VICTOR HUGO

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Виктор Мари Гюго

William Shakespeare

Гюго В.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

The true title of this work should be, "Apropos to Shakespeare." The desire of introducing, as they say in England, before the public, the new translation of Shakespeare, has been the first motive of the author. The feeling which interests him so profoundly in the translator should not deprive him of the right to recommend the translation. However, his conscience has been solicited on the other part, and in a more binding way still, by the subject itself. In reference to Shakespeare all questions which touch art are presented to his mind. To treat these questions, is to explain the mission of art; to treat these questions, is to explain the duty of human thought toward man. Such an occasion for speaking truths imposes a duty, and he is not permitted, above all at such an epoch as ours, to evade it. The author has comprehended this. He has not hesitated to turn the complex questions of art and civilization on their several faces, multiplying the horizons every time that the perspective has displaced itself, and accepting every indication that the subject, in its rigorous necessity, has offered to him. This expansion of the point of view has given rise to this book.

Hauteville House, 1864.

PART I

HIS LIFE

CHAPTER I

Twelve years ago, in an island adjoining the coast of France, a house, with a melancholy aspect in every season, became particularly sombre because winter had commenced. The west wind, blowing then in full liberty, made thicker yet round this abode those coats of fog that November places between earthly life and the sun. Evening comes quickly in autumn; the smallness of the windows added to the shortness of the days, and deepened the sad twilight in which the house was wrapped.

The house, which had a terrace for a roof, was rectilinear, correct, square, newly whitewashed, – a true Methodist structure. Nothing is so glacial as that English whiteness; it seems to offer you the hospitality of snow. One dreams with a seared heart of the old huts of the French peasants, built of wood, cheerful and dark, surrounded with vines.

To the house was attached a garden of a quarter of an acre, on an inclined plane, surrounded with walls, cut in steps of granite, and with parapets, without trees, naked, where one could see more stones than leaves. This little uncultivated domain abounded in tufts of marigold, which flourish in autumn, and which the poor people of the country eat baked with the eel. The neighbouring seashore was hid from this garden by a rise in the ground; on this rise there was a field of short grass, where some nettles and a big hemlock flourished.

From the house you might perceive, on the right, in the horizon, on an elevation, and in a little wood, a tower, which passed for haunted; on the left you might see the dyke. The dyke was a row of big trunks of trees, leaning against a wall, planted upright in the sand, dried up, gaunt, with knots, ankylosès, and patellas, which looked like a row of tibias. Revery, which readily accepts dreams for the sake of proposing enigmas, might ask to what men these tibias of three fathoms in height had belonged.

The south façade of the house looked on the garden, the north façade on a deserted road.

A corridor at the entrance to the ground-floor, a kitchen, a greenhouse, and a courtyard, with a little parlour, having a view of the lonely road, and a pretty large study, scarcely lighted; on the first and second floors, chambers, neat, cold, scantily furnished, newly repainted, with white blinds to the window, – such was this lodging, with the noise of the sea ever resounding.

This house, a heavy, right-angled white cube, chosen by those who inhabited it apparently by chance, perhaps by intentional destiny, had the form of a tomb.

Those who inhabited this abode were a group, – to speak more properly, a family; they were proscribed ones. The most aged was one of those men who, at a given moment, are *de trop* in their own country. He had come from an assembly; the others, who were young, had come from a prison. To have written, that is sufficient motive for bars. Where shall thought conduct except to a dungeon?

The prison had set them free into banishment.

The oldest, the father, had in that place all his own except his eldest daughter, who could not follow him. His son-in-law was with her. Often were they leaning round a table or seated on a bench, silent, grave, thinking, all of them, and without saying it, of those two absent ones.

Why was this group installed in this lodging, so little suitable? For reasons of haste, and from a desire to be as soon as possible anywhere but at the inn. Doubtless, also, because it was the first house to let that they had met with, and because proscribed people are not lucky.

This house, – which it is time to rehabilitate a little and console, for who knows if in its loneliness it is not sad at what we have just said about it; a home has a soul, – this house was called Marine Terrace. The arrival was mournful; but after all, we declare, the stay in it was agreeable, and Marine Terrace has not left to those who then inhabited it anything but affectionate and dear remembrances. And what we say of that house, Marine Terrace, we say also of that island of Jersey. Places of suffering and trial end by having a kind of bitter sweetness which, later on, causes them to be regretted. They have a stern hospitality which pleases the conscience.

There had been, before them, other exiles in that island. This is not the time to speak of them. We mention only that the most ancient of whom tradition, a legend, perhaps, has kept the remembrance, was a Roman, Vipsanius Minator, who employed his exile in augmenting, for the benefit of his country's dominion, the Roman wall of which you may still see some parts, like bits of hillock, near a bay named, I think, St. Catherine's Bay. This Vipsanius Minator was a consular personage, – an old Roman so infatuated with Rome that he stood in the way of the Empire. Tiberius exiled him into this Cimmerian island, Cæsarea; according to others, to one of the Orkneys. Tiberius did more; not content with exile, he ordained oblivion. It was forbidden to the orators of the senate and the forum to pronounce the name of Vipsanius Minator. The orators of the forum and the senate, and history, have obeyed; about which Tiberius, of course, did not have a doubt. That arrogance in commanding, which proceeded so far as to give orders to men's thoughts, characterized certain ancient governments newly arrived at one of those firm situations where the greatest amount of crime produces the greatest amount of security.

Let us return to Marine Terrace.

One morning at the end of November, two of the inhabitants of the place, the father and the youngest of the sons, were seated in the lower parlour. They were silent, like shipwrecked ones who meditate. Without, it rained; the wind blew. The house was as if deafened by the outer roaring. Both went on thinking, absorbed perhaps by this coincidence between a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile.

All at once the son raised his voice and asked the father, —

"What thinkest thou of this exile?"

"That it will be long."

"How dost thou reckon to fill it up?"

The father answered, —

"I shall look on the ocean."

There was a silence. The father resumed the conversation: —

"And you?"

"I," said the son, – "I shall translate Shakespeare."

CHAPTER II

There are men, oceans in reality.

These waves; this ebb and flow; this terrible go-and-come; this noise of every gust; these lights and shadows; these vegetations belonging to the gulf; this democracy of clouds in full hurricane; these eagles in the foam; these wonderful gatherings of stars reflected in one knows not what mysterious crowd by millions of luminous specks, heads confused with the innumerable; those grand errant lightnings which seem to watch; these huge sobs; these monsters glimpsed at; this roaring, disturbing these nights of darkness; these furies, these frenzies, these tempests, these rocks, these shipwrecks, these fleets crushing each other, these human thunders mixed with divine thunders, this blood in the abyss; then these graces, these sweetnesses, these *fêtes* these gay white veils, these fishing-boats, these songs in the uproar, these splendid ports, this smoke of the earth, these towns in the horizon, this deep blue of water and sky, this useful sharpness, this bitterness which renders the universe

wholesome, this rough salt without which all would putrefy, these angers and assuagings, this whole in one, this unexpected in the immutable, this vast marvel of monotony inexhaustibly varied, this level after that earthquake, these hells and these paradises of immensity eternally agitated, this infinite, this unfathomable, – all this can exist in one spirit; and then this spirit is called genius, and you have Æschylus, you have Isaiah, you have Juvenal, you have Dante, you have Michael Angelo, you have Shakespeare; and looking at these minds is the same thing as to look at the ocean.

CHAPTER III

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in a house under the tiles of which was concealed a profession of the Catholic faith beginning with these words, "I, John Shakespeare." John was the father of William. The house, situate in Henley Street, was humble; the chamber in which Shakespeare came into the world, wretched, – the walls whitewashed, the black rafters laid crosswise; at the farther end a tolerably large window with two small panes, where you may read to-day, among other names, that of Walter Scott. This poor lodging sheltered a decayed family. The father of William Shakespeare had been alderman; his grand-father had been bailiff. Shakespeare signifies "shake-lance;" the family had for coat-of-arms an arm holding a lance, – allusive arms, which were confirmed, they say, by Queen Elizabeth in 1595, and apparent, at the time we write, on Shakespeare's tomb in the church of Stratford-on-Avon. There is little agreement on the orthography of the word Shake-speare, as a family name; it is written variously, – Shakspere, Shakespere, Shakespeare, Shakspeare. In the eighteenth century it was habitually written Shakespear; the actual translator has adopted the spelling Shakespeare, as the only true method, and gives for it unanswerable reasons. The only objection that can be made is that Shakspeare is more easily pronounced than Shakespeare, that cutting off the *e* mute is perhaps useful, and that for their own sake, and in the interests of literary currency, posterity has, as regards surnames, a claim to euphony. It is evident, for example, that in French poetry the orthography Shakspeare is necessary. However, in prose, and convinced by the translator, we write Shakespeare.

2. The Shakespeare family had some original draw-back, probably its Catholicism, which caused it to fall. A little after the birth of William, Alderman Shakespeare was no more than "butcher John." William Shakespeare made his *début* in a slaughter-house. At fifteen years of age, with sleeves tucked up, in his father's shambles, he killed the sheep and calves "pompously," says Aubrey. At eighteen he married. Between the days of the slaughter-house and the marriage he composed a quatrain. This quatrain, directed against the neighbouring villages, is his *début* in poetry. He there says that Hillbrough is illustrious for its ghosts and Bidford for its drunken fellows. He made this quatrain (being tipsy himself), in the open air, under an apple-tree still celebrated in the country in consequence of this Midsummer Night's Dream. In this night and in this dream where there were lads and lasses, in this drunken fit, and under this apple-tree, he discovered that Anne Hathaway was a pretty girl. The wedding followed. He espoused this Anne Hathaway, older than himself by eight years, had a daughter by her, then twins, boy and girl, and left her; and this wife, vanished from Shakespeare's life, appears again only in his will, where he leaves her the worst of his two beds, "having probably," says a biographer, "employed the best with others." Shakespeare, like La Fontaine, did but sip at a married life. His wife put aside, he was a schoolmaster, then clerk to an attorney, then a poacher. This poaching has been made use of since then to justify the statement that Shakespeare had been a thief. One day he was caught poaching in Sir Thomas Lucy's park. They threw him in prison; they commenced proceedings. These being spitefully followed up, he saved himself by flight to London. In order to gain a livelihood, he sought to take care of horses at the doors of the theatres. Plautus had turned a millstone. This business of taking care of horses at the doors existed in London in the last century, and it formed then a kind of small band or corps that they called "Shakespeare's boys."

3. You may call London the black Babylon, – gloomy the day, magnificent the night To see London is a sensation; it is uproar under smoke. Mysterious analogy! The uproar is the smoke of noise. Paris is the capital of one side of humanity. London is the capital of the opposite side, – splendid and melancholy town! Life there is a tumult; the people there are an ant-hill; they are free, and yet dove-tailed. London is an orderly chaos. The London of the sixteenth century did not resemble the London of our day; but it was already a town without bounds. Cheapside was the high-street; St Paul's, which is a dome, was a spire. The plague was nearly as much at home in London as at Constantinople. It is true that there was not much difference between Henry VIII. and a sultan. Fires, also, as at Constantinople, were frequent in London, on account of the populous parts of the town being built entirely of wood. In the streets there was but one carriage, – the carriage of her Majesty. Not a cross-road where they did not cudgel some pickpocket with that drotsch-block which is still retained at Groningen for thrashing the wheat. Manners were rough, almost ferocious; a fine lady rose at six, and went to bed at nine. Lady Geraldine Kildare, to whom Lord Surrey inscribed verses, breakfasted off a pound of bacon and a pot of beer. Queens, the wives of Henry VIII., knitted mittens, and did not even object to their being of coarse red wool. In this London, the Duchess of Suffolk took care of her hen-house, and with her dress tucked up to her knees, threw corn to the ducks in the court below. To dine at midday was a late dinner. The pleasures of the upper classes were to go and play at "hot cockles" with my Lord Leicester. Anne Boleyn played there; she knelt down, with eyes bandaged, rehearsing this game, without knowing it, in the posture of the scaffold. This same Anne Boleyn, destined to the throne, from whence she was to go farther, was perfectly dazzled when her mother bought her three linen chemises at sixpence the ell, and promised her for the Duke of Norfolk's ball a pair of new shoes worth five shillings.

4. Under Elizabeth, in spite of the anger of the Puritans, there were in London eight companies of comedians, those of Newington Butts, Earl Pembroke's company. Lord Strange's retainers, the Lord-Chamberlain's troop, the Lord High-Admiral's troop, the company of Blackfriars, the children of St. Paul's, and, in the first rank, the Showmen of Bears. Lord Southampton went to the play every evening. Nearly all the theatres were situate on the banks of the Thames, which increased the number of water-men. The play-rooms were of two kinds: some merely open tavern-yards, a trestle leaning against a wall, no ceiling, rows of benches placed on the ground, for boxes the windows of the tavern. The performance took place in the broad daylight and in the open air. The principal of those theatres was the Globe; the others, which were mostly closed play-rooms, lighted with lamps, were used at night. The most frequented was Blackfriars. The best actor of Lord Pembroke's troop was called Henslowe; the best actor at Blackfriars was Burbage. The Globe was situate on Bank Side. This is known by a document at Stationers' Hall, dated 26th November, 1607: —

"His Majesty's servants playing usually at the Globe on the Bank Side."

The scenery was simple. Two swords laid crosswise, sometimes two laths, signified a battle; a shirt over the coat signified a knight; the petticoat of one of the comedians' wives on a broom-handle, signified a palfrey caparisoned. A rich theatre, which made its inventory in 1598, possessed "the limbs of Moors, a dragon, a big horse with his legs, a cage, a rock, four Turks' heads, and that of the ancient Mahomet, a wheel for the siege of London, and a *bouche d'enfer.*" Another had "a sun, a target, the three feathers of the Prince of Wales, with the device *Ich Dien*, besides six devils, and the Pope on his mule." An actor besmeared with plaster and immovable, signified a wall; if he spread his fingers, it meant that the wall had crevices. A man laden with a fagot, followed by a dog, and carrying a lantern, meant the moon; his lantern represented the moonshine. People may laugh at this *mise en scène* of moonlight, become famous by the "Midsummer Night's Dream," without imagining that there is in it a gloomy anticipation of Dante.[1] The robing-room of these theatres, where

[1] See L'Inferno, Chant xx.

the comedians dressed themselves pell-mell, was a corner separated from the stage by a rag of some kind stretched on a cord. The robing-room at Blackfriars was shut off by an ancient piece of tapestry which had belonged to one of the guilds, and represented a blacksmith's workshop; through the holes in this partition, flying in rags and tatters, the public saw the actors redden their cheeks with brick-dust, or make their mustaches with a cork burned at a tallow-candle. From time to time, through an occasional opening of the curtain, you might see a face grinning in a mask, peeping to see if the time for going on the stage had arrived, or the smooth chin of a comedian, who was to play the part of a woman. "Glabri histriones," said Plautus. These theatres were frequented by noblemen, scholars, soldiers, and sailors. They acted there the tragedy of "Lord Buckhurst," "Gorbuduc," or "Ferrex and Porrex," "Mother Bombic," by Lilly, in which the phip-phip of sparrows was heard; "The Libertine," an imitation of the "Convivado de Piedra," which had a European fame; "Felix and Philomena," a fashionable comedy, performed for the first time at Greenwich, before "Queen Bess;" "Promos and Cassandra," a comedy dedicated by the author, George Whetstone, to William Fleetwood, recorder of London; "Tamerlane," and the "Jew of Malta," by Christopher Marlowe; farces and pieces by Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kid; and lastly, mediæval comedies. For just as France has her "L'Avocat Pathelin," so England has her "Gossip Gurton's Needle." While the actors gesticulated and ranted, the noblemen and officers, with their plumes and band of gold lace, standing or squatting on the stage, turning their backs, haughty and easy in the midst of the constrained comedians, laughed, shouted, played at cards, threw them at each other's heads, or played at post and pair; and below in the shade, on the pavement, among pots of beer and pipes, you might see the "stinkards" (the mob). It was by that very theatre that Shakespeare entered on the drama. From being the guardian of horses, he became the shepherd of men.

