

Suddenly saying: "There, beside our friend in clerical garb: here she comes; judge if that is the girl for the foulest of curs to worry, no matter where she's found," Dartrey directed the colonel's attention to Nesta and Mr. Barnby turning off the pier and advancing.

He saluted. She bowed. There was no contraction of her eyelids; and her face was white. The mortal life appeared to be deadened in her cold wide look; as when the storm-wind banks a leaden remoteness, leaving blown space of sky.

The colonel said: "No, that's not the girl a gentleman would offend."

"What man!" cried Dartrey. "If we had a Society for the trial of your gentleman!—but he has only to call himself gentleman to get grant of licence: and your Society protects him. It won't punish, and it won't let you. But you saw her: ask yourself—what man could offend that girl!"

"Still, my friend, she ought to keep clear of the Marssetts."

"When I meet him, I shall treat him as one out of the law."

"You lead on to an ultimate argument with the hangman."

"We'll dare it, to waken the old country. Old England will count none but Worrells in time. As for discreet, if you like!—the young lady might have been more discreet. She's a girl with a big heart. If we were all everlastingly discreet!"

Dartrey may have meant, that the consequence of a prolonged conformity would be the generation of stanches to shock to purging tempests the tolerant heavens over such smooth stagnancy. He had his ideas about movement; about the good of women, and the health of his England. The feeling of the hopelessness of pleading Nesta's conduct, for the perfect justification of it to son or daughter of our impressing conventional world—even to a friend, that friend a true man, a really chivalrous man!—drove him back in a silence upon his natural brotherhood with souls that dare do. It was a wonder, to think of his finding this kinship in a woman. In a girl?—and the world holding that virgin spirit to be unclean or shadowed because its rays were shed on foul places? He clasped the girl. Her smitten clear face, the face of the second sigh after torture, bent him in devotion to her image.

The clasping and the worshipping were independent of personal ardours: quaintly mixed with semi-paternal recollections of the little 'blue butterfly' of the days at Craye Farm and Creckholt; and he had heard of Dudley Sowerby's pretensions to her hand. Nesta's youthfulness cast double age on him from the child's past. He pictured the child; pictured the girl, with her look of solitariness of sight; as in the desolate wide world, where her noble compassion for a woman had unexpectedly, painfully, almost by transubstantiation, rack-screwed her to woman's mind. And above sorrowful, holy were those eyes.

They held sway over Dartrey, and lost it some steps on; his demon temper urging him to strike at Major Worrell, as the cause of her dismayed expression. He was not the happier for dropping to his nature; but we proceed more easily, all of us, when the strain which lifts us a foot or two off our native level is relaxed.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

\* \* \* The Editor of this Review does not undertake to return any Manuscripts.

THE  
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INSCRIPTIONS  
FOR THE FOUR SIDES OF A PEDESTAL.

I.

MARLOWE, the father of the sons of song

Whose praise is England's crowning praise, above  
All glories else that crown her, sweet and strong  
As England, clothed with light and fire of love,  
And girt with might of passion, thought, and trust,  
Stands here in spirit, sleeps not here in dust.

II.

Marlowe, a star too sovereign, too superb,

To fade when heaven took fire from Shakespeare's light,  
A soul that knew but song's triumphal curb  
And love's triumphant bondage, holds of right  
His pride of place, who first in place and time  
Made England's voice as England's heart sublime.

## THE POET VERLAINE.

## I.

WERE I called on to declare in a word what I think the keynote of Verlaine, I should reply—it is to be found in his peculiar thrill of *grief*. “You have invented a new shudder,” wrote Victor Hugo to Baudelaire. What Verlaine has invented, is a new shade of woe.

In the attempt to define in its full distinctness and uniqueness the particular, mournful, world-weary, world-wounded thrill which is the Verlaine *leit-motiv*, recourse must be had to negatives. It is not wistfully cold and pure like the melancholy of De Vigny; not raging and wailing by turns like the angry sorrow of Musset; not deliberately and calmly desperate like the pessimism of Leconte de Lisle; not quivering continually at the precise point between tears and smiles like the pathos of Heine, and not consistently, logically agonising like the world-horror of Leopardi. Something less material it is than even the least material of these. . . . Something imperceptibly faint and slight, like the liliputian wreath of vapour that might rise from hot tears shed silently one by one in secret; something throbbing in a sort of reproachful dumbness of amaze, a dulness and deadness of pain, like some very frail and small creature crushed bleeding to the ground by a big and brutal force or being that it cannot rightly understand. . . .

