

LOMBROSO CESARE

THE MAN OF
GENIUS

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The Man of Genius:

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Cesare Lombroso

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PREFACE

IT has never before happened that in the latest edition of a book I have had to disown so much in preceding editions; my first imperfect and spontaneous idea has never before been so modified and transformed, the final form being, perhaps, not even yet altogether attained.

The idea that genius was a special morbid condition had indeed often occurred to me, but I had always repelled it; and besides, without a sure experimental basis, ideas to-day do not count. Like still-born children, they appear but for a moment, to disappear at once. I had been enabled to discover in genius various characters of degeneration which are the foundation and the sign of nearly all forms of congenital mental abnormality, but the exaggerated extension which was at that time given to theories of degeneration, and still more the vague and inexact character of that conception, had repelled me; so that I accepted the facts, but not their ultimate consequences. How, in fact, can one suppress a feeling of horror at the thought of associating with idiots and criminals those individuals who represent the highest manifestations of the human spirit?

But recent teratologic researches, especially those of Gegenbauer, have shown that the phenomena of atavistic retrogression do not always indicate true degradation, but that very often they are simply a compensation for considerable development and progress accomplished in other directions. Reptiles have more ribs than we have; quadrupeds and apes possess more muscles than we do, and an entire organ, the tail, which we lack. It has been in losing these advantages that we have gained our intellectual superiority. When this is seen, the repugnance to the theory of genius as degeneration at once disappears. Just as giants pay a heavy ransom for their stature in sterility and relative muscular and mental weakness, so the giants of thought expiate their intellectual force in degeneration and psychoses. It is thus that the signs of degeneration are found more frequently in men of genius than even in the insane.

And again, this theory has entered to-day on so certain a path, and agrees so entirely with my studies on genius, that it is impossible for me not to accept it, and not to see in it an indirect confirmation of my own ideas. I find this confirmation in the characters of degeneration recently discovered;¹ and still more in the uncertainty of the theories which were at first advanced to explain the problem of genius. Thus Joly affirms in a too convenient formula that “it is not even necessary to refute the theory of insanity in genius;” for, he says, “strength

¹ Magnan, *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, 1887; Lombroso, *Tre Tribuni*, pp. 3-9, 16-23, 148-150; Saury, *Études Cliniques sur la Folie Héréditaire*, 1886.

is not weakness, health is not disease, and for the rest the cases quoted in favour of these hypotheses are only particular cases.”² But the physician knows that very often, in the delirious and epileptic, strength is precisely an index of disease. As to the second objection, it falls to the ground as facts accumulate. It is certain that there have been men of genius presenting a complete equilibrium of the intellectual faculties; but they have presented defects of affectivity and feeling; though no one may have perceived it, or, rather, recorded it. Up to recent years, historians, being chroniclers rather than psychologists, very careful to transmit to us the adventures and pageantries of princes and peoples, and the wars which have so much importance in the eyes of the multitude, have neglected everything which concerns the psychology of thought. They have very seldom informed us concerning the disorders and degenerative characters which exist in men of genius and their families; while vanity, which is extreme in men of genius, has never allowed them, save in rare instances (such as Cardan, Rousseau, J. S. Mill, Renan), to yield spontaneous revelations of themselves. If Richelieu had not on one single occasion been caught in an epileptic fit, who could ever have guessed it? If it had not been for the recent works of Berti and Mayor, who would have believed that Cavour twice attempted to kill himself? If Taine had not been one of those rare writers who understand what help psychiatry can give in the study of history, he would never have been able to surprise those

² *Psychologie du Génie*, 1883.

characteristics which make Napoleon's moral insanity manifest to all. Carlyle's wife wrote the narration of her tortures; few wives do as much, and, to tell the truth, few husbands are anxious to publish such narratives. Many persons still regard as an angelic being the celebrated painter Aiwosowski, who succoured hundreds of poor persons and left his own wife and children to die of hunger.

It must be added that moral insanity and epilepsy which are so often found in association with genius are among the forms of mental alienation which are most difficult to verify, so that they are often denied, even during life, although quite evident to the alienist. There are still many estimable persons who doubt the insanity of King Ludwig of Bavaria, and even openly deny it.³

There are, also, no individual cases in nature; all particular cases are the expression and effect of a law. And the fact, now unquestioned, that certain great men of genius have been insane, permits us to presume the existence of a lesser degree of psychosis in other men of genius.

But, adds Joly, genius is often precocious; as Raphael at fourteen years of age, Mozart at six, Michelangelo at sixteen; and sometimes it is tardy, with special characteristics, as in Alfieri. This is true; precocious originality is one of the characteristics of genius; but precisely because genius is a neurosis, an accidental circumstance may provoke it even at a comparatively late age, and like every neurosis which depends on irritation of the

³ De Renzis, *L'opera d'un Pazzo*, 1887.

cerebral cortex it may take on different aspects, according to the spot attacked, while preserving the same nature.

Hailes, in a much praised essay on genius in art, maintains that genius is a continuation of the conditions of ordinary life; thus, as we all write prose we must all have a little genius. But how then does it happen, Brunetière rightly objects,⁴ that one individual alone becomes a great painter or a great poet? And how is it that so many philosophers affirm, and quite truly, that genius consists in an exaggerated development of one faculty at the expense of others?

The man of genius is a monster, say others. Very well, but even monsters follow well-defined teratologic laws.

Brunetière remarks that there have been men of talent, like Addison and Pope, who were lacking in genius; and men of genius, like Sterne, who were lacking in talent. These two facts, however, are not contradictory; to be lacking in talent, or rather in good sense or common sense, is one of those characters of genius which witness to the presence of neurosis, and indicate that hypertrophy of certain psychic centres is compensated by the partial atrophy of other centres. As to the first assertion, it confirms rather than destroys my conclusions. Certainly talent is not genius, just as vice is not crime, but there is a transition from one to the other in virtue of that law of continuity which may be observed in all natural phenomena. *Natura non facit saltus*.

I must confess here that very often in this book I have had

⁴ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1886.

to confound genius with talent; not because they are not quite distinct, but because the line that separates them, like that which separates vice from crime, is very difficult to define. A man of scientific genius, lacking in education and opportunities – a Gorini, for example – will appear more sterile than a man of talent, who has been favoured by circumstances from the first.

For the rest – and this is the point which concerns us most – the morbid effects and analogies are the same in both, since the man of talent, even without genius, presents various slight but real abnormalities. A man of even ordinary talent may be so exhausted as to exhibit the pathological central reactions of the most powerful genius, and to leave traces of degeneration in his offspring; and, although it is rare, it is not impossible for the man of talent to descend from the neurotic and insane. This may easily be explained: talent, like genius, is accompanied by cortical excitation, only in a less degree and in a smaller brain. The true normal man is not the man of letters or of learning, but the man who works and eats —*fruges consumere natus*.

But our nature, it is customary to say, revolts against a conception which tends to lower the most sublime manifestation of humanity to the level of the sorrowfully degenerate, to idiocy and insanity. It is sad, I do not deny, but has not nature caused to grow from similar germs, and on the same clod of earth, the nettle and the jasmine, the aconite and the rose? The botanist cannot be blamed for these coincidences; and since they exist it is not a crime that he should record them as he finds them.

Repugnance also is a sentiment, not a reason; and a sentiment, moreover, which has not been shared by the race generally, who long ago reached conclusions – repugnant to the academic world, which sometimes closes its eyes in order not to see – entirely in harmony with the results here presented. We may see this in the most ancient etymologies; in Hebrew as well as in Sanscrit the lunatic is synonymous with the prophet. We may see it, too, in proverbs: “*I matti ed i fancialli indovinano*,” “*Kinder und Narren sprechen die Wahrheit*,” “*Un fol advise bien un sage*,” “*Sæpe enim est morio valde opportune locutus*.” The lunatic, again, among barbarous people is feared and adored by the masses who often confide to him supreme authority.

In modern times the same conviction has been preserved, but in a form, it must be confessed, altogether disadvantageous to genius. Not only is fame (and until recent years even liberty), denied to men of genius during their lives, but even the means of subsistence. After death they receive monuments and rhetoric by way of compensation. And why is this? Neither the jealousy of rivals nor the envy of mediocre men is enough to explain it. The reason is that if we leave out certain great statesmen (though there are exceptions – Bismarck, for example), men of genius are lacking in tact, in moderation, in the sense of practical life, in the virtues which are alone recognized as real by the masses, and which alone are useful in social affairs. “*Le bon sens vaut mieux que le génie*,” says an old French adage. And as Mirabeau said, “Good sense is the absence of every strong

passion, and only men of strong passions can be great.” Good sense travels on the well-worn paths; genius, never. And that is why the crowd, not altogether without reason, is so ready to treat great men as lunatics, while the lettered crowd cry out when – as I have attempted to do here – this general opinion is attached to a theory.

By some of those persons who have too much good sense – and who do not know that that destroys every great truth, because we reach truth more by remote paths than by smooth and ordinary roads – it has been objected: “Many of these defects that you find in great men may be found also in those who are not men of genius.” This is very true, but it is by the quality and quantity that the abnormal character is marked; and, above all, by the contradiction with the whole of the other characters of their personality, that the abnormality appears. Cooks are vain, but in those matters which refer to their occupation they are not so vain as to believe themselves gods. The nobleman will boast of descent from a mediæval hero, but not of being a sculptor. We are all forgetful sometimes, but not so far forgetful that we cannot recall our own names while at the same time we have an extraordinary memory for our own discoveries. Many have said what Michelangelo said of monks, but they have not afterwards spent large sums in fattening monasteries. In short, it is the doubling and contradiction of personality in genius which reveals the abnormality.

It has again been objected to me that these studies are deficient

in utility. To this I might reply with Taine that it is not always necessary that the true should be useful. Yet numerous practical applications arise out of these researches; they furnish us with explanations of those strange religious insanities which become the nucleus of great historical events. The examination of the productions of the insane supply us with new sources of analysis and criticism for the study of genius in art and literature; and, above all, these data bring an important element to the solution of penal questions, for they overthrow for ever that prejudice by virtue of which only those are declared insane, and therefore irresponsible, whose reason has entirely departed, a prejudice which has handed thousands of irresponsible creatures to the executioner. They show us, lastly, that literary madness is not only a curious psychiatric singularity, but a special form of insanity, which hides impulses the more dangerous, because not easy to perceive, a form of insanity, which, like religious insanity, may be transformed into a historical event.

C. LOMBROSO.

PART I.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GENIUS

CHAPTER I.

History of the Problem

Aristotle – Plato – Democritus – Felix Plater – Pascal –
Diderot – Modern writers on genius.

IT is a sad mission to cut through and destroy with the scissors of analysis the delicate and iridescent veils with which our proud mediocrity clothes itself. Very terrible is the religion of truth. The physiologist is not afraid to reduce love to a play of stamens and pistils, and thought to a molecular movement. Even genius, the one human power before which we may bow the knee without shame, has been classed by not a few alienists as on the confines of criminality, one of the teratologic forms of the human mind, a variety of insanity.

This impious profanation is not, however, altogether the work of doctors, nor is it the fruit of modern scepticism. The great Aristotle, once the father, and still the friend, of philosophers, observed that, under the influence of congestion of the head, “many persons become poets, prophets, and sybils, and, like

Marcus the Syracusan, are pretty good poets while they are maniacal; but when cured can no longer write verse.”⁵ And again, “Men illustrious in poetry, politics, and arts, have often been melancholic and mad, like Ajax, or misanthropic, like Bellerophon. Even in modern times such characters have been noted in Socrates, Empedocles, Plato, and in many others, especially poets.”⁶

In the *Phædo*, Plato affirms that “delirium is by no means an evil, but, on the contrary, when it comes by the gift of the gods, a very great benefit. In delirium, the prophetesses of Delphi and Dodona performed a thousand services for the citizens of Greece; while in cold blood they were of little use, or rather of none. It often happened that, when the gods afflicted men with fatal epidemics, a sacred delirium took possession of some mortal, and inspired him with a remedy for those misfortunes. Another kind of delirium, that inspired by the Muses, when a simple and pure soul is excited to glorify with poetry the deeds of heroes, serves for the instruction of future generations.”

Democritus was more explicit, and would not believe that there could be a good poet who was not out of his mind: —

*“Excludit sanos Helicone poetas
Democritus.”*⁷

⁵ *De Pronost.*, i. p. 7.

⁶ *Problemata*, sect. xxx.

⁷ Horace, *Ars Poet.*, 296-297.

It was, evidently, the observation of these facts, wrongly interpreted and, according to a common habit, transformed into superstitions, which caused ancient nations to venerate the insane as beings inspired from on high. We possess not only the witness of history to this effect, but also that of the words *navi* and *mesugan* in Hebrew and *nigrata* in Sanscrit, in which the ideas of insanity and prophecy are confused and assimilated.

Felix Plater affirmed that he had known persons who, although they excelled in certain arts, were yet mad, and betrayed their infirmity by a curious seeking for praise, and by strange and indecent acts. He had known at Court an architect, a celebrated sculptor, and a distinguished musician, who were mad.⁸

Pascal, later on, repeated that extreme intelligence was very near to extreme madness, and himself offered an example of it. Diderot wrote: "I conjecture that these men of sombre and melancholy temperament only owed that extraordinary and almost Divine penetration which they possessed at intervals, and which led them to ideas, sometimes so mad and sometimes so sublime, to a periodical derangement of the organism. They then believed themselves inspired, and were insane. Their attacks were preceded by a kind of brutish apathy, which they regarded as the natural condition of fallen man. Lifted out of this lethargy by the tumult within them, they imagined that it was Divinity,

⁸ *Observationes in Hom. Affect.*, 1641, lib. 10, p. 305. More singular examples in Italy were collected by F. Gazoni, in the *Hospitale dei folli incurabili*, 1620.

which came down to visit and exercise them... Oh! how near are genius and madness! Those whom heaven has branded for evil or for good are more or less subject to these symptoms; they reveal them more or less frequently, more or less violently. Men imprison them and chain them, or raise statues to them.”⁹

Many examples of men who were at once mad and highly intelligent were offered by Hécart in his *Stultitiana, ou petite bibliographie des Fous de Valenciennes, par un homme en démente*; by Delepierre, an enthusiastic bibliophile, in his curious *Histoire littéraire des Fous* (1860); by Forgues, in *Revue de Paris* (1826); and by an anonymous writer in *Sketches of Bedlam* (London, 1873).

On the other hand, it was shown in Lélut’s *Démon de Socrate* (1836) and *Amulette de Pascal* (1846), in Verga’s *Lipemania del Tasso* (1850) and in my own *Pazzia di Cardano* (1856), that there are men of genius who have long been subject to hallucinations, and even to monomania. Other proofs, the more precious because impartial, were supplied by Réveillé-Parise, in his *Physiologie et Hygiène des hommes livrés aux travaux de l’esprit* (1856). Moreau (de Tours), who delighted in the least verisimilar aspects of truth, in his solid monograph, *Psychologie Morbide* (1859), and J. A. Schilling, in his *Psychiatrische Briefe* (1863), endeavoured to show, by researches that were very copious although not very strict in method, that genius is always a neurosis, and often a true insanity. Hagen has more

⁹ Diderot, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique*.

recently sought to prove a thesis which is partly the same in his *Verwandtschaft des Genies mit dem Irrsinn* (Berlin, 1877), and, indirectly, Jürgen-Meyer, in his admirable monograph, *Genie und Talent* (from the *Zeitschrift für Völker-psychologie*, 1879). These two writers have tried to explain the physiology of genius, and, singularly, they have reached conclusions which were reached, more by intuition than through close observation, by an Italian Jesuit, now quite forgotten – Bettinelli – in his book, *Dell' entusiasmo nelle belle Arti* (Milan, 1769).

Radestock, in his *Genie und Wahnsinn* (Breslau, 1884), added little to the solution of the problem, as he merely copied, for the most part, from his predecessors, without profiting greatly by their work.

Among recent writers, I note Tarnowski and Tchukinova, who to the Russian translation of my book (St. Petersburg, 1885) have added many new documents from the history of Russian literature; Maxime du Camp, who in his curious *Souvenirs Littéraires* (1887), has shown how many modern French writers have concealed within them the sorrowful seed of insanity; Ramos Mejia, who, in his *Neurosis de los Hombres Celebres de la Historia Argentina* (Buenos Ayres, 1885), shows how nearly all the great men of the South American Republics were inebriate, neurotic, or insane; A. Tebaldi, who, in his book *Ragione e Pazzia* (Milan, 1884), brings fresh documents to the literature of insanity; and, finally, that acute thinker and brilliant writer,

Pisani-Dossi, who has given us a curious study,¹⁰ which is a monograph on madness in art; as in my *Tre Tribuni* (1889) I have attempted to do with the insane and semi-insane in their relation to politics.

¹⁰ *I Mattoidi e il Monumente a Vittorio Emanuele*, 1885.

CHAPTER II.

Genius and Degeneration

The signs of degeneration – Height – Rickets – Pallor – Emaciation – Physiognomy – Cranium and Brain – Stammering – Lefthandedness – Sterility – Unlikeness to Parents – Precocity – Delayed development – Misoneism – Vagabondage – Unconsciousness – Instinctiveness – Somnambulism – The Inspiration of Genius – Contrast – Intermittence – Double Personality – Stupidity – Hyperæsthesia – Paræsthesia – Amnesia – Originality – Fondness for special words.

THE paradox that confounds genius with neurosis, however cruel and sad it may seem, is found to be not devoid of solid foundation when examined from various points of view which have escaped even recent observers.

A theory, which has for some years flourished in the psychiatric world, admits that a large proportion of mental and physical affections are the result of degeneration, of the action, that is, of heredity in the children of the inebriate, the syphilitic, the insane, the consumptive, &c.; or of accidental causes, such as lesions of the head or the action of mercury, which profoundly change the tissues, perpetuate neuroses or other diseases in the patient, and, which is worse, aggravate them in his descendants, until the march of degeneration, constantly growing more rapid

and fatal, is only stopped by complete idiocy or sterility.

Alienists have noted certain characters which very frequently, though not constantly, accompany these fatal degenerations. Such are, on the moral side, apathy, loss of moral sense, frequent tendencies to impulsiveness or doubt, psychical inequalities owing to the excess of some faculty (memory, æsthetic taste, &c.) or defect of other qualities (calculation, for example), exaggerated mutism or verbosity, morbid vanity, excessive originality, and excessive pre-occupation with self, the tendency to put mystical interpretations on the simplest facts, the abuse of symbolism and of special words which are used as an almost exclusive mode of expression. Such, on the physical side, are prominent ears, deficiency of beard, irregularity of teeth, excessive asymmetry of face and head, which may be very large or very small, sexual precocity, smallness or disproportion of the body, lefthandedness, stammering, rickets, phthisis, excessive fecundity, neutralized afterwards by abortions or complete sterility, with constant aggravation of abnormalities in the children.¹¹

Without doubt many alienists have here fallen into exaggerations, especially when they have sought to deduce degeneration from a single fact. But, taken on the whole, the theory is irrefutable; every day brings fresh applications and confirmations. Among the most curious are those supplied by

¹¹ Magnan, *Annales Médico-psych.*, 1887; Déjerine, *L'Hérédité dans les Maladies Mentales*, 1886; Ireland, *The Blot upon the Brain*, 1885.

recent studies on genius. The signs of degeneration in men of genius they show are sometimes more numerous than in the insane. Let us examine them.

Height.—First of all it is necessary to remark the frequency of physical signs of degeneration, only masqued by the vivacity of the countenance and the prestige of reputation, which distracts us from giving them due importance.

The simplest of these, which struck our ancestors and has passed into a proverb, is the smallness of the body.

Famous for short stature as well as for genius were: Horace (*lepidissimum homunculum dicebat Augustus*), Philopœmen, Narses, Alexander (*Magnus Alexander corpore parvus erat*), Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus, Chrysippus, Laertes, Archimedes, Diogenes, Attila, Epictetus, who was accustomed to say, “Who am I? A little man.” Among moderns one may name, Erasmus, Socinus, Linnæus, Lipsius, Gibbon, Spinoza, Haüy, Montaigne, Mezeray, Lalande, Gray, John Hunter (5ft. 2in.), Mozart, Beethoven, Goldsmith, Hogarth, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, Wilberforce, Heine, Meissonnier, Charles Lamb, Beccaria, Maria Edgeworth, Balzac, De Quincey, William Blake (who was scarcely five feet in height), Browning, Ibsen, George Eliot, Thiers, Mrs. Browning, Louis Blanc, Mendelssohn, Swinburne, Van Does (called the Drum, because he was not any taller than a drum), Peter van Laer (called the Puppet). Lulli, Pomponazzi, Baldini, were very short; so also were Nicholas Piccinini, the philosopher Dati, and Baldo, who replied to the

sarcasm of Bartholo, "*Minuit præsentia fama*," with the words, "*Augebit cætera virtus*;" and again, Marsilio Ficino, of whom it was said, "*Vix ad lumbos viri stabat*." Albertus Magnus was of such small size that the Pope, having allowed him to kiss his foot, commanded him to stand up, under the impression that he was still kneeling. When the coffin of St. Francis Xavier was opened at Goa in 1890, the body was found to be only four and a half feet in length.

