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REVIEW.

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good in this practically sessile colonel miles away? Does he heliograph instructions when the sun shines and subside when the weather is dull? Or do they use the telephone system, such as it is, of this unhappy land? Or he is really no good at all, and this metaphorical connection between him and these cyclists, just folly and no more?

*Apropos* of that great-coat question, Lt.-Col. Balfour lapses still further and describes an operation conducted by "battalions" of cyclists. But under the system he is defending, battalions of cyclists are just what is impossible. My case was that this system gives us no organised cyclist force at all, but a miscellany of odd companies differing in uniform and equipment, under different miles-away Colonels, and practically incapable of efficient co-operation. Now Lt.-Col. Balfour descends upon my statement that these cyclists are inseparately linked to infantry battalions with particular vigour. He describes that statement as a "plum." "I have," he says, "hopelessly confused peace administration with war organisation," and he makes it clear that this national danger of a War Office, should war break upon us and a cyclist force be needed, proposes to draw the men "*from the various companies*" of the battalions to which they belong—every company in the battalion may be depleted—and to despatch these shreds and patches of the British Army against a conceivably efficient enemy as a cyclist force. This scheme to commit manslaughter might be set working to-morrow. And here, at any rate, I will plead guilty to the charge of "ignorance." Lt.-Col. Balfour rails against me. I did not know. I did not guess the depths to which the War Office could sink. I jumped to the conclusion that the cyclist company was at least a separate company, because there are a hundred reasons why it should be so, and none why it shall not. But you see!

Finally, to show "what results our early efforts to train cyclists can produce," Lt.-Col. Balfour positively prints a letter in which the extreme misery of a cyclist outpost cut off from its kit by that "carted baggage" folly, is very vividly described. Although I knew him to be the author of this drill-book by the time I reached this passage, I could scarcely believe my eyes. But there the thing stands in his paper. And this little tale of quite avoidable hardship is just one small example, a hand specimen as it were, of the realities this drill-book may bring about.

By virtue of this harmless-looking little pink pamphlet, unless some grievous outrage to Lt.-Col. Balfour's pride of authorship is speedily done, I am convinced that men of my blood and class will be brought to intolerable hardships, to shame and surrender, to useless struggles, and wounds and death.

Faithfully yours,  
H. G. WELLS.

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No. CCCCXII. NEW SERIES.—APRIL 1, 1901.

WILL GERMANY FAIL?

WHAT was the political meaning of the Kaiser's visit we have now upon authority. Replying to Dr. Schaedler's interpellation in the Reichstag, Count Bülow assured his hearers that it meant nothing. If England chose to throw herself at Germany's head—under an entire delusion as it follows—in consequence of the Kaiser's personal chivalry, it was, of course, not the interest of Germany to repulse her, though he inferred, by every adroit turn of the phrases in which he excels, that there was no positive necessity to reciprocate the emotions we insist upon importing into business. Here he evoked the strange but unflinching accompaniment of the Chancellor's speeches upon Anglo-German relations—unfriendly laughter in the Reichstag. What should we, or Germany, think if all our references to one of our neighbours, in the House of Commons, were habitually received with an equally uncomplimentary levity, and were intended to provoke it? Count Bülow's speeches ought not to be read in translations, which cannot do justice to their peculiar vein of jocose irony where England is concerned. Their idiomatic colour is even less flattering to this country than their acidulated neutrality in direct statement. They carry more meaning to his German hearers than meets the British mind, and what the Reichstag understands them to expound are the merits of pursuing a profitable policy towards this country in a thinly veiled spirit of benevolent contempt. The essential humour of this attitude is always an effective suggestion in the German Parliament, and never fails, apparently, to draw the lightning as well as the laughter. Pungent platitude is, no doubt, the only form of wit in which statesmen, dealing with the irritable susceptibilities of nations, dare indulge; but it is possible that the German Chancellor's favourite use, even of this slight luxury, might be economised with some advantage. The attitude in which he most pleases the anti-English gallery is far from irksome to him personally, but would be forced upon him, even if he disliked it, by the necessity of managing his audience. To us the facetious patronage of Count Bülow is a form of

But there are many holes in the official armour that could easily be repaired. There should be a greater community of interest between the Navy and those charged with its administration; a willingness to receive suggestions respectfully submitted; a desire to give the taxpayers every possible encouragement to take an interest in the Fleet, upon which their daily bread depends; and a determination to be practical, businesslike, and even enterprising in the interest of the greatest service in the world. None who are aware of the immense volume of work which devolves on the officials at Whitehall would desire to indulge in mere carping criticism, but it should be impossible for such typical errors as have been mentioned to sully their record. It may be that there is not much fault inherent in the system, if it were not hampered with unnecessary red tape, hindered in its working, often carelessly controlled, and its safety valve screwed down. Those who know most of the size of the Navy, and the responsibilities that devolve upon the heads of the departments, do not ask perfection, but there is a wide margin between perfection and the present administration, and the spirit by which it is too frequently animated. It cannot be seriously argued that in any large commercial house, whether it be concerned with ocean liners, insurance, or shipbuilding, all of which activities are analogous to the work of the Admiralty, such blunders as can be laid at the door of the naval authorities would be tolerated. If those who hold the levers of the machine would only let it have a fair chance of working at its best and smoothly, it would probably be found that the mistakes and inequalities are mere excrescences.

