ГЕНРИК СЕНКЕВИЧ

SO RUNS THE WORLD

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So Runs the World:

Содержание

Henryk Sienkiewicz
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PART FIRST
HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

I once read a short story, in which a Slav author had all the lilies and bells in a forest bending toward each other, whispering and resounding softly the words: "Glory! Glory! Glory!" until the whole forest and then the whole world repeated the song of flowers.

Such is to-day the fate of the author of the powerful historical trilogy: "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge" and "Pan Michael," preceded by short stories, "Lillian Morris," "Yanko the Musician," "After Bread," "Hania," "Let Us Follow Him," followed by two problem novels, "Without Dogma," and "Children of the Soil," and crowned by a masterpiece of an incomparable artistic beauty, "Quo Vadis." Eleven good books adopted from the Polish language and set into circulation are of great importance for the English-reading people – just now I am emphasizing only this – because these books are written in the most beautiful language ever written by any Polish author! Eleven books of masterly, personal, and simple prose! Eleven

good books given to the circulation and received not only with admiration but with gratitude – books where there are more or less good or sincere pages, but where there is not one on which original humor, nobleness, charm, some comforting thoughts, some elevated sentiments do not shine. Some other author would perhaps have stopped after producing "Quo Vadis," without any doubt the best of Sienkiewicz's books. But Sienkiewicz looks into the future and cares more about works which he is going to write, than about those which we have already in our libraries, and he renews his talents, searching, perhaps unknowingly, for new themes and tendencies.

When one knows how to read a book, then from its pages the author's face looks out on him, a face not material, but just the same full of life. Sienkiewicz's face, looking on us from his books, is not always the same; it changes, and in his last book ("Quo Vadis") it is quite different, almost new.

There are some people who throw down a book after having read it, as one leaves a bottle after having drank the wine from it. There are others who read books with a pencil in their hands, and they mark the most striking passages. Afterward, in the hours of rest, in the moments when one needs a stimulant from within and one searches for harmony, sympathy of a thing apparently so dead and strange as a book is, they come back to the marked passages, to their own thoughts, more comprehensible since an author expressed them; to their own sentiments, stronger and more natural since they found them in somebody else's words.

Because ofttimes it seems to us – the common readers – that there is no difference between our interior world and the horizon of great authors, and we flatter ourselves by believing that we are 'only less daring, less brave than are thinkers and poets, that some interior lack of courage stopped us from having formulated our impressions. And in this sentiment there is a great deal of truth. But while this expression of our thoughts seems to us to be a daring, to the others it is a need; they even do not suspect how much they are daring and new. They must, according to the words of a poet, "Spin out the love, as the silkworm spins its web." That is their capital distinction from common mortals; we recognize them by it at once; and that is the reason we put them above the common level. On the pages of their books we find not the traces of the accidental, deeper penetrating into the life or more refined feelings, but the whole harvest of thoughts, impressions, dispositions, written skilfully, because studied deeply. We also leave something on these pages. Some people dry flowers on them, the others preserve reminiscences. In every one of Sienkiewicz's volumes people will deposit a great many personal impressions, part of their souls; in every one they will find them again after many years.

There are three periods in Sienkiewicz's literary life. In the first he wrote short stories, which are masterpieces of grace and ingenuity – at least some of them. In those stories the reader will meet frequent thoughts about general problems, deep observations of life – and notwithstanding his idealism,

very truthful about spiritual moods, expressed with an easy and sincere hand. Speaking about Sienkiewicz's works, no matter how small it may be, one has always the feeling that one speaks about a known, living in general memory work. Almost every one of his stories is like a stone thrown in the midst of a flock of sparrows gathering in the winter time around barns: one throw arouses at once a flock of winged reminiscences.

The other characteristics of his stories are uncommonness of his conceptions, masterly compositions, ofttimes artificial. It happens also that a story has no plot ("From the Diary of a Tutor in Pozman," "Bartek the Victor"), no action, almost no matter ("Yamyol"), but the reader is rewarded by simplicity, rural theme, humoristic pictures ("Comedy of Errors: A Sketch of American Life"), pity for the little and poor ("Yanko the Musician"), and those qualities make the reader remember his stories well. It is almost impossible to forget – under the general impressions – about his striking and standing-out figures ("The Lighthouse Keeper of Aspinwall"), about the individual impression they leave on our minds. Apparently they are commonplace, every-day people, but the author's talent puts on them an original individuality, a particular stamp, which makes one remember them forever and afterward apply them to the individuals which one meets in life. No matter how insignificant socially is the figure chosen by Sienkiewicz for his story, the great talent of the author magnifies its striking features, not seen by common people, and makes of it a masterpiece of

literary art.

