

WILLIAM CLEAVER WILKINSON

CLASSIC FRENCH COURSE
IN ENGLISH

William Cleaver Wilkinson
Classic French Course in English

«Public Domain»

Wilkinson W.

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PREFACE

The preparation of the present volume proposed to the author a task more difficult far than that undertaken in any one of the four preceding volumes of the group, The After-School Series, to which it belongs. Those volumes dealt with literatures limited and finished: this volume deals with a literature indefinitely vast in extent, and still in vital process of growth. The selection of material to be used was, in the case of the earlier volumes, virtually made for the author beforehand, in a manner greatly to ease his sense of responsibility for the exercise of individual judgment and taste. Long prescription, joined to the winnowing effect of wear and waste through time and chance, had left little doubt what works of what writers, Greek and Roman, best deserved now to be shown to the general reader. Besides this, the prevalent custom of the schools of classical learning could then wisely be taken as a clew of guidance to be implicitly followed, whatever might be the path through which it should lead. There is here no similar avoidance of responsibility possible; for the schools have not established a custom, and French literature is a living body, from which no important members have ever yet been rent by the ravages of time.

The greater difficulty seen thus to inhere already in the nature itself of the task proposed for accomplishment, was gravely increased by the much more severe compression deemed to be in the present instance desirable. The room placed at the author's disposal for a display of French literature was less than half the room allowed him for the display of either the Greek or the Latin.

The plan, therefore, of this volume, imposed the necessity of establishing from the outset certain limits, to be very strictly observed. First, it was resolved to restrict the attention bestowed upon the national history, the national geography, and the national language, of the French, to such brief occasional notices as, in the course of the volume, it might seem necessary, for illustration of the particular author, from time to time to make. The only introductory general matter here to be found will accordingly consist of a rapid and summary review of that literature, as a whole, which is the subject of the book. It was next determined to limit the authors selected for representation to those of the finished centuries. A third decision was to make the number of authors small rather than large, choice rather than inclusive. The principle at this point adopted, was to choose those authors only whose merit, or whose fame, or whose influence, might be supposed unquestionably such that their names and their works would certainly be found surviving, though the language in which they wrote should, like its parent Latin, have perished from the tongues of men. The proportion of space severally allotted to the different authors was to be measured partly according to their relative importance, and partly according to their estimated relative capacity of interesting in translation the average intelligent reader of to-day.

In one word, the single inspiring aim of the author has here been to furnish enlightened readers, versed only in the English language, the means of acquiring, through the medium of their vernacular, some proportioned, trustworthy, and effective knowledge and appreciation, in its chief classics, of the great literature which has been written in French. This object has been sought, not through narrative and description, making books and authors the subject, but through the literature itself, in specimen extracts illuminated by the necessary explanation and criticism.

It is proposed to follow the present volume with a volume similar in general character, devoted to German literature.

I.

FRENCH LITERATURE

Of French literature, taken as a whole, it may boldly be said that it is, not the wisest, not the weightiest, not certainly the purest and loftiest, but by odds the most brilliant and the most interesting, literature in the world. Strong at many points, at some points triumphantly strong, it is conspicuously weak at only one point,—the important point of poetry. In eloquence, in philosophy, even in theology; in history, in fiction, in criticism, in epistolary writing, in what may be called the pamphlet; in another species of composition, characteristically, peculiarly, almost uniquely, French,—the Thought and the Maxim; by eminence in comedy, and in all those related modes of written expression for which there is scarcely any name but a French name,—the *jeu d'esprit*, the *bon mot*, *persiflage*, the *phrase*; in social and political speculation; last, but not least, in scientific exposition elegant enough in form and in style to rise to the rank of literature proper,—the French language has abundant achievement to show, that puts it, upon the whole, hardly second in wealth of letters to any other language whatever, either ancient or modern.

What constitutes the charm—partly a perilous charm—of French literature is, before all else, its incomparable clearness, its precision, its neatness, its point; then, added to this, its lightness of touch, its sureness of aim; its vivacity, sparkle, life; its inexhaustible gayety; its impulsion toward wit,—impulsion so strong as often to land it in mockery; the sense of release that it breathes and inspires; its freedom from prick to the conscience; its exquisite study and choice of effect; its deference paid to decorum,—decorum, we mean, in taste, as distinguished from morals; its infinite patience and labor of art, achieving the perfection of grace and of ease,—in one word, its style.

We speak, of course, broadly and in the gross. There are plenty of French authors to whom some of the traits just named could by no means be attributed, and there is certainly not a single French author to whom one could truthfully attribute them all. Voltaire insisted that what was not clear was not French,—so much, to the conception of this typical Frenchman, was clearness the genius of the national speech. Still, Montaigne, for example, was sometimes obscure; and even the tragedist Corneille wrote here and there what his commentator, Voltaire, declared to be hardly intelligible. So, too, Rabelais, coarsest of humorists, offending decorum in various ways, offended it most of all exactly in that article of taste, as distinguished from morals, which, with first-rate French authors in general, is so capital a point of regard. On the other hand, Pascal,—not to mention the moralists by profession, such as Nicole, and the preachers Bourdaloue and Massillon,—Pascal, quivering himself, like a soul unclad, with sense of responsibility to God, constantly probes you, reading him, to the inmost quick of your conscience. Rousseau, notably in the "Confessions," and in the *Reveries* supplementary to the "Confessions;" Chateaubriand, echoing Rousseau; and that wayward woman of genius, George Sand, disciple she to both,—were so far from being always light-heartedly gay, that not seldom they spread over their page a sombre atmosphere almost of gloom,—gloom flushed pensively, as with a clouded "setting sun's pathetic light." In short, when you speak of particular authors, and naturally still more when you speak of particular works, there are many discriminations to be made. Such exceptions, however, being duly allowed, the literary product of the French mind, considered in the aggregate, will not be misconceived if regarded as possessing the general characteristics in style that we have now sought briefly to indicate.

French literature, we have hinted, is comparatively poor in poetry. This is due in part, no doubt, to the genius of the people; but it is also due in part to the structure of the language. The language, which is derived chiefly from Latin, is thence in such a way derived as to have lost the regularity and stateliness of its ancient original, without having compensated itself with any richness and sweetness

of sound peculiarly its own; like, for instance, that canorous vowel quality of its sister derivative, the Italian. The French language, in short, is far from being an ideal language for the poet.

In spite, however, of this fact, disputed by nobody, it is true of French literature, as it is true of almost any national literature, that it took its rise in verse instead of in prose. Anciently, there were two languages subsisting together in France, which came to be distinguished from each other in name by the word of affirmation—*oc* or *oil*, yes—severally peculiar to them, and thus to be known respectively as *langue d'oc*, and *langue d'oïl*. The future belonged to the latter of the two forms of speech,—the one spoken in the northern part of the country. This, the *langue d'oïl*, became at length the French language. But the *langue d'oc*, a soft and musical tongue, survived long enough to become the vehicle of lyric strains, mostly on subjects of love and gallantry, still familiar in mention, and famous as the songs of the troubadours. The flourishing time of the troubadours was in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Provençal is an alternative name of the language.

Side by side with the southern *troubadours*, or a little later than they, the *trouvères* of the north sang, with more manly ambition, of national themes, and, like Virgil, of arms and of heroes. Some productions of the *trouvères* may fairly be allowed an elevation of aim and of treatment entitling them to be called epic in character. *Chansons de geste* (songs of exploit), or *romans*, is the native name by which those primitive French poems are known. They exist in three principal cycles, or groups, of productions,—one cycle composed of those pertaining to Charlemagne; one, of those pertaining to British Arthur; and a third, of those pertaining to ancient Greece and Rome, notably to Alexander the Great. The cycle revolving around the majestic legend of Charlemagne for its centre was Teutonic, rather than Celtic, in spirit as well as in theme. It tended to the religious in tone. The Arthurian cycle was properly Celtic. It dealt more with adventures of love. The Alexandrian cycle, so named from one principal theme celebrated,—namely, the deeds of Alexander the Great,—mixed fantastically the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome with the then prevailing ideas of chivalry, and with the figments of fairy lore. (The metrical form employed in these poems gave its name to the Alexandrine line later so predominant in French poetry.) The volume of this quasi-epical verse, existing in its three groups, or cycles, is immense. So is that of the satire and the allegory in metre that followed. From this latter store of stock and example, Chaucer drew to supply his muse with material. The *fabliaux*, so called,—fables, that is, or stories,—were still another form of early French literature in verse. It is only now, within the current decade of years, that a really ample collection of *fabliaux*—hitherto, with the exception of a few printed volumes of specimens, extant exclusively in manuscript—has been put into course of publication. Rutebeuf, a *trouvère* of the reign of St. Louis (Louis IX., thirteenth century), is perhaps as conspicuous a personal name as any that thus far emerges out of the sea of practically anonymous early French authorship. A frankly sordid and mercenary singer, Rutebeuf, always tending to mockery, was not seldom licentious,—in both these respects anticipating, as probably also to some extent by example conforming, the subsequent literary spirit of his nation. The *fabliaux* generally mingled with their narrative interest that spice of raillery and satire constantly so dear to the French literary appetite. Thibaud was, in a double sense, a royal singer of songs; for he reigned over Navarre, as well as chanted sweetly in verse his love and longing, so the disputed legend asserts, for Queen Blanche of Castile. Thibaud bears the historic title of The Song-maker. He has been styled the Béranger of the thirteenth century. To Thibaud is said to be due the introduction of the feminine rhyme into French poetry,—a metrical variation of capital importance. The songs of Abélard, in the century preceding Thibaud, won a wide popularity.

Prose, meantime, had been making noteworthy approaches to form. Villehardouin must be named as first in time among French writers of history. His work is entitled, "Conquest of Constantinople." It gives an account of the Fourth Crusade. Joinville, a generation later, continues the succession of chronicles with his admiring story of the life of Saint Louis, whose personal friend he was. But Froissart of the fourteenth century, and Comines of the fifteenth, are greater names. Froissart, by his simplicity and his narrative art, was the Herodotus, as Philip de Comines, for his

political sagacity, has been styled the Tacitus, of French historical literature. Up to the time of Froissart, the literature which we have been treating as French was different enough in form from the French of to-day to require what might be called translation in order to become generally intelligible to the living generation of Frenchmen. The text of Froissart is pretty archaic, but it definitely bears the aspect of French.

With the name of Comines, who wrote of Louis XI. (compare Walter Scott's "Quentin Durward"). we reach the fifteenth century, and are close upon the great revival of learning which accompanied the religious reformation under Luther and his peers. Now come Rabelais, boldly declared by Coleridge one of the great creative minds of literature; and Montaigne, with those Essays of his, still living, and, indeed, certain always to live. John Calvin, meantime, writes his "Institutes of the Christian Religion" in French as well as in Latin, showing once and for all, that in the right hands his vernacular tongue was as capable of gravity as many a writer before him had superfluously shown that it was capable of levity. Amyot, the translator of Plutarch, is a French writer of power, without whom the far greater Montaigne could hardly have been. The influence of Amyot on French literary history is wider in reach and longer in duration than we thus indicate; but Montaigne's indebtedness to him is alone enough to prove that a mere translator had in this man made a very important contribution to the forming prose literature of France.