A new First Lord of the Admiralty is now controlling the administration, and the Navy Estimates and Mr. Arnold Forster's speech in explanation of them give promise of better days. There are signs of the practical business mind applying itself to the task of perfecting the machinery which can make or mar the Fleet. Is it too much to hope that Earl Selborne will bend himself to the task of reform and give the nation an administration that will work efficiently and accurately without the public panics of the past, and that the First Sea Lord will be permitted every year to set forth for the assurance of those who pay for the Fleet his views on its strength, and the adequacy of the provision being made for the maintenance of that supremacy which is an epitome of our Imperial history, and the only safeguard on which, in the first and last resort, we can depend in the future?

EXCUBITOR.

## FRENCH POETRY OF TO-DAY.<sup>1</sup>

THAT I am to-day the guest of your venerable University is a privilege I owe to the interest taken by you in the unceasing and many-sided life of Letters. Familiar with its growth in your country, you would fain mark its development among your neighbours, and it is your custom to turn for information to the latest of our contemporary writers. It gives me great pleasure that your choice should have fallen upon me; yet greater pleasure that you have allowed me to speak to you of those recent and daring manifestations of French poetry, to which I have devoted all the effort of my life. When Stéphane Mallarmé, from this very chair, held your attention rivetted to his sybilline utterances, he claimed to be the bearer of great tidings. Violent hands had been laid by certain poets in France upon the holy ark of traditional verse, and this circumstance, simple as it was, filled the Master's mind with sympathetic emotion.

I will attempt to show you to-day how, why, and to what extent the laws of verse have been modified, and also what new modes of composition have accompanied the new forms of prosody.

I will speak to you, therefore, of the youngest of our poets; but that you may the better realise the full scope of their work, I will briefly review that of their forerunners. Some of these, like Lamartine, Vigny, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, expanded or turned over the old poetical matter, the stock of thoughts and ideas which give birth to poetry; others, such as Hugo and Verlaine, were concerned rather with the outward shape of French verse, the garment of syllables and rhymes donned by poetical conceptions to strut in the gardens of human memory. All contributed to make the contemporary transformations first possible and then unavoidable.

During the last hundred years, French poetry has effected a new crystallisation of ideas, governed by liberty and truth even to its lowest stratifications. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had witnessed a very different crystallisation, based upon rigid rules and stiff formalism. By the genius of Racine this suddenly attained its triumphant maturity. But after Racine, Crébillon and Voltaire began to disintegrate it, the tragic poets of the Empire brought about its decomposition, which is even now completed in the still-born productions of a few obscure schoolmasters.

(1) A lecture delivered at the Taylorian Institute, Oxford, March, 1901, by M. Emile Verhaeren.

Already the puny poets of the eighteenth century had deprived it of all life and activity. Dorat, Gentil-Bernard, Chaulieu are little better than mechanical rhymsters. Of love, that greatest of human passions, they make a pretty knick-knack, a pretext for insipid twaddle and childish poutings, a sort of bewigged and bepowdered sprite, ever flitting from a sofa to an alcove. Lyrics give way to artifice, and M. le Chevalier de Parny is not the man to restore them. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and Lefranc de Pompignan hold fast the full power of the great biblical conceptions in the claws of their frigid stanzas; but if now and again they adequately voice the lamentations of the prophets, they are yet very careful to make a nice clean bed of Job's unsavoury dunghill!

Ducis, when he brings over Shakespeare to France, mutilates and muzzles him; Voltaire domesticates Othello, that fierce king of the desert; Florian and Andrieux spin out their trite and insipid fables; Berquin, with his pink and blue ribbons, fastens the hymeneal bonds between Estelle and Némorin. Prose, indeed, had shaken itself free; it had given us Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques, Diderot, Beaumarchais. But poetry became daily more anæmic; it was painted in watery hues. Originality of thought was superseded by commonplace, beauty of form was but a mechanical trick.

The crystallisation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had thus exhausted its original activity. Poets had sunk to the level of mere imitators, "arranging" the work of others; starch and conventionality had smothered every noble impulse, every artless extravagance: the end was at hand.

Suddenly Lamartine appears, heralded by Esménard and Chenedollé. He renews the matter, while Hugo, foreshadowed by Chénier, revolutionises the forms of prosody. Thus the new crystallisation of the nineteenth century set in, in the name of liberty and truth, diversely interpreted, indeed, but always proclaimed in the manifestoes of the successive schools.

The names of Lamartine and Hugo cast a halo upon French literature at the beginning of our age. Like a god, the former raises poetry from the grave by the boundless power of supreme inspiration. He is himself the sole burden of his song, but together with himself he celebrates the whole world; he is one of those men whose nature is a very abstract of humanity, and who reveal it to us as they tell their own tale. His doubts and dreams, his loves, hopes and fits of melancholy, his memories and fond delusions, all belong to eternal man as much as to himself. He reasons but little, he combines still less, he writes as he breathes. He is a prodigious creator, scarce heeding the miracles he performs; his sensations, sentiments and ideas appear to be simply the upstartings or subsidings of his soul. Before him French poetry was a stranger to melancholy, to religious ecstasy, to

passionate love, of which Nature herself is both a witness and co-partner.

Everything seems to obey his call: metre, rhyme and verse. He sometimes violates the strictest rules; he cares but little for spelling. He knows not effort, pains or application. Had he not led such a noble life he might have been termed a great voluptuary. The springs of his spontaneity are never rusty. He remains a child to the hour of his death.