Although we have a popular saying: *Comparaison n'est pas raison*, one cannot refrain from stating here that this love for the poor, the little, and the oppressed, brought out so powerfully in Sienkiewicz's short stories, constitutes a link between him and François Coppée, who is so great a friend of the friendless and the oppressed, those who, without noise, bear the heaviest chains, the pariahs of our happy and smiling society. The only difference between the short stories of these two writers is this, that notwithstanding all the mastercraft of Coppée's work, one forgets the impressions produced by the reading of his work – while it is almost impossible to forget "The Lighthouse Keeper" looking on any lighthouse, or "Yanko the Musician" listening to a poor wandering boy playing on the street, or "Bartek the Victor" seeing soldiers of which military discipline have made machines rather than thinking beings, or "The Diary of a Tutor" contemplating the pale face of children overloaded with studies. Another difference between those two writers – the comparison is always between their short stories – is this, that while Sienkiewicz's figures and characters are universal, international – if one can use this adjective here – and can be applied to the students of any country, to the soldiers of any nation, to any wandering musician and to the light-keeper on any sea, the figures of François Coppée are mostly Parisian and could be hardly displaced from their Parisian surroundings and conditions.

Sometimes the whole short story is written for the sake of that which the French call *pointe*. When one has finished the reading of "Zeus's Sentence," for a moment the charming description of the evening and Athenian night is lost. And what a beautiful description it is! If the art of reading were cultivated in America as it is in France and Germany, I would not be surprised if some American Legouvé or Strakosch were to add to his répertoire such productions of prose as this humorously poetic "Zeus's Sentence," or that mystic madrigal, "Be Blessed."

"But the dusk did not last long," writes Sienkiewicz. "Soon from the Archipelago appeared the pale Selene and began to sail like a silvery boat in the heavenly space. And the walls of the Acropolis lighted again, but they beamed now with a pale green light, and looked more than ever like the vision of a dream."

But all these, and other equally charming pictures, disappear for a moment from the memory of the reader. There remains only the final joke – only Zeus's sentence. "A virtuous woman – especially when she loves another man – can resist Apollo. But surely and always a stupid woman will resist him."

Only when one thinks of the story does one see that the ending – that "immoral conclusion" I should say if I were not able to understand the joke – does not constitute the essence of the story. Only then we find a delight in the description of the city for which the wagons cater the divine barley, and the water is carried by the girls, "with amphorae poised on their shoulders and lifted hands, going home, light and graceful, like immortal nymphs."

And then follow such paragraphs as the following, which determine the real value of the work:

"The voice of the God of Poetry sounded so beautiful that it performed a miracle. Behold! In the Ambrosian night the gold spear standing on the Acropolis of Athens trembled, and the marble head of the gigantic statue turned toward the Acropolis in order to hear better… Heaven and earth listened to it; the sea stopped roaring and lay peacefully near the shores; even pale Selene stopped her night wandering in the sky and stood motionless over Athens."

"And when Apollo had finished, a light wind arose and carried the song through the whole of Greece, and wherever a child in the cradle heard only a tone of it, that child grew into a poet."

What poet? Famed by what song? Will he not perhaps be a lyric poet?

The same happens with "Lux in Tenebris." One reads again and again the description of the fall of the mist and the splashing of the rain dropping in the gutter, "the cawing of the crows, migrating to the city for their winter quarters, and, with flapping of wings, roosting in the trees." One feels that the whole misery of the first ten pages was necessary in order to form a background for the two pages of heavenly light, to bring out the brightness of that light. "Those who have lost their best beloved," writes Sienkiewicz, "must hang their lives on something; otherwise they could not exist." In such sentences – and it is not the prettiest, but the shortest that I have quoted – resounds, however, the

quieting wisdom, the noble love of that art which poor Kamionka "respected deeply and was always sincere toward." During the long years of his profession he never cheated nor wronged it, neither for the sake of fame nor money, nor for praise nor for criticism. He always wrote as he felt. Were I not like Ruth of the Bible, doomed to pick the ears of corn instead of being myself a sower – if God had not made me critic and worshipper but artist and creator – I could not wish for another necrology than those words of Sienkiewicz regarding the statuary Kamionka.

Quite another thing is the story "At the Source." None of the stories except "Let Us Follow Him" possess for me so many transcendent beauties, although we are right to be angry with the author for having wished, during the reading of several pages, to make us believe an impossible thing – that he was deceiving us. It is true that he has done it in a masterly manner – it is true that he could not have done otherwise, but at the same time there is a fault in the conception, and although Sienkiewicz has covered the precipice with flowers, nevertheless the precipice exists.

On the other hand, it is true that one reading the novel will forget the trick of the author and will see in it only the picture of an immense happiness and a hymn in the worship of love. Perhaps the poor student is right when he says: "Among all the sources of happiness, that from which I drank during the fever is the clearest and best." "A life which love has not visited, even in a dream, is still worse."

Love and faith in woman and art are two constantly recurring

themes in "Lux in Tenebris," "At the Source," "Be Blessed," and "Organist of Ponikila."

When Sienkiewicz wrote "Let Us Follow Him," some critics cried angrily that he lessens his talent and moral worth of the literature; they regretted that he turned people into the false road of mysticism, long since left. Having found Christ on his pages, the least religious people have recollected how gigantic he is in the writings of Heine, walking over land and sea, carrying a red, burning sun instead of a heart. They all understood that to introduce Christ not only worthily or beautifully, but simply and in such a manner that we would not be obliged to turn away from the picture, would be a great art – almost a triumph.

