers aside, ordinary French prose has lost some of its former graces—its lucidity, its proportion, its easy march. From being the most childishly prudish of all writers about neologisms and the *mot propre*, the French prose writer has become the most clumsily promiscuous in his vocabulary. He is always using 'square' instead of 'place,' 'le macadam' instead of 'le pavé,' 'un caoutchouc' when he means a waterproof overcoat. Much of this, no doubt, is due to the singular inability which the language seems to experience in forming genuine vernacular compounds; an inability from which a few more persons like the much ridiculed Du Bartas might have rescued it. But, however this may be, it must be admitted that, great as have been the benefits of the Romantic movement, it has left the ordinary French prose style of novel and newspaper in a condition of indigestion and disarray.

As for the movement itself, the most brilliant season of romantic productiveness seems to have terminated, after being long represented only by its greatest, earliest, and at the same time latest name. The comparative disorganisation is all the more noticeable. It is in this disorganisation that our history perforce leaves the magnificent literature which we have traced from its source. Unsafe as all prophecy is, there are few things less safe to prophesy about than the progress of literary development. But it is not historically unreasonable

to expect, after the splendid harvest of the last half century, what is called a dead season, of longer or shorter duration. There is nothing really discouraging in such seasons either in nature or in art. In each case there is the garnered wealth of the past to fall back upon, and in each there is confidence that the seeming stagnation and death are in truth only the necessary pause and period of gestation which precede and bring about the life of the future.

BOOK V.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The Romantic Movement.

The preceding chapter will at once have indicated the defects under which the later classical literature of France laboured, and the remedies which were necessary for them. Those remedies began to be applied early in the reign of Charles X., and the literary revolution which accompanied them is called the Romantic movement. Strictly speaking, this movement did not affect, or rather was not supposed to affect, any branch of letters except the Belles Lettres; really its influence was far wider, and has affected every branch of literary composition. Nor is it yet exhausted, although more than two generations

have passed since the current was started. As is usual in the later stages of such things, this influence is in part disguised under the form of apparent reactions, developments, modifications, and other eddies or backwaters of the great wave. But as the Romantic movement was above all things a movement of literary emancipation, it can never be said to be superseded until fresh chains are imposed on literature. Of this there is as yet no sign, except in the puerile and disgusting school of naturalism, a mere scum-flake—to keep up the metaphor—on the surface of the waters.

Writers of the later Transition.

The literature of the Revolution, the Empire, and the early Restoration, which has been in part already surveyed, displayed the last effete products of the old classical tradition side by side with the vigorous but nondescript and tentative efforts at reform of Chateaubriand, Madame de Stael, Courier, and others. So the first products of the new movement found themselves side by side with what may be called a second generation of the transition. The names which chiefly illustrate this second generation must be dealt with before the Romantics proper are arrived at. The chief of them are Béranger, Lamartine, Lamennais, Cousin, Stendhal, Nodier, and the dramatists Alexandre Soumet and Casimir Delavigne. Most of these, while irresistibly impelled half way towards the movement, stood aloof from it in feeling and taste; others, such as Stendhal, exercised upon it an influence not much felt at first, but deep and lasting; one, Nodier, threw in his lot with it frankly and decidedly.

Béranger.

Pierre Jean de Béranger is one of the most original and not the least pleasant figures in the long list of French poets. His life, though long, was comparatively uneventful. Despite the particle of nobility, he belonged to the middle class, and rather to the lower than to the upper portion of it; for, if his father was a man of business, his grandfather was a tailor. He himself lived in his youth with an aunt at Péronne, was then apprenticed to a printer, and was so ill off that, in 1804, he was saved from absolute poverty only by the patronage of Lucien Bonaparte, to whom he had sent some of his verses, and who procured him a small government clerkship. He held this for some years. After the Restoration, Béranger, whose political creed was an odd compound of Bonapartism and Republicanism, got into trouble with the government for his political songs. He was repeatedly fined and imprisoned, but each sentence made him more popular. After the Revolution of July, however, he refused to accept any favours from the Orleanist dynasty, and lived quietly, publishing nothing after 1833. In 1848 he was elected to the Assembly, but immediately resigned his seat. He behaved to the Second Empire as he had behaved to the July monarchy, refusing all honours and appointments. He died in 1857. Béranger's poetical works consist entirely of *Chansons*, political, amatory, bacchanalian, satirical, philosophical after a fashion, and of almost every other complexion that the song can possibly take. Their form is exactly that of the eighteenth-century *Chanson*, the frivolity and licence of language being considerably curtailed, and the range of subjects proportionately extended. The popularity of Béranger with ordinary readers, both in

and out of his own country, has always been immense; but a somewhat singular reluctance to admit his merits has been shown by successive generations of purely literary critics. In France his early contemporaries found fault with him on the one hand for being a mere *chansonnier,* and on the other, for dealing with the *chanson* in a graver tone than that of his masters, Panard, Collé, Gouffé, and his immediate predecessor and in part contemporary, Désaugiers. The sentimental school of the Restoration thought him vulgar and unromantic. The Romantics proper disdained his pedestrian and conventional style, his classic vocabulary. The neo-Catholics disliked his Voltairianism. The Royalists and the Republicans detested, and detest equally, though from the most opposite sides, his devotion to the Napoleonic legend. Yet Béranger deserves his popularity, and does not deserve the grudging appreciation of critics. His one serious fault is the retention of the conventional mannerism of the eighteenth century in point of poetic diction, and he might argue that time had almost irrevocably associated this with the *chanson* style. His versification, careless as it looks, is really studied with a great deal of care and success. As to his matter, only prejudice against his political, religious, and ethical attitude, can obscure the lively wit of his best work; its remarkable pathos; its sound common sense; its hearty, if somewhat narrow and mistaken, patriotism; its freedom from self-seeking and personal vanity, spite, or greed; its thorough humanity and wholesome natural feeling. Nor can it be fairly said that his range is narrow. *Le Grenier*, *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, *Roger Bontemps*, *Les Souvenirs du Peuple*, *Les Fous*, *Les Gueux*, cover a considerable variety of tones and subjects, all of which are happily treated.

Béranger indeed was not in the least a literary poet. But there is room in literature for other than merely literary poets, and among these Béranger will always hold a very high place. The common comparison of him to Burns is in this erroneous, that the element of passion, which is the most prominent in Burns, is almost absent from Béranger, and that the unliterary character which was an accident with Burns was with Béranger essential. The point of contact is, that both were among the most admirable of song writers, and that both hit infallibly the tastes of the masses among their countrymen.

Lamartine.

Alphonse Prat de Lamartine was in almost every conceivable respect the exact opposite to Béranger. He was born at Macon, on the 21st of October, 1791, of a good family of Franche Comté, which, though never very rich, had long devoted itself to arms and agriculture only. His father was a strong royalist, was imprisoned during the Terror, and escaped narrowly. Lamartine was educated principally by the Pères de la Foi, and, after leaving school, spent some time first at home and then in Italy. The Restoration gave him entrance to the royal bodyguard; but he soon exchanged soldiering for diplomacy, and was appointed attaché in Italy. He had already (1820) published the *Méditations*, his first volume of verse, which had a great success. Lamartine married an English lady in 1822, and spent some years in the French legations at Naples and Florence. He was elected to the Academy in 1829. After the revolution of July he set out for the East, but, being elected by a constituency to the Chamber of Deputies, returned. He acquired much fame as an orator, contributed not

a little to the overthrow of Louis Philippe, and in 1848 enjoyed for a brief space something not unlike a dictatorship. Power, however, soon slipped through his hands, and he retired into private life. His later days were troubled by money difficulties, though he wrote incessantly. In 1867 he received a large grant from the government of Napoleon III., and died not long afterwards—in 1869. The chief works of Lamartine are, in verse, the already mentioned *Méditations* (of which a new series appeared in 1823), the *Harmonies*, 1829, the *Recueillements*, *Le Dernier Chant du Pélerinage d'Harold*, *Jocelyn*, *La Chute d'un Ange*, the two last being fragments of a huge epic poem on the ages of the world; in prose, *Souvenirs d'Orient*, *Histoire des Girondins*, *Les Confidences*, *Raphael*, *Graziella*, besides an immense amount of work for the booksellers, in history, biography, criticism, and fiction, produced in his later days. Lamartine's characteristics, both in prose and verse, are well marked. He is before all things a sentimentalist and a landscape-painter. He may indeed be said to have wrought into verse what Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and Chateaubriand had already expressed in prose, supplying only an additional, and perhaps original, note of meditative tenderness. Lamartine's verse is exquisitely harmonious, and frequently picturesque; but it is deficient in vigour and brilliancy, and marred by the perpetual current of sentimental complaining. Beyond this he never could get; his only important attempt in a different and larger style, the *Chute d'un Ange*, being, though not without merits, on the whole a failure. In harmony of verse and delicate tenderness of feeling his poetry was an enormous advance on the eighteenth century, and its power over its first readers is easily understood. But

Lamartine made little, if any, organic change in the mechanism of French poetry, so far as its versification is concerned, while his want of range in subject equally disabled him from effecting a revolution. His best poems, such as *Le Lac*, *Paysage dans le Golfe de Gênes*, *Le Premier Regret*, are however among the happiest expressions of a dainty but rather conventional melancholy, irreproachable from the point of view of morals and religion, thoroughly well bred, and creditably aware of the beauties of nature, which it describes and reproduces with a great deal of skill.

Lamennais.

The next name on the list belongs to a far stronger, if a less accomplished, spirit than Lamartine. Félicité Robert de Lamennais was born in 1782, at St. Malo. In the confusion of the last decade of the eighteenth century, when, as a contemporary bears witness, even persons holding important state offices had often received no regular education whatever, Lamennais was for the most part his own teacher. He betook himself, however, to literature, and in 1807 was appointed to a mastership in the St. Malo Grammar School. Shortly afterwards he published a treatise on 'The Church during the Eighteenth Century,' and taking orders before long followed it up by others. These placed him in the forefront of the Catholic reaction, of which Chateaubriand from the picturesque, and Joseph de Maistre from the philosophical side, were the leaders. He took priest's orders in 1816, and in 1817 published his *Essai sur l'Indifférence en Matière de Religion*. This is a sweeping defence of the absolute authority of the Church, but the 'rift within the lute' already appears. Lamennais

bases this authority, according to a tradition of that very eighteenth century which he most ardently opposes, on universal consent. Although therefore the deductive portion of his argument is in thorough accordance with Roman doctrine, the inductive portion can hardly be said to be so, and it prepared the way for his subsequent change of front. For a time Lamennais contented himself with the hope of establishing a sect of liberal royalist Catholics. A rapid succession of journals, most of which were suppressed, led to the *Avenir*, in which Montalembert, Lacordaire, and others took part, and which, like some English periodicals of a later period, aimed directly at the union of orthodox religious principles of the Roman complexion with political liberalism, and a certain freedom of thought in other directions. The *Avenir* was definitely censured by Gregory XVI. in 1832, and Lamennais rapidly fell away from his previous orthodoxy. He had established himself in the country with a following of youthful disciples. Of these the best-known now is Maurice de Guérin, a feeble poet who died young, but who, with his abler sister Eugénie, interested Sainte-Beuve, Mr. Matthew Arnold, and others. *Les Paroles d'un Croyant*, which appeared in 1834, united speculative Republicanism of the most advanced kind with a direct defiance of Rome in matter of religion, and this was followed by a long series of works in the same spirit. Lamennais' ardent and ill-balanced temperament, the chief note of which was the most excessive personal vanity, no sooner threw off the yoke of orthodoxy than it ran to the opposite extreme, and the Catholic royalist of the first empire became an atheistic, or at most theistic, democrat. Lamennais died in 1854. He had a great influence both on men and on books in France, and

his literary work is extremely remarkable. It bears the marks of his insufficient education and of his excitable temperament. In the *Paroles d'un Croyant* the style is altogether apocalyptic in its mystic and broken declamation, full of colour, energy, and vague impressiveness, but entirely wanting in order, lucidity, and arrangement. The earlier works show something of this, though necessarily not so much. Lamennais' literary, as distinguished from his political and social, importance consists in the fact that he was practically the first to introduce this style into French. He has since had notable disciples, among whom Michelet and even Victor Hugo may be ranked.

Victor Cousin.

The contrast of the return from Lamennais to Cousin is almost as great as that of the change from Lamartine to Lamennais. The careers of the poet and the philosopher have indeed something in common, for Cousin's delicate, exquisite, and somewhat feminine prose style is a nearer analogue to the poetry of Lamartine even than the latter's own prose, and the sudden decline of Cousin's reputation in philosophy almost matches that of Lamartine's reputation as a poet. Victor Cousin was born in 1792, at Paris, and was one of the most brilliant pupils of the Lycée Charlemagne. He passed thence to the École Normale, and, in the year of the Restoration, became Assistant Professor to Royer Collard at the Sorbonne. He adopted vigorously the doctrines of that philosopher, which practically amounted to a translation of the Scottish school of Reid and Stewart, but he soon combined with them much that

he borrowed from Kant and his successors in Germany. This latter country he visited twice; on the second occasion with the unpleasant result of an arrest. He soon returned to France, however, and became distinguished as a supporter of the liberal party. The years immediately before and after the July Revolution were Cousin's most successful time. His lectures were crowded, his eclecticism was novel and popular, and when after July itself he became officially powerful, he distinguished himself by patronising young men of genius. During the reign of Louis Philippe he was one of the most influential of men of letters, though curiously enough, he combined with his political liberalism a certain tendency to reaction in matters of pure literature. After 1848 he retired from public life, and, though he survived for nearly twenty years, produced little more in philosophy. His brilliant but patchy eclecticism had had its day, and he saw it; but he earned new and perhaps more lasting laurels by betaking himself to the study of French literary history, and producing some charming essays on the ladies of the Fronde. Cousin's history is interesting as an instance of the accidental prosperity which in the first half of this century the mixture of politics and literature brought to men of letters. But his own literary merits are very considerable. Without the freedom and originality of the great writers who were for the most part his juniors by ten or twenty years, he possessed a style studied from the best models of the seventeenth century, which, despite a certain artificiality, has great beauty. Besides editions of philosophical classics, the chief works of his earlier period are *Fragments Philosophiques*, 1827, *Cours de l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, 1827; of his later, *Du Vrai, Du Beau et Du Bien*, and his studies on the

women of the seventeenth century.

Beyle.

The author now to be noticed has found little place hitherto in histories of literature, and estimates of his positive value are even yet much divided. Henri Beyle, who wrote under the name of De Stendhal, was born at Grenoble, in January, 1783. His family belonged to the middle class, though, unfortunately, Beyle allowed himself during the Empire to be called M. *de* Beyle, and incurred not a little ridicule in consequence. His literary *alias* was also, it may be noticed, arranged so as to claim nobility. He was a clever boy, but manifested no special predilection for any profession. At last he entered the army, and served in it (chiefly in the non-combatant branches) on some important occasions, including the campaigns of the St. Bernard, of Jena, and of Moscow. He also held some employments in the civil service of the Empire. At the Restoration he went to Italy, which was always his favourite place of residence; but when in 1821 political troubles began to arise, he was 'politely' expelled by the Austrian police. After this he lived chiefly in Paris, making part of his living by the unexpected function of contributing to the London *New Monthly Magazine*. He knew English well, admired our literature, and visited London more than once. Being, as far as he was a politician at all, a Bonapartist, he was not specially interested in the Revolution of 1830; but it was profitable to him, for through some of his friends he was appointed French consul, first at Trieste, and then (the Austrians objecting) at Civita Vecchia. He lived, however, chiefly at Rome, and travelled a good deal. Latterly his health was weak, and he died at

Paris, in 1842, of apoplexy. He was buried at Montmartre; but, with his usual eccentricity, his epitaph was by his direction written in Italian, and he was described as a Milanese. Beyle's character, personal and literary, was very peculiar. In temperament, religious views, and social ideas he was a belated *philosophe* of the Diderot school. But in literature he had improved even on Diderot, and very nearly anticipated the full results of the Romantic movement, while in politics, as has been said, he was an imperialist. His works are pretty voluminous. They consist of novels (*La Chartreuse de Parme*, *Armance*, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *Mémoires d'un Touriste*, etc.); of criticism (*Histoire de la Peinture en Italie*, *Racine et Shakespeare*, *Mélanges*); of biography (Lives of Napoleon, Haydn, Mozart, Metastasio, etc.); of topographical writing of a miscellaneous kind (*Promenades dans Rome, Naples et Florence*, etc.); and lastly, of a singular book entitled *De l'Amour*, which unites extraordinary acuteness and originality of thought with cynicism of expression and paradox of theory. In this book, and in his novels, Beyle made himself the ancestor of what has been called successively realism and naturalism in France. Perhaps, however, his most remarkable work was Mérimée, of whose family he was a friend, and who, far excelling him in merit of style if not in freshness of thought, learnt beyond all doubt from him his peculiar and half-affected cynicism of tone, his curious predilection for the apparently opposed literatures of England and Southern Europe, and not improbably also his imperialism. Beyle is a difficult author to judge briefly, the contradictions, affectations, and oddities in him demanding minute examination. Of his power, intrinsic and exerted on others, there is no doubt.



Nodier.

Delavigne.

Soumet.

The three remaining writers require shorter notice. Charles Nodier, who was born at Besançon in 1780, and died at Paris in 1844, is one of the most remarkable failures of a great genius in French literary history. He did almost everything—lexicography, text-editing, criticism, poetry, romance—and he did everything well, but perhaps nothing supremely well. If an exception be made to this verdict, it must be in favour of his short tales, some of which are exquisite, and all but, if not quite, masterpieces. As librarian of the Mazarin Library, Nodier was a kind of centre of the early Romantic circle, and, though he was more than twenty years older than most of its members, he identified himself thoroughly with their aims and objects. His consummate knowledge of the history and vocabulary of the French tongue probably had no mean influence on that conservative and restorative character which was one of the best sides of the movement. Casimir Delavigne was born at Havre in 1793. He first distinguished himself by his *Messéniennes*, a series of satires or patriotic jeremiads on the supposed degradation of France under the Restoration. Then he took to the stage, and produced successively *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, *Marino Faliero*, *Louis XI.* (well known in England from the affection which several English tragic actors have shown for the title part), *Les Enfants d'Edouard*, etc. He also wrote other non-dramatic poems, most of them of a political character. Casimir Delavigne is a writer of

little intrinsic worth. He held aloof from the Romantic movement, less from dislike to its extravagances and its cliquism, than from genuine weakness and inability to appreciate the defects of the classic tradition. He is in fact the direct successor of Ducis and Marie Joseph Chénier, having forgotten something, but learned little. The defects of his poems are parallel to those of his plays. His patriotism is conventional, his verse conventional, his expression conventional, though the convention is in all three cases slightly concealed by the skilful adoption of a certain outward colouring of energy and picturesqueness. He was not unpopular in his day, being patronised to a certain extent by the extreme classical party, and recommended to the public by his liberal political principles. But he is almost entirely obsolete already, and is never likely to recover more than the reputation due to fair literary workmanship in an inferior style. Alexandre Soumet was another dramatist of the same kind, but perhaps of a less artificial stamp. He adhered to the old model of drama, or to something like it, more, apparently, because it satisfied his requirements, than from abstract predilection for it, or from dislike to the new models. His *Norma* has the merit of having at least suggested the libretto of one of the most popular of modern operas, and his *Une Fête sous Néron* is not devoid of merit. Soumet was in the early days of the movement a kind of outsider in it, and it cannot be said that at any time he became an enemy, or that his work is conspicuous for any fatal defects according to the new method of criticism. A deficiency of initiative, rather than, as in Delavigne's case, a preference of inferior models, seems to have been the reason why he did not advance further.