Hugo, on the other hand, great as is the number of ideas he skims over, is above all things a formal poet. In his "Contemplations" he arraigns the whole train of his bold innovations. He "crowns the old vocabulary with the Phrygian cap"; he "lets loose in the palace of the French language—a manner of royal Versailles—a riotous mob of plebeian words"; he "pulls down the Bastille of rhyme"; he "treads under foot the coils of periphrasis"; he "takes in hand that great greenhorn of an Alexandrine," and sharpens him up by displacing the cæsura at will, and allowing the sense to "overflow" into the next line (*enjambement*). Moreover—a vital point—he is the first to proclaim that the word is endowed with a living soul. He terms the word "a living entity." All modern schools, and the latest more than any, have accepted this truth as an axiom.

By the mere assemblage of its syllables, quite apart from its meaning or future application, the word holds within the curves and angles of its component letters a mysterious life, which it breathes into the sentence. Every syllable becomes a note of music. There is a minor and a major key. Line and verse become a kind of verbal orchestration. They are animated by a life of their own, which mingles with the lives of the thoughts and sentiments, and imbues them with new vigour. Sometimes, indeed, the mere aspect of a sentence suggests an outline or a mass of light or shade, which imprints itself upon the whole, so that all that is seen or heard, even before man has embodied his thought in it, assumes to the eye that reads, the ear that listens, the tongue that articulates, a special artistic significance.

There are words as dead and dull as the tomb, others as sharp and speedy as arrows, words that are in themselves pageants and cavalcades, words bare and unpretending, words as massive as heavy weights. Lines that are made up of such words do not only express objects, but make you see and hear them. They bring them home to our senses as well as to our minds. They cause them to live, as man himself lives, with a body and a soul. I would ask you to note this mysterious power of words in two passages I have chosen, the first from Hugo, the second from Verlaine.

In the former observe the restful effect produced by an almost monotonous repetition of certain long and sonorous words. You seem

to hear the utterances of a hypnotiser, given out in slow modulations. Not a word that jars, not a violent motion. The lines extend evenly one by the side of the other, like bodies laid out on couches or in tombs.

“ Paix à l'ombre ! Dormez, dormez, dormez, dormez,  
 Etres, groupes confus lentement transformés,  
 Dormez les champs, dormez les fleurs, dormez les tombes !  
 Toits, murs, seuils des maisons, pierres des catacombes,  
 Feuilles au fond des bois, plumes au fond des nids,  
 Dormez, dormez, brins d'herbe et dormez infinis !  
 Calmez-vous, forêts, chênes, érable, frêne, yeuse.  
 Silence sur la grande horreur religieuse,  
 Sur l'Océan qui lutte et qui ronge son mors,  
 Et sur l'apaisement insondable des morts !  
 Paix à l'obscurité muette et redoutée,  
 Paix au doute effrayant, à l'immense ombre athée,  
 A toi, nature, cercle et centre, âme et milieu,  
 Fourmillement de tout, solitude de Dieu !  
 O générations aux brumeuses haleines,  
 Reposez-vous ! pas noirs qui marchez dans les plaines.  
 Dormez, vous qui saignez, dormez vous qui pleurez.  
 Douleurs ! douleurs ! douleurs ! fermez vos yeux sacrés . . . ”

And just as the slow, appeasing measures of this lament illustrate the funereal impression of long-drawn-out words, so you will note in the following *fête galante*, by Verlaine, the lively and, if I may be allowed the expression, the roguish airs and graces of the phrase. The words trip along with a merry lilt. The quick, sprightly measure is adapted to the sense. You can see and hear the whole scene before you have grasped its meaning. It is like a shadow on a screen, quick to come, and quick to go.

“ Léandre, le sot  
 Pierrot qui d'un saut  
 De puce  
 Franchit le buisson,  
 Cassandre, sous son  
 Capuce,

“ Arlequin aussi,  
 Cet aigrefin si  
 Fantastique,  
 Aux costumes fous,  
 Ses yeux luisants sous  
 Son masque.

“ Do, mi, sol, mi, la !  
 Tout ce monde va,  
 Rit et chante,  
 Et danse devant  
 Une belle enfant  
 Méchante,

“ Dont les yeux pervers  
 Comme les yeux verts  
 Des chattes  
 Gardent ses appas  
 Et disent ‘ A bas  
 Les pattes.’ ”

Yes, in such poems words live indeed, as Hugo asserts. They have a magnetic influence even upon the minds of those who are not conversant with the French language. They are understood—the latter like the twanging of a guitar or the clatter of castanets—

the former like the pealing of bells or the booming of guns about the mournful cities of the dead.

Like Lamartine, Hugo is influenced by the spirit of his age. Every novelty is made a subject for poems, and sometimes for lyrical vaticination. He introduces into his dramas the grotesque, that bugbear of the classical school. There is in his eyes no hard and fast distinction between fair and foul. The artist's own interpretation, his vision, his power, alone determine the domain of the æsthetic. Art claims the entire province of Nature—a truly wide and magnificent programme, doing away for ever with the narrow and despotic limitations hitherto assigned to poetry.

As fondly enamoured of fraternity as Lamartine was of liberty, Hugo asserts himself as a social, and at times a socialistic, poet. Fraternity, as he contemplates it, is often but an empty dream. Nothing is more distasteful to him than to have strife and war forced upon his notice. Whenever he meets with these he rails at them. He does not perceive that strife and solidarity, far from being antagonistic in their essence, are both inseparable from the great human struggle. It is impossible, save among beings deprived of reason, to conceive any act which is not at once selfish and altruistic. All manner of co-operation has, after all, but one object—conquest.

Lamartine and Hugo were both optimists. They extended to the right, in the direction of light, the boundaries of the land of letters. Vigny removed its landmarks to the left, in the direction of darkness. Like his hero on Mount Sinai, he stands forth “a mighty recluse” in his “ivory tower.” His book, *Les Destinées*, is replete with the cold despair, the solemn bitterness, the precise and harsh conceptions of pessimism. A strictly philosophical poet is born into the world.