In later times we have made many such attempts. "The Mysticism" became to-day an article of commerce. The religious tenderness and simplicity was spread among Parisian newspaper men, playwrights and novelists. Such as Armand Sylvèstre, such as Theodore de Wyzewa, are playing at writing up Christian dogmas and legends. And a strange thing! While the painters try to bring the Christ nearer to the crowd, while Fritz von Uhde or Lhermitte put the Christ in a country school, in a workingman's house, the weakling writers, imitating poets, dress Him in old, faded, traditional clothes and surround Him with a theatrical light which they dare to call "mysticism." They are crowding the porticos of the temple, but they are merely merchants. Anatole France alone cannot be placed in the same crowd.

In "Let Us Follow Him" the situation and characters are

known, and are already to be found in literature. But never were they painted so simply, so modestly, without romantic complaints and exclamations. In the first chapters of that story there appears an epic writer with whom we have for a long time been familiar. We are accustomed to that uncommon simplicity. But in order to appreciate the narrative regarding Antea, one must listen attentively to this slow prose and then one will notice the rhythmic sentences following one after the other. Then one feels that the author is building a great foundation for the action. Sometimes there occurs a brief, sharp sentence ending in a strong, short word, and the result is that Sienkiewicz has given us a masterpiece which justifies the enthusiasm of a critic, who called him a Prince of Polish Prose.

In the second period of his literary activity, Sienkiewicz has produced his remarkable historical trilogy, "The Deluge," "With Fire and Sword," and "Pan Michael," in which his talent shines forth powerfully, and which possess absolutely distinctive characters from his short stories. The admirers of romanticism cannot find any better books in historical fiction. Some critic has said righteously about Sienkiewicz, speaking of his "Deluge," that he is "the first of Polish novelists, past or present, and second to none now living in England, France, or Germany."

Sienkiewicz being himself a nobleman, therefore naturally in his historical novels he describes the glorious deeds of the Polish nobility, who, being located on the frontier of such barbarous nations as Turks, Kozaks, Tartars, and Wolochs (to-

day Roumania), had defended Europe for centuries from the invasions of barbarism and gave the time to Germany, France, and England to outstrip Poland in the development of material welfare and general civilization among the masses – the nobility being always very refined – though in the fifteenth century the literature of Poland and her sister Bohemia (Chechy) was richer than any other European country, except Italy. One should at least always remember that Nicolaus Kopernicus (Kopernik) was a Pole and John Huss was a Chech.

Historical novels began in England, or rather in Scotland, by the genius of Walter Scott, followed in France by Alexandre Dumas *père*. These two great writers had numerous followers and imitators in all countries, and every nation can point out some more or less successful writer in that field, but who never attained the great success of Sienkiewicz, whose works are translated into many languages, even into Russian, where the antipathy for the Polish superior degree of civilization is still very eager.

The superiority of Sienkiewicz's talent is then affirmed by this fact of translation, and I would dare say that he is superior to the father of this kind of novels, on account of his historical coloring, so much emphasized in Walter Scott. This important quality in the historical novel is truer and more lively in the Polish writer, and then he possesses that psychological depth about which Walter Scott never dreamed. Walter Scott never has created such an original and typical figure as Zagloba is, who is a worthy rival to Shakespeare's Falstaff. As for the description

of duelings, fights, battles, Sienkiewicz's fantastically heroic pen is without rival.

Alexandre Dumas, notwithstanding the biting criticism of Brunetière, will always remain a great favorite with the reading masses, who are searching in his books for pleasure, amusement, and distraction. Sienkiewicz's historical novels possess all the interesting qualities of Dumas, and besides that they are full of wholesome food for thinking minds. His colors are more shining, his brush is broader, his composition more artful, chiselled, finished, better built, and executed with more vigor. While Dumas amuses, pleases, distracts, Sienkiewicz astonishes, surprises, bewitches. All uneasy preoccupations, the dolorous echoes of eternal problems, which philosophical doubt imposes with the everlasting anguish of the human mind, the mystery of the origin, the enigma of destiny, the inexplicable necessity of suffering, the short, tragical, and sublime vision of the future of the soul, and the future not less difficult to be guessed of by the human race in this material world, the torments of human conscience and responsibility for the deeds, is said by Sienkiewicz without any pedanticism, without any dryness.

If we say that the great Hungarian author Maurice Jokay, who also writes historical novels, pales when compared with that fascinating Pole who leaves far behind him the late lions in the field of romanticism, Stanley J. Weyman and Anthony Hope, we are through with that part of Sienkiewicz's literary achievements.

In the third period Sienkiewicz is represented by two problem

novels,

"Without Dogma" and "Children of the Soil."

The charm of Sienkiewicz's psychological novels is the synthesis so seldom realized and as I have already said, the plastic beauty and abstract thoughts. He possesses also an admirable assurance of psychological analysis, a mastery in the painting of customs and characters, and the rarest and most precious faculty of animating his heroes with intense, personal life, which, though it is only an illusionary life, appears less deceitful than the real life.