The Romantic Propaganda in Periodicals.

It was, however, reserved for a younger generation actually to cross the Rubicon, and to achieve the reform which was needed. The assistance which the vast spread of periodical literature lent to such an attempt has been already noted, and it was in four periodical publications that the first definite note of the literary revolution was sounded. In these the movement was carried on for many years before the famous representation of *Hernani*, which announced the triumph of the innovators. These four publications were: first, *Le Conservateur Littéraire* (a journal published as early as 1819, before the *Odes* of Victor Hugo, who was one of its main-stays, or even the *Méditations* of Lamartine had appeared); secondly, the *Annales Romantiques*, which began in 1823, with perhaps the most brilliant list of contributors that any periodical—with the possible exception of the nearly contemporary *London Magazine*—ever had; a list including Chateaubriand, Lamennais, Lamartine, Joseph de Maistre (posthumously), Alfred de Vigny, Henri de Latouche, Hugo, Nodier, Béranger, Casimir Delavigne, Madame Desbordes-Valmore, and Delphine Gay, afterwards Madame de Girardin. Although not formally, this was practically a kind of annual of the *Muse Française*, which had pretty nearly the same contributors, and conducted the warfare in more definitely polemical manner by criticism and precept, as well as by example. Lastly, there was the important newspaper —a real newspaper this—called *Le Globe*, which appeared in 1822. The other Romantic organs had

been either colourless as regards politics, or else more or less definitely conservative and monarchical, the middle age influence being still strong. The *Globe* was avowedly liberal in politics. Men of the greatest eminence in various ways, Jouffroy, Damiron, Pierre Leroux, and Charles de Rémusat, wrote in it; but its literary importance in history is due to the fact that here Sainte-Beuve, the critic of the movement, began, and for a long time carried out the vast series of critical studies of French and other literature which, partly by destruction and partly by construction, made the older literary theory for ever obsolete. The various names in poetry and prose of this romantic movement must now be reviewed.

Victor Hugo.

Victor Marie Hugo was born at Besançon on the 28th of February, 1802. His father was an officer of distinction in Napoleon's army, his mother was of Vendean blood and of royalist principles, which last her son for a long time shared. His literary activity began extremely early. He was, as has been seen, a contributor to the *Conservateur Littéraire* at the age of seventeen, and, with much work which he did not choose to preserve, some which still worthily finds a place in his published collections appeared there. Indeed, with his two brothers, Abel and Eugène, he took a principal share in the management of the periodical. His *Odes et Poésies Diverses* appeared in 1822, when he was twenty, and were followed two years afterwards by a fresh collection. In these poems, though great strength and beauty of diction are apparent, nothing that can be called distinct innovation appears. It is otherwise with the *Odes et*

Ballades of 1826, and the *Orientales* of 1829. Here the Romantic challenge is definitely thrown down. The subjects are taken by preference from times and countries which the classical tradition had regarded as barbarous. The metres and rhythm are studiously broken, varied, and irregular; the language has the utmost possible glow of colour as opposed to the cold correctness of classical poetry, the completest disdain of conventional periphrasis, the boldest reliance on exotic terms and daring neologisms. Two romances in prose, more fantastic in subject and audacious in treatment than the wildest of the *Orientales*, had preceded the latter. The first, *Han d'Islande*, was published anonymously in 1823. It handled with much extravagance, but with extraordinary force and picturesqueness, the adventures of a bandit in Norway. The second, *Bug Jargal*, an earlier form of which had already appeared in the *Conservateur*, was published in 1826. But the rebels, of whom Victor Hugo was by this time the acknowledged chief, knew that the theatre was at once the stronghold of their enemies, and the most important point of vantage for themselves. Victor Hugo's theatrical, or at least dramatic, *début* was not altogether happy. *Cromwell*, which was published in 1828, was not acted, and indeed, from its great length and other peculiarities, could hardly have been acted. It is rather a romance thrown into dramatic form than a play. In its published shape, however, it was introduced by an elaborate preface, containing a full exposition of the new views which served as a kind of manifesto. Some minor works about this time need not be noticed. The final strokes in verse and prose were struck, the one shortly before the revolution of July, the other shortly after it, by the drama of *Hernani, ou l'Honneur Castillan*, and the prose romance of *Notre*

Dame de Paris. The former, after great difficulties with the actors and with outside influences—it is said that certain academicians of the old school actually applied to Charles X. to forbid the representation—was acted at the Théâtre Français on the 25th of February, 1830. The latter was published in 1831. The reading of these two celebrated works, despite nearly sixty years of subsequent and constant production with unflagging powers on the part of their author, would suffice to give any one a fair, though not a complete, idea of Victor Hugo, and of the characteristics of the literary movement of which he has been the head. The main subject of *Hernani* is the point of honour which compels a noble Spaniard to kill himself, in obedience to the blast of a horn sounded by his mortal enemy, at the very moment of his marriage with his beloved. *Notre Dame de Paris* is a picture by turns brilliant and sombre of the manners of the mediaeval capital. In both the author's great failing, a deficient sense of humour and of proportion, which occasionally makes him overstep the line between the sublime and the ridiculous, is sometimes perceivable. In both, too, there is a certain lack of technical neatness and completeness in construction. But the extraordinary command of the tragic passions of pity, admiration, and terror, the wonderful faculty of painting in words, the magnificence of language, the power of indefinite poetical suggestion, the sweep and rush of style which transports the reader, almost against his will and judgment, are fully manifest in them. As a mere innovation, *Hernani* is the most striking of the two. Almost every rule of the old French stage is deliberately violated. Although the language is in parts ornate to a degree, the old periphrases are wholly excluded; and when simple things have to be

said they are said with the utmost simplicity. The cadence and arrangement of the classical Alexandrine are audaciously reconstructed. Not merely is the practice of *enjambement* (or overlapping of lines and couplets, as distinct from the rigid separation of them) frequent and daring, but the whole balance and rhythm of the individual line is altered. Ever since Racine the one aim of the dramatist had been to make the Alexandrine run as monotonously as possible. The aim of Victor Hugo was to make it run with the greatest possible variety. In short, the whole theory of the drama was altered. The decade which followed the revolution of July was Victor Hugo's most triumphant period. A series of dramas, *Marion de Lorme*, *Les Roi s'Amuse*, *Lucrèce Borgia*, *Marie Tudor*, *Angelo*, *Les Burgraves*, succeeded each other at short intervals, and were accompanied by four volumes of immortal verse, *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, *Chants du Crépuscule*, *Les Voix Intérieures*, *Les Rayons et les Ombres*. The dramas continued to show Victor Hugo's command of tragic passion, his wonderful faculty of verse, his fertility in moving situations, and in incidents of horror and grandeur; but they did not indicate an increased acquaintance with those minor arts of the playwright, which are necessary to the success of acted dramas, and which many of Hugo's own pupils possessed to perfection. Accordingly, towards the end of the decade, some reaction took place against them, and their author ceased to write for the stage. His purely poetical productions showed, however, an increase at once of poetical and of critical power; and of the four volumes mentioned, each one contains many pieces which have never been excelled in French poetry, and which may be fairly compared with the greatest poetical productions of the same kind in other

literatures. Meanwhile, Victor Hugo's political ideas (which never, in any of their forms, brought him much luck, literary or other) had undergone a remarkable change. During the reign of Louis Philippe, he, who had recently been an ardent legitimist, became, first, a constitutional royalist (in which capacity he accepted from the king a peerage), then an extreme liberal, and at last, when the revolution of 1848 broke out, a republican democrat. He was banished for his opposition to Louis Napoleon, and fled, first to Brussels, and then to the Channel Islands, launching against his enemy a prose lampoon, *Napoléon le Petit*, and then a volume of verse, *Les Châtiments*, of marvellous vigour and brilliancy. During the ten years before this his literary work had been for the most part suspended, at least as far as publication is concerned. But his exile gave a fresh spur to his genius. After four years' residence, first in Jersey, then in Guernsey, he published *Les Contemplations* (2 vols.), a collection of lyrical pieces, not different in general form from the four volumes which had preceded them; and, in 1859, *La Légende des Siècles*, a marvellous series of narrative or pictorial poems representing scenes from different epochs of the history of the world. These three volumes together represent his poetical talent at its highest. He, at other times before and since, equalled but never surpassed them. In *La Légende des Siècles* the variety of the music, the majesty of some of the pieces and the pathos of others, the rapid succession of brilliant dissolving views, and the complete mastery of language and versification at which the poet arrived, combine to produce an effect not easily paralleled elsewhere. The *Contemplations*, as their name imports, are chiefly meditative. They are somewhat unequal, and the tone of speculative

pondering on the mysteries of life which distinguishes them sometimes drops into what is called sermonising, but their best pieces are admirable. During the whole of the Second Empire Victor Hugo continued to reside in Guernsey, publishing, in 1862, a long prose romance, *Les Misérables*, one of the most unequal of his books; then another, the exquisite *Travailleurs de la Mer*, as well as a volume of criticism on *William Shakespeare*, some passages in which rank among the best pieces of ornate prose in French; and, in 1869, *L'Homme qui Rit*, a historical romance of a somewhat extravagant character, recalling his earliest attempts in this kind, but full of power. A small collection of lyric verse, mostly light and pastoral in character, had appeared under the title of *Chansons des Rues et des Bois*. The Revolution which followed the troubles of France, in 1870, restored Victor Hugo to his country only to inflict a bitter, though passing, annoyance on him. He had somewhat mistaken the temper of the National Assembly at Bordeaux to which he had been elected. He even found himself laughed at, and he retired to Brussels in disgust. Here he was identified by public opinion with the Communists, and subjected to some manifestations of popular displeasure, which, unfortunately, his sensitive temperament and vivid imagination magnified unreasonably. Returning to France after the publication of nearly his weakest book, *L'Année Terrible*, he lived quietly, but as a kind of popular and literary idol, till his death in 1885. Of his abundant later (including not a little posthumous) work *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, another historical romance, and two books of poetry (a second series of the *Légende des Siècles*, 1877, and *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, 1881) at their best, equal anything he has

ever done. The second *Légende* is inferior to the first in variety of tone and in vivid pictorial presentment, but equals it in the declamatory vigour of its best passages. *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit* is, perhaps, the most striking single book that Victor Hugo produced, containing as it does lyric and narrative work of the very finest quality, and a drama of an entirely original character, which, after more than sixty years of publicity, showed a new side of the author's genius.

This somewhat minute account of Victor Hugo's work must be supplemented by some general criticism of his literary characteristics. As will probably have been observed, from what has already been said, there were remarkable gaps in his ability. In purely intellectual characteristics, the characteristics of the logician and the philosopher, he was weak. He was also, as has been said, deficient in the sense of humorous contrast, and in the perception of strict literary proportion. Long years of solitary pre-eminence, and of the frequently unreasonable worship of fools as well as of wise men, gave him, or encouraged in him, a tendency to regard the universe too much from the point of view of France in the first place, Paris in the second, and Victor Hugo in the third. His unequalled skill in the management of proper names tempted him to abuse them as instruments of sonority in his verse. He is often inaccurate in fact, presenting in this respect a remarkable resemblance to his counterpart and complement Voltaire. The one merit which swallowed up almost all others in classical and pseudo-classical literature is wanting in him—the sense of measure. He is a childish politician, a visionary social reformer. But, when all this has been said, there remains a sum total of purely literary

merits which suffices to place him on a level with the greatest in literature. The mere fact that he is equally remarkable for the exquisite grace of his smaller lyrics, and for the rhetorical magnificence of his declamatory passages, argues some peculiar and masterly idiosyncrasy in him. No poet has a rarer and more delicate touch of pathos, none a more masculine or a fuller tone of indignation. The great peculiarity of Victor Hugo is that his poetry always transports. No one who cares for poetry at all, and who has mastered the preliminary necessity of acquaintance with the French language and French prosody, can read any of his better works without gradually rising to a condition of enthusiasm in which the possible defects of the matter are altogether lost sight of in the unsurpassed and dazzling excellence of the manner. This is the special test of poetry, and there is none other. The technical means by which Victor Hugo produces these effects have been already hinted at. They consist in a mastery of varied versification, in an extraordinary command of pictorial language, dealing at once with physical and mental phenomena, and, above all, in a certain irresistible habit of never allowing the iron to grow cold. Stroke follows stroke in the exciting and transporting process in a manner not easily paralleled in other writers. Other poets are often best exhibited by very short extracts, by jewels five words long. This is not so with Victor Hugo. He has such jewels, but they are not his chief titles to admiration. The ardour and flow, as of molten metal, which characterise him are felt only in the mass, and must be sought there. What has been said of his verse is true, with but slight modifications, of his prose, which is however on the whole inferior. His unequalled versification is a weapon which he could

not exchange for the less pointed tool of prose without losing much of his power. His defects emerge as his merits subside. But taking him altogether, it may be asserted, without the least fear of contradiction, that Victor Hugo deserves the title of the greatest poet hitherto, and of one of the greatest prose writers of France. Such a faculty, thrown into almost any cause, must have gone far to make it triumph. But in a cause of such merits, and so stoutly seconded by others, as that of the destruction of the classical tradition which had cramped and starved French literature, there could be no doubt of success when a champion such as Victor Hugo took up and carried through to the end the task of championship.

Sainte-Beuve.

It is very seldom that the two different forces of criticism and creation work together as they did in the case of the Romantic movement. Each had numerous representatives, but the point of importance is that each was represented by one of the greatest masters. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the critic not merely of the Romantic movement, but of the nineteenth century, and in a manner the first scientific and universal critic that the world has seen, was born at Boulogne on the 23rd of December, 1804. His father held an office of some importance; his mother was of English blood. He was well educated, first at his native town, then at Paris. He began by studying medicine, but very soon turned to literature, and, as has been said, distinguished himself on the *Globe*. The most important of his articles in this paper were devoted to the French

literature of the sixteenth century, and these were published as a volume, in 1828, with great success. Sainte-Beuve at once became the critic *en titre* of the movement, though he did not very long continue in formal connection with it. It was some time, however, before he resigned himself to purely critical work. *Les Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, *Les Consolations*, and *Volupté* were successive attempts at original composition, which, despite the talent of their author, hardly made much mark, or deserved to make it. He did not persevere further in a career for which he was evidently unfitted, but betook himself to the long series of separate critical studies, partly of foreign and classical literature, but usually of French, which made his reputation. The papers to which he chiefly contributed were the *Constitutionnel* and the *Moniteur*, and during the middle of this century his Monday *feuilletons* of criticism were the chief recurring literary event of Europe. These studies were at intervals collected and published in sets under the titles *Critiques et Portraits Littéraires*, *Portraits Contemporains*, *Causeries du Lundi*, and *Nouveaux Lundis*, the last series only finishing with his death in 1869. Besides this he had undertaken a single work of great magnitude in his *Histoire de Port Royal*, on which he spent some twenty years. He was elected to the Academy in 1845, and after the establishment of the Empire he was one of the few distinguished literary men who took its side. The first reward that he obtained was a professorship in the College de France; but some years before his death he received the senatorship, a lucrative position, and one which interfered very little with the studies of the occupant. In character Sainte-Beuve strongly resembled some of the epicureans of his favourite seventeenth century; but whatever faults he may

have had were redeemed by much good-nature and an entire absence of literary vanity.

His Method.

Dangers of the Method.

The importance of Sainte-Beuve in literature is historically, and as a matter of influence, superior even to that of the great poet with whom he was for some time in close friendship, though before very long their stars fell apart. Until his time the science of criticism had been almost entirely conducted on what may be called pedagogic lines. The critic either constructed for himself, or more probably accepted from tradition, a cut-and-dried scheme of the correct plan of different kinds of literature, and contented himself with adjusting any new work to this, marking off its agreements or differences, and judging accordingly. Here and there in French literature critics like Saint-Evremond, Fénelon, La Bruyère in part, Diderot, Joubert, had adopted another method, but the small acquaintance which most Frenchmen possessed of literature other than their own stood in the way of success. Sainte-Beuve was the first to found criticism on a wide study of literature, instead of directing a more or less narrow study of literature by critical rules. Victor Hugo himself has laid down, in the preface to the *Orientales*, one important principle—the principle that the critic has only to judge of the intrinsic goodness of the book, and not of its conformity to certain pre-established ideas. There remains the

difficulty of deciding what is intrinsically good or bad. To solve this, the only way is, first, to prepare the mind of the critic by a wide study of literature, which may free him from merely local and national prejudices; and, secondly, to direct his attention not so much to cut-and-dried ideas of an epic, a sonnet, a drama, as to the object which the author himself had before him when he composed his work. In carrying out this principle it becomes obviously of great importance to study the man himself as well as his works, and his works as a whole as well as the particular sample before the judge. Sainte-Beuve was almost the first in France to set the example of the *causerie critique*, the essay which sets before the reader the life, circumstances, aims, society, and literary atmosphere of the author, as well as his literary achievements. This accounts for the extreme interest shown by the public in what had very commonly been regarded as one of the idlest and least profitable kinds of literature. At the same time the method has two dangers to which it is specially exposed. One is the danger of limiting the consideration to external facts merely, and giving a gossiping biography rather than a criticism. The other, and the more subtle danger, is the construction of a new cut-and-dried theory instead of the old one, by regarding every man as simply a product of his age and circumstances, and ticketing him off accordingly without considering his works themselves to see whether they bear out the theory by facts. In either case, the great question which Victor Hugo has stated, 'L'ouvrage est-il bon ou est-il mauvais?' remains unanswered in any satisfactory measure. Sainte-Beuve himself did not often fall into either error. His taste was remarkably catholic and remarkably fine. The only fault which can justly be

found with him is the fault which naturally besets such a critic, the tendency to look too complacently on persons of moderate talent, whose merits he himself is perhaps the first to recognise fully, and to be proportionately unjust to the greater names whose merits, on good systems and bad alike, are universally acknowledged, in whose case it is difficult to say anything new, and who are therefore somewhat ungrateful subjects for the ingenious and delicate analysis which more mixed talents repay. But study of the work of such a man as Sainte-Beuve is an almost absolute safeguard against the intolerance of former days in matter of literature, and this is its great merit.