5. Such was the theatre in London about the year 1580, under "the great queen." It was not much less wretched, a century later, at Paris, under "the great king;" and Molière, at his debut, had, like Shakespeare, to make shift with rather miserable playhouses. There is in the archives of the Comédie Française an unpublished manuscript of four hundred pages, bound in parchment and tied with a band of white leather. It is the diary of Lagrange, a comrade of Molière. Lagrange describes also the theatre where Molière's company played by order of Mr. Rateban, superintendent of the king's buildings: "Three beams, the frames rotten and shored up, and half the room roofless and in ruins." In another place, by date Sunday, 15th March, 1671, he says, "The company have resolved to make a large ceiling over the whole room, which, up to the said date (15th) has not been covered, save by a large blue cloth suspended by cords." As for lighting and heating this room, particularly on the occasion of the extraordinary expenses necessary for the performance of "Psyche," which was by Molière and Corneille, we read: "Candles, thirty livres; door-keeper, for wood, three livres." This was the style of playhouse which "the great king" placed at the disposal of Molière. These bounties to literature did not impoverish Louis XIV. so much as to deprive him of the pleasure of giving, for example, at one and the same time, two hundred thousand livres to Lavardin, and the same to D'Epernon; two hundred thousand livres, besides the regiment of France, to the Count de Médavid; four hundred thousand livres to the Bishop of Noyon, because this bishop was Clermont-Tonnerre, a family that had two patents of count and peer of France, – one for Clermont and one for Tonnerre; five hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Vivonne; and seven hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Quintin-Lorges, besides eight hundred thousand livres to Monseigneur Clement de Bavière, Prince-Bishop of Liége. Let us add that he gave a thousand livres pension to Molière. We find in Lagrange's journal in the month of April, 1663, this remark: —

> "About the same time, M. de Molière received, as a great wit, a pension from the king, and has been placed on the civil list for the sum of a thousand livres."

Later, when Molière was dead and interred at St. Joseph, "Chapel of ease to the parish of St. Eustache," the king pushed patronage so far as to permit his tomb to be "raised a foot out of the ground."

6. Shakespeare, as we see, remained as an outsider a long time on the threshold of theatrical life. At length he entered. He passed the door and got behind the scenes. He succeeded in becoming call-boy, vulgarly, a "barker." About 1586 Shakespeare was barking with Greene at Blackfriars. In 1587 he gained a step. In the piece called "The Giant Agrapardo, King of Nubia, worse than his late brother, Angulafer," Shakespeare was intrusted with carrying the turban to the giant. Then from a supernumerary he became actor, thanks to Burbage, to whom, by an interlineation in his will, he left thirty-six shillings, to buy a gold ring. He was the friend of Condell and Hemynge, – his comrades whilst alive, his publishers after his death. He was handsome; he had a high forehead, a brown beard, a mild countenance, a sweet mouth, a deep look. He took delight in reading Montaigne, translated by Florio. He frequented the Apollo tavern, where he would see and keep company with two *habitués* of his theatre, – Decker, author of the "Gull's Hornbook," in which a chapter is specially devoted to "the way a man of fashion ought to behave at the play," and Dr. Symon Forman, who has left a manuscript journal, containing reports of the first representations of the "Merchant of Venice," and "A Winter's Tale." He used to meet Sir Walter Raleigh at the Siren Club. Somewhere about that time, Maturin Régnier met Philippe de Béthune at la Pomme de Pin. The great lords and fine gentlemen of the day were rather prone to lend their names in order to start new taverns. At Paris the Viscount de Montauban, who was a Créqui, founded Le Tripot des Onze Mille Diables. At Madrid, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the unfortunate admiral of the "Invincible," founded the Puño-en-rostro, and in London Sir Walter Raleigh founded the Siren. There you found drunkenness and wit.

7. In 1589, when James VI. of Scotland, looking to the throne of England, paid his respects to Elizabeth, who, two years before, on the 8th February, 1587, had beheaded Mary Stuart, mother of this James, Shakespeare composed his first drama, "Pericles." In 1591, while the Catholic king was dreaming, after a scheme of the Marquis d'Astorga, of a second Armada, more lucky than the first, inasmuch as it never put to sea, he composed "Henry VI." In 1593, when the Jesuits obtained from the Pope express permission to paint "the pains and torments of hell," on the walls of "the chamber of meditation" of Clermont College, where they often shut up a poor youth, who the year after, became famous under the name of Jean Châtel, he composed "Taming the Shrew." In 1594, when, looking daggers at each other and ready for battle, the King of Spain, the Queen of England, and even the King of France, all three said "my good city of Paris," he continued and completed "Henry VI." In 1595, while Clement VIII. at Rome was solemnly aiming a blow at Henry IV. by laying his crosier on the backs of Cardinals du Perron and d'Ossat, he wrote "Timon of Athens." In 1596, the year when Elizabeth published an edict against the long points of bucklers, and when Philip II. drove from his presence a woman who laughed when blowing her nose, he composed "Macbeth." In 1597, when this same Philip II. said to the Duke of Alba, "You deserve the axe," not because the Duke of Alba had put the Low Countries to fire and sword, but because he had entered into the king's presence without being announced, he composed "Cymbeline" and "Richard III." In 1598, when the Earl of Essex ravaged Ireland, bearing on his headdress the glove of the virgin Queen Elizabeth, he composed the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," "King John," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Comedy of Errors," "All's Well that Ends Well," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Merchant of Venice." In 1599, when the Privy Council, at her Majesty's request, deliberated on the proposal to put Dr. Hayward to the rack for having stolen some of the ideas of Tacitus, he composed "Romeo and Juliet." In 1600, while the Emperor Rudolph was waging war against his rebel brother and sentencing his son, murderer of a woman, to be bled to death, he composed "As You Like It," "Henry IV.," "Henry V.," and "Much Ado about Nothing." In 1601, when Bacon published the eulogy on the execution of the Earl of Essex, just as Leibnitz, eighty years afterward, was to find out good reasons for the murder of Monaldeschi, with this difference however, that Monaldeschi was nothing to Leibnitz, and

that Essex had been the benefactor of Bacon, he composed "Twelfth Night; or, What you Will." In 1602, while in obedience to the Pope, the King of France, styled "Renard de Béarn" by Cardinal Aldobrandini, was counting his beads every day, reciting the litanies on Wednesday, and the rosary of the Virgin Mary on Saturday, while fifteen cardinals, assisted by the heads of the chapter, opened the discussion on Molinism at Rome, and while the Holy See, at the request of the crown of Spain, "was saving Christianity and the world" by the institution of the congregation "de Auxiliis," he composed "Othello." In 1603, when the death of Elizabeth made Henry IV. say, "She was a virgin just as I am a Catholic," he composed "Hamlet." In 1604, while Philip III. was losing his last footing in the Low Countries, he wrote "Julius Cæsar" and "Measure for Measure." In 1606, at the time when James I. of England, the former James VI. of Scotland, wrote against Bellarmin the "Tortura Forti" and faithless to Carr began to look sweetly on Villiers, who was afterward to honour him with the title of "Your Filthiness," he composed "Coriolanus." In 1607, when the University of York received the little Prince of Wales as doctor, according to the account of Father St. Romuald "with all the ceremonies and the usual fur gowns," he wrote "King Lear." In 1609, when the magistracy of France, placing the scaffold at the disposition of the king, gave upon trust a *carte blanche* for the sentence of the Prince de Condé "to such punishment as it might please his Majesty to order," Shakespeare composed "Troilus and Cressida." In 1610, when Ravaillac assassinated Henry IV. by the dagger, and the French parliament assassinated Ravaillac by the process of quartering his body, Shakespeare composed "Antony and Cleopatra." In 1611, while the Moors, driven out by Philip III., and in the pangs of death, were crawling out of Spain, he wrote the "Winter's Tale," "Henry VIII.," and "The Tempest."

8. He used to write on flying sheets, like nearly all poets. Malherbe and Boileau are almost the only ones who have written on quires of paper. Racan said to Mlle. de Gournay: —

> "I have seen this morning M. de Malherbe sewing with coarse gray thread a bundle of white papers, on which will soon appear some sonnets."

Each of Shakespeare's dramas, composed according to the wants of his company, was in all probability learned and rehearsed in haste by the actors from the original itself, as they had not time to copy it; hence, in his case as in Molière's, the mislaying of manuscripts which were cut into parts. Few or no entry-books in those almost itinerant theatres; no coincidence between the time of representation and the publication of the plays; sometimes not even a printed copy, – the stage the sole publication. When the pieces by chance are printed, they bear titles which bewilder us. The second part of Henry VI. is entitled "The First Part of the War between York and Lancaster." The third part is called "The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York." All this enables us to understand why so much obscurity rests on the dates when Shakespeare composed his dramas, and why it is difficult to fix them with precision. The dates that we have just given, and which are here brought together for the first time, are pretty nearly certain; notwithstanding, some doubt still exists as to the years when the following were written, or indeed played, – "Timon of Athens," "Cymbeline," "Julius Cæsar," "Antony and Cleopatra," "Coriolanus," and "Macbeth." Here and there we meet with barren years; others there are of which the fertility seems excessive. It is, for instance, on a simple note by Meres, author of the "Treasure of Wit," that we are compelled to attribute to the year 1598 the creation of six pieces, – "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," the "Comedy of Errors," "King John," "Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice," and "All's Well that Ends Well," which Meres calls "Love's Labour Gained." The date of "Henry VI." is fixed, for the first part at least, by an allusion which Nash makes to this play in "Pierce Penniless." The year 1604 is given as that of "Measure for Measure," inasmuch as this piece had been represented on Stephen's Day of that year, of which Hemynge makes a special note; and the year 1611 for "Henry VIII." inasmuch as "Henry VIII." was played at the time of the fire of the Globe Theatre. Various circumstances – a disagreement with his company, a whim of the lord-chamberlain – sometimes compelled Shakespeare to change

from one theatre to another. "Taming the Shrew" was played for the first time in 1593, at Henslowe's theatre; "Twelfth Night" in 1601, at Middle Temple Hall; "Othello" in 1602, at Harefield Castle. "King Lear" was played at Whitehall during Christmas (1607) before James I. Burbage created the part of Lear. Lord Southampton, recently set free from the Tower of London, was present at this performance. This Lord Southampton was an old *habitué* of Blackfriars; and Shakespeare, in 1589, had dedicated the poem of "Adonis" to him. Adonis was the fashion at that time; twenty-five years after Shakespeare, the Chevalier Marini wrote a poem on Adonis which he dedicated to Louis XIII.

9. In 1597 Shakespeare lost his son, who has left as his only trace on earth one line in the death-register of the parish of Stratford-on-Avon: "1597. August 17. Hamnet. Filius William Shakespeare." On the 6th September, 1601, his father, John Shakespeare, died. He was now the head of his company of comedians. James I. had given him, in 1607, the lease of Blackfriars, and afterward that of the Globe. In 1613 Madame Elizabeth, daughter of James, and the Elector-palatine, King of Bohemia, whose statue may be seen in the ivy at the angle of a big tower at Heidelberg, came to the Globe to see the "Tempest" performed. These royal attendances did not save him from the censure of the lord-chamberlain. A certain interdict weighed on his pieces, the representation of which was tolerated, and the printing now and then forbidden. On the second volume of the register at Stationers' Hall you may read to-day on the margin of the title of three pieces, "As You Like It," "Henry V.," "Much Ado about Nothing," the words "4 Augt. to suspend." The motives for these interdictions escape us. Shakespeare was able, for instance without raising objection, to place on the stage his former poaching adventure and make Sir Thomas Lucy a buffoon (Judge Shallow), show the public Falstaff killing the buck and belabouring Shallow's people, and push the likeness so far as to give to Shallow the arms of Sir Thomas Lucy, – an outrageous piece of Aristophanism by a man who did not know Aristophanes. Falstaff, in Shakespeare's manuscripts, was written Falstaffe. In the mean time his circumstances had improved, as later they did with Molière. Toward the end of the century he was rich enough for a certain Ryc-Quiney to ask, on the 8th October, 1598, his assistance in a letter which bears the inscription: "To my amiable friend and countryman William Shakespeare." He refused the assistance, as it appears, and returned the letter, found since among Fletcher's papers, and on the reverse of which this same Ryc-Quiney had written: "*Histrio! Mima!*" He loved Stratford-on-Avon, where he was born, where his father had died, where his son was buried. He there purchased or built a house, which he christened "New Place." We say, bought or built a house, for he bought it, according to Whiterill, and he built it according to Forbes, and on this point Forbes disputes with Whiterill. These cavils of the learned about trifles are not worth being searched into, particularly when we see Father Hardouin, for instance, completely upset a whole passage of Pliny by replacing *nos pridem* by *non pridem.*

10. Shakespeare went from time to time to pass some days at New Place. In these short journeys he met half-way Oxford, and at Oxford the Crown Hotel, and in the hotel the hostess, a beautiful, intelligent creature, wife of the worthy innkeeper, Davenant. In 1606 Mrs. Davenant was brought to bed of a son whom they named William, and in 1644 Sir William Davenant, created knight by Charles I., wrote to Lord Rochester: "Know this, which does honour to my mother, I am the son of Shakespeare," thus allying himself to Shakespeare in the same way that in our days M. Lucas Montigny claimed relationship with Mirabeau. Shakespeare had married off his two daughters, – Susan to a doctor, Judith to a merchant; Susan had wit, Judith knew not how to read or write, and signed her name with a cross. In 1613 it happened that Shakespeare, having come to Stratford-on-Avon, had no further desire to return to London. Perhaps he was in difficulties. He had just been compelled to mortgage his house. The contract deed of this mortgage, dated 11th March, 1613, and indorsed with Shakespeare's signature, was up to the last century in the hands of an attorney, who gave it to Garrick, who lost it. Garrick lost likewise (it is Miss Violetti, his wife, who tells the story), Forbes's manuscript, with his letters in Latin. From 1613 Shakespeare remained at his house at New Place, occupied with his garden, forgetting his plays, wrapped up in his flowers. He planted in this garden of New Place the first mulberry-tree that was grown at Stratford, just as Queen Elizabeth

wore, in 1561, the first silk stockings seen in England. On the 25th March, 1616, feeling ill, he made his will. His will, dictated by him, is written on three pages; he signed each of them; his hand trembled. On the first page he signed only his Christian name, "William;" on the second, "Willm. Shaspr.;" on the third, "William Shasp." On the 23d April, he died. He had reached that day exactly fifty-two years, being born on the 23d April, 1564. On that same day, 23d April, 1616, died Cervantes, a genius of like growth. When Shakespeare died, Milton was eight years, Corneille ten years of age; Charles I. and Cromwell were two youths, the one sixteen, the other seventeen years old.

