THE

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW.

No. CCLXXXIX. New Series.—January 1, 1891.

LIGHT: AN EPICEDE.

TO PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

Love will not weep because the seal is broken
That sealed upon a life beloved and brief
Darkness, and let but song break through for token
How deep, too far for even thy song's relief,
Slept in thy soul the secret springs of grief.

Thy song may soothe full many a soul hereafter,
As tears, if tears will come, dissolve despair;
As here but late, with smile more bright than laughter,
Thy sweet strange yearning eyes would seem to bear
Witness that joy might cleave the clouds of care.

in Finland. Those who are even superficially acquainted with the present economical state of Russia will readily understand all that is implied in the words, "incorporated in the Empire." For those who are not, the following brief summing up, taken from a recent number of one of the best-informed and most patriotic organs of St. Petersburg, may possibly prove helpful:—

> "The most respected students of Russian life bear witness to the fact that so far from the people becoming, as in West European countries, better fed, better housed, better instructed, and more civilised year by year, it is painfully evident that the unmistakable process of decomposition has set in among the Russian peasantry, the drying up of the material and moral sap, the process of demoralization. . . . Neither in Europe nor in any civilised country of the whole world is there a people to be found poorer than the Russian people, more grossly ignorant than the Russian people, who dwell in more primitive dwellings than the Russian people, or who till the ground with more primitive implements. Even such pagan countries as China and Japan, with their well-informed inhabitants and high standard of agriculture, have far outstripped our Russian people. . . . Our peasant, with his plough and wooden harrow, that seem to have been handed down from the Age of Bronze, and with his benighted ignorance and carelessness, loses three-fourths of the possible harvest. . . . Among the peasants epidemic diseases are continually raging to such an extent that competent medical authorities declare that they carry off as many lives yearly as if cholera were perpetually in our midst. The terrific mortality among children is accounted for by the custom of giving infants sour black bread wrapped up in a rag to suck—a barbarity not practised even by the non-Russian tribes on the Volga. The astounding lack of elementary civilization among the people manifests itself in the frightful spread of drunkenness and syphilis. It is notorious that these two scourges were the main causes of the degeneration of Australian and other savages. In Russia among our own people, painful though it be to make the admission, something extremely suggestive of this process is now taking place. We will say nothing of drunkenness, in which, to use an expression of Dostoïeffsky's, our people 'is rotting away.' Things much more horrible still may be in store for our people from syphilis. Spread throughout the length and breadth of Russia, it has in many places infected *the whole population*. Dr. Maslovsky, for instance, writes from the Government of Tamboff:—'In some places every man, woman, and child, or nearly every one, is infected, and it is impossible to prevent this spread of syphilis by any conceivable measures.' How can you cure a disease so catching when all the members of the peasant family eat out of one platter, sleep in one bed, and when the same coat and the same felt boots pass from one member of the family to another? The zemsky doctors of the Government of Kursk, at the Fourth Medical Congress, resolved that—'recognising the fruitlessness of the efforts made to stay the spread of syphilis, the Governmental zemstvo be requested to release all zemsky doctors from the obligation of making any.' . . . From the effects of drunkenness, insufficient nourishment, heavy work out of all proportion to their strength, and disease, even the physical type of the Russian peasant is obviously degenerating. More than ten years ago Professor Janson, in his *Comparative Statistics*, called attention to the lamentable fact that the Great Russian race was degenerating, even if compared with the non-Russian tribes of the Empire. And thus the erstwhile powerful, gifted branch of Slavonic colonisers, the founders of a mighty empire, are degenerating into a weak effete race of beings, devoid even of the capacity for progress."[1]

And this is the race with which the Tsar declares it desirable that Finland should be joined in closer union.

E. B. LANIN.

---

(1) *Nedelya* (The Week), 9th November, 1890.

"CHEZ POUSSET": A LITERARY EVENING.

THE eighteenth was a coffee-house century in London as well as Paris. During this nineteenth century the coffee-house has dropped out of London life. But in the French capital it has gone on thriving, and it—or the beerhouse, its equivalent—is to-day nothing less than a Parisian institution. Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, and many others sat and ruled the empire of letters and, in thought and speech, controlled the spirit of the time, over their cups of *café noir* at the Procope not much more than a hundred years ago. Men quite the peers, in talent at least, of a Diderot or a Voltaire, sit now over "*demis*" of Munich beer at Pousset's in the Faubourg Montmartre, and pour forth wit, sarcasm, scorn, poetry, and transcendental philosophy (too often also grossness, meanness, malice, envy and all uncharitableness), which elements, mixed and beaten up together into a "clotted heap," form a rich feast for the intellect.

