

Th. Sect.

A STUDY OF STE. BEUVE'S CRITICISMS
OF
ENGLISH AND GERMAN LITERATURES.

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FOREWORD.

An attempt is made in the following pages to discuss the various judgments pronounced by Ste. Beuve upon the literatures of England and Germany.

The task of reading Ste. Beuve's 60 odd volumes, in addition to those books consulted for reference, has been onerous but at the same time most interesting. In the case of a work like the 'Decline and Fall', I have to confess myself in a position rather similar to that of Mr. Silas Wegg: "I haven't been, not to say right slap through him very lately, having been otherwise employed. Mr. Boffin"; but with regard generally to the fairly wide reading involved in all three languages, my pleasure has been increased by renewing acquaintance with much that had long since been forgotten.

Liberal use has been made throughout of quotations from the critic's own writings:- a practice which he himself preferred to follow, although it often results, as here, in a somewhat broken style.

To Professor Sarolea, of Edinburgh University, who first suggested the subject of this thesis and whose wise and generous advice has been of the utmost value, I owe very sincere thanks. He will, I hope, allow me the satisfaction of associating the name of so widely known a scholar and publicist with these pages.

I would also express my deep gratitude to the Librarian of Aberdeen University for the ready courtesy in affording me every opportunity to consult the rich store of King's College.

And to my wife, whose constant help in countless ways has been a great benefit, and to whom I affectionately dedicate this work, my thanks will always be due.

J.R.K.

July 1928.

1. "Car je suis de ceux qui citent, et qui ne sont contents que quand ils ont decoupe dans un auteur un bon morceau."
(Caus. du lundi, XV, 215.)

C O N T E N T S.

Foreword.

Part I.

I.	Introduction	6.
II.	Ste. Beuve's Qualifications as a Critic of English Literature	8.
III.	Scott	21.
IV.	Chesterfield	31.
V.	Gibbon	42.
VI.	Cowper	52.
VII.	Taine's History; Pope.	78.
VIII.	Byron.	99.
IX.	Shakespeare	102.
X.	Milton	106.
XI.	Bacon	109.
XII.	Coleridge and Wordsworth	111.
XIII.	Johnson	115.
XIV.	Goldsmith, Crabbe and others	119.

Part II.

I.	Introduction	129.
II.	Ste. Beuve's Knowledge of German	132.
III.	The Swabian School	133.
IV.	Schiller	136.
V.	Heine	140.
VI.	Hoffmann	141.
VII.	'Werthers Leiden'	144.
VIII.	Goethe-Bettina Correspondence	151.
IX.	Goethe-Eckermann Conversations	157.
X.	Goethe and Germany	174.
XI.	Conclusion	180.
	Appendix.	188.
	Bibliography	193.

PART I.

STE. BEUVE'S CRITICISMS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

1. INTRODUCTION.

1.

The English influence of the 18th century on French literature was sufficiently strong to counterbalance and triumph over the somewhat compromising effects which the Revolution and Napoleonic enmity exercised on France. But where that influence had been, in the main, philosophic and social - an influence of ideas - it changed character, and it is from the early years of the 19th century that the purely literary influence of England dates¹. This is nowhere more clearly evidenced than in the domain of literary criticism, which, sharing the reconstruction undergone by all spheres of French existence in the period lasting from the Revolution till about 1850, grew in strength under the increasing influence of Romanticism and the Renaissance of History.

The efflorescence of criticism in general is, indeed, but natural under the circumstances: the forces exerted by Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël; the birth of numberless literary experiments, theories and dogmas; the interest, and even bitterness, excited by the Classic-Romantic quarrel; the rise of a powerful literary press; the fresh lease of life taken and upheld by university teaching under men like Villemain; - these and others², in conjunction with the inherent French qualities of system, order and taste, all combine not

1. Cp. Hist. de la Litt. française, P. de Julleville, Vol. 8, chap. 12, by J. Texte. Cp. also, Sarolea, Essais de Philosophie et de littérature: Commerce des idées entre la France et l'Angleterre; especially pp. 33 ff.

2. Ibid., IV, 541. Cp. also Pellissier, Mouvement litt. au XIX. siècle, 213 ff.

only to increase the output of literary criticism, but also to raise its level to an extraordinary degree. Indeed, towards the middle of the 19th century, no other literary genre represents more fully, or more artistically, the diverse tendencies of the epoch. "Criticism", says Nisard, "is the general and dominating faculty of the 19th century it is the soul of all works; it is mingled in all genres."¹

2.

The name which first arises at any mention of French literary criticism is naturally that of Ste. Beuve. Of his just and glorious fame much has been said, and well said. But, strangely enough, little has been written concerning his criticisms of literatures other than his own. In the forty-two volumes which compose his writings, there is, of course, so very much else to engage the attention of French exponents that his relationship to English and German literatures must occupy for them a secondary place.

It is doubtless a truism to say that no study benefits more from being carried out in the method of contrast and comparison than that of literature; to discover differences in points of view, both as regards matter and style, and to endeavour to reconcile them, is at once interesting and profitable; such a method has, at least, deservedly wide sanction. Moreover, no languages or literatures complete each other in so strange and perfect a way as those of France and England;² "so close has been the contact, that it has

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1. Ibid., 541. Cp. also Pellissier, op. cit., 213 ff.
 2. Cp. Saintsbury, Collected Essays, IV., 221.

become impossible to understand the one without the other."¹ Ste. Beuve's pronouncements on English writers and their works are, therefore, doubly interesting to students of French as well as of English literature; his pronouncements on German literature we shall treat in the second part of this thesis.

II. Ste. Beuve's qualifications as Critic of English Literature.

As might well be expected from a man of such wide reading, Ste. Beuve's references are extremely numerous. It is true that he always regarded his own country's literature as of first importance; he did not "specialise" in our literature as did men like Schérer, Phil. Chasles, Montégut and others. Of the 640 essays which compose the *Causeries* and the *Nouveaux Lundis* four bear directly on English subjects, and of the 250 articles embodied in the "Portraits littéraires", "Portraits des Femmes", the "Portraits contemporains" and the "Premiers lundis", only one deals wholly with our literature. But scattered through all these works and in the various columns of his correspondence, the indirect references to English letters are as numerous as they are varying in importance.

It is sometimes apt to be forgotten that Ste. Beuve, besides being, as Schérer² called him, one of the princes of criticism, was also a prince of journalism, and that as a journalist he had to please his readers³ - "to cater for his public", as the modern jargon has it. And if it is borne in

1. Sarolea, Robert Louis Stevenson and France, 5.
2. *Etudes critiques sur la litt. contemporaine*, 350.
3. Ste. Beuve often chafed at the restrictions put upon him; he would have liked, for example, to become a contributor to the *Journal des Savants*, where his choice of subjects would have been much greater. There is no doubt that jealousy on the part of others prevented this, and when at length the barrier was removed, mainly by the death of V. Cousin, it was too late. Cp. *Corresp.*, Letter to Mérimée, Feb. 20th, 1867.

mind that, as is generally admitted, the French nation has never shown any warm hospitality to foreign ideas¹, nor has been familiar with foreign literature, it is clear that Ste. Beuve, with the best will in the world to widen his countrymen's literary horizon, had to keep himself within limits. For, as we have already remarked, not only was he not a writer who "specialised" in foreign literature, but he had a certain stay-at-home quality essentially French, which reminds us of our own Addison more than of the majority of later men. Thus, although Ste. Beuve's success was made possible and, in view of the genius of the man, inevitable, by his close contact with his public, it was at the same time restricted thereby. All this is, no doubt, self-evident, but it has nevertheless to be mentioned, if only out of fairness to Ste. Beuve.

Another matter equally self-evident must be emphasised for the same reason. Any average writer - and indeed any writer far above the average - would have found no time in which to acquire more than a bowing acquaintance with even one foreign language and literature when leading so busy a life as did Ste. Beuve. For so many years he was fettered to his weekly article, and the description of his six - and often more - days' labour

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1. Cf. Texte, op. cit., VIII, 663 ff.; E. Partridge, *The French Romantic's Knowledge of Eng. Lit.*, 8 ff.
 "Les Français, disait Ste. Beuve, aiment à apprendre ce qu'ils savent. Quant à ce qu'ils ignorent, c'est différent. Que de peine pour leur insinuer une idée neuve! à combien de quodlibets on s'expose!" (A.-J. Pons, *Ste. Beuve et ses inconnues*, 145.)

The following anecdote seems appropriate here and has the merit of not being well-known. "Un poète anglais alla frapper un jour à la porte de Leconte de Lisle, en lui apportant une lettre d'introduction, et lui exprima son admiration enthousiaste avec toute la ferveur dont il était capable. L'auteur des *Poèmes Barbares*, après avoir toisé à travers son monocle son admirateur, lui répondit: "Les éloges des étrangers me sont indifférents!" The notorious treatment meted out by Paul Bourget to R.L.S. is somewhat analogous.

in the week in producing one *Causerie* is well enough known¹. When the extraordinary richness and versatility of these *Causeries* is fully realised, with their vast learning, freshness and exactness, the wonder grows. All the more so indeed, when one reviews the meagre knowledge of English possessed by so many French critics who, nevertheless, did not hesitate to lay down their views on English literature, Magnin and Barbey d'Aurevilly perpetuated gross errors²; even Taine³ is more than once caught tripping; and in our times Jules Lemaitre goes so far as to take a certain pride and pleasure in his ignorance of English, the which, however, does not cause him to hesitate to proclaim his poor opinion of Shakespeare!² Even Brunetière is capable of declaring that Burns and Shelley were at the extreme opposite poles of the social scale from Byron⁴. Nor would it be difficult to add further instances.

With Ste. Beuve, however, we need entertain no uncomfortable suspicions, although, as is but natural under the circumstances, certain allowances must be made.

M. Michant has declared that "Ste. Beuve savait très bien l'anglais, l'ayant appris de sa mère à Boulogne"⁵, and another writer⁶ repeats the statement. But there seems little ground for such a conclusion.

The fact that his mother was the daughter of an English woman has but little to do, it seems to us, with his knowledge of English. For while the former may in her younger years have had some acquaintance with her mother's way of speech, it

1. Schérer, *Etudes critiques sur la litt. contemp.*, 342.
2. Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 435.
3. Roe, *Taine en Angleterre*, 34 ff.
4. *Etudes critiques*, VI, 234.
5. *Ste. Beuve avant les lundis*, 1903.
6. M.A. Smith: *Influence des Laksists sur les Romantiques français*, Paris, 1920, p. 69.

would be rash to maintain that, born and bred for forty years in France, the child of a Frenchman and the wife of a Frenchman, she should be able to pass on any great knowledge to her son. Ste. Beuve himself never mentions his mother's acquaintance with English, though he waxes loquacious enough concerning his upbringing by her and her sister-in-law. Moreover, he has left us certain indications which seem to prove that his mother was of no help to him with regard to the learning of English. Writing to his friend Salleque, who had been a fellow-pupil in Landry's pension, he says: "J'apprends l'anglais par forme de désœuvrement; et à mon retour, sinon à ton arrivée, nous pouvons la jargonner ensemble." Ste. Beuve was then eighteen years of age.

Whatever Ste. Beuve may have owed to his "hérédités entrecroisées" it is, then, very unlikely that an early acquaintance with English formed part of them. During his schooldays, both in Boulogne and in Paris, English formed no part of his curriculum. It was his desire to learn Greek which was one of his reasons for hastening from Boulogne to the capital in 1817. It was, we think, most probable that the seeds of his knowledge of our language were sown in Paris during his college days. A fellow-boarder at M. Landry's was a certain Charles Neate² with whom Ste. Beuve was on terms of close intimacy; he had a number of English friends and many of his associates knew English well³. His reading of English literature - though not necessarily in the English language - must have begun fairly

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1. Corresp. I, 4, letter dated Sept. 14th, 1822.
 2. Later Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and W.P. for Oxford. Cp. D.N.B. XL
 3. William Hughes (1822-87) is here especially noteworthy. Born in Dublin, he settled in Paris and became chief of the foreign press dept. of the Ministry of the Interior. Between 1858 and 1886, he published a large number of French adaptations from Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, etc. He was a lifelong friend of Ste. Beuve and was originally introduced to him by the latter's secretary, Lacaussade. Cp. D.N.B., vol. XXVIII.

early, and even if it is the case, as M. Séché tells us¹, that in the catalogue of Ste. Beuve's library there is no English book mentioned, such a fact in itself, and with all due deference, proves very little, for he had at least during his lifetime many an English book in his possession.

(2.)

Ste. Beuve was certainly no traveller: two short stays in Germany, three quarters of a year in Switzerland, a sojourn of eighteen months at Liège, one brief visit to England and another to Italy comprised his travels abroad. After 1849, he hardly left Paris and took practically no holidays.

With regard to his visit to England in the months of August and September 1828, we have very few particulars owing to the unfortunate loss of the letters which the critic wrote to Victor Hugo at the time. M. Séché² is of the opinion that Ste. Beuve travelled as far as the Lake District; a later writer³ goes so far as to assume that he not only visited the Lake District but that he also met there some of the Lake poets! Both assumptions, it seems to us, are groundless. If Ste. Beuve had actually gone as far, and above all, had he met any of the Lake poets, he would surely have said so definitely, apart from casual mention in his correspondence; but nowhere does he even hint anything of the sort. A passage in one of the *Lundis*⁴ is significant: "Je suis bien sûr au moins de la correspondance (between Wordsworth and La Morvonnais), car j'y ai vu avec une surprise reconnaissante que mon nom était connu de Wordsworth."

1. Léon Séché: Ste. Beuve, I: "La Bibliothèque de Ste. Beuve", Paris, 1904. But Potier, in his Catalogue de la bibliothèque de Ste. Beuve (Paris, 1870), informed us that this is not the case! And cp. Ste. Beuve's own footnote N.L., VIII, 100, for his remarks on his copy of The Golden Treasury - "un charmant petit livre, ... ce petit recueil est tout un trésor, en effet, de forte ou suave poésie." Cp. also G. Michaud, Ste. Beuve avant les lundis, p. 106.
2. L. Séché: Ste. Beuve: son esprit, ses idées, 86.
3. M.A. Smith: op. cit. 29.
4. C. du. L., XV, 27-8.

That Ste. Beuve should be gratefully surprised that his name was known to Wordsworth is a pretty good proof that he had never met the latter.

Again, M. Gustave Simon shows by his discovery of two of the missing letters to Victor Hugo, that the critic visited Southampton, Winchester, Salisbury and Stonehenge, besides, of course, London. His impression of all he had seen are detailed at some length: the life of a country clergyman; the charming countryside of Tubney; the little villages around Oxford, and Oxford itself, with its colleges and churches; London where he spent a fortnight and where he was disappointed because the theatres and galleries were closed. But neither of the Lake District nor of the Lake poets is there any mention. On the other hand, he twice gives the full address to which Victor Hugo is to write him: "M. Ste. Beuve, Tubney Lodge, near Oxford, Angleterre, England."² It is, indeed, very likely that he lived at the home of his friend Neate, above-mentioned, who had remained on cordial terms with him.

This would not disprove, in itself, Seche's opinion, since there may have been such mention in those letters still to be accounted for. But in 1911 was published another letter³ which Ste. Beuve wrote seven years after his visit to England (Sept. 5th, 1835), to his friend Charles Labitte, who was at that time on the point of making his first visit to England. In it we

1. Cp. *Revue de Paris*, Dec. 15th, 1904, pp. 743-8.
2. Cp. *Idem*, pp. 745 & 748.
3. Cp. G. Sanguier, *Lettres inédites à Ch. Labitte*, Paris, 1912, 14. Cp. also *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 20, 1925, pp. 328-29.

have an echo from the letter above-mentioned, but there is nothing, here or elsewhere, from which to conclude that he ever visited the Lake District or ever met any English writer at all; and this was his first and last visit to England. No; to declare that he "savait très bien l'anglais l'ayant appris de sa mère" or that his visit to England was so extensive may be true, but we possess no concrete evidence to that effect: and the odds seem against either declaration.

3.

Another French critic opines that: "En dépit des facilités que son ascendance et son lieu de résidence première auraient pu lui procurer, Ste. Beuve n'apprit l'anglais qu'assez tard et par des moyens probablement livresques; il ne l'a jamais parlé et il ne l'a su que médiocrement.²" We hope that the following pages will refute this last clause; a word like "médiocrement" can have different connotations: what is mediocre to one person may seem feeble or the reverse to another.

1. "J'aime beaucoup ce pays, je l'ai vu il y a sept ans, en 1828, ou du moins j'ai passé deux mois alors chez des amis aux environs d'Oxford dans de délicieuses petites campagnes qui sont si d'accord avec les fraîches descriptions des poètes anglais. Je n'ai vu Londres que pendant quinze jours, en été c'est à dire pendant l'absence de toute la gentry et nobility, pendant la fermeture de tous les monumens publics, seul et dans des accès de spleen que j'ai été heureux de retrouver plus tard dans une page d'André Chénier également ennuyé et morose à Londres où il était d'ailleurs secrétaire d'Ambassade; mais la pauvreté et la fierté lui gâtaient cette position. Vous devez aimer, ce me semble, avec la nature de vos goûts, le paysage anglais, cette verdure ornée, cette vie domestique un peu agreste, les cottages ayant tous leur grand rosier qui les cache, ces bruyères fréquentes entrecoupées de jardins et de culture, les presbytères qui rappellent (sic) le vicaire de Wakefield ou le cimetière (sic) de Gray, les petites aiguilles gothiques si bien conservées et s'élevant dans des bouquets d'arbres; hélas! tout ce cadre gracieux et reposé est bien près, je le crains, d'éclater et de se rompre dans la tourmente politique que tous les efforts de la prudence humaine, très grande il est vrai chez nos voisins, ne pourront sans doute conjurer que quelque temps encore. Jouissez-en durant votre voyage et prenez-en occasion de lire ces poètes délicieux, même ceux du 18e siècle comme Gray, Beattie, Goldsmith, Collins, Cowper, précurseurs classiques des Crabbe et des Wordsworth."

2. G. Roth, Revue germanique, 1920-21, 378-381.

Ste Beuve himself deliberately states that, although he cannot speak English he can nevertheless read it. And he must, without question, have known English a great deal more than "médiocrement" to write what he had written on English literature..... It is, after all, not beyond the bounds of possibility to know and understand a language very thoroughly and yet, at the same time, to be the reverse of fluent in the talking of it. When the idea of emigrating to England once occurred to him, he wrote to a friend in London: "Would there be any way for a Frenchman of letters to find in England, at the University of London, or at Oxford, or Edinburgh, enough to live decently by teaching French literature....."² Why should he have thought of England when he might have chosen any other country? England was not the only foreign country in which he had friends. Does not the very nature of his enquiry lend at least some colour to the presumption that he knew more than the elements of English?

Throughout his life, at long or at short intervals, he kept in touch with English friends. Shortly before his death, while lying ill in bed, he could still find pleasure in reading and writing about the English books which those friends occasionally sent him. On the 28th May 1868, for example, we find him writing: "Je suis grand partisan de la littérature anglaise. Je crois que la posséder dans quelquesunes de ses branches, au moins, serait une grande avance, une leçon pour nos romanciers et nos poètes." And in his enthusiasm he adds: "Et pour les politiques, donc! Ce n'est voler que d'une aile que de ne pas savoir la société anglaise et le monde anglais!"

1. Cp. Revue des revues, Sept. 15th, 1908: M. Cabanes, "Ste Beuve à l'étranger."

2. Nouv. Corresp., letter of July 27th, 1848.

Even later, a few months before he died, he was able to reply to a Mr. George Francis Armstrong who had sent him a copy of some original verses: "Vous avez des accents qui font tressaillir jusqu'à la vieillesse et qui lui arrachent des soupirs."¹ It would indeed be a strange excess of politeness which could cause such words to be written by an old man lying on his deathbed and suffering from a very painful disease, if he knew English only "médiocrement"!

We may, then conclude that although doubtless unable to speak much English, as he himself modestly confesses, Ste. Beuve yet possessed such knowledge as to enable him to judge fairly and adequately of the authors he treated in our literature.² Both his experience of the world and his knowledge of English - and German - came to him through two main channels: - reading and personal relations. Naturally, he never hesitates to avail himself of all possible help in his work.³ The article on Mary Stuart, for example, is founded on Mignet's *Histoire de Marie Stuart*, those on Gibbon are based on Guizot's translation, that on Chesterfield was inspired by the edition of *Amadée Renée*. And even then, as Schérer assures us, "you

1. *Nouv. Corresp.*, letter of Feb. 26th, 1869.

2. Si vous saviez l'anglais, vous auriez des trésors où vous pourriez puiser. Ils ont une littérature poétique bien supérieure à la nôtre, et surtout plus saine, plus pleine. Wordsworth n'est pas traduit; on ne traduit pas ces choses; on va les respirer à la source. Laissez-moi vous donner ce conseil: apprenez l'anglais, vous le pouvez presque seul; il suffirait, au début, de quelque assistance. La syntaxe n'est rien, la lecture et la pratique sont tout. En un an ou deux, vous en seriez maître, et vous auriez un trésor poétique, intime, à votre usage. Letter to the Abbé Roussel, March 26th, 1861, *Corresp.* I. The significance of the above is obvious.

3. Cp. Schérer, *Etudes*, IV, 107.

In connection with such a book as *Correspondence, Dispatches and Other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh*, (Murray, London, 1853) of which no French translation existed, Ste. Beuve must have read it so carefully or had it translated for him so carefully, as to give the exact page from which he makes a quotation. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, II, 318. Such examples of meticulous accuracy abound. As another instance, among very many, of his finicking exactness, cp. his letter to Hughes, Feb. 13th, 1865, *Nouv. Corresp.*, enquiring as to the syntax of "I was told of a man..." Cp. also footnote, C. du lundi XI, 158-9, "mes amis et moi, nous avons cherché à lutter d'exactitude et de fidélité de ton en présence de l'original." It is safe to assert that so perfervid a lover of truth and exactitude as Ste. Beuve

would have had to know Ste. Beuve to realise the almost morbid importance he attached to the spelling of a proper name, to a piece of information, to a date. He wished to see everything with his own eyes, to verify everything." Moreover, he was always scrupulous to add, or to append in a footnote, the source of his translations. Where no such reference is given, it is not presumptuous to conclude that he himself was the translator. And it must always be borne in mind that, besides his consuming passion for accuracy and his anxiety to let no detail pass and to take nothing for granted, his good friends J.J. Ampère, Ch. de Rémusat, Magnin, William Hughes and others were ever at hand, ready and eager to help. Finally, and above all, his criticisms of English literature are such that no-one could have written them if his knowledge of the language was not more than merely mediocre.

There is, however, another matter quite as important as linguistic considerations which should be touched on at this juncture: - the essential difference between the English and the French minds. It is one which must inevitably lead to prolonged speculation and can therefore be only briefly discussed here. "England and France have been attracted and stimulated," says Sarolea,¹ "not by their elective affinities; they have been stimulated by their opposites. The French genius is the complement of the English genius."

The Englishman's fierce independence is far from the facile

would not have dreamed of undertaking to criticise any English work if his knowledge of the language had not been adequate.

1. For an extremely interesting discussion of this, cp. Sarolea, *Essais de philosophie et de litt.*, pp. 75 ff. Cp. also E. Demolins, *A quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons?*
2. Robert Louis Stevenson and France, p. 12.

cheerfulness with which the French allow themselves to be governed: the strange English mixture of hard matter-of-factness with dashes of mysticism, melancholy and religiosity are so distant from the French gaily ironic and clearcut opinions; the British predilection for realism and for positivism as against the French passion for theorising, speculation and ideology: - all this, comprising only the more obvious characteristics of the two nations, demonstrates the truth of Sarolea's remark.

And yet there is a broad simplicity and directness in the Briton which is the opposite, as the same critic points out¹, of the Frenchman's disconcertingly complex mentality². How, then, is Ste. Beuve to settle down to the criticism of English literature which is so essentially different from his own? The task he sets himself is extraordinarily difficult. "In general," says Dowden³, "a foreign critic can say little that is at once new to us and true with reference to the inner power and more intimate meanings of our own literature." And Ste. Beuve is so typically French in his infinite variety: now he is Catholic, now Agnostic; now Liberal now Tory; now a Reactionary now a Revolutionary; now a Classicist now Romantic; now the medical student striving to be a poet; now the creator but at length the commentator: - as full of "les soubresauts de l'esprit français"⁴ as his times were of change and of revolution. So in the following pages, we must keep in mind

1. Cp. Sarolea's *Essais*, 89.
2. "Le Français vit plus facilement dans l'avenir que dans le présent, dans le monde abstrait que dans le monde concret, dans la passion mensongère et passagère que dans le sentiment vrai et durable." Quoted by Sarolea, *op. cit.* 91.
3. *New Studies in Lit.*, 364.
4. Sarolea, *op. cit.* 94.

that there was not one Ste. Beuve but many, that he is not the same man when criticising Walter Scott as he is when dealing with Cowper. As he says himself, "J'ai l'esprit étendu successivement, mais je ne l'ai étendu à la fois. Je ne vois bien à la fois qu'un point ou qu'un objet déterminé."¹

It is true that he suffered as much as, if not more than, the average man from "temperament": he was not infallible but, on the contrary, could be, as Gosse² has gently put it, very human and therefore very erring; he was quite able to forsake his sense of impartiality and to indulge in what looked very like spite, "to lose his critical balance and often his critical disinterestedness."³ Indeed, he often falls strangely short of his own standards, although he seems quite unaware that he is doing so; and Matthew Arnold is certainly exaggerating when he declares "The root of everything in his (Ste. Beuve's) criticism is his singlehearted devotion to truth."⁴ But it is no exaggeration to say that if Ste. Beuve has one trait predominant over all others, it is his love for truth. "He took for seal the English word which represents both "la verite" and "le vrai."⁵ Towards the end of his life, he wrote: "Le beau, le bien, le vrai est une belle devise et surtout précieuse ... ce n'est pas la mienne .. Si j'avais une devise, ce serait le vrai, le vrai seul. Et que le beau et le bien s'en tirent ensuite comme ils pourront!"⁶ Again, "Le sage et le critique qui a d'avance purgé son esprit de toutes les

1. Cahiers, 39.

2. More Books on the Table, 14.

3. Dowden, op. cit., 381.

4. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., vol. 23, 1024.