CHAPTER IV

Shakespeare's life was greatly imbittered. He lived perpetually slighted; he states it himself. Posterity may read this to-day in his own verses: —

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd.
Pity me, then,
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysel."[2]

"Your love and pity doth th' impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow."[3]

"Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name."[4]

"Or on my frailty why are frailer spies."[5]

Shakespeare had permanently near him one envious person, Ben Jonson, – an indifferent comic poet, whose *début* he assisted. Shakespeare was thirty-nine when Elizabeth died. This queen had not paid attention to him; she managed to reign forty-four years without seeing that Shakespeare was there. She is not the least qualified, historically, to be called the "protectress of arts and letters," etc. The historians of the old school gave these certificates to all princes, whether they knew how to read or not.

Shakespeare, persecuted like Molière at a later date, sought, as Molière, to lean on the master. Shakespeare and Molière would in our days have had a loftier spirit. The master, it was Elizabeth, – "King Elizabeth," as the English called her. Shakespeare glorified Elizabeth: he called her the "Virgin Star," "Star of the West," and "Diana," – a name of a goddess which pleased the queen, – but in vain. The queen took no notice of it; less sensitive to the praises in which Shakespeare called her Diana than to the insults of Scipio Gentilis, who, taking the pretensions of Elizabeth on the bad side, called her "Hecate," and applied to her the ancient triple curse, "Mormo! Bombo! Gorgo!" As for James I., whom Henry IV. called Master James, he gave, as we have seen, the lease of the Globe to Shakespeare, but he willingly forbade the publication of his pieces. Some contemporaries, Dr. Symon Forman among others, so far took notice of Shakespeare as to make a note of the occupation

[2] Sonnet 111.

[3] Sonnet 112.

[4] Sonnet 36.

[5] Sonnet 121.

of an evening passed at the performance of the "Merchant of Venice!" That was all which he knew of glory. Shakespeare, once dead, entered into oblivion.

From 1640 to 1660 the Puritans abolished art, and shut up the playhouses. All theatricals were under a funeral shroud. With Charles II. the drama revived without Shakespeare. The false taste of Louis XIV. had invaded England. Charles II. belonged rather to Versailles than London. He had as mistress a French girl, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and as an intimate friend the privy purse of the King of France. Clifford, his favourite, who never entered the parliament-house without spitting, said: "It is better for my master to be viceroy under a great monarch like Louis XIV. than the slave of five hundred insolent English subjects." These were not the days of the republic, – the time when Cromwell took the title of "Protector of England and France," and forced this same Louis XIV. to accept the title of "King of the French."

Under this restoration of the Stuarts, Shakespeare completed his eclipse. He was so thoroughly dead that Davenant, possibly his son, re-composed his pieces. There was no longer any "Macbeth" but the "Macbeth" of Davenant. Dryden speaks of Shakespeare on one occasion in order to say that he is "out of date." Lord Shaftesbury calls him "a wit out of fashion." Dryden and Shaftesbury were two oracles. Dryden, a converted Catholic, had two sons, ushers in the Chamber of Clément XI., made tragedies worth putting into Latin verse, as Atterbury's hexameters prove; and he was the servant of that James II. who, before being king on his own account, had asked of his brother, Charles II., "Why don't you hang Milton?" The Earl of Shaftesbury, a friend of Locke, was the man who wrote an "Essay on Sprightliness in Important Conversations," and who, by the manner in which Chancellor Hyde helped his daughter to the wing of a chicken, divined that she was secretly married to the Duke of York.

These two men having condemned Shakespeare, the oracle had spoken. England, a country more obedient to conventional opinion than is generally believed, forgot Shakespeare. Some purchaser pulled down his house, New Place. A Rev. Dr. Cartrell cut down and burned his mulberry-tree. At the commencement of the eighteenth century the eclipse was total. In 1707, one called Nahum Tate published a "King Lear," warning his readers "that he had borrowed the idea of it from a play which he had read by chance, – the work of some nameless author." This "nameless author" was Shakespeare.

CHAPTER V

In 1728 Voltaire imported from England to France the name of Will Shakespeare. Only in place of Will, he pronounced it *Gilles.*

Jeering began in France, and oblivion continued in England. What the Irishman Nahum Tate had done for "King Lear," others did for other pieces. "All's Well that Ends Well" had successively two arrangers, – Pilon for the Haymarket, and Kemble for Drury Lane. Shakespeare existed no more, and counted no more. "Much Ado about Nothing" served likewise as a rough draft twice, – for Davenant in 1673, for James Miller in 1737. "Cymbeline" was recast four times: under James II., at the Theatre Royal, by Thomas Dursey; in 1695 by Charles Marsh; in 1759 by W. Hawkins; in 1761 by Garrick. "Coriolanus" was recast four times: in 1682, for the Theatre Royal, by Tates; in 1720, for Drury Lane, by John Dennis; in 1755, for Covent Garden, by Thomas Sheridan; in 1801, for Drury Lane, by Kemble. "Timon of Athens" was recast four times: at the Duke's Theatre, in 1678, by Shadwell; in 1768, at the Theatre of Richmond Green, by James Love; in 1771, at Drury Lane, by Cumberland; in 1786, at Covent Garden, by Hull.

In the eighteenth century the persistent raillery of Voltaire ended in producing in England a certain waking up. Garrick, while correcting Shakespeare, played him, and acknowledged that it was Shakespeare that he played. They reprinted him at Glasgow. An imbecile, Malone, made commentaries on his plays, and as a logical sequence, whitewashed his tomb. There was on this tomb a little bust, of a doubtful resemblance, and moderate as a work of art; but, what made it a subject of

reverence, contemporaneous with Shakespeare. It is after this bust that all the portraits of Shakespeare have been made that we now see. The bust was whitewashed. Malone, critic and whitewasher of Shakespeare, spread a coat of plaster on his face, of idiotic nonsense on his work.

MEN OF GENIUS

CHAPTER I

Great Art, using this word in its arbitrary sense, is the region of Equals.

Before going farther, let us fix the value of this expression, Art, which often recurs in our writing.

We speak of Art as we speak of Nature; here are two terms of an almost unlimited signification. To pronounce the one or the other of these words, Nature, Art, is to make a conjuration, to extract from the depths the ideal, to draw aside one of the two grand curtains of a divine creation. God manifests himself to us in the first degree through the life of the universe, and in the second through the thought of man. The second manifestation is not less holy than the first. The first is named Nature, the second is named Art. Hence this reality: the poet is a priest

There is here below a pontiff, – it is genius.

Sacerdos Magnus.

Art is the second branch of Nature.

Art is as natural as Nature.

By the word *God*– let us fix the sense of this word – we mean the Living Infinite.

The I latent of the Infinite patent, that is God.

God is the Invisible seen.

The world concentrated is God. God expanded, is the world.

We, who are speaking, we believe in nothing out of God.

That being said, let us proceed. God creates art by man. He has for a tool the human intellect. This tool the Workman has made for himself; he has no other.

Forbes, in the curious little work perused by Warburton and lost by Garrick, affirms that Shakespeare devoted himself to the practice of magic, that magic was in his family, and that what little good there was in his pieces was dictated to him by one "Alleur," a spirit.

Let us say on this point, for we must not avoid any of the questions about to arise, that it is a wretched error of all ages to desire to give the human intellect assistance from without, —*antrum adjuvat vatem.* To the work which seems superhuman, people wish to bring the intervention of the extra-human, – in antiquity, the tripod; in our days, the table. The table is nothing but the tripod come back. To accept *au pied de la lettre* the demon that Socrates talks of, the thicket of Moses, the nymph of Numa, the spirit of Plotinus, and Mahomet's dove, is to be the victim of a metaphor.

On the other hand, the table, turning or talking, has been very much laughed at; to speak the truth, this raillery is out of place. To replace inquiry by mockery is convenient, but not very scientific. For our part, we think that the strict duty of science is to test all phenomena. Science is ignorant, and has no right to laugh; a savant who laughs at the possible is very near being an idiot. The unexpected ought always to be expected by science. Her duty is to stop it in its course and search it, rejecting the chimerical, establishing the real. Science has but the right to put a visa on facts; she should verify and distinguish. All human knowledge is but picking and culling. Because the false mixes with the true, it is no excuse for rejecting the mass. When was the tare an excuse for refusing the corn? Hoe the weed, error, but reap the fact, and place it beside others. Knowledge is the sheaf of facts.

The mission of science, – to study and try the depth of everything. All of us, according to our degree, are the creditors of investigation; we are its debtors also. It is owed to us, and we owe it to others. To avoid a phenomenon, to refuse to pay it that attention to which it has a right, to lead it out, to shut to the door, to turn our back on it laughing, is to make truth a bankrupt, and to leave the draft of science to be protested. The phenomenon of the tripod of old, and of the table of to-day, is

entitled, like anything else, to observation. Psychic science will gain by it, without doubt. Let us add that to abandon phenomena to credulity is to commit treason against human reason.

Homer affirms that the tripods of Delphi walked of their own accord; and he explains the fact[6] by saying that Vulcan forged invisible wheels for them. The explanation does not much simplify the phenomenon. Plato relates that the statues of Dædalus gesticulated in the darkness, had a will of their own, and resisted their master; and that he was obliged to tie them up, so that they might not walk off. Strange dogs at the end of a chain! Fléchier mentions, at page 52 of his "Histoire de Thédodose" – referring to the great conspiracy of the magicians of the fourth century against the emperor – a table-turning of which, perhaps, we shall speak elsewhere, in order to say what Fléchier did not say, and seemed to ignore. This table was covered with a round plating of several metals, *ex diversis metallicis materiis fabrefacta*, like the plates of copper and zinc actually employed in biology. So you may see that the phenomenon, always rejected and always reappearing, is not a matter of yesterday.

Besides, whatever credulity has said or thought about it, this phenomenon of the tripods and tables is without any connection, and it is the very thing we want to come to, with the inspiration of the poets, – an inspiration entirely direct. The sibyl has a tripod, the poet none. The poet is himself a tripod. He is a tripod of God. God has not made this marvellous distillery of thought, the brain of man, not to be made use of. Genius has all that it wants in its brain; every thought passes by there. Thought ascends and buds from the brain, as the fruit from the root. Thought is man's consequence; the root plunges into earth, the brain into God, – that is to say, into the Infinite.

Those who imagine (there are such, witness Forbes) that a poem like "Le Médecin de son Honneur," or "King Lear," can be dictated by a tripod or a table, err in a strange fashion; these works are the works of man. God has no need to make a piece of wood aid Shakespeare or Calderon.

Then let us dispose of the tripod. Poetry is the poet's own. Let us be respectful before the possible of which no one knows the limit; let us be attentive and serious before the extra-human, out of which we come, and which awaits us; but let us not diminish the great workers of earth by hypotheses of mysterious assistance, which is not necessary. Let us leave to the brain what belongs to it, and agree that the work of the men of genius is of the superhuman, the offspring of man.

CHAPTER II

Supreme Art is the region of Equals.

The *chef d'œuvre* is adequate to the *chef d'œuvre.*

As water, when heated to 100 °C., is incapable of calorific increase, and can rise no higher, so human thought attains in certain men its maximum intensity. Æschylus, Job, Phidias, Isaiah, Saint Paul, Juvenal, Dante, Michael Angelo, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven, with some others, mark the 100° of genius.

The human mind has a summit.

This summit is the Ideal.

God descends, man rises to it.

In each age three or four men of genius undertake the ascent. From below, the world follow them with their eyes. These men go up the mountain, enter into the clouds, disappear, re-appear. People watch them, mark them. They walk by the side of precipices. A false step does not displease certain of the lookers-on. They daringly pursue their road. See them aloft, see them in the distance; they are but black specks. "How small they are!" says the crowd. They are giants. On they go. The road is uneven, its difficulties constant. At each step a wall, at each step a trap. As they rise, the cold increases. They must make their ladder, cut the ice, and walk on it, hewing the steps in haste. Every storm is raging. Nevertheless, they go forward in their madness. The air becomes difficult to

[6] Song XVIII of the Iliad.

breathe. The abyss increases around them. Some fall. It is well done. Others stop and retrace their steps; there is sad weariness.

The bold ones continue; those predestined persist. The dreadful declivity sinks beneath them and tries to draw them in; glory is traitorous. They are eyed by the eagles; the lightning plays about them; the hurricane is furious. No matter, they persevere. They ascend. He who arrives at the summit is thy equal, Homer!

Those names that we have mentioned, and those which we might have added, repeat them again. To choose between these men is impossible. There is no method for striking the balance between Rembrandt and Michael Angelo.

And, to confine ourselves solely to the authors and poets, examine them one after the other. Which is the greatest? Every one.