Dumas the Elder.

Around Victor Hugo were grouped not a few writers who were only inferior to himself. But, before mentioning the members of what is called the *cénacle*, or innermost Romantic circle, a third name of almost equal temporary importance to those of Hugo and Sainte-Beuve must be named—that of Alexandre Dumas. This writer, one of the most prolific, and in some respects one of the most remarkable of dramatists and novelists, was the son of a general in the revolutionary army, and was born, on the 23rd of July, 1806, at Villers Cotterets. He had hardly any education; but, coming to Paris at the age of twenty, he was fortunate enough to obtain a clerkship in the household of the Duke of Orleans. He tried literature almost at once, and in 1829 his *Henri III. et sa Cour* was played, and was a great success. This was a year before *Hernani*, and though Dumas had no pretence to rival Hugo in literary

merit, his drama was quite as revolutionary in style, events, language, and general arrangement as Hugo's. But he had not heralded it by any general defiance, and it possessed (what his greater contemporary's dramatic work never fully possessed) the indefinable knowledge of the stage and its requirements, which always tells on an audience. After the Revolution of July, the daring play of *Antony* achieved an almost equal success, despite its attacks on the proprieties, attacks of which at that time French opinion was not tolerant in a serious play. Then he returned to the historical drama in the *Tour de Nesle*, another play of strong situations and reckless sacrifice of everything else to excitement. After this Dumas published many plays, of which *Don Juan de Marana* and *Kean* are perhaps the most extravagant, and *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*, 1839, the best. But before long he fell into a train of writing more profitable even than the drama. This was the composition of historical romances something in Scott's manner. The most famous of these, such as the *Three Musketeers*, *La Reine Margot*, and *Monte Cristo*, were produced towards the latter part of the reign of Louis Philippe, his early patron. He travelled a great deal, making books and money out of his travels; and sometimes, as when he was the companion of Garibaldi, finding himself in curious company. No man, probably, ever made so much money by literature in France as Dumas, though he was not equally skilled in keeping it. He died, in the midst of the disasters of his country, on Christmas Eve, 1870. Dumas' literary position and influence are not very easy to estimate, because of the strange extent to which he carried what is called collaboration, and his frank avowal of something very like plagiarism in many of the works which he

wrote unassisted. Endeavours have even been made to show that his most celebrated works are the production of hack writers whom he paid to write under his name. Nor is there the least doubt that he did resort on a large scale to something like the practice of those portrait painters who employ their pupils to paint in the draperies, backgrounds, and accessories of their work. But that Dumas was the moving spirit still, and the actual author of what is best and most peculiar in the works that go by his name, is sufficiently proved by the fact that none of his assistants, whose names are in many cases known, and who in not a few instances subsequently attained eminence on their own account, have equalled or even resembled his peculiar style. Dumas' dramatic work is of but little value as literature properly so called. His forte is the already mentioned playwright's instinct, as it may be termed, which made him almost invariably choose and conduct his action in a manner so interesting and absorbing to the audience that they had no time to think of the merits of the style, the propriety of the morals, the congruity of the sentiments. His plays, in short, are intended to be acted, not to be read. Of his novels many are disfigured by long passages of the inferior work to be expected from mere hack assistants, by unskilful insertions of passages from his authorities, and sometimes by plagiarisms so audacious and flagrant, that the reader takes them as little less than an insult. His best work, however, such as the whole of the long series ranging from *Les Trois Mousquetaires* through *Vingt Ans après* to *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, a second long series of which *La Reine Margot* is a member, and parts of others, has peculiar and almost unique merits. The style is not more remarkable as such than that of the dramas; there is

not always, or often, a well-defined plot, and the characters are drawn only in the broadest outline. But the cunning admixture of incident and dialogue by which Dumas carries on the interest of his gigantic narrations without wearying the reader is a secret of his own, and has never been thoroughly mastered by any one else.

Honoré de Balzac.

While Dumas thus gave himself up to the novel of incident, two other writers of equally remarkable genius, and of greater merely literary power, also devoted themselves to prose fiction, and by this means exercised a wide influence on their generation. Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours, on the 20th of May, 1799. He was fairly well educated, but his father's circumstances compelled him to place his son in a lawyer's office. This Balzac could not endure, and he very shortly betook himself to literature, suffering very considerable hardships. The task he attempted was fiction, and his experience in it was unique. For years he wrote steadily, and published dozens of volumes, not merely without attaining success, but without deserving any. But few of these are ever read now, and when they are opened it is out of mere curiosity, a curiosity which meets with but little return. Yet Balzac continued, in spite of hardship and of ill success, to work on, and in his thirtieth year he made his first mark with *Les Derniers Chouans*, a historical novel, which, if not of great excellence, at least shows a peculiar and decided talent. From this time forward he worked with spirit and success in his own manner, and in twenty years produced the vast collection which he

himself termed *La Comédie Humaine*, the individual novels being often connected by community of personages, and always by the peculiar fashion of analytical display of character which from them is identified with Balzac's name. The most successful of these are concerned with Parisian life, and perhaps the most powerful of all are *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Cousine Bette*, *La Peau de Chagrin*, *La Recherche de l'Absolu*, *Séraphita*. The last is the best piece of mere writing that Balzac has produced. He had also a wonderful faculty for short tales (*Le Chef-d'œuvre Inconnu*, *Une Passion dans le Désert*, etc.). He tried the theatre, but failed. Notwithstanding Balzac's untiring energy (he would often work for weeks together with the briefest intervals of sleep) and the popularity of his books, he was always in pecuniary difficulties. These were caused partly by his mania for speculation, and partly by his singular habits of composition. He would write a novel in short compass, have it printed, then enlarge the printed sheets with corrections, and repeat this process again and again until the expenses of the mere printing swallowed up great part of the profits of the work. At last he obtained wealth, and, as it seemed, a prospect of happiness. In 1850 he married Madame Hanska, a rich Polish lady, to whom he had been attached for many years. He had prepared for a life of opulent ease at Paris with his wife; but a few months after his marriage he died of heart disease. Balzac is in a way the greatest of French novelists, because he is the most entirely singular and original. It has been said of him, with as much truth as exaggeration, that he has drawn a whole world of character after having first created it out of his own head. Balzac's characters are never quite human, and the atmosphere in which they are placed has something

of the same unreality (though it is for the most part tragically and not comically unreal) as that of Dickens. Everything is seen through a kind of distorting lens, yet the actual vision is defined with the most extraordinary precision, and in the most vivid colours. Balzac had great drawbacks. Despite his noble prefix he cannot conceive or draw either a gentleman or a lady. His virtuous characters are usually virtuous in the theatrical sense only; his scheme of human character is altogether low and mean. But he can analyse vice and meanness with wonderful vigour, and he is almost unmatched in the power of conferring apparent reality upon what the reader nevertheless feels to be imaginary and ideal. It follows almost necessarily that he is happiest when his subject has a strong touch of the fantastic. The already mentioned *Peau de Chagrin*—a magic skin which confers wishing powers on its possessor but shrivels at each wish, shortening his life correspondingly—and *Séraphita*, a purely romantic or fantastic tale, are instances of this. Almost more striking than either are the *Contes Drolatiques*, tales composed in imitation of the manner and language of the sixteenth century. Here the grotesque and fantastic incidents and tone exactly suit the writer, and some of the stories are among the masterpieces of French literature. The same sympathy with the abnormal may be noticed in the *Chef-d'œuvre Inconnu*, where a solitary painter touches and retouches his supposed masterpiece till he loses all power of self-criticism, and at lasts exhibits triumphantly a shapeless and unintelligible daub of mingled colours. Balzac's style is not in itself of the best; it is clumsy, inelastic, and destitute of the order and proportion which distinguish the best French prose, but it is not ill suited to the peculiar character

of his work.

George Sand.

With Balzac's name is inseparably connected, if only from the striking contrast between them, that of George Sand. Amandine Lucile Aurore Dupin, who took the writing name of George Sand, was born at Paris in 1804, and had a somewhat singular family history, of which it is enough to say here that she was descended through her father's mother from Marshal Saxe, the famous son of Augustus of Saxony and Aurore von Köningsmarck. At the age of eighteen she married a man named Dudevant, and was very unhappy, though it is rather difficult to determine on whom the blame of the unhappiness ought to rest. They separated after a few years, and she came to Paris, from her home at Nohant in Berry, to seek a living. She found it soon in literature, having met with a friend and companion in the novelist Jules Sandeau, and with a stern and most useful critic in Henri de Latouche. Her first novel of importance was *Indiana*, published in 1832. This was followed by *Valentine*, *Lélia*, *Jacques*, etc. The interest of all or most of these turns on the sufferings of the *femme incomprise*, a celebrated person in literature, of whom George Sand is the historiographer, if not the inventor. A long series of novels of this kind gave way, between 1840 and 1849, first to a series of philosophical rhapsodies, of which *Spiridion* is the chief, and then to one in which the political aspirations of the socialist Republicans appear. Of these, *Consuelo*, which is perhaps popularly considered the author's masterpiece, was the chief. Her private history was somewhat remarkable, and

she succeeded in making at least two men of greater genius than herself, Alfred de Musset and Chopin, utterly miserable. They, however, afforded the subjects of two noteworthy books, *Elle et Lui*, and *Lucrezia Floriani*, the latter perhaps the most characteristic of all her early works. After the establishment of the Second Empire her tastes and habits became quieter. She lived chiefly, and latterly almost wholly, at Nohant, being greatly attached to the country; and she wrote many charming sketches of country life with felicitous introduction of *patois*, such as *La Mare au Diable*, *François le Champi*, *La Petite Fadette*. Some voluminous memoirs, published in 1854, dealt with her own early experiences. She lived till the age of seventy-two, dying in 1876, and never ceased to put forth novels which showed no distinct falling off in fertility or imagination, or in command of literary style. She must have written in all nearly a hundred books. As the chief characteristics of Balzac are intense observation, concentrated thought, and the most obstinate and unwearying labour, so the chief characteristic of George Sand is easy improvisation. She had an active and receptive mind which took in the surface of things, whether it was love, or philosophy, or politics, or scenery, or manners, with remarkable and indifferent facility. She had also a style which, if it cannot be ranked among the great literary styles from its absence of statuesque outline, and from its too great fluidity, was excellently suited for the task of improvisation. Her novels, therefore, slipped from her without the slightest mental effort, and appear to have cost her nothing. It is not true, in this case, that what has cost nothing is worth nothing. But even favourable critics admit that it is peculiarly difficult to read a novel of George Sand a second time, and

this is perhaps a decisive test. She is, indeed, far more of an improvising novelist than Dumas, to whom the term has more often been applied, though she wrote better French, and attempted more ambitious subjects. The better characteristics of her novels reappeared, perhaps to greater advantage, in her numerous and agreeable letters, especially those to the novelist Flaubert.

Mérimée.

In striking contrast with these three novelists was Prosper Mérimée, also a novelist for the most part, but, unlike them, a comparatively infertile writer[292], and one of the most exquisite masters of French prose that the nineteenth century has seen. Mérimée was born in 1803, and was therefore almost exactly of an age with the writers just mentioned. For a time he took a certain share in the Romantic movement, but his distinguishing characteristic was a kind of critical cynicism, partly real, partly affected, which made him dislike and distrust exaggeration of all kinds. He accordingly soon fell off. Possessing independent means, and entering the service of the government, he was not obliged to write for bread, and for many years he produced little, devoting himself as much to archæology and the classical languages as to French. He accepted the Second Empire apparently from a genuine and hearty hatred of democracy, and was rewarded with the post of senator. But he had to assist Napoleon III. in his *Cæsar*, and to dance attendance on the Court, the latter duty being made somewhat less irksome to him by his personal attachment to the Empress. Two collections of letters, which have appeared since his death, one addressed to an unknown lady, and the

other to the late Sir Antonio Panizzi, while adding to Mérimée's literary reputation, have thrown very curious light on his character, exhibiting him as a man who, with very genuine and hearty affections, veiled them under an outward cloak of cynicism, for fear of being betrayed into vulgarity and extravagance. He died in 1870, at the beginning of the troubles of France, by which he was deeply afflicted. The entire amount of Mérimée's work is, as has been said, not large, and during the last twenty years of his life it is almost insignificant. But such as it is, it has an enduring and monumental value, which belongs to the work of few of his contemporaries. He began by a curious practice, which united the romantic fancy for strange countries and strong local colour with his personal longing for privacy and the absence of literary *éclat*. *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul*—plays, nominally by a Spanish actress—was produced when he was but one-and-twenty; two years later, with an audacious anagram on the title of his previous work, he published, under the title of *La Guzla*, some nominal translation of Dalmatian prose and verse, in which he utilised with extraordinary cleverness the existing books on Slav poetry. *La Famille de Carvajal* was a further *supercherie* in the same style. In the very height and climax of the Romantic movement Mérimée produced two works, attesting at once his marvellous supremacy of style, his strange critical appreciation of the current forces in literature, his penetrating insight into history, and the satiric background of all his thoughts and studies. These were *La Jacquerie*, and a *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX*. These books, with Balzac's *Contes Drolatiques* (which they long preceded), are the most happy creative criticisms extant of the middle ages

and the Renaissance in France. They are not fair or complete: on the contrary, they are definitely and unfairly hostile. But the mastery at once of human nature and of literary form which they display, the faculty of vivid resurrection indicated by them, the range, the insight, the power of expression, are extraordinary. During the rest of his life Mérimée, with some excursions into history (ancient and modern), archæology, and criticism, confined himself for the most part to the production, at long intervals, of short tales or novels of very limited length. They are all masterpieces of literature, and, like most masterpieces of literature, they indicate, in a comparatively incidental and by-the-way fashion, paths which duller men have followed up to the natural result of absurdity and exaggeration. *Colomba*, *Mateo Falcone*, *La Double Méprise*, *La Vénus d'Ille*, *L'Enlèvement de la Redoute*, *Lokis*, have equals, but no superiors either in French prose fiction or in French prose. Grasp of human character, reserved but masterly description of scenery, delicate analysis of motive, ability to represent the supernatural, pathos, grandeur, simple narrative excellence, appear turn by turn in these wonderful pieces, as they appear hardly anywhere else except in the author to whom we shall come next. It is noteworthy, however, that Mérimée is a master of the simple style in literature as Gautier is of the ornate. One cannot be said to be greater than the other, but between them they exhibit French prose in a perfection which, since the seventeenth century, it had not possessed.

Théophile Gautier.

Théophile Gautier was born considerably later than most of the writers just mentioned. His birth-year was 1811, and he was a native of Tarbes in Gascony. His education was partly at the grammar school of that town, and partly at the Lycée Charlemagne, where he made friends with Gérard de Nerval, who was destined to have a great influence on his life. After leaving school he was intended for the profession of art. But, like Thackeray, to whom he had many points of resemblance, he had much less artistic faculty than taste. Gérard introduced him to the circle of Victor Hugo, and he speedily became one of the most fervent disciples of the author of *Hernani*. In a red waistcoat which has become historic, and in a mass of long hair which he continued to wear through life, he was the foremost of the Hugonic *claque* at the representation of that famous play. Young as he was, he soon justified himself as something more than a hanger-on of great men of letters. In 1830 itself he produced a volume of verse, and this was followed by *Albertus*, an audacious poem in the extremest Romantic style, and by a work which did him both harm and good, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. In this the most remarkable qualities of style and artistic conception were accompanied by a wilful disregard of the proprieties. Before long his unusual command of style, which was partly natural, partly founded on a wide and accurate study of the French writers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, recommended him to newspaper work, at which he toiled manfully for the remainder of his life. There was hardly a

department of belles lettres which he did not attempt. He travelled in Algeria, in Russia, in Turkey, in Spain, in Italy, in England, and wrote accounts of his travels, which are among the most brilliant ever printed. He was an assiduous critic of art, of the drama and of literature, and the only charge which has ever been brought against his work in this kind is that it is usually too lenient—that his fine appreciation of even the smallest beauties has made him overlook gross defects. His work in prose fiction was incessant, in poetry more intermittent, and all the more perfect. When the Empire established itself, Gautier, who had no political sympathies, but was, in an undecided sort of way, a conservative from the æsthetic point of view, accepted it. But he gave it no active support, beyond continuing to contribute to the *Moniteur*, and received from it no patronage of any kind. Nor did he sacrifice the least iota of principle, insisting, in the very face of *Les Châtiments*, on having his praise of Victor Hugo inserted in the official journal on pain of his instant resignation. He led a pleasant but laborious life in one of the suburbs of Paris, with a household of sisters, daughters, and cats, to all of whom he was deeply attached. Here he lived through the Prussian siege. On the restoration of order he manfully grappled with his journalist work again, all hopes of lucrative appointments having gone with the Empire. But his health had been broken for some time, and he died in 1872. The works by which Gautier will be remembered are, in miscellaneous prose, a remarkable series of studies on curious figures, chiefly of the seventeenth century, called *Les Grotesques*, and a companion series on the partakers in the movement of 1830, besides his descriptive books. In novel writing there must be mentioned an unsurpassed collection of

short tales (the best of which is *La Morte Amoureuse*); *Le Roman de la Momie*, a clever *tour de force* reviving ancient Egyptian life; and, lastly, *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, a novel in the manner of Dumas, but fashioned in his own inimitable style. In verse, he wrote, besides work already mentioned, the *Comédie de la Mort*, some miscellaneous poems of later date, and, finally, the *Émaux et Camées*. In prose he is, as has been said, the greatest recent master of the ornate style of French, as Mérimée is the greatest master of the simple style. His mastery over mere language is accompanied by a very fine sense of the total form of his tales, so that the already-mentioned *Morte Amoureuse* is one of the unsurpassable things of literature. In general writing he has a singular faculty of embalming the most trivial details in the amber of his style, so that his articles can be read again and again for the mere beauty of them. As a poet he is specially noteworthy for the same command of form joined to the same exquisite perfection of language. In *Émaux et Camées* especially it is almost impossible to find a flaw; language, metre, arrangement, are all complete and perfect, and this formal completeness is further informed by abundant poetic suggestion. The chief fault, if it be a fault, which can be found with Gautier is, that he set himself too deliberately against the tendencies of his age, and excluded too rigidly everything but purely æsthetic subjects of interest from his contemplation, and from the range of his literary energy.

Alfred de Musset.