Towering high above Leopardi, that frail and sorrowful dreamer, Vigny, makes of the irremediable nothingness of things the very groundwork of his pride. He probes and explores it to its lowest depths; he listens unmoved to the call of the deep. His mind is the mind of a stoic. It confessedly hopes for nothing, though still, through inborn pride, fulfilling its appointed task.

“ Gémir, pleurer, prier est également lâche,  
 Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche  
 Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler ;  
 Puis après, comme moi, souffre et meurs, sans parler.”

And in another passage :—

“ Le vrai Dieu, le Dieu fort est le Dieu des idées.”

Imprisoned in this hard and fast circle, in this frigid conception

life, his mind cannot, however, entirely shut out the restless and noisy world about it. But it is especially attracted by its sadder and more chastened aspects. It will bend over the more brutal forms of human activity, over the storm-tossed lives of seamen, the bustle of great liners, and the tempests of iron and smoke of the monstrous railway-engines.

More even than De Vigny, Charles Baudelaire, the author of *Fleurs du Mal*, presents to our view the pomp and circumstance of labour. Harbours, worksheds, and factories blot out the horizon of his broadest poems with their masts and smoky mists. It was thought that the Muses were too frail to breathe such heavy atmosphere. On the contrary, they get used to it, and their lungs remain as strong as ever. Not that these tall, feverish apparitions are the special characteristic of the art of Baudelaire. Its scope is rather spiritual and moral. He evokes and studies great vices, violent passions, just as the art of Lamartine extolled the master virtues. He judges them in the name of order, wielding the sword of the archangel, a thyrsis of crossed thunderbolts. He explores the depths of human depravity. He follows the drunkard, the murderer, the courtesan, the backslider, in the winding streets of great cities; he pities, he condemns, he scourges them. He fingers the cavities and protuberances of the great satanic mask with which civilisation covers the hoary face of humanity; he projects upon it such a flood of light as would have appalled great Balzac himself. Strange sensations, subtle investigations, new and thrilling terrors. If he does not alter the form of verse, he at least points the way to a new modality of lyrical composition.

He calls attention to the latent analogies which prolong the ideal ramifications of a thought, as an echo repeats and prolongs the voice. He ascribes to the symbol its natural powers of evocation; he shows the interpenetration of the different senses, their action and reaction the one upon the other, their blood relationship. Henceforward, functions hitherto restricted to the senses of touch and sight can legitimately be attributed to the sense of hearing.

A well-known sonnet of his expounds in its fourteen lines these valuable innovations. It is called "Correspondances."

"La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles.  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

"Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

"Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme le hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
Et d'autres corrompus, riches et triomphants,

"Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens."

Baudelaire's *Correspondances* enunciates a theory of ideas; Verlaine's *Art Poétique* a theory of form. Hugo had decorticated the alexandrine; upon this he concentrated his effort; Verlaine takes in hand the whole gamut of verse, more especially measures of seven or nine syllables. He infuses into them a new charm, an unexpected fluidity. Their want of symmetry delights him, their lack of balance takes somewhat from their heaviness. A new simplicity pervades his poems, aglow with fresh youth. The lines become light and, as it were, volatile. The Romanticists were painters, the Parnassians sculptors, Verlaine dubs himself a musician. He demands the interpenetration of the arts as Baudelaire demanded the interpenetration of the senses. The one theory leads to the other.

In the following quatrains we find condensed the new reform of prosody—

"De la musique avant toute chose  
Et pour cela, préfère l'impair  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

"Il faut aussi que tu n'aïles point  
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise :  
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise  
Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint.

"C'est des beaux yeux derrière des voiles,  
C'est le grand jour tremblant de midi,  
C'est, par un ciel d'automne attiédi,  
Le bleu fouilli des claires étoiles!

"Prends l'éloquence, et tords-lui le cou !  
Tu feras bien, en train d'énergie,  
De rendre un peu la Rime assagie ;  
Si l'on n'y veille, elle ira jusqu'où ?

"O qui dira les torts de la Rime !  
Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou  
Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou  
Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime ?

"De la musique encor et toujours !  
Que ton vers soit la chose envolée  
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée  
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours.

"Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure  
Eparse au vent crispé du matin  
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym—  
Et tout le reste est littérature."

Rhyme, as you see, is boldly impugned. Sainte-Beuve and Banville looked upon it as the sole harmony of French verse.

"Rime, qui donne leurs sons  
Aux chansons,  
Rime, l'unique harmonie  
Du vers, qui, sans tes accents  
Frémissements  
Serait muet au génie."

(Joseph Delorme).

Verlaine on the contrary evolves harmony from its every part, from the soft succession of its syllables, from the ever-varying measure, from the willowy suppleness of the whole. He admits blank verse, he is content with alliteration. Hugo, though not a slave, was yet a servant to that quality of rhyme called "rich," and depending upon the consonants as well as the vowel-sound of the last syllable. The exquisite, subtle, artless songster of the *Romances sans Paroles* and the *Fêtes Galantes* scorns such uncouth and meretricious ornament. He goes on careless of the gaudy wealth of rhyme, free from artifice or complexity. He is the simple shepherd who eyes the star, not the pompous Magian King, whose heavy metallic stanzas are enclosed in caskets heavy and metallic. And his journey towards the star, if not dazzling in its brightness, at least brings him in the end to a genuflexion of unsurpassed depth and sincerity.