In that field of novels Sienkiewicz differs greatly from Balzac, for instance, who forced himself to paint the man in his perversity or in his stupidity. According to his views life is the racing after riches. The whole of Balzac's philosophy can be resumed in the deification of the force. All his heroes are "strong men" who disdain humanity and take advantage of it. Sienkiewicz's psychological novels are not lacking in the ideal in his conception of life; they are active powers, forming human souls. The reader finds there, in a well-balanced proportion, good and bad ideas of life, and he represents this life as a good thing, worthy of living.

He differs also from Paul Bourget, who as a German savant counts how many microbes are in a drop of spoiled blood, who is pleased with any ferment, who does not care for healthy souls, as a doctor does not care for healthy people – and who is fond of corruption. Sienkiewicz's analysis of life is not exclusively

pathological, and we find in his novels healthy as well as sick people as in the real life. He takes colors from twilight and aurora to paint with, and by doing so he strengthens our energy, he stimulates our ability for thinking about those eternal problems, difficult to be decided, but which existed and will exist as long as humanity will exist.

He prefers green fields, the perfume of flowers, health, virtue, to

Zola's liking for crime, sickness, cadaverous putridness, and manure.

He prefers *l'âme humaine* to *la bête humaine*.

He is never vulgar even when his heroes do not wear any gloves, and he has these common points with Shakespeare and Molière, that he does not paint only certain types of humanity, taken from one certain part of the country, as it is with the majority of French writers who do not go out of their dear Paris; in Sienkiewicz's novels one can find every kind of people, beginning with humble peasants and modest noblemen created by God, and ending with proud lords made by the kings.

In the novel "Without Dogma," there are many keen and sharp observations, said masterly and briefly; there are many states of the soul, if not always very deep, at least written with art. And his merit in that respect is greater than of any other writers, if we take in consideration that in Poland heroic lyricism and poetical picturesqueness prevail in the literature.

The one who wishes to find in the modern literature some

aphorism to classify the characteristics of the people, in order to be able afterward to apply them to their fellow-men, must read "Children of the Soil."

But the one who is less selfish and wicked, and wishes to collect for his own use such a library as to be able at any moment to take a book from a shelf and find in it something which would make him thoughtful or would make him forget the ordinary life, – he must get "Quo Vadis," because there he will find pages which will recomfort him by their beauty and dignity; it will enable him to go out from his surroundings and enter into himself, *i. e.*, in that better man whom we sometimes feel in our interior. And while reading this book he ought to leave on its pages the traces of his readings, some marks made with a lead pencil or with his whole memory.

It seems that in that book a new man was aroused in Sienkiewicz, and any praise said about this unrivaled masterpiece will be as pale as any powerful lamp is pale comparatively with the glory of the sun. For instance, if I say that Sienkiewicz has made a thorough study of Nero's epoch, and that his great talent and his plastic imagination created the most powerful pictures in the historical background, will it not be a very tame praise, compared with his book – which, while reading it, one shivers and the blood freezes in one's veins?

In "Quo Vadis" the whole *alta Roma*, beginning with slaves carrying mosaics for their refined masters, and ending with patricians, who were so fond of beautiful things that one of them

for instance used to kiss at every moment a superb vase, stands before our eyes as if it was reconstructed by a magical power from ruins and death.

There is no better description of the burning of Rome in any literature. While reading it everything turns red in one's eyes, and immense noises fill one's ears. And the moment when Christ appears on the hill to the frightened Peter, who is going to leave Rome, not feeling strong enough to fight with mighty Caesar, will remain one of the strongest passages of the literature of the whole world.

After having read again and again this great – shall I say the greatest historical novel? – and having wondered at its deep conception, masterly execution, beautiful language, powerful painting of the epoch, plastic description of customs and habits, enthusiasm of the first followers of Christ, refinement of Roman civilization, corruption of the old world, the question rises: What is the dominating idea of the author, spread out all over the whole book? It is the cry of Christians murdered in circuses: *Pro Christo*!

Sienkiewicz searching always and continually for a tranquil harbor from the storms of conscience and investigation of the tormented mind, finds such a harbor in the religious sentiments, in lively Christian faith. This idea is woven as golden thread in a silk brocade, not only in "Quo Vadis," but also in all his novels. In "Fire and Sword" his principal hero is an outlaw; but all his crimes, not only against society, but also against nature,

are redeemed by faith, and as a consequence of it afterward by good deeds. In the "Children of the Soul," he takes one of his principal characters upon one of seven Roman hills, and having displayed before him in the most eloquent way the might of the old Rome, the might as it never existed before and perhaps never will exist again, he says: "And from all that nothing is left only crosses! crosses! crosses!" It seems to us that in "Quo Vadis" Sienkiewicz strained all his forces to reproduce from one side all the power, all riches, all refinement, all corruption of the Roman civilization in order to get a better contrast with the great advantages of the cry of the living faith: *Pro Christo!* In that cry the asphyxiated not only in old times but in our days also find refreshment; the tormented by doubt, peace. From that cry flows hope, and naturally people prefer those from whom the blessing comes to those who curse and doom them.