Not long ago the editors of an American magazine put into execution this idea. They united the cleverest of their contributors at a supposed unceremonious and *entre soi* repast, the while a stenographer sat behind a screen, fixing on his tablets for subsequent publication every flash of *esprit* and fancy, every side-light of experience, knowledge, feeling, emitted under the usual *pendant*- and *après*-dinner influences by the divers gifted guests. The result as it appeared in print was interesting—moderately. It is a pity that such a stenographic "chiel" could not be introduced some night at Pousset's between the hours of twelve and two or three. He might very well be stowed away between the legs of one of those old oak tables in what has been called the *coin des littérateurs*. And then, though somewhat cramped, perhaps, with regard to the disposal of his own legs, presumably longer than the table's, the chiel would be situated admirably for the "taking" of those oft-quoted "notes." More than "moderately" interesting would these be, as the *littèrateurs* who pass habitually the small hours at the big typical *brasserie* near the Place de Châteaudun are anything but mediocrities.

In default of any "chiel," stenographic or otherwise, the following random notes dictated by the memory of one who for years past has sat metaphorically at the feet of the Pousset geniuses and sat literally, though not perhaps always quite comfortably, upon the meagre stamped-leather cushions of the old oak Pousset chairs, must suffice.

I.

. . . Midnight, on a balmy spring evening, one of those Paris evenings when the soft air seems filled with a sort of impalpable silver dust. People bubbling about here, there, and everywhere in the streets and babbling as they go, light-hearted, merry, French. A woman—pretty—strolling carelessly along between two men, looks round her with a little satisfied sigh and says: "Comme il fait beau ce soir! . . . Il fait bon vivre. . . ."

Flights of the neat little open cabs, with their gleaming fire-fly eyes, are in busy circulation, mostly occupied by couples. From the theatres, the café-chantants, the lounges—from the Champs Elysées and from the Bois de Boulogne—everyone is returning to eat and drink and be merry in the fashionable nocturnal restaurants and cafés.

Let us float along with the tide and look about us as we go.

Three illuminated points in the Rue Royale . . . Weber's, with its customary little knot of male and female swells in the upper room to the left, which they for years past have affected, no doubt because it is of too exiguous dimensions to admit of more than a picked and chosen few. Larue's, resort of a somewhat cheaper gaiety, on the right-hand corner of the broad straight street opposite the Madeleine Church; the Madeleine showing, on this exquisite May night, so whitely pure and peaceful in the moonlight of Verlaine's verse:—

> "Le calme clair de lune triste et beau,
> Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres,
> Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
> Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres."

And on the other corner, Durand's, which always has been and always will be consummately "correct."

Down the boulevards. . . . Hill's, where will be gathered in less than two hours hence some of the worst characters of either sex that the Paris pavement supports. The Grand Café, not particularly decorous, and yet, rather particularly dull. Then, further on, past the portals of the Grand Hotel, the Café de la Paix. Divided, so to speak, into compartments like a train: third class, the room at the back, where persons of the category termed expressively "riff-raff" play at cards with much noise for little money; second class, the front part, devoted to dominoes and the mildest refreshments; first class, the supper-rooms on the Place de l'Opera, overflowing about this hour with a *jeunesse dorée*. To pursue this railway metaphor to the bitter end, the private rooms upstairs where people of a fairly smart description occasionally find themselves when they wish to vary their venue from Bignon's or the Maison d'Or, might be likened to Pullman cars. Yes, really, "la Paix" is not dissimilar from a rambling ramshackle train, making night hideous with its clatter and crowded to excess, as it pants its way along the rails of folly and vice, with travellers paying far too much for their tickets.