All these reforms, from Hugo to Verlaine, bore after all upon side issues only. They led to modifications rather than transformations; but they cleared the way, by their slow but ceaseless advance, for a deeper and more thorough reform. This was accomplished by the later modern schools, writers of blank verse, symbolists and decadents. Never were so many different names given to artistic groups. But what matter the labels, they will all be carried away when the work of these innovators has melted into the general growth of literature. Their action was a collective one, as if poetry already shared in the new mode of human activity, which depends not upon the single effort of one man, leading others, but upon the co-operation of many such agents all working towards a common end.

I will quote a few names: Rimbaud, Laforgue, Kahn, Moréas, Maeterlinck, Regnier, Vielé-Griffin, Stuart Merrill, André Gide, Rotté, Francis Jammes, Henry Bataille, Charles Van Lerberghe, Max Elskamp, André Fontainas, Albert Mockel, Henri Ghéon. Each

different from the rest—some with an individuality the more clearly defined according as their talent expands and asserts itself, they all concur in guiding in the direction of a wider freedom of form and a more truthful synthesis of matter, that crystallisation begun at the dawn of the nineteenth century, and of which their own work is the ultimate consequence.

The present school of critics explain and justify in the name of logic, the convulsion that has shaken prosody to its very depths. Granted that they have reason on their side, they yet have not sufficient reason.

They ask: Why prohibit a hiatus at the meeting of two words and allow it in the body of a word? Why prescribe *il y a* (a verb) and tolerate *Illion* (a substantive)? Why insist upon the rhyme being full, solemn and "rich," in elevated subjects, when such rhyme almost invariably leads to a punning jingle? Why talk of caesura when our language contains words of seven or eight syllables? Why permit the *enjambement* and reject with scorn lines of thirteen and fourteen feet? And any but a purblind critic arrives at the conclusion that the poets of to-day are doing rational work.

Granted, but in matters of art, strict logic is not a decisive argument; poetry wells up like a boiling spring from the depths of human nature, and like love and fancy it refuses to obey the mandates of pure reason. Whether or not the labour of poets is logical is quite a secondary matter. The truth is this: from its earliest beginnings, French verse has been based upon measure; to-day it is sought to found it upon rhythm. It is not the want of logic of the older prosody that is impugned; it is the principle on which it rested.

Rhythm, measure! Assuredly every measure is possessed with rhythm, every rhythm with measure. The distinction between these two almost identical terms is nevertheless a notable one. The form of the older French poetry, based upon measure, appears like a mould, preordained and sharply defined, into which a whole train of thought is compressed, without ever widening, restricting or doing away with a single division. The form is pre-existent; it therefore determines the length, progress and subdivision of the lyrical movements. Rhythm may also be termed a form, but a flexible form of infinite variety, literally embodying the thought, for what is it but that thought which, in finding expression, fashions out its own mould? There is not pre-existence but co-existence between the thought and its materialisation. The modern poets reject measure, the superimposed form, and adopt rhythm, the direct form. The sentiments evolved in a poem thus appear in all their original spontaneity.

But, it may be asked, not without a pardonable diffidence, is it then possible to seize in so subtle and direct a manner every thought that

springs into existence? For the real poet this presents no difficulty. Alone he possesses the secret gift, at the very instant a thought takes birth in his brain, of at once conceiving it as a living entity with its inherent static or dynamic action. Now this action is rhythm itself. The true poet cannot, therefore, but be a perfect master of rhythm. All great masters were so. In spite of the guiding-strings and shackles of conventional, sterile and useless metre, Racine, Lafontaine, Lamartine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine cannot but obey the movement of the idea. Remember the lamentations of *Phidre* and her lassitude; the conclusion of the fable *Le Chêne et le Roseau*; *Isolement* in the *Méditations*; the *Djinn*s in the *Orientales*; *Lesbos* in the *Fleurs du Mal*; *Languueur* in *Jadis et Naguère*.

A poem therefore appears as the notation of movements of the mind, and no longer as a development conforming to such and such a rule of prosody. A canvas to work upon is no longer needed; the knots of the work are themselves its chain and woof. Canalisation is superseded, the river is left to hollow out its own bed. Such a theory may conceivably frighten second-rate poets. Granted. In art all is either easy or impossible.

The earliest poets were free singers; they evolved from themselves the form of their emotions. They preceded all manner of criticism or laying down of laws. It is to them, to their source of youth and light, that we should return. If we examine how it came about that in those far-off times rhythm was made subservient to measure, the domination of the latter can only appear as that of an usurper.

It was the pedagogues who brought it about. When certain ancient rhapsodists, either by habit or sterility, congealed their songs into set forms, the scribes stepped in and decreed that poets yet unborn should be subjected to this restriction, thus withering up the future in the name of the past. The art of the poet is spontaneous and intensive, that of the critic rational and restrictive; there can be no agreement between them, there must be war to the knife. The critic has domesticated the lofty plant of pristine and savage beauty; he has trimmed, pruned, stunted and dwarfed it. He has grown it in conservatories, cultivated it in nurseries. He has exhibited it neat, symmetrical and glossy. Now it was meant to live in the open, affronting wind and rain, storms, mists, and sunshine; it would have thriven in the rich virgin soil, it would have shot up and spread, dropping its seed into the vast lap of Nature, to be blown away further and further to the far end of the horizon.