Sienkiewicz considers the Christian faith as the principal and even the only help which humanity needs to bear cheerfully the burden and struggle of every-day life. Equally his personal experience as well as his studies made him worship Christ. He is not one of those who say that religion is good for the people at large. He does not admit such a shade of contempt in a question touching so near the human heart. He knows that every one is a man in the presence of sorrow and the conundrum of fate, contradiction of justice, tearing of death, and uneasiness of hope. He believes that the only way to cross the precipice is the flight with the wings of faith, the precipice made between the

submission to general and absolute laws and the confidence in the infinite goodness of the Father.

The time passes and carries with it people and doctrines and systems. Many authors left as the heritage to civilization rows of books, and in those books scepticism, indifference, doubt, lack of precision and decision.

But the last symptoms in the literature show us that the Stoicism is not sufficient for our generation, not satisfied with Marcus Aurelius's gospel, which was not sufficient even to that brilliant Sienkiewicz's Roman *arbiter elegantiarum*, the over-refined patrician Petronius. A nation which desired to live, and does not wish either to perish in the desert or be drowned in the mud, needs such a great help which only religion gives. The history is not only *magister vitae*, but also it is the master of conscience.

Literature has in Sienkiewicz a great poet – epical as well as lyrical.

I shall not mourn, although I appreciate the justified complaint about objectivity in *belles lettres.* But now there is no question what poetry will be; there is the question whether it will be, and I believe that society, being tired with Zola's realism and its caricature, not with the picturesqueness of Loti, but with catalogues of painter's colors; not with the depth of Ibsen, but the oddness of his imitators – it seems to me that society will hate the poetry which discusses and philosophizes, wishes to paint but does not feel, makes archeology but does not give impressions,

and that people will turn to the poetry as it was in the beginning, what is in its deepest essence, to the flight of single words, to the interior melody, to the song – the art of sounds being the greatest art. I believe that if in the future the poetry will find listeners, they will repeat to the poets the words of Paul Verlaine, whom by too summary judgment they count among incomprehensible originals:

"*De la musique encore et toujours.*"

And nobody need be afraid, from a social point of view, for Sienkiewicz's objectivity. It is a manly lyricism as well as epic, made deep by the knowledge of the life, sustained by thinking, until now perhaps unconscious of itself, the poetry of a writer who walked many roads, studied many things, knew much bitterness, ridiculed many triflings, and then he perceived that a man like himself has only one aim: above human affairs "to spin the love, as the silkworm spins its web."

S.C. DE SOISSONS.

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PART SECOND
SO RUNS THE WORLD ZOLA

I have a great respect for every accomplished work. Every time I put on the end of any of my works *finis*, I feel satisfied; not because the work is done, not on account of future success, but on account of an accomplished deed.

Every book is a deed – bad or good, but at any rate accomplished – and a series of them, written with a special aim, is an accomplished purpose of life; it is a feast during which the workers have the right to receive a wreath, and to sing: "We bring the crop, the crop!"

Evidently the merit depends on the result of the work. The profession of the writer has its thorns about which the reader does not dream. A farmer, bringing the crop to his barn, has this absolute surety, that he brings wheat, rye, barley, or oats which will be useful to the people. An author, writing even with the best of faith, may have moments of doubt, whether instead of bread he did not give poison, whether his work is not a great mistake or a great misdeed, whether it has brought profit to humanity, or whether, were it not better for the people and himself, had he not written anything, nothing accomplished.

Such doubts are foes to human peace, but at the same time they are a filter, which does not pass any dirt. It is bad when there

are too many of them, it is bad when too few; in the first case the ability for deeds disappears, in the second, the conscience. Hence the eternal, as humanity, need of exterior regulator.

But the French writers always had more originality and independence than others, and that regulator, which elsewhere was religion, long since ceased to exist for them. There were some exceptions, however. Balzac used to affirm that his aim was to serve religion and monarchy. But even the works of those who confessed such principles were not in harmony with themselves. One can say that it pleased the authors to understand their activity in that way, but the reading masses could understand it and often understood it as a negation of religious and ethical principles.

In the last epoch, however, such misunderstanding became impossible, because the authors began to write, either in the name of their personal convictions, directly opposite to social principles and ties, or with objective analysis, which, in its action of life, marks the good and the evil as manifestations equally necessary and equally justified. France – and through France the rest of Europe – was overflowed with a deluge of books, written with such lightheartedness, so absolute and with such daring, not counting on any responsibility toward people, that even those who received them without any scruples began to be overcome with astonishment. It seemed that every author forced himself to go further than they expected him to. In that way they succeeded in being called daring thinkers and original artists. The boldness in touching certain subjects, and the way of interpreting

them, seemed to be the best quality of the writer. To that was joined bad faith, or unconscious deceiving of himself and others. Analysis! They analyzed in the name of truth, which apparently must and has the right to be said, everything, but especially the evil, dirt, human corruption. They did not notice that this pseudo-analysis ceases to be an objective analysis, and becomes a sickish liking for rotten things coming from two causes: in the first place from the corruption of the taste, then from greater facility of producing striking effects.

They utilized the philological faculty of the senses, on the strength of which repulsive impressions appear to us stronger and more real than agreeable, and they abused that property beyond measure.