Further down, other cafés. . . Cabs and *coupés* by the hundred line the sidewalk in front of them, and crowds of orderly "consumers" sit at the little round-topped tables on the "terrace." Julien's, of the big and blazing order, highly "modern" in the worst sense: debauchery at wholesale prices, a sort of "stores" for the dispensing of adulterated drinkables, eatables such as had best be left uneaten, and—the rest. Immediately alongside of Julien's, in obedience perhaps to the law of contrasts, stands the old-established "Napolitain," one of the best of Paris cafés, where the company is generally on a par with the ices and liqueurs. Close by the Vaudeville Theatre, opposite, is Lucien's, now Mercier's, which will always, one supposes, be better known by its official title of Café Américain. A name which embodies a satire upon a nation, great only in regard to the number of its population and to the extent of its territory, but which, with its obvious shortcomings, has perhaps done something to deserve that a café such as this should take its name.

Several hundreds of yards onwards one arrives at the next batch of boulevard cafés. Why, in Paris, should cafés thus stick together in clusters? One might imagine they fear solitude, and long wildly to be always in each other's company, when one sees how, from one end of the boulevards to the other, extensive café-less patches are succeeded by spots where two or three or more of the places are huddled one on top of the other. Here, on the Boulevard des Italiens, is a sort of spurious Pousset's; a branch, an offshoot, not *the* Pousset's, only an exoteric *succursale* of the establishment whose esoteric centre is in the Faubourg Montmartre. To this latter place it is now quite time to repair. The other cafés along the boulevards—Zimmer's, the Café de Suède, Café Garen, Café des Princes—are neither worth going to nor speaking of.

II.

From twelve to half-past, a good time to arrive at Pousset's. Vacant seats are few, but celebrities many. Inside and outside, the café is packed. And when one reflects that to each one of those "consumers," who has his place taken by other "consumers" the moment he departs—corresponds at least one and generally more than one big mug of Munich beer, one can readily conceive why a special train runs daily from the Bavarian capital to Paris, freighted solely with the produce of Löwenbraü, Spatenbraü, and other Braüs claiming doubtless to be equally good. A great German victory, greater than Worth or Sedan. French patriots may, and do, declaim and rave. The only answer to their objurgations is, that if German beer is not to be drunk in France, then France must fabricate beer of her own at least as good if not better, which she doesn't, and can't do.

On making good one's entrance into the famous *brasserie* of the wits, one pauses and looks around with some bewilderment. Such crowding, such clattering of glasses and plates, such Babel noise of tongues, such apparent general confusion; such rushing of white-aproned waiters to and fro, bearing aloft foaming tankards of the topaz-hued liquid all a-glitter under the bluish glare of electric light! The decoration of the room, with its dark tones of old oak and Spanish leather, dim faded hues of tapestry hangings, freshness of faïences here and there on the walls, and richness of handsome stained-glass windows, is, in its elaborately designed effect of mediævalism, harmonious and pleasing to the eye. But attendants and company too, are as un-mediæval as could possibly be imagined. At first sight, a motley crew; a gathering, at least, as composite as can be seen in the street outside.

The situation of Pousset's, for a place which from the first has had its aspects of *chic*-ness, is un-*chic* to a degree. The Faubourg Montmartre, by night especially, is one of the nastiest thoroughfares in Paris. The Strand, only worse; if worse than the Strand, in the hours of darkness, be conceivable to the mind of man. That Place de Châteaudun, too, at the corner of which Pousset's stands is not improper only, but *bourgeois* in its commonplaceness of impropriety. Yet people for years past have patronised Pousset's who perhaps would hesitate to honour it with their presence were it situated in any better part of the town.

Notwithstanding Pousset's vogue among fashionable and literary circles, persons neither fashionable nor literary, nor anything else that is mentionable to ears polite, will often force their way into the place from their native gutter without. They do not, of course, here find themselves in their element. Visibly they don't enjoy having to be on their good behaviour, and are generally inclined to vote Pousset's (as the writer once heard said by a gentleman of essentially Faubourg-Montmartrean appearance who was turned ruthlessly away one night from the temple of old oak and stained glass) a "sale boîte," fit only for "des sales artistes." Pousset's is not sufficiently democratic for the denizens of the "Faubourg du Crime."