"The Pleiades," so called, were a group of seven writers, who, about the middle of the sixteenth century, banded themselves together in France, with the express aim of supplying influential example to improve the French language for literary purposes. Their peculiar appellation, "The Pleiades," was copied from that of a somewhat similar group of Greek writers, that existed in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus. Of course, the implied allusion in it is to the constellation of the Pleiades. The individual name by which the Pleiades of the sixteenth century may best be remembered is that of Ronsard the poet, associated with the romantic and pathetic memory of Mary, Queen of Scots. Never, perhaps, in the history of letters was the fame of a poet in the poet's own lifetime more universal and more splendid than was the fame of Ronsard. A high court of literary judicature formally decreed to Ronsard the title of The French Poet by eminence. This occurred in the youth of the poet. The wine of success so brilliant turned the young fellow's head. He soon began to play lord paramount of Parnassus, with every air of one born to the purple. The kings of the earth vied with each other to do him honor. Ronsard affected scholarship, and the foremost scholars of his time were proud to place him with Homer and with Virgil on the roll of the poets. Ronsard's peculiarity in style was the free use of words and constructions not properly French. Boileau indicated whence he enriched his vocabulary and his syntax, by satirically saying that Ronsard spoke Greek and Latin in French. At his death, Ronsard was almost literally buried under praises. Sainte-Beuve strikingly says that he seemed to go forward into posterity as into a temple.

Sharp posthumous reprisals awaited the extravagant fame of Ronsard. Malherbe, coming in the next generation, legislator of Parnassus, laughed the literary pretensions of Ronsard to scorn. This stern critic of form, such is the story, marked up his copy of Ronsard with notes of censure so many, that a friend of his, seeing the annotated volume, observed, "What here is not marked, will be understood to have been approved by you." Whereupon Malherbe, taking his pen, with one indiscriminate stroke drew it abruptly through the whole volume. "There I Ronsardized," the contemptuous critic would exclaim, when in reading his own verses to an acquaintance,—for Malherbe was poet himself,—he happened to encounter a word that struck him as harsh or improper. Malherbe, in short, sought to chasten and check the luxuriant overgrowth to which the example and method of the Pleiades were tending to push the language of poetry in French. The resultant effect of the two contrary tendencies—that of literary wantonness on the one hand, and that of literary prudery on the other—was at the same time to enrich and to purify French poetical diction. Balzac (the elder), close to Malherbe in time, performed a service for French prose similar to that which the

latter performed for French verse. These two critical and literary powers brought in the reign of what is called classicism in France. French classicism had its long culmination under Louis XIV.

But it was under Louis XIII., or rather under that monarch's great minister, Cardinal Richelieu, that the rich and splendid Augustan age of French literature was truly prepared. Two organized forces, one of them private and social, the other official and public, worked together, though sometimes perhaps not in harmony, to produce the magnificent literary result that illustrated the time of Louis XIV. Of these two organized forces, the Hôtel de Rambouillet was one, and the French Academy was the other. The Hôtel de Rambouillet has become the adopted name of a literary society, presided over by the fine inspiring genius of the beautiful and accomplished Italian wife of the Marquis de Rambouillet, a lady who generously conceived the idea of rallying the feminine wit and virtue of the kingdom to exert a potent influence for regenerating the manners and morals, and indeed the literature, of France. At the high court of blended rank and fashion and beauty and polish and virtue and wit, thus established in the exquisitely builded and decorated saloons of the Rambouillet mansion, the selectest literary genius and fame of France were proud and glad to assemble for the discussion and criticism of literature. Here came Balzac and Voiture; here Corneille read aloud his masterpieces before they were represented on the stage; here Descartes philosophized; here the large and splendid genius of Bossuet first unfolded itself to the world; here Madame de Sévigné brought her bright, incisive wit, trebly commended by stainless reputation, unwithering beauty, and charming address, in the woman who wielded it. The noblest blood of France added the decoration and inspiration of their presence. It is not easy to overrate the diffusive beneficent influence that hence went forth to change the fashion of literature, and to change the fashion of society, for the better. The Hôtel de Rambouillet proper lasted two generations only; but it had a virtual succession, which, though sometimes interrupted, was scarcely extinct until the brilliant and beautiful Madame Récamier ceased, about the middle of the present century, to hold her famous *salons* in Paris. The continuous fame and influence of the French Academy, founded by Richelieu, everybody knows. No other European language has been elaborately and sedulously formed and cultivated like the French.

But great authors are better improvers of a language than any societies, however influential. Corneille, Descartes, Pascal, did more for French style than either the Hôtel de Rambouillet or the Academy,—more than both these two great literary societies together. In verse, Racine, following Corneille, advanced in some important respects upon the example and lead of that great original master; but in prose, when Pascal published his "Provincial Letters," French style reached at once a point of perfection beyond which it never since has gone. Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Fénelon, Massillon, Molière, La Fontaine, Boileau, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère,—what a constellation of names are these, to glorify the age of Louis XIV.! And Louis XIV. himself, royal embodiment of a literary good sense carried to the pitch of something very like real genius in judgment and taste,—what a sun was he (with that talent of his for kingship, probably never surpassed), to balance and to sway, from his unshaken station, the august intellectual system of which he alone constituted the despotic centre to attract and repel! Seventy-two years long was this sole individual reign. Louis XIV. still sat on the throne of France when the seventeenth century became the eighteenth.

The eighteenth century was an age of universal reaction in France. Religion, or rather ecclesiasticism,—for, in the France of those times, religion was the Church, and the Church was the Roman Catholic hierarchy,—had been the dominant fashion under Louis XIV. Infidelity was a broad literary mark, written all over the face of the eighteenth century. It was the hour and power of the Encyclopædists and the Philosophers,—of Voltaire, of Diderot, of D'Alembert, of Rousseau. Montesquieu, though contemporary, belongs apart from these writers. More really original, more truly philosophical, he was far less revolutionary, far less destructive, than they. Still, his influence was, on the whole, exerted in the direction, if not of infidelity, at least of religious indifferentism. The French Revolution was laid in train by the great popular writers whom we have now named, and by their fellows. It needed only the spark, which the proper occasion would be sure soon to strike out,

and the awful, earth-shaking explosion would follow. After the Revolution, during the First Empire, so called,—the usurpation, that is, of Napoleon Bonaparte,—literature was well-nigh extinguished in France. The names, however, then surpassingly brilliant, of Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël, belong to this period.

Three centuries have now elapsed since the date of "The Pleiades." Throughout this long period, French literature has been chiefly under the sway of that spirit of classicism in style which the reaction against Ronsardism, led first by Malherbe and afterwards by Boileau, had established as the national standard in literary taste and aspiration. But Rousseau's genius acted as a powerful solvent of the classic tradition. Chateaubriand's influence was felt on the same side, continuing Rousseau's. George Sand, too, and Lamartine, were forces that strengthened this component. Finally, the great personality of Victor Hugo proved potent enough definitively to break the spell that had been so long and so heavily laid on the literary development of France. The bloodless warfare was fierce between the revolutionary Romanticists and the conservative Classicists in literary style, but the victory seemed at last to remain with the advocates of the new romantic revival. It looked, on the face of the matter, like a signal triumph of originality over prescription, of genius over criticism, of power over rule. We still live in the midst of the dying echoes of this resonant strife. Perhaps it is too early, as yet, to determine on which side, by the merit of the cause, the advantage truly belongs. But, by the merit of the respective champions, the result was, for a time at least, triumphantly decided in favor of the Romanticists, against the Classicists. The weighty authority, however, of Sainte-Beuve, at first thrown into the scale that at length would sink, was thence withdrawn, and at last, if not resolutely cast upon the opposite side of the balance, was left wavering in a kind of equipoise between the one and the other. But our preliminary sketch has already passed the limit within which our choice of authors for representation is necessarily confined.

With first a few remarks, naturally suggested, that may be useful, on the general subject thus rather touched merely than handled, the present writer gives way to let now the representative authors themselves, selected for the purpose, supply to the reader a just and lively idea of French literature.

The first thing, perhaps, to strike the thoughtful mind in a comprehensive view of the subject, is not so much the length—though this is remarkable—as the long *continuity* of French literary history. From its beginning down to the actual moment, French literature has suffered no serious break in the course of its development. There have been periods of greater, and periods of less, prosperity and fruit; but wastes of marked suspension and barrenness, there have been none.

The second thing noticeable is, that French literature has, to a singular degree, lived an independent life of its own. It has found copious springs of health and growth within its own bosom.

But then, a third thing to be also observed, is that, on the other hand, the touch of foreign influence, felt and acknowledged by this most proudly and self-sufficiently national of literatures, has proved to it, at various epochs, a sovereign force of revival and elastic expansion. Thus, the great renaissance in the sixteenth century of ancient Greek and Latin letters was new life to French literature. So, again, Spanish literature, brought into contact with French through Corneille and Molière with others, gave to the national mind of France a new literary launch. But the most recent and perhaps the most remarkable example of foreign influence quickening French literature to make it freshly fruitful, is supplied in the great romanticizing movement under the lead of Victor Hugo. English literature—especially Shakspeare—was largely the pregnant cause of this attempted emancipation of the French literary mind from the burden of classicism.

A fourth very salient trait in French literary history consists in the self-conscious, elaborate, persistent efforts put forth from time to time by individuals, and by organizations, both public and private, in France, to improve the language, and to elevate the literature, of the nation. We know of nothing altogether comparable to this anywhere else in the literature of the world.

A fifth striking thing about French literature is, that it has to a degree, as we believe beyond parallel, exercised a real and vital influence on the character and the fortune of the nation. The social,

the political, the moral, the religious, history of France is from age to age a faithful reflex of the changing phases of its literature. Of course, a reciprocal influence has been constantly reflected back and forth from the nation upon its literature, as well as from its literature upon the nation. But where else in the world has it ever been so extraordinarily, we may say so appallingly, true as in France, that the nation was such because such was its literature?

French literature, it will at once be seen, is a study possessing, beyond the literary, a social, a political, and even a religious, interest.

Readers desiring to push their conversance with the literary history of France farther than the present volume will enable them to do, will consult with profit either the *Primer*, or the *Short History*, of French Literature, by Mr. George Saintsbury. Mr. Saintsbury is a well-informed writer, who, if the truth must be told, diffuses himself too widely to do his best possible work. He has, however, made French literature a specialty, and he is in general a trustworthy authority on the subject.