5. MacClintock, Ste. Beuve's Critical Theory, 8.

6. Corresp., II, Letter of Dec. 9th, 1865.

idoles et de tous les fantômes ... ne continue pas moins, chaque jour et à chaque instant, de servir à sa manière l'avancement de l'espèce, d'étudier, de chercher le vrai, le vrai seul, de s'y tenir sans le forcer, sans l'exagérer, sans y ajouter, et en laissant subsister, à côté des points acquis, tous les vides et toutes les lacunes qu'il n'a pu combler.^{1.} Nor would it be difficult to find many passages of similar import throughout his writings.

Whatever be the value of his criticisms of English and German literature, we can be certain that they are, in the main, stamped with the hall-mark of sincerity. His passion for truth carried him to extreme lengths: no trouble was too great, no detail too insignificant, for the honest critic, he declares, "ne prétend rien ôter que de faux... ne veut y remettre que la vérité."^{2.} And so far as in him lay he loyally endeavoured to follow out his critical ideal.^{3.}

Let us now turn to the *Causeries* themselves which bear directly upon English literature.

1. *Nouv. lundis*, IX, 105.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 187.

3. Sometimes, indeed, even ostentatiously: *op.*, *ibid.*, II, 1; *ibid.*, I, 9; *ibid.*, III, 315; *Port. litt.*, I, 369.

III. SCOTT.

1.

It is regrettable that Ste. Beuve's first pronouncements¹ on Sir Walter Scott should be associated with what is admittedly one of the latter's minor works; had the two articles on the "Life of Napoleon" been revised in the critic's later and calmer years it would have probably been tempered with more mercy. As it is, the two *Causeries* which appear in the first volume of the *Portraits litteraires* consist of a drastic exposure of Scott's failures when he strays from his proper domain as a novelist into that of the historian.

Ste. Beuve begins ominously by laying it down that a great genius has the right to demand special indulgence for his less striking works because of the glory attaching to his best. But Scott cannot justifiably make this claim for "*nous ne prétendons pas le placer encore parmi ces deux ou trois privilégiés en chaque siècle.*"² Nor does Ste. Beuve think that Scott would have been able to surpass anything he had already written (these two articles were written about five years before Scott's death). Still less has an author any claim for special consideration when, as is here the case with Scott, he respects neither his public nor truth nor himself; in such circumstances, says Ste. Beuve sternly, he absolves all others of the duty to respect him. In the critic's opinion, indeed, the affair seems as black as can be against the "*baronnet écossais,*" because the latter was not inspired by anger or hatred - which are at least honest vices, as it were,

1. *Portraits litt.*, I, 241 ff., 2 arts., July 28th and Aug. 25th, 1827.

2. *Ibid.*, 242.

- against the great French soldier, but by something much more vulgar: "Il a spéculé en grand sur sa renommée, et il a tout bonnement voulu escamoter une souscription à l'Europe" in return for a history which is nothing but "de la légèreté, de la précipitation, de l'ignorance, de la mauvaise foi, un reste de vieille rancune, pas un trait de talent, un ton et un goût détestables." These are harsh words and are to be equalled only by those others with which Ste. Beuve describes Scott's motives in writing his history.

Much of all this is, unfortunately, true: one cannot but regret, however, that Ste. Beuve had either no knowledge or deliberately took no account of extenuating circumstances. We, of course, nowadays, must and do make allowance for the haste in which Scott wrote this work, with the fearsome shadow of bankruptcy looming ever blacker before him; and we know, as probably Ste. Beuve did not, that the novelist was here writing against time and running a race with an illness which was surely gaining ground, and with an over-amount of work which was surely crushing him. Therefore, as we said before, it is a pity that Ste. Beuve chose the "Life of Napoleon" for his first public announcement on this Scottish genius. Not only would he have been more merciful, but he would not have hesitated to place him amongst these two or three privileged beings of every century.

The *Causeries* consist of practically nothing but fault-finding and hole-picking from the very beginning of Scott's preliminary sketch of the French Revolution, right on to the end of the Life. Instead of giving these "Vues générales qui caractérisent l'historien et révèlent en lui l'intelligence de

1. Ibid. 245.

son sujet," Scott piles up anecdotes, jokes, sneers and the like, in a jumble which serves only to lengthen his book. He makes mistake after mistake, upon each of which Ste. Beuve seizes with a kind of savage glee. He holds up to scorn Scott's false assertion that the Revolution finished at the death of Robespierre.^{2.} When Scott declares that the men of letters of the 18th century were on a footing not much higher than that of actors and musicians and that ladies of quality "while receiving them in their salons, were nonetheless convinced that they were formed of baser clay,"^{3.} Ste Beuve indulges in rather heavy sarcasm in which names like those of Montesquieu, Buffon, Voltaire, Madame du Deffant etc. are, of course, mentioned.^{4.} Where Scott quotes^{5.} an opinion of Fontenelle, obviously under the impression that the author was yet alive during the years just preceding the Revolution, (whereas the philosopher had died in 1757), the blunder naturally affords Ste. Beuve another chance to wax sarcastic. But his sarcasm occasionally becomes lighter in vein as, for example,^{6.} when he compares Scott to an Englishwoman sitting at a tea-table and, with frowning face, condemning the indelicacy of the French in general, and in particular of the correspondence between Josephine and Bonaparte which, "malgré l'intimité du lien conjugal, un mari anglais n'emploierait pas, et qu'une femme anglaise ne regarderait pas comme l'expression convenable de l'affection conjugale."^{8.} Risum teneatis amici

1. Ibid, 246.

2. Robespierre was guillotined on the 27th July, 1794 whereas the French Revolution ended on the 18th Brumaire 1795. Cp. p. 353, Scott's Life of Napoleon, Vol. I, Edin., A. & C. Black, 1875.

3. Cp. Scott's Napoleon, p. 23. 4. Port. litt., 247.

5. Cp. " " p. 25. 6. " " 250.

7. In Vol. II, p. 166, Scott gives a few examples of Napoleon's correspondence which Ste. Beuve must have read. (Appendix 4) If we are to judge by them, Scott was strangely exaggerating; their chief characteristic is their somewhat ungrammatical style and their almost entire absence of correct punctuation!

8. Portraits litt. I, 251.

And so on - it would be wearisome to prolong the agony. The whole forms a distressing indictment "of shocking and puerile absurdities" in which the style is also attacked on the ground of the numerous and involved comparisons, more or less apt, which tumble over each other. This is evident, says Ste. Beuve, "quoiqu'il y ait une sorte d'impertinence à décider du style d'après une traduction."

Nor does the second article furnish any pleasanter reading: It is a mere continuance of the fault-finding and fault-blaming. It is all well done, of course, and besides giving proof of the critic's gift for sarcasm, shows forth at the same time his undoubted learning. He rounds off his attacks with protestations of his admiration for the great novelist and poet, which strike one as perfunctory. He again bewails the fact that so brilliant, fertile and picturesque an imagination should have been tempted to wander at large into a domain where the strictest exactness and truth are so essential.

No doubt we cannot blame Ste. Beuve for judging the "Life of Napoleon" strictly and solely upon its merits; and yet he, of all critics, is the one usually so ready to take everything into account, even side issues which do not bear very directly upon the subject at hand. It is, by now, generally recognised that this history is prejudiced² and founded upon insufficient materials; that it was written with undue haste and with frequent prolixity and that the work did

1. Ibid., 255.

2. But cp. Preface to Scott's Napoleon, p.4: "Neither the greatness of his (Napoleon's) talents nor the success of his undertakings ought to stifle the voice or dazzle the eyes of him who adventures to be his historian."

not live long¹. Nevertheless, Ste. Beuve, with all his righteous anger, might have spared a word of praise for the literary merit of its vigour and dramatic feeling², and for the extreme human quality of the work, thumb-marked though it be by imperfections.

It is also open to doubt whether these comparisons to which Ste. Beuve so strongly objects are really so inept: Ste. Beuve, in any case, gives no examples. And cannot an anecdote give a good deal of force and point to a history? Ste. Beuve complains that the anecdotes are irrelevant, but against that must be balanced Scott's assertion that "he has been careful not to rely upon any which did not come on sufficient authority. He (the author) has neither grubbed the anecdotes nor has he solicited information from individuals who could not be impartial witnesses."³

Scott's "Life of Napoleon" may, thus, be almost as bad as Ste. Beuve in his haste maintains, but it is rather a sorry business to read this criticism written by a man who has so evidently lost his temper, and who has so evidently had no

1. Cp. O. Elton, Survey of Lit., Vol. I, p. 356.

It should perhaps be also pointed out that Ste. Beuve's articles were based on a French translation of the 1st Edition in which very little documentation appears to have been given. It was only in the 1843 and subsequent editions that anything like fulness of notes was collected by other hands. Cp. Editor's note p.5 of the 1876 Edition.

Cp. Goethe's Gespräche mit Eckermann, II, 212-13: "It is true that the author (i.e. Scott) may be reproached with great inaccuracy, and also with great impartiality, but even these two defects give his work a particular value in my eyes. The success of the book in England was far beyond expectations; and thus we see that Walter Scott, in this very hatred for Napoleon and the French, has been the true interpreter and representative of English popular opinion and national sentiment. His book will assuredly not be a document for the history of France but it will be one for the history of England."

2. Cp., to select one or two from many examples of brilliant writing, Scott's description of Napoleon at the zenith of his power, Vol. IV., pp. 73-74; the entry into and retreat from Moscow, Vol. IV., chaps. LX-LXIII; Napoleon's last days, V., 332-334.
3. Preface to Life of Napoleon, pp. 3 & 4.

other motive than to pick to tatters the object of his wrath. No doubt his perfervid admiration for Bonaparte has a great deal to do with his bitterness which he is trying to purge by a reasoned course of denigration.

It has to be remembered that at this time Ste. Beuve was an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon. Indeed, he never quite lost his admiration, and later, "son adhésion à la présidence de Louis Bonaparte fut sincère et dégagée d'arrière-pensée"¹; and later still, when a senator, he was on terms of very cordial friendship with the Bonaparte princesses². This being so, it is not surprising that he should have so drastically and yet so loyally dealt with a work which he felt keenly to be wrong and false from his every point of view. One is glad, however, to recall what another critic³ has said of Scott in another connection: "for when Time, that old ravager, has done his very worst, there will be enough left of Sir Walter to carry down his name and fame to the remotest age." And even in the matter of this despised "Life of Napoleon" it is pleasant to hear the praise of Goethe⁴ - surely no mean a judge: "What could now be more delightful to me than leisurely and calmly to sit down and listen to the discourse of such a man, while clearly, truly, (note the adverbs!) and with all the skill of a great artist, he recalls to me the incidents on which

1. A.-J. Pons, Ste. Beuve et ses inconnues, 207 ff.

2. Ibid, 290.

3. A. Birrell: Collected Essays, II, 323.

4. Posthumous Works, VI, 253.

through life I have meditated, and the influence of which is still daily in operation."

II.

It is to be expected that Ste. Beuve, writing his second short article on Scott, only six days after the latter's death would strike the more pleasing and eulogistic vein, which is evident in his opening words: "Ce n'est pas seulement un deuil pour l'Angleterre; c'en doit être un pour la France et pour le monde civilisé." But one has not read far till one sees Ste. Beuve qualifying the praise he has just bestowed, and taking away with the one hand what he had given with the other. For example, immediately after expressing the sense of grief which all the civilised world must be experiencing, he adds, by way of rather luke-warm consolation, that after all Scott had accomplished his life-work; that towards the end, his faculties were beginning to weaken; that although his death, along with those of Byron, Goethe and Schiller, marks the end of an era, yet the new era is heralded and other great men will adorn it. And this new era, he hints, would not be in tune with Scott's Toryism which "manqua d'un caractère politique aux besoins nouveaux ... et ... resta l'esclave des préjugés de son éducation²." In this connection, he cites (the reader watches for its arrival!) Scott's "Life of Napoleon"; the above-mentioned mourning no doubt prompts him to excuse its shortcomings on the score of "légèreté et préventions d'habitude," and not, as he had maintained in his slashing review of it (v. supra) "mauvais vouloir et système." These "préventions d'habitude," he goes on to observe, are really inevitable to a man like Scott, and placed in such

1. Premiers lundis, II, 108 ff., dated Sept. 27th, 1832.

2. Ibid, 111.

circumstances as he was. For Scott, gifted with a mind eager for diverse knowledge, and "d'un naturel bien veillant, facile, agréablement enjoué," was unlike many a writer in that, during his early days, he had had no battles to fight, no hardships to undergo. "Ses goûts d'étude ne furent jamais contrariés, et il ne fit que s'épanouir dans un loisir riant au souffle qui le favorisait." Thus it is that he had no great width of outlook and never had any deeply passionate or bitter emotions. On the contrary he was swayed by the manners and opinions in vogue, and if he has depicted himself anywhere, it is in the character of Morton - "un type pâle, indécis, honnête et bon."²

3.

From all of the foregoing, it is fairly evident that Ste. Beuve had, at no time, any perfervid love for Scott. There are, apart from the articles here dealt with, scattered through the numerous volumes of his criticisms, many references to the great Scotsman, but all of them are of little or no importance.³

When we begin to sum up Ste. Beuve's opinions upon Scott, it is, to say the least, disconcerting to find that here is a case, if there ever was one, of an author being damned with faint praise. It is vain for us to read Ste. Beuve's meagre

1. Ibid. 113.
2. Ibid. 113. Cp. also article on Molière, Port. litt. II, (first appeared as a preface written in Jan., 1835, to an edition of the Oeuvres de Molière, 2 Vols., Paris, 1835-1836) in which Ste. Beuve writes: On a cru voir ainsi la physiogonomie bienveillante de Scott dans Mordaunt Mertoun. He is thus evidently confusing Mordaunt Mertoun, the hero of the "Pirate" with Henry Morton, the hero of Old Mortality. No doubt he had imperfectly remembered the previous remark quoted above (27th Sept., 1832) on the alleged resemblance. As for the identity of the "On", above-mentioned, this is probably one of the by no means rare occasions upon which Ste. Beuve gives his own opinion under the guise of anonymity. Cp., on this point, Giraud's Introduction to "Mes Poisons": Cahiers intimes inédits de Ste. Beuve.
3. Cp. Port. litt., III, 156; Port. contemp., I, 27, 216; Nouv. lundis, III, 314, IV, 80, 89; IX, 151, etc., all of which are hardly more than mere references to his name and of no importance.

eulogy in Vol. II of the *Premiers lundis*. Even had he there indulged in the most extravagant of encomiums, we might, in complete understanding of the special circumstances - within a week of Scott's death! - have felt inclined to agree with him. But truth, - *veritas odium parit* - or truth as he sees it, gives him no halt. His entire outlook, it would seem, is coloured by the attitude which he took up in that first unfortunate onslaught and to which he has remained grimly faithful.

For who would seek to deny Scott's creation of the historical novel, at any rate in England; or that it was he who first showed, apart from the drama, that local colour is a necessary element in fiction; or that he ranks beside Shakespeare (and perhaps Trollope) in the creation of characters crowding the galleries of "interiors" and "exteriors"? And lastly, did he not leave the whole province of the novel with a fine tradition of "moral and intellectual health, of manliness, of truth and humour, freedom and courtesy" which has not been surpassed. It may be objected, of course, that these remarks have but little to do with Ste. Beuve's bitterness in connection with the "Life of Napoleon". To that we can only reply that that bitterness is such as to cause the critic to find none but the faintest of praise for the general output of Scott's writings; he is viewing not the forest but the trees. In brief, does it not all amount to this: that Ste. Beuve showed scant mercy to Scott, simply because he could not understand him;² and he could not understand him, as we have seen, chiefly because his admiration for Napoleon blinded him to Scott's greatness. Here, then, is an example of the many occasions already mentioned³ upon which he falls short of his

1. *Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, 681.

2. *Cp. p. 19.*

3. It would, for instance, be difficult to find a man to whom the words "*pâle et indécis*" could be more falsely attributed.

own critical standards; for he comes under his own strictures upon a foreigner's disability to pass judgment upon a literary work, more especially when that work is contemporary.¹

IV. CHESTERFIELD'S LETTERS.

1.

The first real *Lundi*² in which Ste. Beuve deals entirely with an Englishman is hardly a literary one, nor is its subject a literary man in the generally accepted sense of the term. But it is easy to understand the appeal which such a subject must have made to Ste. Beuve. The famous Letters were written by one whom the critic considered "l'un des plus liés avec la France."³ And here was a great man giving the fruit of his mature thought and experience in clear and concise form agreeably flavoured with cynicism; an eminent man of the world confiding his secret recipes for material success in the shape of very practical advice; a not excessively moral man indicating what, and what not, to avoid in high society; an engrossing and many-sided personality setting down his opinions of life in general; and yet with all that, here was a man who despite his great gifts of rank and intellect yet turned out a sort of

1. *Pr. lundis*, II, 305 ff. Cp. also *Nouv. lundis*, XII, 31: "Le devoir de la critique dans tout sujet est avant tout de l'envisager sans parti pris, de se tenir exempte de préventions, fussent-elles des mieux fondées....."

2. *Caus. du lundi*, II, 1850.

3. *Ibid.*, 127.

tragic failure.

No wonder, then, that the French critic should have found in him a subject after his own heart, for a reputation such as Chesterfield's must indeed have had a peculiar fascination for a man of Ste. Beuve's mentality, since it leaves so much room for conjecture. More adventurous characters afford the commentator more topics for praise or blame, but the colours in which they are painted are fast and clear and speculation is often idle. The Chesterfields of politics leave us problems none the less interesting because they are insoluble, and we are constantly asking, though with no prospect of reply, whether their reserve was due to self-knowledge or to magnanimity, and whether, if they would, they could have achieved more.

The *Causerie* opens with a sketch of Lord Chesterfield's childhood and of his career, but soon we are told: "Le Chesterfield que nous aimons à étudier est l'un d'esprit et d'expérience ... c'est celui qui, dès sa jeunesse fut l'ami de Pope, l'introducteur en Angleterre de Montesquieu et de Voltaire, le correspondant de Fontenelle ... celui que l'Académie des Inscriptions adopta parmi ses membres, qui unissait l'esprit des deux nations ... c'est la Rochefoucauld de l'Angleterre."¹

He quotes with evident approval Chesterfield's admiration of Voltaire and la Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and Montesquieu; he also agrees with the Englishman's censure of certain imprudences committed by Voltaire. Chesterfield's remark - "Let each one think as he likes but he must not communicate his ideas when they are such as to trouble the repose of society" - is on a square with Ste. Beuve's own tolerant philosophy.² He

1. Ibid, 232-3.

2. Cp., for his love for justice and tolerance, *Nouv. lundis*, I, 81.

goes on to defend Chesterfield against the complaint of "Le severe Johnson" that the Letters "taught the morality of a courtesan and the manners of a dancing master." Such a judgment, he says, is "souverainement injuste," and he maintains that Chesterfield was afraid of his son's becoming so respectable as not also to be "aimable", and so indirectly trouble the repose of the society into which one day he was to enter.

While the critic admits freely that more than one passage of the Letters may seem to come very strangely from a father to a son, yet he sees clearly enough that the Letters as a whole reflect the morality of the age, and that their author was merely systematising in them those principles of conduct which seemed to lead to success. He goes even further than that:

"L'ensemble est animé d'un véritable esprit de tendresse et de sagesse," and adds triumphantly, "Si Horace avait un fils, je me figure qu'il ne lui parlerait guère autrement."

Then comes a resume of the main body of the Letters; Ste. Beuve insists that an amplitude of solid instruction is given, and he approvingly quotes various dicta showing how highly Chesterfield esteemed, inter alia, the value of history and mythology, the importance of attention, the desire to excel, and the like: all tinged with that cynicism already mentioned, and which, though it draws from Ste. Beuve some gentle regrets, puts him on a level, he says, with those masters of human morals La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyere. One imagines the critic must have chuckled while quoting, for instance, Chesterfield's fairly overt hints on that "arrangement honnête qui sied bien à un galant homme,"² and while again snubbing the "pudeur du grave Johnson" with Voltaire's line, "Il n'est jamais de mal en bonne

1. Oaus. du lundi, II, 234.

2. Ibid, 235.

compagnie.¹"

A few further quotations from the Letters touching religion, social life and so forth follow, and the Causerie closes with a laudatory extract from a letter written to Chesterfield in 1771 by Voltaire shortly before the latter's death less than three years later.

2.

We have referred to the attraction which Lord Chesterfield's character has exerted upon the many writers who extend from his own time to the present day; it is safe to say that the great majority of these writers have indulged in a spirit not overtempered with mercy. It is, of course, easy enough to understand the dislike shown so generally to Chesterfield, and nothing were easier than to quarrel with his outlook on life. He was not what is usually called a "good" man, and although, when judged by the standards of his time, he was probably no worse than the majority of his peers, yet he seems to have inspired little or no affection. The impression of coldness and insincerity which his character evidently - but, to no small extent, falsely² - conveyed, must have been fatal to any chance of popularity.

That the English reader of S te. Beuve's Review will find much in it with which not to agree is, then, fairly evident. Coming fresh to it, primed with his own prejudices against Chesterfield, the reader will quickly seize on various points which the French critic barely mentions.

First and foremost, why is Johnson's famous Letter - which, for most Englishmen, is inseparably connected with the

1. IBid, 240

2. Cp. W.H. Craig, Life of Lord Chesterfield, 1907, pp. 203 ff.

name of Lord Chesterfield - practically passed over in silence?^{1.} Again, objection is usually taken to the lack of morality in the Letters, no doubt rightly so; yet we find Ste. Beuve, in the comparison quoted above, associating Chesterfield with Horace, in very vigorous defence. And where the general harshness of attitude displayed by Chesterfield to his son is so frequently stressed by English writers, Ste. Beuve maintains that it is one, on the whole, of tenderness and wisdom. And finally, why does Ste. Beuve gloss over the many obvious shortcomings of his subject in the domain of literature and the arts? For it is difficult, very often, not to feel either irritated or amused at the strangely narrow egotism which causes Chesterfield, to dismiss, for example, with the complacency of ignorance, giants like Plato and Cicero ("the philosophy of both of them is wretched and the reasoning part miserable"); to hold music in silent contempt as being an "occupation unfit for a gentleman"; to express disgust that the liberal arts of painting and sculpture were beginning to be deemed so worthy; to sneer at Berkeley's philosophy on the one hand and "the many extravagances and much nonsense" of Shakespeare on the other. Why then should Ste. Beuve be so sympathetic, - so ardently sympathetic, as many would have it?

Let us try to answer such objections as briefly and fairly as may be.

With regard to Dr. Johnson's famous letter, it is easy to over-rate its significance and to overlook the fact that it was largely the outcome of wounded personal vanity. We could not do better than refer the perfervid Johnsonian to

1. Ste. Beuve does make one indirect reference to it, but in very vague terms: "Le sévère Johnson, qui, d'ailleurs, n'était pas impartial à l'égard de Chesterfield et qui croyait avoir à se plaindre de lui.... Caus. du lundi, II, 234.

Mr. Saintsbury's interesting and convincing defence of Chesterfield in this connection.¹ His finding serves admirably to put the matter in its proper place and proper light, which have for long been respectively too large and too lurid.

Of the morality of the Letters we have already spoken. That the garment which Chesterfield wove for his son was by no means one of righteous^{ness} is true enough: but how could, and why should, it have been otherwise? How many of his contemporaries can be written down as free from immorality or unspotted by a manner of life shallow and often squalid? "Whilst few great names were spared in that irreverent age, his was usually mentioned with a fair amount of respect."² There is also this further point to be noticed: the criterion of morality played a very minor part in Ste. Beuve's critical practice and he himself was more often the "advocatus diaboli" than the censor of public morals. His maxim, "ne soyons plus rigoristes qu'il ne convient"³ is by no means unlike many of Chesterfield's. It must be admitted that if Ste. Beuve did not avoid the consideration of moral turpitude in the men he studied, yet he palliated them and glossed them over. It is, then, hardly to be expected that he should go out of his way to condemn Chesterfield's easy cynicism.