There was created a certain kind of travelling in putridness, because the subjects being exhausted very quickly, there was a necessity to find something new which could attract. The truth itself, in the name of which it was done, was put in a corner in the presence of such exigencies. Are you familiar with Zola's "La Terre"? This novel is to represent a picture of a French village. Try and think of a French village, or of any other village. How does it look altogether? It is a gathering of houses, trees, fields, pastures, wild flowers, people, herds, light, sky, singing, small country business, and work. In all that, without any doubt, the manure plays an important part, but there is something more behind it and besides it. But Zola's village looks as if it was composed exclusively of manure and

crime. Therefore the picture is false, the truth twisted, because in nature the true relation of things is different. If any one would like to take the trouble of making a list of the women represented in French novels, he would persuade himself that at least ninety-five per cent. of them were fallen women. But in society it is not, and cannot be, so. Probably even in the countries where they worshipped Astarte, there were less bad women. Notwithstanding this, the authors try to persuade us that they are giving a true picture of society, and that their analysis of customs is an objective one. The lie, exaggeration, liking for rotten things – such is the exact picture in contemporary novels. I do not know what profit there is in literature like that, but I do know that the devil has not lost anything, because through this channel flows a river of mud and poison, and the moral sense became so dulled that finally they tolerated such books which a few decades ago would have brought the author to court. To-day we do not wish to believe that the author of "Madame Bovary" had two criminal suits. Had this book been written twenty years later, they would have found it too modest.

But the human spirit, which does not slumber, and the organism that wishes to live, does not suffer excess of poison. Finally there came a moment for hiccoughs of disgust. Some voices began to rise asking for other spiritual bread; an instinctive sentiment awakes and cries that it cannot continue any longer in this way, that one must arise, shake off the mud, clean, change! The people ask for a fresh breeze. The masses cannot

say what they want, but they know what they do not want; they know they are breathing bad air, and that they are suffocating. An uneasiness takes hold of their minds. Even in France they are seeking and crying for something different; they began to protest against the actual state of affairs. Many writers felt that uneasiness. They had some moments of doubt, about which I have spoken already, and those doubts were stronger on account of the uncertainty of the new roads. Look at the last books of Bourget, Rod, Barrès, Desjardin, the poetry of Rimbaud, Verlaine, Heredia, Mallarmé, and even Maeterlinck and his school. What do you find there? The searching for new essence and new form, feverish seeking for some issue, uncertainty where to go and where to look for help – in religion or mysticism, in duty outside of faith, or in patriotism or in humanity? Above all, however, one sees in them an immense uneasiness. They do not find any issue, because for it one needs two things: a great idea and a great talent, and they did not have either of them. Hence the uneasiness increases, and the same authors who arouse against rough pessimism of naturalistic direction fell into pessimism themselves, and by this the principal importance and aim of a reform became weaker. What remains then? The bizarre form. And in this bizarre form, whether it is called symbolism or impressionism, they go in deeper and become more entangled, losing artistic equilibrium, common sense, and serenity of the soul. Often they fall into the former corruption as far as the essence is concerned, and almost always into dissonance with

one's self, because they have an honest sentiment that they must give to the world something new, and they know not what.

Such are the present times! Among those searching in darkness, wandering and weary ones, one remained quiet, sure of himself and his doctrine, immovable and almost serious in his pessimism. It was Emile Zola. A great talent, slow but powerful and a potent force, surprising objectivism if the question is about a sentiment, because it is equal to almost complete indifference, such an exceptional gift of seeing the entire soul of humanity and things that it approaches this naturalistic writer to mystics – all that gives him a very great and unusual originality.

The physical figure does not always reproduce the spiritual individuality. In Zola, this relation comes out very strikingly. A square face, low forehead covered with wrinkles, rough features, high shoulders and short neck, give to his person a rough appearance. Looking at his face and those wrinkles around the eyes, you can guess that he is a man who can stand much, that he is persevering and stubborn, not only in his projects but in the realization of them; but what is mere important, he is so in his thinking also. There is no keenness in him. At the first glance of the eye one can see that he is a doctrinarian shut up in himself, who does not embrace large horizons – sees everything at a certain angle, narrow-mindedly yet seeing distinctly.

His mind, like a dark lantern, throws a narrow light in only one direction, and he goes in that direction with immovable surety.

In that way the history of a series of his books called "Les

Rougon-Macquart" becomes clear.

Zola was determined to write the history of a certain family at the time of the Empire, on the ground of conditions produced by it, in consideration of the law of heredity.