Another writer on the subject is Mr. H. Van Laun. Him, although a predecessor of his own in the field, Mr. Saintsbury severely ignores, by claiming that he is himself the first to write in English a history of French literature based on original and independent reading of the authors. We are bound to say that Mr. Van Laun's work is of very poor quality. It offers, indeed, to the reader one advantage not afforded by either of Mr. Saintsbury's works, the advantage, namely, of illustrative extracts from the authors treated,—extracts, however, not unfrequently marred by wretched translation. The cyclopædias are, some of them, both in articles on particular authors and in their sketches of French literary history as a whole, good sources of general information on the subject. Readers who command the means of comparing several different cyclopædias, or several successive editions of some one cyclopædia, as, for example, the "*Encyclopædia Britannica*," will find enlightening and stimulating the not always harmonious views presented on the same topics. Hallam's "*History of Literature in Europe*" is an additional authority by no means to be overlooked.

II. FROISSART. 1337-1410

French literature, for the purposes of the present volume, may be said to commence with Froissart. Froissart is a kind of mediæval Herodotus. His time is, indeed, almost this side the middle ages; but he belongs by character and by sympathy rather to the mediæval than to the modern world. He is delightfully like Herodotus in the style and the spirit of his narrative. Like Herodotus, he became a traveller in order to become an historian. Like Herodotus, he was cosmopolite enough not to be narrowly patriotic. Frenchman though he was, he took as much pleasure in recounting English victories as he did in recounting French. His countrymen have even accused him of unpatriotic partiality for the English. His *Chronicles* have been, perhaps, more popular in their English form than in their original French. Two prominent English translations have been made, of which the later, that by Thomas Johnes, is now most read. Sir Walter Scott thought the earlier excelled in charm of style.

Jehan or Jean Froissart was a native of Valenciennes. His father meant to make a priest of him, but the boy had other tastes of his own. Before he was well out of his teens, he began writing history. This was under the patronage of a great noble. Froissart was all his life a natural courtier. He thrived on the patronage of the great. It was probably not a fawning spirit in him that made him this kind of man; it was rather an innate love of splendor and high exploit. He admired chivalry, then in its last days, and he painted it with the passion of an idealizer. His father had been an heraldic painter, so it was perhaps an hereditary strain in the son that naturally attached him to rank and royalty. The people—that is, the promiscuous mass of mankind—hardly exist to Froissart. His pages, spacious as they are, have scarcely room for more than kings and nobles, and knights and squires. He is a picturesque and romantic historian, in whose chronicles the glories of the world of chivalry—a world, as we have said, already dying, and so soon to disappear—are fixed forever on an ample canvas, in moving form and shifting color, to delight the backward-looking imagination of mankind.

Froissart, besides being chronicler, was something of a poet. It would still be possible to confront one who should call this in question, with thirty thousand surviving verses from the chronicler's pen. Quantity, indeed, rather than quality, is the strong point of Froissart as poet.

He had no sooner finished the first part of his *Chronicles*, a compilation from the work of an earlier hand, than he posted to England for the purpose of formally presenting his work to the Queen, a princess of Hainault. She rewarded him handsomely. Woman enough, too, she was, woman under the queen, duly to despatch him back again to his native land, where the young fellow's heart, she saw, was lost to a noble lady, whom, from his inferior station, he could woo only as a moth might woo the moon. He subsequently returned to Great Britain, and rode about on horseback gathering materials of history. He visited Italy under excellent auspices, and, together with Chaucer and with Petrarch, witnessed a magnificent marriage ceremonial in Milan. Froissart continued to travel far and wide, always a favorite with princes, but always intent on achieving his projected work. He finally died at Chimay, where he had spent his closing years in rounding out to their completeness his "*Chronicles of England, France, and the Adjoining Countries*."

Froissart is the most leisurely of historians, or, rather, he is a writer who presupposes the largest allowance of leisure at the command of his readers. He does not seek proportion and perspective. He simply tells us all he had been able to find out respecting each transaction in its turn as it successively comes up in the progress of his narrative. If he goes wrong to-day, he will perhaps correct himself to-morrow, or day after to-morrow,—this not by changing the first record where it stands, to make it right, but by inserting a note of his mistake at the point, whatever it may be, which he shall chance to have reached in the work of composition when the new and better light breaks in on his eyes. The

student is thus never quite certain but that what he is at one moment reading in his author, may be an error of which at some subsequent moment he will be faithfully advised. A little discomposing, this, but such is Froissart; and it is the philosophical way to take your author as he is, and make the best of him.

Of such an historian, an historian so diffuse, and so little selective, it would obviously be difficult to give any suitably brief specimen that should seem to present a considerable historic action in full. We go to Froissart's account of the celebrated battle of Poitiers (France). This was fought in 1356, between Edward the Black Prince on the English side, and King John on the side of the French.

King John of the French was, of course, a great prize to be secured by the victorious English. There was eager individual rivalry as to what particular warrior should be adjudged his true captor. Froissart thus describes the strife and the issue:—

There was much pressing at this time, through eagerness to take the king; and those who were nearest to him, and knew him, cried out, "Surrender yourself, surrender yourself, or you are a dead man!" In that part of the field was a young knight from St. Omer, who was engaged by a salary in the service of the King of England; his name was Denys de Morbeque; who for five years had attached himself to the English, on account of having been banished in his younger days from France, for a murder committed in an affray at St. Omer. It fortunately happened for this knight, that he was at the time near to the King of France, when he was so much pulled about. He, by dint of force, for he was very strong and robust, pushed through the crowd, and said to the king, in good French, "Sire, sire, surrender yourself!" The king, who found himself very disagreeably situated, turning to him, asked, "To whom shall I surrender myself? to whom? Where is my cousin, the Prince of Wales? If I could see him, I would speak to him."—"Sire," replied Sir Denys, "he is not here; but surrender yourself to me, and I will lead you to him."—"Who are you?" said the king. "Sire, I am Denys de Morbeque, a knight from Artois; but I serve the King of England because I cannot belong to France, having forfeited all I possessed there." The king then gave him his right-hand glove, and said, "I surrender myself to you." There was much crowding and pushing about; for every one was eager to cry out, "I have taken him!" Neither the king nor his youngest son Philip were able to get forward, and free themselves from the throng....

The Prince [of Wales] asked them [his marshals] if they knew any thing of the King of France: they replied, "No, sir, not for a certainty; but we believe he must be either killed or made prisoner, since he has never quitted his battalion." The prince then, addressing the Earl of Warwick and Lord Cobham, said, "I beg of you to mount your horses, and ride over the field, so that on your return you may bring me some certain intelligence of him." The two barons, immediately mounting their horses, left the prince, and made for a small hillock, that they might look about them. From their stand they perceived a crowd of men-at-arms on foot, who were advancing very slowly. The King of France was in the midst of them, and in great danger; for the English and Gascons had taken him from Sir Denys de Morbeque, and were disputing who should have him, the stoutest bawling out, "It is I that have got him."—"No, no," replied the others: "we have him." The king, to escape from this peril, said, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, I pray you conduct me and my son in a courteous manner to my cousin the prince; and do not make such a riot about my capture, for I am so great a lord that I can make all sufficiently rich." These words, and others which fell from the king, appeased them a little; but the disputes were always beginning again, and they did not move a step without rioting. When the two barons saw this troop of people, they descended from the hillock, and, sticking

spurs into their horses, made up to them. On their arrival, they asked what was the matter. They were answered, that it was the King of France, who had been made prisoner, and that upward of ten knights and squires challenged him at the same time, as belonging to each of them. The two barons then pushed through the crowd by main force, and ordered all to draw aside. They commanded, in the name of the prince, and under pain of instant death, that every one should keep his distance, and not approach unless ordered or desired so to do. They all retreated behind the king; and the two barons, dismounting, advanced to the king with profound reverences, and conducted him in a peaceable manner to the Prince of Wales.

We continue our citation from Froissart with the brief chapter in which the admiring chronicler tells the gallant story of the Black Prince's behavior as host toward his royal captive, King John of France (it was the evening after the battle):—

When evening was come, the Prince of Wales gave a supper in his pavilion to the King of France, and to the greater part of the princes and barons who were prisoners. The prince seated the King of France, and his son the Lord Philip, at an elevated and well-covered table: with them were Sir James de Bourbon, the Lord John d'Artois, the earls of Tancarville, of Estampes, of Dammartin, of Gravelle, and the Lord of Partenay. The other knights and squires were placed at different tables. The prince himself served the king's table, as well as the others, with every mark of humility, and would not sit down at it, in spite of all his entreaties for him so to do, saying that "he was not worthy of such an honor, nor did it appertain to him to seat himself at the table of so great a king, or of so valiant a man as he had shown himself by his actions that day." He added, also, with a noble air, "Dear sir, do not make a poor meal, because the Almighty God has not gratified your wishes in the event of this day; for be assured that my lord and father will show you every honor and friendship in his power, and will arrange your ransom so reasonably, that you will henceforward always remain friends. In my opinion, you have cause to be glad that the success of this battle did not turn out as you desired; for you have this day acquired such high renown for prowess, that you have surpassed all the best knights on your side. I do not, dear sir, say this to flatter you; for all those of our side who have seen and observed the actions of each party, have unanimously allowed this to be your due, and decree you the prize and garland for it." At the end of this speech, there were murmurs of praise heard from every one; and the French said the prince had spoken nobly and truly, and that he would be one of the most gallant princes in Christendom if God should grant him life to pursue his career of glory.

A splendid and a gracious figure the Black Prince makes in the pages of Froissart. It was great good fortune for the posthumous fame of chivalry, that the institution should have come by an artist so gifted and so loyal as this Frenchman, to deliver its features in portrait to after-times, before the living original vanished forever from the view of history. How much the fiction of Sir Walter Scott owes to Froissart, and to Philip de Comines after Froissart, those only can understand who have read both the old chronicles and the modern romances.

It was one of the congenial labors of Sidney Lanier—pure flame of genius that late burned itself out so swiftly among us!—to edit a reduction or abridgment of Froissart's Chronicles dedicated especially to the use of the young. "The Boy's Froissart," he called it. This book is enriched with a wise and genial appreciation of Froissart's quality by his American editor.

Whoever reads Froissart needs to remember that the old chronicler is too much enamoured of chivalry, and is too easily dazzled by splendor of rank, to be a rigidly just censor of faults committed by

knights and nobles and kings. Froissart, in truth, seems to have been nearly destitute of the sentiment of humanity. War to him was chiefly a game and a spectacle.