Fashion at Pousset's—that is represented by, here and there, seated in the more comfortable corners, a certain number of men and women (men *with* women, *cela va sans dire*) whose smartness is genuine enough—It has been a *première* to-night at one of the best theatres. So Pousset is attracting not only several of the critics, but also a batch of first-nighters, who stand or sit and look about them as if they were come to seek a sixth act to the evening's performance. . . . Quite a theatrical night, indeed, at this beerhouse. Appropriately accompanied, here are several well-known ladies of the boards. Ensconced at one of the tables near the door, that woman with the small pretty features, melting eye, and delicate porcelain complexion. . . She is charmingly dressed in white and Nile-green silk, with a bonnet of the kind that any lady would immediately and very truthfully pronounce "a love." It is Mlle. du Minil, of the Français, with her good and respected mother—a mother of that monumental type which actresses, French actresses at any rate, seem to revel in. That other attractive face, straight proud little nose, delicate Cupid's bow mouth, brow fresh and smooth beneath the *bandeaux à la vierge*—Mlle. Depoix of the Gymnase, or is it the Vaudeville now? . . . I forget. Here, again, a somewhat interesting female visage, sharp expression, keen eye, and somewhat Gavroche air generally—Mlle. Augustine Leriche. It isn't her expression only that is sharp. . . *Pour plus amples détails*, inquire of the lady's lady-friends.

Histrions of the other sex also are here to-night, more numerous, if less delightful. Those two little shrivelled old men, sitting huddled up together, as like as two twins. . . . Twins they are. . . . . *Ils s'y sont mis à deux*, as Scholl said, *pour nous embêter davantage.* Anxious roving black eyes, wizened smooth-shaven visages, long black locks thrown back with that displeasing careful carelessness, one of the surest marks of a nature filled with vulgar conceit—the "frères Lyonnet," who for forty years past have been singing, reciting, attending at all funerals of eminent artists, and otherwise thrusting their little joint individuality upon a public which has long since tired of the same. And now they are stranded, high and dry, upon two stamped-leather seats at the *brasserie* Pousset, with none so kind as to do them—a *demi* or even a *quart* of Munich beer. Not long ago they brought out a volume of *Souvenirs.* Amusing, but not exactly in the places where amusement was meant. "Reminiscences" of that kind are what readers generally wish to forget.

A heavily-lined closely-shaven face, with grey hair showing beneath the brim of a quite extraordinary hat. . . . Georges Richard. . . . Plays he has written, theatres he has directed; or rather these latter have directed him, towards the Bankruptcy Court, if current report is to be believed. Was it he or some other fellow-creature bearing the same by no means unusual patronymic, who perpetrated that most pathetic apostrophe in a five-act drama in verse to "cette *table* qui t'a vu naître"?

. . . A singularly pretty boy, with another pretty boy. Both nicely clothed, scarfed, and hatted (a thing rare enough in Paris to be "made a note of" when "found"), and both completely conscious of these facts. Pretty boy No. 1: young Samary, whose full smooth face with the peculiar bright-eyed expression, recalls instantly to mind his late clever sister Jeanne. She held at the Français a more prominent position than he, one fears, ever will do. But one imagines that life, for George Samary, contains other successes than those to be won at the Comédie Française. Pretty boy No. 2: his name escapes me for the moment, but I know he is a recent *prix de comédie* of the Conservatoire, and is looked on by admiring friends—of the female gender more especially—as the Delaunay of the future.

A face bearing every mark of intelligent perceptions and sympathetic power: Antoine's, the young and brilliantly successful manager of the Théâtre Libre. His companion's face, Mévisto's, one of the cracks of the Théâtre Libre troupe: coarse, and rather sneering just at present (the pair are probably talking about a friend), but not without a certain look of power. Enter to Antoine a gentleman fresh from England. The new-comer promptly sits himself down to prawns along with a *demi* of beer, and relates a tale of one of Antoine's English *confrères*. Antoine, the manager of the Théâtre Libre, considers the anecdote amusing. Perhaps there are anecdotes about Antoine that might be considered amusing by the English actor in question.

Playwrights like poets are an irritable genus, and several of them, *entre parenthèses*, are here to night at Pousset's. That young one—so young, but already so fat!—is Gandillot, the author of *Les Femmes Collantes*, the farce hailed with such Comanche yells of delight by Sarcey several years ago, when it was first produced at the Théâtre Déjazet. "Ce petit Gandillot," Sarcey wrote—though why "petit," seeing the gentleman is very nearly as large around the waist as M. Sarcey himself—"ce petit Gandillot ira loin." *Ce petit* has not since betrayed any very special anxiety to realise that prediction. He may "go far" yet, but if so, he will have to do it pretty quickly. Along with Gandillot is a man much bigger than he: speaking not literally, but figuratively: Henri Becque.