That a loveless and repellent tone is often pronounced in the Letters is also true, but that, nevertheless, does not utterly refute Ste. Beuve's already mentioned remark as to their essential and compensating tenderness. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and Chesterfield's heart, however hard or warped, was yet sufficiently concerned for his son's welfare as to engage in the rather thankless task of

1. Peace of the Augustans, 217-8.

2. Cp. W. H. Craig, op. cit., p. 205.

3. Nouv. lundis, V, 9.

supplying a code of behaviour to a boy whom he well knew to be no genius. It may seem difficult to qualify with the word tenderness many of the messages which Chesterfield sent to his son.¹ On the other hand, what could inspire the father to write four hundred long letters, all of them breathing a real anxiety for the son's success?²

Chesterfield's practice was probably more aimable than his theory. If, for example, his attitude towards Mrs. Eugenie Stanhope was cold, his treatment both of her and her two children was essentially kind. If he sneered at the Rev. Mr. Harte's social qualities and poured contempt on that somewhat awkward scholar's devotion to his books, yet he deliberately chose him as a fitting governor for his son. Does such a fact not seem to show that Chesterfield was at least willing enough not to put his son - a son, moreover, who was not his heir - under the charge of any dissipated, however socially gifted rake? And it must have been something strangely like affection which caused Chesterfield so carefully to adapt and vary the style and tone of these hundreds of letters as to suit the recipient's advancing years and needs. It cannot have been sheer harshness which led him to make obvious, if intermittent, attempts to be amusing and interesting, as well as instructive, and yet with no shadow of condescension.

Ste. Beuve, then, is doubtless far from solving the enigma by the magic word 'tendresse', but, at the same time, let us admit that he has more right on his side than have the many who condemn forthright and who, holding up hands of horror, can speak of little else but 'harshness', 'unfatherly

1. Cp. Letter 178: "When you cease to deserve it (i e. his father's affection) you may expect every possible mark of my resentment ... I shall not have the slightest regard for anything you may allege in your defence."
2. Cp. Letter 177: "Make yourself the accomplished man I wish to have you...."

feelings', and the like. It may be as well to add that no desire or expectation of literary fame lie at the root of Chesterfield's unwearied zeal, for the Letters were at no time intended for publication - a point sometimes apt to be forgotten.¹

3.

In regard to Ste. Beuve's omission to refer to the strange attitude affected by Chesterfield towards the arts, we submit that such omission, if not primarily due to mere lack of space, was intentional, and is on a like footing with the critic's enthusiastic tone throughout. That tone can, we think, be best explained by asserting the full compatibility with what was, after all, Ste. Beuve's main intention: to introduce to a fresh audience one who might appeal to them as an English La Rochefoucauld ... For not only was Chesterfield "the last good English writer before Johnson came to vitiate the language," as Wordsworth called him, but he was one who, in the words of Ste. Beuve, "unit assez bien les avantages des deux nations avec un trait, pourtant, qui est bien de sa race. Il a de l'imagination jusque dans l'esprit Il a plus d'imagination ... qu'on n'en rencontre chez St. Evremond et chez nos fins moralistes en général. Il tient à cet égard de son ami Montesquieu."²

Chesterfield had many close relationships with France, for which country he had a strong liking and admiration. He was, as we have seen, the friend and correspondent of nearly all the chief writers of his day, and the Académie des Inscriptions elected him one of its members. As Ste. Beuve points out, Chesterfield was one who "plus qu'aucun de ses compatriotes en son temps a témoigné pour notre nation des prédilections singulières; qui a goûté ... nos qualités

1. Cp. Peace of the Augustans, 221.

2. Caus. du lundi, II, 243-4.

aimables; qui a senti nos qualités sérieuses; et duquel on pourrait dire, pour tout éloge, que c'est un esprit français.¹"

In view of all this, it was but natural that Ste. Beuve should wish to present his subject in the most favourable light. There was every reason not to darken the shadows, not to exaggerate the immorality or the lack of sympathy with liberal taste and generous emotion, and not to sneer at Chesterfield's wisdom as that of Mr. Worldly Wiseman. It is true that Ste. Beuve is not acting up to his own ideal of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but who cannot feel a certain sympathy here for his work of propaganda? It was in 1850 that Ste. Beuve wrote this *Causerie*. Since then it has only very slowly come to be recognised that the stone cast at Chesterfield was done so unjustly. His merits are not yet generally admitted; is it not, then, remarkable that Ste. Beuve, almost alone amongst critics, and a foreign critic at that, should so quickly and eagerly have appreciated the man? When it is remembered that the *Causerie* itself had to conform to certain strict limits of space, can it be fairly denied that, in the extent of a single article, an abler word picture were possible? It is no doubt this lack of space which also accounts for the fact that Ste. Beuve has said nothing about the literary style of the Letters; but the numerous extracts are sufficient in themselves.

A recent biographer of Chesterfield, in estimating the value of the many writings upon the Earl, puts second on his list this *Causerie* by Ste. Beuve.² And Mr. Saintsbury sets upon it the stamp of his approval with the word 'admirable.'³

1. *Ibid*, 244.

2. W.H. Craig, *op. cit.*, 358.

3. *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 320.

V. GIBBON¹.

1.

"Gibbon est à certains égards un écrivain français, et il a de droit sa place marquée en notre 18e siècle." This forms Ste. Beuve's reason for not only writing about the great historian but also for doing him "une justice particulière."² From this opening Ste. Beuve goes direct to the famous - or infamous 15th and 16th chapters of the History, and in so doing strikes the somewhat disparaging note which runs through both the articles. He admits that in speaking of Gibbon even in France "on a ... une prévention défavorable à vaincre," and he asserts that Gibbon, seeking to calm the storm of protest which these two chapters raised, acted "exclusivement dans un intérêt politique et social," while still secretly scorning all forms of religion. He quotes appositely the remark, made by Gibbon towards the end of his life, about Burke, and which would seem to prove that the historian's deepest feelings about religion never altered: "I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics and I can almost excuse his respect for religions establishments."³

All the above can probably not be disputed: Cotter Morison, in his admirable account of Gibbon in that no less admirable series, English Men of Letters, refers to Gibbon's "narrow and distorted conception of the emotional side of man's nature. Having no spiritual aspirations himself, he could not appreciate or understand them in others."⁴ But it is contrary to Ste. Beuve's usual habit to strike the unfriendly note at the very beginning of a Causerie, and one wonders whether it is

1. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 345-378: 2 Articles.

2. Ibid, 346-7.

3. Ibid, 348.

4. Op. cit., 122.

in keeping with his declaration that Gibbon was due "une justice particulière" to single out so soon a defect from amid so much vast magnificence. For Ste. Beuve continues in this strain: he accuses Gibbon of a general lack of emotion or enthusiasm for anything. In fact, only once, apart from the love of his life work, does he allow Gibbon to give any sign of human feeling - "il y a un moment où, dans les dangers de la guerre de Sept Ans, il est redevenu Anglais à la voix de Pitt... et a paru animé d'un éclair d'enthousiasme."¹ And when the critic goes on to allude at some length to Gibbon's admiration for Trajan, is he implying that the historian's contempt for religion is on a par with that generally credited to the Roman Emperor? If so, then surely Ste. Beuve is here rather forcing things, for Trajan was not, after all, an infamous monster but was, when allowance is duly made for the spirit of his times, by no means a merciless tyrant, nor was he so considered by his subjects.² If not, then why has Ste. Beuve, foreign to his practice, delayed the customary biographical details and insisted on foisting upon the reader this preliminary stock of impressions? However, he rounds off this introduction by a brief estimate of the Decline and Fall - "une belle histoire où le génie de l'ordre, de la méthode, de la bonne administration domine; une narration revêtue de toutes les qualités fermes, continues et solides qui la font ressembler, jusque dans ses dégradations successives et inévitables à travers les temps barbares, à une large chaussée romaine."³

Then comes the biography, the usual points of which are dealt with interestingly and at fair length. It is characteristic of Ste. Beuve to mention the unhappiness of Gibbon's

1. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 348-9.

2. Cp. Prof. Reid's Article in Vol. 27, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed.

3. Ibid, 350.

youth caused by the lack of a mother's care: "ceux à qui a manqué la sollicitude d'une mère ... sont plus aisément que d'autres dénués du sentiment de la religion." But he is surprisingly indulgent in his remarks upon Gibbon's extraordinary feat of reading himself in and then out of Catholicism, and also on the ludicrous affair with Mlle. Curchod. And yet the critic is being only fair: he himself was not a model of consistency as far as religion was concerned; and it must also be allowed, despite the many sneers directed at his unfortunate love affair, that Gibbon, as a plain man of rather prosaic good sense, behaved neither heinously nor meanly in the matter. The whole biographical sketch, indeed, forms a contrast to the introduction; no doubt the delightful pages of Gibbon's own memoirs had here a strong influence on the critic. It is pleasant incidentally to note Ste. Beuve's tribute to Hume: it is little touches such as these, which crop up so frequently and so refreshingly, that warm the hearts of Ste. Beuve's readers.

The criticism bestowed upon the "Essai sur l'étude de la littérature" is likewise by no means harsh. It largely follows the lines of Gibbon's own remarks on the subject. Ste. Beuve's opinion, for example, that the French in which the essay was written too closely imitates that of Montesquieu, simply re-echoes Gibbon's lament: "alas! how fatal has been the imitation of Montesquieu." The French critic's objections, first to the style which is "assez difficile et parfois obscure," and then to "la liaison des idées qui échappe souvent par trop de concision, et par le désir qu'a eu le jeune auteur d'y faire entrer, d'y condenser la plupart de ses notes," are balanced by Gibbon's own admissions: "the

1. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 358.

2. Cp. Gibbon's Autobiography, p. 58.

obscurity of many passages is often affected; 'brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio'; the desire of expressing perhaps a common idea with sententious and oracular brevity."

The aim of the essay was, the historian declared, "to justify and praise the object of a favourite pursuit, that is, the study of ancient literature." Ste Beuve devotes almost two pages to Gibbon's ideas "qui méritent qu'on lui sourie."² He points out how they show the historian in embryo here trying his wings, yet with little danger of falling; and emphasizes the fact that the *Essai* foreshadows the method to be magnificently employed in the *History*. But is it not a little surprising to find him mentioning Gibbon's name and that of Mably in the same sentence, even though he is contrasting the two? Does it not seem somewhat needless to assert that Gibbon's "esprit de critique ... sera tout l'opposé de la méthode raide et tranchante d'un Mably."³

A description follows of Gibbon's years as captain of Militia. One feels that Ste. Beuve might have made a little more of this extraordinary event in the life of his subject, for all English literature can offer no episode more astounding. Has the critic realised to the full the extraordinary wonder and richness of such an occurrence? In any

1. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

2. *Caus. du lundi*, VIII, 360 ff.

3. *Ibid.* 360. Ste. Beuve had probably in mind Mably's "De la manière d'écrire L'Histoire," 1783, in which the Abbé submits that history should not be regarded as a mere narrative, but as a study, yielding profitable lessons to be adapted to present day requirements. Art, literature, science, even industry itself, he considers elements which make for corruption and decay. Mankind, he thinks, is being threatened by three dangers - despotism, anarchy and conquest; and communism is the only remedy, for the differences among men are not essential, but exterior, and capable, therefore, of being attenuated by uniform education in which the lessons of history form the most important part. It would not be easy to find two writers as different both in outlook and manner as Mably and Gibbon; one wonders, therefore, why Ste. Beuve should take occasion to mention so obvious a fact. Cp. B. de Puchesse, *Condillac*, Paris, 1910, and Paul Janet, *Histoire de la science politique*, Paris, 1887.

case, he might have pointed out one, if not the most important, aspect of these two and a half mortal years of camp life: the enforced cessation of omniverous and continued reading afforded Gibbon time for thinking, with the result that when he returned to the shelter of his father's house in Hampshire, he had determined upon the nature of his life's work, although, indeed, the actual details were not yet sorted out in his mind.

Ste. Beuve brings the first *Causerie* to an end with a résumé of Gibbon's qualities: "Culture, suite, ordre, méthode, une belle intelligence, froide, fine, toujours exercée, et aiguisée, des affections modérées, constantes, d'ailleurs l'étincelle sacrée absente, jamais le coup de tonnerre: c'est sous ces traits que Gibbon s'offre à nous en tout temps et dès sa jeunesse." All of which is true, although it may be asked what was Ste. Beuve's exact connotation of the "étincelle sacrée." But when he adds: "Dans tout ce que j'ai dit, je n'ai fait qu'extraire et reserrer ses *Mémoires*; j'ai seulement tâché d'en présenter une épreuve un peu plus fraîche et plus marquée à l'usage du moment," one becomes doubtful. For is his sketch even a little "plus fraîche et plus marquée" than the autobiography which, as at least one English critic has declared, "may be boldly pronounced perfect"²?

2.

The second and concluding article on Gibbon opens with a description of the historian's arrival in Rome, and the famous passage³ from the autobiography is quoted in which he depicts his sensations and the final conception of his life work. But here again Gibbon's prejudice against Christianity would seem to be over-emphasized by Ste. Beuve. It cannot be denied,

1. *Ibid.*, 362.

2. A. Birrell, *Selected Essays*, II, 35.

3. *Cp. Autobiog.*, 82.

of course, "that in the two famous chapters at least, which concluded his first volume, he adopted a tone which must be pronounced offensive, not only from the Christian point of view but on the broad ground of historical equity." This is neither the time nor the place to attempt any discussion of religious dogma, but it may be pleaded that it is doubtful whether such a thing as absolute impartiality can exist; may one not make some allowance at least for even a historian's private feelings and convictions? In any case, Gibbon, though doubtless guilty enough as regards matters of good taste, was carrying out the dictates of his own principles: he believed all his life, "that the propagation of the Gospel and the triumph of the Church are inseparably connected with the decline of the Roman monarchy."¹

For Ste. Beuve is usually so largely tolerant in religious matters. He was never for any length of time a great churchman and, as the historian of Port Royal, his "réussite littéraire a, moralement, été une faillite. Cette religion ... il lui a été impossible d'y entrer autrement que pour la comprendre, pour l'exposer; il n'y était qu'un investigateur ... un disciple, non pas."² It is, therefore, all the more perplexing to find him so often adopting towards Gibbon this attitude of coldness and lack of sympathy. In another place he himself asks, "Pourquoi, sitôt qu'on touche cette corde religieuse, prendre un ton d'aigreur...?"³ It is to be regretted that he did not here bear in mind not only this query but also the fact to which he himself alluded⁴ - that in any connection with Gibbon "on a une prévention

1. Morison, op. cit. 122.
2. Cp. Autobiog. , p. 89.
3. Michaud, Ste. Beuve, 105 .
4. Nouv. lundis, III, 301.
5. Already quoted: cp. P. 42.

défavorable à vaincre."

Ste. Beuve now turns to the "Decline and Fall." Whether he had read it all is doubtful, for he admits that "sur l'ensemble de cette Histoire, je ne saurais mieux faire que de me couvrir de l'autorité d'un homme qui l'a étudiée à fond" - namely Guizot, - "qui a toutes les conditions requises pour être un bon juge."

He mentions the three stages through which Guizot passed while reviewing the French translation: first, his great interest in the History; then his regret at its touches of partiality; and lastly, his admiration for the author of so vast and erudite a work. To give an idea of its extent, Ste. Beuve details the contents of the first volume and characterizes the style as "soigné, étudié, et dont l'élégance va parfois jusqu'à la parure."² Whether it is true or not that this first volume lacks the grasp and easy mastery which distinguishes its successor, it certainly is true that Ste. Beuve is here indulging in no fulsome flattery! Considering the extreme difficulty which confronted Gibbon and remembering that the first volume was "a tentative trying of his instrument, a running over the keys in preparatory search for the right note,"³ a need of warmer praise would not have been out of keeping.

Nor is the criticism under which pass the subsequent volumes at any time enthusiastic. He calls the work, indeed, the most comprehensive of Histories, but he immediately and somewhat ungraciously adds that it will necessarily be surpassed by later studies. Where on the one hand he praises the historian for his order and method, he blames him, on the

1. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 364.
2. Ibid, 365.
3. Cf. Morison, op. cit., 115.

other, for his lack of fire and impetuosity: when Gibbon's prudent analysis and deduction is mentioned, the next sentence contains a reproach for failing to shed an all-illuminating light; if the work as a whole renders full justice to the spirit of the ancient world, it falls far short in doing the same service to that of the Christian world. And, as we have by this time learned to expect, Ste. Beuve returns to the religious question in the same spirit of querulousness which we have already noted. Why, he asks, has Gibbon not realised and appreciated the creation and introduction of a new heroism? Why does he not see that Christianity has inculcated in the hearts of men a livelier and more absolute conception of truth? Why can he not take pains to be wisely tolerant towards all forms of religious establishment....?

Why, we might ask in our turn, does Ste. Beuve ask these questions when he is perfectly aware of the answer? We submit that he evinces in this connection a spirit so petulant as to surprise and irritate his readers; that he harps too much on these unfortunate Chapters XV and XVI; that he shows a lack of real appreciation, not only of the triumph with which Gibbon surmounts his appalling difficulties, but also of the magnificence and brilliance of the triumph; in short that Ste. Beuve's criticism as a whole is needlessly severe.

As is readily admitted, the peculiarity of Gibbon's sceptical attitude towards all forms of religion in general and towards Christianity in particular is a blot, and a serious blot, in his work; but that granted, what remains? We have it on no less an authority than Mr. Saintsbury that "Gibbon had no other fault as a Historian than this,

1. Ibid., 366-7.

(i.e. his attitude towards religion) and even this was not fatal." Morison, too, insists that the distinction must be made, because "the offensive tone in question is confined to these two chapters."² Thus, having roundly censured Gibbon at the beginning of the first *Causerie*, might not Ste. Beuve very well have left it at that? One cannot but wish, indeed, that he had remembered and acted more fully upon some of his own dicta. For instance, referring to Génin, he calls him a "tape-dur, qui a toujours besoin de taper sur quelqu'un."³ Again: "le devoir de la critique dans tout sujet est avant tout de l'envisager sans parti pris, de se tenir exempte de préventions, fussent-elles les mieux fondées."⁴

In his faint praise of Gibbon's style Ste. Beuve would seem to be too greatly influenced by its general tendency towards grandiloquence. The great Person once launched that awful word 'verbose' against certain pages; and that there are other faults is no doubt true enough. But how little Ste. Beuve says of the rare and great excellence of the sounding phrase, the gorgeous distion with its stately wave-like role. Gibbon has not the "javelin," the "panting cry" of Montesquieu, says the critic,⁵ a little complacently; which means "in other words, the somewhat theatrical and rhetorical touch of the French."⁶ What of it? He had, at any rate, that "magnificence, that sense of the vast procession of events and that power of reproducing it, which gives an

1. Hist. of Eng. Lit., 627.

2. Op. cit., 122.

3. Caus. du lundi, XI, 464.

4. Iden, XII, 31; already quoted, op. p.31. Cp. also *Nouv. lundis*, II, 179; idem, VI, 316, etc.

5. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 368.

6. Saintsbury, Hist. of Crit., III, 323.

almost poetic self transcendence to an otherwise prosaic and 'philosophe' nature.¹

And when Ste. Beuve declares that Gibbon "se contente de n'être jamais bien net,"² especially in the famous account of Julian, he is strangely at variance with so high an authority as Morison whose book on Gibbon is usually admitted to be one of the most valuable and accurate. The latter, in the course of a lengthy analysis of this part of the History, maintains that Gibbon "has found his way with a prudence and an insight which extorted admiration even in his own day," and he goes on to commend the vividness of the narrative, the sheer historic insight and clear vision of the facts.³

That there are fine things well said in Ste. Beuve's *Causerie* goes without saying; the biographical parts, for example, are excellent. The extracts towards the conclusion of the *Causerie* given from correspondence between Walpole and Mme. du Deffand, the descriptions of the historian's attitude towards the Revolution, and of his last years - all this is interesting and pointed. But the general standard of the articles is far below normal; it never reaches the one with which he deals, for example, with Cowper, and he does not appear with that luminosity which Lowell⁴ praises as his dominant characteristic. His judgment is here blunted, says Mr. Saintsbury, who adds that the Englishman who turns to these two articles on Gibbon will be disappointed.⁵ And indeed, Ste. Beuve evinced a strongly grudging attitude towards one of whom it has recently been written: "Nobody at all ... succeeds so eminently as he does."⁶

1. Ibid,

2. *Caus. du lundi*, VIII, 368.

3. *Op. cit.*, 120.

4. *Cp. Prose Works*, III, 166.

5. *Cp. Hist. of Crit*, III, 323.

6. Saintsbury, *Peace of the Augustans*, 263.



VI. COWPER.

1.

Almost at the very beginning of this study of Cowper Ste. Beuve inserts his translation of "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture," and in so doing, strikes a note which is to echo through each of the three *Causeries*, - the note of deep if suppressed grief and longing so feelingly sounded in that poem and so characteristic of its writer. It is significant that Ste. Beuve not only took the trouble to translate the whole of the poem and to give it this prominence, but that he also should have singled out, at this early stage of the *Causerie*, a work, not ^{only} so characteristic in itself, but one which Cowper wrote more than fifty years after his mother's death. For one of the critic's maxims is that "on retrouve à coup sûr l'homme supérieur ... dans sa mère surtout,"³ and he frequently makes reference to "ceux à qui a manqué cette sollicitude d'une mère."⁴

Among these is Cowper, and thus we have from the Frenchman a study which, in point of sympathetic insight, will be by no means inferior to those of such English writers as Bagehot, Goldwin Smith, Leslie Stephen and E.V. Lucas, charming though these are. And the sympathy is all the more contagious, as Augustine Birrell⁵ has pointed out, because it is conveyed so quietly and tenderly. For whether it be that Ste. Beuve's methods are scientific or not, his heart was human, and here are none of the cheap sneers and clumsy jesting about old

1. *Causeries du lundi* XI, 117-165: 3 articles dated respectively Nov. 20th, 27th, and Dec. 4th, 1854, based on a translation of Southey's edition. Of the *Correspondence*, however, no translation had yet appeared, a fact which Ste. Beuve laments, since the *Correspondence* "égale en mérite et en pensée ses œuvres poétiques, et qui est encore plus naturelle et surtout plus aisée."

2. See Appendix.

3. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 18; cp. also *ibid*, III, 315; *ibid*, IV, 3, 194.

4. *Caus. du lundi*, VIII, 436.

5. Cp. A. Birrell, *Miscell. Essays*, II, 211.

women and balls of worsted in which a lesser critic might easily enough have indulged.

It has sometimes been said that Ste. Beuve was overfond of gossip details and that he was usually more interested in the life-history of his subject, - especially if that subject's temperament were of a morbid nature, - than in his works or deeds. It is true, certainly, that perhaps too often, Ste. Beuve becomes the literary biographer instead of the literary critic, and that he occasionally even goes so far as to show a disappointed astonishment when the individual he is discussing refuses, under his scalpel, to uncover any particular vice or deformity of mind or character.² Into the case of Cowper, however, anything of such a nature never enters. That is not to say that Cowper's case did not interest Ste. Beuve intensely. On the contrary, the reader cannot but be fascinated by the skill with which the various facts of the poet's childhood and upbringing are marshalled. How well has the critic succeeded in his expressed desire of making us know the man,³ and how beautifully does he make us feel "non seulement l'affectueuse emotion ... mais aussi ce qu'il y avait de particulièrement sensible, de tendrement sensitif et douloureux dans cette nature de Cowper qui avait avant tout besoin de la tiédeur et de l'abri du nid domestique."⁴ Nor is it difficult to imagine the interest of that French public in Cowper's trials and tribulations: his lack, almost from infancy, of a mother so well equipped to bring up the sensitive child: his earliest

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1. Cp. Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du XIXe. siècle*, III, 185; Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 304; B. Croce, *19th Cent. Lit.*, 309.
 2. Cp. *Caus. du lundi*, I, 163; *ibid.*, III, 139; *ibid.*, VIII, 387; *ibid.*, XV, 430.
 3. *Ibid.*, XI, 140.
 4. *Ibid.*, XI, 118.

religious training at the hands of rigorous teachers which implanted ineradically in his consciousness the terrifying images and paralysing doctrines of thorough-going Calvinistic theology: his dire experiences at school as a shrinking, wistful little being, flung into the midst of severe masters and unfeeling, unimaginative older boys; his sheer dread of appearing in public and the recurring spells of melancholia which projected over his later life the dim shadows of childhood. Ste. Beuve touches in all this so deftly, gently and pityingly as to offer a glaring contrast to that Life and Correspondence of Cowper by the Rev. T. S. Grimshaw² which, as Augustine Birrell may well say, "is not a nice book."³

The numerous quotations from Cowper's letters are not made so much with the aim of emphasising their literary excellence, as of showing forth his need for the warmth and shelter of a "nid domestique," and his quiet happiness when he achieves that need with the Unwin family. The hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," is cited in a verse translation as evidence of the poet's attempt to "combattre et réfuter sa propre terreur, de se rasurer contre ses craintes habituelles." For this now brings us to the critical year 1773, when Cowper had that dream which remained for ever one of the fixed points of his delusions and whose cry, "actum est de te, periisti," if it sank in happy hours to a whisper, was always there, ready to

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1. Ste. Beuve makes no mention, however, of Cowper's *Tirocinium* - that vigorous attack on the brutality of public schools; the reason is probably because it was not included in Southey's edition.
 2. London, 8 vols., 1835.
 3. *Op. cit.*, 213.
 4. By Mme. Langlais, daughter of Ste. Beuve's great friend Mme. Desbordes-Valmore. This translation is not particularly well-done; was it on that account that Ste. Beuve calls it a "traduction ou imitation en français?" (*Nouv. lundis*, XI, 136) In any case, he adds a prose version of his own which is much more successful.
 5. *Cp.* Cowper's correspondence, edited by T. Wright, 4 vols, 1904, I, 132-4.

swell to a sinister ringing in his ears. Nothing could console him, nothing could undeceive him, and the unforgiveable sin which he imagined he had committed would not even allow him the help of prayer: "il avait l'âme comme morte," says Ste. Beuve compassionately. The critic regrets that Cowper was without the help of a visible Church; had Cowper not hated Rome he might have felt himself not so terribly alone - "lancé seul comme il l'était sur cet océan insondable des tempêtes et des volontés divines."