Our presentation of Froissart must close with a single passage additional, a picturesque one, in which the chronicler describes the style of living witnessed by him at the court—we may not unfitly so apply a royal word—of the Count de Foix. The reader must understand, while he reads what we here show, that Froissart himself, in close connection, relates at full, in the language of an informant of his, how this magnificent Count de Foix had previously killed, with a knife at his throat, his own and his only son. "I was truly sorry," so, at the conclusion of the story, Froissart, with characteristic direction of his sympathy, says, "for the count his father, whom I found a magnificent, generous, and courteous lord, and also for the country that was discontented for want of an heir." Here is the promised passage; it occurs in the ninth chapter of the third volume:—

Count Gaston Phoebus de Foix, of whom I am now speaking, was at that time fifty-nine years old; and I must say, that although I have seen very many knights, kings, princes, and others, I have never seen any so handsome, either in the form of his limbs and shape, or in countenance, which was fair and ruddy, with gray and amorous eyes, that gave delight whenever he chose to express affection. He was so perfectly formed, one could not praise him too much. He loved earnestly the things he ought to love, and hated those which it was becoming him so to hate. He was a prudent knight, full of enterprise and wisdom. He had never any men of abandoned character with him, reigned prudently, and was constant in his devotions. There were regular nocturnals from the Psalter, prayers from the rituals to the Virgin, to the Holy Ghost, and from the burial service. He had every day distributed as alms, at his gate, five florins in small coin, to all comers. He was liberal and courteous in his gifts, and well knew how to take when it was proper, and to give back where he had confidence. He mightily loved dogs above all other animals, and during the summer and winter amused himself much with hunting....

When he quitted his chamber at midnight for supper, twelve servants bore each a lighted torch before him, which were placed near his table, and gave a brilliant light to the apartment. The hall was full of knights and squires, and there were plenty of tables laid out for any person who chose to sup. No one spoke to him at his table, unless he first began a conversation. He commonly ate heartily of poultry, but only the wings and thighs; for in the daytime, he neither ate nor drank much. He had great pleasure in hearing minstrels; as he himself was a proficient in the science, and made his secretaries sing songs, ballads, and roundelays. He remained at table about two hours, and was pleased when fanciful dishes were served up to him, which having seen, he immediately sent them to the tables of his knights and squires.

In short, every thing considered, though I had before been in several courts of kings, dukes, princes, counts, and noble ladies, I was never at one that pleased me more, nor was I ever more delighted with feats of arms, than at this of the Count de Foix. There were knights and squires to be seen in every chamber, hall, and court, going backwards and forwards, and conversing on arms and amours. Every thing honorable was there to be found. All intelligence from distant countries was there to be learnt, for the gallantry of the count had brought visitors from all parts of the world. It was there I was informed of the greater part of those events which had happened in Spain, Portugal, Arragon, Navarre, England, Scotland, and on the borders of Languedoc; for I saw, during my residence, knights and squires arrive from every nation. I therefore made inquiries from them, or from the count himself, who cheerfully conversed with me.

The foregoing is one of the most celebrated passages of description in Froissart. At the same time that it discloses the form and spirit of those vanished days, which will never come again to the world, it discloses likewise the character of the man, who must indeed have loved it all well, to have been able so well to describe it.

We take now a somewhat long forward step, in going, as we do, at once from Froissart to Rabelais. Comines, lying between, we must reluctantly pass, with thus barely mentioning his name.

III. RABELAIS. 1495-1553

Rabelais is one of the most famous of writers. But he is at the same time incomparably the coarsest.

The real quality of such a writer, it is evidently out of the question to exhibit at all adequately here. But equally out of the question it is to omit Rabelais altogether from an account of French literature.

Of the life of François Rabelais the man, these few facts will be sufficient to know. In early youth he joined the monastic order of the Franciscans. That order hated letters; but Rabelais loved them. He, in fact, conceived a voracious ambition of knowledge. He became immensely learned. This fact, with what it implies of long labor patiently achieved, is enough to show that Rabelais was not without seriousness of character. But he was much more a merry-andrew than a pattern monk. He made interest enough with influential friends to get himself transferred from the Franciscans to the Benedictines, an order more favorable to studious pursuits. But neither among the Benedictines was this roistering spirit at ease. He left them irregularly, but managed to escape punishment for his irregularity. At last, after various vicissitudes of occupation, he settled down as curate of Meudon, where (the place, however, is doubtful, as also the date) in 1553 he died. He was past fifty years of age before he finished the work which has made him famous.

This work is "The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel," a grotesque and nondescript production, founded, probably, on some prior romance or traditionary tale of giants. The narrative of Rabelais is a tissue of adventures shocking every idea of verisimilitude, and serving only as a vehicle for the strange humor of the writer. The work is replete with evidences of Rabelais's learning. It would be useless to attempt giving any abstract or analysis of a book which is simply a wild chaos of material jumbled together with little regard to logic, order, or method of whatever sort. We shall better represent its character by giving a few specimen extracts.

Rabelais begins his romance characteristically. According as you understand him here, you judge the spirit of the whole work. Either he now gives you a clew by which, amid the mazes of apparent sheer frivolity on his part, you may follow till you win your way to some veiled serious meaning that he had all the time, but never dared frankly to avow; or else he is playfully misleading you on a false scent, which, however long held to, will bring you out nowhere—in short, is quizzing you. Let the reader judge for himself. Here is the opening passage,—the "Author's Prologue," it is called in the English translation executed by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Motteux; a version, by the way, which, with whatever faults of too much freedom, is the work of minds and consciences singularly sympathetic with the genius of the original; the English student is perhaps hardly at all at disadvantage, in comparison with the French, for the full appreciation of Rabelais:—

Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's which is entitled, "The Banquet," whilst he was setting forth the praises of his schoolmaster Socrates (without all question the prince of philosophers), amongst other discourses to that purpose said that he resembled the Sileni. Sileni of old were little boxes, like those we now may see in the shops of apothecaries, painted on the outside with wanton toyish figures, as harpies, satyrs, bridled geese, horned hares, saddled ducks, flying goats, thiller harts, and other such counterfeited pictures, at pleasure, to excite people unto laughter, as Silenus himself, who was the foster-

father of good Bacchus, was wont to do; but within those capricious caskets called Sileni, were carefully preserved and kept many rich and fine drugs, such as balm, ambergreese, amomon, musk, civet, with several kinds of precious stones, and other things of great price. Just such another thing was Socrates; for to have eyed his outside, and esteemed of him by his exterior appearance, you would not have given the peel of an onion for him, so deformed he was in body, and ridiculous in his gesture.... Opening this box, you would have found within it a heavenly and inestimable drug, a more than human understanding, an admirable virtue, matchless learning, invincible courage, inimitable sobriety, certain contentment of mind, perfect assurance, and an incredible disregard of all that for which men commonly do so much watch, run, sail, fight, travel, toil, and turmoil themselves.

Whereunto (in your opinion) doth this little flourish of a preamble tend? For so much as you, my good disciples, and some other jolly fools of ease and leisure,... are too ready to judge, that there is nothing in them but jests, mockeries, lascivious discourse, and recreative lies;... therefore is it, that you must open the book, and seriously consider of the matter treated in it. Then shall you find that it containeth things of far higher value than the box did promise; that is to say, that the subject thereof is not so foolish, as by the title at the first sight it would appear to be.

...Did you ever see a dog with a marrow-bone in his mouth?... Like him, you must, by a sedulous lecture [reading], and frequent meditation, break the bone, and suck out the marrow; that is, my allegorical sense, or the things I to myself propose to be signified by these Pythagorical symbols;... the most glorious doctrines and dreadful mysteries, as well in what concerneth our religion, as matters of the public state and life economical.

Up to this point, the candid reader has probably been conscious of a growing persuasion that this author must be at bottom a serious if also a humorous man,—a man, therefore, excusably intent not to be misunderstood as a mere buffoon. But now let the candid reader proceed with the following, and confess, upon his honor, if he is not scandalized and perplexed. What shall be said of a writer who thus plays with his reader?

Do you believe, upon your conscience, that Homer, whilst he was couching his Iliad and Odyssey, had any thought upon those allegories which Plutarch, Heraclides Ponticus, Eustathius, Phornutus, squeezed out of him, and which Politian filched again from them? If you trust it, with neither hand nor foot do you come near to my opinion, which judgeth them to have been as little dreamed of by Homer, as the gospel sacraments were by Ovid, in his Metamorphoses; though a certain gulligut friar, and true bacon-picker, would have undertaken to prove it, if, perhaps, he had met with as very fools as himself, and, as the proverb says, "a lid worthy of such a kettle."

If you give any credit thereto, why do not you the same to these jovial new Chronicles of mine? Albeit, when I did dictate them, I thought thereof no more than you, who possibly were drinking the whilst, as I was. For, in the composing of this lordly book, I never lost nor bestowed any more, nor any other time, than what was appointed to serve me for taking of my bodily refection; that is, whilst I was eating and drinking. And, indeed, that is the fittest and most proper hour, wherein to write these high matters and deep sentences; as Homer knew very well, the paragon of all philologues, and Ennius, the father of the Latin poets, as Horace calls him, although a certain sneaking jobbernot alleged that his verses smelled more of the wine than oil.

Does this writer quiz his reader, or, in good faith, give him a needed hint? Who shall decide?

We have let our first extract thus run on to some length, both for the reason that the passage is as representative as any we could properly offer of the quality of Rabelais, and also for the reason that the key of interpretation is here placed in the hand of the reader, for unlocking the enigma of this remarkable book. The extraordinary horse-play of pleasantry, which makes Rabelais unreadable for the general public of to-day, begins so promptly, affecting the very prologue, that we could not present even that piece of writing entire in our extract. We are informed that the circulation in England of the works of Rabelais, in translation, has been interfered with by the English government, on the ground of their indecency. We are bound to admit, that, if any writings whatever were to be suppressed on that ground, the writings of Rabelais are certainly entitled to be of the number. It is safe to say that never, no, not even in the boundless license of the comedy of Aristophanes, was more flagrant indecency, and indecency proportionately more redundant in volume, perpetrated in literature, than was done by Rabelais. Indecency, however, it is, rather than strict lasciviousness. Rabelais sinned against manners, more than he sinned against morals. But his obscenity is an ocean, without bottom or shore. Literally, he sticks at nothing that is coarse. Nay, this is absurdly short of expressing the fact. The genius of Rabelais teems with invention of coarseness, beyond what any one could conceive as possible, who had not taken his measure of possibility from Rabelais himself. And his diction was as opulent as his invention.

Such is the character of Rabelais the author. What, then, was it, if not fondness for paradox, that could prompt Coleridge to say, "I could write a treatise in praise of the moral elevation of Rabelais' works, which would make the church stare and the conventicle groan, and yet would be truth, and nothing but the truth"? If any thing besides fondness for paradox inspired Coleridge in saying this, it must, one would guess, have been belief on his part in the allegorical sense hidden deep underneath the monstrous mass of the Rabelaisian buffoonery. A more judicial sentence is that of Hallam, the historian of the literature of Europe: "He [Rabelais] is never serious in a single page, and seems to have had little other aim, in his first two volumes, than to pour out the exuberance of his animal gayety."