Henri Becque: a name to conjure with in the Paris of to-day. Becque's face at once makes you think of his plays. Massive and full; a firm clear glance, from under strongly-marked brows; a mouth, soft and sensitive yet not exactly weak, under a stiffly-clipped moustache; but the chin, that pasty chin, in which all the strength of the rest of the countenance appears belied! His chin gives Becque away; to use one of those Americanisms now thriving lustily, like any other weeds, in the fair but ill-kept garden of our English speech. *Desinit in piscem* applies to both the visage

and the pieces. They begin, these pieces, most effectively, powerfully; progress most happily, and then fall away to nothing at the close. Genius, yes, but the poor man cannot keep it up for more than two acts out of five. This sort of thing must be trying to the temper; and Becque is querulous and complaining. At this very moment he is saying, in his raspingest voice, vinegary things to Gandillot, who listens with one ear and, with one eye, glances indifferently assent. "Becque est arrivé en se plaignant," somebody lately said: "he has complained his way into success." Smart enough, perhaps, but not true. People are constantly saying untrue things about other people in Paris as occasionally also in London. If the things were always smart things it wouldn't so much matter.

III.

Not fashionables, however, not actresses and actors, not dramatists, not even prawns and beer, are the chief attraction at Pousset's. These things are either not worth having, or else may be had in equal perfection elsewhere. One must remember that what one has come for is the presence and the conversation of the literary geniuses and artists.

These are easily distinguishable among even the large crowd gathered together here to-night. Unmistakable, at all times in all places, is the stamp of superior intellect, that sets apart those marked with it from the ordinary unideaed herd, like shepherds' dogs in the midst of a flock of sheep.

Almost every night that score of men come to take up that little quarter of their own in the corner, where half-a-dozen tables are set end to end against the handsomely tapestried wall. They split themselves usually into little groups forming part of one great whole, as the nebulæ do in the Milky Way; and then, to the accompaniment *obligato* of beer and smoke, and ham and sourcrout and prawns (to such Germanic uses are Parisian palates now put), they, night after night, hour after hour, up to two or three A.M., sit realising Lee's line on Alexander, slightly altered:—

"Then *they will* talk—ye gods! how *they will* talk!"

Most admirable among the talkers—in various respects most remarkable among all the beerhouse's divers habitués—is the gentleman known to letters under the name of Catulle Mendès. Singular he is as to looks. A face filled to overflowing with beauty of the finest kind. Beauty of feature, hue, expression . . . Long soft light hair, thinning but slightly—at fifty years of age!—over the crown of the head, but unflecked with the least thread of grey. Smooth brow; large eyes veiled by drooping lids; a nose quite admirable in shape, its Hebraism apparent only in a slight peculiarity of the nostril's curve. A rounded gentle contour of cheek and chin, framed by a beard as graceful as the swaying frondage of the fern. A countenance like that of Fra Angelico's Christ. And yet suggestive, most horribly, of that corruption which is the soul of Mendès's art. A certain blasphemous but witty quatrain on Mendès has been circulating in Paris for years past, which however must be left to be supplied by the imagination of English readers not accustomed to the audacity of French wit, and not prepared, because it is witty, to pardon it for being outrageous.

Mendès's art, to other artists, is of course a more interesting question than Mendès's morality. And one has to confess that his art is superb. The great faculty of distinguishing and appropriating the special note of beauty in the art of all other men, is in Mendès developed to excess. "Il fait," as some one once said of him, "du bon n'importe qui." *Du bon* Gautier, *du bon* Hugo, *du bon* Leconte de Lisle, *du bon* Verlaine. . . . *Du bon* anybody and everybody, both in prose and verse. Those scrofulous little stories of his in the *Echo de Paris* are, in point of mere workmanship, masterly and unique. — Altogether, with his extraordinary passion for beauty, and his utter natural obliviousness to anything like that which the modern world calls moral sense, Mendès seems a figure from the days of classical decay.

One is reminded as one hears him speak of that old saying of the "golden mouth." The grace, facility, fluency, freedom of his utterance and expression are quite delicious to hear. He does not talk, but wreathes together, by the hundred, words, as one might wreathe the loveliest flowers. Around and about every subject that they touch, his caressing supple periods, like convolvuli, entwine themselves in graceful adornment. At this moment he is expatiating on Théodore de Banville, and dwelling, with luxurious wealth of term, upon that poet's peculiar "exteriority." Says Mendès: "Banville is exactly what a fruit would be if it were all smooth satin rind, with nothing at all beneath." Villiers de l'Isle Adam achieved something still better in this direction, when he defined Henry Fouquier, the *chroniqueur*, as a Zero. "And not even the line which circumscribes the Zero. But the empty space circumscribed, the inner nothingness, the interior blank and void."