Among great men of tall stature I only know Volta, Goethe, Petrarch, Schiller, D'Azeglio, Helmholtz, Foscolo, Charlemagne, Bismarck, Moltke, Monti, Mirabeau, Dumas père, Schopenhauer, Lamartine, Voltaire, Peter the Great, Washington, Dr. Johnson, Sterne, Arago, Flaubert, Carlyle, Tourgueneff, Tennyson, Whitman.

Rickets.— Agesilaus, Tyrtæus, Æsop, Giotto, Aristomenes, Crates, Galba, Brunelleschi, Magliabecchi, Parini, Scarron, Pope, Leopardi, Talleyrand, Scott, Owen, Gibbon, Byron, Dati, Baldini, Moses Mendelssohn, Flaxman, Hooke, were all either rachitic, lame, hunch-backed, or club-footed.

Pallor.— This has been called the colour of great men; "*Pulchrum sublimium virorum florem*" (S. Gregory, *Orationes XIV.*). It was ascertained by Marro¹² that this is one of the most frequent signs of degeneration in the morally insane.

Emaciation.— The law of the conservation of energy which rules the whole organic world, explains to us other frequent

¹² *I Caratteri dei Delinquenti*, 1886, Turin.

abnormalities, such as precocious greyness and baldness, leanness of the body, and weakness of sexual and muscular activity, which characterize the insane, and are also frequently found among great thinkers. Lécamus¹³ has said that the greatest geniuses have the slenderest bodies. Cæsar feared the lean face of Cassius. Demosthenes, Aristotle, Cicero, Giotto, St. Bernard, Erasmus, Salmasius, Kepler, Sterne, Walter Scott, John Howard, D'Alembert, Fénelon, Boileau, Milton, Pascal, Napoleon, were all extremely thin in the flower of their age.

Others were weak and sickly in childhood; such were Demosthenes, Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke, Adam Smith, Boyle, Pope, Flaxman, Nelson, Haller, Körner, Pascal, Wren, Alfieri, Renan.

Ségur wrote of Voltaire that his leanness recalled his labours, and that his slight bent body was only a thin, transparent veil, through which one seemed to see his soul and genius. Lamennais was "a small, almost imperceptible man, or rather a flame chased from one point of the room to the other by the breath of his own restlessness."¹⁴

Physiognomy.—Mind, a celebrated painter of cats, had a cretin-like physiognomy. So also had Socrates, Skoda, Rembrandt, Dostoieffsky, Magliabecchi, Pope, Carlyle, Darwin, and, among modern Italians, Schiaparelli, who holds so high a rank in mathematics.

¹³ *Méd. de l'Esprit*, ii.

¹⁴ Lamartine, *Cours de Littérature*, ii.

Cranium and Brain.— Lesions of the head and brain are very frequent among men of genius. The celebrated Australian novelist, Marcus Clarke, when a child, received a blow from a horse's hoof which crushed his skull.¹⁵ The same is told of Vico, Gratry, Clement VI., Malebranche, and Cornelius, hence called *a Lapide*. The last three are said to have acquired their genius as a result of the accident, having been unintelligent before. Mention should also be made of the parietal fracture in Fusinieri's skull;¹⁶ of the cranial asymmetry of Pericles, who was on this account surnamed Squill-head (σκινोकέφαλος) by the Greek comic writers¹⁷; of Romagnosi, of Bichat, of Kant,¹⁸ of Chenevix,¹⁹ of Dante, who presented an abnormal development of the left parietal bone, and two osteomata on the frontal bone; the plagiocephaly of Brunacci and of Machiavelli; the extreme prognathism of Foscolo (68°) and his low cephalic-spinal and cephalic-orbital index;²⁰ the ultra-dolichocephaly of Fusinieri (index 74), contrasting with the ultra-brachycephaly which is characteristic of the Venetians (82 to 84); the Neanderthaloid skull of Robert Bruce;²¹ of Kay Lye,²² of San Marsay (index

¹⁵ *Revue Britannique*, 1884.

¹⁶ Canesterini, *Il Cranio di Fusinieri*, 1875.

¹⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*, iii.

¹⁸ Kupfer, "Der Schädel Kants," in *Arch. für Anth.*, 1881.

¹⁹ Welcker, *Schiller's Schädel*, 1883.

²⁰ Mantegazza, *Sul Cranio di Foscolo*, Florence, 1880.

²¹ Turner, *Quarterly Journal of Science*, 1864.

69), and the ultra-dolichocephaly of O'Connell (index 73), which contrasts with the mesocephaly of the Irish; the median occipital fossa of Scarpa;²³ the transverse occipital suture of Kant, his ultra-brachycephaly (88·5), platycephaly (index of height 71·1), the disproportion between the superior portion of his occipital bone, more developed by half, and the inferior or cerebellar portion. It is the same with the smallness of the frontal arch compared to the parietal.

²² De Quatrefages, *Crania Ethnica*, Part i. p. 30.

²³ Zoja, *La Testa di Scarpa*, 1880.



Fig. 1 —

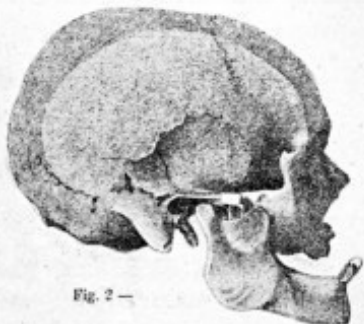


Fig. 2 —



Fig. 3 —



Fig. 4 —



Fig. 5 —



Fig. 6 —



Fig. 7 —



Fig. 8 —

Figs. 1-3. Kant's Skull.

“ 4. Volta's Skull.

Figs. 5-6. Fusinieri's Skull.

“ 7-8. Foscolo's Skull.

In Volta's skull²⁴ I have noted several characters which anthropologists consider to belong to the lower races, such as prominence of the styloid apophyses, simplicity of the coronal suture, traces of the median frontal suture, obtuse facial angle (73°), but especially the remarkable cranial sclerosis, which at places attains a thickness of 16 millemetres; hence the great weight of the skull (753 grammes).

The researches of other investigators have shown that Manzoni, Petrarch, and Fusinieri had receding foreheads; in Byron, Massacra (at the age of 32), Humboldt, Meckel,²⁵ Foscolo, Ximenes, and Donizetti there was solidification of the sutures; submicrocephaly in Rasori, Descartes, Foscolo, Tissot, Guido Reni, Hoffmann, and Schumann; sclerosis in Donizetti and Tiedemann who, moreover, presented a bony crest between the sphenoid and the basilar apophysis; hydrocephalus in Milton, Linnæus, Cuvier, Gibbon, &c.

The capacity of the skull in men of genius, as is natural, is above the average, by which it approaches what is found in insanity. (De Quatrefages noted that the greatest degree of

²⁴ *Sul Cranio di Volta*, 1879, Turin.

²⁵ Welcker, *Schiller's Schädel*, 1883.

macrocephaly was found in a lunatic, the next in a man of genius.) There are numerous exceptions in which it descends below the ordinary average.

It is certain that in Italy, Volta (1,860 c.cm.), Petrarch (1,602 c.cm.), Bordoni (1,681 c.cm.), Brunacci (1,701 c.cm.), St. Ambrose (1,792 c.cm.), and Fusinieri (1,604 c.cm.), all presented great cranial capacity. The same character is found to a still greater degree in Kant (1,740 c.cm.), Thackeray (1,660 c.cm.), Cuvier (1,830 c.cm.), and Tourgueneff (2,012 c.cm.).

Le Bon studied twenty-six skulls of French men of genius, among whom were Boileau, Descartes, and Jourdan.²⁶ He found that the most celebrated had an average capacity of 1,732 cubic centimetres; while the ancient Parisians offered only 1,559 c.cm. Among the Parisians of to-day scarcely 12 per cent. exceed 1,700 c.cm., a figure surpassed by 73 per cent. of the celebrated men.

But sub-microcephalic skulls may also be found in men of genius. Wagner and Bischoff,²⁷ examining twelve brains of celebrated Germans, found the capacity very great in eight, very small in four. The latter was the case with Liebig, Döllinger, Hausmann, in whose favour advanced age may be advanced as an

²⁶ *Revue Scientifique*, 1882.

²⁷ Wagner (*Das Hirngewicht*, 1877) gives these measurements of scientific men of Gottingen: —Bischoff (*Hirngewichte bei Münchener Gelehrten*) gives the following measurements: —The measurement of the cerebral area often gives superiority even to those men of genius who present a feeble weight. Fuchs had a cerebral surface of 22,1005 square c. and Gauss of 21,9588; while with the same weight the same surface in an unknown woman was 20,4115 and in a workman 18,7672.

excuse; but this reason does not exist for Guido Reni, Gambetta, Harless, Foscolo (1426), Dante (1493), Hermann (1358), Lasker (1300). Shelley's head was remarkably small.

In the face of all these facts I shall not be taxed with temerity if I conclude that, as genius is often expiated by inferiority in some psychic functions, it is often associated with anomalies in that organ which is the source of its glory.

Reference should here be made to the ventricular dropsy in Rousseau's brain,²⁸ to the meningitis of Grossi, of Donizetti, and of Schumann, to the cerebral œdema of Liebig and of Tiedemann. In the last-named, besides remarkable thickness of the skull, especially at the forehead, Bischoff noted adherence of the *dura mater* to the bone, thickening of the arachnoid and atrophy of the brain. In the physician Fuchs, Wagner found the fissure of Rolando interrupted by a superficial convolution, an anomaly which Giacomini found only once in 356 cases, and Heschl once in 632.²⁹ Pascal's brain showed grave lesions of the cerebral hemispheres. It has recently been discovered that Cuvier's voluminous brain was affected by dropsy; in Lasker's there was softening of the corpora striata, pachymeningitis, hæmorrhage, and endarteritis deformans of the artery of the fissure of Sylvius.³⁰

In eighteen brains of German men of science Bischoff

²⁸ *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie*, 1861.

²⁹ *Die tiefen Windungen des Menschenhirnes*, 1877.

³⁰ Mendel, *Centralblatt*, No. 4, 1884.

and Rüdinger found congenital anomalies of the cerebral convolutions, especially of the parietal.³¹ In the brains of Wülfert and Huber, the third left frontal convolution was greatly developed with numerous meanderings. In Gambetta this exaggeration became a real doubling; and the right quadrilateral lobule is divided into two parts by a furrow which starts from the occipital fissure; of these two parts the inferior is subdivided by an incision with numerous branches, arranged in the form of stars, and the occipital lobe is small, especially on the right.³²

“The comparative study of these brains,” writes Hervé,³³ “shows that individual variations of the cerebral convolutions are more numerous and more marked in men of genius than in others. This is especially the case in regard to the third frontal convolution which is not only more variable in men of genius, but also more complex, especially on one side, while in ordinary persons it is very simple both on the left and on the right. Without doubt the individual arrangements which may be presented by the brains of men of remarkable intelligence may also be found in ordinary brains, but only in rare exceptions.”

I refer those who wish to form an idea of the development reached by Broca's centre in some of the brains of the Munich collection to Rüdinger's monograph, and to the beautiful plates

³¹ *Ein Beitrag zur Anatomie der Affenspalte und der Interparietal Furche beim Menschen nach Rasse, Geschlecht, und Individualität*, 1886.

³² *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie*, 1886, p. 135.

³³ *La Circonvolution de Broca*, Paris, 1888.

which accompany it. One remarks especially the enormous size and the numerous superficial folds at the foot of the left convolution in the jurist Wülfert, who was remarkable among other qualities for his great oratorical talent. On the other hand, the convolution is much reduced and very simple on the left, much developed in all its parts on the right, in the brain of the pathologist Buhl, a professor whose speech was clear and facile, but who was left-handed, or at all events ambidextrous. To these facts others may be added, showing the morphological complexity of Broca's convolution in distinguished men; in the brains, for instance, of various men of science, described and figured by R. Wagner.³⁴ Among these was the illustrious geometrician, Gauss: compared with Gauss's brain that of an artisan called

³⁴ *Vorstudien, &c.*, 1st Memoir, 1860.



Fig. 1



Fig. 3-



Fig. 2

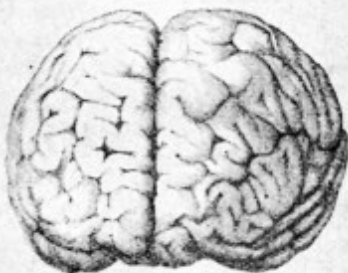


Fig. 4-



Fig. 5--

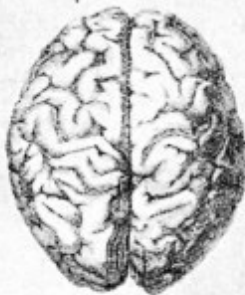


Fig. 6--

Fig. 1. Gauss's Brain.

“ 2. Frontal Lobe of same.

“ 3. Brain of a German Workman.

Fig. 4. Frontal Lobe of same.

“ 5. Dirichlet's Brain.

“ 6. Hermann's Brain.

Krebs was much less complicated, and notably narrower in the frontal region. The frontal convolutions were also inferior in development to those of Gauss; and the anterior lobes were voluminous in another celebrated mathematician, Professor De Morgan, whose brain is in Bastian's possession.³⁵

Stammering.— Men of genius frequently stammer. I will mention: Aristotle, Æsop, Demosthenes, Alcibiades, Cato of Utica, Virgil, Manzoni, Erasmus, Malherbe, C. Lamb, Turenne, Erasmus and Charles Darwin, Moses Mendelssohn, Charles V., Romiti, Cardan, Tartaglia.

Lefthandedness.— Many have been left-handed. Such were: Tiberius, Sebastian del Piombo, Michelangelo, Fléchier, Nigra, Buhl, Raphael of Montelupo, Bertillon. Leonardo da Vinci sketched rapidly with his left hand any figures which struck him, and only employed the right hand for those which were the mature result of his contemplation; for this reason his friends were persuaded that he only wrote with the left hand.³⁶

³⁵ *Le Cerveau et la Pensée*, t. ii. p. 46.

³⁶ Gallichon in *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1867.

Mancinism or leftsidedness is to-day regarded as a character of atavism and degeneration.³⁷

Sterility.— Many great men have remained bachelors; others, although married, have had no children. “The noblest works and foundations,” said Bacon,³⁸ “have proceeded from childless men, which have sought to express the images of their minds, where those of their bodies have failed. So the care of posterity is most in them that have no posterity.” And La Bruyère said, “These men have neither ancestors nor descendants; they themselves form their entire posterity.”

Croker, in his edition of *Boswell*, remarks that all the great English poets had no posterity. He names Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton, Otway, Dryden, Rowe, Addison, Pope, Swift, Gay, Johnson, Goldsmith, Cowper. Hobbes, Camden, and many others, avoided marriage in order to have more time to devote to study. Michelangelo said, “I have more than enough of a wife in my art.” Among celibates may be mentioned also: Kant, Newton, Pitt, Fox, Fontenelle, Beethoven, Gassendi, Galileo, Descartes, Locke, Spinoza, Bayle, Leibnitz, Malebranche, Gray, Dalton, Hume, Gibbon, Macaulay, Lamb, Bentham, Leonardo da Vinci, Copernicus, Reynolds, Handel, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Schopenhauer, Camoëns, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Foscolo, Alfieri, Cavour, Pellico, Mazzini, Aleardi, Guerrazzi. And among women: Florence Nightingale, Catherine Stanley,

³⁷ Lombroso, *Sul Mancinismo motorio e sensorio nei sani e negli alienati*, 1885, Turin.

³⁸ Essay VII., *Of Parents and Children*.

Gaetana Agnesi (the mathematician), and Luigia Laura Bassi. A very large number of married men of genius have not been happy in marriage: Shakespeare, Dante, Marzolo, Byron, Coleridge, Addison, Landor, Carlyle, Ary Scheffer, Rovani, A. Comte, Haydn, Milton, Sterne, Dickens, &c. St. Paul boasted of his absolute continence; Cavendish altogether lacked the sexual instinct, and had a morbid antipathy to women. Flaubert wrote to George Sand: "The muse, however intractable, gives fewer sorrows than woman. I cannot reconcile one with the other. One must choose."³⁹ Adam Smith said he reserved his gallantry for his books. Chamfort, the misanthrope, wrote: "If men followed the guidance of reason no one would marry; for my own part, I will have nothing to do with it, lest I should have a son like myself." A French poet has said:

*"Les grands esprits, d'ailleurs très-estimables,
Ont très peu de talent pour former leurs semblables."*⁴⁰

Unlikeness to Parents.— Nearly all men of genius have differed as much from their fathers as from their mothers (Foscolo, Michelangelo, Giotto, Haydn, &c.). That is one of the marks of degeneration. For this reason one notes physical resemblances between men of genius belonging to very different races and epochs; for example, Julius Cæsar, Napoleon, and Giovanni of

³⁹ *Lettres à Georges Sand*, Paris, 1885.

⁴⁰ Destouches, *Philos. Mariés*.

the Black Bands; or Casti, Sterne, and Voltaire. They often differ from their national type. They differ by the possession of noble and almost superhuman characters (elevation of the forehead, notable development of the nose and of the head, great vivacity of the eyes); while the cretin, the criminal, and often the lunatic, differ by the possession of ignoble features: Humboldt, Virchow, Bismarck, Helmholtz, and Holtzendorf, do not show a German physiognomy. Byron was English neither in his face nor in his character; Manin did not show the Venetian type; Alfieri and d'Azeglio had neither the Piedmontese character nor face. Carducci's face is not Italian. Nevertheless, one finds very notable and frequent exceptions. Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Cellini, presented the Italian type.

Precocity.— Another character common to genius and to insanity, especially moral insanity, is precocity. Dante, when nine years of age, wrote a sonnet to Beatrice; Tasso wrote verses at ten. Pascal and Comte were great thinkers at the age of thirteen, Fournier at fifteen, Niebuhr at seven, Jonathan Edwards at twelve, Michelangelo at nineteen, Gassendi, the Little Doctor, at four, Bossuet at twelve, and Voltaire at thirteen. Pico de la Mirandola knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, and Arabic, in his childhood; Goethe wrote a story in seven languages when he was scarcely ten; Wieland knew Latin at seven, meditated an epic poem at thirteen, and at sixteen published his poem, *Die Vollkommenste Welt*. Lopez de la Vega composed his first verses at twelve, Calderon at thirteen. Kotzebue was trying to

write comedies at seven, and at eighteen his first tragedy was acted. Schiller was only nineteen when his epoch-making *Räuber* appeared. Victor Hugo composed *Irtamène* at fifteen, and at twenty had already published *Han d'Islande*, *Bug-Jargal*, and the first volume of *Odes et Ballades*; Lamennais at sixteen dictated the *Paroles d'un Croyant*. Pope wrote his ode to *Solitude* at twelve and his *Pastorals* at sixteen. Byron wrote verses at twelve, and at eighteen published his *Hours of Idleness*. Moore translated *Anacreon* at thirteen. Meyerbeer at five played excellently on the piano. Claude Joseph Vernet drew very well at four, and at twenty was already a celebrated painter. At thirteen Wren invented an astronomical instrument and offered it to his father with a Latin dedication. Ascoli at fifteen published a book on the relation of the dialects of Wallachia and Friuli. Metastasio improvised at ten; Ennius Quirinus Visconti excited the admiration of all at sixteen months, and preached when six years old. At fifteen Fénelon preached at Paris before a select audience; Wetton at five could read and translate Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and at ten knew Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic. Mirabeau preached at three and published books at ten. Handel composed a mass at thirteen, at seventeen *Corinda* and *Nero*, and at nineteen was director of the opera at Hamburg. Raphael was famous at fourteen. Restif de la Bretonne had already read much at four; at eleven he had seduced young girls, and at fourteen had composed a poem on his first twelve mistresses. Eichorn, Mozart, and Eybler gave concerts at six. At thirteen Beethoven

composed three sonatas. Weber was only fourteen when his first opera, *Das Waldmädchen*, was represented. Cherubini at thirteen wrote a mass which filled his fellow-citizens with enthusiasm. Bacon conceived the *Novum Organum* at fifteen. Charles XII. manifested his great designs at the age of eighteen.⁴¹

This precocity is morbid and atavistic; it may be observed among all savages. The proverb, “A man who has genius at five is mad at fifteen” is often verified in asylums.⁴² The children of the insane are often precocious. Savage knew an insane woman whose children could play classical music before the age of six, and other children who at a tender age displayed the passions of grown men. Among the children of the insane are often revealed aptitudes and tastes – chiefly for music, the arts, and mathematics – which are not usually found in other children.

Delayed Development.— Delay in the development of genius may be explained, as Beard remarks, by the absence of circumstances favourable to its blossoming, and by the ignorance of teachers and parents who see mental obtusity, or even idiocy, where there is only the distraction or amnesia of genius. Many children who become great men have been regarded at school as bad, wild, or silly; but their intelligence appeared as soon as the occasion offered, or when they found the true path of

⁴¹ Beard, *American Nervousness*, 1887; Cancellieri, *Intorno Uomini dotati di gran memoria*, 1715; Klefeker, *Biblioth. eruditorum procacium*, Hamburg, 1717; Baillet, *De præcociibus eruditis*, 1715.