The story of the primitive poets is a salutary lesson to us. From the moment the critics appear, a new literary caste is formed, grounded upon irony and contradiction. If only they were content to exercise a certain supervision, if their labour were restricted to making observations and experiments. A Taine instructs but does not

dogmatise. The rest appraise, pronounce, condemn. They do not understand that a poet is nothing if not a creator, that is a giver of life. And it is with dead matter, with former life now stark and cold, that they bind and confine it in the narrow coffin of their judgments.

In the seventeenth century every bold emancipation was impossible; in the nineteenth, thanks to the liberating efforts of Lamartine, Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, rebellion rears its head and deliverance is at hand. Modern prosody has thus achieved liberty; modern inspiration, untrammelled truth. At the time it set out for this conquest, realism reigned supreme. From the Parnassian group a few poets had become severed, chief of whom was François Coppée. He had wandered off to meet the novelists in the by-ways of minute and direct observation. "*Le Petit Epicier de Montrouge*" was the model of that fireside poetry which he made so popular.

The Parnassians were archaeologists, historians and scientists. Exotic subjects attracted them, they revelled in the Past. They also sought after truth, but after truth as it is to be found in books. They revived old civilisations and old legends, as taught by exegesis and science. They thus reflected one of the great conquests of their age, the science of ruins. They unconsciously displayed certain affinities with the Naturalists whom they combated. Both belonged to the *documentary* school, the one exploring ages that are dead, the other the living age, and Gustave Flaubert might be said to belong to either, according as he wrote *Hérodias* or *l'Education Sentimentale*.

It was to this love of precise, clear, and wholly experimental truth, to this truth to material fact, that the building up of synthetic truth was opposed by the new school. They admit the dogma triumphantly proclaimed in philosophy by Kant and Schopenhauer: Truth cannot be found in material objects, it exists only in the idea. Though reflected to infinity in the sensible universe, the categories of our understanding—subjective forms—may perceive, but cannot penetrate it. The world is but a conjunction of appearances or symbols.

The initiator of this new literary creed, of this new mode of composition, was Stéphane Mallarmé. His verses are like the luminous semi-transparent veils of some great Isis—the underlying thought of each poem. These veils, upon which every part of the goddess's body imprints its warmth and motion, are but the exteriorisation of her beauty, and it is through them that it must be sought. The Parnassians showed, described and related. They amplified to a moderate extent. They were Romanticists grown cold and formal.

Stéphane Mallarmé does not design, he evokes. Picking out from among the theories of Baudelaire those relating to analogy and



relation, he assembles and displays them in successive gradations; he evolves from them sufficient light to at last reveal the object. Further, as this process creates round each single thought a succession of different aspects, and as each of these may have its own peculiar, if superficial, significance, it results that the meaning of the poem is doubled or trebled. There is the shell and the kernel: the husk and the fruit. The tower no longer stands out rude and sharply defined in the blinding light of noon; it looms forth slowly from out the misty atmosphere, dimly felt before it is seen. And when at last it stands revealed, it rises with the more solemn majesty.

To realise the beauty of a poem by Mallarmé is a conquest of the mind. You are rebutted, you persevere, you go astray. When you reach the goal, you can never forget. All who have listened to his wondrous teaching, have imbibed something of his doctrine. All, in varying degrees, have felt the seduction of his discourse. The influence of his new method of lyrical composition is felt in the *Chansons d'Amants*, by Gustave Kahn; in the *Aréthuse*, by Henry de Régnier; in the *Cantilènes*, by Moréas; in the *Cherouchée*, by Vielé-Griffin. No doubt symbolism always existed in literature, and it was not left to any of us moderns to discover it. But Stéphane Mallarmé marked it with a new and distinctive seal. Others used symbols unconsciously; he did so methodically, with the full knowledge of what he was doing. The most laboured and perfect models are enmeshed in his poems.

“ Quelle soie aux baumes du temps  
Où la chimère s'éténue  
Vaut la torve et massive nue  
Que, hors de ton miroir, tu tends !

“ Les trous des drapeaux méditants  
S'exaltent dans notre avenue ;  
Moi, j'ai ta chevelure nue  
Pour enfuir mes yeux contents.

“ Non ! la bouche ne sera sûre  
De rien goûter à sa morsure  
S'il ne fait, ton princier amant

“ Dans la considérable touffe  
Expirer, comme un diamant  
Le cri des gloires qu'il étouffe.”

At the first glance these fourteen lines seem to contain nothing explicit. There is no preparation, nothing to guide or enlighten you; all is vague and abrupt. Gradually we are made aware that it is the voice of a hero addressing a woman whose body sheds a radiance surpassing that of old and richly gleaming silks. Her beauty is soft as a summer cloud, the surroundings primeval and, as it were, immemorial.

A conflict arises between glory and desire.

“ Les trous des drapeaux méditants  
S'exaltent dans notre avenue ;  
Moi, j'ai ta chevelure nue  
Pour enfuir mes yeux contents.”

A subtle analogy is suggested between the standards “flowing locks of Bellona” and the “fleecey tegument” of woman, banner of love. This blots out those, and “the mouth,” which is desire, can only be “certain” of tasting the full joy of its burning kisses if it stifles the cries of glory in the intoxication of sensual passion. It is the old tale—of Hercules, of Theseus, of Tannhäuser, of eternal man laying down his strength at the feet of woman. It is truth through all ages, not merely described, but called up a very living presence.

The peculiar merit of this art, which few critics understand, is to aim at the very essence—whether thoughts or feelings—to raise them to their highest and most universal power, to banish from them all that might determine them in point of space or time. It imparts to them something of the anonymous character of solemn lapidary inscriptions. You can imagine the sonnets of Mallarmé engraved upon stelas, standing by the roadside along the great thoroughfares of human thought. They provoke the lingering wayfarer to long and searching meditation; they are built up of learned syntheses and pure conceptions; and the images they suggest are infinite. If true poetry is the language of figures, of striking and well-applied analogies, his, before all others, may serve as an example.