"Who cannot wish he had been born in the old faith and come into the hands of some humane adroit confessor such as Balzac paints, who might have "cleansed the stuff'd bosom" at the right moment and led him back by mingled suggestion and authority to the paths of sanity, softening by nominal penances, gently graded, the more hideous of the patient's delusions." These words of a modern writer² are almost an exact echo of Ste. Beuve's: "une pensée se présente naturellement dans l'étude de cette maladie religieuse de Cowper: c'est qu'il eût été à souhaiter pour lui qu'entre un Dieu si puissant et si mystérieux ... il eût su voir encore et se donner quelques points d'appui rassurants, soit dans une église visible, ayant pour cela autorité et pouvoir, soit dans des intercesseurs amis comme le sont pour les âmes pieuses la Vierge et les Saints."³

But Ste. Beuve touches only lightly and delicately upon such religious questions and leads his reader out of the atmosphere of gloom which enshrouded the period circa 1773 to the gradually lightening and happier circumstances which

1. Ibid, 162.

2. O. Elton, Survey of Eng. Lit., 1780-1830, I, 82.

3. Caus. du lundi, XI, 128.

ensued. He translates the delightful passage from Cowper's Correspondence in which the poet describes his great friendship - it is not too strong a term - for the tame hares he was given to distract his mind. "Timide lui-même," says Ste. Beuve, seizing characteristically on the apt comparison, and yet giving due emphasis to the manner in which the poet's real self becomes gradually dominant, "et si sujet à la terreur, Cowper faisait de ces animaux à lui un rapprochement naturel; il leur appliquait le mot miséricordieux et humain du poète: 'non ignara mali'.¹" Of like purpose he gives a long quotation describing the poet's pleasure in the simple occupations of carpentry and gardening which helped him to "échapper à tout prix aux inconvénients et aux dangers du rien-faire."²

At the same time Cowper's poetic genius was becoming stronger; but in spite of the increasing number of letters and verses written around 1780, Ste. Beuve finds nothing of great importance to record. And indeed, interesting though they be to the student of Cowper's literary development, these set pieces in heroic couplets - "dull sermons in very indifferent verse" - and the prose essays after the manner of Steele which were contributed to the short-lived *Connoisseur*, would convey nothing of great moment to French readers.⁴ Ste. Beuve quotes one of the best of the poems of this period, "The Nightingale and the Glowworm," and compares it aptly enough with A. de Chenier's version of the epigram by Euenus of Paros,⁵ - "dans laquelle une cigale est aux prises avec une hirondelle: c'est

1. Ibid, 129.

2. Cp. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I, 630.

3. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 131.

4. But we shall consider this point later: cp. p. 61.

5. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 132.

la différence du sentiment grec au sentiment chrétien."

And here the first *Causerie* on Cowper comes to an end. It is, as we see, wholly biographical in interest and yet enough literary samples have been given to whet the appetite for more. The chief thing for Ste. Beuve was to endeavour in the space allotted to him to make his readers eager to learn more - in much the same manner as the serial story breaks off at a dramatic point. But there is nothing offensively dramatic about Ste. Beuve's treatment; no-one, we may suppose, can read this first *Causerie* without failing to love that poor strange figure which appears so vividly within these sixteen pages.

2.

The second *Causerie* deals more with literary matters than does the preceding one. It opens with what Ste. Beuve calls the theory of Cowper's correspondence: "écrire toujours un mot chassant l'autre et laissant courir la plume sans y tant songer, comme va la langue quand on cause, comme va le pied quand on chemine."¹ These words agree with Ste. Beuve's own maxim expressed elsewhere: il faut écrire comme on parle et ne pas trop parler comme on écrit."²

"It is hard," says Professor Elton, "to say anything about the form of Cowper's letters except that it is always right,"³ and so it may not be surprising that Ste. Beuve finds after all but little to say. True, as becomes a devout lover of "sobriété française,"⁴ and one who was wont to take pride from

1. This is a free translation of part of Cowper's letter to Unwin, Aug. 6th, 1780.

2. Cahiers, 121.

3. Op. cit., I, 78.

4. Cp. Port. Cont., V, 459

the assertion that the appreciation of fine style is essentially a French endowment, he winces slightly at "quelques bizarreries au milieu de mille grâces," one of which he cites - the comparing of the state of the poet's soul to the planing of a plank, the shavings of which are likened to his first thoughts. This sort of objection is doubtless sound enough - though we would say it applies with more force to Cowper's poetry than to his prose - but it is somewhat surprising to find Ste. Beuve going on to declare that Cowper in his letters "a le goût plus hardi et original que sûr." For Cowper is never self-conscious and never, on the other hand, does he approach that most offensive of all attitudes, over-innocence; "his letters are among the very best in English, perfectly unaffected and natural." "C'est un délicat," Ste. Beuve continues, "mais un délicat qui a senti des choses si particulières et si aiguës, qu'il osera infiniment, lorsqu'il s'agira d'exprimer au vif ses façons d'être et de penser. Il a des images qui étonnent, des comparaisons étranges et qu'il soutient et prolonge avec une finesse un peu pointilleuse ou compassée. Il ne se refuse aucune de celles qui lui viennent à la fantaisie....." It is true that the critic qualifies these words by adding: "A ces endroits-là, il peut paraître subtil et recherché; mais le plus ordinairement l'imprévu de ses images ne fait qu'ajouter un agrément de plus à leur exactitude."

Yet the censure rankles a little until it is forgotten in the delight, so obviously felt by Ste. Beuve and so ably

1. *Nouv. lundis*, VI, 393.

2. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 134.

3. *Ibid.*, 134.

4. *Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, 588.

imparted to his reader, in the Letters as a whole. He cites in his own translation the famous letter to Newton (dated 16th April, 1780) describing the duel between the "travelled man but not the travelled gentleman" and "our poor little robins," and adds the equally famous description of the visit of the political candidate.² These two letters are quoted as fine examples "de ces ironies pénétrantes comme en ont les natures douloureuses et timides ^{et} douces d'organes plus fins, et que choquent, sans s'en douter, les brusqueries ou les grossièretés d'alentour"; they are, he adds, worthy of a Pliny the Younger.

Lastly comes a reference to the "lettre badine"³ describing the escape of Puss, and Ste. Beuve contrasts its light humour with the "très grave et très sensee" epistle written just ten days later to his cousin Mrs. Cowper, the beautiful conclusion of which Ste. Beuve felt compelled to translate.

It is especially in Cowper's correspondence, Ste. Beuve maintains, "qu'on apprend à le connaître et à pénétrer dans les mystères de son esprit ou de sa sensibilité";⁴ and it

1. See Appendix.

2. To Newton, March 29th, 1784. In singling out this letter for quotation - "une lettre qu'on cite ordinairement quand on a à parler de la Correspondance de Cowper" - Ste. Beuve was no doubt influenced by the fact, which he states in a footnote (ibid, 135) that "cette lettre a été citée par Jeffrey dans l'article qu'il donna autrefois dans la Revue d'Edimburg, (of June 1804) sur la vie de Couper Haley. Je la trouve citée aussi et traduite dans la Bibliothèque universelle de Genève qui contient un travail bien fait sur Cowper. (Jan.- Feb., 1854)

3. To Newton, Aug. 21st, 1780.

4. Caus. du lundi, XI, 135.

were surely ungracious to quarrel with these Letters - as has been done - because of certain limitations of their range or because they cannot enter into competition with the letters of Swift or Carlyle, of Keats or Coleridge. Ste. Beuve, in any case, apart from his gentle censure of a few "bizarreries" is well content. "Le charme de la Correspondance de Cowper," he sums up, "est dans cette succession d'images, de pensées et de nuances qui se déroulent avec une vivacité variée, mais d'un cours égal et paisible. On saisit mieux dans ses lettres les sources véritables de sa poésie, de la vraie poésie domestique et de la vie privée: un badinage encore affectueux, une familiarité qui ne dédaigne rien de ce qui intéresse, comme étant trop humble et trop petit, mais tout à côté, de l'élévation, ou plutôt de la profondeur. N'oublions pas non plus l'ironie, la malice, une raillerie fine et douce comme elle paraît dans les lettres que j'ai citées." In these few words we get all that needs to be said about the Letters. Even Lamb, we imagine, would not allow Ste. Beuve's depreciation of the "images qui étonnent, des comparaisons étranges," to make him refuse his friendship to the French critic, who very evidently was not offended with the "divine chit-chat of Cowper."

Nor does Ste. Beuve ever forget the paramount importance of these Letters for Cowper: the critic fully realises how they ministered to the long spells of comparative happiness which the poet enjoyed and it is the chequering of soft lights with the heavy shadows of the latter's life which gives these letters their effortless distinction and makes them the picture of a soul.

1. Cp. O. Elton, op. cit., I, 78.

2. Cp. Lamb's letter to Coleridge, 1796.

3.

Then comes the main part of Ste. Beuve's criticism of the poetry. He had already referred in passing to some of the minor set poems inspired by Cowper's experiences and circumstances.¹ The fact that the poet's earliest pieces were mainly "fables, où ses rouges-gorges, ses chardonnerets avaient leur rôle et amenaient leur morale toujours humaine et sensible bienque puritaine" leads him to find a relationship with La Fontaine, but he hastily adds that this relationship consists solely in Cowper's need "d'être excité, soutenu par l'amitié" just as La Fontaine required the inspiration of a Bouillon or a Sablonière!² Nor are the serious poems - "Hope", "Truth" and the rest given any more than passing mention; the above-mentioned remark about dull sermons in indifferent verse is a fair translation of Ste. Beuve's "vers d'assez longs sujets, tout sérieux d'abord et presque théologiques... des fleurs d'hiver, qui exhalent une austerité pas trop morale."³

It is possible, however, to argue that Ste. Beuve - and many an English critic - is a little unfair in so casual a dismissal of those earlier poems. No doubt they are austere and narrow and not seldom worded in such a way as to cause the reader to wince; but the spirit of the age was equally austere and narrow, and a phrase such as "fountains filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins" would not horrify these who, like Cowper, devoutly believed in the form of religion preached by Newton in his fiery, bitter sermons, and ruthlessly enforced by such men as Whitfield and Wilber-

1. V. supra, p. 56.

2. Caus. du lundi, XI, 136. Cp. also Elton, op. cit. 78: "Cowper's need to be moved by a happy little excitement of the nerves...."

3. Caus. du lundi, XI, 136.

force. No wonder, then, that these verses and hymns are sternly doctrinal, and no wonder also that they are bare statements of faith untouched by any poetic fire and grace, when one remembers with what anguish of soul Cowper must have written them, with that dark pitiless voice of doom ever ringing in his ears. These "fleurs d'hiver" are not great poetry, but it is none the less a little surprising that Ste. Beuve, usually so readily sympathetic and quick to recognise the grim irony of things when he sees it, does not here temper his judgment with a word or two of appreciation and respect, not only for the undoubted purity of style and diction in some of the passages, and in those where he is to be seen making tentative efforts to escape from "the correct style," but also for the sheer force of will power which Cowper showed in tackling religious problems at all.¹

Probably the French critic was anxious to hasten to his review of Cowper's best poems and, not unnaturally, to convey to his readers the best side of his author's poetic genius. It was obviously not possible to refer in detail to all of Cowper's numerous poems.

It should be added, however, that in the *Causerie*² written a fortnight before the one with which we are dealing - by which time Ste. Beuve was probably busy preparing the present essay - the critic analysed Cowper's "Retirement," and had called it the "best and most beautiful" of Cowper's first collection, and compared it favourably with that "poésie sans poésie"³ of St. Lambert's "Saisons." This would be but faint praise, however, were it not for the evident

- 1 "In the Olney Hymns, it is high proof of his manliness and self-control that in none of them does he seek to give utterance to (his) feelings of despair." Courthorpe, *Hist. of Eng. Poetry*, V, 352.
2. Nov. 13th, 1854. Cp. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 114.
3. Lanson, *Hist. de la litt. française*, 641.

and genuine pleasure with which Ste. Beuve emphasises the delicate freshness and charming innocence of Cowper's lines. Their grave and solemn passages make him call Cowper "le Milton de la vie privée," and their imagery he thinks worthy of a Christian Lucretius, "Vous voilà loin," he concludes, "de St. Lambert."¹

A note is added regarding the small success of Cowper's first volume and part of his rather wistful letter² is quoted to show that if Johnson remained grimly silent, yet such a one as Franklin found praise for it. Perhaps, also, Ste. Beuve was not sorry for the opportunity thus afforded of making a malicious reference to "ce tyran de la critique":³ we have already seen how eager the French critic is "to have a dig" at the Doctor!

John Gilpin is next singled out for comment and a lengthy description of its story is given. Here again the critic was evidently attracted not so much by the poem itself. One feels, indeed, that Ste. Beuve rather wondered at the poem's success: he ends his analysis of its plot with the candid confession that its truly English humour is beyond him: one must be native-born truly to appreciate it, and besides, "il faut voir ces choses dans l'original avec l'humour qui y est propre."⁴ Rather was he struck by the "ironie des choses" associated with the poem: - the vicissitudes of its history and the seeming contradiction in terms which it affords of the poet's character - that prim yet ticklesome humour contrasting with that morbid temperament - and the fact that

1. Gaus. du lundi, XI, 113.

2. To Unwin, June 12th, 1782.

3. Gaus. du lundi XI 138.

4. Ibid, 144.

"ce poète moraliste et austère qui avait visé à réformer le monde" should suddenly become, like a second Besaugiers, the favourite of the fashionable world.

4.

And so to the coping stone of Cowper's poetic reputation "The Task," "touchant et familier, naturel et élevé," Ste. Beuve sketches, perhaps a trifle perfunctorily, the ideas contained in its first hundred lines: "très ingénieux et d'un badinage élevant" as the opening is, the critic feels that Cowper is acquitting himself of his task a trifle stiffly. It is, however, exceedingly doubtful whether Delille could rise, as Ste. Beuve suggests he does,³ even to the somewhat uninspired level which Cowper at this point attains. The "cruel Abbé," as Lanson⁴ feelingly calls him, does not appeal with the gentle gaiety and playful humour that is even here so characteristic of Cowper. Delille, with his long enumerations and wearisome descriptions, his "elegant" and flowing circumlocutions,⁵ and his explanation of a nature which he knew only through Buffon - and surely he and Cowper were wide enough apart! True, the Abbe's kindly nature does show a certain kinship to Cowper's, but as poets there can be very little resemblance between them! One wonders if Ste. Beuve

1. Ibid, 143.

2. Ste. Beuve makes here a slight, but for him very unusual slip: he gives 1784 instead of 1785 as the year in which *The Task* was published.

3. Ibid, 145.

4. Op. cit., 841.

5. Cp. for example Cowper's well-known reference to "the cups that cheer but not inebriate" with the Frenchman's equivalent:

"Le feuillage chinois, par un doux succès,
De nos dîners tardifs corrige les excès,
Et, faisant chaque soir sa ronde accoutumée,
D'une chère indigeste apaise la fumée."

Cp. C.H.C. Wright, *Hist. of French Lit.*, p. 571.

failed to see in these opening lines on "The Sofa" that the latter was indulging in a mildly playful yet tactful parody of Milton? No doubt, Cowper hardly strikes one as capable of being the ideal parodist, nor, devout worshipper as he was at the Miltonic shrine, does one readily believe he would wish to parody his beloved master. Nevertheless, though Cowper does not go so far as to merit Dr. Johnson's heavy frown which was bent on those who sought "to degrade the sounding words and stately construction of Milton by an application of the lowest and most trivial things," these hundred lines are gently and playfully parodic. Is it possible, then, that Ste. Beuve's keen sight has for the moment become a little dimmed? Is he being subconsciously influenced by the fact that much of "The Task" is certainly written in the wornout and didactic 18th century manner - an old garment, as it were, patched with new cloth?

It is interesting to note how Ste. Beuve returns to his comparison, above-mentioned, of Cowper with Delille. After a short eulogy of the latter, he suddenly breaks off with "Laissons les comparaisons inutiles," as if feeling he was belittling Cowper. Yet, at the beginning of the third *Causerie*, he again sings the praises of Delille, seeming, indeed, to go somewhat out of his way to do so. And once again he seems to think he is, by implication, being unjust to the English poet, for a page or so later on he admits that Delille's pictures are done with "une execution moins sure" than is shown in the "polis tableaux" of Cowper's "Winter Evening." It seems fairly clear, then, that Ste. Beuve's

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1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 149.
 2. Ibid, 154.
 3. Ibid, 157.

preference is, on the whole, for Cowper, though it is not a very marked one.

The real - le vrai - Cowper is to be seen at his best and truest, Ste. Beuve declares, in the verses following, and he translates the next two hundred lines beginning

"The sofa suits
The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,
Though on a sofa, may I never feel!":

and which goes on to tell of his boyhood life of the countryside of the Thames and his later affection for the beauty of the Ouse and its meadows. Here, Ste. Beuve points out, one sees what is not often to be noted in Cowper, viz. "une vue d'ensemble de la gradation de la perspective." Usually, he asserts, Cowper is so influenced by his religious point of view that "un petit détail lui semble en effet aussi important qu'un grand objet: tous s'égalisent par rapport à Dieu ... qui se révèle aussi merveilleusement dans les uns que dans les autres." "Comparé à Thomson il a plus que celui-ci l'art de noter les traits particuliers et les détails curieux des choses...." The result is, he goes on to say, that Thomson "est un descriptif plus large il y a des masses chez Thomson." In these above-mentioned two hundred lines, however, Cowper has been able to conciliate and combine both styles - mass and breadth with delicacy and minuteness.

Here is good criticism, and it is interesting to connect it with Ste. Beuve's remark in another *Causerie* in which the critic is agreeing with the strictures placed upon St. Lambert's "Saisons" by such eminent people as Madame du Deffand and Horace Walpole. When he finds Voltaire praising the "Saisons" at the expense of the "Seasons", his indignation makes him roundly declare that the sage of Ferney did not by any means always give

1. De la Poésie de la nature, *Caus.* du lundi, XI, 102-116.

evidence of real literary taste. He goes on to consider other poets of the same genre - Delille, Roucher and Ducis - all of whom he puts more or less on the same level with St. Lambert and, by implication, inferior to Thomson. And so, when he makes, as he does, Cowper's best poetry the high water mark of appreciation we have sufficient proof of Ste. Beuve's sympathy for the Romantics - here, at least, for this point will be dealt with later - and of the fact that he would place in order of merit first Cowper, then Thomson and thirdly these French writers who so closely resemble our own minor authors of the ages of Pope and Johnson.²

It is obvious to lovers of Cowper that these two hundred lines form the cream of Book I of "The Task," Ste. Beuve has as usual chosen well. For "le vrai Cowper" is indeed most himself when he turns his back - as he does here - on the older poetical tradition and, in sudden dazzling flashes, lets us glimpse the beginnings of that true naturalism which was to be the triumphant and dominant impulse of later English poetry. A new voice vibrating with simple and earnest truths is sounding throughout these beautiful descriptions of the poet's "rural walk through lanes of grassy swarth," and Ste. Beuve's quick ear has heard it. So ends the second Causerie, thanks chiefly to the long quotation from Book I of "The Task," in an atmosphere of freshness and quiet natural beauty.

5.

The third and last Causerie consists for the most part of an analysis of the remaining books of "The Task," interspersed with occasional quotations. The points are brought out with a

1. Ibid, XI, 106.

2. Cowper's poetry "stands mid-way between the 'Seasons' and the 'Excursion.'" Courthorpe, 350.

delightful sureness of touch and with an appreciation and sympathy wholly admirable. Cowper's love of the countryside, his deep tenderness and true feeling for suffering humanity, his intense sense of religion, and the like, are clearly brought into line.

Ste. Beuve's delight in the sheer beauty of the poem, especially in its descriptive passages, is most infectious; the praise he bestows upon the parts he quotes is high. The lovely "Winter Morning," for example, which begins Book II and from which he quotes at length, he calls "exquis et mémorable perlée et finie et toutefois si vivante et si naturelle."¹ The cosy serenity of the domestic circle depicted in Book IV:

"Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in..."

reminds him of Horace - *O noctes caenaeque Deum* - but with an added originality which belongs to Cowper alone. It is this note of joyful eulogy which sounds repeatedly throughout his long analysis of "The Task" and with which he brings it to a close. The chief impression on the reader's mind, therefore, is the very obvious pleasure which the critic finds in the poem as a whole, and such an impression Ste. Beuve equally obviously and rightly intended us to have.

While rounding off the biographical sketch, he cannot resist quoting part of "cette tendre et incomparable plainte, écrite avec des larmes,"² 'To Mary', although he had already promised that the lengthy quotation from "The Winter Morning" was to be his last.

And it is then, at long last, that occurs his mention of

1. Ibid, 157.

2. Ibid, 161.

the "Yardley Oak." "Cette pièce," he writes, "est empreinte de sa manière la plus vigoureuse, avec ses qualités et ses défauts: elle a de l'inégalité de style, de la complication de pensée: mais de la grandeur ... et décèle un disciple énergique de Milton."

This, no doubt, is true enough, but is it not disappointingly brief? "Yardley Oak" is surely one of the very finest works of Cowper's imagination, informed with the real spirit of the animism of nature and totally different from the rather dreary platitudes in which a Young or a Blair would indulge on the mutability of things. In it, Cowper has found his own style, and unfinished though the poem be, there is more than enough of a loftiness of mind, an exquisite faithfulness to nature and high nobility of writing to atone for occasional blemishes of phrasing or of metre. One cannot but wish that Ste. Beuve had said more about it, if only to pay it the compliment, as it were, of enumerating "its defects or its inequalities of style." Even granting that he was writing for the benefits of readers who did not know Cowper, and who consequently would not be on the lookout for the critic's comments upon their favourite poem, and with all due allowance for the fact that Ste. Beuve had always to conform, more or less, to certain limits of length, who cannot feel, in spite of it all, that a few sentences less from some of the quotations, or from some of the rather lengthy remarks about the poet's mental health, or from the criticism of the "Table Talk," - meagre though that is - might have been well lost had the resultant space been used for a fuller appreciation of such a master work? For many an English reader, this paucity of comment on "Yardley Oak" must, we repeat, come as a disappointment.

1. Ibid, 163.

The reference made to Cowper's translation of Homer - "une traduction complète et fidèle en vers blanc"¹ - is certainly brief enough, but not, under the circumstances, inexcusably so, for the Homer can hardly be numbered amongst Cowper's successes. That is not to say that, in its own way, it is not interesting enough, for it shows how the translator, avoiding what he called Pope's inflated and strutting phraseology and rhyming jingle goes, as Professor Elton² points out, to the other extreme. The preface itself is worthy of note, by reason of the soundness both of its prose style and of its criticism. It is possible that Ste. Beuve's admiration for Pope caused him to hasten over the Homer.

But if the appraisal of the "Yardley Oak" is disappointing, that of "The Castaway" is almost absurd: "la peinture d'un matelot tombé en pleine mer pendant le voyage de l'amiral Anson, s'efforçant de suivre à la nage le vaisseau d'où ses compagnons lui tendent en vain des cables, et qu'emporte la tempête: il y voyait une image lugubre de sa destinée." This is literally nothing more than a mere definition of the title, to which is added a very perfunctory and insufficient comment. Surely "The Castaway" one of the few poems written in a lucid interval just before the author's end, sounding like the wail of a damned spirit and giving a thrill of tragic finality to his life, deserves more mention than this? The quiet but intense concentration of it strikes a note so deeply resonant as to vibrate loud above the gentle melody of most 18th century poetry. To dismiss so offhandedly what has been considered his greatest poem³ is an unaccountable blunder on Ste. Beuve's part. That

1. Ibid, 159.

2. Op. cit., 86.

3. Cp. Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Lit, 588.

such apparent lack of appreciation for this poem should follow so closely upon the scanty praise dealt out to "Yardley Oak" makes us wonder whether Ste. Beuve did really grasp the true inward beauty and power of both works. He certainly did not fully taste the flavour of "John Gilpin": it would appear that for "The Castaway" and "Yardley Oak" his palate was also dulled.