In the Jardin des Plantes at Paris, in a fine grassy enclosure, is a group of tiny animals, the smallest antelopes known. They will come, about the size of so many cats, close behind their low wire grating, and stand and doubtfully gaze up at you with enormous liquid eyes. And such is the effect of their littleness, their timorousness, their almost absurd delicacy—so small, so delicate, those little, little hoofs, those little tender limbs, those fragile fawn-coloured sides, that little humid twitching muzzle; so small, and yet so keenly, tremulously perceptive and sensitive so intensely; so little, yet all alive and quivering with nerves; so small, so weak, so helpless, and apparently so unfitted for aught except to apprehend; such minute atoms and specks of sentient being, so lost amid a universe's vast incomprehensibility—that my heart has been smitten to look upon those miniature living things, with the quite inordinate frailty of their body and the disproportionate bigness of their eyes.

Symbols or suggestions of humanity's every aspect may, one fancies, be discovered in animal creation. And I think those antelopes are symbols of a state of soul rare enough among men, and yet too

frequent. A somewhat similar combination of hopeless powerlessness to resist with the most unbounded capacity to suffer (“*As-tu réfléchi combien nous sommes organisés pour le malheur?*” Flaubert wrote to George Sand) is reflected in Verlaine's verse.

“Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,  
Si bleu, si calme!  
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit,  
Balance sa palme.  
“La cloche dans le ciel qu'on voit  
Doucement tinte;  
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit  
Chante sa plainte.  
“Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,  
Simple et tranquille;  
Cette paisible rumeur-là  
Vient de la ville.  
“—Qu'as-tu fait, ô toi que voilà,  
Pleurant sans cesse;  
Dis, qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà,  
De ta jeunesse?”

To my perhaps excessive sensibility, there is about that little piece, with the melting silvery softness and sweetness of its opening and the broken suddenness and sternness of the closing apostrophe to the sinner by his soul, a sort of breath, as it were, of haggard horror. Intensity, so profound as to be almost quiescent; despair too great for words, and best expressed by the choking abruptness of a sob.

In these lines, too, that follow, what mournfulness of brooding, and what strange imaginative effect:—

“Je ne sais pourquoi  
Mon esprit amer  
D'une aile inquiète et folle vole sur la mer.  
Tout ce qui m'est cher  
D'une aile d'effroi  
Mon amour le couve au ras des flots. Pourquoi, pourquoi?”

The above stanza for mere workmanship is very striking. The extraordinary prolongation of the Alexandrine: “*D'une aile inquiète et folle vole sur la mer,*” which suggests the protracted sonorous unfurling of the wave upon the beach or the heavy tardy winging of the gull against the wind, is effected, technically speaking, by the use of the two lengthened “a” sounds in “aile” and “inquiète,” and of the “o” sound in the rhyming “folle” and “vole.” Here it may be noted that Verlaine makes somewhat frequent, and always most felicitous use of casually recurrent rhymes within the verse. Another characteristic of Verlaine's manner is his employment of irregular nine-foot, eleven-foot, and thirteen-foot metres, giving results of lightness, fluidity, and softness not to be obtained with the artificial, Versailles-park trimness of such forms as the classic Alexandrine for example. In this as in divers similar par-

ticalars, Verlaine's art, by reason of its varied originality and ingenuity, would well repay a greater amount of study than the limits of this paper will allow.

Among Verlaine's "pièces de tristesse" the following is perhaps the best known:—

"Les sanglots longs  
Des violons  
De l'automne  
Blessent mon cœur  
D'une langueur  
Monotone.

"Tout suffoquant  
Et blême quand  
Sonne l'heure,  
Je me souviens  
Des jours anciens  
Et je pleure,

"Et je m'en vais  
Au vent mauvais  
Qui m'emporte  
De ci, de là,  
Parcél à la  
Feuille morte."