The supply of animal gayety in this man was something portentous. One cannot, however, but feel that he forces it sometimes, as sometimes did Dickens those exhaustless animal spirits of his. A very common trick of the Rabelaisian humor is to multiply specifications, or alternative expressions, one after another, almost without end. From the second book of his romance,—an afterthought, probably, of continuation to his unexpectedly successful first book,—we take the last paragraph of the prologue, which shows this. The veracious historian makes obtestation of the strict truth of his narrative, and imprecates all sorts of evil upon such as do not believe it absolutely. We cleanse our extract a little:—

And, therefore, to make an end of this Prologue, even as I give myself to an hundred thousand panniers-full of fair devils, body and soul,... in case that I lie so much as one single word in this whole history; after the like manner, St. Anthony's fire burn you, Mahoom's disease whirl you, the squinance with a stitch in your side, and the wolf in your stomach truss you, the bloody flux seize upon you, the cursed sharp inflammations of wild fire, as slender and thin as cow's hair strengthened with quicksilver, enter into you,... and, like those of Sodom and Gomorrha, may you fall into sulphur, fire, and bottomless pits, in case you do not firmly believe all that I shall relate unto you in this present Chronicle.

So much for Rabelais's prologues. Our readers must now see something of what, under pains and penalties denounced so dire, they are bound to believe. We condense and defecate for this purpose the thirty-eighth chapter of the first book, which is staggeringly entitled, "How Gargantua did eat up Six Pilgrims in a Sallad":—

The story requireth that we relate that which happened unto six pilgrims, who came from Sebastian near to Nantes; and who, for shelter that night, being afraid of the enemy, had hid themselves in the garden upon the chickling peas, among the cabbages and lettuces. Gargantua, finding himself somewhat dry, asked whether they could get any lettuce to make him a salad; and, hearing that there were the greatest and fairest in the country,—for they were as great as plum trees, or as walnut trees,—he would go thither himself, and brought thence in his hand what he thought good, and withal carried away the six pilgrims, who were in so great fear that they did not dare to speak nor cough. Washing them, therefore, first at the fountain, the pilgrims said one to another, softly, "What shall we do? We are almost drowned here amongst these lettuce: shall we speak? But, if we speak, he will kill us for spies." And, as they were thus deliberating what to do, Gargantua put them, with the lettuce, into a platter of the house, as large as the huge tun of the White Friars of the Cistercian order; which done, with oil, vinegar, and salt, he ate them up, to refresh himself a little before supper, and had already swallowed up five of the pilgrims, the sixth being in the platter, totally hid under a lettuce, except his bourbon, or staff, that appeared, and nothing else. Which Grangousier [Gargantua's father] seeing, said to Gargantua, "I think that is the horn of a shell snail: do not eat it."—"Why not?" said Gargantua; "they are good all this month:" which he no sooner said, but, drawing up the staff, and therewith taking up the pilgrim, he ate him very well, then drank a terrible draught of excellent white wine. The pilgrims, thus devoured, made shift to save themselves, as well as they could, by drawing their bodies out of the reach of the grinders of his teeth, but could not escape from thinking they had been put in the lowest dungeon of a prison. And, when Gargantua whiffed the great draught, they thought to have drowned in his mouth, and the flood of wine had almost carried them away into the gulf of his stomach. Nevertheless, skipping with their bourbons, as St. Michael's palmers used to do, they sheltered themselves from the danger of that inundation under the banks of his teeth. But one of them, by chance, groping, or sounding the country with his staff, to try whether they were in safety or no, struck hard against the cleft of a hollow tooth, and hit the mandibulary sinew or nerve of the jaw, which put Gargantua to very great pain, so that he began to cry for the rage that he felt. To ease himself, therefore, of his smarting ache, he called for his tooth-picker, and, rubbing towards a young walnut-tree, where they lay skulking, unnestled you my gentlemen pilgrims. For he caught one by the legs, another by the scrip, another by the pocket, another by the scarf, another by the band of the breeches; and the poor fellow that had hurt him with the bourbon, him he hooked to him by [another part of his clothes].... The pilgrims, thus dislodged, ran away.

Rabelais closes his story with jocose irreverent application of Scripture,—a manner of his which gives some color to the tradition of a biblical pun made by him on his death-bed.

The closest English analogue to Rabelais is undoubtedly Dean Swift. We probably never should have had "Gulliver's Travels" from Swift, if we had not first had Gargantua and Pantagruel from Rabelais. Swift, however, differs from Rabelais as well as resembles him. Whereas Rabelais is simply monstrous in invention, Swift in invention submits himself loyally to law. Give Swift his world of Liliput and Brobdingnag respectively, and all, after that, is quite natural and probable. The reduction or the exaggeration is made upon a mathematically calculated scale. For such verisimilitude Rabelais cares not a straw. His various inventions are recklessly independent one of another. A characteristic of Swift thus is scrupulous conformity to whimsical law. Rabelais is remarkable for whimsical disregard

of even his own whimses. Voltaire put the matter with his usual felicity,—Swift is Rabelais in his senses.

One of the most celebrated—justly celebrated—of Rabelais's imaginations is that of the Abbey of Thélème [Thelema]. This constitutes a kind of Rabelaisian Utopia. It was proper of the released monk to give his Utopian dream the form of an abbey, but an abbey in which the opposite should obtain of all that he had so heartily hated in his own monastic experience. A humorously impossible place and state was the Abbey of Thélème,—a kind of sportive Brook Farm set far away in a world unrealized. How those Thelemites enjoyed life, to be sure! It was like endless plum pudding—for everybody to eat, and nobody to prepare:—

All their life was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. They rose out of their beds when they thought good; they did eat, drink, labor, sleep, when they had a mind to it, and were disposed for it. None did awake them, none did offer to constrain them to eat, drink, nor to do any other thing; for so had Gargantua established it. In all their rule, and strictest tie of their order, there was but this one clause to be observed,—

DO WHAT THOU WILT

...By this liberty they entered into a very laudable emulation, to do all of them what they saw did please one. If any of the gallants or ladies should say, Let us drink, they would all drink. If any one of them said, Let us play, they all played. If one said, Let us go a walking into the fields, they went all.... There was neither he nor she amongst them, but could read, write, sing, play upon several musical instruments, speak five or six several languages, and compose in them all very quaintly, both in verse and prose. Never were seen so valiant knights, so noble and worthy, so dextrous and skilful both on foot and a horseback, more brisk and lively, more nimble and quick, or better handling all manner of weapons than were there. Never were seen ladies so proper and handsome, so miniard and dainty, less forward, or more ready with their hand, and with their needle, in every honest and free action belonging to that sex, than were there. For this reason, when the time came, that any man of the said abbey, either at the request of his parents, or for some other cause, had a mind to go out of it, he carried along with him one of the ladies, namely her who had before that accepted him as her lover, and they were married together.

The foregoing is one of the most purely sweet imaginative passages in Rabelais's works. The representation, as a whole, sheathes, of course, a keen satire on the religious houses. Real religion, Rabelais nowhere attacks.

The same colossal Gargantua who had that eating adventure with the six pilgrims, is made, in Rabelais's second book, to write his youthful son Pantagruel—also a giant, but destined to be, when mature, a model of all princely virtues—a letter on education, in which the most pious paternal exhortation occurs. The whole letter reads like some learned Puritan divine's composition. Here are a few specimen sentences:—

Fail not most carefully to peruse the books of the Greek, Arabian, and Latin physicians, not despising the Talmudists and Cabalists; and by frequent anatomies get thee the perfect knowledge of that other world, called the microcosm, which is man. And at some of the hours of the day apply thy mind to the study of the Holy Scriptures: first, in Greek, the New Testament, with the Epistles of the Apostles; and

then the Old Testament in Hebrew. In brief, let me see thee an abyss and bottomless pit of knowledge....

...It behoveth thee to serve, to love, to fear God, and on him to cast all thy thoughts and all thy hope, and, by faith formed in charity, to cleave unto him, so that thou mayst never be separated from him by thy sins. Suspect the abuses of the world. Set not thy heart upon vanity, for this life is transitory; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever.

"Friar John" is a mighty man of valor, who figures equivocally in the story of Gargantua and Pantagruel. The Abbey of Thélème is given him in reward of his services. Some have identified this fighting monk with Martin Luther. The representation is, on the whole, so conducted as to leave the reader's sympathies at least half enlisted in favor of the fellow, rough and roistering as he is.

Panurge is the hero of the romance of Pantagruel,—almost more than Pantagruel himself. It would be unpardonable to dismiss Rabelais without first making our readers know Panurge by, at least, a few traits of his character and conduct. Panurge was a shifty but unscrupulous adventurer, whom Pantagruel, pious prince as he was, coming upon him by chance, took and kept under his patronage. Panurge was an arch-imp of mischief,—mischief indulged in the form of obscene and malicious practical jokes. Rabelais describes his accomplishments in a long strain of discourse, from which we purge our selection to follow,—thereby transforming Panurge into a comparatively proper and virtuous person:—

He had threescore and three tricks to come by it [money] at his need, of which the most honorable and most ordinary was in manner of thieving, secret purloining, and filching, for he was a wicked, lewd rogue, a cozener, drinker, roysterer, rover, and a very dissolute and debauched fellow, if there were any in Paris; otherwise, and in all matters else, the best and most virtuous man in the world; and he was still contriving some plot, and devising mischief against the serjeants and the watch.

At one time he assembled three or four especial good hacksters and roaring boys; made them in the evening drink like Templars, afterwards led them till they came under St. Genevieve, or about the college of Navarre, and, at the hour that the watch was coming up that way,—which he knew by putting his sword upon the pavement, and his ear by it, and, when he heard his sword shake, it was an infallible sign that the watch was near at that instant,—then he and his companions took a tumbrel or garbage-cart, and gave it the brangle, hurling it with all their force down the hill, and then ran away upon the other side; for in less than two days he knew all the streets, lanes, and turnings in Paris, as well as his *Deus det*.

At another time he laid, in some fair place where the said watch was to pass, a train of gunpowder, and, at the very instant that they went along, set fire to it, and then made himself sport to see what good grace they had in running away, thinking that St. Anthony's fire had caught them by the legs.... In one of his pockets he had a great many little horns full of fleas and lice, which he borrowed from the beggars of St. Innocent, and cast them, with small canes or quills to write with, into the necks of the daintiest gentlewomen that he could find, yea, even in the church; for he never seated himself above in the choir, but always in the body of the church amongst the women, both at mass, at vespers, and at sermon.

Coleridge, in his metaphysical way, keen at the moment on the scent of illustrations for the philosophy of Kant, said, "Pantagruel is the Reason; Panurge the Understanding." Rabelais himself, in the fourth book of his romance, written in the last years of his life, defines the spirit of the work. This fourth book, the English translator says, is "justly thought his masterpiece." The same authority adds with enthusiasm, "Being wrote with more spirit, salt, and flame than the first part." Here, then,

is Rabelais's own expression, sincere or jocular, as you choose to take it, for what constitutes the essence of his writing. We quote from the "Prologue":—

By the means of a little Pantagruelism (which, you know, is *a certain jollity of mind, pickled in the scorn of fortune*), you see me now ["at near seventy years of age," his translator says], hale and cheery, as sound as a bell, and ready to drink, if you will.