Of Villiers, it may be truly said that he was faithful to Pousset's unto death. Only a few days before he succumbed to a variety of ills, among which pennilessness was doubtless the worst, he came as usual to the *brasserie* and drank three *quarts* (that is a French word, not an English) because he hadn't enough in his pocket to pay for two *demis*. Villiers was the author of some tales highly admirable in their way, and of verses among which these, through the sheer force of their expressiveness, have remained present to my mind—

"Ses crimes évoqués sont tels qu'on croit entendre
La crosse des fusils sonner sur le palier."

The poet here is not referring to his friend Mendès, as certain uncharitable persons might perhaps be inclined to suppose, but to some imaginary female with whom, of course, Villiers is in love. Her iniquity morbidly attracts him, as the unspeakable idiocy of the "catoplébas," that animal so stupid that it ate off its own feet, attracted the hermit in Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine.* Villiers' powers as a conversationalist were stupendous. His knowledge seemed surpassingly various and vast, for his memory was like the tablets of the Recording Angel, from which no line, no letter, once inscribed, can ever thenceforward be effaced. To request Villiers to recall some verse or couplet out of, for example, *Poèmes Barbares* or *La Légende des Siècles*, was not prudent: he would immediately proceed to recite the whole. In his vague quavering monotone, he would render the light and shade effects of a whole long piece, his elocution reminding one somewhat of those great, melancholy yet beautiful frescoes by Puvis de Chavannes, that seem to live with a sort of dream-life of their own. As to whether Villiers was or not really crazy, it is not easy to decide. If he was, it is perhaps a matter for regret that so many other people should be "sane."

. . . A bald pate, pug-nose, small, twinkling black eyes, and rough, rather long black beard: decidedly this other gentleman looks so like the great Greek sage, Plato's tutor, as to set one thinking for a moment of the doctrine of metempsychosis. Ponchon' genius—he has genius, of course, every one of the men who are gathered here to-night in the literary corner at Pousset's has that—lies in the strange originality of his thought, combined with his terseness, freshness, power of expression. The most difficult of Hugo's rhythms he swings with all the dexterous force of a David twirling his sling. And Stupidity is the great Goliath, which Ponchon's verse hits full in the centre of the forehead every time:—

"Car je le dis et le répète
On n'est pas bon quand on est bête. . . ."

That is a small instance of the vigour of his satire.

It was to Ponchon that Verlaine addressed that little beerhouse ode:—

"Bois pour oublier !
L'eau de vie est une
Qui porte la lune
Dans son tablier. . . .

. . . .

L'injure des hommes
Qu'est-ce que ça fait ?
Va, notre cœur sait
Seul ce que nous sommes."

"*Bois* pour *oublier*." . . . One cannot tell whether Ponchon has succeeded in attaining the latter desideratum, but judging from the quantity of little round pieces of felt on the table before him, each separately representing a *demi* already absorbed, with more *demis* still coming, one perceives he is at least persistently putting into practice the former part of his friend's poetic advice.

And here is Verlaine himself, sitting beside him; Verlaine, the finest French poet of the time. Bald, like Ponchon, but with a beard more closely cropped. A somewhat rough-hewn but expressive nose; ardent eyes, set slightly sideways in the head like a faun's; an eager, sensitive, contorted mouth. . . . Verlaine seems sad. I have never seen him otherwise, unless indeed he was either scornful or enraged. He raises to his seamed and wrinkled brow a withered and slightly trembling hand, and stolidly stares awhile at the big glass of beer before him. "A quoi penses-tu?" Ponchon asks. The other looks around, and replies in undertones: "A subject. . . . A young man erect in the cart nearing the guillotine. . . . As it passes, a young woman standing by the way looks up at him. . . . Their eyes meet; he smiles. . . . In one long glance she gives herself to him, gives herself body and soul. Strangers a minute before, in that brief instant they live and love the love of years. . . . She runs along a few steps with the cart; takes from her bosom a flower and casts it up towards him, then falls back again among the seething crowd. He catches it, kisses it, and thrusts it down into his breast. Not many seconds later, his head is in the executioner's hand. . . . But the flower—that yet lies against the heart, now still for ever."