⁴² Savage, *Moral Insanity*, 1886.

their genius. It was thus with Thiers, Pestalozzi, Wellington, Du Guesclin, Goldsmith, Burns, Balzac, Fresnel, Dumas père, Humboldt, Sheridan, Boccaccio, Pierre Thomas, Linnæus, Volta, Alfieri. Thus Newton, meditating on the problems of Kepler, often forgot the orders and commissions given him by his mother; and while he was the last in his class he was very clever in making mechanical playthings. Walter Scott, who also showed badly at school, was a wonderful story-teller. Klaproth, the celebrated Orientalist, when following the courses at Berlin University, was considered a backward student. In examination once a professor said to him: "But you know nothing, sir!" "Excuse me," he replied, "I know Chinese." It was found that he had learnt this difficult language alone, almost in secret. Gustave Flaubert "was the very opposite of a phenomenal child. It was only with extreme difficulty that he succeeded in learning to read. His mind, however, was already working, for he composed little plays which he could not write, but which he represented alone, playing the different personages, and improvising long dialogues."⁴³ Domenichino, whom his comrades called the great bullock, when accused of being slow and not learning so fast as the other pupils, replied: "It is because I work in myself."

Sometimes children have only made progress when abandoned to their own impulses. Thus Cabanis, although intelligent, was regarded at school as obstinate and idle, and was sent home. His father then decided to risk an experiment. He

⁴³ Guy de Maupassant, *Étude sur Gustave Flaubert*, Paris, 1885.

allowed his son, at fourteen years of age, to study according to his own taste. The experiment succeeded completely.

Misoneism.— The men who create new worlds are as much enemies of novelty as ordinary persons and children. They display extraordinary energy in rejecting the discoveries of others; whether it is that the saturation, so to say, of their brains prevents any new absorption, or that they have acquired a special sensibility, alert only to their own ideas, and refractory to the ideas of others. Thus Schopenhauer, who was a great rebel in philosophy, has nothing but words of pity and contempt for political revolutionaries; and he bequeathed his fortune to men who had contributed to repress by arms the noble political aspirations of 1848. Frederick II., who inaugurated German politics, and wished to foster a national art and literature, did not suspect the worth of Herder, of Klopstock, of Lessing, of Goethe;⁴⁴ he disliked changing his coats so much that he had only two or three during his life. The same may be said of Napoleon and his hats. Rossini could never travel by rail; when a friend attempted to accustom him to the train he fell down fainting, remarking afterwards: “If I was not like that I should never have written the *Barbiere*.” Napoleon rejected steam, and Richelieu sent Salomon de Caus, its first inventor, to the Bicêtre. Bacon laughed at Gilbert and Copernicus; he did not believe in the application of instruments, or even of mathematics, to the exact

⁴⁴ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1883, p. 92.

sciences. Baudelaire and Nodier detested freethinkers.⁴⁵ Laplace denied the fall of meteorites, for, he said, with an argument much approved by the Academicians, how can stones fall from the sky when there are none there? Biot denied the undulatory theory. Voltaire denied fossils. Darwin did not believe in the stone age nor in hypnotism.⁴⁶ Robin laughed at the Darwinian theory.

Vagabondage.— Love of wandering is frequent among men of genius. I will mention only Heine, Alfieri, Byron, Giordano Bruno, Leopardi, Tasso, Goldsmith, Sterne, Gautier, Musset, Lenau. “My father left me his wandering genius as a heritage,” wrote Foscolo. Hölderlin, after his much loved wife had entered a convent, wandered for forty years without settling down anywhere. Every one knows of the constant journeys of Petrarch, of Paisiello, of Lavoisier, of Cellini, of Cervantes, at a time when travelling was beset by difficulties and dangers. Meyerbeer travelled for thirty years, composing his operas in the train. Wagner travelled on foot from Riga to Paris. One knows that sometimes, at the Universities, professors are seized by the desire of change, and to satisfy it forget all their personal interests.

Unconsciousness and Instinctiveness.— The coincidence of genius and insanity enables us to understand the astonishing unconsciousness, instantaneousness and intermittence of the creations of genius, whence its great resemblance to epilepsy, the importance of which we shall see later, and whence also

⁴⁵ *Revue Bleue*, 1887, p. 17.

⁴⁶ *Darwin's Life*, 1887.

a distinction between genius and talent. "Talent," says Jürgen-Meyer,⁴⁷ "knows itself; it knows how and why it has reached a given theory; it is not so with genius, which is ignorant of the how and the why. Nothing is so involuntary as the conception of genius." "One of the characters of genius," writes Hagen, "is irresistible impulsion. As instinct compels the animal to accomplish certain acts, even at the risk of life, so genius, when it is dominated by an idea is incapable of abandoning itself to any other thought. Napoleon and Alexander conquered, not from love of glory, but in obedience to an all-powerful instinct; so scientific genius has no rest; its activity may appear to be the result of a voluntary effort, but it is not so. Genius creates, not because it wishes to, but because it must create." And Paul Richter writes: "The man of genius is in many respects a real somnambulist. In his lucid dream he sees farther than when awake, and reaches the heights of truth; when the world of imagination is taken away from him he is suddenly precipitated into reality."⁴⁸

Haydn attributed the conception of the *Creation* to a mysterious grace from on high: "When my work does not advance," he said, "I retire into the oratory with my rosary and say an *Ave*; immediately ideas come to me." When our Milli produces, almost without knowing it, one of her marvellous poems, she is agitated, cries, sings, takes long walks, and almost becomes the victim of an epileptic attack.

⁴⁷ *Genie und Talent*.

⁴⁸ Fischer, *Ästhetik*, ii. 1, p. 386.

Many men of genius who have studied themselves, and who have spoken of their inspiration, have described it as a sweet and seductive fever, during which their thought has become rapidly and involuntarily fruitful, and has burst forth like the flame of a lighted torch. Such is the thought that Dante has engraved in three wonderful lines: —

*“I’ mi son un che, quando
Amore spira, noto ed in quel modo
Che detta dentro vo significando.”*⁴⁹

Napoleon said that the fate of battles was the result of an instant, of a latent thought; the decisive moment appeared; the spark burst forth, and one was victorious. (Moreau.) Kuh’s most beautiful poems, wrote Bauer, were dictated in a state between insanity and reason; at the moment when his sublime thoughts came to him he was incapable of simple reasoning. Foscolo tells us in his *Epistolario*, the finest monument of his great soul, that writing depends on a certain amiable fever of the mind, and cannot be had at will: “I write letters, not for my country, nor for fame, but for the secret joy which arises from the exercise of our faculties; they have need of movement, as our legs of walking.” Mozart confessed that musical ideas were aroused in him, even apart from his will, like dreams. Hoffmann often said

⁴⁹ “I am one who, when Love inspires, attend, and according as he speaks within me, so I express myself.”

to his friends, “When I compose I sit down to the piano, shut my eyes, and play what I hear.”⁵⁰ Lamartine often said, “It is not I who think; my ideas think for me.”⁵¹ Alfieri, who compared himself to a barometer on account of the continual changes in his poetic power, produced by change of season, had not the strength in September to resist a new, or rather, renewed, impulse which he had felt for several days; he declared himself vanquished, and wrote six comedies. In Alfieri, Goethe, and Ariosto creation was instantaneous, often even being produced on awaking.⁵²

This domination of genius by the unconscious has been remarked for many centuries. Socrates said that poets create, not by virtue of inventive science, but, thanks to a very certain natural instinct, just as diviners predict, saying beautiful things, but not having consciousness of what they say.⁵³ “All the manifestations of genius,” wrote Voltaire to Diderot, “are the effects of instinct. All the philosophers of the world put together would not be able to produce Quinault’s *Armide*, or the *Animaux Malades de la peste*, which La Fontaine wrote without knowing what he did. Corneille composed *Horace* as a bird composes its nest.”⁵⁴

Thus the greatest conceptions of thought, prepared, so to

⁵⁰ Schilling, *Psychiat. Briefe*, p. 486.

⁵¹ Ball, *Leçons des Maladies Mentales*, 1881.

⁵² Radestock, p. 42.

⁵³ *Apologia*.

⁵⁴ Letter of April 20, 1752.

say, by former sensations, and by exquisite organic sensibility, suddenly burst forth and develop by unconscious cerebration. Thus also may be explained the profound convictions of prophets, saints, and demoniacs, as well as the impulsive acts of the insane.

Somnambulism.— Bettinelli wrote: “Poetry may almost be called a dream which is accomplished in the presence of reason, which floats above it with open eyes.” This definition is the more exact since many poets have composed their poems in a dream or half-dream. Goethe often said that a certain cerebral irritation is necessary to the poet; many of his poems were, in fact, composed in a state bordering on somnambulism. Klopstock declared that he had received several inspirations for his poems in dreams. Voltaire conceived during sleep one of the books of his *Henriade*; Sardini, a theory on the flageolet; Seckendorf, his beautiful ode to imagination, which in its harmony reflects its origin. Newton and Cardan resolved mathematical problems in dreams. Nodier composed *Lydia*, together with a complete theory of future destiny, as the result of dreams which “succeeded each other,” he wrote, “with such redoubled energy, from night to night, that the idea transformed itself into a conviction.” Muratori, many years after he had ceased to write verse, improvised in a dream a Latin pentameter. It is said that La Fontaine composed in a dream his *Deux Pigeons*, and that Condillac completed during sleep a lesson interrupted in his waking hours.⁵⁵ Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*

⁵⁵ Verga, *Lazzaretti*, 1880.

was composed, in ill health, during a profound sleep produced by an opiate; he was only able to recall fifty-four lines. Holde's *Phantasie* was composed under somewhat similar conditions.

Genius in Inspiration.— It is very true that nothing so much resembles a person attacked by madness as a man of genius when meditating and moulding his conceptions. *Aut insanit homo aut versus facit.* According to Réveillé-Parise, the man of genius exhibits a small contracted pulse, pale, cold skin, a hot, feverish head, brilliant, wild, injected eyes. After the moment of composition it often happens that the author himself no longer understands what he wrote a short time before. Marini, when writing his *Adone*, did not feel a serious burn of the foot. Tasso, during composition, was like a man possessed. Lagrange felt his pulse become irregular while he wrote. Alfieri's sight was troubled. Some, in order to give themselves up to meditation, even put themselves artificially into a state of cerebral semi-congestion. Thus Schiller plunged his feet into ice. Pitt and Fox prepared their speeches after excessive indulgence in porter. Paisiello composed beneath a mountain of coverlets. Descartes buried his head in a sofa. Bonnet retired into a cold room with his head enveloped in hot cloths. Cujas worked lying prone on the carpet. It was said of Leibnitz that he “meditated horizontally,” such being the attitude necessary to enable him to give himself up to the labour of thought. Milton composed with his head leaning over his easy-chair.⁵⁶ Thomas and Rossini composed in their

⁵⁶ Réveillé-Parise, p. 285.

beds. Rousseau meditated with his head in the full glare of the sun.⁵⁷ Shelley lay on the hearthrug with his head close to the fire. All these are instinctive methods for augmenting momentarily the cerebral circulation at the expense of the general circulation.

It is known that very often the great conceptions of thinkers have been organized, or at all events have taken their start, in the shock of a special sensation which produced on the intelligence the effect of a drop of salt water on a well-prepared voltaic pile. All great discoveries have been occasioned, according to Moleschott's remark, by a simple sensation.⁵⁸ Some frogs which were to furnish a medicinal broth for Galvani's wife were the origin of the discovery of galvanism; the movement of a hanging lamp, the fall of an apple, inspired the great systems of Galileo and Newton. Alfieri composed or conceived his tragedies while listening to music, or soon after. A celebrated cantata of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* came to him on seeing an orange, which recalled a popular Neapolitan air heard five years before. The sight of a porter suggested to Leonardo da Vinci his celebrated *Giuda*. The movements of his model suggested to Thorwaldsen the attitude of his Seated Angel. Salvator Rosa owed his first grandiose inspirations to the scenes of Posilipo. Hogarth conceived his grotesque scenes in a Highgate tavern, after his nose had been broken in a dispute with a drunkard. Milton, Bacon, Leonardo da Vinci, liked to hear music before beginning to work. Bourdaloue

⁵⁷ Arago, *Œuvres*, iii.

⁵⁸ *Kreislauf des Lebens*, Brief. xviii.

tried an air on the violin before writing one of his immortal sermons. Reading one of Spenser's odes aroused the poetic vocation in Cowley. A boiling teakettle suggested to Watt the idea of the steam-engine.

In the same way a sensation is the point of departure of the terrible deeds produced by impulsive mania. Humboldt's nursemaid confessed that the sight of the fresh and delicate flesh of his child irresistibly impelled her to bite it. Many persons, at the sight of a hatchet, a flame, a corpse, have been drawn to murder, incendiarism, or the profanation of cemeteries.

It must be added that inspiration is often transformed into a real hallucination; in fact, as Bettinelli well says, the man of genius sees the objects which his imagination presents to him. Dickens and Kleist grieved over the fates of their heroes. Kleist was found in tears just after finishing one of his tragedies: "She is dead," he said. Schiller was as much moved by the adventures of his personages as by real events.⁵⁹ T. Grossi told Verga that in describing the apparition of Prina, he saw the figure come before him, and was obliged to relight his lamp to make it disappear.⁶⁰ Brierre de Boismont tells us that the painter Martina really saw the pictures he imagined. One day, some one having come between him and the hallucination, he asked this person to move so that he might go on with his picture.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Dilthey, *Ueber Einbildungskraft der Dichter*, 1887.

⁶⁰ Lazzaretti, *op. cit.*, 1880.

⁶¹ *Des Hallucinations*, p. 30. Recent investigations in hypnotism show that the

Contrast, Intermittence, Double Personality.— When the moment of inspiration is over, the man of genius becomes an ordinary man, if he does not descend lower; in the same way personal inequality, or, according to modern terminology, double, or even contrary, personality, is the one of the characters of genius. Our greatest poets, Isaac Disraeli remarked (in *Curiosities of Literature*), Shakespeare and Dryden, are those who have produced the worst lines. It was said of Tintoretto that sometimes he surpassed Tintoretto, and sometimes was inferior to Caracci. Great tragic actors are very cheerful in society, and of melancholy humour at home. The contrary is true of genuine comedians. “John Gilpin,” that masterpiece of humour, was written by Cowper between two attacks of melancholia. Gaiety was in him the reaction from sadness. It was singular, he remarked, that his most comic verses were written in his saddest moments, without which he would probably never have written them. A patient one day presented himself to Abernethy; after careful examination the celebrated practitioner said, “You need amusement; go and hear Grimaldi; he will make you laugh, and that will be better for you than any drugs.” “My God,” exclaimed the invalid, “but I am Grimaldi!” D  bureau in like manner went to consult an alienist about his melancholy; he was advised to go to D  bureau. Klopstock was questioned regarding the meaning of a passage in his poem. He replied, “God and I

hallucination often has the character of real sensation; that, for example, visual suggestions may be modified by lenses. See my *Nuove Studii sull' ipnotismo*.

both knew what it meant once; now God alone knows.” Giordano Bruno said of himself: “*In hilaritate tristis, in tristitia hilaris.*” Ovidio justly remarked concerning the contradictions in Tasso’s style, that “when the inspiration was over, he lost his way in his own creations, and could no longer appreciate their beauty or be conscious of it.”⁶² Renan described himself as “a tissue of contradictions, recalling the classic *hirocercf* with two natures. One of my halves is constantly occupied in demolishing the other, like the fabulous animal of Ctesias, who ate his paws without knowing it.”⁶³

“If there are two such different men in you,” said his mistress to Alfred de Musset, “could you not, when the bad one rises, be content to forget the good one?”⁶⁴ Musset himself confesses that, with respect to her, he gave way to attacks of brutal anger and contempt, alternating with fits of extravagant affection; “an exaltation carried to excess made me treat my mistress like an idol, like a divinity. A quarter of an hour after having insulted her I was at her knees; I left off accusing her to ask her pardon; and passed from jesting to tears.”

Stupidity.— The doubling of personality, the amnesia and the misoneism so common among men of science, are the key to the innumerable stupidities which intrude into their writings: *quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*. Flaubert made a very

⁶² *Studi Critici*, Naples, 1880, p. 95.

⁶³ *Souvenirs*, p. 73, Paris, 1883.

⁶⁴ *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*, pp. 218, 251.

curious collection of these, and called it the “*Dossier de la sottise humaine*.” Here are some examples: “The wealth of a country depends on its general prosperity” (Louis Napoleon). “She did not know Latin, but understood it very well” (Victor Hugo, in *Les Misérables*). “Wherever they are, fleas throw themselves against white colours. This instinct has been given them in order that we may catch them more easily... The melon has been divided into slices by nature in order that it may be eaten *en famille*; the pumpkin, being larger, may be eaten with neighbours” (Bernardin de Saint Pierre in *Harmonie de la Nature*). “It is the business of bishops, nobles, and the great officers of the State to be the depositaries and the guardians of the conservative virtues, to teach nations what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is false, in the moral and spiritual world. Others have no right to reason on these matters. They may amuse themselves with the natural sciences. What have they to complain of?” (De Maistre in *Soirées de St. Petersburg*, 8^e Entretien, p. 131). “When one has crossed the bounds there are no limits left” (Ponsard). “I have often heard the blindness of the council of Francis I. deplored in repelling Christopher Columbus, when he proposed his expedition to the Indies” (Montesquieu, in *Esprit des Lois*, liv., xxi., chap. xxii. Francis I. ascended the throne in 1515; Columbus died in 1506). “Bonaparte was a great gainer of battles, but beyond that the least general is more skilful than he... It has been believed that he perfected the art of war, and

it is certain that he made it retrograde towards the childhood of art" (Chateaubriand, *Les Buonaparte et les Bourbons*). "Voltaire is nowhere as a philosopher, without authority as a critic and historian, out of date as a man of science" (Dupanloup, *Haute Éducation intellectuelle*). "Grocery is respectable. It is a branch of commerce. The army is more respectable still, because it is an institution, the aim of which is order. Grocery is useful, the army is necessary" (Jules Noriac in *Les Nouvelles*). Let us recall Pascal, at one time more incredulous than Pyrrho, at another, writing like a Father of the Church; or Voltaire, believing sometimes in destiny, which "causes the growth and the ruin of States";⁶⁵ sometimes in fatality which "governs the affairs of the world";⁶⁶ sometimes in Providence.⁶⁷

Hyperæsthesia.— If we seek, with the aid of autobiographies, the differences which separate a man of genius from an ordinary man, we find that they consist in very great part in an exquisite, and sometimes perverted, sensibility.

The savage and the idiot feel physical pain very feebly; they have few passions, and they only attend to the sensations which concern more directly the necessities of existence. The higher we rise in the moral scale, the more sensibility increases; it is highest in great minds, and is the source of their misfortunes as well as of their triumphs. They feel and notice more things, and with

⁶⁵ Introduction to *Essai sur les Mœurs*.

⁶⁶ *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, 1.

⁶⁷ *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. Climat.

greater vivacity and tenacity than other men; their recollections are richer and their mental combinations more fruitful. Little things, accidents that ordinary people do not see or notice, are observed by them, brought together in a thousand ways, which we call *creations*, and which are only binary and quaternary combinations of sensations.

Haller wrote: "What remains to me except sensibility, that powerful sentiment which results from a temperament vividly moved by the impressions of love and the marvels of science? Even to-day to read of a generous action calls tears from my eyes. This sensibility has certainly given to my poems a passion which is not found elsewhere."⁶⁸ Diderot said: "If nature has ever made a sensitive soul it is mine. Multiply sensitive souls, and you will augment good and evil actions."⁶⁹

The first time that Alfieri heard music he experienced as it were a dazzling in his eyes and ears. He passed several days in a strange but agreeable melancholy; there was an efflorescence of fantastic ideas; at that moment he could have written poetry if he had known how, and expressed sentiments if he had had any to express. He concludes, with Sterne, Rousseau, and George Sand, that "there is nothing which agitates the soul with such unconquerable force as musical sounds." Berlioz has described his emotions on hearing beautiful music: first, a sensation of voluptuous ecstasy, immediately followed by general agitation

⁶⁸ *Tagebuch*, ii. p. 120.

⁶⁹ *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*.

with palpitation, oppression, sobbing, trembling, sometimes terminating with a kind of fainting fit. Malibran, on first hearing Beethoven's symphony in C minor, had a convulsive attack and had to be taken out of the hall. Musset, Goncourt, Flaubert, Carlyle had so delicate a perception of sounds that the noises of the streets and bells were insupportable to them; they were constantly changing their abodes to avoid these sounds, and at last fled in despair to the country.⁷⁰ Schopenhauer also hated noise.

Urquiza fainted on breathing the odour of a rose. Baudelaire had a very delicate sense of smell; he perceived the odour of women in dresses; he could not live in Belgium, he said, because the trees had no fragrance.