Who, walking in some silent wood in late November, has not been conscious, if for an instant only, of the scent, faint yet sharp and fresh although so eloquent of decay, that breathes from matted heaps of fallen leaves at the foot of the denuded trees? Some such fragrance seems to hang upon the quaintness of those lines, with their tremulous indecision of design so justly and subtly corresponding to the undefined sadness of the emotion.

In days comparatively distant Verlaine occasionally could indulge without admixture of acerbity or grief in the delicate, graceful lyric strain constituting one of the chief notes of his genius. For sweetness, simpleness, and freshness, the little piece that follows is like the thrush's silver trill:—

"La lune blanche  
Luit dans les bois;  
De chaque branche  
Part une voix  
Dans la ramée . . .

O bien aimée!

"L'étang reflète  
—Profond miroir—  
La silhouette  
Du saule noir  
Où le vent pleure . . .

Rêvons, c'est l'heure.

"Un vaste et tendre  
Apaisement  
Semble descendre  
Du firmament  
Quo l'astre irise . . .

C'est l'heure exquise."

How lovely, too, is just this snatch:—

"Avant que tu ne t'en ailles,  
Pâle étoile du matin,  
Mille cailles  
Changent, chantent dans le thym."

But this early brightness of his song was soon to be lost in the black bitterness expressed from one of the most tragic and terrible—morally speaking—of all poetic lives.

## II.

. . . What causes for Verlaine's sadness, for Verlaine's perplexity, complexity, perversion? . . . To a sympathetic comprehension they are apparent clearly enough. The so usual domestic misunderstandings—the material difficulties of existence, hard to all, but to one constituted like this, how much more distracting, more degrading, more destructive: is it strange if Paul Verlaine, poor in purse, sad in soul, and grieving for a "loved and lost Lenore" (if not materially lost, yet lost in the spirit, which was worse); strange, if he "sought surcease of sorrow" and the semblance at least of sympathy intellectual and artistic among those Bohemian tavern *coteries* which have long played so great, so exorbitant a part in Parisian life? He sought sympathy, and he found—what was inevitable: coarseness, baseness, envy, malice, and all the other qualities presented by humanity in conglomeration. Through weeks, and months, and years, he sat and listened to the clacking of the poisonous tongues, and to the crackling of the thorns under the pot; and "assisted" daily, nightly, at the vile constant dragging downward of all things not naturally rooted in the mud. "Rooted in the mud" is a term that might finally have been appropriately applied to himself. Contamination, in a case like his, was certain. And the effects on him of such contamination were bound to be especially disastrous. By his own admission in his verse, he sank low. Lower even, if conceivable, than any of his "Bohemian" accomplices.

It is a striking psychological fact, on which all thinkers must have pondered, that extremes of bad in natures of a certain exquisite type should lie so close beside extremes of good. The worst iniquity

is often, as Baudelaire's verse for instance forcibly suggests, nothing more than the logical action in the last resort of an excessive ideality deprived of all exterior aliment and thrown back violently upon itself. Verlaine profoundly touches this point in a line of his allegorical poem entitled—all too significantly—*Crimes Amoris*. In a palace blazing with silk and gold, at Ecbatane in Asia, to the sound of Mohammedan melodies strange and strident, a band of juvenile Satans "font litière aux sept péchés de leurs cinq sens." The demons (demons, remember, are angels degraded) desire vainly to break away from the Evil to which they are attached, but which at heart they abhor. And one, youngest and brightest of them all, despairingly exclaims:—

"Nous avons tous trop souffert, anges et hommes,  
De ce conflit entre le Pire et le Mieux!"

Yes, evidently, a soul is like a blade. The more purely, finely tempered, the more in danger of losing its edge. What less Verlaine-like existence—what, to all exterior appearances, less Verlaine-like character—than that of Nathaniel Hawthorne? Yet see how thoroughly, in his tale *The Artist of the Beautiful*, the American psychologist comprehends and how capitably expresses this truth, so saddening if rightly considered, and last crowning cruelty among the hardships attaching to genius's earthly lot: "He [the Artist] abandoned himself to habits from which it might have been supposed that the mere delicacy of his organisation would have availed to secure him. But, when the ethereal portion of a man of genius is obscured, the earthly part assumes an influence the more uncontrollable, because the character is now thrown off the balance to which Providence had so nicely adjusted it; and which, in coarser natures, is adjusted by some other method." Paul Verlaine, like Owen Harland in that story, "abandoned himself to habits from which it might have been supposed," &c. Also like François Villon, his prototype four hundred years ago. In Verlaine's life, as in Villon's, the same complication is presented of essential moral loveliness with the most lamentable ignominy of circumstance. To say "conduct," in reference to such bruised reeds swirling in the brook or dead leaves whirling in the wind as are the Villons and Verlaines, one feels would not be just.