It is impossible to exaggerate the mad, rollicking humor, sticking at nothing, either in thought or in expression, with which especially this last book of Rabelais's work is written. But we have no more space for quotation.

Coleridge's theory of interpretation for Rabelais's writings is hinted in his "Table Talk," as follows: "After any particularly deep thrust,... Rabelais, as if to break the blow, and to appear unconscious of what he has done, writes a chapter or two of pure buffoonery."

The truth seems to us to be, that Rabelais's supreme taste, like his supreme power, lay in the line of humorous satire. He hated monkery, and he satirized the system as openly as he dared,—this, however, not so much in the love of truth and freedom, as in pure fondness for exercising his wit. That he was more than willing to make his ribald drollery the fool's mask from behind which he might aim safely his shafts of ridicule at what he despised and hated, is indeed probable. But in this is supplied to him no sufficient excuse for his obscene and blasphemous pleasantries. Nor yet are the manners of the age an excuse sufficient. Erasmus belonged to the same age, and he disliked the monks not less. But what a contrast, in point of decency, between Rabelais and Erasmus!

IV. MONTAIGNE. 1533-1592

Montaigne is signally the author of one book. His "Essays" are the whole of him. He wrote letters, to be sure, and he wrote journals of travel in quest of health and pleasure. But these are chiefly void of interest. Montaigne the Essayist alone is emphatically the Montaigne that survives. "Montaigne the Essayist,"—that has become, as it were, a personal name in literary history.

The "Essays" are one hundred and seven in number, divided into three books. They are very unequal in length; and they are on the most various topics,—topics often the most whimsical in character. We give a few of his titles, taking them as found in Cotton's translation:—

That men by various ways arrive at the same end; Whether the governor of a place ought himself to go out to parley; Of liars; Of quick or slow speech; A proceeding of some ambassadors; Various events from the same counsel; Of cannibals; That we laugh and cry from the same thing; Of smells; That the mind hinders itself; Of thumbs; Of virtue; Of coaches; Of managing the will; Of cripples; Of experience.

Montaigne's titles cannot be trusted to indicate the nature of the essays to which they belong. The author's pen will not be bound. It runs on at its own pleasure. Things the most unexpected are incessantly turning up in Montaigne,—things, probably, that were as unexpected to the writer when he was writing, as they will be to the reader when he is reading. The writing, on whatever topic, in whatever vein, always revolves around the writer for its pivot. Montaigne, from no matter what apparent diversion, may constantly be depended upon to bring up in due time at himself. The tether is long and elastic, but it is tenacious, and it is securely tied to Montaigne. This, as we shall presently let the author himself make plain, is no accident, of which Montaigne was unconscious. It is the express idea on which the "Essays" were written. Montaigne, in his "Essays," is a pure and perfect egotist, naked, and not ashamed. Egotism is Montaigne's note, his *differentia*, in the world of literature. Other literary men have been egotists—since. But Montaigne may be called the first, and he is the greatest.

Montaigne was a Gascon, and Gasconisms adulterate the purity of his French. But his style—a little archaic now, and never finished to the nail—had virtues of its own which have exercised a wholesome influence on classic French prose. It is simple, direct, manly, genuine. It is fresh and racy of the writer. It is flexible to every turn, it is sensitive to every rise or fall, of the thought. It is a steadfast rebuke to rant and fustian. It quietly laughs to scorn the folly of that style which writhes in an agony of expression, with neither thought nor feeling present to be expressed. Montaigne's "Essays" have been a great and a beneficent formative force in the development of prose style in French.

For substance, Montaigne is rich in practical wisdom, his own by original reflection, or by discreet purveyal. He had read much, he had observed much, he had experienced much. The result of all, digested in brooding thought, he put into his "Essays." These grew as he grew. He got himself transferred whole into them. Out of them, in turn, the world has been busy ever since dissolving Montaigne.

Montaigne's "Essays" are, as we have said, himself. Such is his own way of putting the fact. To one admiring his essays to him, he frankly replied, "You will like me, if you like my essays, for they are myself." The originality, the creative character and force, of the "Essays," lies in this autobiographical quality in them. Their fascination, too, consists in the self-revelation they contain. This was, first, self-revelation on the part of the writer; but no less it becomes, in each case, self-revelation in the experience of the reader. For, as face answereth to face in the glass, so doth the heart

of man to man,—from race to race, and from generation to generation. If Montaigne, in his "Essays," held the mirror up to himself, he, in the same act, held up the mirror to you and to me. The image that we, reading, call Montaigne, is really ourselves. We never tire of gazing on it. We are all of us Narcissuses. This is why Montaigne is an immortal and a universal writer.

Here is Montaigne's Preface to his "Essays;" "The Author to the Reader," it is entitled:—

Reader, thou hast here an honest book; it doth at the outset forewarn thee that, in contriving the same, I have proposed to myself no other than a domestic and private end: I have had no consideration at all either to thy service or to my glory. My powers are not capable of any such design. I have dedicated it to the particular commodity of my kinsfolk and friends, so that, having lost me (which they must do shortly), they may therein recover some traits of my conditions and humors, and by that means preserve more whole, and more life-like, the knowledge they had of me. Had my intention been to seek the world's favor, I should surely have adorned myself with borrowed beauties. I desire therein to be viewed as I appear in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary manner, without study and artifice; for it is myself I paint. My defects are therein to be read to the life, and my imperfections and my natural form, so far as public reverence hath permitted me. If I had lived among those nations which (they say) yet dwell under the sweet liberty of nature's primitive laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have painted myself quite fully, and quite naked. Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book. There's no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore, farewell.

From Montaigne, the 12th of June, 1580.

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, our author, as the foregoing date will have suggested, derived his most familiar name from the place at which he was born and at which he lived. Readers are not to take too literally Montaigne's notice of his dispensing with "borrowed beauties." He was, in fact, a famous borrower. He himself warns his readers to be careful how they criticise him; they may be flouting unawares Seneca, Plutarch, or some other, equally redoubtable, of the reverend ancients. Montaigne is perhaps as signal an example as any in literature, of the man of genius exercising his prescriptive right to help himself to his own wherever he may happen to find it. But Montaigne has in turn been freely borrowed from. Bacon borrowed from him, Shakspeare borrowed from him, Dryden, Pope, Hume, Burke, Byron,—these, with many more, in England; and, in France, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Voltaire, Rousseau,—directly or indirectly, almost every writer since his day. No modern writer, perhaps, has gone in solution into subsequent literature more widely than Montaigne. But no writer remains more solidly and insolubly entire.

We go at once to chapter twenty-five of the first book of the "Essays," entitled, in the English translation, "Of the education of children." The translation we use henceforth throughout is the classic one of Charles Cotton, in a text of it edited by Mr. William Carew Hazlitt. The "preface," already given, Cotton omitted to translate. We have allowed Mr. Hazlitt to supply the deficiency. Montaigne addresses his educational views to a countess. Several others of his essays are similarly inscribed to women. Mr. Emerson's excuse of Montaigne for his coarseness,—that he wrote for a generation in which women were not expected to be readers,—is thus seen to be curiously impertinent to the actual case that existed. Of a far worse fault in Montaigne than his coarseness,—we mean his outright immorality,—Mr. Emerson makes no mention, and for it, therefore, provides no excuse. We shall ourselves, in due time, deal more openly with our readers on this point.

It was for a "boy of quality" that Montaigne aimed to adapt his suggestions on the subject of education. In this happy country of ours, all boys are boys of quality; and we shall go nowhere amiss in selecting from the present essay:—

For a boy of quality, then, I say, I would also have his friends solicitous to find him out a tutor who has rather a well-made than a well-filled head, seeking, indeed, both the one and the other, but rather of the two to prefer manners and judgment to mere learning, and that this man should exercise his charge after a new method.

'Tis the custom of pedagogues to be eternally thundering in their pupil's ears, as they were pouring into a funnel, whilst the business of the pupil is only to repeat what the others have said: now, I would have a tutor to correct this error, and that, at the very first, he should, according to the capacity he has to deal with, put it to the test, permitting his pupil himself to taste things, and of himself to discern and choose them, sometimes opening the way to him, and sometimes leaving him to open it for himself; that is, I would not have him alone to invent and speak, but that he should also hear his pupil speak in turn.... Let him make him put what he has learned into a hundred several forms, and accommodate it to so many several subjects, to see if he yet rightly comprehends it, and has made it his own.... 'Tis a sign of crudity and indigestion to disgorge what we eat in the same condition it was swallowed: the stomach has not performed its office, unless it have altered the form and condition of what was committed to it to concoct....

Let him make him examine and thoroughly sift every thing he reads, and lodge nothing in his fancy upon simple authority and upon trust. Aristotle's principles will then be no more principles to him than those of Epicurus and the Stoics: let this diversity of opinions be propounded to, and laid before, him; he will himself choose, if he be able; if not, he will remain in doubt.

"Che, non men che saper, dubbiar m'aggrata."

Dante, Inferno, xl. 93.

["That doubting pleases me, not less than knowing."

Longfellow's Translation.]

For, if he embrace the opinions of Xenophon and Plato, by his own reason, they will no more be theirs, but become his own. Who follows another, follows nothing, finds nothing, nay, is inquisitive after nothing. "Non sumus sub rege; sibi quisque se vindicet." ["We are under no king; let each look to himself."—Seneca, *Ep.* 33.] Let him, at least, know that he knows. It will be necessary that he imbibe their knowledge, not that he be corrupted with their precepts; and no matter if he forget where he had his learning, provided he know how to apply it to his own use. Truth and reason are common to every one, and are no more his who spake them first, than his who speaks them after; 'tis no more according to Plato, than according to me, since both he and I equally see and understand them. Bees cull their several sweets from this flower and that blossom, here and there where they find them; but themselves afterward make the honey, which is all and purely their own, and no more thyme and marjoram: so the several fragments he borrows from others he will transform and shuffle together, to compile a work that shall be absolutely his own; that is to say, his judgment: his instruction, labor, and study tend to nothing else but to form that.... Conversation with men is of very great use, and travel into foreign countries;... to be able chiefly to give an account of the humors, manners, customs, and laws of those nations where he has been, and that we may whet and sharpen our wits by rubbing them against those of others....

In this conversing with men, I mean also, and principally, those who live only in the records of history: he shall, by reading those books, converse with the great and heroic souls of the best ages.