The most happily-gifted, save one, of the great men of 1830, the weakest beyond comparison in will, in

temperament, in faculty of improving his natural gifts, has yet to be mentioned. Alfred de Musset was born at Paris in 1810. His father held a government place of some value; his elder brother, M. Paul de Musset, was himself a man of letters, and at the same time deeply attached to his younger brother; and the family, though after the death of the father their means were not great, constantly supplied Alfred with a home. He was, fortunately or unfortunately, thrown, when quite a boy, into the society of Victor Hugo, the *cénacle* or inner clique of the Romantic movement. When only nineteen Musset published a volume of poetry, which showed in him a poetic talent inferior only to Hugo's own, and, indeed, not so much inferior as different. These *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* were quickly followed up by a volume entitled *Un Spectacle dans un Fauteuil*, and Musset became famous. Unfortunately for him, he became intimate with George Sand, and the result was a journey to Italy, from which he returned equally broken in health and in heart. His temperament was of almost ultra-poetic excitability, and he had a positively morbid incapacity for undertaking any useful employment, whether it was in itself congenial or no. Thus he refused a well-paid and agreeable position in the French embassy at Madrid; and though he had written admirable prose tales for his own pleasure, he was either unwilling or unable to write them under a regular commission. As he grew older he unfortunately became addicted to the constant and excessive use of stimulants. He was elected to the Academy in 1852, but produced little of value thereafter, and died in 1857. Alfred de Musset's work, notwithstanding his comparatively short life and his want of regular energy, is not inconsiderable in amount, and in quality is of the

highest merit and interest. His poems, its most important item, are deficient in strictly formal merit. He is a very careless versifier and rhymer, and his choice of language is far from exquisite. He has, however, a wonderful note of genuine passion, somewhat of the Byronic kind, but quite independent in species, and entirely free from the falsetto which spoils so much of Byron's work. Besides this his lyrics are, in what may be called 'song-quality,' scarcely to be surpassed. *Les Nuits*, a series of meditative poems in the form of dialogues between the poet and his muse on nights in the month of May, August, October, and December; *Rolla*, an extravagant but powerful tale of the *maladie du siècle*; the addresses to Lamartine and to Malibran, and a few more poems, yield to no work of our time in genuine, original, and passionate music. Next to his poems in subject, though not in merit, may be ranked the prose *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*. His prose tales, *Emmeline*, *Frédéric et Bernerette*, etc., are of great merit, but inferior relatively to his poems, and to his remarkable dramas. These latter are among the most original work of the century. It was some time before they commended themselves to audiences in France, but they have long won their true position. They are of very various kinds. Some, and perhaps the happiest, are of the class called, in French, *proverbes*, dramatic illustrations, that is to say, of some common saying, *Il ne faut jurer de rien: Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*, etc. The grace and delicacy of these, the ingenuity with which the story is adapted to the moral, the abundant wit (for wit is one of Musset's most prominent characteristics) which illustrates and pervades them, make them unique in literature. Others, such as *Les Caprices de Marianne*, *Le Chandelier*, are regular comedies,

admitting, as against the classical tradition, that a comedy may end ill; and others, as *Lorenzaccio*, nearly attain to the dignity of the historic play. The dramatic instinct in Musset was very strong, and may, perhaps, be said to have exceeded in volume, originality, and variety, if not in intensity, the purely poetical. Altogether, Musset is the most remarkable instance in French literature, and one of the most remarkable in the literature of Europe, of merely natural genius, hardly at all developed by study, and not assisted in the least by critical power and a strong will. What, perhaps, distinguished him most is the singular conjunction of the most fervid passion and the most touching lyrical 'cry' with the finest wit, and with unusual dramatic ability.

Influence of the Romantic Leaders.

These eight sum up whatever is greatest and most influential in the generation of 1830. Victor Hugo gave direction and leading to the movement, identified it with his own masterly and commanding genius, furnished it, at brief intervals, with consummate examples. Sainte-Beuve supplied it with the necessary basis of an immense comparative erudition, by which he was enabled to disengage and to exhibit to those who run the true principles of literary criticism, and to point the younger generation to the sources of a richer vocabulary, a more flexible and highly-coloured style, a more cosmopolitan appreciation. Alexandre Dumas, with less strictly literary virtue than any other of the group, occupied the important vantage grounds of the theatre and the lending library in the Romantic

interest. Balzac, equalling the others in the range of his field, added the special example of a minute psychological analysis, and of the most untiring labour. George Sand taught the secret of utilising to the utmost the passing currents of personal and popular sentiment and thought. Mérimée, the master least followed, supplied, in the first place, the necessary warning against a too enthusiastic following of school models; and, in the second, himself held up a model of prose style of severity and exactness equal to the finest examples of the classical school, yet possessing to the full the romantic merits of versatile adaptability, of glowing colour, of direct and fearless phrase. Gautier exhibited, on the one hand, a model of absolute perfection in formal poetry, the workmanship of a gem or a Greek vase; on the other, the model of a prose style so flexible as to serve the most ordinary purposes, so richly equipped as to be equal to any emergency, and yet, in its most elaborate condition, worthy to rank with his own verse. Lastly, again as an outsider (a position which he shares in the group with Mérimée, though in very different fashion), Musset brought the most natural and unaffected tears and laughter by turns, to correct the too scholastic and literary character of the movement, and to show how the most perfectly artistic effect could be produced with the least apparatus of formal study or preparation.

Under the influence partly of these men, and directly exercised by them, partly of the general movement of which they were the leaders and exponents, the literature of France has developed itself for the rest of the century. It remains to give a brief sketch of its principal ornaments during that time. Many names, whose work is intrinsically of all but the highest interest and merit, will have to be rapidly

dispatched, but their chief achievements and their significance in the general march can at least be indicated.

Minor Poets of 1830.

At the head of the poets of this minor band has to be mentioned Millevoye, who might, perhaps with equal or greater appropriateness, have found a place in the preceding book. He is chiefly remarkable as the author of one charming piece of sentimental verse, *La Chute des Feuilles*; and as the occasion of an immortal criticism of Sainte-Beuve's, 'Il se trouve dans les trois quarts des hommes un poète qui meurt jeune tandis que l'homme survit.' The peculiarity of Millevoye and his happiness was that he did not survive the death of the poet in him, but died at the age of thirty-four. Except the piece just mentioned, he wrote little of value, and his total work is not large. But he may be described as a simpler, a somewhat less harmonious, but a less tautologous Lamartine, to whom the gods were kind in allowing him to die young. A curious contrast to Millevoye is furnished by his contemporary, Ulric Guttinguer. Guttinguer was born in 1785, and, like Nodier, he joined himself frankly to the Romantic movement, and was looked up to as a senior by its more active promoters. Like Millevoye, he has to rest his fame almost entirely on one piece, the verses beginning, 'Ils ont dit: l'amour passe et sa flamme est rapide;' but, unlike him, he lived to a great age, and was a tolerably fertile producer. By the side of these two poets ranks Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, who shares, with Louise Labé and Marie de France, the first rank among the poetesses of her country.

Madame Desbordes-Valmore was born in 1787, and died in 1859. Her first volume of poems was published in 1819, and, as in all the verse of this time, the note of sentiment dominates. She continued to publish volumes at intervals until 1843, and another was added after her death. Great sweetness and pathos, with a total absence of affectation, distinguish her work. Perhaps her best piece is the charming song, in a kind of irregular rondeau form, *S'il avait su*. Jean Polonius, whose real name was Labenski, was a Russian, who contributed frequently to the *Annales Romantiques*, and subsequently published two volumes of French poetry. Emile and Antoni Deschamps were the translators of the Romantic movement. Antoni accomplished a complete translation of Dante, Emile translated from English, German, and Italian poets indifferently. They also published original poems together, and separately. Madame Tastu was also a translator, or rather a paraphraser, and an author of original poems of a sentimental kind. Lastly, Jean Reboul, a native of Nîmes, and born in a humble situation, deserves a place among these.

Three poets deserving of all but the first rank, and belonging to the generation of 1830 itself, require each a somewhat longer notice.

Alfred de Vigny.

Alfred de Vigny was born at Loches, on the 27th of March, 1799. He was a man of rank, and his marriage in 1826 with an Englishwoman of wealth gave him independence. He left the army, in which he had served for some years, in 1828, and spent the rest of his life, until his death in 1864, in literary

ease. He had been for some time a member of the Academy. His poetical career was peculiar. Between 1821 and 1829 he produced a small number of poems of the most exquisite finish, which at once attained the popularity they deserved, and were repeatedly reprinted. But for thirty-five years he published hardly anything else in verse, his *Poèmes Philosophiques* not appearing (at least as a volume) until after his death. Yet he was by no means idle. He had written and published in 1826 the prose romance of *Cinq Mars*, and he followed this up, though at considerable intervals, with others, as well as with dramas, of which *Chatterton* is the best and best known. He also translated *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Alfred de Vigny may perhaps be best described as a link between André Chénier and the Romantic poets. He is not much of a lyrist, his best and most famous poems (*Moïse*, *Eloa*, *Dolorida*) being in Alexandrines, and the general form of his verse inclines to that of the eighteenth-century elegy, while it has much of the classical (not pseudo-classical) proportion and grace of Chénier. But his language, and in part his versification, are romantic, though quieter in style than those of most of his companions, whom it must be remembered he for the most part forestalled. In *Moïse* much of what has been called Victor Hugo's 'science of names' is anticipated, as well as his large manner of landscape and declamation. *Eloa* suggests rather Lamartine, but a Lamartine with his weakness replaced by strength, while *Dolorida* has a strong flavour of Musset. The remarkable thing is that in each case the peculiarities of the poet to whom Vigny has been compared were not fully developed until after he wrote, and that therefore he has the merit of originality. It is probable, however, that, exquisite as his poetical

power was, it lacked range, and that he, having the rare faculty of discerning this, designedly limited his production. The best of the posthumous poems already mentioned are fully worthy of his earlier ones, but they display no new faculty.

Auguste Barbier.

If Alfred de Vigny is a poet of few books, Auguste Barbier is a poet of one. Born in 1805, Barbier never formed part of the Romantic circle, properly so called, but he shared to the full its inspiring influence. He began by an historical novel of no great merit, but the revolution of 1830 served as the occasion of his *Iambes*, a series of extraordinarily brilliant and vigorous satires, both political and social. The most famous of all these is *La Curée*, a description of the ignoble scramble for place and profit under the new Orleanist government. No satirical work in modern days has had greater success, and few have deserved it more; the weight and polish of the verse being altogether admirable. Satire is, however, a vein which it is very difficult to work for any length of time with any novelty, as may be seen sufficiently from the fact that the works of all the best satirists, ancient and modern, are contained in a very small compass. Barbier endeavoured to secure the necessary variety of subjects by going to Italy in *Il Pianto*, and to England in *Lazare*, but without success, though both contain many examples of the nervous and splendid verse in which he excels. During the last forty years of his life he wrote much, and he was elected to the Academy in 1869, but *Les Iambes* will remain his title to fame.



Gérard de Nerval.

A name far less generally known, but deserving of being known very well indeed, is that of Gérard de Nerval, or, as his right appellation was, Gérard Labrunie. He was born in 1805, and was one of the most distinguished pupils of the celebrated Lycée Charlemagne, where he made the acquaintance of Théophile Gautier. Gérard (as he is most generally called) was a man of delicate and far-ranging genius, afflicted with the peculiar malady which weighs on some such men, and which may perhaps be described as an infirmity of will. He was not idle, and there was no reason why he should not be prosperous. At an early age he translated *Faust*, to the admiration of Goethe. His *Travels in the East* were widely read, and every newspaper in Paris was glad of his co-operation; yet he was frequently in distress, and died in a horrible and mysterious manner, either by his own hand or murdered by night prowlers. He has been more than once compared to Poe, whom, however, he excelled both in amiability of temperament and in literary knowledge. But the two have been rightly selected by an excellent judge as being, in company with a living English poet, the chief masters of the poetry which 'lies on the further side between verse and music.' Most of Gérard's work is in prose, taking the form of fantastic but exquisite short tales entitled *Les Filles de Feu*, *La Bohême Galante*, etc. His verse, at least the characteristic part of it, is not bulky; it consists partly of folksongs slightly modernised, partly of sonnets, partly of miscellaneous poems. But, if the expression 'prose poetry' be ever allowable, which has been doubted, it is seldom more applicable than to much of Gérard de Nerval's work, both in his description of his travels

and in avowed fiction.

Some minor names remain to be mentioned. Méry, one of the most fertile authors of the century, was a writer of verse as well as of prose, and displayed much the same talent of brilliant improvisation in each capacity. Auguste Brizeux, a Breton by birth, made himself remarkable by idyllic poetry (*Marie*, *La Fleur d'Or*) chiefly dealing with the scenery and figures of his native province. Amédée Pommier is a fertile and not inelegant verse writer, of no very marked characteristics. Charles Dovalle, who was shot in one of the miserable duels between journalists so common in France, at the age of twenty-two, would probably have done remarkable work had he lived. Hégésippe Moreau, to whom a life but very little longer was vouchsafed, devoted himself partly to bacchanalian and satirical work, for which he had not the slightest genius, but produced also some poems of country life, which rank among the sweetest and most natural of the century. Much of his work is little more than a corrupt following of Béranger. In the same way the imitation of Lamartine was not fortunate for Victor de Laprade (*Psyché*, *Les Symphonies*, *Les Voix de Silence*). This imitation is not so much in subject (for M. de Laprade was a philosopher rather than a sentimentalist) as in manner and versification. His verse is also much more strongly impregnated than Lamartine's with classical culture. With due allowance for difference of dates and countries, there is a considerable resemblance between Laprade and Southey. Both had the same accomplishment of style, the same unquestioning submission to the dogmas of Christianity, the same width of literary information. It is unfortunate for France that Laprade was somewhat deficient in humour, a rare growth on her

soil at all times.

Curiosités Romantiques.

Pétrus Borel.

Louis Bertrand.

All these names are more or less widely known, but there is a class of 'oubliés et dédaignés,' as one of their most faithful biographers has called them, who belong to the movement of 1830, and whose numbers are probably, while their merit is certainly, greater than is the case at any other literary epoch. Few of them can be mentioned here, but those few are worthy of mention, and it may perhaps be said that the native vigour of most of them, though warped and distorted for the most part by oddities of temperament or the unkindness of fortune, equals, if it does not surpass, that of many of their more fortunate brethren. The first of these is Pétrus Borel, one of the strangest figures in the history of literature. Very little is known of his life, which was spent partly at Paris and partly in Algeria. He was perhaps the most extravagant of all the Romantics, surnaming himself 'Le Lycanthrope,' and identifying himself with the eccentricities of the *Bousingots*, a clique of political literary men who for a short time made themselves conspicuous after 1830. Borel wrote partly in verse and partly in prose. His most considerable exploit in the former was a strange preface in verse to his novel of *Madame Putiphar*; his best work in prose, a series of wild but powerful

stories entitled *Champavert*. His talent altogether lacked measure and criticism, but it is undeniable. Auguste Fontaney was born in 1803 and died in 1837, having, like many of the literary men of his day, served for a short time in diplomacy. He was a frequent contributor to the early Romantic periodicals, and somewhat later to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*. His work is very unequal, but at its best it is saturated with the true spirit of poetry. Félix Arvers, like our own Blanco White, has obtained his place in literary history by a single sonnet, one of the most beautiful ever written. Auguste de Chatillon was both poet and painter; his chief title to remembrance in the former capacity being a volume of cheerful verse entitled *A l'Auberge de la Grand' Pinte*. Napoléon Peyrat, who, after the fashion of those times (in which Auguste Maquet, a fertile novelist, and a journalist, and a collaborateur of Alexandre Dumas, called himself Augustus Mackeat, and Théophile Dondey anagrammatised his surname into O'Neddy), dubbed himself Napol le Pyrénéen, survives, and justly, in virtue of a single short poem on *Roland*, possessed of extraordinary *verve* and spirit. Last of all has to be mentioned Louis Bertrand, a poet possessed of the rarest faculty, but unfortunately doomed to misfortune and premature death. Born at Ceva in Piedmont, in 1807, and brought up at Dijon, he came to Paris, found there but scanty encouragement, and died in a hospital in 1841. His only work of any importance, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, a series of prose ballads arranged in verses something like those of the English translation of the Bible, and testifying to the most delicate sense of rhythm, and the most exquisite power of poetical suggestion, did not appear until after his death. He and Borel perhaps only of the names contained in

this paragraph represent individual and solid talent: the others are chiefly noteworthy as instances of the extraordinary stimulating force of the time on minds which in other days would probably have remained indocile to poetry, or at least unproductive of it.

Second Group of Romantic Poets.

Three distinct stages are perceptible in French poetry since the date of the Romantic movement, and we have now exhausted the remarkable names belonging to the first. Another opens with those poets who, being born in or about 1820, came to years of discretion in time to see the first force of the movement spent, and found the necessity of striking out something of a new way for themselves. Of this group three names stand pre-eminently forward, those of Baudelaire, Banville, and Leconte de Lisle, while some others may be mentioned beside them.

Théodore de Banville.

Théodore de Banville was born in 1820, of a good family, his father being an officer in the navy. He began to write very early with the *Cariatides*, and continued for fifty years to be active in prose and poetry. M. de Banville displayed at once a remarkable mastery of rhyme and rhythm, and it is in the exhibition of this that he chiefly excelled. Under his auspices not merely the graceful metrical systems of the Pléiade, but the older forms of the mediaeval poets, Ballades, Rondeaux, Triolets, etc., were once more brought into fashion. But M. de

Banville was by no means only a clever versifier. His serious poetry (*Cariatides*, *Stalactites*, *Odelettes*, *Les Exilé's*, *Trente-six Ballades*) is full of poetical language and sentiment, his lighter verse (*Occidentales*, *Odes Funambulesques*) is charming, his prose is excellent, and he was no mean hand at drama (*Gringoire*).

Leconte de Lisle.

As M. de Banville sought for poetical novelty in an elaborate manipulation of the formal part of poetry, so M. Leconte de Lisle has sought it in a wide range of subject. He is a great translator of Greek verse. But in his original poems (*Poésies Antiques*, *Poésies Barbares*, *Poëmes et Poésies*) he has gone not merely to the classics but to the East and to mediaeval times for his inspiration. A tendency to load his verse with exotic names in unusual forms (he was one of the first Frenchmen to adopt the fashion of spelling Greek names with a strict transliteration) has brought, not perhaps altogether undeservedly, the charge of affectation on M. Leconte de Lisle. But he is a poet of no small power, not merely in outlandish subjects such as *Le Massacre de Mona*, *Le Sommeil du Condor*, *Le Runoia*, etc., but in much simpler work, such as the beautiful *Requies*.

Charles Baudelaire.