1. One, Homer, is the huge poet-child. The world is born, Homer sings. He is the bird of this aurora. Homer has the holy sincerity of the early dawn. He almost ignores shadow. Chaos, heaven, earth; Geo and Ceto; Jove, god of gods; Agamemnon, king of kings; peoples; flocks from the beginning; temples, towns, battles, harvests; the ocean; Diomedes fighting; Ulysses wandering; the windings of a sail seeking its home; Cyclops; dwarfs; a map of the world crowned by the gods of Olympus; and here and there a glimmer of the furnace permitting a sight of hell; priests, virgins, mothers; little children frightened by the plumes; the dog who remembers; great words which fall from gray-beards; friendships, loves, passions, and the hydras; Vulcan for the laugh of the gods, Thersites for the laugh of men; two aspects of married life summed up for the benefit of ages in Helen and Penelope; the Styx; Destiny; the heel of Achilles, without which Destiny would be vanquished by the Styx; monsters, heroes, men; thousands of landscapes seen in perspective in the cloud of the old world, – this immensity, this is Homer. Troy coveted, Ithaca desired. Homer is war and travel, – the first two methods for the meeting of mankind. The camp attacks the fortress, the ship sounds the unknown, which is also an attack; around war every passion; around travels every kind of adventure, – two gigantic groups; the first, bloody, is called the Iliad; the second, luminous, is called the Odyssey. Homer makes men greater than Nature; they hurl at each other rocks which twelve pairs of oxen could not move. The gods hardly care to come in contact with them. Minerva takes Achilles by the hair; he turns round in anger: "What do you want with me, goddess?" No monotony in these puissant figures. These giants are graduated. After each hero, Homer breaks the mould. Ajax, son of Oïleus, is less high in stature than Ajax, son of Telamon. Homer is one of the men of genius who resolve that beautiful problem of art (the most beautiful of all, perhaps), – the true picture of humanity obtained by aggrandizing man; that is to say, the creation of the real in the ideal. Fable and history, hypothesis and tradition, the chimera and knowledge, make up Homer. He is fathomless, and he is cheerful. All the depth of ancient days moves happily radiant and luminous in the vast azure of this spirit. Lycurgus, that peevish sage, half way between a Solon and a Draco, was conquered by Homer. He turned out of the way, while travelling, to go and read, at the house of Cleophilus, Homer's poems, placed there in remembrance of the hospitality that Homer, it is said, had formerly received in that house. Homer, to the Greeks, was a god; he had priests, – the Homerides. Alcibiades gave a bombastic orator a cuff for boasting that he had never read Homer. The divinity of Homer has survived Paganism. Michael Angelo said, "When I read Homer, I look at myself to see if I am not twenty feet in height." Tradition will have it that the first verse of the Iliad should be a verse of Orpheus. This doubling Homer by Orpheus, increased in Greece the religion of Homer. The shield of Achilles[7] was commented on in the temples by Damo, daughter of Pythagoras. Homer, as the sun, has planets. Virgil, who writes the Æneid, Lucan, who writes "Pharsalia," Tasso, who writes "Jerusalem," Ariosto, who composes "Roland," Milton, who writes "Paradise Lost," Camoëns, who writes the "Lusiades," Klopstock, who wrote the "Messiah," Voltaire, who wrote the "Henriade," gravitate toward Homer, and sending back

[7] Song XVII. of the Iliad.

to their own moons his light reflected in different degrees, move at unequal distances in his boundless orbit. This is Homer. Such is the beginning of the epic poem.

2. Another, Job, began the drama. This embryo is a colossus. Job begins the drama, and it is forty centuries ago, by placing Jehovah and Satan in presence of each other; the evil defies the good, and behold the action is begun. The earth is the place for the scene, and man the field of battle; the plagues are the actors. One of the wildest grandeurs of this poem is that in it the sun is inauspicious. The sun is in Job as in Homer; but it is no longer the dawn, it is midday. The mournful heaviness of the brazen ray falling perpendicularly on the desert pervades this poem, heated to a white heat. Job sweats on his dunghill. The shadow of Job is small and black, and hidden under him, as the snake under the rock. Tropical flies buzz on his sores. Job has above his head the frightful Arabian sun, – a bringer-up of monsters, an amplifier of plagues, who changes the cat into the tiger, the lizard into the crocodile, the pig into the rhinoceros, the snake into the boa, the nettle into the cactus, the wind into the simoon, the miasma into the plague. Job is anterior to Moses. Far into ages, by the side of Abraham, the Hebrew patriarch, there is Job, the Arabian patriarch. Before being proved, he had been happy, – "the greatest man in all the East," says his poem. This was the labourer-king. He exercised the immense priesthood of solitude; he sacrificed and sanctified. Toward evening he gave the earth the blessing, – the "berac." He was learned; he knew rhythm; his poem, of which the Arabian text is lost, was written in verse, – this, at least, is certain as regards from verse 3 of chap. III. to the end. He was good; he did not meet a poor child without throwing him the small coin kesitha; he was "the foot of the lame man, and the eye of the blind." It is from that that he was precipitated; fallen, he became gigantic. The whole poem of "Job" is the development of this idea, – the greatness that may be found at the bottom of the abyss. Job is more majestic when unfortunate than when prosperous. His leprosy is a purple cloth. His misery terrifies those who are there; they speak not to him until after a silence of seven days and seven nights. His lamentation is marked by they know not what quiet and sad sorcery. As he is crushing the vermin on his ulcers, he calls on the stars. He addresses Orion, the Hyades, which he names the Pleiades, and the signs that are at noonday. He says, "God has put an end to darkness." He calls the diamond which is hidden, "the stone of obscurity." He mixes with his distress the misfortune of others, and has tragic words that freeze, – "The widow is desolate." He smiles also, and is then more frightful yet. He has around him Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, – three implacable types of the friendly busybody, of whom he says, "You play on me as on a tambourine." His language, submissive toward God, is bitter toward kings: "The kings of the earth build solitudes," leaving our wit to find out whether he speaks of their tomb or their kingdom. Tacitus says, "Solitudinem faciunt." As to Jehovah, he adores him; and under the furious scourging of the plagues, all his resistance is confined to asking of God, "Wilt thou not permit me to swallow my spittle?" That dates four thousand years ago. At the same hour, perhaps, when the enigmatical astronomer of Denderah carves in the granite his mysterious zodiac, Job engraves his on human thought; and his zodiac is not made of stars, but of miseries. This zodiac turns yet above our heads. We have of Job only the Hebrew version, written by Moses. Such a poet, followed by such a translator, makes us dream! The man of the dunghill is translated by the man of Sinai. It is that, in reality, Job is a minister and a prophet. Job extracts from his drama a dogma. Job suffers, and draws an inference. Now, to suffer and draw an inference is to teach; sorrow, when logical, leads to God. Job teaches. Job, after having touched the summit of the drama, stirs up the depths of philosophy. He shows first that sublime madness of wisdom which, two thousand years later, by resignation making itself a sacrifice, will be the foolishness of the cross, —*stultitiam crucis.* The dunghill of Job, transfigured, will become the Calvary of Jesus.

3. Another, Æschylus, enlightened by the unconscious divination of genius, without suspecting that he has behind him, in the East, the resignation of Job, completes it, unwittingly, by the revolt of Prometheus; so that the lesson may be complete, and that the human race, to whom Job has taught but duty, shall feel in Prometheus Right dawning. There is something ghastly in Æschylus from one end to the other; there is a vague outline of an extraordinary Medusa behind the figures in the foreground.

Æschylus is magnificent and powerful, – as though you saw him knitting his brows beyond the sun. He has two Cains, – Eteocles and Polynices; Genesis has but one. His swarm of sea-monsters come and go in the dark sky, as a flock of driven birds. Æschylus has none of the known proportions. He is rough, abrupt, immoderate, incapable of smoothing the way, almost ferocious, with a grace of his own which resembles the flowers in wild places, less haunted by nymphs than by the Eumenides, of the faction of the Titans; among goddesses choosing the sombre ones, and smiling darkly at the Gorgons; a son of the earth like Othryx and Briareus, and ready to attempt again the scaling of heaven against that *parvenu Jupiter*. Æschylus is ancient mystery made man, – something like a Pagan prophet. His work, if we had it all, would be a kind of Greek bible. Poet hundred-handed, having an Orestes more fatal than Ulysses and a Thebes grander than Troy, hard as a rock, raging like the foam, full of steeps, torrents, and precipices, and such a giant that at times you might suppose that he becomes mountain. Coming later than the Iliad, he has the appearance of an elder son of Homer.

4. Another, Isaiah, seems, above humanity, as a roaring of continual thunder. He is the great censure. His style, a kind of nocturnal cloud, lightens up unceasingly with images which suddenly empurple all the depths of this dark mind, and makes us exclaim, "He gives light!" Isaiah takes hand-to-hand the evil which, in civilization, makes its appearance before the good. He cries "Silence!" at the noise of chariots, of *fêtes*, of triumphs. The foam of his prophecy surges even on Nature. He denounces Babylon to the moles and bats, promises Nineveh briers, Tyre ashes, Jerusalem night, fixes a date for the wrong-doers, warns the powers of their approaching end, assigns a day against idols, high citadels, the fleets of Tarsus, the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Basan. He is standing on the threshold of civilization, and he refuses to enter. He is a kind of mouthpiece of the desert speaking to multitudes, and claiming for quicksands, briers, and breezes the place where towns are, because it is just; because the tyrant and the slave – that is to say, pride and shame – exist wherever there are walled enclosures; because evil is there incarnate in man; because in solitude there is but the beast, while in the city there is the monster. That which Isaiah made a reproach of in his day – idolatry, pride, war, prostitution, ignorance – still exists. Isaiah is the eternal contemporary of vices which turn valets, and crimes which exalt themselves into kings.

5. Another, Ezekiel, is the wild soothsayer, – the genius of the cavern; thought which the roar suits. But listen. This savage makes a prophecy to the world, – Progress. Nothing more astonishing. Ah, Isaiah overthrows? Very well! Ezekiel will reconstruct. Isaiah refuses civilization. Ezekiel accepts, but transforms it. Nature and humanity blend together in that softened howl which Ezekiel throws forth. The idea of duty is in Job; of right, in Æschylus. Ezekiel brings before us the resulting third idea, – the human race ameliorated, posterity more and more free. That posterity may be a rising instead of a setting star is man's consolation. Time present works for time to come. Work, then, and hope. Such is Ezekiel's cry. Ezekiel is in Chaldæa; and from Chaldæa he sees distinctly Judæa, as from oppression you may see liberty. He declares peace as others declare war. He prophesies harmony, goodness, sweetness, union, the blending of races, love. Notwithstanding, he is terrible. He is the austere benefactor. He is the universal kind-hearted grumbler at the human race. He scolds, he almost gnashes his teeth; and people fear and hate him. The men about are thorns to him. "I live among the briers," he says. He condemns himself to be a symbol, and makes in his person, become hideous, a sign of human misery and popular degradation. He is a kind of voluntary Job. In his town, in his house, he causes himself to be bound with cords, and rests mute: behold the slave. In the public place he eats dung: behold the courtier. This makes Voltaire burst into laughter, and causes our tears to flow. Ah, Ezekiel, so far does your devotion go! You render shame visible by horror; you compel ignominy to turn the head when recognizing herself in the dirt; you show that to accept a man for master is to eat dung; you cause a shudder to the cowards who follow the prince, by putting into your stomach what they put into their souls; you preach deliverance by vomiting; be reverenced! This man, this being, this figure, this swine-prophet, is sublime. And the transfiguration that he announces he

proves. How? By transfiguring himself. From this horrible and soiled lip comes forth the blaze of poetry. Never has grander language been spoken, never more extraordinary.

> "I saw the vision of God. A whirlwind comes from the north, and a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself. I saw a chariot and a likeness of four animals. Above the creatures and the chariot was a space like a terrible crystal. The wheels of the chariot were made of eyes, and so high that they were dreadful. The noise of the wings of the four angels was as the noise of the All-Powerful, and when they stopped they lowered their wings. And I saw a likeness which was as fire, and which put forth a hand. And a voice said, 'The kings and the judges have in their souls gods of dung. I will take from their breasts the heart of stone, and I will give them a heart of flesh.' I went to them that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I remained there astonished among them seven days."

And again: —

> "There was a plain and dry bones; and I said, 'Bones, rise up,' and I looked, and there came nerves on these bones, and flesh on these nerves, and a skin above; but the spirit was not there. And I cried, 'Spirit, come from the four winds, breathe, so that these dead revive.' The spirit came. The breath entered into them, and they rose up, and it was an army, and it was a people. Then the voice said, 'You shall be one nation, you shall have no king or judge but me; and I will be the God who has one people, and you shall be the people who have one God.'"

Is not everything there? Search for a higher formula, you will not find it. A free man under a sovereign God. This visionary eater of dung is a resuscitator. Ezekiel has mud on the lips and sun in the eyes. Among the Jews the reading of Ezekiel was dreaded. It was not permitted before the age of thirty years. Priests, disturbed, put a seal on this poet. People could not call him an impostor. His terror as a prophet was incontestable. He had evidently seen what he related. Thence his authority. His very enigmas made him an oracle. They could not tell which it was, these women sitting toward the north weeping for Tammuz. Impossible to divine what was the "hasmal," this metal which he pictured as in fusion in the furnace of the dream; but nothing was more clear than his vision of Progress. Ezekiel saw the quadruple man, – man, ox, lion, and eagle; that is to say, the master of thought, the master of the field, the master of the desert, the master of the air. Nothing forgotten. It is posterity complete, from Aristotle to Christopher Columbus, from Triptolemus to Montgolfier. Later on, the Gospel also will become quadruple in the four Evangelists, making Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John subservient to man, the ox, the lion, and the eagle, and, remarkable fact, to symbolize progress will take the four faces of Ezekiel. At all events, Ezekiel, like Christ, calls himself the "Son of Man." Jesus often in his parables invokes and cites Ezekiel; and this kind of first Messiah paves the way for the second. There are in Ezekiel three constructions, – man, in whom he places progress; the temple, where he puts a light that he calls glory; the city, where he puts God. He cries to the temple, – no priest here, neither they, nor their kings, nor the carcasses of their kings.[8] One cannot help thinking that this Ezekiel, a species of biblical demagogue, would help '93 in the terrible sweeping of St. Denis. As for the city built by him, he mutters above it this mysterious name, Jehovah Schammah, which signifies "the Eternal is there." Then he is silent and thoughtful in the darkness, pointing at humanity; farther on, in the depth of the horizon, a continued increase of azure.