. . . Ponchon remains a moment silent.

. . . Jean Richepin, not far off. A somewhat Lucius Verus head, with its curled fleecy shock, black, but besprinkled here and there with snow. Bold features, yet a certain delicacy and fineness about the profile. Richepin since his Sarah Bernhardt days has married and settled down and appears but rarely at the *brasseries* he used so assiduously to frequent. If he is here to-night at Pousset's, it is doubtless for no other reason than to be sketched by me. There is a rather puffed-up look about Richepin's face. His verses are rather puffed-up too. He is very full of "sound and fury," though not otherwise idiotic, and writes things he entitles *Les Blasphèmes*. Richepin prides himself on immense, almost brutal power. But at bottom he is sentimental. Sentimental, kind, and weak. He has written an admirable book, *Madame André*, the story of an ardent, erring young poet, graceful, delicate, frail, and gentle as a woman, yet full of spirit, scorn, and pride. "Jean Richepin" is, in real life, that young poet's name. . . . One asks oneself if Sarah, who knows men and who assuredly knew this one, would not, if consulted upon the point, concur in my apparently paradoxical estimate of the real character of the truculent blasphemer. "Richepin . . . un mouton qui veut se faire croire enragé . . ." That, or something like that, is what I fancy I can hear the *voix d'or* saying. Yet, I confess I like Richepin; I have liked him ever since I read his *Madame André*.

Armand Silvestre, with the graceful smile and somewhat debased expression of the eye . . . A poet, but devoting the whole of his time and talent to the concoction for high pay of bestially dirty stories in the worst of the Boulevard prints. Grosclaude, a wit of the spasmodic order, whose sole end and object in existence is to make the *Gil Blas's* readers smile and the diners at club tables roar. Capus, a young writer distinguished for peculiar astringency of *esprit*, yet afflicted with a sincere lyric sense (he quoted to me once in the streets at three o'clock in the morning the whole of Victor Hugo's *Abeilles*, with a feeling which "l'aïeul" himself would have approved), which foible of course Capus carefully conceals. Montjoyeux, another journalist, the type of the irresistible Don Juan. All is fish that comes within the net of Montjoyeux' delightful, graceful da Vincian smile. Not effeminate, not exactly feminine even, but one of those men who appear to have stolen from women whatever is subtlest and finest in their femininity, for the sole purpose and with the sole design of penetrating more surely and more quickly to the very centre of their hearts. Montjoyeux, born with and exerting constantly to the full the great Cleopatra instinct, to charm all, always, among the opposite sex. I can see him as I sat with him one Sunday going to Asnières by train, a white rose in the buttonhole of his grey frock coat. On the seat in front of us was a girl, timid, only slightly pretty, and quite respectable, although alone. Some governess perhaps, or some *première* in a nice Rue de la Paix kind of shop. My companion, who knew, naturally, that just then he was looking his best—and Montjoyeux' best is no uninteresting or unattractive thing—bent slightly forward with his air of being so ready to respectfully adore, and mutely tendered her his flower . . . She, poor child! blushed suddenly to the whites of her eyes, sat holding Montjoyeux' rose in the palm of her little hand, and on arriving at her destination got out in her confusion on the wrong side of the train. Poor girl, poor child! . . . Who knows how long and how much she may have dwelt since then upon that little incident in the train, when a man who to her eyes must have seemed as loveable as a god of Greece looked straight down for one moment into the core of her little heart, and smiled, gently, at what he saw there! Oh how much there is, how much in life—if one only comes to think of it—how much that is singularly, strangely, infinitely pathetic! What act, what glance so trivial and slight but that, as by a passing gleam of the "light that never shone on land and sea," it may reveal to us something of the secret magic, the deep mystery, of humanity's nature and fate!