Charles Baudelaire had a more original talent than either of these. Although a very careful writer, he is not studious of bizarre rhythm, nor are his subjects for the most part outlandish. He chose, however, to illustrate a peculiar form of poetical melancholy by dwelling on subjects many of which would have been

better left alone, while others were treated in a manner unsuited to the time. His *Fleurs du Mal*, therefore, as his chief work is entitled, had to undergo expurgation before it was allowed to be published, and has never been popular with the general public. But its best pieces, as well as the best of some singular *Petits Poëmes en Prose*, partly inspired by Louis Bertrand, have extraordinary merit in the way of delicate poetical suggestion and a lofty spiritualism. Baudelaire was also a very accomplished critic, his point of view being less exclusively French than that of almost any other French writer of the same class. He translated Poe and De Quincey.

Minor Poets of the Second Romantic Group.

Dupont.

The minor poets of this second Romantic school may again be grouped together. Charles Coran, a miscellaneous poet of talent, anticipated the school of which we shall shortly have to give some notice, that of the *Parnassiens*. Joséphin Soulary is remarkable for the extreme beauty of his sonnets, in devoting himself to which form he anticipated a general tendency of contemporary poets both English and French. Auguste Vacquerie, better known as a critic, a dramatist, and a journalist, began as a lyrical and miscellaneous poet, and achieved some noticeable work. Gustave Le Vavasseur attempted, not without success, to revive the vigorous tradition of Norman poetry. Pierre Dupont, better known than

any of these, seemed at one time likely to be a poet of the first rank, but unfortunately wasted his talent in Bohemian dawdling and disorder. His songs were the delight of the young generation of 1848, and two of them, *Le Chant des Ouvriers* and *Les Bœufs*, are still most remarkable compositions. Louis Bouilhet (whose best poem is *Melœnis*) has some resemblance to M. Leconte de Lisle, though he went still further afield for his subjects. He had no small power, but the defect of the old descriptive poetry revived in him, and in some of his contemporaries and followers, the defect necessarily attendant on forgetfulness of the fact that description by itself, however beautiful it may be, is not poetry. With these may be mentioned Gustave Nadaud, a song-writer pure and simple, free from almost any influence of school literature, a true follower of Béranger, though with much less range, wit, and depth.

The Parnasse.

Except Dupont and Nadaud, all the poets just mentioned may be said to belong more or less to the school of Gautier—the school, that is to say, which attached preponderant importance to form in poetry. Towards the middle of the Second Empire a crowd of younger writers, who had adopted this principle still more unhesitatingly, grew up, and formed what has been known for some years, partly seriously, partly in derision, as the *Parnassien* school. The origin of this term was the issue, in 1866 (as a sort of poetical manifesto preluding the great Exhibition of the next year), of a collection of poetry from the pens of a large number of poets, from Théophile Gautier and

Emile Deschamps downwards. This was entitled *Le Parnasse Contemporain*, after an old French fashion. Another collection of the same kind was begun in 1869, interrupted by the war, and continued afterwards; and a third in 1876: while the *Parnassien* movement was also represented in several newspapers, the chief of which was *La Renaissance*. Another nickname of the poets of this sect (which, however, included almost all French writers of verse, even Victor de Laprade being counted in) was *les impassibles*, for their presumed devotion to art for art's sake, and their scorn of didactic, domestic, and sentimental poetry. Their numbers were very great, and none, save a few, can be mentioned here. Perhaps the chief of the original *Parnassiens* were MM. Sully Prudhomme and François Coppée, the former of whom experienced some reaction and affected what is called 'thoughtful verse,' while M. Coppée, having taken to domestic subjects, is as popular as any contemporary French poet, and in at least one instance (*Le Luthier de Crémone*) has achieved success at the theatre. A poet of great gifts, the latest of the vagabond school of Villon, was Albert Glatigny, who lived as a strolling actor, and died young. Many of his poems, but especially the *Ballade des Enfans sans Souci*, have singular force and pathos. It would hardly be fair to mention any other names, because a singular evenness of talent and general characteristics manifests itself among these poets. All sacrifice something to the perfection of form, or, to speak more correctly and critically, most are saved only by the perfection of their form, which is as a rule far superior to that of English minor poets. Of late years the *Parnasse* as a single group has broken up somewhat, and during the last decade some isolated poets of promise have appeared. M.

Maurice Bouchor recurred to the bacchanalian model for inspiration; M. Paul Deroulède is tyrtaean and bellicose. Both of these may be said to be representative of reaction against the *Parnasse*. The new naturalist school, which has produced such singular work in prose fiction, is represented in poetry by M. Richepin and M. Guy de Maupassant. The former, with much unworthy work, produced in *La Mer* and elsewhere excellent things. The latter, despite an unfortunate licence of subject, showed himself the strongest and most accomplished versifier who has made his appearance in France for the last twenty years. But after his first efforts he appeared to abandon himself almost entirely to prose. M. Paul Verlaine, a poet known from the early days of the Parnasse, has more recently produced work of increased but very unequal merit, exaggerating the faults but showing some of the charm of Baudelaire; and, partly under his, partly under foreign influence, a still younger school has begun to make experiments in prosody which are not uninteresting, but which are too minute for notice here.

Minor and later Dramatists.

Scribe.

Ponsard.

Emile Augier.

Eugène Labiche.

Dumas the Younger.

Victorien Sardou.

The progress of French drama during the last half century is of somewhat less importance to literature, but of even more to social history, than that of poetry. The greatest masters of drama have already been mentioned among the eight typical names of 1830, even Balzac having attempted it, though without much success. The most famous and successful playwrights, however, as distinguished from the producers of literary dramas, have yet to be noticed[293]. Pixérécourt, a melodramatist and a book-collector, achieved his first success with a play on the well-known story of the Dog of Montargis (itself dating back to the earliest days of the Chansons de Gestes), in 1814, and followed it up with a long succession of similar pieces. Two years later Eugène Scribe, who had been born in 1791, made his *début*, as far as success goes, with *Une Nuit de la Garde Nationale*. Scribe was one of the most prolific, one of the most successful, and one of the least literary of French dramatists. For nearly half a century he continued, sometimes alone, and sometimes in collaboration, to pour forth vaudevilles, dramas, and comedies, almost all of which were favourably received. Scribe was generous to his associates, and would sometimes acknowledge the communication of a bare idea by a share in the profits of the play which it suggested. He had also an

almost unrivalled knowledge of the *technique* of the theatre, and not a little wit. But his style is loose and careless, and his dramas do not bear reading. His most important later plays are *Valérie*, 1822; *Le Mariage d'Argent*, 1827; *Bertrand et Raton*, 1833; *Le Verre d'Eau*, 1840; *Une Chaîne*, 1841; *Bataille de Dames*, 1851. One of the less famous partakers in the first Romantic movement, Bouchardy, distinguished himself, in succession to Pixérécourt, as a Romantic melodramatist, his most famous works being *Le Sonneur de Saint Paul*, and *Lazare le Pâtre*. In 1843 a kind of reaction was supposed to be about to take place, the signs of which were the performance of the *Lucrèce* of Ponsard in that year, and of the *Ciguë* of Emile Augier the year after. Ponsard, however, was only a Romantic whose colour was deadened by his inability to attain more brilliant tones. His succeeding plays, *Agnès de Méranie*, *Charlotte Corday*, *L'Honneur et l'Argent*, showed this sufficiently. M. Emile Augier is a more remarkable and a more independent figure. In so far as he represents a protest against Romanticism at all (which he does only very partially), it is because he shared in the growing tendency towards realism, that is, to a recurrence in the Romantic sense to the *tragédie bourgeoise* of the preceding century, and because also he gave no countenance to the practice, in which some of the early Romantics indulged, of representing immoral personages as interesting. Almost all M. Augier's dramas, such as *L'Aventurière*, 1849, which is his masterpiece, *Gabrielle*, 1849, *Diane*, 1852, *Le Mariage d'Olympe*, 1855, *Le Fils de Giboyer*, 1862, and others of more recent date, are distinctly on the side of the angels. But the author does not make the excellence of his intention a reason for passing off inferior work, and he is justly

recognised as one of the leaders of French drama in the latter half of the century. About this same time (1845) was the date of the appearance of a fertile and successful playwright of the less exalted class, M. Dennery (*Don César de Bazan*, *L'Aieule*). Auguste Maquet, another of the old guard of Romanticism, distinguished himself by helping to adapt to the stage the novels of Dumas the elder, which he had already helped to write; and one of his colleagues on Dumas' staff, M. Octave Feuillet, who was shortly to make a great reputation for himself as a novelist, appeared on the boards with *Échec et Mat*. During the whole of this decade (1840-1850) Delphine Gay, the beautiful and accomplished wife of the journalist Emile de Girardin, was a frequent and successful play-writer. Soon afterwards M. Legouvé, son of the academician of the same name, and himself an academician, began to collaborate with Scribe in works of more importance (*Adrienne Lecouvreur*) than the latter had before attempted; while George Sand and her former friend, Jules Sandeau, were also drawn into the inevitable theatrical vortex. In collaboration with Augier, Sandeau produced, from one of his own novels, one of the best plays of the century, *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, 1855. Eugène Labiche, who had been born in 1815, distinguished himself, in 1851, by *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, and in it laid the foundation of a long career of success in the lighter kind of play which, at last, conducted him to the Academy. His best-known play is *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon*. The year 1852 was memorable for the French stage, for it saw the production of *La Dame aux Camélias*, the first important play of Alexandre Dumas *fils*. Without much of his father's talent for novel-writing, M. Dumas has been both a more successful, and perhaps a better, dramatist. Most of

his plays have been directed to some burning question of the social or ethical kind, and it has been his practice to re-issue them after a time, with argumentative prefaces, in a very singular style. *Diane de Lys*, *Le Demi-Monde*, *La Question d'Argent*, *Le Fils Naturel*, *Le Supplice d'une Femme* (nominally composed with Emile de Girardin), *Les Idées de Madame Aubray*, *Une Visite de Noces*, and *L'Étrangère,* are his chief works. In 1854 appeared a now almost forgotten work by Victorien Sardou, who was destined to be the favourite dramatist of the Second Empire, and to share with MM. Augier and Dumas *fils* the chief rank among the dramatists of the last half of the century. Seven years later *Nos Intimes* gave him a great success, and, in 1865, *La Famille Benoiton* a greater, which he followed up with *Nos Bons Villageois*, 1866. Since that time he has written many plays, of which the finest by far, and one of the few comedies of this age likely to become classical, is the admirable *Rabagas*—a satire of the keenest on the interested politicians, who, in France as elsewhere, take up demagogy as a trade. M. Sardou has attempted serious work in various plays, the best of which is, perhaps, *Patrie*, but it is not his forte. Satirical observation of manners, and especially of the current political and social follies of the day, is what he can do best, and in this peculiar line he has few equals. But he is admitted to be one of the most unequal of writers. A peculiar offspring of the Second Empire are the brilliant burlesques of Offenbach, which owed at least part of their brilliancy to the librettos composed for them by MM. Meilhac and Halévy. The first-named of these had produced successful dramas as far back as 1859. The collaborateurs did not confine themselves to furnishing words for M. Offenbach's music, but

attempted the prose drama frequently and with success, *Froufrou* being their most important work in this way. M. Gondinet and M. Pailleron also deserve notice as successful manufacturers of light plays, the latter in especial having an excellent wit (*Le monde où l'on s'ennuie*, *Le Chevalier Trumeau*). This may also be asserted of M. Halévy, who has latterly, in *Les Petites Cardinal* and other non-dramatic sketches, shown himself to even greater advantage than on the stage. Indeed the Cardinal family may be said to be the most striking literary creation of its kind for years.

In a different class and earlier, Joseph Autran, a poet of the school of Lamartine, obtained a great reputation by his tragedy of *La Fille d'Eschyle*, which procured him a seat in the Academy, and gave him the opportunity of writing not a few volumes of polished, but not very vigorous, poetry. M. Théodore de Banville, who has tried most paths in literature, produced, in 1866, a short play, with the old mystery-writer Gringoire for hero and title-giver; a play which is admirably written, and which has kept its place on the stage. M. François Coppée's graceful *Luthier de Crémone* has already been mentioned. Another literary dramatist, to distinguish the class from those who are playwrights first of all, is M. Henri de Bornier, who obtained some success, in 1875, with *La Fille de Roland*, and, in 1880, with *Les Noces d'Attila*. Both these are good, though not consummate, specimens of the poetical drama.

Classes of Nineteenth-Century Fiction.

Active, however, as was the cultivation of poetry proper and of the drama, it is not likely that the nineteenth century will be principally known in French literary history either as a poetical, or as a dramatic age. Its most creative production is in the field of prose fiction. It is particularly noteworthy that every one of the eight names which have been set at its head is the name of a novelist, and that the energy of most of these authors in novel-writing has been very considerable. Their production may be divided into two broad classes—novels of incident, of which Hugo and Dumas were the chief practitioners, and which derive chiefly from Sir Walter Scott; and novels of character, which, with a not inconsiderable admixture of English influence, may be said to be legitimately descended from the indigenous novel created by Madame de la Fayette, continued by Marivaux and still more by Prévost, and maintained, though in diminished vivacity, by later writers. Of this school George Sand and Balzac are the masters, though much importance must also be assigned to Stendhal. At first the novelists of 1830 decidedly preferred the novel of incident, the literary success of which in the hands of Hugo, and its pecuniary success in the hands of Dumas, were equally likely to excite ambitions of different kinds.

Minor and later Novelists.

Jules Janin.

A rival of both of these in popularity during the reign of Louis Philippe, though infinitely inferior to both in literary skill, was Eugène Sue. With him may be

classed another voluminous manufacturer of exciting stories, Frédéric Soulié, and somewhat later Paul Féval, with next to them Amédée Achard and Roger de Beauvoir. A better writer than any of these was Jules Janin, whose literary career was long and prosperous, but not uniform. Janin began with a strange story, in the extremest Romantic taste, called *L'Ane Mort et la Femme Guillotinée*. This at a later period he represented as an intentional caricature, which is not on the whole likely. He followed it up with *Barnave*, a historical novel full of exciting incident. Both these books, however, with grave defects, have power perhaps superior to that shown in anything that Janin did later. Being an exceedingly facile writer, and lacking that peculiar quality of style which sometimes precludes popularity with the many as much as it secures it with the few, he became absorbed in journalism, in the furnishing of miscellaneous articles, prefaces, and so forth, to the booksellers, and finally in theatrical criticism, where he reigned supreme for many years. None of his later novels need remark. With Janin may be mentioned M. Alphonse Karr, who however has been more of a journalist than of a novelist. His abundant and lively work has not perhaps the qualities of permanence. But his *Voyage autour de mon Jardin*, his *Sous les Tilleuls*, and the satirical publication known as *Les Guépes*, deserve at least to be named. Here too may be noticed M. Barbey d'Aurévilly whose works critical and fictitious (the chief being probably *L'Ensorcelée*) display a very remarkable faculty of style, perhaps too deliberately eccentric, but full of distinction and vigour.

Under the Empire, a fresh group of novelists of incident sprang up. MM. Erckmann and Chatrian produced in collaboration a large number of tales,

chiefly dealing with the events of the Revolution and the First Empire in the north-eastern provinces of France. Criminal and legal subjects were great favourites with the late Emile Gaboriau, who naturalised in France the detective novel. His chief follower is M. Fortuné du Boisgobey.

Charles de Bernard.

The best novelists of the generation of 1830, outside the list of masters, have yet to be noticed. These are Charles de Bernard and Jules Sandeau. Charles de Bernard was at one time Balzac's secretary, but his fashion of work is entirely different from that of his employer. He divides himself for the most part between the representation of the Parisian life of good society and that of country-house manners. His shorter tales are perhaps his best, and many of them, such as *L'Ecueil*, *La Quarantaine*, *Le Paratonnerre*, *Le Gendre*, etc., are admirable examples of a class in which Frenchmen have always excelled. But his longer works, *Gerfaut*, *Les Ailes d'Icare*, *Un Homme Sérieux*, etc., are not inferior to them in wit, in accurate knowledge and skilful portraiture of character, in good breeding, and in satiric touches which are always good-humoured.

Jules Sandeau.

Jules Sandeau was a novelist of no very different class, but with less wit, with much less satiric intention, and with a greater infusion of sentiment, not to say tragedy. His best novels, *Catherine*, *Mademoiselle de Penarvan*, *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*, *Le Docteur Herbeau*, are drawn from provincial life,

which, from the great size of France and its diversity in scenery and local character, has been a remarkably fertile subject to French novelists. These novels are remarkable for their accurate and dramatic construction (which is such that they have lent themselves in more than one instance to theatrical adaptation with great success) and their pure and healthy morality.

Octave Feuillet.

Murger.

Edmond About.

Feydeau.

Gustave Droz

Next in order of birth may be mentioned Octave Feuillet, who began, as has been mentioned, by officiating as assistant to Alexandre Dumas. His first independent efforts in novel-writing, *Bellah* and *Onesta*, were of the same kind as his master's; but they were not great successes, and after a short time he struck into an original and much more promising path. His first really characteristic novel was *La Petite Comtesse*, 1856, and this was followed by others, the best of which are *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, 1858; *Sibylle*, 1862; *M. de Camors*, 1867; and *Julia de Trécœur*, 1872: the two last being perhaps his strongest books, though the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme*

Pauvre is the most popular. M. Feuillet wrote in a pure and easy style, and exhibited in his novels acquaintance with the manners of good society, and a considerable command of pathos. He was more studious of the proprieties than most of his contemporaries, but has indulged in a somewhat unhealthy sentimentalism. Henry Murger had a very original, though a somewhat limited, talent. He is the novelist of what is called the Parisian *Bohême*, the reckless society of young artists and men of letters, which has always grouped itself in greater numbers at Paris than anywhere else. The novel, or rather the series of sketches, entitled *La Vie de Bohême* is one which, from the truth to nature, the pathos, and the wit which accompany its caricature and burlesque of manners, will always hold a position in literature. Murger, who experienced many hardships in his youth, was all his life a careless and reckless liver, and died young. His works (all prose fiction, except a small collection of poems not very striking in form but touching and sincere in sentiment) are tolerably numerous, but the best of them are little more than repetitions of the *Vie de Bohême*. Edmond About, a very lively writer, whose liveliness was not always kept sufficiently in check by good taste, oscillated between fiction and journalism, latterly inclining chiefly to journalism. In his younger days he was better known as a novelist, and some of his works, such as *Tolla* and *Le Roi des Montagnes*, were very popular. More characteristic perhaps are his shorter and more familiar stories (*L'Homme à l'Oreille Cassée*, *Le Nez d'un Notaire*, etc.). In this same group of novelists of the Second Republic and Empire ranks Ernest Feydeau, a morbid and thoroughly unwholesome author, who, however, did not lack power, and once at least (in *Sylvie*) produced work of

unquestionable merit. His other novels, *Fanny*, *Daniel*, *La Comtesse de Chalis*, are chiefly remarkable as showing the worst side of the society of the Empire. Among writers of short stories Champfleury, a friend and contemporary of Murger (who has more recently betaken himself to artistic criticism of the historical kind), deserves notice for his amusing extravaganzas, and Gustave Droz for the singularly ingenious and witty series of domestic sketches entitled *Monsieur*, *Madame et Bébé*, and *Entre Nous*. The range of subject in these is wide and not always what is understood by the English word domestic. But the fancy shown in their design and the literary skill of their execution are alike remarkable and worthy of the ancient reputation of France in the short prose tale. Nor have they lacked followers.