6. Another, Lucretius, is that vast obscure thing, All. Jupiter is in Homer; Jehovah is in Job; in Lucretius Pan appears. Such is Pan's greatness that he has under him Destiny, which is above Jupiter. Lucretius has travelled and he has mused, which is another voyage. He has been at Athens; he has been in the haunts of philosophers; he has studied Greece and made out India. Democritus has made

[8] Ezekiel, XLIII. 7.

him dream on matter, and Anaximander on space. His dreams have become doctrine. Nothing is known of the incidents of his life. Like Pythagoras, he frequented the two mysterious schools on the Euphrates, – Neharda and Pombeditha; and he may have met there the Jewish doctors. He spelt the papyri of Sepphoris, which, at his time, was not yet transformed into Diocæsarea. He lived with the pearl-fishers of the isle of Tylos. We may find in the Apocrypha traces of an ancient strange itinerary recommended, according to some, to the philosophers by Empedocles, the magician, of Agrigentum, and, according to others, to the rabbis by the high-priest Eleazer who corresponded with Ptolemy Philadelphus. This itinerary would have served at a later time as a standard for the travels of the Apostles. The traveller who followed this itinerary went through the five satrapies of the country of the Philistines, visited the people who charm serpents and suck poisonous sores, – the Psylli; drank of the torrent Bosor, which marks the frontier of Arabia Deserta; then touched and handled the bronze *carcan* of Andromeda, still sealed to the rock of Joppa; Balbec in Syria; Apamea, on the Orontes, where Nicanor nourished his elephants; the harbour of Eziongeber, where the vessels of Ophir, laden with gold, stopped; Segher, which produced white incense, preferred to that of Hadramauth; the two Syrtes, the mountain of Emerald Smaragdus; the Nasamones, who pillaged the shipwrecked; the black nation, Agysimba; Adribe, the town of crocodiles; Cynopolis, town of aloes; the wonderful cities of Comagena, Claudia, and Barsalium; perhaps even Tadmor, the town of Solomon, – such were the stages of this almost fabulous pilgrimage of the thinkers. This pilgrimage, did Lucretius make it? One cannot tell. His numerous travels are beyond doubt He had seen so many men that at the end they were all mixed up in his eye, and this multitude had become to him shadows. He is arrived at that excess of simplification of the universe which is almost its entire fading away. He has sounded until he feels the plummet float He has questioned the vague spectres of Byblos; he has conversed with the severed tree of Chyteron, who is Juno-Thespia. Perhaps he has spoken in the reeds to Oannes, the man-fish of Chaldæa, who had two heads, – at the top the head of a man, below the head of a hydra, and who, drinking chaos by his lower orifice, re-vomited it on the earth by his upper lip; in knowledge awful. Lucretius has this knowledge. Isaiah borders on the archangels, Lucretius on larvas. Lucretius twists the ancient veil of Isis, steeped in the waters of darkness, and expresses out of it sometimes in torrents, sometimes drop by drop, a sombre poetry. The boundless is in Lucretius. At times there passes a powerful spondaic verse almost terrible, and full of shadow: "Circum se foliis ac frondibus involventes." Here and there a vast image is sketched in the forest, – "Tunc Venus in sylvis jungebat corpora amantum;" and the forest is Nature. These verses are impossible with Virgil. Lucretius turns his back on humanity, and looks fixedly on the Enigma. Lucretius's spirit, working to the very deeps, is placed between this reality, the atom, and this impossibility, the vacuum; by turns attracted by these two precipices. Religious when he contemplates the atom, sceptical when he sees the void; thence his two aspects, equally profound, whether he denies, whether he affirms. One day this traveller commits suicide. This is his last departure. He puts himself *en route* for Death. He departs to see. He has embarked successively on all the pinnaces, – on the galley of Trevirium for Sanastrea in Macedonia; on the trireme of Carystus for Metapon in Greece; on the skiff of Cyllenus for the island of Samothrace; on the sandal of Samothrace for Naxos, where is Bacchus; on the *ceroscaph* of Naxos for Syria; on the vessel of Syria for Egypt, and on the ship of the Red Sea for India. It remains for him to make one voyage. He is curious about the dark country; he takes his passage on the coffin, and himself unfastening the mooring, pushes with foot into space this dark vessel that floats on the unknown wave.

7. Another, Juvenal, has everything in which Lucretius fails, – passion, emotion, fever, tragic flame, passion for honesty, avenging sneer, personality, humanity. He dwells in a certain given point in creation, and he contents himself with it, finding there what may nourish and swell his heart with justice and anger. Lucretius is the universe, Juvenal the locality. And what a locality! Rome. Between the two they are the double voice which speaks to land and town, —*urbi et orbi.* Juvenal has, above the Roman Empire, the enormous flapping of wings of the griffin above the rest of the reptiles.

He pounces upon this swarm and takes them, one after the other, in his terrible beak, – from the adder who is emperor and calls himself Nero, to the earthworm who is a bad poet and calls himself Codrus. Isaiah and Juvenal have each their harlot; but there is something more gloomy than the shadow of Babel, – it is the crashing of the bed of the Cæsars; and Babylon is less formidable than Messalina. Juvenal is the ancient free spirit of the dead republics; in him there is a Rome, in the bronze of which Athens and Sparta are cast. Thence in his poetry something of Aristophanes and something of Lycurgus. Take care of him; he is severe. Not a cord is wanting to his lyre or to the lash he uses. He is lofty, rigid, austere, thundering, violent, grave, just, inexhaustible in imagery, harshly gracious when he chooses. His cynicism is the indignation of modesty. His grace, thoroughly independent and a true figure of liberty, has talons; it appears all at once, enlivening, by we cannot tell what supple and spirited undulations, the well-formed majesty of his hexameter. You may imagine that you see the Cat of Corinth roaming on the frieze of the Parthenon. There is the epic in this satire; that which Juvenal has in his hand is the sceptre of gold with which Ulysses beat Thersites. "Bombast, declamation, exaggeration, hyperbole," cry the slaughtered deformities; and these cries, stupidly repeated by rhetoricians, are a noise of glory. "Crime is quite equal to committing things or relating them," say Tillemont, Marc Muret, Garasse, etc., – fools, who, like Muret, are sometimes knaves. Juvenal's invective blazes since two thousand years ago, – a fearful flash of poetry which still burns Rome in the presence of centuries. This splendid fire breaks out and, far from diminishing with time, increases under the whirl of its mournful smoke. From it proceed rays in behalf of liberty, probity, heroism; and it may be said that it throws even into our civilization minds full of his light. What is Régnier? what D'Aubigné? what Corneille? – scintillations of Juvenal.

8. Another, Tacitus, is the historian. Liberty is incarnate in him as in Juvenal, and rises, dead, to the judgment-seat, having for a toga its winding-shroud, and summons to his bar tyrants. The soul of a people become the soul of man, is Juvenal, as we have just said: thus it is with Tacitus. By the side of the poet who condemns stands the historian who punishes. Tacitus, seated on the curule chair of genius, summons and seizes *in flagante delicto* these guilty ones, the Cæsars. The Roman Empire is a long crime. This crime commences by four demons, – Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. Tiberius, the emperor's spy; the eye which watches the world; the first dictator who dared to twist for himself the law of power made for the Roman people; knowing Greek, intellectual, sagacious, sarcastic, eloquent, terrible; loved by informers; the murderer of citizens, of knights, of the senate, of his wife, of his family; having rather the air of stabbing people than massacring them; humble before the barbarians; a traitor with Archelaus, a coward with Artabanes; having two thrones, – Rome for his ferocity, Caprea for his baseness; an inventor of vices and names for vices; an old man with a seraglio of children; gaunt, bald, crooked, bandy-legged, sour-smelling, eaten up with leprosy, covered with suppurations, masked with plasters, crowned with laurels; having ulcers like Job, and the sceptre as well; surrounded by an oppressive silence; seeking a successor; smelling out Caligula, and finding him good; a viper who selects a tiger. Caligula, the man who has known fear, the slave become master, trembling under Tiberius, terrible after Tiberius, vomiting his fright of yesterday in atrocity. Nothing comes up to this mad fool. An executioner makes a mistake and kills, instead of the condemned one, an innocent man; Caligula smiles, and says, "The condemned had not more deserved it." He gets a woman eaten alive by dogs, for the sake of seeing it. He lies publicly with his three sisters, stark naked. One of them dies, – Drusilla. He says, "Behead those who do not bewail her, for she is my sister; and crucify those who bewail her, for she is a goddess." He makes his horse a pontiff, as, later on, Nero made his monkey god. He offers to the universe this wretched spectacle: the annihilation of intellect by power. Prostitute, sharper, a robber, breaking the busts of Homer and Virgil, his head dressed as Apollo with rays, and booted with wings like Mercury; franticly master of the world, desiring incest with his mother, a plague to his empire, famine to his people, rout to his army, resemblance to the gods, and one sole head to the human race that he might cut it off, – such is Caius Caligula. He forces the son to assist at the torment of his father and the husband the violation of his wife, and to laugh.

Claudius is a mere sketch of a ruler. He is nearly a man made a tyrant, a noodle-head crowned. He hides himself; they discover him, they drag him from his hole, and they throw him terrified on the throne. Emperor, he still trembles, having the crown but not sure that he has his head. He feels for his head at times, as if he searched for it. Then he gets more confident, and decrees three new letters to be added to the alphabet. He is a learned man, this idiot. They strangle a senator. He says, "I did not order it but since it is done, it is well." His wife prostitutes herself before him. He looks at her, and says, "Who is this woman?" He scarcely exists: he is a shadow; but this shadow crushes the world. At length the hour for his departure arrives: his wife poisons him, his doctor finishes him. He says, "I am saved," and dies. After his death they come to see his corpse. While alive they had seen his ghost. Nero is the most formidable figure of *ennui* that has ever appeared among men. The yawning monster that the ancients called Livor and the moderns call Spleen, gives us this enigma to divine, – Nero. Nero seeks simply a distraction. Poet, comedian, singer, coachman, exhausting ferocity to find voluptuousness, trying a change of sex, the husband of the eunuch Sporus, and bride of the slave Pythagoras, and promenading the streets of Rome between his husband and wife. Having two pleasures – one to see the people clutching pieces of gold, diamonds and pearls, and the other to see the lions clutch the people; an incendiary for curiosity's sake, and a parricide for want of employment. It is to these four that Tacitus dedicates his four first pillories. He hangs their reign to their necks: he fastens that *carcan* to theirs. His book of Caligula is lost. Nothing easier to comprehend than the loss and obliteration of these kinds of books. To read them was a crime. A man having been caught reading the history of Caligula by Suetonius, Com modus had him thrown to the wild beasts. "Feris objici jussit," says Lampridius. The horror of those days is wonderful. Manners, below and above stairs, are ferocious. You may judge of the cruelty of the Romans by the atrocity of the Gauls. A row breaks out in Gaul: the peasants place the Roman ladies, naked and still alive, on harrows whose points enter here and there into the body; then they cut their breasts from them and sew them in their mouths, as though they had the appearance of eating them. "These are scarcely reprisals" (*Vix vindicta est*), says the Roman general, Turpilianus. These Roman ladies had the practice, while chattering with their lovers, of sticking pins of gold in the breasts of their Persian or Gallic slaves who dressed their hair. Such is the humanity at which Tacitus is present. This view renders him terrible. He states the facts, and leaves you to draw your conclusions. You only meet a Potiphar in Rome. When Agrippina, reduced to her last resource, seeing her grave in the eyes of her son, offers him her bed, when her lips seek those of Nero, Tacitus is there, following her with his eyes, *lasciva oscula et prænuntias flagitii blanditias*; and he denounces to the world this effort of a monstrous and trembling mother to make the parricide miscarry by incest. Whatever Justus Lipsius, who bequeathed his pen to the Holy Virgin, has said, Domitian exiled Tacitus, and did well. Men like Tacitus are unhealthy subjects for authority. Tacitus applies his style to the shoulder of an emperor, and the marks remain. Tacitus always makes his thrust at the required spot. A deep thrust. Juvenal, all-powerful poet, deals about him, scatters, makes a show, falls and rebounds, strikes right and left, a hundred blows at a time, on laws, manners, bad magistrates, corrupt verses, libertines and the idle, on Cæsar, on the people, – everywhere. He is lavish, like hail; he is careless, like the whip. Tacitus has the conciseness of red iron.

9. Another, John, is the virgin old man. All the ardent sap of man, become smoke and mysterious shaking, is in his head, as a vision. One does not escape love. Love, unsatiated and discontented, changes itself at the end of life into a gloomy overflowing of chimeras. The woman wants man; otherwise man, instead of human, will have a phantom poetry. Some beings, however, resist universal procreation, and then they are in that peculiar state where monstrous inspiration can weaken itself on them. The Apocalypse is the almost mad *chef-d'œuvre* of this wonderful chastity. John, while young, was pleasant and wild. He loved Jesus; then could love nothing else. There is a deep resemblance between the Canticle of Canticles and the Apocalypse; the one and the other are explosions of pent-up virginity. The heart, mighty volcano, bursts open; there proceeds from it this dove, the Canticle of Canticles, or this dragon, the Apocalypse. These two poems are the two poles

of ecstasy, – voluptuousness and horror; the two extreme limits of the soul are attained. In the first poem ecstasy exhausts love; in the second, terrifies it, and carries to mankind, henceforth forever disquieted, the dreadful fright of the eternal precipice. Another resemblance, not less worthy of attention, there is between John and Daniel. The nearly invisible thread of affinity is carefully followed by the eye of those who see in the prophetic spirit a human and normal phenomenon, and who, far from disdaining the question of miracles, generalize it, and calmly attach it to existing phenomena. Religions lose, and science gains, by it. It has not been sufficiently remarked that the seventh chapter of Daniel contains the root of the Apocalypse. Empires are there represented as beasts. Therefore has the legend associated the two poets; it makes the one traverse the den of lions, and the other the caldron of boiling oil. Independently of the legend, the life of John is fine. An exemplary life which undergoes strange openings, passing from Golgotha to Patmos, and from the execution of Messiah to the exile of the prophet. John, after having been present at the sufferings of Christ, finished by suffering on his own account; the suffering seen made him an apostle, the suffering endured made him a magician, – the growth of the spirit was the result of the growth of the trial. Bishop, he writes the gospel; proscribed, he composes the Apocalypse, – tragic work, written under the dictation of an eagle, the poet having above his head we know not what mournful flapping of wings. The whole Bible is between two visionaries, – Moses and John. This poem of poems merges out of chaos in Genesis, and finishes in the Apocalypse by thunders. John was one of the great vagrants of the language of fire. During the Last Supper his head was on the breast of Jesus, and he could say, "My ear has heard the beating of God's heart." He went to relate it to men. He spoke a barbarous Greek, mixed with Hebrew expressions and Syrian words, harsh and grating, yet charming. He went to Ephesus, he went to Media, he went among the Parthians. He dared to enter Ctesiphon, a town of the Parthians, built as a counterpoise to Babylon. He faced the living idol, Cobaris, king, god, and man, forever immovable on his block, which serves him as throne and latrine. He evangelized Persia, which the Gospel calls Paras. When he appeared at the Council of Jerusalem, they thought they saw a pillar of the Church. He looked with stupefaction at Cerintus and Ebion, who said that Jesus was but a man. When they questioned him on the mystery, he answered, "Love you one another?" He died at the age of ninety-four years, under Trajan. According to tradition, he is not dead; he is spared, and John is ever living at Patmos as Barberousse at Kaiserslautern. There are some waiting-caverns for these mysterious everlasting beings. John, as a historian, has his equals, – Matthew, Luke, Mark; as a visionary he is alone. There is no dream approaches his, so deep it is in the infinite. His metaphors pass out from eternity, distracted; his poetry has a profound smile of madness; the reverberation of the Most High is in the eye of this man. It is the sublime going fully astray. Men do not understand it – scorn it, and laugh. "My dear Thiriot," says Voltaire, "the Apocalypse is filth." Religions, being in want of this book, have taken to worshipping it; but, in order not to be thrown to the common sewer, it must be put on the altar. What does it matter? John is a spirit. It is in the John of Patmos, among all, that the communication between certain men of genius and the abyss is apparent. In all other poets men get a glimpse of this communication; in John they see it, at times they touch it, and have a shivering fit in placing, so to speak, the hand on this sombre door. That is the way to the Deity. It seems, when you read the poem of Patmos, that some one pushes you from behind; you have a confused outline of the dreadful opening. It fills you with terror and attraction. If John had only that, he would be immense.