For all the degradation, however, of this Parisian *brasserie* sphere which for years was Paul Verlaine's, it has within the limits of the present generation attracted and detained genius, not his alone. Men, with whom in times not so very long past the poet has sat imbibing *chopes* of Munich beer, and hardly money enough among the lot to be quite certain of "settling" at the end of the evening, have come since to be the rulers of France:—

"Vous voici rois de France! A votre tour!  
(Rois à plusieurs d'une France postiche) . . ."

is how Verlaine has apostrophised them in his verse. Other men, of the erst beerhouse frequenters, are now the editors of great leading "organs." Others, again, authors of books the world has read, or painters of pictures the world has rushed to see. Never has French society, in these respects, been more Balzacian than during the past twenty or thirty years. But what has mainly impressed the poet of *Sagesse* and *Amour* in connection with these *parvenu* associates of his youth is, the vanity and insincerity of most "successful" art, the backstairs and dirty-dish-washing loathsomeness of most "successful" politics, the vile venality and time-service of most journalism of the "influential" type . . . The course of events, public and private, the development of others' character and his own, and the general spectacle of the "civilization" circumambient—these, the divers factors of a painful and perhaps insoluble world-problem, have each and all had their effect of misanthropy on Verlaine. Man delights not him, nor woman (the beerhouse variety of the species) neither:—

"Ces femmes! Dis les gaz, et l'horreur identique  
Du mal partout, du laid toujours sur tes chemins;  
Et dis l'Amour et dis encor la Politique  
Avec du sang déshonoré d'encre à leurs mains!"

Another instance of the deepness of his "political" scorn:—that which most interests him in relation with the phenomenon named Louise Michel, is the lady's high Christian ideal of justice, on the one hand, as contrasted with, on the other, the peculiar characteristics of the persons said and supposed to "govern." The "Ballade en l'honneur de Louise Michel" has a fine stirring ring. It thus concludes:—

"Gouvernements de malfait,  
Mégathérium ou bacille,  
Soldat brut, robin insolent,  
Ou quelque compromis fragile,  
Géant de bone aux pieds d'argile—  
Tout cela son courroux chrétien  
L'écrase d'un mépris agile.  
Louise Michel est très bien.

*Envoi.*

Citoyenne! Votre évangile  
On meurt pour! C'est l'honneur! Eh bien,  
Loin des Taxil et des Basile  
Louise Michel est très bien."

### III.

If in the art, literature, politics and society of France since 1870 Verlaine has found but little to appease his nature's inner cravings

for fitness ethic and æsthetic, neither have the exterior aspects of Paris itself brought unquestioning delight to his mind or eye:—

“La ‘grande ville.’ Un tas criard de pierres blanches  
Où rage le soleil comme en pays conquis.  
Tous les vices ont leur tanière, les exquis  
Et les hideux, dans ce désert de pierres blanches.”

Such are the thoughts, distasteful, with which the “décor” of outward Paris inspires him. The theme, however, is not always treated by Verlaine in this moralising vein. White streets, gay parks, bustling suburban fêtes, busy faubourgs, banal *banlieue*, the varied Parisian scenery familiar in Coppée’s verse, De Nittis’s and Béraud’s paintings, Forain’s sketches and aquarelles: there is much of this in Verlaine, done with a smartness, brightness, vividness of touch quite delightful. Instantaneous photographs, only artistic; like this, of a corner at a fair:—

“Le tréteau qu’un orchestre emphatique secoue  
Grince sous les grands pieds du maigre baladin,  
Qui harangue, non sans finesse et sans dédain,  
Les badauds piétinant devant lui dans la boue.”