There was a question even about something more than this consideration, because this heredity had to become the physiological foundation of the work. There is a certain contradiction in the premises. Speaking historically Rougon-Macquart had to be a picture of French society during its last times. According to their moral manifestations of life, therefore, they ought to be of themselves more or less a normal family. But in such a case what shall one do with heredity? To be sure, moral families are such on the strength of the law of heredity – but it is impossible to show it in such conditions – one can do it only in exceptional cases of the normal type. Therefore the Rougon are in fact a sick family. They are children of nervousness. It was contracted by the first mother of the family, and since that time the coming generations, one after another, followed with the same stigma on their foreheads. This is the way the author wishes to have it, and one must agree with him. In what way, however, can a history of one family exceptionally attainted with a mental disorder be at the same time a picture of French society, the author does not explain to us. Had he said that during the Empire all society was sick, it would be a trick. A society can walk in the perilous road of politics or customs and be sick as a community, and at the same time have healthy individuals and families. These

are two different things. Therefore one of the two: either the Rougon are sick, and in that case the cycle of novels about them is not a picture of French society during the Empire – it is only a psychological study – or the whole physiological foundations, all this heredity on which the cycle is based, in a word Zola's whole doctrine, is nonsense.

I do not know whether any one has paid attention to Zola at this *aut aut*! It is sure that he never thought of it himself. Probably it would not have had any influence, as the criticisms had no influence on his theory of heredity. Critics and physiologists attacked him ofttimes with an arsenal of irrefutable arguments. It did not do any good. They affirmed in vain that the theory of heredity is not proved by any science, and above all it is difficult to grasp it and show it by facts; they pointed in vain that physiology cannot be fantastical and its laws cannot depend on the free conception of an author. Zola listened, continued to write, and in the last volume he gave a genealogical tree of the family of Rougon-Macquart, with such a serenity as if no one ever doubted his theory.

At any rate, this tree has one advantage. It is so pretentious, so ridiculous that it takes away from the theory the seriousness which it would have given to less individual minds. We learn from it that from a nervously sick great-grandmother grows a sick family. But the one who would think that her nervousness is seen in descendants as it is in the physical field, in a certain similar way, in some inclination or passion for something, will be

greatly mistaken. On the contrary, the marvellous tree produces different kinds of fruit. You can find on it red apples, pears, plums, cherries, and everything you might desire. And all that on account of great-grandmother's nervousness. Is it the same way in nature? We do not know. Zola himself does not have any other proofs than clippings from newspapers, describing different crimes; he preserved these clippings carefully as "human documents," and which he uses according to his fancy.

It can be granted to him, but he must not sell us such fancy for the eternal and immutable laws of nature. Grandmother did have nervousness, her nearest friends were in the habit of searching for remedies against ills not in a drug-store, therefore her male and female descendants are such as they must be – namely, criminals, thieves, fast women, honest people, saints, politicians, good mothers, bankers, farmers, murderers, priests, soldiers, ministers – in a word, everything which in the sphere of the mind, in the sphere of health, in the sphere of wealth and position, in the sphere of profession, can be and are men as well as women in the whole world. One is stupefied voluntarily. What then? And all that on account of grandmother's nervousness? "Yes!" answers the author. But if Adelaïde Fouqué had not had it, her descendants would be good or bad just the same and have the same occupations men and women usually have in this world. "Certainly!" Zola answers; "but Adelaïde Fouqué had nervousness." And further discussion is impossible, because one has to do with a man who his own voluntary fancy takes for a law

of nature and his brain cannot be opened with a key furnished by logic. He built a genealogical tree; this tree could have been different – but if it was different, he would sustain that it can be only such as it is – and he would prefer to be killed rather than be convinced that his theory was worthless.

At any rate, it is such a theory that it is not worth while to quarrel about it. A long time ago it was said that Zola had one good thing – his talent; and one bad – his doctrine. If as a consequence of an inherited nervousness one can become a rascal as well as a good man, a Sister of Charity as well as Nana, a farmer boy as well as Achilles – in that case there is an heredity which does not exist. A man can be that which he wishes to be. The field for good will and responsibility is open, and all those moral foundations on which human life is based come out of the fire safely. We could say to the author that there is too much ado about nothing, and finish with him as one finishes with a doctrinarian and count only his talent. But he cares for something else. No matter if his doctrine is empty, he makes from it other deductions. The entire cycle of his books speaks precisely. "No matter what you are, saint or criminal, you are such on the strength of the law of heredity, you are such as you must be, and in that case you have neither merit nor are you guilty." Here is the question of responsibility! But we are not going to discuss it. The philosophy has not yet found the proof of the existence of man, and when *cogito ergo sum* of Cartesius was not sufficient for it, the question is still open. Even if all centuries

of philosophy affirm it or not, the man is intrinsically persuaded that he exists, and no less persuaded that he is responsible for his whole life, which, without any regard to his theories, is based on such persuasion. And then even the science did not decide the question of the whole responsibility. Against authorities one can quote other authorities, against opinions one can bring other opinions, against deductions other deductions. But for Zola such opinion is decided. There is only one grandmother Adelaïde, or grandfather Jacques, on whom everything depends. From that point begins, according to my opinion, the bad influence of the writer, because he not only decides difficult questions to be decided once and forever, but he popularizes them and facilitates the corruption of society. No matter if every thief or every murderer can appeal to a grandmother with nervousness. Courts, notwithstanding the cycle of Rougon-Macquart, will place them behind bars. The evil is not in single cases, but in this, that into the human soul a bad pessimism and depression flows, that the charm of life is destroyed, the hope, the energy, the liking for life, and therefore all effort in the direction of good is shattered.