And yet there is none but will perceive with what pitfalls this art, in spite of its undeniable advantages, is surrounded. All depends upon the skill, I had almost said the witchcraft, of the enchanter. If the veils in which he shrouds his visions are not of perfect texture, if they are too flimsy or too opaque, if, for fear of being obvious, he remains obscure and impenetrable, the charm does not operate, and those who expected a miracle cry shame upon the false prophet.

Such, then, was the upheaval of form and matter brought about by the recent schools of French poetry. It had been, as I have said, prepared at great length. It had become inevitable. The alexandrine, broken, shattered, and crumbled by Hugo, would no longer have been recognised as a measure by its creators of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It was now but a vain and illusive shadow. I would adduce two examples illustrating the deep changes undergone by the form (rhythm and rhyme) as well as the matter of poetical composition, in which the sense is projected beyond the literal signification of the words.

## "LE VENT.

" Sur la bruyère longue infiniment  
Voici le vent cornant Novembre,  
Sur la bruyère infiniment  
Voici le vent  
Qui se déchire et se démembre  
En souffles lourds, battant les bourgs.  
Voici le vent,  
Le vent sauvage de Novembre.

" Aux puits des fermes,  
Les seaux de fer et les poulies  
Grincent ;  
Aux citernes des fermes  
Les seaux et les poulies  
Grincent et crient  
Toute la mort, dans leurs mélancolies.

" Le vent rafe, le long de l'eau,  
Les feuilles mortes des bouleaux,  
Le vent sauvage de Novembre ;  
Le vent mord dans les branches  
Des nids d'oiseaux ;  
Le vent rrape du fer  
Et peigne, au loin, les avalanches,  
Rageusement, du vieil hiver,  
Rageusement, le vent,  
Le vent sauvage de Novembre.

" Dans les étables lamentables  
Les lucarnes rapicées  
Ballottent leurs loques falottes  
De vitres et de papier.  
Le vent sauvage de Novembre !—  
Sur sa butte de gazon bistre

" De bas en haut, à travers airs,  
De haut en bas, à coups d'éclairs,  
Le moulin noir fauche, sinistre,  
Le moulin noir fauche le vent,  
Le vent,  
Le vent sauvage de Novembre.

" Les vieux chaumes, à eropetons,  
Autour de leurs clochers d'église,  
Sont ébranlés sur leurs bâtons ;  
Les vieux chaumes et leurs auvents  
Claquent au vent,  
Au vent sauvage de Novembre.  
Les croix du cimetière étroit,  
Les bras des morts que sont ces croix,  
Tombent comme un grand vol  
Rabattu noir, contre le sol.

" Le vent sauvage de Novembre,  
Le vent,  
L'avez-vous rencontré, le vent,  
Au carrefour des trois cents routes,  
Criant de froid, soufflant d'ahan,  
L'avez-vous rencontré, le vent,  
Celui des peurs et des déroutés ;  
L'avez-vous vu cette nuit-là,  
Quand il jeta la lune à bas,  
Et que, n'en pouvant plus,  
Tous les villages verroulés  
Criaient comme des bêtes,  
Sous la tempête ?

" Sur la bruyère infiniment  
Voici le vent hurlant,  
Voici le vent cornant Novembre."

## "LE PASSEUR D'EAU.

" Le passeur d'eau, les mains aux  
rames,  
A contre-flot depuis longtemps,  
Luttait, un roseau vert entre les  
dents.

" Mais celle, hélas ! qui le hélait  
Au delà des vagues, là-bas,  
Toujours plus loin, par au delà des  
vagues,  
Parmi les brumes reculait.

" Les fenêtres, avec leurs yeux,  
Et le cadran des tours, sur le rivage,  
Le regardaient peiner et s'acharner,  
En un ploïement de torse en deux

Et de muscles sauvages.  
Une rame soudain cassa  
Que le courant chassa  
A vagues lourdes vers la mer.

" Celle là-bas qui le hélait,  
Dans les brumes et dans le vent,  
semblait  
Tordre plus follement les bras,  
Vers celui qui n'approchait pas.

" Le passeur d'eau, avec la rame sur-  
vivante,  
Se prit à travailler si fort  
Que tout son corps craqua d'efforts,  
Et que son cœur trembla de fièvre  
et d'épouvante.

D'un coup brusque, le gouvernail  
cassa  
Et le courant chassa  
Ce haillon morne, vers la mer.

" Les fenêtres sur le rivage  
Comme des yeux grands et fiévreux,  
Et le cadran des tours, ces veuves

" Droites, de mille en mille, au bord  
des fleuves,  
Fixaient, obstinément,  
Cet homme fou, en son entêtement  
A prolonger son fol voyage.

" Celle là-bas qui le hélait  
Dans les brumes, hurlait, hurlait,  
La tête effrayamment tendue  
Vers l'inconnu de l'étendue.

" Le passeur d'eau, comme quelqu'un  
d'airain  
Planté dans la tempête blême,  
Avec l'unique rame entre ses mains,  
Battait les flots, mordait les flots  
quand même.

Ses vieux regards hallucinés  
Voyaient les loins illuminés  
D'où lui venait toujours la voix  
Lamentable, sous les cieux froids.

" La rame dernière cassa,  
Que le courant chassa  
Comme une paille, vers la mer.