And now this *effet de faubourg*:—

“Le bruit des cabarets, la fange du trottoir  
Les platanes déchus s’effeuillant dans l’air noir,  
L’omnibus, ouragan de ferrailles et de boues,  
Qui grince, mal assis entre ses quatre roues,  
Et roule ses yeux verts et rouges lentement,  
Les ouvriers allant au club, tout en fumant  
Leur brûle-gueule au nez des agents de police,  
Toits qui dégouttent, murs suintants, pavé qui glisse,  
Bitume défoncé, ruisseaux comblant l’égout,  
Voilà ma route—avec le paradis au bout.”

In passing let me note how readily, for all his intense Parisianism, modernism, impressionism, Verlaine turns to allegory, that simplest, yet profoundest, of poetic moral effects. He is naturally allegorical, like Baudelaire, Hawthorne, Poe.

. . . This flat, sordid *paysage de banlieue*:—

“Vers Saint-Denis, c’est bête et sale la campagne.  
C’est pourtant là qu’un jour j’emmenai ma compagne.  
Nous étions de mauvaise humeur et querelleurs.  
Un plat soleil d’été tartinait ses rayons  
Sur la plaine séchée ainsi qu’une rôtie.  
C’était pas trop après le Siège: une partie  
Des ‘Maisons de Campagne’ gisaient à terre encor,  
D’autres se relevaient comme on hisse un décor,  
Et des obus tout neufs encastrés aux pilastres  
Portaient écrit autour: ‘Souvenir des Désastres.’”

## IV.

Of Verlaine’s sense for love in the abstract, meaning, in the concrete, woman—and as everyone knows who *quâ* critic knows anything, ’tis the nature and degree of his sense for love that give the truest measure of the poet—I shall only say that it is most delicate, most exquisite at once and most unhappily questioning and revolted. The core of animalism in even the feminine nature is apparent odiously to Verlaine’s sense. Vigny’s line, so shocking in its ferocious physiologism of denunciation:—

“La femme, enfant malade et douze fois impur. . . .”

that line, that hideous line, haunts his imagination and taints, with both the fact and the allegory it involves, all the loveliness, all the super-delicacy of his passion for—

“L’or des cheveux, l’azur des yeux, la fleur des chairs.”

The cruel faculty of the analyst is Verlaine’s: the painfully piercing glance, painful alike to him and to his victim, that gazes half-involuntarily upon the nudeness of the poor flawed stigmatised clay:—

“Tu m’as, ces pâles jours d’automne blanche, fait mal,  
A cause de tes yeux où fleurit l’animal. . . .”

Never, to Verlaine, is woman so divine as when her animal nature sinks into latency, quiescence, and may, for one moment, be lost to his perception:—

“Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse et ces mains pâles  
Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal,  
Et ces yeux, où plus rien ne reste d’animal  
Que juste assez pour dire ‘assez’ aux fureurs mâles. . . .”

Verlaine could write, and, doubtless, often think:—

“ . . . . . heure sainte  
Ou non, qu’importe à votre extase, Amour et Chair? ”—

but in moments when, true to the essential Platonism of his nature, he rises into purer regions than those haunted by a Mendès or Baudelaire, what he thinks, and writes, is the following:—

“Va, l’étreinte jalouse et le spasme obsesseur  
Ne valent pas un long baiser, même qui mente. . . .”

His disgust at the brutality of material love well expresses itself in a line of his sonnet “Dandysme”:—

“Pauvres gens que les gens! Mourir pour Célième,  
Epouser Angélique ou venir de nuit chez  
Agnès et la briser. . . .”

Carnality (never, by the way, more ruthless, more sheer, than when completely and most "respectably" legal: M. Filon, the French critic, expressed acutely an undeniable truth when he wrote of "la sensualité légale, cette chose essentiellement anglaise"), carnality, *per se*, Verlaine abhors. To him it seems a loathsome thing, the slimy slug upon the plant:—

"Tel un pur, un sublime amour,  
Qu'ôt étreint la lueur infâme. . . ."