It is difficult to find a stopping-place in discourse so wise and so sweet. We come upon sentences like Plato for height and for beauty. An example: "The most manifest sign of wisdom is a continual cheerfulness; her state is like that of things in the regions above the moon, always clear and serene." But the genius of Montaigne does not often soar, though even one little flight like that shows that it has wings. Montaigne's garnishes of quotation from foreign tongues are often a cold-blooded device of afterthought with him. His first edition was without them, in many places where subsequently they appear. Readers familiar with Emerson will be reminded of him in perusing Montaigne. Emerson himself said, "It seemed to me [in reading the "Essays" of Montaigne] as if I had myself written the book in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thoughts and experience." The rich old English of Cotton's translation had evidently a strong influence on Emerson, to mould his own style of expression. Emerson's trick of writing "'tis," was apparently caught from Cotton. The following sentence, from the present essay of Montaigne, might very well have served Mr. Emerson for his own rule of writing: "Let it go before, or come after, a good sentence, or a thing well said, is always in season; if it neither suit well with what went before, nor has much coherence with what follows after, it is good in itself." Montaigne, at any rate, wrote his "Essays" on that easy principle. The logic of them is the logic of mere chance association in thought. But, with Montaigne,—whatever is true of Emerson,—the association at least is not occult; and it is such as pleases the reader, not less than it pleased the writer. So this Gascon gentleman of the olden time never tires us, and never loses us out of his hand. We go with him cheerfully where he so blithely leads.

Montaigne tells us how he was himself trained under his father. The elder Montaigne, too, had his ideas on education,—the subject which his son, in this essay, so instructively treats. The essayist leads up to his autobiographical episode by an allusion to the value of the classical languages, and to the question of method in studying them. He says:—

In my infancy, and before I began to speak, he [my father] committed me to the care of a German,... totally ignorant of our language, but very fluent, and a great critic, in Latin. This man, whom he had fetched out of his own country, and whom he entertained with a very great salary, for this only end, had me continually with him: to him there were also joined two others, of inferior learning, to attend me, and to relieve him, who all of them spoke to me in no other language but Latin. As to the rest of his family, it was an inviolable rule, that neither himself nor my mother, man nor maid, should speak any thing in my company, but such Latin words as every one had learned only to gabble with me. It is not to be imagined how great an advantage this proved to the whole family: my father and my mother by this means learned Latin enough to understand it perfectly well, and to speak it to such a degree as was sufficient for any necessary use, as also those of the servants did, who were most frequently with me. In short, we Latined it at such a rate, that it overflowed to all the neighboring villages, where there yet remain, that have established themselves by custom, several Latin appellations of artisans and their tools. As for what concerns myself, I was above six years of age before I understood either French or Perigordin ["Perigordin" is Montaigne's name for the dialect of his province, Perigord (Gascony)], any more than Arabic; and, without art, book, grammar, or precept, whipping, or the expense of a tear, I had, by that time, learned to speak as pure Latin as my master himself, for I had no means of mixing it up with any other.

We are now to see how, helped by his wealth, the father was able to gratify a pleasant whimsey of his own in the nurture of his boy. Highly æsthetic was the matin *reveillé* that broke the slumbers of this hopeful young heir of Montaigne:—

Some being of opinion that it troubles and disturbs the brains of children suddenly to wake them in the morning, and to snatch them violently and overhastily from sleep, wherein they are much more profoundly involved than we, he [the father] caused me to be wakened by the sound of some musical instrument, and was never unprovided of a musician for that purpose.... The good man, being extremely timorous of any way failing in a thing he had so wholly set his heart upon, suffered himself at last to be overruled by the common opinions:... he sent me, at six years of age, to the College of Guienne, at that time the best and most flourishing in France.

In short, as in the case of Mr. Tulliver, the world was "too many" for Eyquem *père*; and, in the education of his son, the stout Gascon, having started out well as dissenter, fell into dull conformity at last.

We ought to give some idea of the odd instances, classic and other, with which Montaigne plentifully bestrews his pages. He is writing of the "Force of Imagination." He says:—

A woman, fancying she had swallowed a pin in a piece of bread, cried and lamented as though she had an intolerable pain in her throat, where she thought she felt it stick; but an ingenious fellow that was brought to her, seeing no outward tumor nor alteration, supposing it to be only a conceit taken at some crust of bread that had hurt her as it went down, caused her to vomit, and, unseen, threw a crooked pin into the basin, which the woman no sooner saw, but, believing she had cast it up, she presently found herself eased of her pain....

Such as are addicted to the pleasures of the field, have, I make no question, heard the story of the falconer, who, having earnestly fixed his eyes upon a kite in the air, laid a wager that he would bring her down with the sole power of his sight, and did so, as it was said; for *the tales I borrow, I charge upon the consciences of those from whom I have them.*

We italicize the last foregoing words, to make readers see that Montaigne is not to be read for the truth of his instances. He uses what comes to hand. He takes no trouble to verify. "The discourses are my own," he says; but even this, as we have hinted, must not be pressed too hard in interpretation. Whether a given reflection of Montaigne's is strictly his own, in the sense of not having been first another's, who gave it to him, is not to be determined except upon very wide reading, very well remembered, in all the books that Montaigne could have got under his eye. That was full fairly his own, he thought, which he had made his own by intelligent appropriation. And this, perhaps, expresses in general the sound law of property in the realm of mind. At any rate, Montaigne will wear no yoke of fast obligation. He will write as pleases him. Above all things else, he likes his freedom.

Here is one of those sagacious historical scepticisms, in which Montaigne was so fond of poisoning his mind between opposite views. It occurs in his essay entitled, "Of the Uncertainty of our Judgments."

Amongst other oversights Pompey is charged withal at the battle of Pharsalia, he is condemned for making his army stand still to receive the enemy's charge, "by reason that" (I shall here steal Plutarch's own words, which are better than mine) "he by so doing deprived himself of the violent impression the motion of running adds to the first shock of arms, and hindered that clashing of the combatants against one another, which is wont to give them greater impetuosity and fury, especially when they come to rush in with their utmost vigor, their courages increasing by the shouts and the career; 'tis to render the soldiers' ardor, as a man may say, more reserved and cold." This is what he says. But, if Cæsar had come by the worse, why might it not as well have been urged by another, that, on the contrary, the strongest and

most steady posture of fighting is that wherein a man stands planted firm, without motion; and that they who are steady upon the march, closing up, and reserving their force within themselves for the push of the business, have a great advantage against those who are disordered, and who have already spent half their breath in running on precipitately to the charge? Besides that, an army is a body made up of so many individual members, it is impossible for it to move in this fury with so exact a motion as not to break the order of battle, and that the best of them are not engaged before their fellows can come on to help them.

The sententiousness of Montaigne may be illustrated by transferring here a page of brief excerpts from the "Essays," collected by Mr. Bayle St. John in his biography of the author. This apothegmatic or proverbial quality in Montaigne had a very important sequel of fruitful influence on subsequent French writers, as chapters to follow in this volume will abundantly show. In reading the sentences subjoined, you will have the sensation of coming suddenly upon a treasure-trove of coined proverbial wisdom:—

Our minds are never at home, but ever beyond home.

I will take care, if possible, that my death shall say nothing that my life has not said.

Life in itself is neither good nor bad: it is the place of what is good or bad.

Knowledge should not be stuck on to the mind, but incorporated in it.

Irresolution seems to me the most common and apparent vice of our nature.

Age wrinkles the mind more than the face.

Habit is a second nature.

Hunger cures love.

It is easier to get money than to keep it.

Anger has often been the vehicle of courage.

It is more difficult to command than to obey.

A liar should have a good memory.

Ambition is the daughter of presumption.

To serve a prince, you must be discreet and a liar.

We learn to live when life has passed.

The mind is ill at ease when its companion has the colic.

We are all richer than we think, but we are brought up to go a-begging.

The greatest masterpiece of man is... to be born at the right time.

We append a saying of Montaigne's not found in Mr. St. John's collection:—

There is no so good man who so squares all his thoughts and actions to the laws, that he is not faulty enough to deserve hanging ten times in his life.

Montaigne was too intensely an egotist, in his character as man no less than in his character as writer, to have many personal relations that exhibit him in aspects engaging to our love. But one friendship of his is memorable,—is even historic. The name of La Boëtie is forever associated with the name of Montaigne. La Boëtie is remarkable for being, as we suppose, absolutely the first voice raised in France against the idea of monarchy. His little treatise "Contr' Un" (literally, "Against One"), or "Voluntary Servitude," is by many esteemed among the most important literary productions of modern times. Others, again, Mr. George Saintsbury for example, consider it an absurdly overrated book. For our own part, we are inclined to give it conspicuous place in the history of free thought in France. La Boëtie died young; and his "Contr' Un" was published posthumously,—first by the Protestants, after the terrible day of St. Bartholomew. Our readers may judge for themselves whether a pamphlet in which such passages as the following could occur, must not have had an historic effect

upon the inflammable sentiment of the French people. We take Mr. Bayle St. John's translation, bracketing a hint or two of correction suggested by comparison of the original French. The treatise of La Boëtie is sometimes now printed with Montaigne's "Essays," in French editions of our author's works: La Boëtie says:—

You sow your fruits [crops] that he [the king] may ravage them; you furnish and fill your houses that he may have something to steal; you bring up your daughters that he may slake his luxury; you bring up your sons that he may take them to be butchered in his wars, to be the ministers of his avarice, the executors of his vengeance; you disfigure your forms by labor [your own selves you inure to toil] that he may cocker himself in delight, and wallow in nasty and disgusting pleasure.

Montaigne seems really to have loved this friend of his, whom he reckoned the greatest man in France. His account of La Boëtie's death is boldly, and not presumptuously, paralleled by Mr. St. John with the "Phædon" of Plato. Noble writing, it certainly is, though its stateliness is a shade too self-conscious, perhaps.

We have thus far presented Montaigne in words of his own such as may fairly be supposed likely to prepossess the reader in his favor. We could multiply our extracts indefinitely in a like unexceptionable vein of writing. But to do so, and to stop with these, would misrepresent Montaigne. Montaigne is very far from being an innocent writer. His moral tone generally is low, and often it is execrable. He is coarse, but coarseness is not the worst of him. Indeed, he is cleanliness itself compared with Rabelais. But Rabelais is morality itself compared with Montaigne. Montaigne is corrupt and corrupting. This feature of his writings, we are necessarily forbidden to illustrate. In an essay written in his old age,—which we will not even name, its general tenor is so evil,—Montaigne holds the following language:—

I gently turn aside, and avert my eyes from the stormy and cloudy sky I have before me, which, thanks be to God, I regard without fear, but not without meditation and study, and amuse myself in the remembrance of my better years:—
*"Animus quod perdidit, optat,
Atque in præterita se totus imagine versat."*
Petronius, c. 128.

["The mind desires what it has lost, and in fancy flings itself wholly into the past."]

Let childhood look forward, and age backward: is not this the signification of Janus' double face? Let years haul me along if they will, but it shall be backward; as long as my eyes can discern the pleasant season expired, I shall now and then turn them that way; though it escape from my blood and veins, I shall not, however, root the image of it out of my memory:—

*"Hoc est
Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui."*
Martial, x. 23, 7.

["'Tis to live twice to be able to enjoy former life again."]