" Le passeur d'eau, les bras tombants,  
S'affaissa morne, sur son banc,  
Les reins rompus de vains efforts,  
Un choc heurta sa barque, à la  
dérive,  
Il regarda derrière lui, la rive :  
Il n'avait pas quitté le bord.

" Les fenêtres et les cadrans,  
Avec des yeux béats et grands  
Constatèrent sa ruine d'ardeur,  
Mais le tenace et vieux passeur  
Garda tout de même, pour Dieu sait  
quand,  
Le roseau vert, entre ses dents."

Romanticism was saturated with spiritualism: it made excessive use of the name of God. To some, the term embodied the belief and guiding light. For others it was merely a handy rhyme. The Realists, Naturalists, and Parnassians were positivists. Auguste Comte, Littré, Spencer, extended their influence over the novels of Flaubert and Zola. the poems of Sully Prudhomme and Leconte de Lisle, the latter of whom colours his serene unbelief with a tinge of pessimism. This penetration of art by philosophy is to be found throughout the history of mankind. When philosophy alters, art follows its lead. Now for the last twenty years French thought has again become idealistic. It has turned its back upon disappointing Positivism. The whole younger generation protest, not against the supremacy of science, but against the narrow materialistic bias that has been forced upon it. Thus the ideal craving that has become manifest in speculation lends its valuable help to literature, and gives it a sure foundation.

And now that you are acquainted with the origin, the history, and life of the latest school of French literature, now that I have endeavoured to acquaint you with its tendencies and legitimate victories, can it be that I have somewhat exaggerated its daring, its revolutionary attitude? I am inclined to think so, when, after expounding its theories, I stop to consider the results. After all, the new poets have not broken with tradition as completely as it has been asserted. Can it be that it is not given, even to the most determined of men, I will not say to destroy, but to modify at all deeply the work of old

time? Or was it that, bold as they were, they were still lacking in lyrical fervour?

Poets, therefore, have not abolished tradition. They have done it no violence. They have merely expanded it, by the introduction of new principles of composition and versification.

In the first place, they allow all the old styles and all the laws of metre to subsist by the side of the new forms. In their books the symbol wields no despotic sway. They have studied folklore and conveyed into their songs some of the transparent simplicity of its artless laments. Old legends still have power to attract them. They proscribe nothing: they merely select.

The adepts of free verse seldom allow their rhythmic flights to exceed measures of thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen syllables, such as are found (exceptionally, it is true) in all classical anthologies. Again, when they introduce lines of unequal length, they do but follow the good example of Jean de Lafontaine. Their new rhythmical principles transgress no fundamental law. Their rhyme, now "rich," now "poor," sometimes depending on alliteration alone, traces back its descent through the long train of literary ages, to the *Chansons de Gestes*. Their stanzas are related to the *laissez* of the old poems, where uninterrupted successions of masculine or feminine rhymes crowd together in sets. All the new fermentation is born and takes place within the walls of tradition; it is contained within the amphora, which it neither bursts nor even rifts. But it violently revives the fragrance of the vapid liquor.

Nor will this transformation of French poetry be the last; it must of necessity be followed by further transformations. Already are born the "*Romane*" and the "*Naturaliste*" schools. The former, alas, has strayed into the blind alley of imitation; but the second innovates in its turn, and claims to be inspired by liberty and truth, just as much as its forerunners. It proclaims the names of St. Georges de Bouhélier, Maurice Leblond, Albert Fleury, Eugène Montfort. It aims at taking part in social action. It becomes militant.

Its growth should be viewed with hope. It has the priceless advantage of being the newest manifestation of life. That it should make an onslaught against its immediate predecessors is perfectly natural. Art can only profit by such conflicts, which oblige it to change, that is to live. Time reduces everything to its proper proportions. And the poets of free verse and of the symbol have nothing to fear from time. They have laboured hard and earnestly, some, indeed, with brilliancy and genius, for the glory of immortal letters.

EMILE VERHAEREN.

*Translated by C. Heywood.*

## THE POINT OF VIEW.

### A SENTIMENTAL INTERLUDE.

#### I.

*Said the Star to the Moth:—*

Love is of the Unattainable, the Unrealised. That which is securely won we criticise; and when Criticism is born, Love dies. Love loves the Unknown.

That is why the Moth loves the Star, the Thinker loves his Ideal, the Hero loves the Forlorn Hope, the Man loves the Woman. Not a woman, but Woman.

\* \* \* \*

Selene had never kissed Endymion nor Endymion Selene. She bathed him in her beams when he was sleeping, but when he awoke, it was Helios—Apollo, the God of Art—looking at him, and not Selene. Apollo—the God of Art—is always the phantasm of a reality, the imitation of a truth. The dream is a fact; the sun-glare is the symbol, the Maya, the Illusion.

\* \* \* \*

She had never kissed him save in dreams, nor he her. This was the secret of her mastery. What is the history of Love? Is it not always joy, eagerness, anticipation, in the earlier chapters? Pain only comes in the later—the unutterable pain of the discovered, the explored, the familiar.

\* \* \* \*

But one day, she kissed him. For a moment, he was transfigured into the seventh heaven. And then his wings failed him. He knew now. The dream was over.

\* \* \* \*

Love is of the Unrealised, the Unexperienced. To love is to hope. To know is to cease to love.

#### II.

*Said the Moth to the Star:—*

Love is not of the bleak uplands. It belongs to the homestead. It is the warmth of encircling arms, the touch of tender hands, the glance of appealing eyes. If I may not draw my love to my side, and know that she irradiates my home, then I must seek her, where-