But if carnality pure and simple repels him, depravity in its more refined forms exercises a quite morbid attraction for his spirit. Take as proof his *Fêtes Galantes*. Redolent it is, of all possible loveliness of sin; all imaginable grace, charm, force, terror, diabolism, delight, of the thoroughly corrupt. A tiny wreath, woven with delicate, delicious art, of the rarest, subtlest, sweetest flowers of passion's aberrance and unhealth, insinuating—so strongly!—on the sense the languor, torpor, from which there may be no awaking. The fullest essence is herein, of that dangerous eighteenth-century compound of sensuality the most determined, refinement the most delightful, intelligence the most vivid, elegance the most extreme. Twenty little pieces, as cunningly coquettish, suggestive as scientifically, of all by which depravity may be, has been, rendered stronger than love and than death, as one fancies the bewitching patches were that showed black upon the pulp-whiteness of the Dubarry's nude skin. Twenty little pieces of verse, steeped to the lips in the French  *dix-huitième siècle's* perfumed and gilded putrescence. Yet, by a touch here and there, as of an organ note now and again among the "pleasing" of flutes and lutes, is made to be felt the poet's own occasional interior thrill at the thought of the essential horror underlying this "gallantry" and these "fêtes." For example, the two typical young lovers, in their satins and their ruffles, and their courtly high-heeled shoes, escorting through the decorous old park two glittering belles, all smiles, all furbelows, all freshness. . . . The youths eye the daintiness of the ladies' attire, and note furtively the provoking, distracting, half-display, half-concealment of a score of secret charms. Each little incident of the scene and hour—the leafy contact of an overhanging bough, the hum of some presumptuous insect—provides a pretext for *rapprochements* which the young men seem to dread, while the belles more boldly desire:—

"Parfois aussi le dard d'un insecte jaloux  
Inquiétait le col des belles sous les branches,  
Et c'était des éclairs soudains de nuques blanches,  
Et ce régal combait nos jeunes yeux de fous.

"Le soir tombait, un soir équivoque d'automne:  
Les belles, se penchant rétrocées à nos bras,  
Dirent alors des mots si spécieux, tout bas,  
Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne!"

Oh, how admirably is Verlaine's own attitude of soul there expressed, as, whilst succumbing to the "*specious* words, low-whispered" of all which is most delicate among the lusts of the flesh, he yet feels that wild strange thrill of doubt and terror and amaze,—the throbbing of the breast of the bird, when it finds its foot glued irrecoverably to the twig! . . .

" . . . l'ardée et peinte comme au temps des bergeries,  
Frêle parmi les nœuds énormes de rubans,  
Elle passe, sous les ramures assombries,  
Dans l'allée où verdit la mousse des vieux bancs  
Avec mille façons et mille afféteries  
Qu'on garde d'ordinaire aux perruches chéries.  
Sa longue robe à queue est bleue, et l'éventail  
Qu'elle froisse en ses doigts fluets aux larges bagues  
S'égaie en des sujets érotiques, si vagues  
Qu'elle sourit, tout en rêvant à maint détail.  
—Blonde en somme. Le nez mignon avec la bouche  
Incarnadine, grasse, et divino d'orgueil  
Inconscient.—D'ailleurs plus fine que la mouche  
Qui ravive l'éclat un peu niais de l'œil."

That precious little sonnet, a  *Watteau retouché à l'eau-forte*, comprises the whole eighteenth-century Frenchwoman, most efficient of stalking-horses behind which the Devil has gone hunting for souls. Comment upon the art of the thing would be useless. No one susceptible of perceiving its dainty *pimant* grace has need that the same should be expounded, whilst to others, what amount of explanation could convey the entire effect?

See how, in a further piece, the poet curiously, keenly, but not unkindly, stands contemplating Colombine—little head, no heart, appetite, perhaps, but no real passion, and in a word, all small, sure, shrewd, cold, hard, *self-love*—as she leads her pack of danglers a merry dance:—

"Léandre le sot,  
Pierrot qui d'un saut  
De puce  
Franchit le buisson,  
Cassandre sous son  
Capuce,  
Arlequin aussi. . . ."

Touched to seriousness for one moment, the moralist inquires of the mute fatefulness of the stars:—

"Fatidique cours des astres  
Oh! dis-moi vers quels  
Mornes ou cruels  
Désastres

"L'implacable enfant  
Preste et relevant  
Ses jupes,

La rose au chapeau,  
Conduit son troupeau  
De dupes ? ”

Yet even Colombine—even this typical coquette—is not without the faintest shadow of a flutter, sometimes, in the place where might be situated her heart :—

“ Colombine rêve, surprise,  
De sentir un cœur dans la brise  
Et d’entendre en son cœur des voix.”