Guy de Maupassant says of Gustave Flaubert: "From his early childhood the distinctive features of his nature were a great

⁷⁰ Noise had become an obsession to Jules de Goncourt, says his brother Edmund, in a note to the former's *Lettres*: "It seemed to him that he had 'an ear in the pit of his stomach,' and indeed noise had taken, and continued to take as his illness increased, as it were in some *féerie* at once absurd and fatal, the character of a persecution of the things and surroundings of his life... During the last years of his life he suffered from noise as from a brutal physical touch... This persecution by noise led my brother to sketch a gloomy story during his nightly insomnia... In this story a man was eternally pursued by noise, and leaves the rooms he had rented, the houses he had bought, the forests in which he had camped, forests like Fontainebleau, from which he is driven by the hunter's horn, the interior of the pyramids, in which he was deafened by the crickets, always seeking silence, and at last killing himself for the sake of the silence of supreme repose, and not finding it then, for the noise of the worms in his grave prevented him from sleeping. Oh, noise, noise, noise! I can no longer bear to hear the birds. I begin to cry to them like Débureau to the nightingale, 'Will you not be still, vile beast?' " (*Lettres de Jules de Goncourt*, Paris, 1885.)

naïveté and a horror of physical action. All his life he remained *naïf* and sedentary. It exasperated him to see people walking or moving about him, and he declared in his mordant, sonorous, always rather theatrical voice, that it was not philosophic. ‘One can only think and write seated,’ he said.”⁷¹ Sterne wrote that intuition and sensibility are the only instruments of genius, the source of the delicious impressions which give a more brilliant colour to joy, and which make us weep with happiness. It is known that Alfieri and Foscolo often fell at the feet of women who were very unworthy of them. Alfieri could not eat on the day when his horse did not neigh. Every one knows that the beauty and love of the Fornarina inspired Raphael’s palette, but very few know that he also composed one hundred sonnets in her honour.⁷²

Dante and Alfieri fell in love at nine years of age, Scarron at eight, Rousseau at eleven, Byron at eight. At sixteen Byron, hearing that his beloved was about to marry, almost fell into convulsions; he was almost suffocated and, although he had no idea of sex, he doubted if he ever loved so truly in later years. He had a convulsive attack, Moore tells us, on seeing Kean act. The painter Francia died of joy on seeing one of Raphael’s pictures. Ampère was so sensitive to the beauties of nature that he thought he would die of happiness on seeing the magnificent shores of

⁷¹ *Étude sur Gustave Flaubert*, Paris, 1885.

⁷² Among the fragments that have been preserved some are of great sweetness: —“Quanto fu dolce il giogo e la catenaDe’ suoi candidi bracci al col mio volte, Che sciogliendomi io sento mortal pena;D’altre cose non dico che son molte, Chè soverchia dolcezza a morte mena.”

Genoa. In one of his manuscripts he had left the journal of an unfortunate passion. Newton was so affected on discovering the solution of a problem that he was unable to continue his work. Gay-Lussac and Davy, after making a discovery, danced about in their slippers.

It is this exaggerated sensibility of men of genius, found in less degree in men of talent also, which causes great part of their real or imaginary misfortunes. "This precious gift," writes Mantegazza, "this rare privilege of genius, brings in its train a morbid reaction to the smallest troubles from without; the slightest breeze, the faintest breath of the dog-days, becomes for these sensitive persons the ruffled rose-petal which will not let the unfortunate sybarite sleep."⁷³ La Fontaine perhaps thought of himself when he wrote: —

"Un souffle, une ombre, un rien leur donne la fièvre."

Offences which for others are but pin-pricks for them are sharpened daggers. When Foscolo heard a mocking word from one of his friends he became indignant, and said to her: "You wish to see me dead; I will break my skull at your feet"; so saying, he threw himself with great violence and lowered head against the edge of the marble mantelpiece; a charitable bystander promptly seized him by the collar of his coat, and saved his life by throwing him on the ground. Boileau and Chateaubriand could not hear any one praised,

⁷³ Mantegazza, *Del Nervosismo dei grandi uomini*, 1881.

even their shoemakers, without a certain annoyance. Hence the manifestations of morbid vanity which often approximate men of genius to ambitious monomaniacs. Schopenhauer was furious and refused to pay his debts to any one who spelled his name with a double "p." Barthez could not sleep with grief because in the printing of his *Génie* the accent on the *ē* was divided into two. Whiston said he ought not to have published his refutation of Newton's chronology, as Newton was capable of killing him. Poushkin was seen one day in the crowded theatre, in a fit of jealousy, to bite the shoulder of the wife of the Governor-General, Countess Z., to whom he was then paying attention.

Any one who has had the rare fortune to live with men of genius is soon struck by the facility with which they misinterpret the acts of others, believe themselves persecuted, and find everywhere profound and infinite reasons for grief and melancholy. Their intellectual superiority contributes to this end, being equally adapted to discover new aspects of truth and to create imaginary ones, confirming their own painful illusions. It is true, also, that their intellectual superiority permits them to acquire and to express, regarding the nature of things, convictions different from those adopted by the majority, and to manifest them with an unshakeable firmness which increases the opposition and contrast.

But the principal cause of their melancholy and their misfortunes is the law of dynamism which rules in the nervous system. To an excessive expenditure and development of nervous

force succeeds reaction or enfeeblement. It is permitted to no one to expend more than a certain quantity of force without being severely punished on the other side; that is why men of genius are so unequal in their productions. Melancholy, depression, timidity, egoism, are the prices of the sublime gifts of intellect, just as uterine catarrhs, impotence, and tabes dorsalis are the prices of sexual abuse, and gastritis of abuse of appetite.

Milli, after one of her eloquent improvisations which are worth the whole existence of a minor poet, falls into a state of paralysis which lasts several days. Mahomet after prophesying fell into a state of imbecility. "Three *suras* of the *Koran*," he said one day to Abou-Bekr, "have been enough to whiten my hair."⁷⁴ In short, I do not believe there has ever been a great man who, even at the height of his happiness, has not believed and proclaimed, even without cause, that he was unfortunate and persecuted, and who has not at some moment experienced the painful modifications of sensibility which are the foundation of melancholia.

Sometimes this sensibility undergoes perversion; it consumes itself, and is agitated around a single point, remaining indifferent to all others. Certain series of ideas or sensations acquire, little by little, the force of a special stimulant on the brain, and sometimes on the entire organism, so that they seem to survive life itself. Heine, who in his letters declared himself incapable of understanding the simplest things, Heine, blind and paralytic,

⁷⁴ *Journal des Savants*, Oct., 1863.

when advised to turn towards God, replied in his dying agony: “*Dieu me pardonnera; c’est son métier;*” thus crowning with a stroke of supreme irony the most æsthetically cynical life of our time. The last words of Aretino after extreme unction were, it is said, “Keep me from the rats now I am anointed.” The dying Rabelais enveloped his head in his *domino*, and said, “*Beati qui in Domino moriuntur.*” Malherbe, in his last illness, reproached his nurse with the solecisms she committed, and rejected the counsel of his confessor on account of its bad style. The last words of Bouhours the grammarian, were, “*Je vais ou je va mourir: l’un et l’autre se disent.*”

Foscolo confesses that “very active in some directions, he was in others inferior to a man, to a woman, to a child.”⁷⁵ It is known that Corneille, Descartes, Virgil, Addison, La Fontaine, Dryden, Manzoni, Newton, were almost incapable of expressing themselves in public. D’Alembert and Ménage, insensible to the sufferings of a surgical operation, wept at a slight critical censure. Luce de Lancival smiled when his legs were amputated, but could not endure Geoffrey’s criticisms. Linnæus, at the age of sixty, rendered paralytic and insensible by an apoplectic stroke, was aroused when carried near to his beloved herbarium.⁷⁶ Lagny was stretched out comatose, insensible to the strongest stimulants, when it occurred to some one to ask him the square of twelve, he replied immediately, “One hundred and forty-four.” Sebouyah,

⁷⁵ *Epistolario*, v. 3, p. 163.

⁷⁶ Vicq d’Azir, *Elog.*, p. 209.

the Arab grammarian, died of grief because the Khalif Haroun-al-Raschid did not agree with him on some grammatical point.

It should be observed here that men of genius, at all events, if men of science, often present that species of mania which Wechniakoff⁷⁷ and Letourneau⁷⁸ have called *monotypic*. Such men occupy themselves throughout their whole lives with one single problem, the first which takes possession of their brains, and which henceforth rules them. Otto Beckmann was occupied during the whole of his life with the pathology of the kidneys; Fresnel with light; Meyer with ants. Here is a new and striking point of resemblance with monomaniacs.

On account of this exaggerated and concentrated sensibility, it becomes very difficult to persuade or dissuade either men of genius or the insane. In them the roots of error, as well as those of truth, fix themselves more deeply and multiplexly than in other men, for whom opinion is a habit, an affair of fashion, or of circumstance. Hence the slight utility of moral treatment as applied to the insane; hence also the frequent fallibility of genius.

In the same way we can explain why it is that great minds do not seize ideas that the most vulgar intelligence can grasp, while at the same time they discover ideas which would have seemed absurd to others: their greater sensibility is associated with a greater originality of conception. In exalted meditation thought deserts the more simple and easy paths which no longer suit its

⁷⁷ *Physiologie des Génies*, 1875.

⁷⁸ *Science et Matérialisme*, 1890, p. 103.

robust energy. Thus Monge resolved the most difficult problems of a differential calculus, and was embarrassed in seeking an algebraic root of the second degree which a schoolboy might have found. One of Lulli's friends used to say habitually on his behalf: "Pay no attention to him; he has no common sense: he is all genius."

Paræsthesia.— To the exhaustion and excessive concentration of sensibility must be attributed all those strange acts showing apparent or intermittent anæsthesia, and analgesia, which are to be found among men of genius as well as among the insane. Socrates presented a photo-paræsthesia which enabled him to gaze at the sun for a considerable time without experiencing any discomfort. The Goncourts, Flaubert, Darwin had a kind of musical daltonism.

Amnesia.— Forgetfulness is another of the characters of genius. It is said that Newton once rammed his niece's finger into his pipe; when he left his room to seek for anything he usually returned without bringing it.⁷⁹ Rouelle generally explained his ideas at great length, and when he had finished, he added: "But this is one of my arcana which I tell to no one." Sometimes one of his pupils rose and repeated in his ear what he had just said aloud; then Rouelle believed that the pupil had discovered the arcanum by his own sagacity, and begged him not to divulge what he had himself just told to two hundred persons. One day, when performing an experiment during a lecture, he said to his hearers:

⁷⁹ Brewster, *Life*, 1856.

“You see, gentlemen, this cauldron over the flame? Well, if I were to leave off stirring it an explosion would at once occur which would make us all jump.” While saying these words, he did not fail to forget to stir, and the prediction was accomplished; the explosion took place with a fearful noise: the laboratory windows were all smashed, and the audience fled to the garden.⁸⁰ Sir Everard Home relates that he once suddenly lost his memory for half an hour, and was unable to recognise the house and the street in which he lived; he could not recall the name of the street, and seemed to hear it for the first time. It is told of Ampère that when travelling on horseback in the country he became absorbed in a problem; then, dismounting, began to lead his horse, and finally lost it; but he did not discover his misadventure until, on arrival, it attracted the attention of his friends. Babinet hired a country house, and after making the payments returned to town; then he found that he had entirely forgotten both the name of the place and from what station he had started.⁸¹

One day Buffon, lost in thought, ascended a tower and slid down by the ropes, unconscious of what he was doing, like a somnambulist. Mozart, in carving meat, so often cut his fingers, accustomed only to the piano, that he had to give up this duty to other persons. Of Bishop Münster, it is said that, seeing at the door of his own ante-chamber the announcement: “The master

⁸⁰ *Revue Scientifique*, 1888.

⁸¹ Michiels, *Le Monde du Comique*, 1886.

of the house is out,” he remained there awaiting his own return.⁸² Of Toucherel, it is told by Arago, that he once even forgot his own name. Beethoven, on returning from an excursion in the forest, often left his coat on the grass, and often went out hatless. Once, at Neustadt, he was arrested in this condition, and taken to prison as a vagabond; here he might have remained, as no one would believe that he was Beethoven, if Herzog, the conductor of the orchestra, had not arrived to deliver him. Gioia, in the excitement of composition, wrote a chapter on the table of his bureau instead of on paper. The Abbé Beccaria, absorbed in his experiments, said during mass: “*Ite! experientia facta est.*” Saint Dominic, in the midst of a princely repast, suddenly struck the table and exclaimed: “*Conclusum est contra Manicheos.*” It is told of Ampère that having written a formula, with which he was pre-occupied, on the back of a cab, he started in pursuit as soon as the cab went off.⁸³ Diderot hired vehicles which he then left at the door and forgot, thus needlessly paying coachmen for whole days. He often forgot the hour, the day, the month, and even the person to whom he was speaking; he would then speak long monologues like a somnambulist.⁸⁴ Rossini, conducting the orchestra at the rehearsal of his *Barbiere*, which was a fiasco, did not perceive that the public and even the performers had left him alone in the theatre until he reached the end of an act.

⁸² Réveillé-Parise, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Perez, *L'enfant de trois à sept ans*, 1886.

⁸⁴ Scherer, *Diderot*, 1880.

Originality. – Hagen notes that originality is the quality that distinguishes genius from talent.⁸⁵ And Jürgen-Meyer: “The imagination of talent reproduces the stated fact; the inspiration of genius makes it anew. The first disengages or repeats; the second invents or creates. Talent aims at a point which appears difficult to reach; genius aims at a point which no one perceives. The novelty, it must be understood, resides not in the elements, but in their shock.” Novelty and grandeur are the two chief characters which Bettinelli attributes to genius; “for this reason,” he says, “poets call themselves *troubadours* or *trouvères*.” Cardan conceived the idea of the education of deaf mutes before Harriot; he caught a glimpse of the application of algebra to geometry and geometric constructions before Descartes.⁸⁶ Giordano Bruno divined the modern theories of cosmology and of the origin of ideas. Cola di Rienzi conceived Italian unity, with Rome as capital, four hundred years before Cavour and Mazzini. Stoppani admits that the geological theory of Dante, with regard to the formation of seas, is at all points in accordance with the accepted ideas of to-day.

Genius divines facts before completely knowing them; thus Goethe described Italy very well before knowing it; and Schiller, the land and people of Switzerland without having been there. And it is on account of those divinations which all precede common observation, and because genius, occupied with lofty

⁸⁵ *Ueber die Verwandtschaft des Genies mit dem Irrsinn*, 1887.

⁸⁶ Bertolotti, *Il Testamento di Cardano*, 1883.

researches, does not possess the habits of the many, and because, like the lunatic and unlike the man of talent, he is often disordered, the man of genius is scorned and misunderstood. Ordinary persons do not perceive the steps which have led the man of genius to his creation, but they see the difference between his conclusions and those of others, and the strangeness of his conduct. Rossini's *Barbiere*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio* were received with hisses; Boito's *Mefistofele* and Wagner's *Lohengrin* have been hissed at Milan. How many academicians have smiled compassionately at Marzolo, who has discovered a new philosophic world! Bolyai, for his invention of the fourth dimension in anti-Euclidian geometry, has been called the geometrician of the insane, and compared to a miller who wishes to make flour of sand. Every one knows the treatment accorded to Fulton and Columbus and Papin, and, in our own days, to Piatti and Praga and Abel, and to Schliemann, who found Ilium, where no one else had dreamed of looking for it, while learned academicians laughed. "There never was a liberal idea," wrote Flaubert, "which has not been unpopular; never an act of justice which has not caused scandal; never a great man who has not been pelted with potatoes or struck by knives. The history of human intellect is the history of human stupidity, as M. de Voltaire said."⁸⁷

In this persecution, men of genius have no fiercer or more terrible enemies than the men of academies, who possess the

⁸⁷ G. Flaubert, *Lettres à Georges Sand*, Paris, 1885.

weapons of talent, the stimulus of vanity, and the *prestige* by preference accorded to them by the vulgar, and by governments which, in large part, consist of the vulgar. There are, indeed, countries in which the ordinary level of intelligence sinks so low that the inhabitants come to hate not only genius, but even talent.

Originality, though usually of an aimless kind, is observed with some frequency among the insane – as we shall see later on – and especially among those inclined to literature. They sometimes reach the divinations of genius: thus Bernardi, at the Florence Asylum in 1529, wished to show the existence of language among apes.⁸⁸

In exchange for this fatal gift, both the one and the other have the same ignorance of the necessities of practical life which always seems to them less important than their own dreams, and at the same time they possess the disordered habits which renders this ignorance dangerous.

Fondness for Special Words.— This originality causes men of genius, as well as the insane, to create special words, marked with their own imprint, unintelligible to others, but to which they attach extraordinary significance and importance. Such are the *dignità* of Vico, the *indivuità* of Carrara, the *odio serrato* of Alfieri, the *albero epogonico* of Marzolo, and the *immiarsi*, the *intuarsi*, and the *entomata* of Dante.

⁸⁸ Delepiepierre, *Histoire Littéraire des fous*, Paris, 1860.

CHAPTER III.

Latent Forms of Neurosis and Insanity in Genius

Chorea and Epilepsy – Melancholy – Megalomania
—*Folie du doute*— Alcoholism – Hallucinations – Moral
Insanity – Longevity.

IT is now possible to explain the frequency among men of genius, even when not insane, of those forms of neurosis or mental alienation which may be called latent, and which contain the germs and as it were the outlines of these disorders.

Chorea and Epilepsy.— Many men of genius, like the insane, are subject to curious spasmodic and choreic movements. Lenau and Montesquieu left upon the floor of their rooms the signs of the movements by which their feet were convulsively agitated during composition; Buffon, Dr. Johnson, Santeuil, Crébillon, Lombardini, exhibited the most remarkable facial contortions.⁸⁹ There was a constant quiver on Thomas Campbell's thin lips. Chateaubriand was long subject to convulsive movements of the arm. Napoleon suffered from habitual spasm of the right shoulder and of the lips; "My anger," he said, one day after an altercation with Lowe, "must have been fearful, for I felt the

⁸⁹ Réveillé-Parise, *Physiologie et Hygiène des hommes livrés aux travaux de l'esprit*, Paris, 1856.

vibration of my calves, which has not happened to me for a long time.” Peter the Great suffered from convulsive movements which horribly distorted his face. Carducci’s face at certain moments, writes Mantegazza, is a veritable hurricane; lightnings dart from his eyes and his muscles tremble.⁹⁰ Ampère could only express his thoughts while walking, and when his body was in a state of constant movement.⁹¹ Socrates often danced and jumped in the street without reason, as if by a freak.

Julius Cæsar, Dostoieffsky, Petrarch, Molière, Flaubert, Charles V., Saint Paul, and Handel, appear to have been all subject to attacks of epilepsy. Twice upon the field of battle the epileptic vertigo nearly had a serious influence on Cæsar’s fate. On another occasion, when the Senate had decreed him extraordinary honours, and had gone out to meet him with the consuls and prætors, Cæsar, who at that moment was seated at the tribune, failed to rise, and received the Senators as though they were ordinary citizens. They retired showing signs of discontent, and Cæsar, suddenly returning to himself, immediately went home, took off his clothes and uncovering his neck, exclaimed that he was ready to deliver his throat to any one who wished to cut it. He explained his behaviour to the Senate as due to the malady to which he was subject; he said that those who were affected by it were unable to speak standing, in public, that they soon felt shocks in their limbs, giddiness, and at last completely

⁹⁰ Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression*.

⁹¹ Arago, ii. p. 82.

lost consciousness.⁹²

Convulsions sometimes hindered Molière from doing any work for a fortnight at a time. Mahomet had visions after an epileptic fit: "An angel appears to me in human form; he speaks to me. Often I hear as it were the sound of cats, of rabbits, of bells: then I suffer much." After these apparitions he was overcome with sadness and howled like a young camel. Peter the Great and his son by Catherine were both epileptics.

It may be noted here that artistic creation presents the intermittence, the instantaneousness, and very often the sudden absences of mind which characterize epilepsy. Paganini, Mozart, Schiller, and Alfieri, suffered from convulsions. Paganini was even subject to catalepsy.⁹³ Pascal from the age of twenty-four had fits which lasted for whole days. Handel had attacks of furious and epileptic rage. Newton and Swift were subject to vertigo, which is related to epilepsy. Richelieu, in a fit, believed he was a horse, and neighed and jumped; afterwards he knew nothing of what had taken place.⁹⁴ Maudsley remarks that epileptics often believe themselves patriarchs and prophets. He thinks that by mistaking their hallucinations for divine revelations they have largely contributed to the foundation of religious beliefs. Anne Lee, who founded the sect of Shakers, was an epileptic: she saw Christ come to her physically and spiritually.

⁹² Plutarch, *Life, &c.*

⁹³ Radestock, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Moreau, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

The vision which transformed Saint Paul from a persecutor into an apostle seems to have been of the same order. The Siberian Shamans, who profess to have intercourse with spirits, operate in a state of convulsive exaltation, and choose their pupils by preference from among epileptic children.