The conclusion of the *Causerie* deals with certain points of comparison and contrast between Cowper and Rousseau. Ste. Beuve sees a resemblance between the mental states of both. Cowper "se voyait voué à une réprobation irrévocable," while the other "se voyait l'objet d'une conspiration universelle." Both again are lovers of the country - the one has no more affection for London than the other has for Paris. But in their common love of nature there arises the contrast between their separate outlooks. "Rousseau aspire à se passer d'autrui, affecte de s'isoler et de se mettre en guerre ou en divorce avec le genre humain; Cowper au contraire aime à devoir aux autres, à ceux qu'il aime, et à se sentir leur obligé."¹

And here Ste. Beuve states definitely what he had previously implied: he considers that while descriptions of nature by French writers, whose elevated prose (note the noun) presents such beautiful and magnificent images, are almost as fine as those of English literature, he regrets the want of any union "de la poésie de la famille et du foyer avec celle de la nature." The lack of this union, which, he adds, is an essential defect of Rousseau, arises from the influence that the more private, sheltered and sweeter home life of England inevitably inspires in its poetry, "dont la douce et poétique ferveur on vient de voir

1. *Caus.* du lundi, 160 ff.

2. *Ibid.*, XI, 162.

tant de purs exemples." But, by "une application heureuse," French poets can and do succeed in taking a leaf out of our book, and he cites Bernardin de St. Pierre as one who had already given proofs, though neither so excellent nor so popular as "The Task," of what may yet be accomplished in France.

6.

Let us try now to sum up as briefly as may be the general effect which Ste. Beuve's appraisal of Cowper leaves with us.

Enough has been said to bring out the tactful understanding and real sympathy which the critic entertained for Cowper's strange character. Although we now know that the poet's madness was temperamental and that his experiences were rather the occasion than the cause of his malady, Ste. Beuve's acute interest in his case is justified. "And be it remembered that Cowper's miseries are not wholly to the loss of literature: that is the only reason why we speak of them. Had he been saved by some fortunate medicine of the soul, we should not have had, as we now have, ringing in our ears the terrible, almost Shakespearian cries of his double self, of that which suffered or of that which watched and worded the suffering. He might have made more of his gay mundane verse: but we should ^{not} have known his full power as a writer; indeed, in a pitiable indirect way, we owe his existing poetry to his disease: "despair made amusement necessary," he wrote, "and I find poetry the most agreeable amusement." Thus, much of his best poetry was done to hold the enemy at bay; but we also owe to the enemy many rare, strange and bitter pages - those Letters to Newton, and afterwards the Letters to Teedon, and "The Castaway" - that enriched English Literature at his expense." In other words, Cowper "n'eut

1. Ibid, 163.
2. O. Elton, op. cit, 83.

point réussi, à exprimer si au vif la poésie s'il n'avait eu ses orages intérieurs étranges et ses bouleversements profonds." Here, once more Ste. Beuve's judgment is corroborated by modern criticism.

There is, however, one point which the critic might with advantage have made more evident, namely the sinister influence which Newton exercised on the poet. "No more dangerous adviser, if this world had been searched over, says Bagehot,² "could have been found; prompt encouragement to cheerful occupation, quiet amusement, gentle and unexhausting society would have warded off many a term of insanity." The terrible ex-slaveship captain willed otherwise and the result was disastrous. Yet Ste. Beuve refers only casually to Newton as a man revered by a chosen flock "qui essaya d'occuper l'imagination de Cowper et de la détourner par une voie religieuse." Newton meant well, no doubt, but we know what road is paved with good intentions, and it is indeed strange that Ste. Beuve, voluble as he is on the subject, does not so much as hint at the sinister importance of the Newtonian influence,³ and at the abyss to which that desolate "voie religieuse" was in truth leading.

We have also alluded to the faint and disappointing praise which Ste. Beuve bestows on such genuinely poetic and important works as "Yardley Oak" and "The Castaway," and have suggested that part, at least, of the reason is to be associated with journalistic considerations of space. On the other hand,

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 157.

2. Literary Studies, Vol. 1., 249. Everyman, 1916.

3. Cp. Mr. Saintsbury's remark: "Cowper would have been ... a greater figure in English Literature, if the Rev. Mr. Newton had been early conceded to the sharks." Peace of the Augustans, 333.

however, the eulogy with which "The Task" is described seems at times, and in comparison, almost unduly high. For example, when the critic goes out of his way to censure such slight bizarreries of metaphor in the Letters as is described above, it would be expected that he would certainly comment unfavourably upon the usage of words like 'arthritic,' 'oscitancy', 'stercoraceous' and the like, which occur in "The Task." For, after all, the Letters are in prose, and such words as those just mentioned, though no doubt clumsy enough, might possibly be defended. But, occurring as they do in a poem, their effect is correspondingly the more startling. The Letters, moreover, were not written primarily with a view to publication; Cowper, indeed, expressly said that in his correspondence he is clear of the charge of premeditation. With a poem, however, the circumstances are exactly opposite.

Further, such dispraise as Ste. Beuve does give could reasonably be sterner. For, remembering the somewhat scanty justice¹ he doles out to the earlier satires like "Truth" and "Hope," which were written in a period of storm and stress, we might well expect more to be said of the "dull and unreadable stretches" of "The Task." Instead comes a mild remark now and then about the poet's too dominant austerity - "presque hébraïque par la rigidité" - or the "inconvenance" he has of more than once composing sermons in verse. And even this gentle censure is mitigated by the side attack on "les poètes orageux et hardis comme Byron, les natures mondaines et vives comme Thomas Moore or Haslitt,"³ who, unlike the moral Cowper

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 125-6.

2. Vide supra, p. 58.

3. Ibid, 156.

and the grave Wordsworth scorn the sweets of domestic bliss. It is just because of a general lack of "vertu pratique et l'habitude dans la teneur de la vie," Ste. Beuve hints darkly, that no real success has attended the efforts of such writers as do seek to introduce into France pictures of familiar and domestic poetry. He concludes this sudden onslaught with Bossuet's gloomy warning to the too many ungodly French writers who achieve no end but that of filling the universe with the follies of their ill-spent youth.

Although the satires and didactic poems, which Ste. Beuve dismisses, have doubtless much rather windy rhetoric, it should be remembered that out of his life Cowper lost twenty years owing to his mental disease. During that time he read almost nothing; at no time, indeed, could he be called a well-read man. Ste. Beuve quotes his remark about being thirteen before reading any English poet, but it is questionable whether the critic always gives full credit to the astonishing fact that Cowper did accomplish what he has done. For it is this huge gap in his lifetime, alongside with the spirit of the times, which accounts for the ill-success of the early poems as well as for the narrowness of the outlook noticeable in nearly all his work. It is not that we are wishing here for praise where none is due: but a word of what Boileau called "louange agréable" would, in the circumstances, have been generous and not out of place.

Lastly, we would have liked Ste. Beuve's opinion as to the place Cowper was to occupy in the history of English Literature. "L'esprit et l'ardeur du poète montrent combien Cowper s'élève au-dessus de l'ordre des poètes descriptifs et pittoresques proprement dits": this somewhat vague remark, added to a reference to Cowper as "l'un des pères du réveil de la poésie

1. Ibid, 153.

anglaise" constitute all that Ste. Beuve will allow himself to say.¹ It may be urged, reasonably enough, that it was no part of the critic's task to indulge in literary prophesy and it is true that the *Causeries*, at once semi-biographical and semi-critical, are very often left without being rounded off by a set judgment, or any kind of formal summary of qualities or defects. Yet Cowper's position is of such special importance; the forces at work within him are so exceptionally interesting. One can watch him, as it were, working out of the classical tradition, gradually losing the metallic ring of his first satires, and moving towards simplicity and grace and the "language of the heart." And as a craftsman his power and versatility are so extraordinary; things so different from each other as "The Task" and "John Gilpin," "The Wreck of the Royal George" and the inimitable Letters are amazing, coming as they do from that gentle, timid soul. The case of Cowper, therefore, does seem to call for some kind of placing. And when we remember Ste. Beuve's admiration for Pope on the one hand and his interest in the innovations of Wordsworth and Coleridge on the other, it is disappointing not to have some such judgment on the poet who so strangely stands with a foot in either camp. Ste. Beuve had probably read Wordsworth's "revolutionary" "Preface," and his own early poems testify to his response to the teachings of Wordsworth and Cowper whom he called his "early brothers."²

On the whole, then, we submit that there are certain

1. Ibid, 142.

2. In a letter, dated Nov. 2nd, 1863, to M. William Reynard, Librarian at the Academie de Lausanne, Ste. Beuve, referring to the Lake Poets writes: "Je les ai devinés comme parents et frères aînés, bien plus tôt que je ne les ai connus d'abord et étudiés de près." Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, IV, 455.

lacunae and inequalities in Ste. Beuve's criticism; but these objections are, after all, essentially personal. Amid so much general excellence they could never interfere with anyone's enjoyment - be he Frenchman or Englishman - of the three *Causeries*. "No matter what other authors have to be postponed," says Gosse, "Ste. Beuve must be read."¹ Bagheot, writing in 1855, less than a year after Ste. Beuve had written these essays, declared that "we do not remember to have seen his (Cowper's) name in any continental book we cannot recall any such familiar and cursory mention as would evince a real knowledge and a hearty appreciation of his writings."² One wonders whether, ten years or so later, he ever came across the 11th volume of the *Causeries du lundi*.³

1. More Books on Table, p. 14.

2. *Op. cit.*, 229.

3. Other references to Cowper are frequent throughout Ste. Beuve's writings, but none of them contain anything of great importance. For the most part they repeat what he has said in the above three *Causeries*. In the *Portraits Contemporains*, I, 337 ff., for example, he praises Cowper's descriptions of nature: "la nature anglaise domestique, si verts, si fleurie, si lustree."

VII. TAINÉ'S HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.¹

1.

Ste. Beuve starts off with a modest disclaimer as to his abilities to review adequately this great work, and announces his desire to mention only what seem to him the most probable conclusions which may be drawn from it. But that he is not incompetent to undertake the task becomes fairly clear from the acuteness of one of his first remarks: i.e., that much of the adverse criticism to which Taine's History was subjected would have been mitigated had the title been "Histoire de la race et de la civilisation anglaises par la littérature." And while bestowing full justice and praise upon the boldness of Taine's famous theories - of which Ste. Beuve himself was almost the inventor² - he quickly places his finger on the salient weak point. Despite - or because of - the theories, "il lui échappe encore quelque chose, il lui échappe le plus vif de l'homme, ce qui fait que de vingt hommes ou de cent, ou de mille, soumis en apparence presque aux mêmes conditions intrinsèques ou extérieures, pas un ne se ressemble Enfin l'étincelle même du génie en ce qu'elle a d'essentiel, il ne l'a pas atteinte et il ne vous la montre pas dans son analyse."³

But it is not so much Ste. Beuve's criticism of Taine's work which interests us here as the remarks which it brings

1. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, dated May 30th, 1864.

2. In his article (*Portraits Contemp.*, III.) on R. Töpffer, written in 1841, while Taine was still a schoolboy, we have race and milieu discussed at some length, and even the moment is clearly enough indicated. But there is no kind of attempt to base upon them a scientific system. Cp., also, in this connection, the article on Benjamin Constant in the same volume. Other instances are not lacking: cp. *Caus. du lundi*, XV, "De la tradition en littérature"; *Nouv. lundis*, IX, "Essai de critique naturelle"; *Nouv. lundis*, III, "Chateaubriand," especially pp. 15 ff.

3. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 69.

forth concerning English Literature. One cannot, however, resist the temptation to exclaim in parenthesis upon the charming suavity and friendliness with which Ste. Beuve touches upon Taine's character, his biography, his love of philosophy, his early writings, and, once again, his theories. This first article is a pure delight from end to end, and each fresh reading of it brings fresh pleasure alike for the grace of its style as for its modesty and the pregnancy of its observations.

2.

in
It is the second article that Ste. Beuve deals with the great History. He has nothing to say about the beginnings of English literature, for the one reason at least that Taine himself gives comparatively few actual literary details. Compare, for example, the first two chapters of Book I in Taine's History and then the first two Books of Saintsbury's Short History! In each case the subject matter extends to the pre-Chaucerian era; but what a difference in the respective treatments! The force of Ste. Beuve's remark that Taine should have changed the title of his work becomes very apparent. And it is also apparent that Ste. Beuve had no very great knowledge of our early literature, for otherwise he would assuredly have had something to say upon the airy manner in which Taine omits names and periods. As it is, he contents himself with a few remarks of praise for Taine's comparisons between the national genius of the English and that of the French:-English humour and high spirits as opposed to French "malice," the typical Robin Hood character as contrasted with the figure of Seigneur Ysangrain.

One is justified, therefore, in wondering what exactly Ste. Beuve means when he says that Taine's book "dans sa composition a l'avantage de mettre surtout en lumiere les parties les plus

1. Our references are made to Van Laun's English translation, 4 vols., Edin., 1873.

difficiles et les plus ardues, les hautes époques antérieures de la littérature anglaise."¹ Why the 'surtout' in particular? It cannot be gainsaid that Taine gives an interesting and racy account of Saxon and Norman civilisations; but so far as the most difficult and arduous parts of the main epochs of early English literature are concerned Taine is hardly illuminating!

His speed and verve must also have affected Ste. Beuve, for the way in which his second article jumps from era to era is somewhat breathless. He quotes Pope's remark that English literature, as a whole, may be arranged under four names: those of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Dryden; adds that of Shakespeare; goes on to utter a word of praise for Byron, and then returns to mention the Renaissance (which Taine, he says, treats admirably). But except for a passing allusion to Chaucer - "le premier en date des poètes et des conteurs anglais" in whom are to be observed gifts of humour and description, Ste. Beuve says nothing about anyone else! He hastens on, giving an approving pat on the back to Taine for his enthusiasm for Sidney in prose and Spenser in poetry, and for the independence of his opinion which "le mène, en certains cas, à dépasser les jugements convenus." In this connection, Hudibras and the Pilgrim's Progress are mentioned, and then we double back for a bare mention of names - Massenger, Ford, Webster, who "n'ont nulle part été expliqués et exprimes aussi énergiquement que chez Mons. Taine."² Shakespeare is just mentioned; so are Bacon and Burton, and Sir Thomas Browne is honoured with a brief quotation which leads the critic to indulge in an apostrophe to Chance: "Hasard, Hasard," he cries, "si l'on veut rester vrai, on ne fera jamais ta part assez grande"³etc. The suspicion

1. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 93.

2. Ibid, 96.

3. Ibid, 97-8.

that Ste. Beuve is here indulging in some little padding seems strengthened by a reference, which strikes one as rather irrelevant, to a report on Egyptian antiquities that had just been published by a Mons. de Rouge!

It is all extremely disappointing. It may be urged, and no doubt urged quite legitimately, that Ste. Beuve is reviewing Taine's book on English literature and not English literature itself. But is it not tantalising to have nothing from the reviewer as to his own likes or dislikes, nothing about Shakespeare, next to nothing about Chaucer, Spenser...? What actual criticism there is, apart from general eulogy of Taine's gallant independence and so forth, deals with the author's style and is therefore not germane to our present study. It is, however, a real fault in Ste. Beuve that he has nothing to remark upon Taine's shortcomings as a literary historian. The work omits so much, that it would be easier to enumerate the writers he does mention than those he does not. None of the great Scottish poets of the 15th century, for example, receive any mention; Mallory, Elyot, Haywood, Wyatt, and scores of others are passed over in silence. Open Volume I in quest of a reasoned statement on, let us say, 15th century prose, or on the rise of the drama, or on the Pamphleteers and Martin Marprelate, and the quest will prove fruitless. This is all well enough known and it is needless for us to enlarge on Taine's glaring defects; but Ste. Beuve should certainly have done so. "To begin with," says Mr. Saintsbury, "Taine himself did not know enough," and these words might here have applied with equal justice to Ste. Beuve. How otherwise can the critic's failure to point out the deficiencies be accounted for? It is not as if these deficiencies were slight in character; to quote Mr.

1. Cp. Hist. of Crit., III, 442.

Saintsbury again, "he (Taine) is at the mercy of any cub in criticism"; and it is interesting to speculate as to the nature of Ste. Beuve's private feelings while toiling in panting pursuit after Taine and his seven-leagued strides!

A brief and much needed halt is called to consider how "le plus beau et le plus compliqué génie poétique de l'Angleterre" could become the friend of Cromwell. The point is of no great interest to us here; what is of interest, however, is, that in the course of his remarks, Ste. Beuve refers to Marvell's famous Ode to Cromwell. The Ode, he tells us, he read in the Golden Treasury; it is true that he could not have read any account of it in Taine's History in which there is a mere passing reference² to the poet and none at all to the poem. Ste. Beuve's observation, "on sent ici comme la réalité anglaise et la franchise du ton se contiennent mal sous l'imitation classique, comme elles percent et crévent en quelque sorte l'enveloppe d'Horace,"³ does not strike too high a note of praise for what is "among the noblest and most individual of its kind in England."⁴

Then on again by way of a short synopsis of Dryden's qualities: "multiple, fertile, unequal, imaginative, abundant, vigorous": a mere piling up of adjectives which gives an effect of perfunctoriness not very satisfying. And so at last we reach what has been Ste. Beuve's real goal from the very outset. "Puisqu'il faut bien," he says slyly, "sous peine de monotonie, varier la louange par quelque chicane," he calls in question Taine's treatment of Pope. This is the first time that the critic has any real disagreement with his author, and the

1. Ibid, 443.

2. Cp. Taine's History, III, 47.

3. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 101.

4. Cp. Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Lit., 426.

disagreement affords the excuse to make Pope, his well-beloved, the climax of the *Causeries*. Where he has raced on through the thirtyseven pages given over to his review of Taine and his History, he now settles down with a sigh of relief to fill thirtythree comfortable pages about his favourite English author.

3.

That Pope is one of his favourites is very obvious from the strong, righteous indignation with which he censures Taine's "façon rude et desobligeante."¹ He takes up cudgels with a right good will and first of all demands what Pope's ugliness has to do with literature. If Pope was irritable, was he not at the same time a "quintessence d'âne," a "goutte de vif esprit dans du coton"?² Ste. Beuve continues his defence by emphasising the English poet's extraordinary precocity and brilliance, and his profound admiration for, and knowledge of, the classics both ancient and modern. In him, exclaims Ste. Beuve, Malherbe and Boileau are united, and his life-long object to be a great and at the same time a 'correct' English poet was well and nobly achieved. If, then, with so glorious an end in view, and with his poor health and sickly body, Pope attended carefully to his physical well-being, is this a reason for ill-mannered gibes? Let us smile if you will, says Ste. Beuve, but let us smile indulgently, admiringly. Moreover, he continues warmly - though here his warmth certainly causes him to exaggerate - Pope was not the crotchety irritable creature Taine makes him out to be. To those who were kind and helpful to him, he gave proofs of a lasting and tender gratitude from a heart which was loving and made for love. These words, one imagines, would have made many a contemporary dweller in Grub Street open his eyes! What, for example, would poor old penurious Elkanah

1. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 105.

2. *Ibid.*, 108.

Settle have said, who never did Pope any harm but who was so unmercifully belaboured by him? If it is true that "Pope never even began to understand the lesson in deportment inculcated by Lord Chesterfield's maxim that "one should not wrestle with a chimney-sweep," it is also true that he showed but little signs of a heart which was loving and made for love, when he so bitterly and unjustifiably attacked poor timid creatures who could not possibly hit back!

And lastly, if Pope is the least Anglo-Saxon of poets, and neither a Shakespeare nor yet a Milton, he is "le poète ... le plus parfait de sa nation."² A big claim, this, and Ste. Beuve's Apologia for Pope must indeed satisfy the most ardent lover of the Augustan Age in whose mind still rankle Taine's harsh words!³

Ste. Beuve stops for an instant to plead for a reconciliation of these old enemies the Romantics and the Classicists. When, if ever, a critic can bring about such a consummation, then the perfect critic is found: "mais je demande l'impossible on voit bien que c'est un rêve."

Then he goes on to deal with Pope's Homer, and he claims at the very outset that no translator of Homer can be absolutely successful. He therefore admits Pope's failure despite the latter's full understanding of his subject and the supreme elegance of his couplets. That failure is due, in the first instance, Ste. Beuve maintains, to this very attempt to translate Homer into rhymed verse: "la rime l'a conduit à des oppositions, à des redoublements d'antithèses dans des tours de phrases limitées, ce qui est son fort à lui, mais ce qui est contraire à

1. Cp. J.C. Squire in "The Observer," Jan. 8th, 1928.
2. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 113.
3. Cp. Vol. III, chap. 7, of Taine's History, especially pp. 238, 345, 351 for "harsh words"!

la large manière homérique et à ce plein fleuve naturel, courant à toutes ondes, continu, et pendu et sonore ... Ce qu'il faut dire c'est qu'Homère est intraduisible en vers."¹

Despite his artificial translation, however, says Ste. Beuve,² Pope gives undoubted proof that the true poetic fire burns within him; to be moved to tears by the beauty of a poem as he was - and as Shelley also was in almost similar circumstances, - is to demonstrate conclusively that "quand on est critique à ce degré, c'est qu'on est poète."³

This appraisal of Pope's Iliad is not, all said and done, too high. A lesser critic, inspired like Ste. Beuve by a warm desire to vindicate his protege against virulent and grossly unfair attacks, would have found it easy enough to make out a much stronger case for the defence, sided as Ste. Beuve was, too, by Matthew Arnold's Lectures in which there is so much generous praise of Pope's translation.⁴ But he maintains an equable course, balancing the artistry of Pope's version with the undoubted brilliance of his achievement, regarded as an independent work. The only assertion by Ste. Beuve with which all may not be in agreement is that in which he maintains that "Pope a parfaitement senti Homère";⁵ for it is very much open to doubt whether any translator of the Iliad who had, like Pope, "little Latin and less Greek" could adequately "feel" his subject. And, incidentally, was Ste. Beuve so well acquainted with Bentley's famous remark - "it is a very pretty poem, Mr.

1. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 116.

2. ¹*Ibid*, 117. How one should have liked this opinion on the prose translation by Messrs. Lang, Leaf and Myers! In a footnote, p. 117, Ste. Beuve acknowledges the help afforded him by M. Arnold's Lectures on Translating Homer. He calls Arnold "l'un des plus finis et des plus exactes critiques anglais."

3. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 118.

4. Cp. Oxford Edition (1914) of M. Arnold's Lectures on Translating Homer, pp. 251, 255 and 256.

5. *Ibid*, 116.

6. Cp. Churton Collin's Edition of the Essay on Criticism, p. 16.

Pope, but you must not call it Homer" - as might be imagined from his casual reference to it? For Matthew Arnold¹ in his first lecture quotes the second part of the remark which Ste. Beuve likewise cites: why did he not give the whole sentence, especially when it fitted in so neatly with his criticism?

4.

For the Essay on Criticism, Ste. Beuve's enthusiasm is most marked. "Que de judicieuses et fines remarques, éternellement vraies je recueille en le lisant, et comme elles sont exprimées dans une forme brève, concise, élégante et une fois pour toutes!"² He goes on to translate some of them with a running commentary of praise, choosing as his first extracts:

"In Poets as true genius is but rare,
True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write."

and

"Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,
Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain Fools at last."
(I, ll. 11-14, and 36-37)

which point out the relation of natural abilities to discipline, and which, says Ste. Beuve, are "une réponse à ces artistes orgueilleux et vains, impatientes de toute observation."

Then he quotes approvingly the lines (124-129) laying down the critic's necessity to study the ancients, particularly Homer and Virgil. Here, says Ste. Beuve, "Pope établit la vraie ligne et la vraie voie pour les talents classiques et qui restent dans l'ordre de la tradition"; and Pope's later line (I, 180),

"Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream",
is added with emphasis. As for "le beau rôle de critique," how nobly and proudly, says Ste. Beuve, does Pope define it!

The lines 233-238 and 630-642³ are then given which constitute

1. Op. cit., 256.

2. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 119-20.

3. See Appendix.

a "beau portrait, l'idéal du genre, et que chaque critique de profession devrait avoir encadré dans son cabinet."¹

Pope's whole theory, Ste. Beuve, concludes, like that of Virgil, of Racine, of Raphael, of all those in short, "qui dans l'art, ne sont pas pour la réalité pure, pour la franchise à tout prix, fût-ce la crudité! pour la force à tout prix, fût-ce la violence!" may be summed up in the famous verses which he translates beginning:

"True Wit² is nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed"

For the style of the poem Ste. Beuve has nothing but praise, and while ranking the Essay on the same level with the critical works of Horace and Boileau, he adds that Pope has this advantage over the latter as well as Malherbe: he is dealing with a language very rich in monosyllables. Thus the English poet achieves a certain effect of regularity highly appropriate to his subject matter. He cites the lines beginning:

"'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an Echo to the sense."³
(II, ll. 364-373)

as an example: "de tels morceaux ...sont intraduisibles."⁴

5.

Now, is all this very acute criticism of Pope's Essay?