## V.

. . . And so with Paul Verlaine, the fatal process went on. . . . From temptation to excess, excess to satiety, satiety to disgust; all, all in love, all love and every kind of love, is hollow utterly, utterly false :—

“ Toutes les amours de la terre  
Laissent au cœur du délétere  
Et de l’alfreusement amer ;  
Fraternelles et conjugales,  
Paternelles et filiales,  
Civiques et nationales,  
Les charnelles, les idéales,  
Toutes ont la guêpe et le ver. . . ”

From disgust finally to remorse :—

“ J’aurais dû passer dans l’odeur et le frais  
De l’arbre et du fruit sans m’arrêter jamais ;  
Le ciel m’a puni . . . J’aurais dû, j’aurais dû ! ”

Till at last the poet turns him away from the vanities of earthly passion, and seeks a refuge in the pity, and the pardon, and the tenderness ineffable, that some declare and perhaps believe and feel to be existent within the depths of a heaven, to others a blank and void.

“ . . . Il faut n’être pas dupe en ce farceur de monde  
Où le bonheur n’a rien d’exquis et d’alléchant,  
S’il n’y frétille un peu de pervers et d’immonde,  
Et pour n’être pas dupe il faut être méchant.”

Yes, but :—

“ Bien de n’être pas dupe dans ce monde d’une heure.  
Mais pour ne l’être pas durant l’éternité,  
Ce qu’il faut à tout prix qui règne et qui demeure,  
Ce n’est pas la méchanceté, c’est la bonté.”

Indeed, throughout the thickest of his impiety Verlaine had not been without some latent sense of grace :—

“ Mais sans doute, et moi j’inclinerais fort à le croire,  
Dans quelque coin bien discret et sûr de ce cœur même  
Il avait gardé comme qui dirait la mémoire  
D’avoir été ces petits enfants que Jésus aime. . . ”

and the day came, when under circumstances of great disgrace, affliction, and despair, he seems actually to have been penetrated with the “peace that passeth all understanding” (as indeed, anyone not personally possessing it must confess that it does). But such is the strange complexity of the artist nature, that to it the finest, noblest, highest emotions, as well as, perchance, the darkest and worst, must be always themes, for emotional and artistic treatment and expression, rather than direct, absolute, genuine sentiments in themselves. The artist has but one genuine sentiment, and that is : Art. A doubt therefore subsists as to the completeness of this conversion of Verlaine’s. And such doubt becomes, to a mind possessed of any critical acumen, an almost certainty when one finds Verlaine claiming the right to produce “*Parallèlement*,” as he calls it, by way of title to one of his more recent volumes, verse devoted to emotions of religion on the one hand, and emotions of the senses on the other : a striking instance of the wish poetically to serve those two irreconcilable masters, God and the World. Thus art, plainly, is stronger in Verlaine’s breast than faith.

He has lived for his art alone, and by reason of his art he must die; because, full of art, he is void of many things else. Void of broad general humanity, void of the deeper world-wisdom, void of the eloquence most penetrating and profound that coming from the heart goes to the heart not of the time merely but of all time, and speaks, a lofty Voice, along the ages.

No great poet, no world-poet, is Paul Verlaine. But the exquisite, delightful, diseased, lacerated poet of a morbid *élite*. In the main, however, a touching figure, with the intensity of his emotion, elevation of his impulse, and fatal weakness of his will. Poor knight-errant, bruised and broken, with that headpiece of “singing gold,” that flaming Nessus’s “tunic” of grief and sin, and the red blood from his breast raining down upon the “azure ground” of his illusions :—

“ J’étais né pour plaire à toute âme un peu fière.

J’étais, je suis né pour plaire aux nobles âmes,  
Pour les consoler un peu d’un monde impur,  
Cimier d’or chanteur et tunique de flammes,  
Moi, le Chevalier qui saigne sur azur ! ”

Yes, poor wandering, worsted Knight, wandering and worsted and woeful and utterly downcast, but not, when all is said and done, not ignoble, and so painstricken, and so pitiable !

EDWARD DEWILLE.