Flaubert.

The greatest of the Second Empire novelists is unquestionably Gustave Flaubert, who was born in 1821. Having a sufficient income he betook himself early to literature, which he cultivated with an amount of care and elaborate self-discipline rare among authors. In 1848 he contributed to the *Artiste* newspaper, then edited by Gautier, some fragments of a remarkable fantasy-piece on the legend of St. Anthony, which was not published as a whole till nearly a quarter of a century later. In 1859, being then nearly forty years old, he achieved at once a great success and a great scandal by his novel of *Madame Bovary*, a study of provincial life, as unsparing as any of Balzac's, but more true to actual nature, more finished in construction, and far superior in style. It was the subject of a prosecution, but the author was acquitted. Next, M. Flaubert

selected an archaeological subject, and produced, after long study, *Salammbo*, a novel the scene of which is pitched at Carthage in the days of the mercenary war. This book, like the former, has a certain repulsiveness of subject in parts; but the vigour of the drawing and the extraordinary skill in description are as remarkable as ever. *L'Education Sentimentale*, which followed, was Flaubert's least popular work, being too long, and having an insufficiently defined plot and interest. Then appeared the completed *Tentation de St. Antoine*, a book deserving to rank at the head of its class—that of the fantastic romance. Afterwards came *Trois Contes*, exhibiting in miniature all the author's characteristics; and lastly, after his sudden death, in 1881, the unfinished *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The faults of Flaubert are, in the first place, indiscriminate meddling with subjects best left alone, which he shares with most French novelists; in the second, a certain complaisance in dealing with things simply horrible, which is more peculiar to him; in the third, an occasional prodigality of erudite detail which clogs and impedes the action. His merits are an almost incomparable power of description, a mastery of those types of character which he attempts, an imagination of extraordinary power, and a singular satirical criticism of life, which does not exclude the possession of a vein of romantic and almost poetical sentiment and suggestion. He is a writer repulsive to many, unintelligible to more, and never likely to be generally popular, but sure to retain his place in the admiration of those who judge literature as literature.

The Naturalists. Emile Zola.



The name of Flaubert has been much invoked, and his reputation has been not a little compromised, by a small but noisy school of novelists and critics who call themselves naturalists, and affect to preach and practice a new crusade for the purpose of revolutionising poetry, fiction, and the drama. These persons, whose leader is M. Emile Zola, a busy and popular novelist, an unsuccessful dramatist, and a critic of great industry, include the brothers Goncourt (one of whom is now dead) and a number of younger writers who deserve no notice, except M. Guy de Maupassant, whose prose, if too often ill employed, is as vigorous as his verse, and who in his excellent *Pierre et Jean* broke his naturalist chains. The naturalists affect to derive from Stendhal, through Balzac and Flaubert. That is to say, they adopt the analytic method, and devote themselves chiefly to the study of character. But they go farther than these great artists by objecting to the processes of art. According to them, literature is to be strictly 'scientific,' to confine itself to anatomy, and, it would appear, to morbid anatomy only. The Romantic treatment, that is to say, the presentation of natural facts in an artistic setting, is rigidly proscribed. Everything must be set down on the principle of a newspaper report, or, to go to another art for an illustration, as if by a photographic camera, not by an artist's pencil. Now it will be obvious to any impartial critic that the pursuance of this method is in itself fatal to the interest of a book. The reader, unless of the very lowest order of intellect, does not want in a novel a mere reproduction of the facts of life, still less a mere scientific reference of them to causes. Accordingly, the naturalist method inevitably produces an extreme dulness. In their search for a remedy, its practitioners have observed that there

are certain divisions of human action, usually classed as vice and crime, in which, for their own sake, and independently of pleasure in artistic appreciation of the manner in which they are presented, a morbid interest is felt by a large number of persons. They therefore, with businesslike shrewdness, invariably, or almost invariably, select their subjects from these privileged classes. The ambition of the naturalist, briefly described without epigram or flippancy, but as he would himself say scientifically, is to mention the unmentionable with as much fulness of detail as possible. In this business M. Emile Zola has not hitherto been surpassed, though many of his pupils have run him hard. Unfortunately, for those who are proof against the attraction of disgusting subjects merely because they are disgusting, M. Zola is one of the dullest of writers. His style is also very bad, possessing for its sole merits a certain vulgar vigour which is occasionally not ineffective, and a capacity for vivid description. He is deeply learned in *argot*, or slang, the use of which is one of the naturalist instruments, and his works are therefore not useless as repertories of expressions to be avoided. M. Zola's criticisms are more interesting than his novels, consisting chiefly of vigorous denunciations of all the good writers of his own day.

M. Victor Cherbuliez, besides political and miscellaneous work of inferior relative power, has produced a series of novels (*Le Comte Kostia*, *Le Roman d'une Honnête Femme*, *Méta Holdenis*, *Samuel Brohl et Cie*) which are remarkable for style, construction, and wit. M. Alphonse Daudet, beginning early, produced in his first stage a charming collection of *Lettres de mon Moulin*, and a pathetic autobiographic novel *Le Petit Chose*. In his second, attempting the manner of Dickens, he

obtained with *Jack*, 1873, and *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné*, 1874, great popularity. His later works, *Le Nabab*, *Les Rois en Exil*, *Numa Roumestan*, *L'Évangéliste*, *L'Immortel*, shew, in their condescending to the satisfaction of vulgar curiosity as to living or lately dead persons, a great falling off. The capacity of M. Daudet (whose *Tartarin de Tarascon* with its sequel is wholly admirable extravaganza) cannot be doubted: his taste is deplorable. Of still more recent novelists two only can be mentioned: M. Georges Ohnet (*Serge Panine*, *Le Maître de Forges*, *La Grande Marnière*) whose popularity with readers is only equalled by the unanimous disfavour with which all competent critics regard him, and M. Viaud ('Pierre Loti'), a naval officer, whose work (*Aziyadé*, *Le Mariage de Loti*, *Mon Frère Yves*, *Madame Chrysanthème*), midway between the novel, the autobiography, and the travel-book displays some elegance and much 'preciousness' of style and fancy.

Journalists and Critics.

Paul de Saint-Victor.

Hippolyte Taine.

After the Revolution the fortune of journalism was assured, and though under the subsequent forms of government it was subjected to a rigid censorship, it was too firmly established to be overthrown. Almost all men of letters flocked to it. The leading article or unsigned political and miscellaneous essay has never

been so strong a feature of French journalism as it has been of English. On the other hand, the *feuilleton*, or daily, weekly, and monthly instalment of fiction or criticism, has been one of its chief characteristics. Many, if not most, of the most celebrated novels of the last half century have originally appeared in this form, publication in independent parts, which was long fashionable in England, never having found favour in France. In the same way, though weekly reviews devoted wholly or mainly to literary criticism have, for some reason, never been successful with the French as they have with us, daily journalism has given a greater space to criticism, and especially to theatrical criticism. All French criticism subsequent to 1830 may be said to derive, whether it deals with literature, with the theatre, or with art, from three masters, Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, and Janin. The method of the first has been sufficiently explained. Gautier's was rather the expression of a fine critical appreciation in the most exquisite style, and Janin's, the far easier, and, after a short time, unimportant plan of gossiping amiably and amusingly about, it might be the subject, it might be something quite different. The only successor to Gautier was Paul de Saint-Victor, who, however, was inferior to his master in appreciative power, and exaggerated his habit of relying on style to carry him through. Paul de Saint-Victor was not a frequent writer, and his collected works as yet do not fill many volumes. *Hommes et Dieux*, which is perhaps the principal of them, exhibits a deficiency of catholicity in literary appreciation. His latest book, *Les Deux Masques*, an unfinished study of the history of the stage, contains much brilliant writing, but is wanting in solid qualities. As a theatrical critic, Janin was succeeded

by a curiously different person, M. Francisque Sarcey, who has chiefly been noteworthy for severity and a kind of pedagogic common sense, as unlike as possible to the good-humoured gossip of Janin. M. de Pontmartin was an acrid but vigorous critic on the royalist and orthodox side. M. Hippolyte Taine, chief of Sainte-Beuve's followers, has somewhat caricatured his master's method. Sainte-Beuve's principle was, it must be remembered, to examine carefully the circumstances of his author's time, in order to ascertain their bearing upon him. In M. Taine's hands this wise practice changed itself into a theory—the theory that every man is a kind of product of the circumstances, and that, by examining the latter, the man is necessarily explained. M. Taine chose for his principal exercising ground the history of English literature. He produced under that title a series of studies often acute, always brilliant in style, but constantly showing the faults of the critical method just indicated. Of other literary critics, the two chief besides M. Taine are M. Edmond Scherer and M. Emile Montégut. The latter is a critic of a very fine and delicate appreciation. A short essay of his on Boccaccio may be specified as one of the best of French contemporary critical exercises. M. Scherer has a good deal of common sense, a considerable acquaintance with literature, and a clear, straightforward, and vigorous style. His judgment, however, is much limited by prejudice, and some of his studies, such as those on Baudelaire and Diderot, show that he is an untrustworthy judge of what is not commonplace.

Academic Critics.

A separate school of criticism, of a more academic character than that represented by most of the names just mentioned, has existed in France during the greater part of the century, and during a great part of it has found its means of utterance partly in the University chairs and in treatises crowned by the Academy, partly in a well-known fortnightly periodical, the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*. The master of this school of criticism may be said to have been Villemain, 1790-1870, who represents the classical tradition corrected by a very considerable study of other European languages besides French. Not the least part of the narrowness of the older classical school was due to its ignorance of these languages, and its consequent incapacity to make the necessary comparisons. Villemain's criticism, though not quite so flexible as it might have been, was on the whole sound, and the same variety of the art, though with more limitations, was represented by Guizot. Not a few critics of merit of the same kind were born at the close of the last century, or at the beginning of this. Among them may be mentioned M. Nisard, a bitter opponent of the Romantic movement, and a prejudiced critic of French literature, but a writer of very considerable knowledge, and of some literary merit; Eugène Geruzez, author of by far the best history of French literature in a small compass, and of many separate treatises of value; Alexandre Vinet, a Swiss, and a Protestant, who died at no very advanced age, leaving much work of merit; and Saint-Marc Girardin, who busied himself nearly as much in journalism and politics as in literary criticism proper, but whose professorial *Cours de Littérature Dramatique* is a work of interest, exhibiting a kind of transition style between the older and newer criticism. Michelet, Quinet, M. Renan, and

others, who will be mentioned under other heads, have also been considerable as critics. Philarète Chasles was a lively writer, who devoted himself especially to English literature, and whose judgment in matters literary was not quite equal to his affection for them. The critics of the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* proper include, besides not a few authors named elsewhere, Gustave Planche, a person of curious idiosyncrasy, chiefly remarkable for the ferocity of his critiques; Saint René Taillandier, a dull man of industry; and M. Caro, a man of industry who was not dull. Latterly some younger writers have endeavoured (chiefly in its pages) to set up a kind of neo-classical school, which is equally opposed to modern innovations, and to the habit of studying old French, that is, French before the sixteenth century. The chief of these advocates of a return to the Malherbe-Boileau dungeon is M. Ferdinand Brunetière. We must not omit among the older generation M. Lenient, the author of two admirable volumes on the History of French Satire; among the younger, M. Paul Stapfer, the author of an excellent study of 'Shakespeare et l'Antiquité,' M. Jules Lemaître, a brilliant critic, who is perhaps a little more brilliant than critical, and M. Emile Faguet, whose criticism is as sound as it is accomplished.

Among the representatives of art criticism Viollet-le-Duc as a writer on architecture, and Charles Blanc (brother of Louis) as an authority on decorative art generally, made before their deaths reputations sufficiently exceptional to be noticed here. Here also, as representatives of other classes of literature, the names of Hector Berlioz, the great composer, author of letters and memoirs of great interest; of Henri Monnier, an artist not much less skilful with his pen than with his pencil in satirical sketches of Parisian

types (especially his famous 'Joseph Prudhomme'); of Charles Monselet, a miscellaneous writer whose sympathies were as wide and his temper as genial as his literary faculty was accomplished; of X. Doudan, whose posthumous remains and letters attracted much attention after a life of silence; and of the Genevese diarist Amiel, selections from whose vast journal of philosophical sentimentalism and miscellaneous reflection have also been popular, may be cited.

Linguistic and Literary Study of French.

The revived study of old French literature just noticed is the only department of the literature of erudition which can receive notice here, for prose science and classical study fall equally out of our range of possible treatment here. The *Histoire Littéraire* was revived, and has been steadily proceeded with. Every department of old French literature has been studied, latterly in vigorous rivalry with the Germans. The most important single name in this study has been that of the late M. Paulin Paris, who edited reprints of all sorts with untiring energy, and in a thoroughly literary spirit. The Chansons de Gestes have been the especial care of M. Paulin Paris, his son M. Gaston Paris (*Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*), and M. Léon Gautier, who has written, and is now republishing in an altered and improved form, a great work on the early French epics. The Arthurian romances have been more studied in Germany and Belgium than in France, though valuable work has been done in them by M.

Paulin Paris, M. Hucher, and others. The Fabliaux have recently appeared in a nearly complete edition, by M. de Montaiglon. M. P. Meyer has thrown new light on the *Roman d'Alixandre*. The *Roman du Renart*, also published by Méon, has been undertaken again by M. Ernest Martin. The separate authors of the later ages have, in almost every case, been the subject of much careful work, and for some years past a 'Société des Anciens Textes Français' has existed for the express purpose of publishing unprinted MSS. This society has undertaken the great collection of *Miracles de Notre Dame*, the works of Eustache Deschamps, and other important tasks. A great deal of excellent work in the same direction has been done in Belgium by members of the various Academies. The great classics of France, from the sixteenth century onward, have been the object of constant and careful editing, such as the classics of no other country have enjoyed. Nor has the linguistic part of the study been omitted. The two chief monuments of this are the great dictionary of Littré, and the complement of it, now in course of publication, by M. Godefroy, which contains a complete lexicon of the older tongue. Among the collections of old French literature, the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne may be especially noticed. This, besides many reprints of isolated authors, contains invaluable examples of the early theatre, a still more precious collection of scattered poems of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and one of miscellanies of the sixteenth and seventeenth. Under the Empire the government began the publication of all the Chansons de Gestes, but the enterprise was unfortunately interrupted at the tenth volume.

Philosophical

Writers.

Comte.

The branches of literature, other than the Belles Lettres, which naturally retain, longer than those which busy themselves with science as it is now understood, the literary interest, are philosophy, theology, and history. In philosophy France has produced, during the present century, only one name of the first importance. As has been the case with all other European nations, her philosophical energies have chiefly been devoted to the historical side of philosophy, a tendency specially encouraged by the already-mentioned influence of Cousin. Damiron, the chief authority in French on the materialist schools of the eighteenth century; M. Jules Simon and Vacherot, who busied themselves chiefly with the Alexandrian philosophers—Cousin it should be remembered was the editor of Proclus—and Charles de Rémusat, a man of great capacity, who, among other rather unexpected literary occupations, devoted himself to Abelard, Thomas à Becket, and other representatives of scholasticism, illustrate this tendency. The philosophy of the middle ages was also the subject of one of the clearest and best-written of philosophical studies, the *De la Philosophie Scolastique* of B. Hauréau. The name, however, of the century in French philosophical literature is that of Auguste Comte, the founder of what is called Positivism. He was born at Montpelier three or four years before the end of the last century, and died at Paris in September, 1857. Comte passed through the discipline of initiation in the Saint Simonian views—Saint Simon was a descendant of the great writer of that name, who developed a curious form of

communism very interesting politically, but important to literature only from the remarkable influence it had upon his contemporaries—but, like most of Saint Simon's disciples, soon emancipated himself. To discuss Comte's philosophical views would be impossible here. It is sufficient to say that the cardinal principle of his earlier work, the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, is that the world of thought has passed through successively a theological stage and a metaphysical stage, and is now reduced to the observation and classification of phenomena and their relations. On the basis cleared by this sweeping hypothesis, Comte, in his later days (under the inspiration of a lady, Madame Clotilde de Vaux, if he himself be believed), developed a remarkable construction of positive religion. This was indignantly rejected by his most acute followers, the chief of whom was the philologist and critic Littré. Outside of Comtism, France has not produced many writers on philosophy, except philosophical historians. M. Taine, in his *De l'Intelligence*, turned his acute intellect and ready pen in this direction for a moment, but not with much success. Perhaps from the literary view the most important philosophical writer in French for the last half century is M. Renan, who will find his place more appropriately in the next paragraph. Between Saint Simon and Comte, if space allowed, notice would have to be taken of many political writers of the middle of the century, whose visionary and for the most part communistic views had a considerable but passing influence, such as Cabet, Fourier, Pierre Leroux, and the violent and not wholly sane but vigorous Proudhon. Here, however, nothing but bare mention, and that only for completeness' sake, can be given to them.



Theological Writers. Montalembert.

Ozanam.

Lacordaire.

Ernest Renan.