Before answering the question, several things must be taken into account. Firstly, and as has been already pointed out, the title of this Causerie is "M. Taine's History of English Literature"; that is, Ste. Beuve had not the time nor the space in which to give a finished review of any single work far less than of the collected works of any individual figuring in that History. Secondly, his main object was, at this present

1. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 121.
2. "Wit" Ste. Beuve here translates as "esprit" ou "talent" (cp. 122) - not perhaps a very satisfactory definition of its connotation here. Cp. Churton Collins, op. cit., 35.
3. See Appendix.
4. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 125.

junction, to rehabilitate Pope in the eyes of French readers of Taine's volumes who might with every excuse form a totally false impression. He would, therefore, naturally wish to stress the poet's good points without casting too strong a light upon the bad. For the brilliance of Pope's terse and felicitous expression, the skill with which he compiled this epitome of tried and useful truths, - a kind of anthology of wit and wisdom - and, (which would certainly appeal most keenly to Ste. Beuve) the truth of those portraits of the ideal critic that so strikingly resemble Ste. Beuve himself - all this must inevitably have roused Pope's champion to enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, Ste. Beuve being the man he was, might well have seasoned his enthusiasm with a grain of just and salutary censure. What, one may ask, could be the feelings of a French student who has first read Taine's opinions and then, turning to Ste. Beuve, finds the exact opposite?

And indeed the faults of the Essay on Criticism are such as to require mentioning, especially to a foreign audience, and Ste. Beuve was not true to his ideals in giving no hint of Pope's by no means frequent lapses. Things such as the poet's implied underestimate of men like Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, and his expressed over-estimate of such mediocrities as Sheffield, Roscommon and Walsh; the extraordinary omission of Dryden;² the weak treatment of poetic rules and licences; the cases of inconsistency: - all these and others³ should certainly have, at least, been mentioned. Thus, the conclusion to which we are forced is that, in this instance, at least, Ste. Beuve allows his delight with the poem's glitter and polish to blind

1. Op. cit., p. 357 ff.

2. Except for the two mere mentions in line 383 and line 617.

3. Cp. Saintsbury, Hist. of Crit., II, 456 and 459.

him to its faults; he has not paid much attention to Pope's own maxim: "Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move."²

There follows another general and generous estimate of Pope, who, although Ste. Beuve admits he is not perhaps a universal poet, is none the less a true one "dans une mode ornée, juste et pure," much the superior of Boileau in the extent of his ideas and artistry of his taste. It is clear that Ste. Beuve in his insistence on Pope's real poetic gifts, is rebelling at the objection so often levelled against the English poets of the time - and against French writers of Boileau's school - namely, the artificiality of the sentiments towards nature. Bowles's³ somewhat drastic demand that a poet must be able to note at one glance every varying shade and tint in the abundance of Nature is referred to; Ste. Beuve retorts in Pope's own words:

"In every work regard the writer's End
Since none can compass more than they intend."
(II, lines 255-6),

and rebukes Bowles for his unreason "en exigeant à une organisation le fruit d'une autre." To seek to compare the spirit of Wordsworth who alone could satisfy those requirements,

1. Cp. Churton Collins, op. cit., 33 ff. Cp. also De Quincey's verdict: "a collection of independent maxims, tied together into a fasciculus by the printer, but having no natural order or logical dependency." (Essay on Pope, Vol. XV of Works, 142).
2. Line 390.
3. Caus. du lundi, 127. Bowles, for whom Ste. Beuve seemed, however, to have some admiration, brought out an edition in 10 volumes of Pope's Works in 1806, from the preface to which Ste. Beuve quotes the above remark, adding: "Bowles lui-même a fait en ce sens des sonnets délicieux, d'une nuance infinie, et il n'a pas pris garde qu'il érigeait son goût et son talent personnel en loi et théorie générale; il se prenait pour type, comme il arrive souvent."

with Pope's, is, says Ste. Beuve, no doubt rightly enough, to show confusion of mind.

6.

A brief reference is now made to the Essay on Man¹ - brief for three reasons. It had been translated into French by Fontanes in 1783 and was already well enough known; also Ste. Beuve, while he admires its just definitions and maxims, does not seem to care very much for it; last but by no means least, he is in a hurry to come to what had always interested him, and to what has also some reference to Taine's theories - Pope's doctrine of the "ruling passion."

It is this "ruling passion" which gives the key to everything says Ste. Beuve; in the gaining of full knowledge about any individual, "tout trompe, tout est sujet à méprise, et l'apparence et l'habitude, et les opinions et le langage, et les actions mêmes qui souvent sont en sens inverse de leur mobile: il n'y a qu'une chose qui ne trompe pas, c'est quand on a pu saisir une fois le secret ressort d'un chacun, sa passion maîtresse et dominante."² Ste. Beuve continues with great verve to give instances of its force and to paraphrase Pope "à la française," - that is, to cite examples calculated to be more within the ken of a French public than Pope's instances would be.

The master passion, then, as Ste. Beuve conceives it, is innate. He himself, he says, was born with a passion for

1. There is a slight confusion here in Ste. Beuve's titles; he mentions "l'Épître morale" when he obviously means the First Epistle (to Sir Richard Temple, Lord Cobham, published in 1733) of the series of Moral Essays on the Knowledge and Characters of Men. A foreigner might well lose his way among the numerous Epistles and Moral Essays in Pope's Works!

2. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 128.

letters which was hereditary¹, and cases abound throughout the *Causeries* in which the utmost help in his criticism has been afforded to him by his uncanny gift of laying bare a "faculte maîtresse."² In this connection, it is as easy to exaggerate as to deprecate the importance of Ste. Beuve's doctrine. On the one hand, it may occupy, no doubt, a relatively small place in modern psychology, and in the light of our present day knowledge his doctrine may amount to little enough. But, on the other hand, the term pseudo-science should not be cast at him too lightly, especially when due account is taken of the fact that the sciences of psychology and sociology were then at their most rudimentary stages. Moreover, though Ste. Beuve was too able a man to wish to tie down literary criticism within certain limits, yet his insistence on the importance of the "passion maîtresse" can often be justified.³ He does not drive it to extremes and so, along with the aesthetic side of criticism, it forms a firm and natural basis for genuine literary criticism.⁴

As to politics, says Ste. Beuve, Pope was coldly indifferent. He had never the range of ideas of Milton, but was always "un esprit éclairé." Once more we have Pope shown as being made for "les amitiés du choix," and Ste. Beuve refers to Spence's *Anecdotes*⁵ which must be read, he asserts, "pour apprécier le Pope de la Causerie et de l'intimité," and to enjoy his literary judgments which are "d'une vérité exquise."

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1. Cp. *Cahiers*, 64.
 2. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, V, 63; *Caus. du lundi*, II, 410 and 445; XII, 191, etc.; cp. also Babbitt, *Masters of Mod. French Criticism*, pp.167 ff.
 3. Ste. Beuve was also so far in agreement with La Rochefoucauld as to believe firmly the latter's dictum that amour propre is the mainspring of nearly all action. Cp. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, pp. 410 ff.
 4. Cp. MacClintock, *Ste. Beuve's Critical Theory*, p. 45.
 5. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 131-2. The *Anecdotes* evidently show Pope's critical faculties in a better light than do the *Works*, but they do not seem to be of any outstanding importance; cp. *Saintsbury, Hist. of Crit.*, III, 154. I have to plead ignorance of the book which, despite all efforts, I have been unable to procure.

7.

It might be as well to interpolate, at this point, one or two remarks on a matter which has sometimes been taken too much for granted: the alleged close kinship between Pope and Ste. Beuve.

The lines which Ste. Beuve wrote to Louis Depret - "je suis resté, malgré tout, de l'école d'Horace et du chantre de la forêt de Windsor, et même en l'y mettant plus du tout de passion, je reste obstiné par ce côté de mon esprit et dans ce for intérieur de mon sentiment"¹ - are, perhaps, apt to lead one to attach overmuch importance to Ste. Beuve's connection with Pope. There can be no doubt as to the critic's indebtedness to Horace, but it is easy to exaggerate the other association.

Mr. Babbitt, when he says that Ste. Beuve "frequently refers to Pope"² leaves himself open to the question as to what he means by "frequently." For Ste. Beuve frequently refers to Shakespeare, to Byron, and to many another without, after all, saying very much about them. With regard to Pope, that name occurs some thirtyfive times throughout the sixty odd volumes of Ste. Beuve's work,³ apart, that is, from the present *Causerie*. It is probable that Ste. Beuve's connection with Pope began in 1838, when he wrote the article⁴ on Fontanes, since it is in this article that Pope's name first occurs. These thirtyfive references are all of very slight importance, mere casual allusions such, we shall see later, as the critic very often makes. It is in this review of Taine's *History* that the main body of Ste. Beuve's opinion of Pope is contained, and his chief

1. *Nouv. Correspondance*, 235, letter dated March 29th, 1876.

2. *Op. cit.*, 168.

3. Cp. V. Giraud, *Table alphabétique et analytique de Ste. Beuve*, Paris, 1903.

4. *Port. litt.*, II, 218; cp. also *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 128; *Caus. du lundi*, I, 376.

purpose was, as we have already pointed out, to re-direct the balance by discussing, sympathetically and appreciatively, Pope the man, the critic, the philosopher, and the stylist. The Essay on Criticism naturally enough far outdistances in Ste. Beuve's opinion Pope's other works, and the critic obviously and profoundly approves of Pope's dicta in general and in particular. Second in importance comes the Essay on Man, from which, as has also been already said, Ste. Beuve singles out for extended discussion the passages dealing with the "ruling passion." This doctrine bears a close resemblance to that which Ste. Beuve incorporated in his own critico-philosophical system, and which constituted so large a part of that system.

Now, in view of the above-mentioned "frequency" with which Ste. Beuve refers to Pope, the question at once arises - how far does Ste. Beuve show himself to be influenced by Pope? This is a big question and not wholly relevant to our present purpose, but we shall attempt briefly to summarise some points.

To begin with, is there not something irreconcilable between Pope's preciosity and formalism, his glossy, 18th century diction, and the Frenchman's wide liberality and tolerance? No doubt, this is a somewhat superficial matter, and there must be a close resemblance underneath, if only because the Essay on Criticism, the Art Poétique and the Ars Poetica, forming as they do, the supreme expression and defence of the "commonsense school," necessarily interpret the views of Ste. Beuve himself. After his break with Romanticism in 1849, he emerged, of course, as the avowed champion of "la Raison"; but even during his Romantic period he refers "frequently" enough in all conscience to Boileau.

1. Cp. Babbitt, op.cit., 167-9, 173.

It must not, however, be too hastily imagined that Ste. Beuve's acquaintance with Pope coincides with his definite revolt from the Romantic School. Pope's theory of the "master-passion" had really nothing to do with Ste. Beuve's theory of the "maitresse passion," since the conception of each had an entirely different genesis. Ste. Beuve's theory arose independently of Pope's, so that the increased number of references to the latter, after 1849, merely indicate that he found in the English poet corroboration and authority for views he had developed for himself. The name of Pope becomes, therefore, a symbol: "ce nom est pour moi un prétexte pour un certain côté"¹ - the certain side being the Classicists who, as he also said, were in danger of neglect because of too marked a favour for the Romantics, and who comprised "les écrivains d'un ordre moyen, justes, sensés, éloquents, toujours nets, d'une passion noble encore....."²

And it is indeed clear that Pope's name is a symbol when we realise that it is almost always associated with that of Boileau and of Horace.³ Out of fifteen passages in which Pope is mentioned, Boileau is named eight times, and Horace - "leur maître à tous" - nine times.⁴ The three names Pope, Boileau and Horace form a cliché, a stereotyped phrase which, in Ste. Beuve's mind, stands for, and summarises, the classical ideal.

There is another point which goes to show the exaggeration with which the Pope-Ste. Beuve association is occasionally apt

1. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 112.

2. ¹*ibid.* 115.

3. *Caus. du lundi*, III, 43-44.

4. *Caus. du lundi*, III, 43-44; V, 129; VI, 503; X, 310; *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 115; *ibid.*, 123; *ibid.*, XII, 278; *Nouv. Corresp.*, 235.

to be treated. Despite the undeniable warmth of Ste. Beuve's admiration for Pope in this review of Taine's History, despite the proclamation that "je suis resté de l'école d'Horace et du chantre de la forêt de Windsor," he does not hesitate to rank him along with Boileau as "du second ordre," as coming "après les plus grands." This may seem at first a strange contradiction to the attitude which he consistently assumes towards those whom he so stoutly proclaims his masters, but the fact remains. It would seem to prove that notwithstanding his sincere admiration for Pope, Boileau and even Horace,¹ he was in no wise a bond-slave to them, but that he retained from his Romantic days vestiges of the Romantic cult. Possibly he regarded Pope and the writers whom he generally associated with him as representatives of the normal, commonsense attitude towards life and literature. The real giants like Goethe, Shakespeare and Dante he tended to avoid: "les grands hommes sont sujets à faire illusion sur l'époque qu'ils éclairent et qu'ils remplissent brillamment jusqu'à éteindre quelquefois ce qui les entoure; les hommes secondaires, et pourtant essentiels, ont l'avantage de nous faire pénétrer avec eux, sans éblouissement et sans faste, dans les parties restées à demi obscures, et dans les rouages mêmes de la machine dont ils étaient, à un certain degré, un des ressorts."²

To sum up: the essential difference in the respective styles of Pope and Ste. Beuve; their independence of outlook, one from the other; the second-class rank which Ste. Beuve bestows on the other - all would seem to indicate that the French

1. Cp. Caus. du lundi II, 305, in which he places Horace in a "groupe second." Cp. also *ibid.*, III, 47, and V, 277 ff.

2. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 420.

critic was not so greatly influenced by the English poet as might at the offset be imagined. Certainly Ste. Beuve entertained true and loyal admiration for Pope, and when the object of his admiration was unjustly attacked, as he was by Taine, then his blood was roused and he valiently offered defence and defiance. Pope and his school had faults and well enough did Ste. Beuve know them; but by their very faults it would seem they endeared themselves to him and he felt that, as apostles of reason, he could at all times turn to them for sympathy and corroboration as he proceeded with his task towards the time when, "tous les voyages étant finis, toutes les expériences achevées, on n'a pas de plus vives jouissances que d'étudier et d'approfondir les choses qu'on sait, de savourer ce qu'on sent, comme de voir et de revoir les gens qu'on aime ... pures délices du coeur et du goût dans la maturité."¹

8.

The last section of this series of *Causeries* deals as did the first part with Taine's *History* proper. Except for the discussion which ends it and in which Ste. Beuve rebukes the *Académie* for refusing Taine a prize, it is an enumeration of points in which Taine's third volume is open to criticism. There is, Ste. Beuve says, a lack of proportion (a lack of which is unfortunately not confined to this third volume!); the author is "trop occupé de l'unité de son plan et semble trop pressé d'arriver et de conclure"; Collins and Goldsmith, the Lake poets and others, "sont trop à l'étroit." One has only to consult the seventh chapter of Book III of Taine's work from page 372² onwards to be speedily convinced of the truth and

1. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 133.

2. In Van Laun's Edition.

reasonableness of Ste. Beuve's remarks. But his claim that Burns "est fortement senti et dignement classé" is very widely open to question, for it is pretty clear that Taine did not really understand the Scottish poet. When he remarks that "I even believe he (Burns) was fundamentally religious" it affords a striking clue as to his knowledge; and he talks much more about Burns' insobriety and the like than about his poetry.¹ It is allowable also to ask whether Ste. Beuve himself had any very profound knowledge of Burns' works; his praise for Taine's treatment, in any case, leaves him not a little suspect.

Ste. Beuve's downright objection to Taine's comparison of Lamartine with Gray is, however, quite justifiable: "if Lamartine," says Taine, "read Gray's Odes he would find there the melancholy sweetness, the exquisite art, the fine arguments, half the ideas of his own poetry." Such a verdict overshoots the mark and Ste. Beuve rightly retorts: "Il n'y nul rapport entre Gray et Lamartine, pas plus qu'entre un perle et un lac."² He also objects to Taine's treatment of Cowper, although, indeed, it is by no means among the least successful of this third volume. In contrast, however, to Ste. Beuve's own discussion of Cowper,³ Taine falls a long way short and assuredly does not give due weight to "cette renaissance du goût naturel de l'expression réelle et poétique." And, somewhat surprisingly, Ste. Beuve finds that Scott is "sévérement traité et nullement au gré de nos souvenirs. M. Taine ne le met point comme romancier au rang auquel il a droit,"⁴ "A little surprisingly" is perhaps wrong, for Ste. Beuve would have never attained his lofty position as a critic, had he not long since turned his back on

1. Ibid. 406.

2. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 178.

3. *Vide supra* pp. 52 ff.

4. Ibid.

the two articles he had written in his hot youth more than thirty years before.

And so Ste. Beuve's review of Taine's History reaches its end. What is to be said of it as a whole? Is it satisfactory? Is it good criticism?

It is good enough criticism so far as it goes, yes; but to us English readers of English Literature it is far from satisfying. The main reason for this is, of course, obvious: the subject on which it is based is very far from satisfying. Suffice it to say that the chief impression which the reader of these three long Causeries cannot but feel is associated chiefly with Ste. Beuve's sins of omission. For, after all, in any fair-sized review of a History of English Literature, is it not strange to find nothing but mere references of little moment to Spenser and Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton, Dryden and Addison and Wordsworth? What there is is good enough, but what there is, apart from the pages devoted to Pope, is almost unmixed praise which in the end becomes cloying. And this is a History written by a most brilliant author, but who is so "occupied with his plan" as to make his work call out, as it were, for ruthless corrections and strictures of every kind! Instead, we have a breathless scamper down the ages to Pope; there we are almost bounced into an agreement with the critic's enthusiastic eulogy, with his robust refusal to see any blemishes either in the full works of Pope which he considers, or in the poet's personal character. Then to round off, a few objections to Taine's critical methods and estimates - et voila! No: to ascertain Ste. Beuve's genuinely critical opinions regarding English literature these Causeries afford but little guidance; it is elsewhere that we must seek.

1. Vide supra p. 96.

VIII. BYRON.

In the preceding pages, we have discussed Ste. Beuve's criticisms of those English authors to whom he specially devoted a *Causerie* or *Causeries*. We shall now attempt to co-ordinate the remarks he made on those other writers who are ^{not} thus honoured. It would be well nigh impossible to refer to each of these remarks individually, for scattered throughout his volumes are literally hundreds of references to English literature. And even if it were possible, the task would be a futile one, for in the vast majority of cases these references have very little significance.

For example, although Byron's name figures often enough, Ste. Beuve employs terms more or less hackneyed - clichés which are more often than not empty of real import. Thus, a short note¹, which is repeated, upon Scott's retreat before Byron in the lists of poetry; a comparison of Byron's exploits as a swimmer with those of Lamannais²; Byron's "ironie, poignante, et exaltée"³; his antipathy to Chateaubriand⁴; the fact that he "a senti et pratiqué les Alpes bien autrement que Chateaubriand"⁵; the assertion that he is one of the "poètes ourageux et hardis"⁶; - these are fair samples of the numerous labels attached to the name of Byron but which amount to little or nothing.

1. Port. litt., II, 11, and Prem. lundis, II, 114.

2. Nouv. lundis, VIII, 15.

3. Port. contemp., II, 279.

4. Nouv. lundis, XIII, 216-7.

5. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 338.

6. Ibid, XI, 186

It is surprising, indeed, that Byron appears to have interested Ste. Beuve so little. True, the critic ranks him among the great ones of the earth: "Pour ne pas abuser des termes, Byron, Milton, Pindare, restent seuls les vraiment grands poètes,"¹ but such a judgment is neither very profound in itself nor is it very illuminating as to Ste. Beuve's real opinion.

His real opinion is, we think, more evident in the estimate of Byron which occurs in the attack delivered against Villemain who had classed Cowper and Wordsworth "négligement parmi les esprits singuliers et maladifs,"² and who were therefore of lesser poetic merit than Byron. Ste. Beuve strongly objects and maintains that Wordsworth, for instance, "n'est pas inférieur à Byron en génie simple, en peinture naturelle et profonde comme il l'est en gloire." Perhaps one reason why Ste. Beuve has so little to say of any great importance about Byron is that so much had already been said by others. In any case, it is quite clear that he did not share in the almost hysterical praise which made Emile Deschamps, to take but one instance, loudly proclaim: "On sent que Byron est venu!"³ Nearly all the poets of 1830 had repeated such things ad nauseam, save Ste. Beuve, who, as a critic, had too much acumen, and who as a poet of that generation, expressed his melancholy in terms of an Obermann rather than in those of a Lara or a René or a Werther.

He refused, moreover, to admit that Byron's influence was so great as others would make out. "Cette poésie (i.e. Romantic poetry) reçut tout à fait à sa naissance les rayons du génie

1. *Ibid.*, V, 399.

2. *Port. contemp.*, II, 391.

3. Quoted by E. Estève: *Byron et le romantisme français*, Paris, 1907, p. 166.

catholique, chevalresque et monarchique de M. de Chateaubriand
 Toute cette période rétrograde et militante de l'école
 de poésie dite romantique se termine lors de la
 brusque retraite de M. de Chateaubriand.¹ In this attitude,
 which to the rank and file seemed incomprehensible Ste. Beuve
 attracted to himself not a little noteriety.² A Jules Lefèvre,
 who has distinguished himself in being one of the few translators
 of his day with an adequate knowledge of the language from which
 he translated, is also distinguished by the marked dislike he
 bore Ste. Beuve because the latter refused to be a perfervid
 admirer of Byron.³

Everything seems to show, therefore, that Ste. Beuve's
 opinion of Byron was not really so high as he sometimes made out,
 in which case he was perfectly within his rights in not saying
 so much about the English poet as some of his readers might wish.
 And he often must have found it difficult to speak with complete
 honesty and fulness because he so often discovered that his
 judgment was at variance with public and accepted opinions.
 Thus, in connection with Montesquieu, he admits that although he
 had written much concerning the eighteenth century he had not
 so far ventured on any elaborate treatment of that writer. Why?
 Because "il est un de ces hommes qu'on n'aborde qu'avec crainte,
 à cause du respect réel qu'ils inspirent et de l'espèce de

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1. This was written as long back as Oct. 11th, 1830 for the
 Globe and reproduced in the Prem. lundis, I, 401-402. Cp.
 a modern critic: "For even the two foreign influences that
 seem all powerful those of Byron and Scott, do little
 more than affect the surface manifestations of the great
 main movement which comes down from Rousseau and
 Chateaubriand." (Babbitt, op.cit., 81) How right Ste.
 Beuve turns out to be, time and time again!
 2. Cp. Esteve, op. cit, 185.
 3. Ibid, 191; cp. also Nouv. lundis, VI, 452 ff.

religion qui s'est faite autour d'eux."

IX. SHAKESPEARE.

We have already mentioned in passing that Ste. Beuve has often been reproached for his preference to point out peculiarities rather than to measure greatness, and for his too ready obedience to the injunction "ne despicias minores." "He cannot refrain from a certain satisfaction when an author and his works are less than unique and therefore more capable of being explained."²

"He attempts no profound study of Molière, he approaches Goethe almost solely on the side of social intercourse through the letters of Bettina and the Conversations of Eckermann; he makes the same exception to Shakespeare that most of us make for the great literatures of the East, as something which the shortness of life exempts us from including in our world of thought; he has little to say about Dante, and that little inadequate; he manages to create for himself a sphere of philosophical activity in which we miss the luminous presence of Plato, and in a train of dramatic tradition which can scarcely

1. Caus. du lundi, VII, 41; a similar apology with respect to Lacordaire occurs in Nouv. lundis, IV, 393. But on the other hand, he sometimes - but not very often - feels it equally difficult to be the first to discuss some subject: "On hésite toujours à se mettre en avant quand l'opinion de la foule ne nous a pas frayé le chemin; il faut même, pour cela, une espèce particulière de courage.." (Caus. du lundi, X, 476) Again, referring to Grimm: "Un excellent critique ... et venant le premier dans ses jugements; n'oublions pas cette dernière condition. Quand la réputation des auteurs est établie, il est aisé d'en parler convenablement ... mais à leurs débuts, ... et à mesure qu'ils se développent, les juger avec tact, ... prédire leur essor ou deviner leurs limites, ... c'est là le propre du critique né pour l'être." (Ibid, VII, 287)

We have here examples of those perplexing contradictions which are so frequent in Ste. Beuve.

2. Babbitt, op. cit., 160 ff.

be said to reach back to Sophocles. These are serious omissions for which no amount of interest in Chapelle and Bachaumont, Rivarol, Dangeau and Mlle. de la Vallière can compensate.¹

If such a statement be wholly true - and it is difficult to contradict it - it goes far to explain the lack of any full treatment by Ste. Beuve of Shakespeare; and it accounts also, as we shall see later, for the fact that the critic was never quite at his ease when dealing with that other giant of literature, Goethe. His own words, indeed, seem time and again to prove the truth of the statement: "A vrai dire, M. Coulmann me plaît, ... par ce côté même d'absence de toute originalité; il est l'expression honnête et facile du milieu où il vit, et il nous en marque la température assez exacte, sans y mêler la résistance ou le surcroît d'un caractère trop individuel."²

And, indeed, when one casts a bird's eye view over Ste. Beuve's works as a whole, how clearly does one see that his favourite type of essay is that which deals with the discovering and proclaiming of new or little recognised talent, or with the less known aspects of fully recognised talents. He obviously delighted in introducing a famous novelist as a writer of plays, a philosopher or a statesman as a letter-writer, or some great artist or other celebrity merely as a man, approaching him by the intimately biographical path. Fully three fourths of all the essays are taken up with memoirs, letters and biographies.