. . . Other figures in Pousset's literary corner: Jules Case, a young man of partly English parentage, author of *Bonnet Rouge*, one of the best albeit least-known books of the day in France; Rodolphe Darzens, a long-haired poet of the sensuo-mystico-symbolic school,—he is much more "sensual" in appearance than he is either of the other things; Gustave Guiches, a small, vivid, gracious face, Dresden China-like in its delicacy of complexion and distinctly marked with genius, genuine if slight; Paul Bonnetain, acute expression of countenance, quite the air of being somebody, and yet so narrowly escaping the being nobody after all; Octave Mirbeau, bold, virile and contemptuous in glance and port, the strongest "temperament" among all the young novelists and free-lances of the press; Henri Mercier, next door to nothing as to results, but as to potentiality simply a giant; an ever-seething volcano of science, lyrism, satire, passion, poison, and in one word—which must be a French word, English possessing no equivalent—a *raté titanesque*.

"Le Café des Ratés," indeed, is what a very clever English friend of mine suggested that Pousset's should be called. But this would hardly be correct, for the real *ratés* among the geniuses at Pousset's are but few. The majority of them are doing their own work their own way, which means, if anything does, fruition. True, these are the least powerful and least gifted of the lot; in accordance, no doubt, with the fatal law that the greater the genius the less the chances of its coming fully to light. But what then? Is not genius, in the main, self-sufficing; a kingdom, a world, a Heaven, and also, alas, a Hell, unto itself?

. . . Va, notre cœur sait
Seul ce que nous sommes!"

—Paul Verlaine's view, the right one.

IV.

. . . The sitting perforce is drawing to a close. Final despairing cries for *demis* or even for *quarts*, for *fines*, for whiskeys (pronounced here "veeskee"), and especially for *kümmel*, are unavailing to attract the notice of harassed *garçons* intent on claiming the settlement of the evening's accounts. "Messieurs, trois heures; on ferme!" shouts a "gérant," the size of his voice in inverse ratio to that of his frame. But still the talk goes on at the literary tables, more fragmentary, more spasmodic now, but perhaps also more brilliant; like quartz broken up very small; the smaller the pieces, the more they shine.

. . . .

"Ohé, Verlaine, l'homme aux vers de dix-neuf pieds et demi! Prête-m'en deux, je ne peux plus me servir des miens."

. . . .

"Tout homme a dans le cœur un *Mirbeau* qui sommeille."

"Cochon vous-même," Mirbeau replies with a ready indignation.

. . . .

"Je suis allé à Londres, j'ai vu un homme qui a de grosses joues et de grands cheveux et qui parle bien. On m'a dit qu'il était 'Wilde' . . . J'ai répondu: 'Il en a l'air; mais pourquoi alors qu'on le laisse se promener dans les rues?'"

. . . .

"Une chronique, dix chroniques, mille chroniques, et pas un mot! Est-ce qu'on a le droit d'écrire sans jamais faire des mots? Rabelais a fait des mots, et c'est pour ça qu'on en parle encore."

Thus Grosclaude, the man of *mots*, about one of his "chronicling" *confrères*.

. . . .

"Cet être que vous voyez là—cet être franco-américo-anglais," remarks Mercier, meaning—so kind of him!—the author of the present lines, "vient de me dire qu'il ne lit plus que les proverbes de Salomon et les poésies de Mossieu Browning. Quel goût, ces étrangers! Se préoccuper de bêtises comme ça quand on a les vers de François Coppée et la prose d'Emmanuel Arène!"

"Pardon!" exclaims another Arène, answering to the 'little name' of Paul, "pardon! ne me rappelez pas à la triste réalité des choses . . . Ne me faites point songer qu'un autre—et quel autre, un homme de politique!—me fait l'injure de porter mon nom. Il serait nécessaire que je pusse dormir cette nuit en paix."

. . . .

"Balzac—un grand poète né sans voix . . . Une lyre énorme sans cordes."

. . . .

"Un tel? C'est une canaille . . . Je le connais, je suis comme lui."

"Il est pourri, c'est vrai . . . Mais ce qu'il fait est d'un art! . . . Que voulez-vous . . . Il faut du fumier à la racine des fleurs."

. . . .

"Allons, allons, dépêchons-nous, on ferme! Ça va finir mal—comme une pièce de Henri Becque."

"Becque? ne vous gênez pas pour lui . . . Il est parti depuis une heure."

"Eh bien, suivons son exemple."

And now the symposium breaks up. Outside, the cool greyness of the morning streets, with, just perceptible in the fleecy sky, the first warm suggestion of a brilliant day. Cabs, of a kind, are still to be had near Pousset's. So some of the literary revellers are driven to baccarat at the clubs, others to supper at the Américain upstairs, others again—a prudent few—home to bed.

EDWARD DELILLE.