Harmlessly, even engagingly, pensive seems the foregoing strain of sentiment. Who could suppose it a prelude to detailed reminiscence on the author's part of sensual pleasures—the basest—enjoyed in the past? The venerable voluptuary keeps himself in countenance for his lascivious vein, by writing as follows:—

I have enjoined myself to dare to say all that I dare to do; even thoughts that are not to be published, displease me; the worst of my actions and qualities do not appear to me so evil, as I find it evil and base not to dare to own them....

...I am greedy of making myself known, and I care not to how many, provided it be truly.... Many things that I would not say to a particular individual, I say to the people; and, as to my most secret thoughts, send my most intimate friends to my book.... For my part, if any one should recommend me as a good pilot, as being very modest, or very chaste, I should owe him no thanks [because the recommendation would be false].

We must leave it—as, however, Montaigne himself is far enough from leaving it—to the imagination of readers to conjecture what "pleasures" they are, of which this worn-out debauchee (nearing death, and thanking God that he nears it "without fear") speaks in the following sentimental strain:—

In farewells, we oftener than not heat our affections towards the things we take leave of: I take my last leave of the pleasures of this world; these are our last embraces.

Mr. Emerson, in his "Representative Men," makes Montaigne stand for The Sceptic. Sceptic Montaigne was. He questioned, he considered, he doubted. He stood poised in equilibrium, in indifference, between contrary opinions. He saw reasons on this side, but he saw reasons also on that, and he did not clear his mind. "*Que sçai-je?*" was his motto ("What know I?"), a question as of hopeless ignorance,—nay, as of ignorance also void of desire to know. His life was one long interrogation, a balancing of opposites, to the end.

Such, speculatively, was Montaigne. Such, too, speculatively, was Pascal. The difference, however, was greater than the likeness, between these two minds. Pascal, doubting, gave the world of spiritual things the benefit of his doubt. Montaigne, on the other hand, gave the benefit of his doubt to the world of sense. He was a sensualist, he was a glutton, he was a lecher. He, for his portion, chose the good things of this life. His body he used to get him pleasures of the body. In pleasures of the body he sunk and drowned his conscience,—if he ever had a conscience. But his intelligence survived. He became, at last,—if he was not such from the first,—almost pure sense, without soul.

Yet we have no doubt Montaigne was an agreeable gentleman. We think we should have got on well with him as a neighbor of ours. He was a tolerably decent father, provided the child were grown old enough to be company for him. His own lawful children, while infants, had to go out of the house for their nursing; so it not unnaturally happened that all but one died in their infancy. Five of such is the number that you can count in his own journalistic entries of family births and deaths. But, speaking as "moral philosopher," in his "Essays," he says, carelessly, that he had lost "two or three" "without repining." This, perhaps, is affectation. But what affectation!

Montaigne was well-to-do; and he ranked as a gentleman, if not as a great nobleman. He lived in a castle, bequeathed to him, and by him bequeathed,—a castle still standing, and full of personal association with its most famous owner. He occupied a room in the tower, fitted up as a library. Over the door of this room may still, we believe, be read Montaigne's motto, "*Que sçai-je?*" Votaries of Montaigne perform their pious pilgrimages to this shrine of their idolatry, year after year, century after century.

For, remember, it is now three centuries since Montaigne wrote. He was before Bacon and Shakspeare. He was contemporary with Charles IX., and with Henry of Navarre. But date has little to do with such a writer as Montaigne. His quality is sempiternal. He overlies the ages, as the long hulk of "The Great Eastern" overlay the waves of the sea, stretching from summit to summit. Not that, in the form of his literary work, he was altogether independent of time and of circumstance. Not that he was uninfluenced by his historic place, in the essential spirit of his work. But, more

than often happens, Montaigne may fairly be judged out of himself alone. His message he might, indeed, have delivered differently; but it would have been substantially the same message if he had been differently placed in the world, and in history. We need hardly, therefore, add any thing about Montaigne's outward life. His true life is in his book.

Montaigne the Essayist is the consummate, the ideal, expression, practically incapable of improvement, of the spirit and wisdom of the world. This characterization, we think, fairly and sufficiently sums up the good and the bad of Montaigne. We might seem to describe no very mischievous thing. But to have the spirit and wisdom of this world expressed, to have it expressed as in a last authoritative form, a form to commend it, to flatter it, to justify it, to make it seem sufficient, to erect it into a kind of gospel,—that means much. It means hardly less than to provide the world with a new Bible,—a Bible of the world's own, a Bible that shall approve itself as better than the Bible of the Old and New Testaments. Montaigne's "Essays" constitute, in effect, such a book. The man of the world may,—and, to say truth, does,—in this volume, find all his needed texts. Here is *viaticum*—daily manna—for him, to last the year round, and to last year after year; an inexhaustible breviary for the church of this world! It is of the gravest historical significance that Rabelais and Montaigne, but especially Montaigne, should, to such an extent, for now three full centuries, have been furnishing the daily intellectual food of Frenchmen.

Pascal, in an interview with M. de Saci (carefully reported by the latter), in which the conversation was on the subject of Montaigne and Epictetus contrasted,—these two authors Pascal acknowledged to be the ones most constantly in his hand,—said gently of Montaigne, "Montaigne is absolutely pernicious to those who have any inclination toward irreligion, or toward vicious indulgences." We, for our part, are prepared, speaking more broadly than Pascal, to say that, to a somewhat numerous class of naturally dominant minds, Montaigne's "Essays," in spite of all that there is good in them,—nay, greatly because of so much good in them,—are, by their subtly insidious persuasion to evil, upon the whole quite the most powerfully pernicious book known to us in literature, either ancient or modern.

V.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD: 1613-1680 (La Bruyère: 1646 (?)-1696; Vauvenargues: 1715-1747)

In La Rochefoucauld we meet another eminent example of the author of one book. "Letters," "Memoirs," and "Maxims" indeed name productions in three kinds, productions all of them notable, and all still extant, from La Rochefoucauld's pen. But the "Maxims" are so much more famous than either the "Letters" or the "Memoirs," that their author may be said to be known only by those. If it were not for the "Maxims," the "Letters" and the "Memoirs" would probably now be forgotten. We here may dismiss these from our minds, and concentrate our attention exclusively upon the "Maxims." Voltaire said, "The 'Memoirs' of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld are read, but we know his 'Maxims' by heart."

La Rochefoucauld's "Maxims" are detached sentences of reflection and wisdom on human character and conduct. They are about seven hundred in number, but they are all comprised in a very small volume; for they generally are each only two or three lines in length, and almost never does a single maxim occupy more than the half of a moderate-sized page. The "Maxims," detached, as we have described them, have no very marked logical sequence in the order in which they stand. They all, however, have a profound mutual relation. An unvarying monotone of sentiment, in fact, runs through them. They are so many different expressions, answering to so many different observations taken at different angles, of one and the same persisting estimate of human nature. 'Self-love is the mainspring and motive of every thing we do, or say, or feel, or think:' that is the total result of the "Maxims" of La Rochefoucauld.

The writer's qualifications for treating his theme were unsurpassed. He had himself the right character, moral and intellectual; his scheme of conduct in life corresponded; he wrote in the right language, French; and he was rightly situated in time, in place, and in circumstance. He needed but to look closely within him and without him,—which he was gifted, with eyes to do,—and then report what he saw, in the language to which he was born. This he did, and his "Maxims" are the fruit. His method was largely the sceptical method of Montaigne. His result, too, was much the same result as his master's. But the pupil surpassed the master in the quality of his work. There is a fineness, an exquisiteness, in the literary form of La Rochefoucauld, which Montaigne might indeed have disdained to seek, but which he could never, even with seeking, have attained. Each maxim of La Rochefoucauld is a "gem of purest ray serene," wrought to the last degree of perfection in form with infinite artistic pains. Purity, precision, clearness, density, point, are perfectly reconciled in La Rochefoucauld's style with ease, grace, and brilliancy of expression. The influence of such literary finish, well bestowed on thought worthy to receive it, has been incalculably potent in raising the standard of French production in prose. It was Voltaire's testimony, "One of the works which has most contributed to form the national taste, and give it a spirit of accuracy and precision, was the little collection of 'Maxims' by François Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

There is a high-bred air about La Rochefoucauld the writer, which well accords with the rank and character of the man La Rochefoucauld. He was of one of the noblest families in France. His instincts were all aristocratic. His manners and his morals were those of his class. Brave, spirited, a touch of chivalry in him, honorable and amiable as the world reckons of its own, La Rochefoucauld ran a career consistent throughout with his own master-principle, self-love. He had a wife whose conjugal fidelity her husband seems to have thought a sufficient supply in that virtue for both himself and her. He behaved himself accordingly. His illicit relations with other women were notorious. But they unhappily did not make La Rochefoucauld in that respect at all peculiar among the distinguished men of his time. His brilliant female friends collaborated with him in working out his "Maxims."

These were the labor of years. They were published in successive editions, during the lifetime of the author; and some final maxims were added from his manuscripts after his death.

Using, for the purpose, a very recent translation, that of A. S. Bolton (which, in one or two places, we venture to conform more exactly to the sense of the original), we give almost at hazard a few specimens of these celebrated apothegms. We adopt the numbering given in the best Paris edition of the "Maxims:"—

No. 11. The passions often beget their contraries. Avarice sometimes produces prodigality, and prodigality avarice: we are often firm from weakness, and daring from timidity.

No. 13. Our self-love bears more impatiently the condemnation of our tastes than of our opinions.

How much just detraction from all mere natural human greatness is contained in the following penetrative maxim!—

No. 18. Moderation is a fear of falling into the envy and contempt which those deserve who are intoxicated with their good fortune; it is a vain parade of the strength of our mind; and, in short, the moderation of men in their highest elevation is a desire to appear greater than their fortune.

What effectively quiet satire in these few words!—

No. 19. We have strength enough to bear the ills of others.

This man had seen the end of all perfection in the apparently great of this world. He could not bear that such should flaunt a false plume before their fellows:—

No. 20. The steadfastness of sages is only the art of locking up their uneasiness in their hearts.

Of course, had it lain in the author's chosen line to do so, he might, with as much apparent truth, have pointed out, that to lock up uneasiness in the heart requires steadfastness no less—nay, more—than not to feel uneasiness.

The inflation of "philosophy" vaunting itself is thus softly eased of its painful distention:—

No. 22. Philosophy triumphs easily over troubles passed and troubles to come, but present troubles triumph over it.

When Jesus once rebuked the fellow-disciples of James and John for blaming those brethren as self-seekers, he acted on the same profound principle with that disclosed in the following maxim:—

No. 34. If we had no pride, we should not complain of that of others.

How impossible it is for that Proteus, self-love, to elude the presence of mind, the inexorable eye, the fast hand, of this incredulous Frenchman:—

No. 39. Interest [self-love] speaks all sorts of languages, and plays all sorts of parts, even that of disinterestedness.

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