It has been admitted that the type which more closely approaches that of the average man is more truly the product of its time than the genius, and is thus a better starting point for these social studies in which Ste. Beuve was so eminently interested. "La critique littéraire, qui doit être heureuse et

1. Harper, Ste. Beuve, London, 1909, p. 321.

2. Nouv. lundis, IX, 141; cp. also Caus. du lundi, III, 18.

fière de s'élever toutes les fois qu'elle rencontre de grands sujets, se plaît pourtant, par sa nature, à ces sujets moyens qui ne sont point pour cela médiocres, et qui permettent à la morale sociale d'y pénétrer."¹ The complement of this statement appears in the following: "Les grands hommes, les grands écrivains et poètes ... sont comme ces fleuves démesurément larges à leur embouchure et trop ouvertement navigables. Tous les connaissent ... c'est une banalité que leur gloire."²

Further, he complains that French criticism has been too timid and conservative, keeping too much to the well-known subjects and the well-worn paths of criticism, and not venturing into those less frequented regions where he feels it his duty to go. In spite of the fact that he says, "je n'élude pas systématiquement tous les grands sujets qui passent,"³ he does elude nearly all the greatest names.

Yet to do Ste. Beuve justice, it must be granted that his constant reference to these great names and to others only less great exercised a dispersed but pervasive influence, and formed, as it were, a kind of noble background and a kind of supreme high court of standards. And he makes another point which is well worthy of notice; "Ceux qui sont une fois connus, adoptés par l'opinion et par la renommée, nous les avons sans cesse à la bouche et nous les accablons de couronnes."⁴ Again, "On pousse trop à l'admiration quand même, on ne juge plus; une fois le mot génie prononcé, tout est accepté, proclamé ..."⁵

1. Caus. du lundi, VII, 188. 2. Cahiers, p. 5.

3. Ibid, X, 446.

4. Caus. du lundi, XV, 336.

5. Corresp., II, 94.

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1. Caus. du lundi, VII, 188. 2. Cahiers, p. 5.

3. Ibid, X, 446.

4. Caus. du lundi, XV, 336.

5. Corresp., II, 94.

And the fact is at all times to be taken into account that he was not his own master; on many occasions he must have resented the knowledge that his position as critic for the government and in an official journal constituted an obligation: "Condamné (he prints the words in italics) par circonstances à écrire sur tous les sujets, je ne choisis pas, je traite les sujets qui s'offrent d'eux-mêmes à ma rencontre."¹ Again; "Obligé si souvent de déplacer mon esprit et mon intérêt, de l'attacher et de l'enfoncer en des écrits et des auteurs si différents je me blase aussi vite sur les irritations et les piqûres, et au bout de quelque temps, je ne sais plus de quoi il s'agit."²

The element of acceptability to his public was naturally important: he could never forget that "Le Moniteur s'affiche au coin des rues."³

With respect to Ste. Beuve's reluctance to discuss Shakespeare at any length, another matter requires to be mentioned. Is it not astonishing that he who so often asserts that the French genius is essentially dramatic, should yet have shown so little interest in the drama?⁴ Was there perhaps something un-Gallic in his nature which might account for this indifference? In any case, the fact remains that the only passage of dramatic criticism of any length at all is that in which he deals with Corneille's *Cid*,⁵ and even then he seems of less concerned with the play as a play than as a manifestation of the spirit of its times. This neglect is indeed curious,

1. Corresp., I, 301, letter of 22nd Aug., 1862)

2. Quoted by A.-J. Pons, *op. cit.*, 5.

3. *Caus. du lundi*, X, 53; *cp. also* *ibid*, IX, 80.

4. *Cp. Faguet*, Ste. Beuve, *critique dramatique*, 69.

5. *Cp. Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 258, 285.

and there seems nothing which can satisfactorily account for it; it is, however, another reason which helps to explain his strange silence with regard to Shakespeare.

That Ste. Beuve had a reasonably sound knowledge of the dramatist cannot be for a moment doubted. In the *Causerie* on Ducis, full as it is of delightfully ironic tenderness towards the man who took himself and his translations of Shakespeare so very seriously, that knowledge is at once apparent. Note, as one instance among many, his words of mingled wrath, horror and amusement at Ducis' version of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which a passage¹ from *Macbeth* and an episode from Dante were calmly inserted! "Il serait superflu aujourd'hui et fastidieux," says Ste. Beuve sadly, "de montrer en détail en quoi Ducis gatait et faussait Shakespeare."² And again, "Si l'on relit, comme je viens de le faire, le *Roi Lear* et qu'on lise à côté la soi-disante imitation française (by Ducis), il est impossible de voir dans celle-ci autre chose qu'un travestissement sentimental à l'usage du dixhuitième siècle...."⁴

But the other references to Shakespeare, although certainly numerous enough, are merely stock phrases in which, unfortunately, nothing of real import is given us.

X. MILTON .

In view of what has just been said about Ste. Beuve's small desire to discuss the greatest names in literature, it will not be surprising to find that Milton receives but little mention. His name occurs some half dozen times in the *Nouveaux lundis*, but the longest reference is found in the first volume of the

1. *Caus. du lundi*, VI,

2. This passage - act IV, sc. 3, in which Macduff begins: "he has no children" - seems to cause trouble, for even so great a man as Goethe makes a mistake of interpretation. (mentioned by Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 371; cp. also *Goethe-Eckermann Convers.*, III, 99.

3. *Caus. du lundi*, 374.

4. *Ibid.*, 376.

causeries, and even there, it is brought in comparatively with Musset's name.

The critic has been speaking of the "Nuits," and, putting them alongside *l'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, finds them on the whole the more pleasing. Milton's two poems are, he declares, of too cold and passionless a beauty: "Il s'y contente d'y porter une disposition grave, noble, sensible, mais calme, comme un miroir légèrement ému." The *Penseroso*, he calls indeed a masterpiece and likens it to some magnificent oratorio rising slowly and prayerfully to God. But while "Tout ce qui est beau de Milton est hors de pair," Musset is the more living, human poet, inspired, as Milton is not, by "la passion signante et la douleur sincère."¹ It is easy enough to see that Ste. Beuve does not appreciate Milton to the same extent as he does Musset; he seems almost struggling to maintain an attitude of impartiality. Note that phrase - "Tout ce qui est beau de Milton est hors de pair": is there not just a feeling here that the praise is a trifle perfunctory, as though added to maintain a more equal poise amidst his very enthusiastic eulogy of Musset's lyricism? Does it not smack of the clichés with which Milton is so often labelled? However that may be, Ste. Beuve's preference is clearly for the "Nuits"; and who shall say he is wrong when he suggests that the *Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, despite their peerless beauty, are decorative rather than descriptive, artificial rather than natural?

Nevertheless, and apart from all suggestion of that prejudice almost inevitably associated with the master-works of one's own tongue, may it not be submitted that Ste. Beuve, at this juncture, hardly does fair and full justice to Milton's two poems? They are exceptional if only from the fact that they

1. Caus. du lundi, I, 303.

2. Ibid.

satisfy the critics and they delight mankind" - the fate, certainly, of very few poems; and their perfect technique, their subtle variations of sound and movement, the beautiful antithesis in tone and construction - that, and much more besides, combine to form works the like of which there is nothing before Milton, and since his day nothing fit to compare with them.

It is not, of course, that we wish to deprecate Ste. Beuve's praise of the "Nuits"; but it is probable that if he had possessed a sure and full mastery of our language, his appreciation would have been more quickly, more spontaneously and more justly generous to poems which stand in a class by themselves in our literature.

Apart from this, then, nothing is to be found save for an occasional baldly comparative reference to Milton and Homer.¹ One sometimes wonders whether the fact that the combination in Milton of the 'grand manner' and a christian subject made a special appeal to Chateaubriand has anything to do with Ste. Beuve's avoidance of the same subject? For Chateaubriand is beyond doubt one of the writers against whom the critic always entertained a strongly marked antipathy, and the former's brilliant pages² on *Paradise Lost* had effectually given Milton classic rank in France. After 1820, however, the seed sown by Chateaubriand and also by Mme. de Staël came to full harvest and with an abundance of cross-fertilisation.³ Whether Ste. Beuve's silence on the great works of Milton is due to these brilliant studies achieved by his predecessors or not, it is none the less

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1. Cp. *Nouv. lundis*, II, 131, 340; also *ibid*, XIII, 184; *Caus. du lundi*, I, 318.
 2. Cp. especially the last paragraph of his *Essai sur la litt. anglaise*.
 3. Cp. E. Partridge, *The French Romantics' Knowledge of Eng. Lit., 1820-1848*.

striking and intriguing; and it is his readers who are once again the losers.

XI. BACON.

Although Ste. Beuve's references to Francis Bacon are of the briefest - a remark that the English Essayist was at the same time a poet is typical of the rest of his dicta - the well-known passage¹ in which the critic proclaims himself a "disciple of Bacon" is important, not because it throws any particular light upon his opinions of the English philosopher or of English literature, but because it concerns Ste. Beuve's general critical theories. These general theories are perhaps not strictly relevant to our present purpose, but in any discussion of Ste. Beuve they are so interesting that we may be allowed a short digression in which briefly to summarise them.

He lays it down elsewhere² that "la critique naturelle ou physiologique" must go hand in hand with "la critique historique" and "la critique du goût pur." That is, the first step in the critical process is to gather all the facts not only about a particular book but also about its author: his country, his race, his epoch, his ancestors, his parents and so forth all go to frame the portrait of the author whom, as the second step, the critic must then proceed to paint. At this point the subject's immediate environment is to be dealt with - his childhood, education, his "premier milieu, le premier groupe d'amis et de contemporains."³ Answers must be found to questions concerning his attitudes towards religion, nature, money and the like. Lastly, the critic must estimate his author's influence for good or bad, the admiration or the dislike which he inspires. To do all this is, says Ste. Beuve, to become a disciple of

1. Nouv. lundis, IX, 69.

2. Cp. Cahiers, 70.

3. Nouv. lundis, III, 61.

of Bacon in literary history; as such, the critic will not be so liable to be deceived or to go astray as he would otherwise be if confining himself merely to the judgment of pure rhetoric.

It is from this scientific attitude that arises much of Ste. Beuve's distinctive contribution to literary criticism. He was himself aware that in adopting this attitude he was breaking away from the historic and conventional technique of French literary theory of the Boileau-La Harpe school.¹ His purpose was to endeavour to bring his theories into line with the pervading scientific spirit of his century. "Nous sommes déjà si loin de ces temps (the age of Louis XIV)," he maintained, "que, pour bien juger d'un homme il ne suffit pas toujours de lire ses productions, il faut encore les revoir en place, recomposer l'ensemble de l'époque et l'existence entière du personnage."² His innovation, then, is his answer to the Baconian query, Is the whole truth ever barren? and by means of which the critic could proceed to an exact estimate of his subject. At the same time, Ste. Beuve was too shrewd not to realise that his theory could not be carried too far: "quelque soin qu'on mette à pénétrer ou à expliquer ... il y aura toujours une certaine partie inexpiquée, inexpiquable, celle en quoi consiste le don individuel du génie."³ And here he lays his finger on Taine's failure with his History which is not trustworthy in its critical opinions just because its author sought to force all men into adjustment with his own theories.

In calling himself a disciple of Bacon, Ste. Beuve was thus not mistaken; but, in his quality of discipleship, he might acceptably have given us something more satisfying, more solid, about his master than he has done.⁴

1. Cp. MacClintock, op. cit., 30.

2. *Nouv. lundis*, IX, 70.

3. *Nouv. lundis*, VIII, 66.

4. For a most interesting and detailed discussion of Ste. Beuve's "scientific criticism," cp. Babbitt, op. cit. 167 ff.

XII. Coleridge and Wordsworth.

In these days where it is considered fashionable to cast a stone at Coleridge, it is refreshing to know, according to Ste. Beuve, that his Meditative Poems have not been sufficiently praised. They are admirable, he says, and in them "la nature anglaise domestique - (how Ste. Beuve loves this "nature anglaise domestique! ") si verte, si fleurie, si lustrée, décore à ravir et avec inépuisable richesse, des sentiments d'effusion religieuse, conjugale ou fraternelle." "The Nightingale," "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison," "Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement," and others were evidently well-known to Ste. Beuve, who remarks appreciatively on the poet's "curiosité brillante, l'étincelle perpétuelle du détail, et en même temps l'élévation et la spiritualité des sentiments. Il y a en lui une irrésistible sympathie par tous les points avec la vie universelle, et il cherche ensuite à réprimer cette expansion, à la ramener dans un ordre régulier de foi: il y a en lui, si je l'ose dire, du bouddhiste qui tâche d'être méthodiste. Cette lutte et ce contraste ont un grand charme."²

This indeed makes pleasant reading even although personal opinions may differ as to the truth of the Buddhist-Methodist element in Coleridge. But how little all the above must seem in the keenness of our disappointment when we realise that no mention is made of the "Ancient Mariner" or of "Kubla Khan," or of "Christabel" - even allowing for the fact that none of Coleridge's poems had yet been translated into French! Time after time, Ste. Beuve stops tantalisingly short just when ^{our} interest is at its highest point!

1. Port. contemp., I, 338.

2. Ibid. 339.

A page or two further on in the same volume Ste. Beuve compares Wordsworth² with Lamartine who is the chief figure in this Causerie. The critic remarks upon the love which each poet cherished for all natural beauty, but that, while Lamartine goes straight to the heart of his subject, Wordsworth "se dérobe par des circuits nombreux, compliqués ... s'il monte au sommet d'un mont, et qu'il veuille, en s'asseyant, bénir Dieu au bout du pèlerinage, il fera, par exemple, le sonnet suivant" - and here follows a rendering in French of "Rest and be Thankful." Lamartine, on the other hand, had he been on the same pilgrimage, "eût entonné son hymne d'actions et de grâces, au sommet, sans s'arrêter à cette comparaison, fort belle d'ailleurs, mais cherchée, de l'oiseau et du poisson, avec l'âme qui monte, tandis que le corps est étendu immobile."

While opinion may again vary as to whether Wordsworth's simile is "cherchée" or not, the criticism is just and keenly observant. So also is Ste. Beuve's next comparison, and it is amusing as well: if Lamartine were to stop in front of a Highland hut accompanied by a lady, he would be able to describe it to her with the utmost charm and detail, but without realising the possibility of any hesitation, on the part of his companion, to trespass upon the cottager's domain. "Wordsworth au contraire, nous parle ainsi," and there follows a translation of the "Highland Hut," where Wordsworth, in a manner which might appear to some, at least, a little uncalled for, gravely rebukes his companion for what, after all, may be a very natural reluctance to overstep the bounds of ordinary politeness!

Again, continues Ste. Beuve, compare Lamartine's "Le Lac,"

1. Ibid, 241.

2. Wordsworth's "Ballades et petits poèmes" were translated in 1850 by Richomme.

3. Port. contemp., I, 342.

or "Milly," or "Jocelyn," with a poem like "Bothwell Castle." The French poet is quite content to reproduce the scene before his mind's eye, whereas Wordsworth prefers to write a kind of psychological poem.¹ "Lamartine réfléchit volontiers les objets en sa poésie, comme une belle eau de lac, parfois ébranlée à la surface, réfléchit les hautes cimes du rivage; Wordsworth est plus difficile à suivre à travers les divers miroirs par lesquels il nous donne à regarder sa pensée.... le poète de Rydal-Mount a le don des symboles."²

His last comparison between Wordsworth and Lamartine deals in the manner in which each regards the progress of humanity. Referring to the former's "Proud were ye, Mountains, when in Times of Old," Ste. Beuve declares "on sent ce qu'il en coûte à la noble muse druidique des bois, à la muse des contemplations et des superstitions solitaires, pour saluer ainsi ce qui ravage déjà son empire et la doit en partie détronner je m'en attendris comme quand Enée, par ordre du Destin, s'arrache à la Didon aimée, pour fonder la Ville inconnue. Il obéit, il se hâte, mais il pleure - lacrymae volvuntur inanes. Ces pleurs, amère et vaine rosée, à la face du héros ou du poète, répond à merveille à l'austère sourire du temps,"

"And smiles on you with cheer sublime"³

This passage - and reasons of space prohibit the giving of it all - is one of the comparatively few in which Ste. Beuve leaves his usually calm, even matter-of-fact style to write in a manner which, for him, attains the heights of passion. He goes on to praise the poet's zeal as a reformer, his impassioned love for simplicity, and his belief that nature is a formative influence superior to any other.⁴

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1. Cp. John Morley: "Thought is, on the whole, predominant over feeling in his (Wordsworth's) verse." (Introduction to edition of Works of Wordsworth, London, 1893.
 2. Port. contemp., I, 344.
 3. Ibid, 345.
 4. Cp. L. Cazamian: Hist. of Eng. Lit., II, 270 ff. for an echo of this passage.

We have already seen how anxious Ste. Beuve was to introduce into French verse a humbler and more domestic note - that note which Wordsworth praises in the "Prelude":

"..... the vulgar forms of present things,
The actual world of our familiar days."

And it is not too much to say that his own "Consolations" opened a vein of that familiar poetry which, aided by the influence of men like Cowper, Crabbe, Coleridge and, above all, Wordsworth, added its weight to the growing body of opinion against Byron in favour of Wordsworth.² "Nothing can tarnish the splendour of his (Ste. Beuve's) courage in boldly challenging the classical opinion of 1830 and in procuring a welcome for the great succeeding generation of French Romantics."³ From his early days when he formed part of that group of Parisian lovers of English literature he cherished a love for Wordsworth which, throughout his life, caused him to remain a high priest of the Wordsworth cult.

This being so, it is disappointing for us English admirers of Ste. Beuve to have so little actually said by Ste. Beuve about Wordsworth. By disappointing we do not infer that the French critic was in any way falling short of his duty: his duty, if we may so term it, lay in furthering, as far as possible, the Wordsworthian influence in France.⁴ But he could have furthered that influence much more powerfully, had he devoted a few articles to a study of the "Prelude" or of the "Intimations of Immortality"; to a criticism of the famous

1. Cp. p. 71.

2. Cp. Babbitt, op. cit., 118.
It is interesting to note that in the *Revue europ.*, 1835, deuxième série, II, 83, Fontaney had two articles on Wordsworth with several translations from the poems, among which was "The Idiot Boy": precisely the poem which Byron had most bitterly ridiculed! Cp. Estève, op. cit., 251.

3. Gosse, *More Books on the Table*, 1923.

4. Cp. Texte, *Etudes sur la litt. europ.*, 1898, pp. 183-194.

Preface to the Lyrical Ballads; to a discussion of Coleridge's 22nd chapter of the Biographia Literaria in which Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, laid down in that Preface, is so ably analysed ...

To have done at least some of this would have more than justified Ste. Beuve's title of "Frère aîné"; not to have done it makes us exclaim in exasperation, makes us ask why he did not echo such brief but none the less compelling clarion-calls as that which sounds in "The Small Celandine"

"Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"; -

for what better banner could he have unfurled in his campaign for the invasion into France of that "poésie humble et domestique .. si vivante et si naturelle" for which his heart hungered' Whether indeed he really knew the "Intimations" or "Tintern Abbey," or knew of Coleridge's and Hazlitt's and De Quincey's criticisms cannot be definitely known. Let us, therefore, "find brief solace there", in the "scanty plot of ground" he has tilled for us.

XIII. DR. JOHNSON.

Johnson's name, we know, is mentioned in connection with Chesterfield and Cowper; the other references to him are, with one exception, insignificant.

In the *Causeries du lundi*, Ste. Beuve praises Johnson's weight and authority as a critic; "Johnson avait un bon jugement et l'autorité nécessaire pour le faire valoir, qualités essentielles à tout critique et que les critiques de nos jours paraissent, au contraire, trop oublier: car, avec tous leurs

1. Cp. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 151 ff.

beaux et brillants développements, ils trouvent souvent le moyen de n'avoir ni jugement ni autorité Du bon sens sterling, voilà ce qu'avait Johnson, et c'est à quoi toutes les malices et les fines ironies ne suppléent pas."¹ This is true, of course, but is it the whole truth? Johnson's "bon sens sterling" is evident in his appraisals of men like Pope, Dryden and of many minor writers, but it is distressingly lacking in connection with Milton, Donne, Gray and others.² His "estimate of Chaucer doubtless would have been, as his "Rambler" remarks on Spencer actually are, worthless, except as a curiosity."³ Indeed, his "authority" is largely the result of the position he held among the literati of his day, and his characteristic refusal to question orthodox beliefs makes his whole code of criticism to rest exclusively on a purely didactic and logical basis which inevitably rendered his outlook incapable of appreciating the highest poetry. How different, then, is Ste. Beuve's attitude, so widely tolerant, sympathetic, inquisitive, so eager to explain, to discuss and to praise! On the one hand is the magisterial doctor judging "authors as if they were criminals in the dock, answerable for every infraction of the rules and regulations laid down by the laws of art and which it was his business to administer without fear or favour."⁴ On the other is Ste. Beuve overflowing with that ready understanding which makes us feel as if we were actually seeing and living with his subjects; and yet "the absolute truthfulness, which was as

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 490.

2. Cp. his opinion of Lycidas: "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, the numbers unpleasing ... easy, vulgar and therefore disgusting." This, too, of a poem generally considered a touchstone of taste!

3. Saintsbury, Hist. of Eng. Lit., 616.

4. L. Strachey, Book and Persons, 16.

naturally a feature of his character as his industry,"¹ forbids the employment of his imagination except in matters of pure description.

How, then, can Ste. Beuve's above-quoted praise for Johnson be reconciled with the latter's own practice and precept? Beliefs which he expresses elsewhere show indirectly how he secretly looked upon "the great Aristarch." When enumerating certain essential qualities which a critic must possess, the French critic always emphasised personal weight and influence - that mental and moral integrity which can state an opinion authoritatively and can properly defend it, if need be, against attack. This certainty and ability he termed "irritabilité du bon sens et de la raison qui fait dire "non" avec véhémence."² This Johnson had, but to too great a degree, and, like other critics, was therefore very frequently led to a dogmatism, to a kind of "susceptibilité vive, passionnée, irritable,"³ which is occasionally the accentuation of a virtue, since it is the manifestation of the critic's awareness of his own authority. Ste. Beuve approves in general "il y a dans cette autorité et dans l'importance de celui que l'exerce, quelque chose de vivant, de personnel, qui ne tient pas uniquement à ce qu'il écrit et qui ne s'y représente pas toujours, en entier, mais qui tient de plus près à l'homme même, à son geste, à son action."⁴

But too much importance may be attached to Ste. Beuve's admiration for "le bon sens sterling" of Johnson; for while it is obvious that the French critic was largely in agreement with

1. Brandes, op. cit., 328.

2. Caus. du lundi, II, 19.

3. Caus. du lundi, VIII, 310.

4. Cahteaubriand, II, 115.

the latter, although there is, alas, no actual evidence that he was acquainted with, and disapproved of, the doctor's all too frequent insensibility and sour prejudices, yet the ill-concealed "malice" with which we have seen him so often allude to "le sévère Johnson" makes us fairly certain that that admiration was duly qualified and limited.

In other words, where Johnson fails in his down-right verdicts, full of rigid orthodoxy and with a blind eye ever turned especially towards original or non-didactic poetry, Ste. Beuve prudently avoids wide generalisations. "Le vrai d'hier, déjà incomplet ce matin, sera demain tout à fait dépassé et laissé derrière. Les moules, fixés à peine, deviennent aussitôt trop étroits et insuffisants. Aussi, ... chacun à chaque instant devrait être occupé à briser dans son esprit le moule qui est près de prendre et de se former. Ne nous figeons pas; tenons nos esprits vivants et fluides."¹

Ste. Beuve was a good enough poet himself to appraise the value of 'sterling good sense' when ruthlessly applied to the highest poetry; if he nowhere definitely says so, the inference is clear that he was by no means, and for the reasons stated above, in such close agreement with the Doctor as might at first glance be imagined. The numerous "hits" which the latter received from Ste. Beuve, evidence of which we saw in the articles² on Cowper, are significant of much.

1. Nouv. lundis, 7, 49.

2. It is surprising that in these articles Ste. Beuve did not quote the poet's derogatory remarks upon Johnson's "Prayers and Meditations."

XIV. GOLDSMITH, CRABBE, SWIFT,
ADDISON and OTHERS.

1.