A quoi bon? Such is the question coming by itself. A book is also an activity, forming human souls. If at least the reader would find in Zola's book the bad and good side of human life in an equal proportion, or at least in such as one can find it in reality! Vain hope! One must climb high in order to get colors from a rainbow or sunset – but everybody has saliva in his mouth and it is easy to paint with it. This naturalist prefers cheap effects more

than others do; he prefers mildew to perfumes, *la bête humaine* to *l'âme humaine!*

If we could bring an inhabitant of Venus or Mars to the earth and ask him to judge of life on the earth from Zola's novels, he would say most assuredly: "This life is sometimes quite pure, like 'Le Rève,' but in general it is a thing which smells bad, is slippery, moist, dreadful." And even if the theories on which Zola has based his works were, as they are not, acknowledged truths, what a lack of pity to represent life in such a way to the people, who must live just the same! Does he do it in order to ruin, to disgust, to poison every action, to paralyze every energy, to discourage all thinking? In the presence of that, we are even sorry that he has a talent. It would have been better for him, for France, that he had not had it. And one wonders that he is not frightened, that when a fear seizes even those who did not lead to corruption, he alone with such a tranquillity finishes his Rougon-Macquart as if he had strengthened the capacity for life of the French people instead of having destroyed it. How is it possible that he cannot understand that people brought up on such corrupted bread and drinking, such bad water, not only will be unable to resist the storm, but even they will not have an inclination to do so! Musset has written in his time this famous verse: "We had already your German Rhine." Zola brings up his society in such a way that, if everything that he planted would take root, the second of Musset's verses would be: "But to-day we will give you even the Seine." But it is not as bad as that. "La

Débâcle" is a remarkable book, notwithstanding all its faults, but the soldiers, who will read it, will be defeated by those who in the night sing: "Glory, Glory, Halleluia!"

I consider Zola's talent as a national misfortune, and I am glad that his times are passing away, that even the most zealous pupils abandon the master who stands alone more and more.

Will humanity remember him in literature? Will his fame pass? We cannot affirm, but we can doubt! In the cycle of Rougon-Macquart there are powerful volumes, as "Germinal" or "La Débâcle." But in general, that which Zola's natural talent made for his immortality was spoiled by a liking for dirty realism and his filthy language. Literature cannot use such expressions of which even peasants are ashamed. The real truth, if the question is about vicious people, can be attained by other means, by probable reproduction of the state of their souls, thoughts, deeds, finally by the run of their conversation, but not by verbal quotation of their swearings and most horrid words. As in the choice of pictures, so in the choice of expression, exist certain measures, pointed at by reason and good taste. Zola overstepped it to such a degree ("La Terre") to which nobody yet dared to approach. Monsters are killed because they are monsters. A book which is the cause of disgust must be abandoned. It is the natural order of things. From old production as of universal literature survive the forgetfulness of the rough productions, destined to excite laughter (Aristophanes, Rabelais, etc.), or lascivious things, but written with an elegance (Boccaccio). Not one book

written in order to excite nausea outlived. Zola, for the sake of the renown caused by his works, for the sake of the scandal produced by every one of his volumes, killed his future. On account of that happened a strange thing: it happened that he, a man writing according to a conceived plan, writing with deliberation, cold and possessing his subjects as very few writers are, created good things only when he had the least opportunity to realize his plans, doctrines, means, – in a word, when he dominated the subject the least and was dominated by the subject most.

Such was the case in "Germinal" and "La Débâcle." The immensity of socialism and the immensity of the war simply crushed Zola with all his mental apparatus. His doctrines became very small in the presence of such dimensions, and hardly any one hears of them in the noise of the deluge, overflowing the mine and in the thundering of Prussian cannons; only talent remained. Therefore in both those books there are pages worthy of Dante. Quite a different thing happened with "Docteur Pascal." Being the last volume of the cycle, it was bound to be the last deduction, from the whole work the synthesis of the doctrine, the belfry of the whole building. Consequently in this volume Zola speaks more about doctrine than in any other previous volume; as the doctrine is bad, wicked, and false, therefore "Docteur Pascal" is the worst and most tedious book of all the cycle of Rougon-Macquart. It is a series of empty leaves on which tediousness is hand in hand with lack of moral sense, it is a pale picture full of falsehood – such is "Le Docteur Pascal." Zola wishes to have him

an honest man. He is the outcast of the family Rougon-Macquart. In heredity there happens such lucky degenerations; the doctor knows about it, he considers himself as a happy exception, and it is for him a source of continuous inward pleasure. In the mean while, he loves people, serves them and sells them his medicine, which cures all possible disease. He is a sweet sage, who studies life, therefore he gathers "human documents," builds laboriously the genealogical tree of the family of Rougon-Macquart, whose descendant he is himself, and on the strength of his observations he comes to the same conclusion as Zola. To which? It is difficult to answer the question; but here it is more or less: if any one is not well, usually he is sick and that heredity exists, but mothers and fathers who come from other families can bring into the blood of children new elements; in that way heredity can be modified to such a degree that strictly speaking it does not exist.

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