10. Another, Paul, a saint for the Church, a great man for humanity, represents this prodigy, at the same time human and divine, – conversion. He is the one who has had a glimpse of the future. It leaves him haggard; and nothing can be more magnificent than this face, forever wondering, of the man conquered by the light. Paul, born a Pharisee, had been a weaver of camel's-hair for tents, and servant of one of the judges of Jesus Christ, Gamaliel; then the scribes had advanced him, trusting to his natural ferocity. He was the man of the past; he had taken care of the mantles of the stone-throwers. He aspired, having studied with the priests, to become an executioner; he was on the road for this. All at once a wave of light emanates from the darkness, throws him down from his horse,

and henceforth there will be in the history of the human race this wonderful thing, – the road to Damascus. That day of the metamorphosis of Saint Paul is a great day; keep the date, – it corresponds to the 25th January in our Gregorian calendar. The road to Damascus is necessary to the march of Progress. To fall into the truth and to rise a just man, a fall and transfiguration, that is sublime. It is the history of Saint Paul. From his day it will be the history of humanity. The flash of light is beyond the flash of lightning. Progress will carry itself on by a series of scintillations. As for Saint Paul, who has been turned aside by the force of new conviction, this harsh stroke from on high opens to him genius. Once on his feet again, behold him proceed: he will no more stop. "Forward!" is his cry. He is a cosmopolite. He loves the outsiders, whom Paganism calls barbarians, and Christianity calls Gentiles; he devotes himself to them. He is the apostle of the outer world. He writes to the nations epistles on behalf of God. Listen to him speaking to the Galatians: "O insane Galatians! how can you go back to the yokes to which you were tied? There are no more Jews, or Greeks, or slaves. Do not carry out your grand ceremonies ordained by your laws. I declare unto you that all that is nothing. Love each other. Man must be a new creature. Freedom is awaiting you." There were at Athens, on the hill of Mars, steps hewn in rock, which may be seen to this day. On these steps sat the great judges before whom Orestes had appeared. There Socrates had been judged. Paul went there; and there, at night (the Areopagus only sat at night), he said to the grave men, "I come to announce to you the unknown God." The Epistles of Paul to the Gentiles are simple and profound, with the subtlety so marked in its influence over savages. There are in these messages gleams of hallucination; Paul speaks of the Celestials as if he distinctly saw them. Like John, half-way between life and eternity, it seems that he had one part of his thought on the earth and one in the Unknown; and it may be said, at moments, that one of his verses answers to another from beyond the dark wall of the tomb. This half-possession of death gives him a personal certainty, and one often distinctly apart from the dogma, and a mark of conviction on his personal conceptions, which makes him almost heretical. His humility, bordering on the mysterious, is lofty. Peter says, "The words of Paul may be taken in a bad sense." The deacon Hilaire and the Luciferians ascribe their schism to the Epistles of Paul. Paul is at heart so anti-monarchical that King James I., very much encouraged by the orthodox University of Oxford, caused the Epistle to the Romans to be burned by the hand of the common hangman. It is true it was one with a commentary by David Pareus. Many of Paul's works are rejected by the Church: they are the finest; and among them his Epistle to the Laodiceans, and above all his Apocalypse, erased by the Council of Rome under Gelasius. It would be curious to compare it with the Apocalypse of John. On the opening that Paul had made to heaven the Church wrote, "Entrance forbidden." He is not less holy for it. It is his official consolation. Paul has the restlessness of the thinker; text and formulary are little for him. The letter does not suffice; the letter, it is matter. Like all men of progress, he speaks with reserve of the written law; he prefers grace, as we prefer justice. What is grace? It is the inspiration from on high; it is the breath, *flat ubi vult*; it is liberty. Grace is the spirit of law. This discovery of the spirit of law belongs to Saint Paul; and what he calls "grace" from a heavenly point of view, we, from an earthly point, call "right." Such is Paul. The greatness of a spirit by the irruption of clearness, the beauty of violence done by truth to one spirit, breaks forth in this man. In that, we insist, lies the virtue of the road to Damascus. Henceforth, whoever wishes this increase, must follow the guide-post of Saint Paul. All those to whom justice shall reveal itself, every blindness desirous of the day, all the cataracts looking to be healed, all searchers after conviction, all the great adventurers after virtue, all the holders of good in quest of truth, shall go by this road. The light that they find there shall change nature, for the light is always relative to darkness; it shall increase in intensity. After having been revelation, it shall be rationalism; but it shall always be light. Voltaire is like Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. The road to Damascus shall be forever the passage for great minds. It shall also be the passage for peoples, – for peoples, these vast individualisms, have like each of us their crisis and their hour. Paul, after his glorious fall, rose up again armed against ancient errors, with

that flaming sword, Christianity; and two thousand years after, France, struck by the light, arouses herself, she also holding in hand this sword of fire, the Revolution.

11. Another, Dante, has mentally conceived the abyss. He has made the epic poem of spectres. He rends the earth; in the terrible hole he has made he puts Satan. Then he pushes through purgatory up to heaven. Where all end Dante begins. Dante is beyond man; beyond, not without, – a singular proposition, which, however, has nothing contradictory in it, the soul being a prolongation of man into the indefinite. Dante twists light and shade into a huge spiral; it descends, then it ascends. Wonderful architecture! At the threshold is the sacred mist; across the entrance is stretched the corpse of Hope; all that you perceive beyond is night. The infinite anguish is sobbing somewhere in the invisible darkness. You lean over this gulf-poem. Is it a crater? You hear reports; the verse shoots out narrow and livid, as from the fissures of a solfatara. It is vapour now, then lava. This paleness speaks; and then you know that the volcano, of which you have caught a glimpse, is hell. This is no longer the human medium; you are in the unknown abyss. In this poem the imponderable submits to the laws of the ponderable, with which it is mixed, as in the sudden tumbling down of a building on fire, the smoke, carried down by the ruins, falls and rolls with them, and seems caught under the timber and the stones; thence strange effects: the ideas seem to suffer and to be punished in men. The idea, sufficiently man to undergo expiation, is the phantom (a form that is shade), impalpable, but not invisible, – an appearance retaining yet a sufficient amount of reality for the chastisement to have a hold on it; sin in the abstract state, but having kept the human figure. It is not only the wicked who grieves in this Apocalypse, it is the evil; there all possible bad actions are in despair. This spiritualization of pain gives to the poem a powerful moral import. The depth of hell once sounded, Dante pierces it, and remounts to the other side of the infinite. In rising, he becomes idealized; and thought drops the body as a robe. From Virgil he passes to Beatrice. His guide to hell, it is the poet; his guide to heaven, it is poetry. The epic poem continues, and has more grandeur yet; but man comprehends it no more. Purgatory and paradise are not less extraordinary than gehenna; but the more he ascends the less interested is man. He was somewhat at home in hell, but he is no longer so in heaven. He cannot recognize himself in angels. The human eye is perhaps not made for so much sun; and when the poem draws happiness, it becomes tedious. It is generally the case with all happiness. Marry the lovers, or send the souls to dwell in paradise, it is well; but seek the drama elsewhere than there. After all, what does it matter to Dante if you no longer follow him? He goes on without you. He goes alone, this lion. His work is a wonder. What a philosopher is this visionary! What a sage is this madman! Dante lays down the law for Montesquieu; the penal divisions of "L'Esprit des Lois" are an exact copy of the classifications in the hell of the "Divina Commedia." That which Juvenal does for the Rome of the Cæsars, Dante does for the Rome of popes; but Dante is a more terrible judge than Juvenal. Juvenal whips with cutting thongs; Dante scourges with flames. Juvenal condemns; Dante damns. Woe to the living on whom this awful traveller fixes the unfathomable glare of his eyes!

12. Another, Rabelais, is the soul of Gaul. And who says Gaul says also Greece, for the Attic salt and the Gallic jest have at bottom the same flavour; and if anything, buildings apart, resembles the Piræus, it is La Rapée. Aristophanes is distanced; Aristophanes is wicked. Rabelais is good; Rabelais would have defended Socrates. In the order of lofty genius, Rabelais chronologically follows Dante; after the stem face, the sneering visage. Rabelais is the wondrous mask of ancient comedy detached from the Greek proscenium, from bronze made flesh, henceforth a human living face, remaining enormous, and coming among us to laugh at us, and with us. Dante and Rabelais spring from the school of the Franciscan friars, as later Voltaire springs from the Jesuits. Dante the incarnate sorrow, Rabelais the parody, Voltaire the irony, – they came from the Church against the Church. Every genius has his invention or his discovery. Rabelais has made this one: the belly. The serpent is in man; it is the intestines. It tempts, betrays, and punishes. Man, single being as a spirit and complex as man, has within himself for his earthly mission three centres, – the brain, the heart, the stomach. Each of these centres is august by one great function which is peculiar to it: the brain has thought, the heart has

love, the belly has paternity and maternity. The belly may be tragic. "Feri ventrem," says Agrippina. Catherine Sforza, threatened with the death of her children, kept in hostage, exhibits herself naked to her navel on the battlements of the citadel of Rimini and says to the enemy, "With this I can give birth to others." In one of the epic convulsions of Paris a woman of the people, standing on a barricade, raised her petticoat, showed the soldiery her naked belly, and cried, "Kill your mothers!" The soldiers perforated that belly with balls. The belly has its heroism; but it is from it that flows in life corruption, in art comedy. The breast, where the heart rests, has for its summit the head; the belly has the phallus. The belly being the centre of matter, is our gratification and our danger; it contains appetite, satiety, and putrefaction. The devotion, the tenderness, which we feel then are subject to death; egotism replaces them. Easily do the affections become intestines. That the hymn can become a drunkard's brawl, that the strophe can be deformed into a couplet, is sad. That comes from the beast that is in man. The belly is essentially this beast. Degradation seems to be its law. The ladder of sensual poetry has for its topmost round the Canticle of Canticles, and for its lowest the coarse jest. The belly god is Silenus; the belly emperor is Vitellius; the belly animal is the pig. One of those horrid Ptolemies was called the Belly, —*Physcon.* The belly is to humanity a formidable weight: it breaks every moment the equilibrium between the soul and the body. It fills history. It is responsible for nearly all crimes. It is the bottle of all vices. It is the belly which by voluptuousness makes the sultan and by drunkenness the czar; it is this that shows Tarquin the bed of Lucrece; it is this that ends by making that senate which had waited for Brennus and dazzled Jugurtha deliberate on the sauce of a turbot. It is the belly which counsels the ruined libertine, Cæsar, the passage of the Rubicon. To pass the Rubicon, how well that pays one's debts! To pass the Rubicon, how readily that throws women, into one's arms! What good dinners afterward! And the Roman soldiers enter Rome with the cry, "Urbani, claudite uxores; mœchum calvum adducimus." The appetite debauches the intellect. Voluptuousness replaces will. At starting, as is always the case, there is some nobleness. It is the orgy. There is a gradation between being fuddled and being dead drunk.

Then the orgy degenerates into bestial gluttony. Where there was Solomon there is Ramponneau. Man becomes a barrel; an inner sea of dark ideas drowns thought; conscience submerged cannot warn the drunken soul. Beastliness is consummated; it is not even any longer cynical, it is empty and beastly. Diogenes disappears; there remains but the barrel. We commence by Alcibiades, we finish by Trimalcion. It is complete; nothing more, neither dignity, nor shame, nor honour, nor virtue, nor wit, – animal gratification in all its nakedness, thorough impurity. Thought dissolves itself in satiety; carnal gorging absorbs everything; nothing survives of the grand sovereign creature inhabited by the soul. As the word goes, the belly eats the man. Such is the final state of all societies where the ideal is eclipsed. That passes for prosperity, and is called aggrandizing one's self. Sometimes even philosophers thoughtlessly aid this degradation by inserting in their doctrines the materialism which is in the consciences. This sinking of man to the level of the human beast is a great calamity. Its first fruit is the turpitude visible at the summit of all professions, – the venal judge, the simoniacal priest, the hireling soldier; laws, manners, and beliefs are a dungheap, —*totus homo fit excrementum.* In the sixteenth century all the institutions of the past are in that state. Rabelais gets hold of that situation; he proves it; he authenticates that belly which is the world. Civilization is, then, but a mass; science is matter; religion is blessed with a stomach; feudality is digesting; royalty is obese. What is Henry VIII.? A paunch. Rome is a fat-gutted old woman. Is it health? Is it sickness? It is perhaps obesity; it is perhaps dropsy-query. Rabelais, doctor and priest, feels the pulse of Papacy; he shakes his head and bursts out laughing. Is it because he has found life? No, it is because he has felt death; it is, in reality, breathing its last. While Luther reforms, Rabelais jests. Which tends best to the end? Rabelais ridicules the monk, the bishop, the Pope; laughter and death-rattle together; fool's bell sounding the tocsin! Well, then, what? I thought it was a feast; it is agony. One may be deceived by the nature of the hiccough. Let us laugh all the same. Death is at the table; the last drop toasts the last sigh. The agony feasting, – it is superb. The inner colon is king; all that old world feasts

and bursts, and Rabelais enthrones a dynasty of bellies, – Grangousier, Pantagruel, and Gargantua. Rabelais is the Æschylus of victuals; indeed, it is grand when we think that eating is devouring. There is something of the gulf in the glutton. Eat then, my masters, and drink, and come to the finale. To live is a song, of which to die is the refrain. Others dig under the depraved human race fearful dungeons. For subterraneous caves the great Rabelais contents himself with the cellar. This universe, which Dante put into hell, Rabelais confines in a wine-cask; his book is nothing else. The seven circles of Alighieri bung and encompass this extraordinary tun. Look within the monstrous cask, and you see them there. In Rabelais they are entitled, Idleness, Pride, Envy, Avarice, Anger, Luxury, Gluttony; and it is thus that you suddenly meet again the formidable jester. Where? – in church. The seven sins are this *curé's* sermon. Rabelais is priest. Castigation, properly understood, begins at home; it is therefore on the clergy that he strikes first. It is something, indeed, to be at home! The Papacy dies of indigestion. Rabelais plays the Papacy a trick, – the trick of a Titan. The Pantagruelian joy is not less grandiose than the mirth of a Jupiter, – jaw for jaw. The monarchical and priestly jaw eats; the Rabelaisian jaw laughs. Whoever has read Rabelais has forever before his eyes this stem opposition: the mask of Theocritus gazed at fixedly by the mask of Comedy.