Melancholy.— The tendency to melancholy is common to the majority of thinkers, and depends on their hyperæsthesia. It is proverbially said that to feel sorrow more than other men constitutes the crown of thorns of genius. Aristotle had remarked that men of genius are of melancholic temperament, and after him Jürgen-Meyer has affirmed the same. “*Tristes philosophi et severi*,” said Varro.

Goethe, the impassible Goethe, confesses that “my character passes from extreme joy to extreme melancholy;” and elsewhere that “every increase of knowledge is an increase of sorrow;” he could not recall that in all his life he had passed more than four pleasant weeks. “I am not made for enjoyment,” wrote Flaubert.⁹⁵ Giusti was affected by hypochondria, which reached to delirium; sometimes he thought he had hydrophobia. Corradi has shown⁹⁶ that all the misfortunes of Leopardi, as well as his philosophy, owe their origin to an exaggerated sensibility, and a hopeless love which he experienced at the age of eighteen. In fact, his philosophy was more or less sombre according as his health was better or worse, until the tendency was transformed into a habit.

⁹⁵ *Correspondance*, p. 119, 1887.

⁹⁶ *Memorie dell Istituto Lombardo*, 1878.

“Thought,” he wrote, “has long inflicted on me, and still inflicts, such martyrdom as to produce injurious effects, and it will kill me if I do not change my manner of existence.”⁹⁷ In his poems Leopardi appears the most romantic and philanthropic of men. In his letters, on the other hand, he appears cold, indifferent to his parents, and still more to his native country. From the publications of his host and protector Ranieri⁹⁸ may be seen how little grateful he was to his friends, and that he was eccentric to the verge of insanity. Desiring death every moment in verse, he took exaggerated pains to cling to life, exposing himself to the sun for hours together, sometimes eating only peaches, at other times only flesh, always in extremes. No one hated the country more than he, who so often sang its praises. He hardly reached it before he wished to return, and stayed with difficulty an entire day. He made day night, and night day. He suspected every one; one day he even suspected that he had been robbed of a box in which he preserved old combs.

The list of great men who have committed suicide is almost endless. It opens with the names of Zeno Aristotle(?), Hegesippus, Cleanthes, Stilpo, Dionysus of Heraclea, Lucretius, Lucan, and reaches to Chatterton, Clive, Creech, Blount, Haydon, David. Domenichino was led to commit suicide by the contempt of a rival; Spagnoletto by the abduction of his daughter; Nourrit by the success of Dupré; Gros could not survive

⁹⁷ Letter to Giordani, Aug., 1817.

⁹⁸ *Sette Anni di Sodalizio*.

the decadence of his genius. Robert, Chateaubriand, Cowper, Rousseau, Lamartine on several occasions nearly put an end to their lives. Burns wrote in a letter: "My constitution and frame were *ab origine* blasted with a deep incurable taint of melancholia which poisons my existence." Schiller passed through a period of melancholy which caused him to be suspected of insanity. In B. Constant's letters we read: "If I had had my dear opium, it would have been the moment, in honour of *ennui*, to put an end to an excessive movement of love."⁹⁹ Dupuytren thought of suicide even when he had reached the climax of fame. Pariset and Cavour were only saved from suicide by devoted friends. The latter twice attempted to kill himself. Lessmann, the humorous writer, who wrote the *Journal of a Melancholiac*, hanged himself in 1835 during an attack of melancholia. So died, also, the composer of *Masaniello*, Fischer, Romilly, Eult von Burg, Hugh Miller, Göhring, Kuh (the friend of Mendelssohn), Jules Uberti, Tannahill, Prévost-Paradol, Kleist, who died with his mistress, and Majláth, who drowned himself with his daughter.

George Sand, who seems, however, free from all neurosis, declared that whether it was that bile made her melancholy, or that melancholy made her bilious, she had been seized at moments of her life by a desire for eternal repose – for suicide. She attributed this to an affection of the liver. "It was an old chronic disorder, experienced and fought with from early youth, forgotten like an old travelling companion whom one believes

⁹⁹ B. de Boismont, *op. cit.* p. 265.

one has left behind, but who suddenly presents himself. This temptation,” she continues, “was sometimes so strange that I regarded it as a kind of madness. It took the form of a fixed idea and bordered on monomania. The idea was aroused chiefly by the sight of water, of a precipice, of phials.”

George Sand tells us that Gustave Planche was of strangely melancholy character. Edgar Quinet suffered at times from unreasonable melancholy, in this taking after his mother. Rossini experienced, about 1848, keen grief because he had bought a house at a slight loss. He became really insane, and took it into his head that he was reduced to extreme misery, so that he must beg. He believed that he had become an idiot. He could, indeed, neither compose nor even hear music spoken of. The care of Sansone, of Ancona, gradually restored him to fame and to his friends. The great painter Van Leyden believed himself poisoned, and during his latter years never rose from his bed. Mozart was convinced that the Italians wished to poison him. Molière had numerous attacks of melancholia.¹⁰⁰ Voltaire was hypochondriacal.¹⁰¹ “With respect to my body,” he wrote, “it is moribund... I anticipate dropsy. There is no appearance of it, but you know that there is nothing so dry as a dropsical person... Diseases, more cruel even than kings, are persecuting me. Doctors only are needed to finish me.” “All this” (travels, pleasures, &c.), said Grimm, “did not prevent him from saying

¹⁰⁰ Hagen, *Ueber die Verwandtschaft*, &c., 1877.

¹⁰¹ Roger, *Voltaire Malade*, 1883.

that he was dead or dying; he was even very angry when one dared to assure him that he was still full of strength and life.” Zimmermann was afraid sometimes of dying of hunger, sometimes of being arrested; he actually died of voluntary starvation, the result of a fixed idea that he had no money to pay for food. The poet Gray, the “melancholy Gray,” was of a gloomy and extremely reserved character. Abraham Lincoln was a victim of constitutional melancholy, which assumed a most dangerous form on one or two occasions in his earlier years.

Chopin during the last years of his life was possessed by a melancholy which went as far as insanity. An abandoned convent in Spain filled his imagination with phantoms and terrors. One day G. Sand and her son were late in returning from a walk. Chopin began to imagine, and finally believed, that they were dead; then he saw himself dead, drowned in a lake, and drops of frozen water fell upon his breast. They were real drops of rain falling upon him from the roof of the ruin, but he did not perceive this, even when George Sand pointed it out. Some trifling annoyance affected him more than a great and real misfortune. A crumpled petal, a fly, made him weep.¹⁰²

Cavour from youth believed himself deprived of domestic affections. He saw no friends around; he saw above him no ideal to realise; he found himself alone.¹⁰³ His condition reached such a point that, to avoid greater evils and to leave an insipid life,

¹⁰² G. Sand, *Histoire de Ma Vie*, 9.

¹⁰³ Berti, p. 154.

he wished to kill himself. He hesitated only because he was doubtful about the morality of suicide. "But, while this doubt exists, it is best for me to imitate Hamlet. I will not kill myself: no, but I will put up earnest prayers to heaven to send me a rapid consumption which may carry me off to the other world." At a very youthful age he sometimes gave himself up to strange attacks of bad temper. One day, at the Castle of Diluzers, at Balangero, he threw himself into so violent a rage on being asked to study that he wished to kill himself with a knife and throw himself from the window. These attacks were very frequent but of brief duration.¹⁰⁴ When the hopes of war raised by the words of Napoleon III. to Baron Hübner seemed suddenly to give place in the Emperor's mind to thoughts of peace, Cavour was carried away by such agitation that some extreme resolution was apprehended. This is confirmed by Castelli, who went to his house and found him alone in his room. He had burnt various papers, and given orders that no one should be admitted. The danger was plain. He looked fixedly at Castelli, who spoke a few calm words calculated to affect him, and then burst into tears. Cavour rose, embraced him convulsively, took a few steps distractedly about the room, and then said slowly: "Be at rest; we will brave everything, and always together." Castelli ran to reassure his friends, but the danger had been very grave.¹⁰⁵

Chateaubriand relates, in his *Mémoires d'outre Tombe*, that

¹⁰⁴ Berti, *Cavour Avanti il 1848*, Rome; Mayor, in *Archivio di Psichiatria*, vol. iv.

¹⁰⁵ Mayor, *op. cit.*

one day as a youth he charged an old musket, which sometimes went off by itself, with three balls, inserted the barrel in his mouth and struck the stock against the ground. The appearance of a passer-by suspended his resolution.

Gérard de Nerval was never so much inspired as in those movements when, according to the saying of Alexandre Dumas, his melancholy became his muse. “Werther, René, Antony,” says Dumas, “never uttered more poignant complaints, more sorrowful sighs, tenderer words, or more poetic cries.”

J. S. Mill¹⁰⁶ was seized during the autumn of 1826, at the age of twenty, by an attack of insanity which he himself could only describe in these words of Coleridge’s:

“A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet or relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.”

I quote these lines the more willingly as they show in their extreme energy that Coleridge himself was affected by the same malady. To this state of mind succeeded another in which Mill sought to cultivate the feelings; among other preoccupations he feared the exhaustion of musical combinations: “The octave consists only of five tones and two semi-tones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small

¹⁰⁶ *Autobiography.*

proportion are beautiful: most of them, it seemed to me, must have been already discovered, and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers to strike out, as these had done, entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty. This source of anxiety may, perhaps, be thought to resemble that of the philosophers of Laputa, who feared lest the sun should be burnt out.”¹⁰⁷

Megalomania (Delusions of grandeur). – The delirium of melancholia alternates with that of grandiose monomania.

“The title ‘Son of David,’ ” writes Renan, “was the first which Jesus Christ accepted, probably without taking part in the innocent frauds by which it was sought to make it certain. The family of David had, in fact, long been extinct.” Later on he declared himself the son of God. “His Father had given him all power; nature obeyed him; he could forgive sins; he was superior to David, to Abraham, to Solomon, to the prophets. It is evident,” Renan continues, “that the title of Rabbi, with which he was at first contented, no longer satisfied him; even the title of Prophet or Messenger from God no longer corresponded to his conception. The position which he attributed to himself was that of a superhuman being.” He declared that he was come to give sight to the blind, and to blind those who think they see. One day his ill humour with the Temple called forth an imprudent expression: “This Temple, made by human hands,” he said, “I could, if I liked, destroy, and in its place build another, not

¹⁰⁷ *Autobiography*, p. 145.

made by human hands. The Queen of Sheba,” he added, “will rise up at the Judgment against the men of to-day and condemn them, because they came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon’s wisdom; yet a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the Judgment against the men of to-day and condemn them, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; yet a greater than Jonah is here.”

Dante’s pride, legitimate as it may have been, is proverbial. It is well known that he placed himself “*sesto fra cotanto senno*,” and declared himself superior to his contemporaries in style and the favourite of God: —

“ ... e forse e nato
Chi l’uno e l’altro caccierà di nido...
... perchè tanta
Grazia in te luce prima che sei morto...”

At the Institute Dumas said with truth of Hugo: “Victor Hugo was dominated by a fixed idea: to become the greatest poet and the greatest man of all countries and all ages.” It is this, according to Dumas, which explains the entire life and all the changes in Victor Hugo, who began by being a Catholic and monarchist. “He could not submit to be shut up within a government and a religion where he had not the right to say anything and the chance to be first. The glory of Napoleon long haunted Victor Hugo. But the day came when he could no longer tolerate that any one should have glory equal to his own. The great captain must give way

to the great poet; the giant of action must efface himself before the giant of thought. Is not Homer greater than Achilles? Victor Hugo came to believe himself superior to all human beings. He did not say, 'I am Genius,' but he began to believe firmly that the world would say so. His personages do not possess the characters of reality nor the proportions of man; they are always above and beyond humanity, sometimes reversed, not to say upside down; that was because Nature had for him aspects that were seen by no other. His eye enlarged everything; he saw herbs as tall as trees; he saw insects as large as eagles."

Hegel believed in his own divinity. He began a lecture with these words: "I may say with Christ, that not only do I teach truth, but that I am myself truth."¹⁰⁸

"Man is the vainest of animals, and the poet is the vainest of men," wrote Heine, who knew.¹⁰⁹ And in another letter: "Do not forget that I am a poet, and, as such, convinced that men must forsake all and read my verses."

"Every one knows," wrote George Sand of her friend Balzac,¹¹⁰ "how the consciousness of greatness overflowed in him, how he loved to speak of his works and to narrate them. Genial and ingenuous, he asked advice from children, but never waited for the answer, or else opposed it with all the obstinacy of his superiority. He never instructed, but always talked very well

¹⁰⁸ Von Sedlitz, *Schopenhauer*, 1872.

¹⁰⁹ *Letters*, 1885.

¹¹⁰ *Histoire de Ma Vie*, v. p. 9.

indeed of himself, of himself alone. One evening, having on a beautiful new dressing-gown, he wished to go out, thus clothed, with a lamp in his hand, to excite the admiration of the public.”

Chopin directed in his will that he should be buried in a white tie, small shoes, and short breeches. He abandoned the woman whom he tenderly loved because she offered a chair to some one else before giving the same invitation to himself.¹¹¹

Giordano Bruno declared himself illumined by superior light, a messenger from God, who knew the essence of things, a Titan who would destroy Jupiter: “And what others see far ahead I leave behind.”¹¹² And again: —

“Nam me Deus alter
Vertentis sæcli melioris non mediocrem
Destinat, haud veluti, media de plebe, magistrum.”

The poet Lucilius did not rise when Julius Cæsar entered the college of poets because he believed himself his superior in the art of verse. Ariosto, after receiving the laurel from Charles V., ran like a madman through the streets.¹¹³ The celebrated surgeon Porta would not suffer any medical paper to be read at the Lombard Institute without murmuring and showing his contempt; as soon as a mathematical or philological paper was

¹¹¹ G. Sand, *op. cit.*

¹¹² *De Immenso et innumerat.*, iii.

¹¹³ G. Menke, *De ciarlataneria eruditorum*, 1780.

brought forward he became quiet and attentive. Comte gave out that he was the High Priest of Humanity. Wetzel intitled his works, *Opera Dei Wetzelii*. Rouelle, the founder of chemistry in France, quarrelled with all his disciples who wrote on chemistry. They were, he said, ignorant bunglers, plagiaries; this latter term assumed so odious a significance in his mind that he applied it to the worst criminals; for instance, to express his horror of Damiens he said he was a plagiarist.

Many men of genius, while avoiding these excesses, nevertheless believe that they embody in themselves absolute truth; they modify scientific conclusions in their own interests, and in accordance with the part they are themselves able to take. Delacroix, become incapable of drawing beautiful lines, declared, "Colour is everything." Ingres said, "Drawing is honesty, drawing is honour." Chopin charged Schubert and Shakespeare with temerity because in these great men he always sought a correspondence with his own temperament.¹¹⁴ The Princess Conti having said to Malherbe, "I wish to show you some of the most beautiful verses in the world, which you have not yet seen," he replied immediately with emotion, "Pardon me, madame, I have seen them; for, since they are the most beautiful in the world, I must have written them myself."

Folie du doute.— Among men of genius we often find the phenomena which characterizes that disorder termed by alienists *folie du doute*, one of the varieties of melancholia. In this form

¹¹⁴ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1883.

of insanity the subject has every appearance of mental health; he reasons, writes, and speaks like other people; everything goes well until he has to execute a definite action, and in this he finds all sorts of imaginary dangers. Thus I have treated a woman who when she had to get up in the morning, would hesitate for hours beside her bed, with one arm in the sleeve of her chemise, and the other sleeve hanging down, until her husband came to her help. Sometimes the husband was obliged to give her a few slight blows to induce her to take action. If she went for a walk and knocked against a stone, or came across a puddle, she would remain motionless; her husband had then to carry her for a few instants. In conversation she seemed the best and most sensible of mothers, but woe to the unfortunate person who dropped any word she regarded with suspicion, such as “devil,” “death,” “God”; she immediately seized him and cried out, until he repeated a certain formula, declaring a dozen times that the word had not been uttered to injure her. A peasant, affected by the same disorder, was incapable of attending to his work, unless some one was there to watch over him; for, said he, “I cannot make up my mind whether I ought to dig or to hoe, to go to the field or to the hill, and my uncertainty is so great that I end by doing nothing.”

When Johnson walked along the streets of London he was compelled to touch every post he passed; if he omitted one he had to return. He always went in or out of a door or passage in such a way that either his right or his left foot (Boswell was not

certain which) should be the first to cross the threshold; when he made any mistake in the movement, he would return, and, having satisfactorily performed the feat, rejoin his companions with the air of a man who had got something off his mind. Napoleon I. could not pass through a street, even at the head of his army, without counting and adding up the rows of windows. Manzoni, in a letter (addressed to Giorgio Briano) which has become famous, declared that he was incapable of giving himself up to politics because he did not know how to decide on anything; he was always in a state of uncertainty before every resolution, even the most trifling. He was afraid of drowning in the smallest puddle, and could never resolve to go out alone; he confessed on various occasions that, from his youth up, he had suffered from melancholy.¹¹⁵ He passed whole days without being able to apply himself to anything,¹¹⁶ so that in a month there were five or six useful days during which he worked five hours, and then he became incapable of thinking.¹¹⁷ Ugo Foscolo said that “very active in regard to some things, he was in regard to others less than a man, less than a woman, less than a child.”¹¹⁸ Tolstoi confesses that philosophic scepticism had led him into a condition approximating to madness; let us add, to *folie du doute*. “I imagined,” he said, “that there existed nothing outside

¹¹⁵ *Letters*, p. 62.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 119, 123.

¹¹⁷ G. Sforza, *Epistolario di A. Manzoni*, Milan, 1883.

¹¹⁸ *Epistolario*, 3, p. 163.

me, either living or dead; that the objects were not objects, but vain appearances; this state reached such a point that sometimes I turned suddenly round, and looked behind me in the hope of seeing *nothing* where I was not.” “The deplorable mania of doubt exhausts me,” cried Flaubert, “I doubt about everything, even about my doubts.”¹¹⁹ “I am embarrassed and frightened at my own ideas,” wrote Maine de Biran, “every expression stops me and gives me scruples. I have no confidence in anything that I publish, and am always tempted to withdraw my works when they have scarcely appeared, to substitute others which would certainly be worthless. I always call those happy who are tied down to fixed labour, who are not submitted to the torment of uncertainty, to the indecision which poisons men who are masters of their time. I am always trying my strength; I commence, and recommence again and again. It is my fortune to be useless, to be wanting in measure, never to feel my existence, never to have confidence in my capacity. I am never happy wherever I am, because I carry within my own organism a source of affliction and unrest. I have only sufficient feeling of my own personality to feel my impotence, which is a great torture. I am always ready to do a number of things ... and I do nothing.”¹²⁰ The little miseries of existence were tortures for Carlyle; to have to pack his portmanteau was a grave affair of state; the idea of ordering coats or buying gloves crushed him. “I have

¹¹⁹ *Correspondance*, p. 119. 1887.

¹²⁰ *Journal de ma vie intime*.

long renounced the omnibus,” wrote Renan in his *Souvenirs de Jeunesse*, “the conductors refuse to regard me as a serious traveller. At the railway station, unless I have the protection of an inspector, I always obtain the worst place... I see too well that to do a good turn to one, is usually to do a bad one to another. The vision of the unknown person I am injuring stops short my zeal.”