In theology, as represented in literature, the dominant interest of the period belongs at first to the continuators of the Liberal-Catholic school of Lamennais. The greatest of these, beyond all question, was Charles Forbes de Montalembert, whose mother was a Scotchwoman, and his father French ambassador in Sweden. He was born in April, 1810, and died on the 13th of March, 1870. Montalembert was young enough to come under the influence of Lamennais only indirectly, and at the extreme end of that writer's orthodox period. His immediate master was rather the eloquent Abbé Lacordaire. His father was a peer of France, and Montalembert succeeded early to his position, which gave him an opportunity of supporting the great contention of the Liberal Catholics under Louis Philippe, the right to establish schools for themselves. Being devoted first of all to the defence of ecclesiastical interests by every legitimate means, and having no anti-Republican prejudices, Montalembert was able to accept the second Revolution, though not the Second Empire, and he continued to be one of the most moderate, but dangerous, opponents of the government of Napoleon III. His chief works, which have much

brilliancy and vigour, are his 'Life of Elizabeth of Hungary,' his 'Life and Times of St. Anselm,' his *Avenir Politique de l'Angleterre*, and, most of all, his great work on 'The Monks of the West from St. Benedict to St. Bernard.' A fellow worker with Montalembert, though earlier cut off, was Frédéric Ozanam, a brilliant student and lecturer in mediaeval history, who was the chief literary critic of the Neo-Catholic movement during the later years of Louis Philippe's reign. Ozanam's chief work was his study on Dante. About this time a considerable resurrection of pulpit eloquence took place. Its chief representative was the already-mentioned Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, who was born in 1802, and died in 1861. Lacordaire was a partner of Lamennais in the *Avenir*. But, unlike his master, he took the papal reproof obediently, and continued to preach in the orthodox sense. He entered the order of St. Dominic in 1840, but was nevertheless elected to the Assembly, in 1848, as a compliment, doubtless, to the fervent radicalism he had displayed earlier. Lacordaire's literary reputation is almost entirely confined to his sermons, the most famous of which were preached at Notre Dame. Other celebrated preachers of the middle of the century were, on the Catholic side, the Père Félix, and on the Protestant, Athanase Coquerel. Of the extreme orthodox party, during the Second Empire, the chief names from the point of view of literature were those of Monseigneur Dupanloup, bishop of Orleans, and the journalist, Louis Veuillot. The former, one of the most eloquent and one of the ablest men of his time in France, began with a certain liberalism, but gradually hardened into extremer views, distinguishing himself in his place in the Academy by violent opposition to the admission of M. Littré, as a positivist. The latter,

as editor of the journal *L'Univers*, brought remarkable wit and a faculty of slashing criticism, not often equalled, to the service of his party, indulging, however, too often in mere scurrility. From this same literary point of view, the chief name in the theological literature of this period is once more on the unorthodox side. Since the days of Joseph de Maistre the church had far more than held her own in the literary arena; but the discouragement given at Rome to the followers of Lamennais seemed to bring ill luck with it. Ernest Renan, who, with some faults, is one of the most remarkable masters of French style in our time, was born in 1823, at Tréguier in Britanny. He was intended for the priesthood, and was educated for the most part at clerical seminaries. On arriving, however, at manhood, he did not feel inclined to take orders; accepted the place of usher at a school, and soon distinguished himself by linguistic studies, especially on the Semitic languages. He also exercised himself a good deal in literary criticism and as a journalist of all work on the staffs of the *Journal des Débats* and the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*. His first really remarkable work, published in 1850, is *Averroès et l'Averroïsme*, a book injured by the author's want of sympathy with the thought of the middle ages, but full of research and of reflection. This gained him a post in the Paris Library. He then produced several works, dealing more or less with the Hebrew Scriptures. In 1860 he had a government mission to Phoenicia and Palestine, which enabled him to examine the Holy Land very attentively. On his return he was appointed to the chair of Hebrew at the Collège de France, but the outcry against his unorthodoxy was so great that he was suspended. He began about this time to publish his famous series of *Origines du Christianisme* with, for a first volume, a

Vie de Jésus, imbued with a curious kind of eclectic and romantic rationalism. This has been followed by numerous volumes dealing with the early ages of Christianity. In 1870 he made himself conspicuous by a letter to Strauss on the subject of the Franco-German War. After the catastrophe he confined himself for a time to literary and philosophical studies. Recently, however, besides working at his *Origines*, which are now completed, he has produced some half-political, half-fanciful studies of great literary excellence, such as *Caliban*, a satire on democracy, and *La Fontaine de Jouvence*, a brilliant mediaeval fantasy-piece, covering a violent attack on Germany. M. Renan is, in point of style, perhaps the most considerable prose writer of France now living who is a prose writer only. His prejudices are strong, and his strictly argumentative and logical faculty rather weak. In temperament he is what may be called a sentimental rationalist. But his literary knowledge is extraordinarily wide and very accurate, while his literary sympathies, though somewhat irregular in their operation, are warm. These peculiarities reflect themselves in his style, which is a direct descendant of that of Rousseau through M. Renan's own countryman, Chateaubriand. As a describer of scenery he is unmatched among his contemporaries. He has an extraordinary power of vivid and interesting narration inclining somewhat to the over-picturesque. No one is able more cleverly to seize on the most striking and telling features of a landscape, a book, a character, and, by adroit dwelling on these, to present the whole as vividly as possible to his readers. No one again is more thoroughly master of a certain rather vague but telling eloquence which deals chiefly with the moral feelings and the domestic affections, and exercises an

amiably softening influence on those who submit themselves to it. M. Renan in style is rather an orator than a writer, though the extreme care and finish which he bestows on his work give him a high place in literature proper.

Historians.
Thierry.

In history a group of distinguished names, besides a still larger number of names only less individually distinguished, deserve notice. First among these, in order of time, may be mentioned the two brothers Amédée and Augustin Thierry, the former of whom was born in 1787, and died in 1873, while the latter, born in 1795, died in 1856. Both devoted themselves to historical studies. But, while Amédée employed himself almost wholly on the history of Gaul during Roman times and on Roman history, Augustin, who was by far the more gifted of the two, took a wider range. He was born and educated at Blois, and for some time devoted himself to politics and sociology, being a disciple of Saint Simon, and a fellow-worker of Comte. He soon, however, betook himself to history, and in 1825 published his 'History of the Norman Conquest in England.' Blindness followed, but he was able to continue his work. In 1835 he published *Dix Ans d'Etudes Historiques*, and in 1840, what is perhaps his best work, *Récits des Temps Mérovingiens*, a book which has few rivals as exhibiting in a fascinating light, but without any sacrifice of historical accuracy to mere picturesqueness, the circumstances and events of an unfamiliar time. His last work of importance was an essay on the Tiers Etat and its origin. Thierry is an excellent example of an historian handling, with

little guidance from predecessors, a difficult and neglected but important age.

Thiers.

Far less important as a historian, but distinguished by his double character of statesman and *littérateur*, in which he was more fortunate than his two rivals in the same double career, Guizot and Lamartine, was Louis Adolphe Thiers, who was born at Marseilles, of the lower middle class, in 1797. He was brought up for the law, being educated at Marseilles and at Aix. Then he went to Paris, and after a short time obtained work on the *Constitutionnel* as supporter of the liberal opposition during the Restoration. His *Histoire de la Révolution Française* appeared between 1823-1827, and brought him much reputation, which was very ill deserved as far as fulness and accuracy of information are concerned. French readers, however, have ever been indifferent to mere accuracy, and are given to admire even a superficial appearance of order and clearness; at any rate, the book, added to his considerable reputation as a political writer, made him famous. A paper, which he founded in the beginning of 1830, the *National*, had much share in bringing about the Revolution of that year. After it Thiers was elected to the Chamber of Deputies for Aix, and in a short time became a renowned debater. He held office again and again under Louis Philippe, and was believed to be in favour of a warlike policy. When he retired from office he began his principal literary work (a continuation of his first), 'The History of the Consulate and the Empire.' He took no part in the Revolution of 1848, and accepted the Republic, but was banished at the *coup d'état*, though not for long.

In 1863 he re-entered the Chamber, having constantly worked at his History, which tended not a little to reconstruct the Napoleonic legend. Yet he was a steady though a moderate opponent of the Second Empire. On its downfall, Thiers, as the most distinguished statesman the country possessed, undertook the negotiations with the enemy—a difficult task, which he performed with extreme ability. He then became President of the Republic, which post he held till 1873. He died on the 3rd of September, 1877. The chief fault of Thiers as a historian is his misleading partiality, which is especially displayed in his account of Napoleon's wars, and reaches its climax in that of the battle of Waterloo. He has, however, great merits in lucidity of arrangement, in an eloquent, if rather declamatory style, and in a faculty of conveying a considerable amount of information without breaking the march of his narrative.

Guizot

By a curious coincidence, the chief rival of Thiers in politics (at least during the greater part of his life) was of his own class and condition, and, like him, primarily a man of letters. François Pierre Guillaume Guizot was, however, ten years the senior of Thiers, having been born in 1787, at Nîmes. Guizot was a Protestant, and his father perished in the Terror. He was educated at Geneva, but went to Paris early, and produced in 1809 (being then only twenty-two) a dictionary of synonyms. After this he did miscellaneous literary work of various kinds, and at the Restoration filled, as a moderate Royalist, various posts under government, being appointed, among other things, to a history professorship at the

Sorbonne. He became more and more liberal, and in 1824 his lectures were forbidden. His literary activity, was, however, incessant, his greatest work being a collection of early French historical writings in thirty-one volumes. He also paid much attention to the history of England, and published, in 1826, a *Histoire de la Révolution d'Angleterre*. This was followed by many other works, of which his 'History of Civilisation in Europe,' and 'History of Civilisation in France,' are the best known. He had been elected a member of the Chamber before the Revolution of 1830, and after it he was appointed minister of Public Instruction, having the powerful support of the Broglie family. He was afterwards ambassador to London, and then Prime Minister, being, it is said, very much to blame for the Revolution of February. He escaped to London with some difficulty, and, though he revisited France, had to return to England at the advent of Louis Napoleon. He was not, however, a permanent exile, but was allowed to enjoy his estate at Val Richer in Normandy. He died in 1874, having been incessantly occupied on literary work of all kinds (chiefly connected with French and English history) for the last half century of his life. The chief of these in bulk was a voluminous history of France not completed till after his death. Guizot's enormous fertility (for not a twentieth of his works has been mentioned) perhaps injuriously affected his style, which is not remarkable. Sound common sense and laborious acquaintance with facts are his chief characteristics.

Mignet.

A companion of Thiers at college, and a *protégé* of his during his years of power, was François Mignet. Born

a year before his friend, he outlived him. Mignet, too, wrote, and at the same time as Thiers, a History of the French Revolution of curiously different character. He became secretary of the Institute, and in 1837 a member of the Academy. His chief later works were on the 'Spanish Succession,' on Mary Stuart, and on Charles the Fifth after his abdication, with, last of all, the rivalry of Charles V. and Francis I. Mignet is as trustworthy as Thiers is the reverse. But his historical manner is exceedingly dry, as also is his style, though it is correct and not inelegant.

Michelet.

A very different writer was Jules Michelet, the most original and remarkable historian in point of style that France has ever produced. Born at Paris, in 1798, he was also educated there, and became a schoolmaster. Soon after he came of age he was transferred to the Ecole Normale. The Revolution of 1830, owing to the influence of Cousin and Guizot, opened great opportunities for historical students, and Michelet was enabled to publish not a few historical treatises, some of a rather specialist nature, others popular abstracts of French history. In 1838 he was appointed to a chair in the Collège de France, and, in conjunction with his friend Quinet, he took part in the violent polemic against the Jesuits which distinguished the time. He had already for some years begun his strange and splendid *Histoire de France*, 1833-1867, but he accompanied its progress with a crowd of little books of a controversial and miscellaneous character. Shortly before the Revolution of 1848 he began, and soon after the *coup d'état* finished, his *Histoire de la Révolution*. He declined to take the oaths to the Empire, and so lost

the place in the Record Office which he then held. He died in 1874, and, notwithstanding his incessant literary activity during his life, various unpublished works have appeared since, one of which, describing the hunger-pinched population of the Riviera, is a masterpiece of his volcanic style. This style is characteristic not only of his great history, but also of his smaller books, of which *Des Jésuites*, *Du Prêtre*, *Du Peuple*, *L'Oiseau*, *L'Insecte*, *L'Amour*, *La Sorcière* (the last perhaps the most remarkable of all), are especially noteworthy. It is entirely unlike the style of any previous French writer, except that of Lamennais, who was, however, rather Michelet's contemporary than his predecessor, and that of Victor Hugo, in some of his more recent work. Broken and irregular in construction, it is extraordinarily vivid in colour, and striking in the outline of its presentment. The *History of France* is a book to which little justice can be done in the space here available. It is strongly prejudiced by Michelet's republican and anti-Catholic views, and, like all picturesque histories, it brings into undue relief incidents and personages which have happened to strike the author's imagination. But it is extraordinarily stimulating, full of energy and life, and almost unequalled in the power with which the writer restores and revives the past.

Quinet.

A bosom friend of Michelet, and his compeer in the attack on the Jesuits, was Edgar Quinet, who was born near Bourg in 1803, and died in 1875. He was brought up for the most part at his country home in a retired situation, where he early showed not only great devotion to literature, but a curious tendency

towards philosophic mysticism. He travelled in Germany when young, and his translation of Herder's *Philosophie der Geschichte* introduced him to Cousin, and gave him some profit and much reputation. He was sent to Greece on a government mission, and after a time received a professorship, first at Lyons, and then at Paris, though his republicanism did not recommend him. He was an active supporter of the Revolution of February, and a consistent opponent of the Empire, during which he remained in exile. Quinet's works, both in poetry and prose, are numerous. The chief are a great prose poem, or dramatic allegory, called *Ahasuerus*, 1834, a work on the early French epics (insufficiently informed, but appreciative and enthusiastic), *Le Génie des Religions*, 1843 (a series of discourses full of the widest and vaguest generalisation, but stimulating and generous), *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, 1861 (another curious book something after the fashion of *Ahasuerus*), a nondescript miscellany on history and science entitled *La Création*, 1869, and *La Révolution*, 1865. His poems (in verse) are *Prométhée*, *Napoléon*, *Les Esclaves*, of which the first and last are dramatic in form. His style and thought were strongly tinged with mysticism, and with a singular undogmatic pietism, as well as with strong but speculative republicanism in politics. He is thus not a historian to consult for facts (though his knowledge both of history and literature was accurate and wide), but an inspiriting generaliser on the philosophy of history. Both in Michelet and in Quinet there is an affectation of the seer, as well as an undue fluency of language, and an absence of precision in form and place, which detract from their otherwise high literary value. The collected works of the first exceed fifty volumes, those of the second fill

nearly thirty; and much of this vast total is ephemeral in interest and unchastened in form. Although neither was a journalist, both exhibit the defects of a period of journalism.

Tocqueville.

The last of the greater names calling for mention is that of Alexis de Tocqueville, who was born, of a noble Norman family, at Verneuil, in 1805. Tocqueville was educated for the bar, and called to it after the Restoration. But after the revolution of July he exchanged his appointment in the magistracy for a travelling mission to America, to examine the prisons and penitentiaries of the United States. He, however, studied something else than prisons, and, in 1835, published his famous work on 'Democracy in America.' He married an Englishwoman, and soon afterwards entered the Chamber. During the Republic he occupied positions of some importance. The Empire dismissed him from public life, but gave him the opportunity of writing his second great book on the *Ancien Régime*. His health was, however, weak, and he died, in 1859, of consumption. The characteristics of Tocqueville as a historian (or rather as a philosophic essayist on history) are great purity and clearness of style, unusual logical power, and an entire absence of prepossession. He is one of the few historians who have treated democracy without either enthusiastic love for it on the one hand, or fanatical dislike and fear of it on the other; and his two books are, and are likely to remain, classics.

Minor Historians.

A very rapid survey must suffice for the remainder of the names in this division. A. de Barante, among numerous other works of merit, is best known by a careful and detailed history of the Dukes of Burgundy; J. A. Buchon, Petitot, J. A. Michaud, and J. Poujoulat, produced invaluable collections of the chronicles and memoirs in which France is so rich. J. J. Ampère occupied himself chiefly with Roman history, and with the history of France and French literature in the Gallo-Roman time. A. Beugnot, besides other work, arranged a precious collection of feudal law. Emile de Bonnechose wrote a good short history of France. Louis Blanc (an important actor in the Revolution of 1848) produced an elaborate and well-written history of the Revolution from the moderate republican side, and afterwards reprinted from newspapers some curious letters from England during his exile here. In opposition chiefly to Thiers, P. Lanfrey, in a laborious history of Napoleon, entirely overthrew the Napoleonic legend, and damaged, it would seem irreparably, the character of its hero. Philippe de Ségur gave a history of the Russian campaign of Napoleon. Mortimer-Ternaux accomplished a valuable history of the Terror. M. Henri Martin was the author of the only recent history of France on a scale which challenges comparison with Michelet. It has no extraordinary literary merit, and its author was something of a partisan. But it is full, sober, and fairly accurate. In recent days M. Taine, deserting literary and philosophical criticism for history, executed a new and remarkable history of the Revolution, which, by once more putting its horrors in a clear and fair light, very much irritated the partisans of the 'ideas of 89.' The Duke d'Aumale has made something more than a mere addition to the works of 'Royal and Noble

Authors,' in his History of the Princes of Condé. The Duke de Broglie, a politician, upon whom the political changes of France enforced political retirement, has produced a series of historical works on the 18th century and has edited the interesting memoirs of his father, the patron of Guizot. Of other recent memoirs by far the most remarkable, whether as literature or history, are those of Madame de Rémusat, mother of Charles de Rémusat, who died early in the Restoration period, but whose memoirs and letters, not published till after her son's death (but already referred to here), have given her a posthumous reputation hardly inferior to that of any of the literary ladies before her and not likely soon to wane.

FOOTNOTES:

[292] Mérimée's work is not absolutely despicable in bulk, for it extends to some eighteen volumes pretty closely packed. But much of these is occupied with familiar letters, and much more with merely miscellaneous writing. His finished and definitely literary publications do not amount to a third of the whole.

[293] In this notice of the acting drama of France, with which, as contrasted with the literary theatre, the present writer has comparatively little acquaintance, he is considerably indebted to Mr. Brander Matthews' useful *French Dramatists of the Nineteenth Century*. London and New York; 1882.

CONCLUSION.

In the five books of this *History* the reader has, it is believed, before him a sufficient though necessarily brief description of the various men and works whereof knowledge is desirable to enable him to perceive the main outlines of the course of French literature. In the interchapters some attempt has been made to sum up the general phenomena of that literature as distinguished from its particular accomplishments during the chief periods of its development. Beyond this neither the scale of the book, nor its plan as indicated in the preface, has permitted of indulgence in generalising criticism. But it has been suggested by authorities whose competence is not disputable that something in the nature of a summary of these summaries, pointing out briefly the general history, accomplishments, and peculiarities of the French tongue in its literary aspect during the ten centuries of its existence, is required, if only for the sake of a symmetrical conclusion. It may be urged on the other side that the history of literature—like all other histories, and perhaps more than all other histories—is never really complete, and that there is consequently some danger in attempting at any given time to treat it as finished. He must have been a miraculously acute critic who, if he had attempted such treatment of the present subject sixty or seventy years ago, would not have found his results ludicrously falsified by the event but few years afterwards. But this drawback only applies to generalisation of the pseudo-scientific kind which attempts to predict: it can be easily guarded against by attending to the strict duties of the historian and, without attempting to speak of the future, dealing only with the actually accomplished

past.