13. Another, Cervantes, is also a form of epic mockery; for as the writer of these lines said in 1827,[9] there are between the Middle Ages and the modern times, after the feudal barbarism, and placed there as it were for a conclusion, two Homeric buffoons, – Rabelais and Cervantes. To sum up horror by laughter, is not the least terrible manner of doing it. It is what Rabelais did; it is what Cervantes did. But the raillery of Cervantes has nothing of the large Rabelaisian grin. It is the fine humour of the noble after the joviality of the *curé*. I am the Signor Don Miguel Cervantes de Saavedra, Caballeros, poet-soldier, and, as a proof, one-armed. No broad, coarse jesting in Cervantes. Scarcely a flavour of elegant cynicism. The satirist is fine, sharp-edged, polished, delicate, almost gallant, and would even run the risk sometimes of diminishing his power with all his affected ways if he had not the deep poetic spirit of the Renaissance. That saves his charming grace from becoming prettiness. Like Jean Goujon, like Jean Cousin, like Germain Pilon, like Primatice, Cervantes has the chimera within himself. Thence all the unexpected marvels of his imagination. Add to that a wonderful intuition of the inmost deeds of the mind, and a philosophy, inexhaustible in aspects, which seems to possess a new and complete chart of the human heart. Cervantes sees the inner man. His philosophy blends with the comic and romantic instinct. Thence does the unexpected break in at each moment in his characters, in his action, in his style, – the unforeseen, magnificent adventure. Personages remaining true to themselves, but facts and ideas whirling around them, with a perpetual renewing of the original idea, with the unceasing breathing of that wind which carries flashes of lightning, – such is the law of great works. Cervantes is militant; he has a thesis; he makes a social book. Such poets are the fighting champions of the mind. Where have they learned fighting? On the battle-field itself. Juvenal was a military tribune; Cervantes arrives from Lepanto, as Dante from Campalbino, as Æschylus from Salamis. After which they pass to a new trial. Æschylus goes into exile, Juvenal into exile, Dante into exile, Cervantes into prison. It is just, for they have served you well. Cervantes, as poet, has the three sovereign gifts, – creation, which produces types, and clothes ideas with flesh and bone; invention, which hurls passions against events, makes man flash brightly over destiny, and brings forth the drama; imagination, sun of the brain, which throws light and shade everywhere, and, giving relieve, creates life. Observation, which is acquired, and which, in consequence, is a quality rather than a gift, is included in creation. If the miser was not observed, Harpagon would not be created. In Cervantes, a new-comer, glimpsed at in Rabelais, puts in a decided appearance; it is common-sense. You have caught sight of it in Panurge; you see it plainly in Sancho Panza. It arrives like the Silenus of Plautus; and it may also say, "I am the god mounted on an ass." Wisdom at once, reason by-and-by; it is indeed the strange history of the human mind. What more wise than all religions?

[9] Preface to "Cromwell."

What less reasonable? Morals true, dogmas false. Wisdom is in Homer and in Job; reason, such as it ought to be to overcome prejudices, – that is to say, complete and armed *cap-à-pie*, – will be found only in Voltaire. Common-sense is not wisdom and is not reason; it is a little of one and a little of the other, with a dash of egotism. Cervantes makes it bestride ignorance; and, at the same time, completing his profound satire, he gives fatigue as a nag to heroism. Thus he shows one after the other, one with the other, the two profiles of man, and parodies them, without more pity for the sublime than for the grotesque. The hippogriff becomes Rosinante. Behind the equestrian figure, Cervantes creates and gives movement to the asinine personage. Enthusiasm takes the field, Irony follows in its footsteps. The wonderful feats of Don Quixote, his riding and spurring, his big lance, steady in the rest, are judged by the donkey, a connoisseur in windmills. The invention of Cervantes is so masterly that there is between the man type and the quadruped complement statuary adhesion; the reasoner, like the adventurer, is part of the beast which belongs to him, and you can no more dismount Sancho Panza than Don Quixote. The Ideal is in Cervantes as in Dante; but it is called the impossible, and is scoffed at. Beatrice is become Dulcinea. To rail at the ideal would be the failing of Cervantes; but this failing is only apparent. Look well! The smile has a tear. In reality, Cervantes is for Don Quixote what Molière is for Alcestes. One must learn how to read in a peculiar manner in the books of the sixteenth century; there is in almost all, on account of the threats hanging over the liberty of thought, a secret that must be opened, and the key of which is often lost Rabelais had something unexpressed, Cervantes had an aside, Machiavelli had a secret recess, – several perhaps; at all events, the advent of common-sense is the great fact in Cervantes. Common-sense is not a virtue; it is the eye of interest. It would have encouraged Themistocles and dissuaded Aristides. Leonidas has no common-sense; Regulus has no common-sense; but in the face of egotistical and ferocious monarchies dragging poor peoples into wars undertaken for themselves, decimating families, making mothers desolate, and driving men to kill each other with all those fine words, – military honour, warlike glory, obedience to discipline etc., – it is an admirable personification, that common-sense coming all at once and crying to the human race, "Take care of your skin!"

14. Another, Shakespeare, what is he? You might almost answer, He is the earth. Lucretius is the sphere; Shakespeare is the globe. There is more and less in the globe than in the sphere. In the sphere there is the whole; on the globe there is man. Here the outer, there the inner, mystery. Lucretius is the being; Shakespeare is the existence. Thence so much shadow in Lucretius; thence so much movement in Shakespeare. Space, —*the blue*, as the Germans ay, – is certainly not forbidden to Shakespeare. The earth sees and surveys heaven; the earth knows heaven under its two aspects, – darkness and azure, doubt and hope. Life goes and comes in death. All life is a secret, – a sort of enigmatical parenthesis between birth and the death-throe, between the eye which opens and the eye which closes. This secret imparts its restlessness to Shakespeare. Lucretius is; Shakespeare lives. In Shakespeare the birds sing, the bushes become verdant, the hearts love, the souls suffer, the cloud wanders, it is hot, it is cold, night falls, time passes, forests and crowds speak, the vast eternal dream hovers about. The sap and the blood, all forms of the fact multiple, the actions and the ideas, man and humanity, the living and the life, the solitudes, the cities, the religions, the diamonds and pearls, the dung-hills and the charnel-houses, the ebb and flow of beings, the steps of the comers and goers, – all, all are on Shakespeare and in Shakespeare; and this genius being the earth, the dead emerge from it. Certain sinister sides of Shakespeare are haunted by spectres. Shakespeare is a brother of Dante. The one completes the other. Dante incarnates all supernaturalism, Shakespeare all Nature; and as these two regions, Nature and supernaturalism, which appear to us so different, are really the same unity, Dante and Shakespeare, however dissimilar, commingle outwardly, and are but one innately. There is something of the Alighieri, something of the ghost in Shakespeare. The skull passes from the hands of Dante into the hands of Shakespeare. Ugolino gnaws it, Hamlet questions it; and it shows perhaps even a deeper meaning and a loftier teaching in the second than in the first. Shakespeare shakes it and makes stars fall from it The isle of Prospero, the forest of Ardennes, the heath of Armuyr, the

platform of Elsinore, are not less illuminated than the seven circles of Dante's spiral by the sombre reverberation of hypothesis. The unknown – half fable, half truth – is outlined there as well as here. Shakespeare as much as Dante allows us to glimpse at the crepuscular horizon of conjecture. In the one as in the other there is the possible, – that window of the dream opening on reality. As for the real, we insist on it, Shakespeare overflows with it; everywhere the living flesh. Shakespeare possesses emotion, instinct, the true cry, the right tone, all the human multitude in his clamour. His poetry is himself, and at the same time it is you. Like Homer, Shakespeare is element Men of genius, re-beginners, – it is the right name for them, – rise at all the decisive crises of humanity; they sum up the phases and complete the revolutions. In civilization, Homer stamps the end of Asia and the commencement of Europe; Shakespeare stamps the end of the Middle Ages. This closing of the Middle Ages, Rabelais and Cervantes have fixed also; but, being essentially satirists, they give but a partial aspect Shakespeare's mind is a total; like Homer, Shakespeare is a cyclic man. These two geniuses, Homer and Shakespeare, close the two gates of barbarism, – the ancient door and the gothic one. That was their mission; they have fulfilled it. That was their task; they have accomplished it. The third great human crisis is the French Revolution; it is the third huge gate of barbarism, the monarchical gate, which is closing at this moment. The nineteenth century hears it rolling on its hinges. Thence for poetry, the drama, and art arises the actual era, as independent of Shakespeare as of Homer.

CHAPTER III

Homer, Job, Æschylus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lucretius, Juvenal, Saint John, Saint Paul, Tacitus, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare.

That is the avenue of the immovable giants of the human mind.

The men of genius are a dynasty. Indeed there is no other. They wear all the crowns, – even that of thorns.

Each of them represents the sum total of absolute that man can realize.

We repeat it, to choose between these men, to prefer one to the other, to mark with the finger the first among these first, it cannot be. All are the Mind.

Perhaps, in an extreme case – and yet every objection would be legitimate – you might mark out as the highest summit among those summits, Homer, Æschylus, Job, Isaiah, Dante, and Shakespeare.

It is understood that we speak here only in an Art point of view, and in Art, in the literary point of view.

Two men in this group, Æschylus and Shakespeare, represent specially the drama.

Æschylus, a kind of genius out of time, worthy to stamp either a beginning or an end in humanity, does not seem to be placed in his right turn in the series, and, as we have said, seems an elder son of Homer's.

If we remember that Æschylus is nearly submerged by the darkness rising over human memory; if we remember that ninety of his plays have disappeared, that of that sublime hundred there remain no more than seven dramas, which are also seven odes, we are stupefied by what we see of that genius, and almost frightened by what we do not see.

What, then, was Æschylus? What proportions and what forms had he in all this shadow? Æschylus is up to his shoulders in the ashes of ages. His head alone remains out of that burying; and, like the giant of the desert, with his head alone he is as immense as all the neighbouring gods standing on their pedestals.

Man passes before this insubmergible wreck. Enough remains for an immense glory. What the darkness has taken adds the unknown to this greatness. Buried and eternal, his brow projecting from the grave, Æschylus looks at generations.

CHAPTER IV

To the eyes of the thinker, these men of genius occupy thrones in the ideal.

To the individual works that those men have left us, must be added various vast collective works, the Vedas, the Râmayana, the Mahâbhârata, the Edda, the Niebelungen, the Heldenbuch, the Romancero.

Some of these works are revealed and sacred. Unknown assistance is marked on them. The poems of India in particular have the ominous fulness of the possible imagined by insanity, or related by dreams. These works seem to have been composed in common with beings to whom our world is no longer accustomed. Legendary horror covers these epic poems. *These books have not been composed by man alone*; the Ash-Nagar inscription says it. Djinns have alighted upon them; polypterian magi have thought over them; the texts have been interlined by invisible hands; the demi-gods have been aided by demi-demons; the elephant, which India calls the sage, has been consulted. Thence a majesty almost horrible. The great enigmas are in these poems. They are full of mysterious Asia. Their prominent parts have the supernatural and hideous outline of chaos. They are a mass in the horizon like the Himalayas. The distance of the manners, beliefs, ideas, actions, persons, is extraordinary. One reads these poems with that wondering stoop of the head which is induced by the profound distance that there is between the book and the reader. This Holy Writ of Asia has evidently been yet more difficult to reduce and put into shape than our own. It is in every part refractory to unity. In vain have the Brahmins, like our priests, erased and interpolated. Zoroaster is there; Ized Serosch is there. The Eschem of the Mazdæan traditions appears under the name of Siva; Manicheism is discernible between Brahma and Bouddha. All kinds of traces blend, cross, and recross each other in these poems. One may see in them the mysterious tramp of a crowd of minds who have worked at them in the mist of ages. Here the measureless toe of the giant; there the claw of the chimera. Those poems are the pyramid of a vanished colony of ants.

The Niebelungen, another pyramid of another ant-hill, has the same greatness. What the dives have done there, the elves have done here. These powerful epic legends, the testaments of ages, tattooings marked by races on history, have no other unity than the very unity of the people. The collective and the successive, combining together, are one. *Turba fit mens.* These recitals are mists, and wonderful flashes of light traverse them. As to the Romancero, which creates the Cid after Achilles, and the chivalric after the heroic, it is the Iliad of many lost Homers. Count Julian, King Roderigo, Cava, Bernard del Carpio, the bastard Mudarra, Nuño Salido, the Seven Infantes of Lara, the Constable Alvar de Luna, – no Oriental or Hellenic type surpasses these figures. The horse of Campeador is equal to the dog of Ulysses. Between Priam and Lear you must place Don Arias, the old man of Zamora's tower, sacrificing his seven sons to his duty, and tearing them from his heart one after another. There is grandeur in that. In presence of these sublimities the reader undergoes a sort of insolation.

These works are anonymous, and owing to the great reason of the *homo sum*, while admiring them, while holding them as the summit of art, we prefer to them the acknowledged works. With equal beauty, the Râmayana touches us less than Shakespeare. The "I" of a man is more vast and profound even than the "I" of a people.

However, these composite myriologies, the great testaments of India particularly, with a coat of poetry rather than real poems, expression at the same time sideral and bestial of humanities passed away, derive from their very deformity an indescribable supernatural air. The "I" multiple expressed by those myriologies makes them the polypi of poetry, – vague and wonderful enormities. The strange joinings of the antediluvian rough outline seem visible there as in the ichthyosaurus or in the pterodactyl. Any one of these black *chefs-d'œuvre* with several heads makes on the horizon of art the silhouette of a hydra.

The Greek genius is not deceived by them, and abhors them. Apollo would attack them. The Romancero excepted, beyond and above all these collective and anonymous productions, there are men to represent peoples. These men we have just named. They give to nations and periods the human face. They are in art the incarnations of Greece, of Arabia, of India, of Pagan Rome, of Christian Italy, of Spain, of France, of England. As for Germany, the matrix, like Asia, of races, hordes, and nations, she is represented in art by a sublime man, equal, although in a different category, to all those that we have characterized above. That man is Beethoven. Beethoven is the German soul.

What a shadow this Germany! She is the India of the West. She holds everything. There is no formation more colossal. In the sacred mist where the German spirit breathes, Isidro de Seville places theology; Albert the Great, scholasticism; Raban Maur, the science of language; Trithemius, astrology; Ottnit, chivalry; Reuchlin, vast curiosity; Tutilo, universality; Stadianus, method; Luther, inquiry; Albert Dürer, art; Leibnitz, science; Puffendorf, law; Kant, philosophy; Fichte, metaphysics; Winckelmann, archæology; Herder, æsthetics; the Vossiuses, of whom one, Gerard John, was of the Palatinate, learning; Euler, the spirit of integration; Humboldt, the spirit of discovery; Niebuhr, history; Gottfried of Strasburg, fable; Hoffman, dreams; Hegel, doubt; Ancillon, obedience; Werner, fatalism; Schiller, enthusiasm; Goethe, indifference; Arminius, liberty.

Kepler gives Germany the heavenly bodies.

Gerard Groot, the founder of the Fratres Communis Vitæ, brings his first attempt at fraternity in the fourteenth century. Whatever may have been her infatuation for the indifference of Goethe, do not consider her impersonal, that Germany. She is a nation, and one of the most generous; for it is for her that Rückert, the military poet, forges the "geharnischte Sonnette," and she shudders when Körner hurls at her the Song of the Sword. She is the German fatherland, the great beloved land, *Teutonia mater*. Galgacus was to the Germans what Caractacus was to the Britons.