Renan, indeed, is a most singular instance of these characteristics in connection with genius, from his earliest years. At mass his childish eye wandered over the roof of the chapel, and he thought of the great men told of in books. It was his dream to write books. “My gentleness,” he writes, “which often arises from indifference, my indulgence, which is very sincere and which depends on a clear perception of the injustice of men to each other, the conscientious habits which are a pleasure to me, the indefinite endurance of *ennui* which I possess – having, perhaps, been inoculated in my youth – may be explained by my surroundings, and the deep impressions I have received. The paradoxical vow to preserve the clerical virtues without the faith which serves as basis for them, and in a world for which they are not made, produced, so far as I am concerned, the most amusing incidents. If ever a comic writer wishes to amuse the public at my expense, he needs but my collaboration; I could tell him things far more amusing than he could invent.” A layman and a sceptic he preserved, involuntarily, the vow of poverty. “My dream would be to be housed, fed, clothed, and warmed, without having to think about it, by someone who would take charge of me and

leave me free. The competence which I possess came late, and in spite of myself... I always thought about writing; it did not occur to me it could bring me any money. What was my astonishment when I saw a gentleman of agreeable and intelligent appearance enter my garret, compliment me on some articles I had published, and offer to collect them in a volume. He brought a stamped paper stipulating conditions I thought astonishingly generous, so that when he asked me to include all my future writings in the same contract, I consented. The idea came to me to make some observations, but I paused at sight of the document; the thought that that beautiful sheet of paper would be lost stopped me. I did well to stop." The politeness which he wrongly believes he learnt at the seminary is not the raw and cold politeness of the priest, but the special and excessive timidity of genius. He could not, he says, treat even a dog with an air of authority. But authority is the chief characteristic of priests. To imagine as he does that men are always good and deserving could only be, as he himself justly notes, a continual danger. "Notwithstanding all my efforts to the contrary, I was predestined to be what I am, a romantic protesting against romanticism, an utopian preaching materialistic politics, an idealist uselessly giving himself much trouble to appear *bourgeois*, a tissue of contradictions... It is as a great observer Challemeil-Lacour has excellently said, 'He thinks like a man, feels like a woman, and acts like a child.' I do not complain, since this moral constitution has procured me the most

vivid intellectual joys that may be tasted.”¹²¹

But the most striking example of this permanent state of doubt is supplied by another philosopher, the author of a journal of his own life, Amiel. He was so tormented by doubt that the strength of his genius was only shown after his death, when in his journal he revealed with absolute exactness the wound which gnawed him. Let us read a few of the most remarkable passages: —

“As life flees,” he says, “I mourn the loss of reality: thought is sad without action, and action is sad without thought: the real is spoilt when the ideal has not added its perfume; but the ideal, when not made one with the real, becomes a poison. I have never learnt the art of writing; it would have been useful to me, but I was ashamed of the useful: on the other hand, I have acquired two opposed intellectual habits: to note immediately passing impressions and to analyse them scientifically... This journal will be useful to no one, and even for me it will serve rather to plan out life than to practice it; it is a pillow of idleness... And even in style I am unequal. Always energetic and correct: that results from my existence: I see before me several expressions and I do not know which I ought to choose. The unique expression is an act of courage which implies confidence in oneself... I discovered very early that it is easier to give up a wish than to gratify it... The idea may be modified, but not the action, so I abhor it, for I fear useless remorse: I thrust aside the idea of a family, because every

¹²¹ *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse.*

lost joy is the stab of a knife, because every hope is an egg from which may proceed a serpent as well as a dove... Action is my cross because it would be my dream; but to be false to the ideal would soil the conscience and be an unpardonable error... It is my passion to injure my interests. When a thing attracts me I flee from it.”¹²²

Every one may see the glorious kinship to genius of all these forms of disease. And every one will think of the great poet-alienist who divined insanity in genius, and left of it a monumental portrait in Hamlet, the man afflicted by *folie du doute*.

It is scarcely necessary to add that these great disordered minds must not be confused with the poor inmates, without genius, of our asylums. Although, as diseased persons, they belong to the same category, and have some of the same characters, they must not be identified with them. While ordinary lunatics are reduced to inaction, or the agitation of sterile delirium, these disordered men of genius are the more active in the ideal life because the less apt for practical life. Further, when we analyse more delicately this form of insanity, or rather of impotence for practical action, so common among men of genius, we see that it is distinct from the other forms. In scientific work these men do not lack precision, or decision, or audacity. But by expending their strength on theoretical problems, they end by failing with reference to practical things.

¹²² Amiel, *Journal Intime*, Geneva, 2nd ed., 1889.

By carrying their glance above and beyond, these sublimely far-sighted persons become, like astronomers, unable to perceive neighbouring objects. The effects seem partly identical, but the nature of the phenomena and their causes are absolutely different.

In his "Dialogue of Nature," Leopardi, after having shown how the excellence of genius involves a greater intensity of life, and consequently a more vivid sense of individual misfortune, makes Nature address him thus: "Besides, the delicacy of your own intelligence and the vivacity of your imagination will shut you out, for a great part, from your empire of yourself. The brutes follow easily the ends that they propose to themselves, with all their faculties and all their strength. But men very rarely utilize all their power; they are usually stopped by reason and imagination, which create for them a thousand uncertainties in deliberation, a thousand obstacles in execution. Those who are less apt or less accustomed to consider and balance motions are the most prompt in taking a resolution, the most powerful in action. But those who are like you, the elect souls, continually folded on themselves and outrun, as it were, by the greatness of their own faculties, consequently powerless to govern themselves, are most often subjected, either in deliberation or execution, to irresolution, which is one of the greatest penalties which afflict human life. Add to this that the excellence of your aptitudes will enable you to surpass, easily and briefly, all other souls in the most profound sciences and the most difficult researches; but, nevertheless,

it will always be impossible or extremely difficult for you to learn or to put in practice a great many things, insignificant in themselves, but absolutely necessary in your relations with other men. And at the same time you will find these things learnt and easily applied by minds, not only inferior to yours, but altogether contemptible.”

Alcoholism.— Many men of genius have abused alcoholic drinks. Alexander died, it is said, after having emptied ten times the goblet of Hercules, and it was without doubt in an alcoholic attack, while pursuing naked the infamous Thais, that he killed his dearest friend. Cæsar was often carried home on the shoulders of his soldiers. Neither Socrates, nor Seneca, nor Alcibiades, nor Cato, nor Peter the Great (nor his wife, Catherine, nor his daughter, Elizabeth), were remarkable for their abstinence. One recalls Horace’s line:

“Narratur et prisca Catonis sæpe mero caluisse virtus.”

Tiberius Nero was called by the Romans Biberius Mero. Septimius Severus and Mahomet II. succumbed to drunkenness or *delirium tremens*. Among confirmed drunkards must be counted the Constable de Bourbon and Avicenna, who, it was said, devoted the second half of his life to showing the uselessness of the studies to which he had devoted the first half; so also have been many famous painters, such as the Caracci, Jan Steen, Barbatelli (on this account nicknamed Pocetta), G.

Morland, Turner; and many poets and novelists, such as Murger, Gérard de Nerval, Alfred de Musset, Kleist, Poe, Hoffmann, Addison, Steele, Carew, Sheridan, Burns, Charles Lamb, James Thomson, Majláth, Hartley Coleridge. Tasso wrote in a letter: "I do not deny that I am mad, but I believe that my madness is caused by intoxication and love; for I know that I drink too much." Coleridge, on account of his lack of will, and his abuse of alcoholic drinks and opium, never succeeded in executing any of his gigantic projects; in youth he was offered thirty guineas for a poem he had improvised, but he never succeeded in getting it on to paper. His son, Hartley, a distinguished writer, gave himself up to drink so entirely that he died of it. It was said of him that he "wrote like an angel and drank like a fish." Savage, during the last days of his life almost lived on wine and died in a Bristol prison. Helius, a German poet of the sixteenth century, affirmed that it was the greatest of shames to be beaten in drinking. Shenstone said of his comrade in poetry, Somerville, that he was "forced to drink himself into pains of the body, in order to get rid of the pains of the mind." Madame de Staël and De Quincey abused opium; the latter has left a vivid picture of his excesses in the *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. Many musical composers were great drinkers; such were Dussek, Handel, and Glück, who used to say that he loved money, wine, and fame for an excellent reason: the first enabled him to obtain the second, and the second, by inspiring him, procured him fame. But besides wine he liked brandy, and one day he drank so much that he died

of it.¹²³ One may say the same of Rovani and of Praga.

Hallucinations.— We have already seen that hallucinations are so closely connected with artistic and genial creations that Brierre de Boismont associated them with the physiology of great men. Every one knows the celebrated hallucination of Cellini in his cell, those of Brutus, of Cæsar, of Napoleon, of Swedenborg, who believed that he had visited Heaven, conversed with the spirits of the great dead, and seen the Eternal Father in person; Van Helmont declared that he had seen his own soul in the form of a brilliant crystal; Kerner was visited by a spectre. Shelley thought he saw a child rise from the sea and clap its hands. Clare, after having read some historical episode, imagined that he was himself spectator and actor. Blake thought he really perceived the fantastic images reproduced by his pencil. A celebrated professor was often subject to a similar illusion, and he believed himself changed into Confucius, Papirius, and Tamerlane. Hobbes confessed that he could not go in the dark without thinking that he saw visions of the dead.¹²⁴ Bunyan heard voices.

When Columbus was cast on the shores of Jamaica he had an hallucination of hearing. He heard a voice reproaching him for giving himself up to grief and for having but a weak faith in God: "What happens to you to-day is a deserved punishment for having served the masters of the world and not God. All

¹²³ Clément, *Musiciens célèbres*, Paris, 1868.

¹²⁴ W. Irving, *Life*, 1880.

these tribulations are engraved on marble, and are not brought about without reason.” Later, Columbus declared that in him was accomplished an ancient prophecy announcing the end of the world on the day on which the universal diffusion of Christianity would be realized. According to the same prophecy, only 156 years of existence remained for humanity.¹²⁵

Malebranche declared that he had distinctly heard within himself the voice of God. Descartes, after a long seclusion, believed himself haunted by an invisible person who charged him to follow up the search for truth.¹²⁶ Byron sometimes imagined he was haunted by a spectre; he afterwards explained this himself by the extreme excitability of his brain.¹²⁷ Dr. Johnson distinctly heard his mother call him “Samuel!” although she was living in a distant town. Pope, who suffered much from the bowels, one day asked his doctor about an arm which seemed to protrude from the wall. Goethe assures us that he one day saw his own image coming to meet him.¹²⁸ When Oliver Cromwell was lying on his bed, kept awake by extreme fatigue, the curtain opened and a woman of gigantic proportions appeared and announced that he would be the greatest man in England.¹²⁹

Moral Insanity.— Complete absence of moral sense and of

¹²⁵ Verga, *Lazzaretti*, &c., Milan, 1880.

¹²⁶ Forbes Winslow, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹²⁷ Forbes Winslow, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹²⁸ *Works*, vol. xxvi. p. 83.

¹²⁹ Dendy, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

sympathy is frequently found among men of genius, as well as among the morally insane. It is an old proverb that "*Quo quisque est doctior eo est nequior.*" Aristotle, in reply to the question, "Why the most learned man is of all living beings the most unjust?" replies: "Because he aims always at pleasures which can only be attained by injustice. And, besides, knowledge resembles the stone which is good to sharpen instruments on, but may also serve the murderer's turn." And Philip of Comines says: "*Doctrina vel meliores reddit homines vel peiores pro cujusque natura.*" And Cardan: "*Sapientes cum calidissimi natura sint, ac humidissimi, nisi philosophia proficiant, pessimi omnium sunt. Adjuvant ad scelera perpetranda industria quam ex studiis acquisuerunt, et melancolia quæ resoluti humore pinguiore gignitur ex superfluis studiis, atque, vigiliis,*" &c.

"The older I grow," wrote George Sand, "the more I reverence goodness because I see that this is the gift of which God is most avaricious. Where there is no intelligence, that which is called goodness is merely stupidity. Where there is no strength the pretended goodness is apathy. Where there is strength and intelligence, goodness can scarcely be found, because experience and observation have given birth to suspicion and hate. The souls devoted to the noblest principles are often the most rough and bitter, because they have become diseased through deceptions. One esteems them, one admires them still, but one cannot love them. To have been unhappy without ceasing to be intelligent and good implies a very powerful organization, and it is such that I

seek and love... I am sick of great men (forgive the expression); I should like to see them all in Plutarch. There they do not make one suffer on the human side. Let them be cut in marble or cast in bronze, and let them be silent. So long as they live they are wicked, persecuting, fantastic, despotic, bitter, suspicious. They confuse in the same proud contempt the goats and the sheep. They are worse to their friends than to their enemies. God protect us from them; be good – stupid if you will.”¹³⁰

“I regret,” said Valerius Maximus,¹³¹ “to speak of the youth of Themistocles, when I see, on the one hand, his father disinheriting him with ignominy, and, on the other, his mother, from shame of such a son, hanging herself with grief.” Sallust, who wrote such beautiful tirades on virtue, passed his life in debauchery. Speusippus, the disciple of Plato, was killed in the act of adultery.¹³² Democritus is said to have blinded himself because he could not look at a woman without desiring her. Aristippus, under the mask of austerity, abandoned himself to debauchery. Anaxagoras denied a deposit confided to him by strangers; Aristotle basely flattered Alexander. Theognis wrote moral maxims, particularly on a happy death, and bequeathed his patrimony to a prostitute (?), leaving his own family destitute. Euripides, Juvenal, and Aretino remarked that women of letters were nearly always licentious. Thus Sappho, Philena,

¹³⁰ *Correspondance*, vol. ii. letter 9.

¹³¹ *De Factis Dictisque Memorabilibus*, Lib. vi. Cap. 9.

¹³² Tertullian, *Apologetica*, p. 46. But see *A. Gellii Noctes Atticæ*, x. p. 17.

and Elephantina were prostitutes, as was Leontion, philosopher and priestess, who gave herself to all the philosophers; and Demophila who told little love stories, and put them in practice. At the Renaissance, Veronica Franco, Tullia of Aragon, and other prostitutes, were as well known for their licentiousness as for their poetry. Voigt considers that immorality was a characteristic feature of the Renaissance period.¹³³

In my *Uomo Delinquente* I have considered criminal genius. Sallust, Seneca, and Bacon were accused of peculation; Cremani was a forger, Demme a poisoner. One may also refer to Casanova, who was declared to have forfeited his nobility for a crime the nature of which is not known, and Avicenna, an epileptic, who in old age plunged into debauchery, and took opium in excess, so that it was said of him that philosophy had not enabled him to live honestly, nor medicine to live healthily.¹³⁴

Among poets and artists criminality is, unfortunately, well marked. Many among them are dominated by passion which becomes the most powerful spur of their activity; they are not protected by the logical criticism and judgment with which men of science are armed. This is why we must count among criminals Bonfadio, Rousseau, Aretino, Ceresa, Brunetto Latini, Franco, Foscolo, possibly Byron. Observe that I leave out of the question ancient times and barbarous countries among which brigandage and poetry went hand in hand.

¹³³ *Wiederbelebung des Klassisch, Altert.*, 1882.

¹³⁴ Pouchet, *Histoire des Sciences Naturelles dans le Moyen Age*, 1870.

More criminal still seem to have been Albergati, a comic writer belonging to the highest aristocracy, who killed his wife through jealousy;¹³⁵ Muret, the humanist, condemned in France for sodomy; and Casanova, so highly gifted for mathematical science and finance, who stained his fine genius by a life of swindling and turpitude, giving us in his *Mémoires* a complete and cynical picture of it. Villon belonged to an honourable family; he received the name by which he is known (*villon*, rascal, robber), when he became famous in scoundrelism, to which he was led, by his own confession, by gaming and women. He began by stealing objects of little value to give a good dinner to his mistresses and companions in idleness; it was their wine that he stole. His chief robbery was inspired by hunger when the woman, at whose expense he lived, turned him out of doors at night in winter. It is to this woman whom, in his *Petit Testament* he bequeaths his heart. He is supposed to have joined a band of armed robbers, who attacked travellers on the Rueil road, and being arrested a second time he with difficulty escaped the halter.

It has been said of the man of genius, as of the madman, that he is born and dies in isolation, cold and insensible to family affection and social conventions. Men of letters, it is true, make much of the powerful cries of pain in artists and writers who have lost, or been abandoned by, a loved person. But often, as in Petrarch's case, this is only a pretext, an opportunity for literary

¹³⁵ Masi, *La vita ed i tempi di Albergati*, 1882.

labours.¹³⁶ Very often such cries were sincere (or could they have been so powerful and effective?) but they were then intermittent explosions, in opposition to the habitual state of these men, or else temporary reactions against their ordinary apathy, from which they were only drawn by personal vanity, and the passion of æsthetic and scientific researches.

Bulwer Lytton, from the first days of his marriage ill-treated his wife by biting and insulting her, so that the courier who accompanied them on the honeymoon refused to proceed to the end. Later he confessed to the wrong he had done her, but wrote to her that a common life was insupportable, and that he must live in liberty.

It is curious to observe that the writers who have been most chaste in their lives are least so in their writings, and *vice versa*. Flaubert wrote in one of his letters, "Poor Bouilhet used to say to me, 'There never was so moral a man who loved immorality so much as you.' There is truth in that. Is it a result of my pride, or of a certain perversity?"¹³⁷ George Sand and Sallust offer the opposite phenomenon.

It is not known whether Comte ever forgave an injury. He certainly always preserved the rancour and the recollection of injuries, and pursued, even to the grave, the memory of

¹³⁶ Laura had eleven children and Petrarch himself two when he dedicated to her 294 sonnets. In politics he turned from Cola di Rienzi to his enemy Colonna and from Robert to Charles IV. (*Famil*, xix. 1. p. 32). He was too much occupied with himself, says Perrens, to be occupied with his country.

¹³⁷ *Lettres à G. Sand*, 1885.

his unfaithful wife. The amorous worship which he dedicated to Clotilde de Vaux was so little sincere that he determined beforehand the month, day, and hour when he should shed tears over her memory.¹³⁸

Bacon employed all his eloquence for the condemnation of the greatest of his benefactors, Essex; by cowardly complaisance to the king, he introduced for the first time into the court of justice an odious abuse, and submitted Peacham to torture so as to be able to condemn him; he sold justice at a price, and, as Macaulay concludes, he was one of those of whom we may say, *scientiis tanquam angeli, cupiditatibus tanquam serpentes*.

“Bridget,” confesses A. de Musset, “calumniated, exposed (by her love) to the insults of the world, had to endure all the disdain and injury which an angry and cruel libertine can heap on the girl whom he pays... The days passed on and my fits of ill-humour and sarcasm took on a sombre and obstinate character.”¹³⁹

Byron’s intimate friend, Hobhouse, wrote of him that he was possessed by a diseased egoism. Even when he loved his wife he refused to dine with her, so as not to give up his old habits. He afterwards treated her so badly that, in good faith, and perhaps with reason, she consulted specialists as to his mental condition.

Napoleon’s conduct towards his wife, his brothers, and towards those who trusted in him was that of a man without moral sense. Taine sums up the diagnosis in one word: he was

¹³⁸ *Revue Philosophique*, 1887, p. 69.

¹³⁹ *Confessions d’un Enfant du Siècle*, pp. 250, 251.

a condottiere.

“A man’s genius is no sinecure,” said Carlyle’s wife, a most intelligent and cultivated woman, who, though capable of becoming (as she had hoped and been assured) her husband’s fellow-worker, was compelled to be his servant. The idea of travelling in a carriage with his wife seemed to him out of the question; he must have his brother with him; he neglected her for other women, and pretended that she was indifferent. Her chief duty was to preserve him from the most remote noises; the second was to make his bread, for he detested that of the bakers; he obliged her to travel for miles on horseback as his messenger, only saw her at meal-time, and for weeks together never addressed a word to her, although his prolonged silence caused her agony. It was only after her death, accelerated by his conduct, that, in a literary form, he showed his repentance, and narrated her history in affecting language, but, as his biographer adds, if she had been still alive he would have tormented her afresh.

Frederick II. said, like Lacenaire, that vengeance is the pleasure of the gods, and that he would die happy if he could inflict on his enemies more evils than he had suffered from them. He experienced real delight in morally tormenting his friends, sometimes beating them; if a courtier liked to pomade himself, he soaked his clothes in oil; he bargained with Voltaire over sugar and chocolate, and deprived him of his money.

Donizetti treated his family brutally; it was after a fit of

savage anger, in which he had beaten his wife, that he composed, sobbing, the celebrated air, *Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali*;¹⁴⁰ a remarkable instance of the double nature of personality in men of genius, and at the same time of their moral insensibility.

Houssaye narrates a similar scene, in which A. Dumas was so carried away during a quarrel, as to tear out his wife's hair. She, in despair, wished to retire to a convent; yet after some minutes he gaily wrote a comic scene, and said to his friends: "If tears were pearls, I would make myself a necklace of them."

Byron used to beat the Guiccioli, and also his Venetian mistress, the gondolier's wife, who, however, gave him as good.

Fontenelle, seeing his companion at table struck by apoplexy, was not disconcerted; he simply took advantage of the incident to change the sauce for the asparagus to vinegar; out of deference to his friend's taste he had previously ordered butter.

It is sufficient to be present at any academy, university, faculty, or gathering of men who, without genius, possess at least erudition, to perceive at once that their dominant thought is always disdain and hate of the man who possesses, almost or entirely, the quality of genius. The man of genius, in his turn, has nothing but contempt for others. He believes he has all the more right to laugh at others, from being himself sensitive to the slightest criticism; he is even offended at praise given to another as blame directed to himself. That is why at academical gatherings the greatest men only agree in praising the most

¹⁴⁰ Cottrau, *Lettre d'un Mélomane*, Naples, 1885.

ignorant person. We have seen that Chateaubriand was offended when his shoemaker was praised. Lisfranc called his colleague, Dupuytren, a brigand, and Roux and Velpeau forgers.

I have been able to observe men of genius when they had scarcely reached the age of puberty: they did not manifest the deep aversions of moral insanity, but I have noted among all a strange apathy for everything which does not concern them; as though plunged in the hypnotic condition, they did not perceive the troubles of others, or even the most pressing needs of those who were dearest to them; if they observed them, they grew tender, and even at once hastened to attend to them; but it was a fire of straw, soon extinguished, and it gave place to indifference and weariness.

Genius, said Schopenhauer, is solitary. Genius, wrote Goethe, is only related to its time by its defects.