The first thing, and perhaps the most important thing, which must strike anyone who looks upon French literature as a whole, is that, taking all conditions together, it is the most complete example of a regularly and independently developed national literature that presents itself anywhere. It is no doubt inferior in the point of independence to Greek, but then it has a much longer course, considered as the exponent of national character. It has a shorter course than English, and it is not more generally expository of national characteristics; but then it is for a great part of that course infinitely more independent of foreign influences, and, unlike English, it has scarcely any breaks or dead seasons in its record. Compared with Latin (which as a literature may be said to be entirely modelled on Greek) it is exceptionally original: compared with Spanish and Italian it has been exceptionally long-lived and hale in its life: compared with German it was exceptionally early in attaining the full possession of its faculties. Just as (putting aside minor and somewhat pedantic considerations) no country in Europe has so long and so independently developed a political history, so in none has literary history developed itself more independently and for a longer space of continuous time. No foreign invasion sensibly affects the French tongue; no foreign influence sensibly alters the course of French literature. It has been shown at intervals during this history how little direct influence classical models had on the original forms of literature in France, how completely German and Celtic contributions of subject were assimilated, how the Provençal examples of form were rather independently followed than literally or slavishly adopted. The

dawn or rather the twilight of the Renaissance seemed to threaten a more powerful and dangerous admixture. But the native genius of the language triumphed, and finally, in the Pléiade reforms, reduced to harmlessness the Rhétoriqueur innovations and the simultaneous danger of Italianising. The criticism of Malherbe, harmful in some ways, served as a counterpoise to the danger of Spanish influence which was considerable in the early years of the seventeenth century, and by the eighteenth the idiosyncrasy of French was so strong that, great as was the effect successively produced by English and by German, it was unable to do more than slightly modify French literature itself. Yet again the singular αυταρκεια of French may be seen by turning from its general accomplishments at different times to its particular forms. No one of these was directly adopted from any foreign, not even from any classical example, with the doubtful exception of the classical tragedy. The French made their own epic, their own lyric, their own comic and miscellaneous drama. They may be said almost to have invented the peculiar and striking kind of history called the memoir, which has characteristics distinguishing it radically from the classical commentary. They apparently invented the essay, and though they only borrowed the beast-fable, they are entitled to the credit of having seen in it the germ of the short verse tale which has no direct moral bearing. All the nations of Europe, so to speak, sent during the middle ages their own raw material of subject to be worked up by French or French-speaking men into literary form. France therefore gives (next to Greece, and in some respects even before Greece) the most instructive and trustworthy example extant of the chronology and order of

spontaneous literary development—first poetry, then drama, then prose: in poetry, first epic, then lyric, then didactic and miscellaneous verse: in drama, first ceremonial and liturgic pieces, then comedy, then artificial tragedy: in prose, first history, then miscellaneous work, and lastly artificial and elaborate fiction. It is a curious and somewhat complex phenomenon that the cycle which began with verse fiction should apparently end with fiction in prose, but the foregoing pages will have shewn sufficiently how dangerous it would be to generalise from this.

One thing however may be safely concluded from the mere fact of this remarkable resistance to foreign influence, or rather from the still more remarkable power of assimilation which this resistance implies. The literature which has been able to exert both must have very strongly marked general characteristics of its own. As a matter of fact French literature has these characteristics: and a brief enumeration and description of them may complete, more appropriately than anything else could do, the survey of its history. French literature, notwithstanding the revolution of fifty years ago, is generally and rightly held to be the chief representative among the greater European literatures of the classical rather than the romantic spirit. It is therefore necessary to define what is meant by these much controverted terms; and the definition which best expresses the views of the present writer is one somewhat modified from the definition given by Heine. The terms classic and romantic apply to treatment not to subject, and the difference is that the treatment is classic when the idea is represented as directly and with as exact an adaptation of form as possible, while it is romantic

when the idea is left to the reader's faculty of divination assisted only by suggestion and symbol. Of these two modes of treatment France has always inclined to the classic: during at least two centuries, the seventeenth and eighteenth, she relied upon it almost wholly. But the fertility of her mediaeval and Renaissance literature in strictly romantic examples, and the general tendency of the literature of the nineteenth century, have shewn a romantic faculty inferior, but only inferior, to the classical. To illustrate this statement by a contrast, it may be pointed out that in Greek the romantic element is almost in abeyance, while in English all without exception of our greatest masterpieces have been purely romantic. Or to put the matter in yet other words, the sense of the vague is, among authors of the highest rank, rarely present to a Greek, always present to an Englishman, and alternately present and absent, but oftener absent, to a Frenchman.

The qualities which this general differentia has developed in French may now be enumerated.

The first is a great and remarkable *sobriety*. It is true that there is nothing more extravagant than an extravagant Frenchman, but that is the natural result of reaction. As a rule, the contributions of matter which France received so abundantly from other nations are always toned and sobered by her in their literary formation. The main materials of her wonderful mediaeval literature of fiction were furnished by Wales, by Germany, and by the East; all of them, to judge by the later but more or less independent handlings which we have from indigenous sources, must have teemed with the supernatural. In the Chansons de Gestes, in the Arthurian romances, and even in the earlier Romans

d'Aventures, the supernatural, though recognised as became a devout age and country, is yet to a certain extent rationalised. It rarely obtrudes itself, and it still more rarely presents itself with exaggerated attributes. A continual spirit of criticism exhibits itself throughout French literature; it always, as represented by its most numerous and on the whole most famous representatives, tends to order, to measure, to symmetry.

The next characteristic is abundant and almost superabundant *wit*. The terms wit and humour have been argued over even more than classical and romantic, and it is equally impossible to enter into the controversy here. Suffice it to say that, according to the most satisfactory definition of humour (thinking in jest while feeling in earnest), wit might be defined to be thinking in jest without interrogating the consciousness as to whether the feeling is earnest or not. At a very early period, as soon indeed as the French spirit had thoroughly emerged from its German-Latin-Celtic swaddling clothes, this faculty of half reckless thinking in jest made its appearance. In classical literature wit is notoriously absent with rare exceptions (Aristophanes and Lucian being almost the only ones of importance); in scarcely any other modern literature does it make its appearance early. But it shows in French by the twelfth century, and it increases during every century that succeeds: while joined to sobriety it begets that satirical criticism, which is so noteworthy a secondary product of French.

A third quality closely connected with the two former but not, like satirical criticism, simply derived from them, is the close *attention to form* which has

always distinguished French. At the present time, despite the great advance made by other literatures and a certain falling off in itself, French prose is on the average superior in formal merit to any other prose written in a modern language. If we look back for eight hundred years, French verse is found to be more carefully and artistically arranged than the corresponding poetical beginnings of any other European country. In the excogitation of careful rules and the deft carrying out of those rules no literature can on the whole approach this except Greek. No literature therefore, with that exception, gives so much of the pleasure which is given by the spectacle of not unreasonable difficulty skilfully overcome in a game which is well played.

A fourth merit is to be found in the *inventiveness* of Frenchmen of letters. In no literature is there a greater variety, and in none is that variety so obviously the effect not of happy blundering but of organised and almost scientific development of the possibilities of art. The wonderful fertility with which the early Trouvères handled and re-handled the motives of the Arthurian and Carlovingian legends has been noticed; and, as a very different but complementary instance, the surprising success and variety with which a scheme so limited as that of the classical tragedy was applied, deserves mention. At the present day in one important department of literature (the drama) inventiveness is almost limited to Frenchmen, and there are few periods of their present history at which they have not in this respect led the van in one department or in another.

Yet another characteristic must be noted, which is, in respect to matter, the complement of the already mentioned attention to form. This is the singular

clearness and *precision* with which not merely the greatest Frenchmen of letters, but all save the least, are accustomed to put their meaning. Whereas the two great classical languages, from the licence of order given by their abundant inflections and complicated syntax, are sometimes enigmatic; whereas German notoriously lends itself to the wrapping up of a simple meaning in a cloud of words; whereas English seems to encourage those who use it not indeed to obscurity but to desultoriness and beating about the bush, French properly used is almost automatically clear and precise. Rivarol's somewhat sententious conceit that the French language has a 'probité attachée à son génie' is not a conceit merely. That this lucidity is sometimes accompanied by want of depth is quite true, but it is equally true that it is often mistaken for it. There is no want of depth in Descartes or in Malebranche, yet there are no clearer writers in the whole range of philosophic literature.

To these main characteristics others which are in a way corollaries might be added, such as urbanity, ease, ready adaptation to different classes of subject, and the like. But those already dwelt upon are the principal, and they have sufficed to make French, as far as general usefulness and interest go, the best vehicle of expression in prose among European languages. In poetry it is not quite the same. Most of the qualities just enumerated are in poetry but of secondary use, some of them are almost directly unfavourable to the vagueness, the indefinite suggestion, the 'making the common uncommon,' which are necessary to poetry. The clearness of French prose has a tendency to become colourless in French poetry, its sobriety turns to the bald, its wit to conceits and prettinesses, its inventiveness to an

undue reliance on complicated devices for creating an artificial attraction, its sense of form and rule to dryness and lack of passion. Moreover the merely sonorous qualities of French render it a difficult instrument for the production of varied poetical sounds. It is almost wholly destitute of quantity, and the intonation which supplies that want is of such a kind that hardly any foot but the iambus is possible in it. On the other hand its terminations admit of elaborate and harmonious rhymes (indeed French poetry without rhyme is a practical impossibility), and the abundance of mute *e* endings has facilitated the adoption of an artificial source of variation of sound in the so-called 'masculine and feminine' rhyming which is in its perfection almost peculiar to the language. With these aids and by the most elaborate attention to metre and euphony, the great poets of France have been enabled to surmount to a very large extent the corresponding difficulties of their prosody. But they have not on the whole been equally fortunate in surmounting the difficulties caused by the very genius of the language—the clear, sober, critical *ethos* of French. This is an enemy to mystery, to vagueness, to what may be called the twilight of sense—all things more or less necessary to the highest poetry. It will not I think be alleged by any impartial reader of this book that its author is insensible to the majesty or to the charm of French verse. But it is impossible for me to admit that that majesty and that charm are shewn in the highest degree (in the degree in which not merely Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine, shew them, but many minor names in Greek, in English, and in German), by any but a very few Frenchmen, and by these in more than comparatively few places. A very competent and obliging French critic has said that it

is impossible for any Frenchman to agree with me exactly in my estimate of La Fontaine, and probably there is no better instance than La Fontaine of the fundamental difference of conception of poetry which corresponds to the English channel. Inexhaustibly inventive, full of criticism of life, a master of harmonious language, managing rhythms and metres with a skill only the more artful that it seems so artless, La Fontaine yet has too little of dawn or sunset, still less of twilight or moonlight, too much of the light of common day to deserve, according to my estimate, the title of poet in the highest degree. The same may be said of most other French poets except a few who are to be found almost exclusively in the middle ages, in the Renaissance, and in the nineteenth century. Only in one form of the highest poetry, the passionate declamation which is in effect oratory of the most picturesque kind, France has never been wanting, and in this she has for half the time been mightily helped by the possession of the magnificent Alexandrine metre.

[294]At the close of the eleventh century and at the beginning of the twelfth we find the vulgar tongue in France not merely in full organisation for literary purposes, but already employed in most of the forms of poetical writing. An immense outburst of epic and narrative verse has taken place, and lyrical poetry, not limited as in the case of the epics to the north of France, but extending from Roussillon to the Pas de Calais, completes this. The twelfth century adds to these earliest forms the important development of the mystery, extends the subjects and varies the manner of epic verse, and begins the compositions of literary prose with the chronicles of St. Denis and of Villehardouin, and the prose romances of the

Arthurian cycle. All this literature is so far connected purely with the knightly and priestly orders, though it is largely composed and still more largely dealt in by classes of men, trouvères and jongleurs, who are not necessarily either knights or priests, and in the case of the jongleurs are certainly neither. With a possible ancestry of Romance and Teutonic *cantilenæ*, Breton *lais*, and vernacular legends, the new literature has a certain pattern and model in Latin and for the most part ecclesiastical compositions. It has the sacred books and the legends of the saints for examples of narrative, the rhythm of the hymns for a guide to metre, and the ceremonies of the church for a stimulant to dramatic performance. By degrees also in this twelfth century forms of literature which busy themselves with the unprivileged classes begin to be born. The fabliau takes every phase of life for its subject; the folk-song acquires elegance and does not lose raciness and truth. In the next century, the thirteenth, mediaeval literature in France arrives at its zenith and remains there until the first quarter of the fourteenth. The early epics lose something of their savage charm, the polished literature of Provence quickly perishes. But in the provinces which speak the more prevailing tongue nothing is wanting to literary development. The language itself has shaken off all its youthful incapacities, and, though not yet well adapted for the requirements of modern life and study, is in every way equal to the demands made upon it by its own time. The dramatic germ contained in the fabliau and quickened by the mystery produces the profane drama. Ambitious works of merit in the most various kinds are published; *Aucassin et Nicolette* stands side by side with the *Histoire de Saint Louis*, the *Jeu de la Feuillie* with the *Miracle de Théophile*, the *Roman de la Rose*

with the *Roman du Renart*. The earliest notes of ballade and rondeau are heard; endeavours are made with zeal, and not always without understanding, to naturalise the wisdom of the ancients in France, and in the graceful tongue that France possesses. Romance in prose and verse, drama, history, songs, satire, oratory, and even erudition, are all represented and represented worthily. Meanwhile all nations of Western Europe have come to France for their literary models and subjects, and the greatest writers in English, German, Italian, content themselves with adaptations of Chrétien de Troyes, of Benoist de Sainte More, and of a hundred other known and unknown trouvères and fabulists. But this age does not last long. The language has been put to all the uses of which it is as yet capable; those uses in their sameness begin to pall upon reader and hearer; and the enormous evils of the civil and religious state reflect themselves inevitably in literature. The old forms die out or are prolonged only in half-lifeless travesties. The brilliant colouring of Froissart, and the graceful science of ballade- and rondeau-writers like Lescurel and Deschamps, alone maintain the literary reputation of the time. Towards the end of the fourteenth century the translators and political writers import many terms of art, and strain the language to uses for which it is as yet unhandy, though at the beginning of the next age Charles d'Orléans by his natural grace and the virtue of the forms he used, emerges from the mass of writers. Throughout the fifteenth century the process of enriching or at least increasing the vocabulary goes on, but as yet no organising hand appears to direct the process. Villon stands alone in merit as in peculiarity. But in this time dramatic literature and the literature of the floating popular broadsheet

acquire an immense extension—all or almost all the vigour of spirit being concentrated in the rough farce and rougher lampoon, while all the literary skill is engrossed by insipid *rhétoriqueurs* and pedants. Then comes the grand upheaval of the Renaissance and the Reformation. An immense influx of science, of thought to make the science living, of new terms to express the thought, takes place, and a band of literary workers appear of power enough to master and get into shape the turbid mass. Rabelais, Amyot, Calvin, and Herberay fashion French prose; Marot, Ronsard, and Regnier refashion French verse. The Pléiade introduces the drama as it is to be and the language that is to help the drama to express itself. Montaigne for the first time throws invention and originality into some other form than verse or than prose fiction. But by the end of the century the tide has receded. The work of arrangement has been but half done, and there are no master spirits left to complete it. At this period Malherbe and Balzac make their appearance. Unable to deal with the whole problem, they determine to deal with part of it, and to reject a portion of the riches of which they feel themselves unfit to be stewards. Balzac and his successors make of French prose an instrument faultless and admirable in precision, unequalled for the work for which it is fit, but unfit for certain portions of the work which it was once able to perform. Malherbe, seconded by Boileau, makes of French verse an instrument suited only for the purposes of the drama of Euripides, or rather of Seneca, with or without its chorus, and for a certain weakened echo of that chorus, under the name of lyrics. No French verse of the first merit other than dramatic is written for two whole centuries. The drama soon comes to its acme, and during the

succeeding time usually maintains itself at a fairly high level until the death of Voltaire. But prose lends itself to almost everything that is required of it, and becomes constantly a more and more perfect instrument. To the highest efforts of pathos and sublimity its vocabulary and its arrangement are still unsuited, though the great preachers of the seventeenth century do their utmost with it. But for clear exposition, smooth and agreeable narrative, sententious and pointed brevity, witty repartee, it soon proves itself to have no superior and scarcely an equal in Europe. In these directions practitioners of the highest skill apply it during the seventeenth century, while during the eighteenth its powers are shown to the utmost of their variety by Voltaire, and receive a new development at the hands of Rousseau. Yet, on the whole, it loses during this century. It becomes more and more unfit for any but trivial uses, and at last it is employed for those uses only. Then occurs the Revolution, repeating the mighty stir in men's minds which the Renaissance had given, but at first experiencing more difficulty in breaking up the ground and once more rendering it fertile. The faulty and incomplete genius of Chateaubriand and Madame de Stael gives the first evidence of a new growth, and after many years the romantic movement completes the work. That movement occupied almost the whole of two generations and though at the close of the second its force may appear to be spent, the results remain, and no new or reactionary movement is visible, and the efforts of the Romantics themselves have been crowned with an almost complete regeneration of letters, if not of language. The poetical power of French has been once more triumphantly proved, and its productiveness in all branches of literature has been

renewed, while in that of prose fiction there has been almost created a new class of composition.

Finally, we may sum up even this summary. For volume and merit taken together the product of these eight centuries of literature excels that of any European nation, though for individual works of the supremest excellence they may perhaps be asked in vain. No French writer is lifted by the suffrages of other nations—the only criterion when sufficient time has elapsed—to the level of Homer, of Shakespeare, or of Dante, who reign alone. Of those of the authors of France who are indeed of the thirty but attain not to the first three, Rabelais and Molière alone unite the general suffrage; and this fact roughly but surely points to the real excellence of the literature which these men are chosen to represent. It is great in all ways, but it is greatest on the lighter side. The house of mirth is more suited to it than the house of mourning. To the latter, indeed, the language of the unknown minstrel who told Roland's death, of him who gave utterance to Camilla's wrath and despair, and of him who in our day sang how the mountain wind makes mad the lover who cannot forget, has amply made good its title of entrance. But for one Frenchman who can write admirably in this strain there are a hundred who can tell the most admirable story, formulate the most pregnant reflexion, point the acutest jest. There is thus no really great epic in French, few great tragedies, and those imperfect and in a faulty kind, little prose like Milton's or like Jeremy Taylor's, little verse (though more than is generally thought) like Shelley's or like Spenser's. But there are the most delightful short tales, both in prose and in verse, that the world has ever seen, the most polished jewellery of reflexion that has ever been wrought, songs of incomparable

grace, comedies that must make men laugh so long as they are laughing animals, and above all such a body of narrative fiction, old and new, prose and verse, as no other nation can show for art and for originality, for grace of workmanship in him who fashions, and for certainty of delight to him who reads.

FOOTNOTES:

[294] The courtesy of Messrs. A. and C. Black allows me to repeat the following passage from an article of mine in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. For this repetition I may borrow from a better writer than myself the excuse that a man cannot say exactly the same thing in two different sets of words so as to please himself, or perhaps others.

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