Germany has everything in herself and at home. She shares Charlemagne with France and Shakespeare with England; for the Saxon element is mingled with the British element. She has an Olympus, – the Valhalla. She must have her own style of writing. Ulfilas, Bishop of Moesia, composes it for her, and the Gothic mode of caligraphy will henceforth keep its ground along with the writing of Arabia. The capital letter of a missal strives to outdo in fancy the signature of a caliph. Like China, Germany has invented printing. Her Burgraves (this remark has been already made[10]) are to us what the Titans are to Æschylus. To the temple of Tanfana, destroyed by Germanicus, she caused the cathedral of Cologne to succeed. She is the grandmother of our history, the grandam of our legends. From all parts, – from the Rhine to the Danube, from the Rauhe-Alp, from the ancient *Sylva Gabresa*, from the Lorraine on the Moselle, and from the ripuarian Lorraine by the Wigalois and the Wigamur, with Henry the Fowler, with Samo, King of the Vends, with the chronicler of Thuringia, Rothe, with the chronicler of Alsace, Twinger, with the chronicler of Limbourg, Gansbein, with all these ancient popular songsters, Jean Folz, Jean Viol, Muscatblüt, with the minnesingers, those rhapsodists, – the tale, that form of dream, reaches her, and enters into her genius. At the same time, idioms are flowing from her. From her fissures rush, to the north, the Danish and Swedish, to the west, the Dutch and Flemish. The German idiom passes the Channel and becomes the English language. In the order of intellectual facts, the German genius has other frontiers besides Germany. Such people resists Germany and yields to Germanism. The German spirit assimilates to itself the Greeks by Müller, the Serbians by Gerhard, the Russians by Goethe, the Magyars by Mailath. When Kepler, in the presence of Rudolph II., was preparing the Rudolphian Tables, it was with the aid of Tycho Brahé German affinities go far. Without any alteration in the local and national autonomies, it is with the great Germanic centre that the Scandinavian spirit in Oehlenschläger, and the Batavian spirit in Vondel, is connected. Poland unites herself to it, with all her glory, from Copernicus to

[10] Preface of the Burgraves, 1843.

Kosciusko, from Sobieski to Mickiewicz. Germany is the well of nations. They pass out of her like rivers; she receives them as a sea.

It seems as though one heard through all Europe the wonderful murmur of the Hercynian forest. The German nature, profound and subtle, distinct from European nature, but in harmony with it, volatilizes and floats above nations. The German mind is misty, luminous, scattered. It is a kind of immense soul-cloud, with stars. Perhaps the highest expression of Germany can only be given by music. Music, by its very want of precision, which in this special case is a quality, goes where the German soul proceeds.

If the German spirit had as much density as expansion, – that is to say, as much will as power, – she could, at a given moment, lift up and save the human race. Such as she is, she is sublime.

In poetry she has not said her last word. At this hour, the symptoms are excellent. Since the jubilee of the noble Schiller, particularly, there has been an awakening, and a generous awakening. The great definitive poet of Germany will be necessarily a poet of humanity, of enthusiasm, and of liberty. Perchance, and some signs give token of it, we may soon see him arise from the young group of contemporary German writers.

Music, we beg indulgence for this word, is the vapour of art. It is to poetry what revery is to thought, what the fluid is to the liquid, what the ocean of clouds is to the ocean of waves. If another description is required, it is the indefinite of this infinite. The same insufflation pushes it, carries it, raises it, upsets it, fills it with trouble and light and with an ineffable sound, saturates it with electricity and causes it to give suddenly discharges of thunder.

Music is the Verb of Germany. The German race, so much curbed as a people, so emancipated as thinkers, sing with a sombre love. To sing resembles a freeing from bondage. Music expresses that which cannot be said, and on which it is impossible to be silent. Therefore is Germany all music until she becomes all liberty. Luther's choral is somewhat a Marseillaise. Everywhere singing clubs and singing tables. In Swabia every year the fête of song, on the banks of the Neckar, in the plains of Enslingen. The *Liedermusik*, of which Schubert's "Le Roi des Aulnes" is the *chef-d'œuvre*, is part of German life. Song is for Germany a breathing. It is by singing that she respires and conspires. The note being the syllable of a kind of undefined universal language, Germany's grand communication with the human race is made through harmony, – an admirable commencement to unity. It is by the clouds that the rains which fertilize the earth ascend from the sea; it is by music that the ideas which go deep into souls pass out of Germany.

Therefore we may say that Germany's greatest poets are her musicians, of which wonderful family Beethoven is the head.

Homer is the great Pelasgian; Æschylus, the great Hellene; Isaiah, the great Hebrew; Juvenal, the great Roman; Dante, the great Italian; Shakespeare, the great Englishman; Beethoven, the great German.

CHAPTER V

The Ex-"Good Taste," that other divine law which has for so long a time weighed on Art, and which had succeeded in suppressing the Beautiful for the benefit of the Pretty, the ancient criticism, not altogether dead, like the ancient monarchy, prove, from their own point of view, the same fault, exaggeration, in those sovereign men of genius whom we have named above. They are exaggerated.

This is caused by the quantity of the infinite that they have in them.

In fact, they are not circumscribed. They contain something unknown. Every reproach that is addressed to them might be addressed to sphinxes. People reproach Homer for the carnage which fills his cavern, the Iliad; Æschylus, for his monstrousness; Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Saint Paul, for double meanings; Rabelais, for obscene nudity and venomous ambiguity; Cervantes, for insidious laughter;

Shakespeare, for his subtlety; Lucretius, Juvenal, Tacitus, for obscurity; John of Patmos and Dante Alighieri for darkness.

None of those reproaches can be made to other minds very great, but less great. Hesiod, Æsop, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Thucydides, Anacreon, Theocritus, Titus Livius, Sallust, Cicero, Terence, Virgil, Horace, Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto, La Fontaine, Beaumarchais, Voltaire, have neither exaggeration nor darkness nor obscurity nor monstrousness. What, then, fails them? *That* which the others have.

That is the Unknown.

That is the Infinite.

If Corneille had "that," he would be the equal of Æschylus. If Milton had "that," he would be the equal of Homer. If Molière had "that," he would be the equal of Shakespeare.

It is the misfortune of Corneille that he mutilated and contracted the old native tragedy in obedience to fixed rules. It is the misfortune of Milton that by Puritan melancholy he excluded from his work the vast Nature, the great Pan. It is Molière's failing that, out of dread of Boileau, he quickly extinguishes the luminous style of the "Etourdi;" that, for fear of the priests, he writes too few scenes like "The Poor" in "Don Juan."

To give no occasion for attack is a negative perfection. It is fine to be open to attack.

Indeed, dig out the meaning of those words, placed as masks to the mysterious qualities of geniuses. Under obscurity, subtlety, and darkness you find depth; under exaggeration, imagination; under monstrousness, grandeur.

Therefore, in the upper region of poetry and thought there are Homer, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lucretius, Juvenal, Tacitus, John of Patmos, Paul of Damascus, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare.

These supreme men of genius are not a closed series. The author of All adds to it a name when the wants of progress require it.

ART AND SCIENCE

CHAPTER I

Many people in our day, readily merchants and often lawyers, say and repeat, "Poetry is gone." It is almost as if they said, "There are no more roses; spring has breathed its last; the sun has lost the habit of rising; roam about all the fields of the earth, you will not find a butterfly; there is no more light in the moon, and the nightingale sings no more; the lion no longer roars; the eagle no longer soars; the Alps and the Pyrenees are gone; there are no more lovely girls or handsome young men; no one thinks any more of the graves; the mother no longer loves her child; heaven is quenched; the human heart is dead."

If it was permitted to mix the contingent with the eternal, it would be rather the contrary which would prove true. Never have the faculties of the human soul, investigated and enriched by the mysterious excavation of revolutions, been deeper and more lofty.

And wait a little; give time for the realization of the acme of social salvation, – gratuitous and compulsory education. How long will it take? A quarter of a century; and then imagine the incalculable sum of intellectual development that this single word contains: every one can read! The multiplication of readers is the multiplication of loaves. On the day when Christ created that symbol, he caught a glimpse of printing. His miracle is this marvel. Behold a book. I will nourish with it five thousand souls, a hundred thousand souls, a million souls, – all humanity. In the action of Christ bringing forth the loaves, there is Gutenberg bringing forth books. One sower heralds the other.

What is the human race since the origin of centuries? A reader. For a long time he has spelt; he spells yet. Soon he will read.

This infant, six thousand years old, has been at school. Where? In Nature. At the beginning, having no other book, he spelt the universe. He has had his primary teaching of the clouds, of the firmament, of meteors, flowers, animals, forests, seasons, phenomena. The fisherman of Ionia studies the wave; the shepherd of Chaldæa spells the star. Then the first books came. Sublime progress! The book is vaster yet than that grand scene, the world; for to the fact it adds the idea. If anything is greater than God seen in the sun, it is God seen in Homer.

The universe without the book is science taking its first steps; the universe with the book is the ideal making its appearance, – therefore immediate modification in the human phenomenon. Where there had been only force, power reveals itself. The ideal applied to real facts is civilization. Poetry written and sung begins its work, magnificent and efficient deduction of the poetry only seen. A striking statement to make, – science was dreaming; poetry acts. With the sound of the lyre, the thinker drives away brutality.

We shall return later on to this power of the book; we do not insist on it at present; that power blazes forth. Now, many writers, few readers; such has the world been up to this day. But a change is at hand. Compulsory education is a recruiting of souls for light. Henceforth every progress of the human race will be accomplished by the literary legion. The diameter of the moral and ideal good corresponds always to the opening of intelligences. In proportion to the worth of the brain is the worth of the heart

The book is the tool to work this transformation. A constant supply of light, that is what humanity requires. Reading is nutriment. Thence the importance of the school, everywhere adequate to civilization. The human race is at last on the point of stretching open the book. The immense human Bible, composed of all the prophets, of all the poets, of all the philosophers, is about to shine and blaze under the focus of this enormous luminous lens, compulsory education.

Humanity reading is humanity knowing.

What, then, is the meaning of that nonsense, "Poetry is gone"? We might say, on the contrary, "Poetry is coming!" For he who says "poetry" says "philosophy" and "light." Now, the reign of the book commences; the school is its purveyor. Increase the reader, you increase the book, – not, certainly, in intrinsic value; that remains what it was; but in efficient power: it influences where it had no influence. The souls become its subjects for good purpose. It was but beautiful; it is useful.

Who would venture to deny this? The circle of readers enlarging, the circle of books read will increase. Now, the want of reading being a train of powder, once lighted it will not stop; and this, combined with the simplification of hand-labour by machinery, and with the increased leisure of man, the body less fatigued leaving intelligence more free, vast appetites for thought will spring up in all brains; the insatiable thirst for knowledge and meditation will become more and more the human preoccupation; low places will be deserted for high places, – a natural ascent for every growing intelligence. People will quit Faublas to read "Orestes." There they will taste greatness; and once they have tasted it, they will never be satiated. They will devour the beautiful because the refinement of minds augments in proportion to their force; and a day will come when the fulness of civilization making itself manifest, those summits, almost desert for ages, and haunted solely by the *élite*, – Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, – will be crowded with souls seeking their nourishment on the lofty peaks.

CHAPTER II

There can be but one law; the unity of law results from the unity of essence. Nature and art are the two sides of the same fact; and in principle, saving the restriction which we shall indicate very shortly, the law of one is the law of the other. The angle of reflection equals the angle of incidence. All being equity in the moral order and equilibrium in the material order, all is equation in the intellectual order. The binomial theorem, that marvel fitting everything, is included in poetry not less than in algebra. Nature plus humanity, raised to the second power, gives art That is the intellectual binomial theorem. Now replace this A + B by the number special to each great artist and each great poet, and you will have, in its multiple physiognomy and in its strict total, each of the creations of the human mind. What more beautiful than the variety of *chefs-d'œuvre* resulting from the unity of law. Poetry like science has an abstract root; out of that science evokes the *chef-d'œuvre* of metal, wood, fire, or air, – machine, ship, locomotive, æroscaph; out of that poetry evokes the *chef-d'œuvre* of flesh and blood, – Iliad, Canticle of Canticles, Romancero, Divine Comedy, "Macbeth." Nothing so starts and prolongs the shock felt by the thinker as those mysterious exfoliations of abstraction into realities in the double region, the one positive, the other infinite, of human thought. A region double, and nevertheless one; the infinite is a precision. The profound word *number* is at the base of man's thought. It is, to our intelligence, elemental; it has a harmonious as well as a mathematical signification. Number reveals itself to art by rhythm, which is the beating of the heart of the Infinite. In rhythm, law of order, God is felt. A verse is a gathering like a crowd; its feet take the cadenced step of a legion. Without number, no science; without number, no poetry. The strophe, the epic poem, the drama, the riotous palpitation of man, the bursting forth of love, the irradiation of the imagination, all this cloud with its flashes, the passion, – all is lorded over by the mysterious word number, even as geometry and arithmetic. Ajax, Hector, Hecuba, the seven chiefs before Thebes, Œdipus, Ugolino, Messalina, Lear and Priam, Romeo, Desdemona, Richard III., Pantagruel, the Cid, Alcestes, all belong to it, as well as conic sections and the differential and integral calculus. It starts from two and two make four, and ascends to the region where the lightning sits.

Yet, between art and science, let us note a radical difference. Science may be brought to perfection; art, not.

Why?

CHAPTER III

Among human things, and inasmuch as it is a human thing, art is a strange exception.

The beauty of everything here below lies in the power of reaching perfection. Everything is endowed with that property. To increase, to augment, to win strength, to march forward, to be worth more to-day than yesterday, – that is at once glory and life. The beauty of art lies in not being susceptible of improvement.

Let us insist on these essential ideas, already touched on in some of the preceding pages.

A *chef-d'œuvre* exists once for all. The first poet who arrives, arrives at the summit. You will ascend after him, as high, not higher. Ah, you call yourself Dante! well; but that one calls himself Homer.

Progress, goal constantly displaced, halting-place forever varying, has a shifting horizon. Not so with the ideal.

Now, progress is the motive power of science; the ideal is the generator of art.

Thus is explained why perfection is the characteristic of science, and not of art.

A savant may outlustre a savant; a poet never throws a poet into the shade.

Art progresses after its own fashion. It shifts its ground like science; but its successive creations, containing the immutable, live, while the admirable attempts of science, which are, and can be nothing but combinations of the contingent, obliterate each other.

The relative is in science; the positive is in art. The *chef-d'œuvre* of to-day will be the *chef d'œuvre* of to-morrow. Does Shakespeare interfere in any way with Sophocles? Does Molière take anything from Plautus? Even when he borrows Amphitryon he does not take him from him. Does Figaro blot out Sancho Panza? Does Cordelia suppress Antigone? No. Poets do not climb over each other. The one is not the stepping-stone of the other. They rise up alone, without any other lever than themselves. They do not tread their equal under foot. Those who are first in the field respect the old ones. They succeed, they do not replace each other. The beautiful does not drive away the beautiful. Neither wolves nor *chefs-d'œuvre* devour each other.

Saint-Simon says (I quote from memory): "There has been through the whole winter but one cry of admiration for M. de Cambray's book, when suddenly appeared M. de Meaux's book, which devoured it." If Fénélon's book had been Saint-Simon's, the book of Bossuet would not have devoured it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.