This emotional anæsthesia may be found even in philanthropists, who possess the genius of sentiment, and have made goodness and pity for the poor the pivot of their actions. It is difficult to explain otherwise some pages in the Gospel. "You think, perhaps," said Jesus, "that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I have come to throw down a sword there... In a household of five persons, three will be against two, and two against three. I have come to bring division between father and son, between mother and daughter, between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. From this time a man's enemies will be of his

own household.”¹⁴¹ “I have come to bring fire on to the earth: if it burns already, so much the better!”¹⁴² “I declare to you,” he added, “whoever leaves house, wife, brothers, and parents, will receive a hundredfold in this world, and in the world to come everlasting life.”¹⁴³ “If any one comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”¹⁴⁴ “He who loves his father and his mother more than me is not worthy of me; he who loves his son or his daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.”¹⁴⁵ Jesus said to a man, “Follow me.” “Lord;” this man replied, “let me first go and bury my father.” Jesus answered: “The dead may bury their dead: go, you, and preach the kingdom of God.”¹⁴⁶

Dante, Goethe, Leopardi, Byron, and Heine were reproached with hating their country. Tolstoi disapproves of patriotism. Schopenhauer said, “In the face of death I confess that I despise the Germans for their unspeakable bestiality, and am ashamed to belong to them.”

Longevity.— This diseased apathy, this diminution of affection, which furnishes genius with a breastplate against so many assaults, and which rapidly destroys fibres at once so delicate and

¹⁴¹ Matthew x. 34-36; Luke xii. 51-53.

¹⁴² Luke xii. 49. See the Greek text.

¹⁴³ Luke xviii. 29-30.

¹⁴⁴ Luke xiv. 26.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew x. 37, xvi. 24; Luke v. 23.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew viii. 21; Luke v. 23.

so strong, explains the remarkable longevity of men of genius, in spite of their hyperæsthesia in other directions. I have noted this character in 134 cases out of 143.

Sophocles, Humboldt, Fontenelle, Brougham, Xenophon, Cato the Elder, Michelangelo, Petrarch, Bettinelli, died at 90; Passeroni, Auber, Manzoni, Xavier de Maistre at 89; Hobbes at 92; Dandolo at 97; Titian at 99; Cassiodorus and Mlle. Scudéry at 94; Viennet and Diogenes at 91; Voltaire, Franklin, Watt, John of Bologna, Vincent de Paul, Baroccio, Young, Talleyrand, Raspail, Grimm, Herschel, Metastasio at 84; Victor Hugo, Donatello, Goethe, Wellington at 83; Zingarelli, Metternich, Theodore de Beza, Lamarck, Halley at 86; Bentham, Newton, St. Bernard de Menthon, Bodmer, Luini, Scarpa, Bonpland, Chiabrera, Carafa, Goldoni at 85; Thiers, Kant, Maffei, Amyot, Villemain, Wieland, Littré at 80; Anacreon, Mercatori, Viviani, Buffon, Palmerston, Casti, J. Bernouilli, Pinel at 81; Galileo, Euler, Schlegel, Béranger, Louis XIV., Corneille, Cesarotti at 78; Herodotus, Rossini, Cardan, Michelet, Boileau, Garibaldi, Archimedes, Paisiello, Saint Augustine at 75; Tacitus and B. Disraeli at 76; Pericles at 70; Thucydides at 69; Hippocrates at 103; and Saint Anthony at 105.

According to Beard the average life of 500 men of genius is 54, and that of 100 modern men of genius is 70. The average duration of life of 35 men of musical genius was 63 years, and 8 months.¹⁴⁷ But this fact does not exclude degeneration when, as

¹⁴⁷ Fiorentino, *La Musica*, Rome, 1884.

among persons with moral insanity, it is united with an apathy which renders temperaments otherwise mobile, insensible to the strongest griefs, and I have shown in another book¹⁴⁸ that instinctive criminals, living out of prison, enjoy great longevity. It should be added that longevity is not always found in genius; many great men of genius, such as Raphael, Pascal, Burns, Keats, Byron, Mozart, Felix Mendelssohn, Bellini, Bichat, Pico de la Mirandola died before the age of forty.

¹⁴⁸ *L'Uomo Delinquente*, 1889.

CHAPTER IV.

Genius and Insanity

Resemblance between genius and insanity – Men and women of genius who have been insane – Montanus – Harrington – Haller – Schumann – Gérard de Nerval – Baudelaire – Concato – Mainländer – Comte – Codazzi – Bolyai – Cardan – Tasso – Swift – Newton – Rousseau – Lenau – Széchenyi – Hoffmann – Foderà – Schopenhauer – Gogol.

THE resemblance between insanity and genius, although it does not show that these two should be confounded, proves at all events that one does not exclude the other in the same subject.

In fact, without speaking of the numerous men of genius who at some period of their lives were subject to hallucinations or insanity, or of those who, like Vico, terminated a great career in dementia, how many great thinkers have shown themselves all their lives subject to monomania or hallucinations!

In recent times insanity has shown itself in Farini, Brougham, Southey, Govone, Gounod, Gutzkow, Monge, Fourcroy, Cowper, Rocchia, Ricci, Fenicia,¹⁴⁹ Engel, Pergolese, Batjusckoff, Mürger, William Collins, Techner, Hölderlen, Von der West, Gallo, Spedalieri, Bellingeri, Salieri, Johannes Müller,

¹⁴⁹ Mastriani, *Sul Genio e la Follia*, Naples, 1881.

Lenz, Barbara, Fuseli, Petermann, the caricaturist Cham, Hamilton, Poe, Uhlich.

In France, remarks Martini, many young and original poets have died insane.¹⁵⁰ Such also seems to have been the fate of Briffault, and of Laurent attacked by a veritable mania of calumny.¹⁵¹ Among women Günderode, Stieglitz (who both committed suicide with great deliberation), Brachmann, L. E. Landon lived and died insane.¹⁵²

Montanus, a victim to solitude and a disordered imagination, was convinced that he had become a grain of wheat. He refused to move for fear of being swallowed by birds.¹⁵³ Harrington is said to have imagined that diseases took the form of bees and flies, and for this reason he retired to a cabin armed with a broom to disperse them. Haller believed that he was persecuted by men and damned by God on account of the vileness of his soul and his heretical works. He could only soothe his excessive terror by enormous doses of opium and by converse with priests.¹⁵⁴ Ampère burnt a treatise on the future of chemistry believing he had written it by Satanic suggestion. The great Dutch artist, Van Goes, thought he was possessed. Carlo Dolce, a prey to religious monomania, vowed only to paint religious pictures. He devoted

¹⁵⁰ *Tra un Sigaro e l'altro*, p. 194.

¹⁵¹ Max. du Camp, *Souvenirs*, 1884.

¹⁵² Schilling, *Psychiatr. Briefe.*, p. 488, 1863.

¹⁵³ Zimmermann, *Solitude*.

¹⁵⁴ *Tagebuch*, 1787, Berne.

his pencil to Madonnas, though his Madonna, indeed, is the portrait of Balduino. On his wedding-day he alone was missing; after some hours he was found prostrated before the altar of the Annunciation. Nathaniel Lee, the dramatist, composed thirteen tragedies during the course of his disease; one day a feeble dramatic colleague told him that it was easy to write like a madman. "It is not easy to write like a madman," he replied, "but it is very easy to write like a fool." Thomas Lloyd, who wrote excellent verse, was a strange mixture of malice, pride, genius, and insanity.¹⁵⁵ If he was not satisfied with his verses he put them in his glass to polish them, as he said. Everything that he came across, even coal, paper, and tobacco, he was accustomed to mix with his food for hygienic reasons; the carbon purified it, stone imparted mineral virtues, &c. Charles Lamb in early life had an attack of insanity which was hereditary in his family; writing of this to Coleridge, he said: "At some future time I will amuse you with an account, as full as my memory will permit, of the strange turns my frenzy took. I look back upon it at times with a gloomy kind of envy, for, while it lasted, I had many, many hours of pure happiness. Dream not, Coleridge, of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of fancy till you have gone mad. All now seems to me vapid, or comparatively so."

Robert Schumann (1810-1856), the precursor of the music of the future, was the youngest son of a well-to-do bookseller in Zwickau, and met with no obstacles in the pursuit of his

¹⁵⁵ *Sketches of Bedlam*, 1823.

cherished art. When a law student he met Clara Wieck, the celebrated pianist, and in her found an excellent and lovable companion; but at the age of twenty-three he became subject to melancholia; at forty-six he was pursued by turning-tables which knew everything; he heard sounds which developed into concords and even whole compositions. For several years he was afraid of being sent to a lunatic asylum; Beethoven and Mendelssohn dictated musical combinations to him from their tombs. In 1854 he threw himself into the Rhine; he was saved, and died two years later in a private asylum at Bonn. The autopsy revealed osteophytes, thickening of the cranial membranes and atrophy of the brain.¹⁵⁶

Gérard de Nerval was subject to *folie circulaire*, with alternate periods of exaltation and depression, each of which lasted six months. In his moments of calm he was a spiritualist; he heard the spirits of Adam, Moses, and Joshua in a piece of furniture; and practised cabalistic exorcisms, executing the dance of the Babylonians. During his stay at an asylum he imagined that it was the superintendent who was a victim to insanity. "He believes," he said, "that he is superintending an asylum, but he is himself the madman and we feign madness in order to humour him." With the honey of flowers he traced on paper symbols which radiated round a fantastic giantess who united the characters of Diana, Saint Rosalie, and of an actress named Colon with whom he believed he was in love. In reality he adored her

¹⁵⁶ *Biographie*, by Wasielewski, Dresden, 1858.

from a great distance, sending her large bouquets, and buying enormous opera-glasses in order to see her, and superb canes with which to applaud her; so that it was said of him that he ruined himself in orgies of opera-glasses and debaucheries of canes. He had discovered a mediæval bed which was to serve for his *amours*, and in order to set it in suitable surroundings he obtained an apartment and luxurious furniture. In days of poverty the furniture was sold, leaving the bed alone in the room, then in a barn, and at last it also disappeared, and its proprietor passed his nights in taverns and low lodging-houses, or writing beneath trees and porches. Later, when he had ceased to see Colon, she became for him a kind of idol with which he lived and who in his mystic ideas became confounded partly with the saints and partly with the stars; one day he declared that she was an incarnation of Saint Theresa. When he heard that she had declared she had never loved him and only seen him once, which was true, he said: "What good if she had loved me?" and he added, quoting a verse of Heine, "He who loves for the second time without hope is a madman. I am that madman. The sky, the sun, the stars laugh at it; I also laugh at it, laugh at it and die of it."

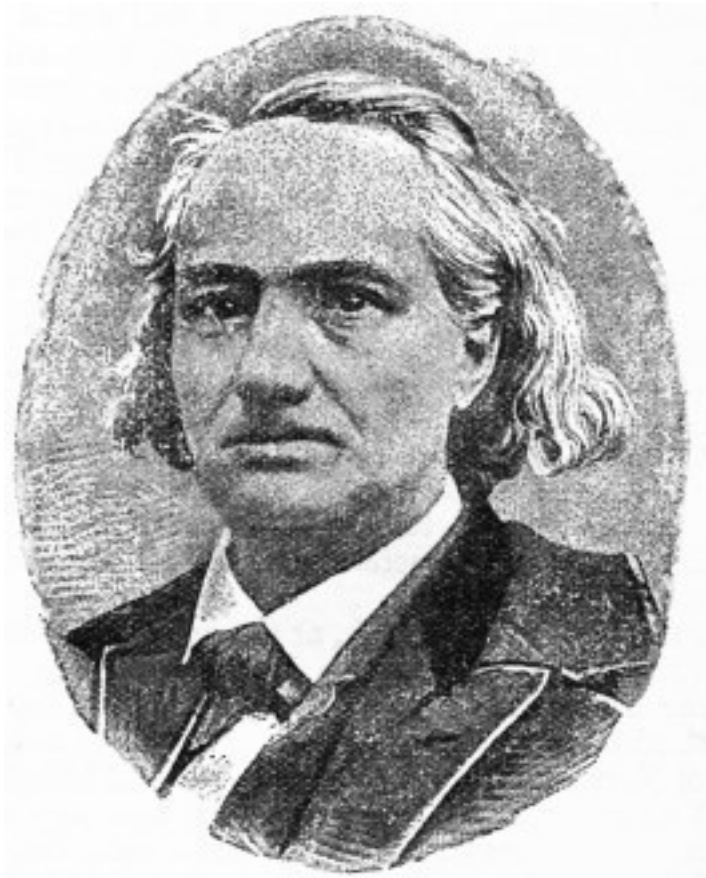
One day, at sunset, he was on the balcony of a house. He suddenly saw a phantom and heard a voice calling him. He ran forward, fell, and was nearly killed. That was his first attack, characterised by hallucinations of sight and hearing.

Towards the end of his life, at the age of forty-six, *folie des grandeurs* developed in him; he spoke of his *châteaux* at

Ermenonville, of his physical beauty which was astonishing, he said, to his attendants; he bought up coins of Nerva, not wishing that the name of his ancestors should circulate as money, yet Nerval was only a pseudonym. Sometimes he gave out that he was a descendant of Folobello de Nerva whose history he wished to write, and all whose male descendants presented, according to him, a supernatural sign, the tetragramma of Solomon, on their breasts. Timid and cautious in his days of calm, he became bold and noisy when the attack came on, and even threatened his friends with weapons. In spite of the low temperature he refused to leave off his summer clothes. "Cold," he declared, "is a tonic and the Lapps are never ill." A few days after, he hanged himself.¹⁵⁷

Baudelaire appears before us, in the portrait placed at

¹⁵⁷ Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*, 1887.



BAUDELAIRE.

the beginning of his posthumous works, as the type of

the lunatic possessed by the *Délire des grandeurs*.¹⁵⁸ He was descended from a family of insane and eccentric persons. It was not necessary to be an alienist to detect his insanity. In childhood he was subject to hallucinations; and from that period, as he himself confessed, he experienced opposing sentiments, the horror and the ecstasy of life; he was hyperæsthetic and at the same time apathetic; he felt the necessity of freeing himself from “an oasis of horror in a desert of *ennui*.” Before falling into dementia he committed impulsive acts; for instance, he threw pots from his house against shop windows for the pleasure of hearing them break. He changed his lodgings every month; asked the hospitality of a friend in order to complete work he was engaged on, and wasted his time in reading which had no relation to it whatever. Having lost his father, he quarrelled with his mother’s second husband, and one day, in the presence of friends, attempted to strangle him. Sent out to India, in order, it is said, to be put to business, he lost everything and only brought back from his voyage a negress to whom he dedicated exotic poems. He desired to be original at all costs; gave himself to excess in wine before high personages, dyed his hair green, wore winter garments in summer, and *vice versa*. He experienced morbid passions in love. He loved ugly and horrible women, negresses, dwarfs, giantesses; to a very beautiful woman he expressed a desire that he might see her suspended by the hands to the ceiling that he might kiss her feet; and kissing the naked foot appears in

¹⁵⁸ Brunetière, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1887, No. 706. *Revue Bleue*, July, 1887.

one of his poems as the equivalent of the sexual act.

He was constantly dreaming of work, calculating the hours and the lines necessary to pay his debts: two months or more. But that was all, and the work was never begun.¹⁵⁹

Proud, misanthropic, and apathetic, he said of himself. "Discontented with others and discontented with myself, I desire to redeem myself, to regard myself with a little pride in the silence and solitude of the night. Souls of those I have loved, souls of those I have sung, strengthen me, sustain me, remove from me the lies and the corrupting vapours of the world; and thou, O Lord my God, grant me grace to produce some fine lines which will prove to myself that I am not the last of men, that I am not inferior to those whom I condemn."¹⁶⁰

And he had need of it, for he called Gustave Planche imbecile, Dumas a *farceur*, Sue stupid, Féval an idiot, George Sand a Veuillot without delicacy. What he attacked in all these writers was the fame he wished to possess; that is why he made fun of Molière and Voltaire.

With the progress of insanity he used to invert words, saying "shut" when he meant to say "open," &c. He died of progressive general paralysis of the insane, of which his excessive ambition was already a fore-running symptom.

Concato was the son of a poor tailor, the victim of grave cerebral affections. He himself presented certain characters of

¹⁵⁹ Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*.

¹⁶⁰ "A une Heure du Matin," in *Petits Poèmes en Prose*.

degeneration, such as pallor and large cheek bones; during many years he was subject to various forms of insanity. At the age of seventeen he was seized by the terror of sudden death, and provided himself with nitre to prevent future cerebral crises. At twenty he resolved to become a monk, although in childhood he had been so little devout that he had fabricated false notes of confession. Afterwards he quarrelled with an Austrian officer, and then became afraid of all sentinels and soldiers. He would never allow an officer to enter his house with his sword by his side; and even in old age trembled at the sight of one of the city guards. One night he dreamt he had committed a homicide, and for many days he was a prey to strange terrors. He suffered from claustrophobia: woe to whomsoever tried to lock him up in a carriage or a room! There were some days during which he considered himself the lowest of men. He was so irascible that he used to say that, to be in good health, one must be angry at least once a day. Yet he was one of the greatest of European physicians.¹⁶¹

Mainländer had a grandfather who, after the death of a son, carried religious mysticism to the extent of insanity, and died of inflammation of the brain at the age of thirty-three. A brother, also insane, wished to embrace Buddhism. As a youth, looking at the sea at Sorrento, he felt impelled to throw himself in, merely attracted by the purity of the water. He educated himself and wrote his celebrated book, *Die Philosophie der Erlösung*, but

¹⁶¹ Bufalini, *Vita di Concato*, 1884.

to realize his theories entirely, he adopted a rule of absolute chastity, and on the day on which his book was published hanged himself, the better to confirm a passage which said: "In order that man may be redeemed it is necessary that he should recognize the value of not-being, and desire intensely not to be."¹⁶²

The great Auguste Comte, the initiator of the positivist philosophy, was for ten years under the care of Esquirol, the famous alienist; he recovered, but only to repudiate, without any cause, the wife who had saved him; later, he – who had wished to abolish all priest-craft – believed himself the priest and apostle of a materialistic religion. In his works, amidst stupendous elucubrations, genuinely maniacal ideas may be found, as, for example, the prophecy that one day women will be fecundated without the help of the male.¹⁶³

It is said that mathematicians are exempt from psychical derangements, but this is not true; it is sufficient to recall not only Newton and Enfantin, of whom I will speak at length, but the two famous distractions of Archimedes, the hallucination of Pascal, and the vagaries of the mathematician Codazzi (not to be confounded with Codazza). Codazzi was sub-microcephalic, oxycephalic, alcoholic, sordidly avaricious; to affective insensibility he added vanity so great that while still young he set apart a sum for his own funeral monument, and refused the least help to his starving parents; he admitted no

¹⁶² *Revue Philosophique*, 1886.

¹⁶³ Littré, *A. Comte et la Phil. Posit.*, 1863.

discussion of his judgment even if it only concerned the cut of a coat; and he had taken it into his head that he could compose melodic music with the help of the calculus.

All mathematicians admire the great geometer Bolyai, whose eccentricities were of an insane character; thus he provoked thirteen officials to duels and fought with them, and between each duel he played the violin, the only piece of furniture in his house; when pensioned he printed his own funeral card with a blank date, and constructed his own coffin – a vagary which I have found in two other mathematicians who died in recent years. Six years later he had a similar funeral card printed, to substitute for the other which he had not been able to use. He imposed on his heir the obligation to plant on his grave an apple-tree, in remembrance of Eve, of Paris, and of Newton.¹⁶⁴ Such was the great reformer of Euclid.

Cardan, called by his contemporaries the greatest of men and the most foolish of children – Cardan, who first dared to criticise Galen, to exclude fire from the number of the elements, and to call witches and saints insane – this great Cardan was the son, cousin, and father of lunatics, and himself a lunatic all his life. “A stammerer, impotent, with little memory or knowledge,” he himself wrote, “I have suffered since childhood from hypnotastic hallucinations.” Sometimes it was a cock which spoke to him in a human voice; sometimes Tartarus, full of bones, which displayed itself before him. Whatever he imagined, he could see

¹⁶⁴ W. de Fonvielle, *Comment se font les Miracles*, 1879.

before him as a real object. From the age of nineteen to that of twenty-six, a genius, similar to one which already protected his father, gave him advice and revealed the future. When he had reached the age of twenty-six he was not altogether deprived of supernatural aid; a recipe which was not quite right forgot one day the laws of gravity, and rose to his table to warn him of the error he was about to commit.¹⁶⁵

He was hypochondriacal, and imagined he had contracted all the diseases that he read of: palpitation, sitophobia, diarrhoea, enuresis, podagra, hernia – all these diseases vanished without treatment, or with a prayer to the Virgin. Sometimes his flesh smelled of sulphur, of extinguished wax; sometimes he saw flames and phantoms appear in the midst of violent earthquakes, while his friends perceived nothing. Persecuted by every government, surrounded by a forest of enemies, whom he knew neither by name nor by sight, but who, as he believed, in order to afflict and dishonour him, had condemned his much-loved son, he ended by believing himself poisoned by the professors of the University of Pavia, who had invited him for this purpose. If he escapes from their hands, he owes it to the help of St. Martin and of the Virgin. Yet such a man in theology had audaciously anticipated Dupuis and Renan!

He declares himself inclined to all vices – wine, gaming, lying, licentiousness, envy, cunning, deception, calumny, inconstancy; he observes that four times during the full moon he found

¹⁶⁵ *De Vita propria*, ch. 45.

himself in a state of real mental alienation. His sensibility was so perverted, that he never felt comfortable except under the stimulus of some physical pain; and in the absence of natural pain, he procured it by artificial means, biting his lips or arms until he fetched blood. "I sought causes of pain to enjoy the pleasure of the cessation of pain, and because I perceived that when I did not suffer I fell into so grave and troublesome a condition, that it was worse than any pain." This fact helps us to understand many strange tortures which madmen have voluptuously imposed on themselves.¹⁶⁶ He had so blind a faith in the revelations of dreams, that he printed a strange work *De Somniis*, conducted his medical consultations, concluded his marriage, and began his works (for example, that on the *Varietà delle Cose* and *Sulle Febbri*) in accordance with dreams.¹⁶⁷

He was impotent up to the age of thirty-four. Virility was given to him in a dream, and to this gift was added, not altogether happily, the cause of his troubles – his future wife, a brigand's daughter, whom, before this dream, as he asserts, he had never even seen. His unhappy mania even led him to regulate his

¹⁶⁶ Byron said, also, that intermittent fevers came at last to be agreeable to him, on account of the pleasant sensation that followed the cessation of pain.

¹⁶⁷ "One day I thought I heard very sweet harmonies in a dream. I awoke, and I found I had resolved the question of fevers: why some are lethal and others not – a question which had troubled me for twenty-five years" (*De Somniis*, c. iv.). "In a dream there came to me the suggestion to write this book, divided into exactly twenty-one parts; and I experienced such pleasure in my condition and in the subtlety of these reasonings as I had never experienced before" (*De Subtilitate*, lib. xviii. p. 915).

medical consultations according to his dreams, as he himself boasts of doing in the case of Borromeo's son. It is possible to cite other examples, sometimes comic, sometimes strange or terrible. I will quote one which unites all these characters: his dream of the jewel.

It was in May, 1560, when Cardan was fifty-two years of age. His son had just been publicly condemned for poisoning. No misfortune could wound more deeply Cardan's already sensitive soul. He loved his son with all a father's tenderness, as is witnessed by his fine verses, *De Morte Filii*, in which there is the imprint of real passion. He hoped also for a grandson who should resemble himself. Drawn more and more into insane ideas by grief, he saw in this condemnation the hands of persecutors. "Thus overwhelmed, I sought distraction in vain in study or in play. In vain I bit myself and struck my arms and legs. It was my third night of sleeplessness, about two hours before dawn. I saw that there was nothing else for me but to die or go mad. Therefore I prayed God to snatch me entirely away from life. And then, against my expectation, sleep took possession of me, and at the same time I heard a person approaching me, whose form I could not see, but who said, 'Why grieve about your son? Put into your mouth the precious stone which you bear suspended from your neck, and as long as you carry it there you will not think of your son.' On waking up, I asked myself what connection there could be between forgetfulness and an emerald; but as I had no other resource, I recalled the sacred words, '*Credidit et reputatum*

ei est ad justitiam’; I put the emerald into my mouth, and then, against all expectation, everything that recalled my son vanished from my memory. It was so for a year and a half. It was only during my meals, and at my public lectures, when I was unable to keep the precious stone in my mouth, that I fell back into my old grief.” This singular cure had its pretext in the double sense of the Italian word *gioia*, which means at once “joy” and “jewel.” Cardan had, however, no need of the revelation of a genius, for in his own works he had already recognized a consoling virtue in precious stones, due to the bond of this absurd etymology.¹⁶⁸

A megalomaniac, he called himself “the seventh physician since the creation of the world;” he claimed to know the things which are before and above us, and those which shall come after.¹⁶⁹

Like Rousseau and like Haller, Cardan, during the last days of his tormented existence, wrote his own life; he also foretold the exact date of his death, which he looked for, and perhaps himself brought about, in order that his horoscope should not be made to lie.¹⁷⁰

What shall we say of Tasso? For those who do not know Verga’s monograph (*Lipemania del Tasso*), it will be enough

¹⁶⁸ “Jewels in sleep are symbolical of sons, of unexpected things, of joy also; because in Italian *gioire* means ‘to enjoy’ (*De Somniis*, cap. 21; *De Subtilitate*, p. 338).

¹⁶⁹ Buttrini, *Girolamo Cardano*, Savona, 1884.

¹⁷⁰ Bertolotti (*I Testamenti di Cardano*, 1888) has shown that this legend has no foundation.

to quote the following letter: “So great is my grief, that I am considered by others and by myself as mad, when, powerless to keep my sorrowful thoughts hidden, I give myself up to long conversations with myself. My troubles are at once human and diabolical; the human are cries of men, and especially of women, and also the laughter of beasts; the diabolical are songs, &c. When I take into my hands a book to give myself up to study, I hear voices sounding in my ear, and distinguish the name of Paul Fulvius.” In his *Messaggiero*, which became with him, later on, a real hallucination, he had already made the often-repeated confession of his madness, which he attributed to wine and to women. I am thus inclined to believe that he described himself in the character of Thyrsis, in that admirable stanza of the *Aminta*, which another monomaniac, Rousseau, loved so much: —

*“Vivrò fra i miei tormenti e fra le cure,
Mie giuste furie, forsennato, errante;
Paventerò l'ombra solinghe e scure
Che il primo error mi recheranno avante;
E del sol che scoprì le mie sventure
A schivo ed in orror avrò it sembiante:
Temerò me medesimo, e da me stesso
Sempre fuggendo, avrò me sempre appresso.”*¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ “I shall live in the midst of my torments, and among the cares that are my just furies, wild and wandering; I shall fear dark and solitary shades, which will bring before me my first fault; and I shall have in horror and disgust the face of the sun which discovered my misfortunes; I shall fear myself, and, for ever fleeing from myself, I shall never escape.”

One day, certainly under the influence of some hallucination, or in a maniacal attack, he drew a knife, and was about to attack a serving-man who entered the ducal chamber; he was imprisoned, says the Tuscan Ambassador, more to cure him than to punish him.

The unfortunate poet went from one country to another, but sorrowful visions everywhere threatened him; and with them came ceaseless remorse, suspicions of poison, and the terrors of hell for the heresies of which he accused himself in three letters to the “too-indulgent” inquisitor.

“I am always troubled by sad and wearisome thoughts,” he confesses to the physician Cavallaro, “by figures and phantoms; also by a great weakness of memory, therefore I beg of your lordship to think to strengthen my memory in the pills that you order for me.” “I am frenzied,” he wrote to Gonzaga, “and I am surprised that they have not written to you of all the things that I say in talking to myself: honours, the good graces of emperors and kings which I dream of, forming and re-forming them according to my fancy.” This curious letter shows us how sombre and sorrowful images alternated in him with others that were joyous, like subjective colours in the retina.

Some days later he wrote to Cattaneo: “I have here much more need of the exorcist than of the physician, for my trouble is caused by magic art. I will tell you about my goblin. The little thief has robbed me of many crowns; he puts all my books upside

down, opens my chests, hides my keys, so that I do not know how to protect myself against him. I am always unhappy, but especially at night, and I do not know if my trouble should be attributed to frenzy.” In another letter: “When I am awake I seem to see lights sparkling in the air; sometimes my eyes are inflamed so that I fear I may lose my sight. At other times I hear horrible noises, hissings, and tinklings, the sound of bells, and, as it were, clocks all striking the hour at the same time. When I am asleep I seem to see a horseman throwing himself on me and casting me to the earth, or else I imagine that I am covered by filthy beasts. All my joints feel it; my head becomes heavy, and in the midst of so many pains and terrors sometimes there appears to me the image of the Virgin, beautiful and young, with her Son, and crowned with a rainbow.” Later he told Cattaneo how a goblin carried away letters in which he was mentioned, “and that is one of the miracles which I saw myself at the hospital. Thus I possess the certainty that these wonders must be attributed to a magician. I have numerous proofs of it. One day a loaf was taken from me, beneath my eyes, towards three o’clock.”

When ill with acute fever he was cured, thanks to an apparition of the Virgin, to whom he testified his gratitude in a sonnet. He wrote and spoke to, almost touched, his genius, who often resembled his former *Messaggiero*, and suggested to him ideas which he had not conceived before.

Swift, the inventor of irony and humour, predicted even in youth that he would die insane, as had been the case with a

paternal uncle. He was walking one day in a garden when he saw an elm almost completely deprived of foliage at the top. "Like that tree," he said, "I shall die at the top." Proud almost to monomania with the great, he yet led a wild and vicious life, and was known as the "Mad Parson." Though a clergyman, he wrote irreligious books, and it was said that before making him a bishop it would be desirable to baptise him. His giddiness began, as he himself tells us, at the age of twenty-three, so that his brain disease lasted for over fifty years. *Vertiginosus, inops, surdus, male gratus amicis*, as he defined himself, he almost succumbed to the grief caused by the death of his beloved Stella, and at the same time he wrote his burlesque *Directions to Servants*. Some months later he lost his memory and only preserved his mordant loquacity; he remained for a whole year without speaking or reading or recognising any one; he would walk for ten hours a day, eating his meals standing, or refusing food, and giving way to attacks of rage when any one entered his room. With the development of some boils his condition seemed to improve; he was heard to say several times: "I am a fool;" but the interval of lucidity was short. He fell back into the stupor of dementia, although his irony seemed to survive reason, and even, as it were, life itself. He died in 1745 in a state of complete dementia, leaving by a will made some years previously a sum of nearly £11,000 to a lunatic asylum. A *post-mortem* examination showed softening of the brain and extreme effusion; his skull (examined in 1855) showed great irregularities from thickening

and roughening, signs of enlarged and diseased arteries, and an extremely small cerebellar region. In an epitaph which he had written for himself he summed up the cruel tortures of his soul now at rest, “*ubi sæva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit.*”

Newton, of whom it was truly said that his mind conquered the human race, was in old age afflicted by mental disorder, though of a less serious character than that of which we have just read. It was probably during this illness that he wrote his *Chronology*, his *Apocalypse*, and the *Letters to Bentley*, so inferior in value to the work of his earlier years. In 1693, after his house had been burnt a second time, and after excess in study, he is reported to have talked so strangely and incoherently to the archbishop that his friends were seriously alarmed. At this time he wrote two letters which, in their confused and obscure form, seem to show that he had been suffering from delusions of persecution. He wrote to Locke (1693): “Being of opinion that you endeavoured to embroil me with women, and by other means, I was so much affected with it, as that when one told me you were sickly and would not live, I answered, ’twere better if you were dead. I desire you to forgive me this uncharitableness; for I am now satisfied that what you have done is just, and I beg your pardon for my having hard thoughts of you for it, and for representing that you struck at the root of morality, in a principle you laid in your book of ideas, and designed to pursue in another book, and that I took you for a Hobbist. I beg your pardon also for saying or thinking that there was a design to sell me an office or to embroil me. I

am your most humble and unfortunate servant, Is. Newton.”¹⁷² Locke replied kindly, and a month later Newton again wrote to him: “The last winter, by sleeping too often by my fire, I got an ill habit of sleeping; and a distemper, which this summer has been epidemical, put me further out of order, so that when I wrote to you I had not slept an hour a night for a fortnight together, and for five days together not a wink. I remember I wrote to you, but what I said of your book I remember not.” And in a letter to Pepys he says that he has “neither ate nor slept this twelvemonth, nor have my former consistency of mind.”¹⁷³

Those who, without frequenting a lunatic asylum, wish to form a fairly complete idea of the mental tortures of a monomaniac, have only to look through Rousseau’s works, especially his later writings, such as the *Confessions*, the *Dialogues*, and the *Rêveries*. “I have very ardent passions,” he writes in his *Confessions*, “and while under their influence, my impetuosity knows no bounds; I think only of the object which occupies me; the entire universe besides is nothing to me; but this only lasts a moment, and the moment which follows throws me into a state of prostration. A single sheet of fine paper tempts me more than the money to buy a ream of it. I see the thing and am tempted; if I only see the means of acquiring it I am not tempted. Even now, if I see anything that tempts me, I prefer taking it to asking for it.”

This is the distinction between the kleptomaniac and the thief:

¹⁷² Brewster’s *Memoirs of Sir I. Newton*, vol. ii. p. 100.

¹⁷³ Brewster’s *Memoirs of Sir I. Newton*, vol. ii. p. 94.

the former steals by instinct, to steal; the latter steals by interest, to acquire: the first is led away by anything that strikes him; the second is attracted by the value of the object.

Dominated by his senses, Rousseau never knew how to resist them. The most insignificant pleasure, he says, so long as it was present, fascinated him more than all the joys of Paradise. In fact, a monk's dinner (Father Pontierre) led him to apostasy, and a feeling of repulsion caused him to abandon cruelly an epileptic friend on the road.

It was not only his passions that were morbid and violent; his intelligence also was affected from his earliest days, as he shows in his *Confessions*: "My imagination has never been so cheerful as when I have been suffering. My mind cannot beautify the really pleasant things that happen to me, only the imaginary ones. If I wish to describe spring well, it must be in winter." Real evils had little hold on Rousseau, he tells us; imaginary evils touched him more nearly. "I can adapt myself to what I experience, but not to what I fear." It is thus that people kill themselves through fear of death.

On first reading medical books Rousseau imagined that he had the diseases which he found described, and was astonished, not to find himself healthy, but to find himself alive. He came to the conclusion that he had a polypus at the heart. It was, as he himself confesses, a strange notion, the overflow of an idle and exaggerated sensibility which had no better channel. "There are times," he says, "in which I am so little like myself that I might

be taken for a man of quite different character. In repose I am indolence and timidity itself, and do not know how to express myself; but if I become excited I immediately know what to say."

This unfortunate man went through a long series of occupations from the noblest to the most degrading; he was an apostate for money, a watchmaker, a charlatan, a music-master, an engraver, a painter, a servant, an embryo diplomatic secretary; in literature and science he took up medicine, music, botany, theology, teaching.

The abuse of intellectual work, especially dangerous in a thinker whose ideas were developed slowly and with difficulty, joined to the ever-increasing stimulus of ambition, gradually transformed the hypochondriac into a melancholiac, and finally into a maniac. "My agitations and anger," he wrote, "affected me so much that I passed ten years in delirium, and am only calm to-day." Calm! When disease, now become chronic, no longer permitted him to distinguish what was real, what was imaginary in his troubles. In fact, he bade farewell to the world of society, in which he had never felt at home, and retired into solitude; but even in the country, people from the town zealously pursued him, and the tumult of the world and notions of *amour-propre* veiled the freshness of nature. It is in vain for him to hide himself in the woods, he writes in his *Rêveries*; the crowd attaches itself to him and follows him. We think once more of Tasso's lines: —

"e da me stesso

Sempre fuggendo, avrò me sempre appresso.”

Rousseau doubtless alluded to these lines when he wrote to Corancez that Tasso had been his prophet. He wrote later that he believed that Prussia, England, France, the King, women, priests, men, irritated by some passages in his works, were waging a terrible war against him, with effects by which he explained the internal troubles from which he suffered.

In the refinement of their cruelty, he says in the *Rêveries*, his enemies only forgot one thing – to graduate their torments, so that they could always renew them. But the chief artifice of his enemies was to torture him by overwhelming him with benefits and with praise. “They even went so far as to corrupt the greengrocers, so that they sold him better and cheaper vegetables. Without doubt his enemies thus wished to prove his baseness and their generosity.”¹⁷⁴ During his stay in London his melancholia was changed into a real attack of mania. He imagined that Choiseul was seeking to arrest him, abandoned his luggage and his money at his hotel, and fled to the coast, paying the innkeepers with pieces of silver spoons. He found the winds contrary, and in this saw another indication of the plot against him. In his exasperation he harangued the crowd in bad English from the top of a hill; they listened stupefied, and he believed he had affected them. But on returning to France his invisible enemies were not appeased. They spied and misinterpreted all

¹⁷⁴ *Dialogues*, i.

his acts; if he read a newspaper, they said he was conspiring; if he smelled the perfume of a rose, they suspected he was concocting a poison. Everything was a crime: they stationed a picture-dealer at his door; they prevented the door from shutting; no visitor came whom they had not prejudiced against him. They corrupted his coffee-merchant, his hairdresser, his landlord; the shoeblack had no more blacking when Rousseau needed him; the boatman had no boats when this unfortunate man wished to cross the Seine. He demanded to be put in prison – and even that was refused him.

In order to take from him the one weapon which he possessed, the press, a publisher, *whom he did not know*, was arrested and thrown into the Bastille. The custom of burning a cardboard figure at the *mi-carême* had been abolished. It is re-established, certainly to make fun of him and to burn him in effigy; in fact, the clothes placed on it resembled his.¹⁷⁵ In the country he meets a child who smiles at him; he turns to respond, and suddenly sees a man whom, by his mournful face (note the method of recognition), he sees to be a spy placed by his enemies.

Under the constant impression of this monomania of persecution he wrote his *Dialogues sur Rousseau jugé par Rousseau*, in which, in order to appease his innumerable enemies he presented a faithful and minute portrait of his hallucinations. He began to distribute his defence, in a truly insane manner, by presenting a copy to any passer-by whose face did not appear

¹⁷⁵ *Dialogues*, ii.

prejudiced against him by his enemies. It was dedicated: “*A tous les Français aimant encore la justice et la vérité.*” In spite of this title, or, perhaps, because of it, he found no one who accepted it with pleasure; several even refused it.

No longer able to put trust in any mortal he turned, like Pascal, to God, to whom he addressed a very tender and familiar letter; then in order to ensure the arrival of his letter at its destination, he placed it together with the manuscript of the *Dialogues* on the altar of Nôtre-Dame at Paris. Then, having found the railing closed, he suspected a conspiracy of Heaven against him.

Dussaulx, who saw him often in the last years of his life, writes that he even distrusted his dog, finding a mystery in his frequent caresses.¹⁷⁶ The *délire des grandeurs* was never absent; it may be seen continually in the *Confessions*, in which he defies the human race to show a better being than himself.

After all this testimony, it does not seem to me that Voltaire and Corancez were altogether wrong in affirming that Rousseau had been mad, and that he confessed it himself. Numerous passages in the *Confessions* and in Grimm’s letters allude to other affections such as paralysis of the bladder and spermatorrhœa, which probably originated in the spinal cord, and which certainly aggravated his melancholia. It must also be remembered that from childhood, Rousseau, like so many other subjects of degeneration, showed sexual precocity and perversion; it appears that he had no pleasure in his relations with women unless they

¹⁷⁶ Bugeault, *Étude sur l’état mental de Rousseau*, 1876, p. 123.

beat him naked, like a child, or threatened to do so.¹⁷⁷

Nicolaus Lenau, one of the greatest lyric poets of modern times, ended, forty years ago, in the asylum of Döbling at Vienna, a life which from childhood shows a mingling of genius and insanity.

He was born in 1802 in Hungary, the son of a proud and vicious aristocrat, and of a melancholy, sensitive, and ascetic mother. At an early age he manifested tendencies to sadness, to music, and to mysticism. He studied medicine, law, agriculture, and especially music. In 1831 Kerner remarked in him strange fits of sadness and melancholy, and noted that at other times he would spend whole nights in the garden playing his favourite violin. "I feel myself," he wrote to his sister, "gravitating towards misfortune; the demon of insanity riots in my heart; I am *mad*. To you, sister, I say it, for you will love me all the same." This demon induced him to go, almost aimlessly to America. He returned to find himself fêted and received with gladness by all; but hypochondria, in his own words, had planted its teeth deep in his heart, and everything was useless.¹⁷⁸ And, in fact, this unhappy heart had an attack of pericarditis, from which it recovered only imperfectly. From that time sleep, once the only medicine for his troubles, ceased to visit him; every night he is surrounded by terrible visions. "One would say," he wrote, in a truly insane fashion, "that the devil is hunting in my belly. I hear

¹⁷⁷ *Revue Philosophique*, 1883.

¹⁷⁸ Schurz, *Lenaus Werke*, vol. i. p. 275.

there a perpetual barking of dogs and a funereal echo of hell. Without joking, it is enough to make one despair.”

That misanthropy which we have already noted in Haller and Swift and Cardan and Rousseau took possession of Lenau in 1840 with all the accompaniments of mania. He is afraid and ashamed of men, disgusted with them. Germany was preparing bouquets and triumphal arches in his honour, but he fled, and without any cause went to and fro from one country to another; he was causelessly angry and impatient, and felt himself incapable of work; *non est firmum sinciput*, it seemed, as he himself said; at the same time his appetite became as insane as his brain. He returned with a strange taste to the mysticism of his childhood, wished to study the Gnostics, and read over again the stories of sorcerers which he had found so attractive in his youth, while he drank coffee enormously and smoked excessively. It was incredible, he observed, how in moving his body, in lighting or changing a cigar, new ideas arose within him. He wrote during entire nights, wandered, journeyed, meditated a marriage, projected great works, and executed none.

It was the last flickering of a great spirit; in 1844 Lenau complained more and more of headache, of constant perspiration, of extreme weakness. His left hand and the muscles of the eyes and cheeks were paralysed, and he began to write with orthographic errors and quibbles, as *Wie gut es mir gut*

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