Goldsmith receives rather more attention from Ste. Beuve than one might expect in view of the meagreness of the remarks about other writers more important, although it must be confessed that the attention does not amount to very much. "The Deserted Village" and the "Vicar of Wakefield" are duly and sincerely praised. The critic exclaims admiringly upon the truth and beauty of the portraits of the English clergyman in each of these two works, but then goes on, in his characteristically allusive manner, to mention in passing Fielding's "Joseph Andrews" and Richardson's "Pamela." But harking back to Goldsmith, he quotes in English the famous lines:

"A man he was to all the country dear
And passing rich with forty pounds a year.

and dwells upon the idyllic happiness of the life of a country clergyman in his rose-embowered cottage, set in a lovely countryside. His remarks are almost certainly coloured by the recollections of his stay near Oxford in 1828.² Thompson and Cowper, he points out, were sons of country manses, and have enriched English literature with their reminiscences of rural delights. But his honesty as well as his knowledge make him give the other side of the picture. The fact that Cowper was a sixth child reminds him that "les Révérends d'ordinaire avaient six ou dix enfants."³ Avec ces nombreuses familles, la réalité était parfois moins fleurie que le rêve du poète." And thus he

1. Cp. Port. contemp., I, 326 ff.

2. Vide supra p.13.

3. Is not this somewhat exaggerated statement on a par with the insistence he also makes here that all English parsons are deeply learned in Greek!

thinks of Crabbe who, he says, gives the best description of this harsh reality. "The Village," "The Borough," and "The Parish Register" are mentioned briefly: "Ce sont des morceaux achevés de précision, de grâce malicieuse, de relief personnel et domestique." The description he gives of the curate in "The Borough" shows the sympathy and enjoyment with which he must have read the poem: "sa science dans les classiques grecs; sa pauvreté; la maladie de sa femme; ses quatres filles si belles et si pieuses, ses cinq fils qui s'affligent avec lui; ce mémoire du marchand entre deux feuillets qui le vient troubler au milieu du livre grec qu'il commentait dans l'oubli de ses maux" - how well has Ste. Beuve, to use a favourite word of his own, "senti" the picture! Yet, along with so much praise, a word or two of censure would not have been out of place and would have struck a juster balance. And it would have given his French public a more precise idea of Crabbe's talents if the critic had indicated the place he keeps by himself in our literature; for he is overshadowed neither by Wordsworth, with his exaltation of realism glorified by a touch of mysticism, nor, on the other hand, by those novelists of social pity, who have given larger scope and livelier animation to his plea in favour of the poor.

Thus, although Ste. Beuve's remarks on both Goldsmith and Crabbe fill some half-dozen pages, they contain no more than a kind of synopsis of the plots of their various works, interspersed with ejaculatory, and at times rather humourless, expressions of eulogy.

2.

Swift comes in for a paragraph!¹ In his article on St. Victor, Ste. Beuve warmly defends Swift against the attacks made upon him in the French writer's "Hommes et Dieux." Ste. Beuve

1. Port. contemp., I, 329.

2. Nouv. lundis, X, 447.

admits that Swift was filled with a strong and bitter irony. - "la plus amère, peut-être, dont un esprit humain se soit montré capable" - but he was, at the same time, "un grand et triste esprit, l'un des plus pénétrants qui aient jamais été." Good reasons are at hand, the critic continues, to mitigate and excuse Swift's bitterness: he was without love and all that love involves; he had penetrated all the secret and overt corruption and vanities of his time; disappointment, disillusionment and a semi-exile were the portion of his latter days. "Peut-on s'étonner que sa bile ardente ait débordé .. Lisez ses lettres ... ce sont des trésors, à mon sens, d'expérience, d'agrément rassis et de sagesse."

The above paragraph no doubt answers Ste. Beuve's purpose in refuting St. Victor's unjust attacks. Nowhere else is Swift mentioned.

3.

In the same way the substance of his remarks on Addison is painfully meagre. He is, we are told, "si anglais sous ses airs d'élégance"; The Spectator crops up now and again but with no important qualifications; there is a brief note on the "Vision of Mirza": "On y trouvera une belle imitation, purement morale, et qui, en comprenant tout ce qu'il y a de triste dans la destinée humaine, ne se fixe pas aux images lugubres, mais s'en détache à temps"; and again Addison is "un moraliste fin, discret, adroit.... son pinceau sans mollesse et sans amertume."³

We repeat: Is this not painfully meagre: - nothing about that astonishing docility with which his century obeyed the lessons he taught it.....

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1. Nouv. lundis, I, 274.
 2. Caus. du lundi, VII, 331.
 3. Caus. du lundi, VI, 325.

4.

When so little is given to one who deserves much, it is tantalising to note how much is given to one who deserves less. For Fennimore Cooper, whose novels do not, strictly speaking, form part and parcel of English literature, although they belong to the Scott school of fiction - of which, as we know, Ste. Beuve was not a wildly enthusiastic admirer - the critic seems to have entertained not a little affection. It is true that he allows the American novelist but little creative faculty, but he hastens to assure us that after once meeting Falcon Eye and Tom Coffin he cannot forget them. The actual plots of the novels are never under good control, he says: they are even less supple and complete than Scott's, because he attempts to spin too many threads at the same time, so that confusion consequently arises. Sometimes, too, the "coup de théâtre" is over-emphasised: when the dying hero unfolds his country's flag and shouts "We triumph!" "cela ressemble trop aux morts théâtrales de notre Cirque Olympien."² The critic pokes goodnatured fun at the long arm of coincidence which is so frequently conspicuous: it would have been better, he says, if the Red Corsair had not been quite so skilful in his disguises; if he had not been at once Mistress Wyliss' brother, Henry's uncle and Gertrude's parent and if the worthy Richard Field had not been so disconcertingly generous with his nautical terms!

Despite these blemishes, however, we are assured that Fennimore Cooper's just claims to fame rest on the beauty of his descriptions. For if his plots "sont presque toujours invraisemblables, Cooper, en effet, ne conte pas pour conter, mais pour décrire il est doué d'une sensibilité contenue et profonde, d'une vaste et paisible imagination. Poète descriptif,

1. Port. litt., I, 288.

2. Ibid, 292.

poète rêveur, patriote sincère, il a cherché avant tout dans le cadre du roman historique une occasion d'épancher son âme."¹

The result is, therefore, that Cooper's novels afford great pleasure, for the beauty and truth of their numerous descriptive passages more than redeem the occasional obscurities and the many improbabilities.

How neatly and deftly has Ste. Beuve touched off the American novelist's strong points and weak points; a word here, a hint there, a quiet smile of amusement turning to one of enjoyment, and we, to whom the critic seems to have been chatting cosily, see the writer with a fresh and clearer vision.²

5.

Hume³, Hobbes, Roger Bacon, Macaulay, Richardson, Waller, and hosts of other names are lavishly sprinkled over the pages of Ste. Beuve's sixty odd volumes, but always and only in connection with something or someone else. It is by no means a rash conclusion to make when we say that Ste. Beuve had no real first-hand knowledge of the writings of all those whom he so casually mentions; this has been already hinted more than once in the foregoing pages. We have seen, for example, how, in his review of Taine's History, he skims over the surface of

1. ¹ibid, 289.

2. Note here another example of Ste. Beuve's tantalisingly brief allusions: Fenimore Cooper, he says, had been a sailor like Smollett: but how much readier we had been to read his opinion of the Englishman. Again, when the "Red Corsair" reminds him of Byron's "Conrad", would we not prefer to hear him discuss the latter?

3. An interesting little comparison is made between the respective styles of Hume and Guizot (Caus. du lundi, I, 321): "Ce que je remarque surtout en lisant Hume, c'est qu'il m'est possible de le contrôler ...: il m'en procure le moyen par les détails mêmes qu'il donne, par la balance qu'il établit." Ste. Beuve then goes on to express his pleasure which the Scots historian's clear, polished, ironical style affords him and contrasts it with Guizot's diction - "austère, qui ne rit jamais - on ne croitait pas qu'il s'agissait de la même histoire, tant le ton est différent!"

our early literature without making the faintest pretence to any knowledge of it. His extraordinarily retentive memory was always of the greatest help to him; what he read once seemed hardly ever forgotten, and at the opportune moment a reference could be brought in "en passant" with striking appropriateness. Yet the frequency with which he could, and did, make allusions from the great wealth of his classical scholarship is not evidenced to anything like the same degree with respect to English, nor as we shall see later, to German literature. To have done so, indeed, were to show that universal monarchy, (to use his own words) which is given to no-one even in the realm of Spirits.¹

A good example of this allusive method occurs in his discussion of the "Vieux Collège" by Brizeux.² The critic is naturally reminded of Gray's "Ode to Eton College," but of Gray the poet or of the poem itself there is no word of criticism. Another reference³ to Gray consists merely in bewailing the fact that the English poet, like himself, found his inspiration so quickly fled; and this lament is again mentioned when he seeks to account for Gray's melancholy by attributing its cause to "la stérilité d'un talent poétique si distingué, si rare, mais si avare."⁴ It is interesting to note in passing the reasons which other critics have offered to explain Gray's melancholy. Bonstetten,⁵ whom Ste. Beuve himself quotes, believed it was due to the fact that the English poet had never been in love; Lowell⁶ half agrees with Ste. Beuve but

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 394.
2. Port. contemp., III, 273.
3. Caus. du lundi, XIV, 431.
4. Port. contemp., IV, 447.
5. Caus. du lundi, XIV, 431 ff.
6. Cp. Prose Works, 1906, II, 166.

would add remorse for indolence; while Matthew Arnold maintains that it arose from a lack of harmony between his poetic soul and the spirit of his age which was essentially one of prose;¹ and a modern French critic² sets it down to the fact that he did not possess the necessary creative force to fuse together the contrary impulses of romantic spontaneity and classical lucidity and that only at brief intervals is he truly a conciliator; thus he purchases his successes at the cost of semi-sterility. Interesting as the problem no doubt is, who can deny that he would not infinitely prefer from Ste. Beuve such illuminating criticism of Gray's actual works as he could so easily have given? In any case, his conjectures above-mentioned do not seem so satisfying as those of Cazamian.

6.

Besides the meagreness of his appraisals of the numerous English authors Ste. Beuve mentions, many a name occurs to the mind which goes without any reference at all. A reason which can well enough be offered to account for some lacunae - namely, that many an English work had not as yet been translated and so brought to the attention of the French public - by no means holds good for a striking majority.

Dickens' "Nicholas Nickelby," for example, was translated in 1839-40 and was followed in rapid succession by the "Old Curiosity Shop." "Copperfield," "Martin Chuzzlewit," "Pickwick" and others.³ Carlyle's "French Revolution" - surely a tempting subject for a French critic - appeared in France in 1865. George Eliot's works began to be published in 1861. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" was translated in 1847. Macaulay's works came out at various dates between 1852 and 1865 and Mrs. Gaskell's "Cranford"

1. Quoted by Lowell, *ibid.*

2. Cp. L. Cazamian, *op. cit.*, 161.

3. Ste. Beuve's great friend W. Hughes (*vide supra* p.11) translated much of Dickens, Thackeray etc.

- surely another delightful subject for a commentator like Ste. Beuve - appeared in 1856. As far back as 1823 Mme. Belloc's version of Thomas Moore's poetry was being extensively read. And as early as 1834 the "Last Days of Pompeii" was published, while two years later Sheridan's complete works appeared in French dress.

These are only a few of a great number¹ which Ste. Beuve completely ignores. It would, of course, be asking for the impossible to expect him to deal with even any one of these when one tries to realise, not only the extraordinary fulness and activity of his literary life as far as French literature is concerned, but also the extent of his studies in other literatures which were, all said and done, extraneous to his common purpose. The thing to lament is that, from our English point of view, he did not oftener choose otherwise than he in fact did. "The little more, how much it is...."

It ill becomes us however to grumble; let us be thankful for what we have received and realise the absurdity of looking for impossibilities: "Quem Fors dierum cunque dabit,
Lucro appone."

Had Ste. Beuve lived twice his span of years he could barely have satisfied a tithe of that on which his opinion would eagerly be desired. If he had no acquaintance with the early stages of our literature; if he ignored some of its very finest flowers; if he has shown an occasional lack of proportion in some of his appraisals; if he too often indulges in empty stylistic formulas, brimming over with famous names and yet in the end conveying so tantalisingly little; if he has elected to discuss some writers whom we would willingly have seen retire in favour of others; even if he has blundered more than

1. Cp. Lanson, Manuel bibliographique de la litt. française.

once; yet, considering the disadvantages under which he had so long to struggle, how much has he given us! He has left to the world - and more especially to his fellow-countrymen - riches for all time to come. And if his judgments upon our literature are neither so numerous as we should have liked nor as convincing as those upon his own, he has proved that it is such extended and comparative studies which form the basis for all true criticism and which are "not only the *via prima* but the *via sola* of literary safety." Such faults as there are in Ste. Beuve's references to the literature of England are faults in the settings: they are not flaws in the jewels.

1. Is it not a little disconcerting to find in one of his letters the following phrase: "dans ce groupe immortel et touchant des Kirke White, des Keats" (Corresp. II, letter of Dec. 17th, 1865). What, we may well inquire, is Kirke White doing in this galley, and what, apart from an alliterative one, is the resemblance between him and Keats? Here, beyond a doubt, Ste. Beuve has stumbled rather badly, as he has also done when he went out of his way to praise the verse of Mrs. Hemans, not only once but twice! (cp. Caus. du lundi, X, 118; *ibid*, XIV, 10) But it is our duty not to confound the accidental with the essential; otherwise we would err grievously and be much the poorer.
2. Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, III, 462.

P A R T I I .

STE. BEUVE'S CRITICISMS OF GERMAN LITERATURE.

I. INTRODUCTION.

1.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Germany, so long a servile imitator of France, began to loosen its bonds and even to look for revenge. When the Sturm and Drang agitation was at its height, it seemed as though Germany, and not France, was to be the scene of a violent social upheaval; for never, with the one exception of the Romantic movement, had individualism been preached with greater vehemence and aggressiveness than it was preached by the leaders of this agitation. And while saying the last word and embodying the highest ideal of individualism, these leaders ushered in at the same time the strongest intellectual movement of the nineteenth century by anticipating, at least in theory, the new collectivistic ideal.

Werther, translated into French in 1779, had an overwhelming success; the dramas of Goethe, and especially of Schiller, were gradually exercising an influence on the pièces de théâtre of the Revolutionary period and on the romantic plays of the later years; Mme. de Staël's "De l'Allemagne," full of first-hand impressions, quickly caught the public ear, and the desire became increasingly manifest to know more of the poets and philosophers of whom she talked so interestingly. In 1821 was begun the publication of "Les chefs d'oeuvres des théâtres étrangers," in which Goethe, Lessing, Kotzebue and Werner figure alongside Shakespeare and Calderon. It is significant that the first dramatic essay of Dumas père was a "Fiesque" imitated from Schiller, and that Victor Cousin was not satisfied until he had gone to Germany to become initiated

1. Cp. K. Francke, Social Forces in German Literature, 318 ff.

into the philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Schelling. This renaissance of Germany is, indeed, amazing, not only in comparison with the literary bankruptcy of the previous era, but also on account of the rapidity of the victorious march onwards.

2.

It is, then, natural that Ste. Beuve's interest should be aroused by the growing vogue. In 1826 his paper, "le Globe," was ridiculing the absurdity of any attempt at literary nationalism: witness the irony of the following passage:-
 "Oui, nous sommes Français, tous Français, et nous saurons nous montrer dignes de nos patriotiques confrères. Ce n'est pas assez de repousser Shakespeare et Schiller, renvoyons à l'Italie ses statues, à l'Allemagne sa musique, à l'Angleterre son industrie et ses machines à vapeur. Assez longtemps nous avons eu la faiblesse d'admirer Newton; Newton est Anglais; proscrivons sa philosophie et revenons-en aux tourbillons de Descartes notre compatriote! Brûlons Scott, et lisons Mme. de Genlis. Sachons en un mot nous passer des étrangers; et, tandis que tous les peuples de l'Europe tendent à mettre en commun leurs arts, leur industrie et leur littérature, renfermés comme les Chinois dans les limites de notre territoire, restons Français, uniquement Français."²

Ste. Beuve heartily endorsed this piece of sarcasm, especially in its relation to English literature; as far as German literature however, was concerned, he suffered a severe handicap. For if his knowledge of English, though sound

1. ... und eine solche, aus der Tiefe der göttlichen Menschenschöpfung und Menschenriegerung entspringende mächtige Strömung war auch die das deutsche Volk seit der Mitte des 18ten ... Jahrhunderts beherrschende poetische Stimmung ... die so allgemein, so mächtig, ja so ausschliesslich war dasz sie nicht einmal ... sich stören liess." (Vilmar, Deutsche National-Literatur, 27te Aufl. S. 347)
3. 2nd Feb., quoted by Michaut. Ste. Beuve avant les lundis, p. 95.

enough, was mainly "livresque," his acquaintance with German was wholly so and by no means sound at that. Despite the growing interest in things German, to nearly all Romantics the language of Germany was a thing unknown. "Aucun des grands poètes français ne savait l'allemand,"¹ he laments. His letters give many instances of the difficulty in which he found himself when confronted with a German text and of how he sighed for the times when he might be able to "balbutier déjà pas mal d'allemand."² And almost thirty years after that utterance, we find him declaring that "les grands ouvrages écrits en allemand ne sont véritablement lus que quand ils sont traduits. Les érudits se passent de traductions et les dédaignent ... Une lecture longue, contenue, complète n'est possible à la plupart, même des gens instruits, que lorsqu'elle est facile."³

His sojourn in Germany (Oct. 1828) was of too short duration to make any marked impression on his study of the language. At that time, he was still cherishing ambitions of being a poet and his verses show occasional traces of his German memories. It is unfortunate that no letters are extant to cast any light upon the detail of his visit which, however, apparently left but small imprint on his mind.⁴

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 269.
2. Cp. the Corresp. inédite à M. et Mme. Juste Olivier, Paris 1904, letter dated Aug. 17th, 1838.
3. Nouv. lundis, I, 46, (April 10th, 1865).
4. The following short extract, from one of his poems written at this time, is typical of the strength of his memories of the various towns visited:-

"J'arrive de bien loin et demain je repars,
J'admire d'un coup d'oeil le fleuve et les remparts,
La haute cathédrale et sa flèche élançée;
Mais rien ne me tient ici tant que la pensée
De ma jeune cousine"

That is, three lines are sufficient to deal with Cologne
.....! cp. les Consolations, XXV.

II. STE BEUVE'S KNOWLEDGE OF GERMAN.

His references to German literature are frequent enough if by no means either so numerous or so weighty as those to English, or even to Italian, literature.¹ And in the large majority of cases they are "Schlagworte." Sometimes, indeed, his wonderful flair for literature combined with his vast powers of memory aid him to quote the names and works of German writers with apparently no effort and with a nice appropriateness; but the cleverness with which he does so cannot conceal the fact that his general knowledge was not profound and that his characteristically allusive method is far oftener tantalisingly deceptive than was the case where English literature was concerned.

For example, when discussing Lamartine's "Jocelyn," he makes the slightest of references to Goethe's "Hermann und Dorothea" and to "le bon Voss et sa Louise"² in connection with Maxine du Camp's "Les Chants modernes," he mentions quite unnecessarily Alexander von Humboldt³, whom he again unnecessarily brings in during his discussion of Bernardin de St. Pierre's descriptions of nature;⁴ other instances are very easily to be found and they add nothing either to help us in our knowledge of German literature or in our estimate of his.

From the foregoing it is clear that Ste. Beuve had to rely, to a far greater extent than was the case with English, upon the help of his German-speaking friends. When he lived in Lausanne, giving his lectures on Port Royal from the autumn of 1837 until the summer of the following year, he made the acquaintance of

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1. Cp. *Revue d'hist. litt.*, vol. 30, 1923, for interesting article by C. Pelligrini, showing that Ste. Beuve's knowledge of Italian literature was fairly comprehensive.
 2. *Port. litt.*, II, 328.
 3. *Caus. du lundi*, XII, 14.
 4. *Port. litt.*, II, 127.

many good German scholars especially the Juste Oliviers and Vinet. Outside Switzerland he was on good terms with Nicolas Martin and Eugene Borel. His acquaintances in Germany, however, and in contra-distinction to those in England, were few and far between: he was on fairly friendly terms with Ludwig Wihl¹, who occasionally sent him books of German poetry; Reuchlin², the theologian, he had met in Lausanne; Ulric Güttinger, the poet, and Bonstetten, a German-speaking Swiss, remained for long among his best friends. All these, and no doubt others, were ready and willing to help the French critic gradually to widen his knowledge both of the language and of the literature of Germany³.

III. THE SWABIAN SCHOOL.

We have already mentioned that when Ste. Beuve was first attracted to German literature he was in the throes of his renunciation of all hopes of becoming a great poet. It is natural, therefore, that German poetry should at that time have interested him most and it is also natural that it was with the Swabian school of poetry that he felt a certain affinity⁴. In it he found described the simple things of nature and that quiet melancholy such as he himself loved. Thus Uhland and Kerner, especially the former, remained among his favourite poets. During his stay in Lausanne while his knowledge of German must have been in its rudimentary stages he translated "freely" seven

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1. He published in Germany an article on Ste. Beuve. Cp. *Nouv. Corresp.*, 381, letter undated.
 2. A professor at Stuttgart. Cp. *Nouv. Corresp.* letter of 8th Jan., 1842.
 3. Cp. *Corresp.*, II, letter of 23rd Aug., 1867.
 4. Cp. letter of 8th Jan., 1842, *Nouv. Corresp.*; "... une foule d'agréables parfums que recèle cette belle et fraîche poésie de Souabe."

poems into French: ¹ two from Uhland², and one each by Schiller, Kerner, Rückert, A.W. Schlegel, and the Minnesanger Hadlaub.

All these poems evidently appealed to him as being in harmony with his general state of depression and melancholy at the time, due not only to his disappointment associated with his poetic ambitions but also to the ill-success of his matrimonial projects.³

It seems certain it was by chance that Ste. Beuve came upon Hadlaub, the Minnesanger, a decadent poet, if there ever was one, of the Middle Ages. In Mme. de Kruderer's "Valerie" he saw a passage which reminded him of the version done by Marmier of one of Hadlaub's poems, and Ste. Beuve's "translation"⁵ is really a kind of revised version of Marmier's work which had appeared in the *Revue de Paris*. The knowledge which Ste. Beuve had of old German was probably on the same level as that which he possessed of German mediaeval archeology: enough, that is, but only

1. Cp. *Poesies de Ste. Beuve*, 2e partie, pp. 291 ff.

Uhland's "Der Räuber" and "Zwo Jungfrauen," Kerner's "Stille Tränen," Rückert's "Und ich war auch in Arkadien geboren," Schlegel's "Rom," Schiller's "Die Erwartung," and a Minnesang by Hadlaub.

2. Cp. Appendix p. for his translations of Uhland's "Der Räuber" and "Die Zwo Jungfrauen," and Kerner's "Stille Tränen."

3. Uhland's "Zwo Jungfrauen" is associated in his mind with his unsuccessful love affair with the two sisters, Frédérique and Elize - it is uncertain which of the two Ste. Beuve preferred: it is, indeed, doubtful whether he knew himself!

A letter dated Oct., 1840, in the *Corresp.*, I, addressed to "M. le General," in which Ste. Beuve refers in thinly veiled terms to the refusal he had evidently sustained at the hands of one of the sisters, most probably conceals the name of General Pelletier who was the father of the two girls. Cf. note by editor (anonymous) of the *Corresp.*, p. 11

4. Cp. *Port. des Femmes*, 392.

5. For Ste. Beuve's version cp. *Poesies*, 2e partie, 277. Marmier's translation appeared in the *Revue de Paris* of April 2nd, 1837.

enough, to allow him to make a fleeting and non-committal reference here and there. As the *Revue de Paris* with its contributions by Marmier furnished him with his bowing acquaintance with the one, so another journal¹ of the same year furnished him with a little knowledge of the other through the articles of the brothers Boissérée.

It seems also fairly certain that it was accident and not intention which led him to Schlegel's "Rom." This elegy was dedicated to Mme. de Stael and Ste. Beuve translated² only that portion of it which bears directly upon her. Not only is it, as are the others, "freely" translated, but he perpetrates a real schoolboy error as well, for he mistakes the logical connection and obvious meaning of the first two lines:

"Hast du das Leben geschlürft an Parthenopes uppigen Busen,
Lerne den Tod nun auch über dem Grabe der Welt"

he renders as:

"Au sein de Parthénope as-tu goûté la vie?
Dans le tombeau du monde apprenons à mourir!"

On two other occasions³ Ste. Beuve refers to Schlegel - always to the elder of the brothers: Fréderich he never mentions, possibly because the latter never came to France as did August Wilhelm - and each time practically all he has to say is a complaint of the German's injustice to French literature. His acquaintance seems, therefore, to be strictly

1. *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1837, I, pp. 186-195: quoted by Walther Kückler in the *Zeitschrift für französische Sprach- u. Literatur*, Bd. XXVIII, 1905.

There are two facts which may help to explain the attention which Ste. Beuve paid to Hadlaub; firstly, Uhland had greatly admired the Minnesanger (cp. Biese, *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, I, 175); and secondly, the celebrated *Manesse Minnelieder MSS.* were still in Paris (cp. Biese, *op. cit.*, III, 322), and it is possible that Ste. Beuve, if he did not actually see them, had at least heard of them. These two circumstances combined may well have aroused in him more interest than a casual reading of Marmier's translation alone would have done.

2. *Poésies*, 2e partie, 211 ff.
3. *Port. litt.*, II, 307; *Nouv. lunais*, II, 30.

limited to the latter's utterances on French literature; for had he known more, we can imagine how certain he would have been to take advantage of the famous Schlegel-Kotzebue quarrel and so revenge himself by giving vent to some of these genially malicious remarks of which he knew so well the secret!

So far as Uhland, Rückert and Kerner are concerned, nothing can be said as to whether Ste. Beuve knew anything about them or their works; all we can presume is that either some friend drew his attention to them and to their poems from which he selected, for translation purposes, the three above-mentioned songs, or that he stumbled across them himself. Apart from the acknowledgement he makes concerning the source of his translations in the "Poésies," no other mention is to be found.

IV. SCHILLER.

In all these poems Ste. Beuve was helped by the Oliviers¹ and Lebre. It is easy to imagine that chiefly through these friends he was acquainted with a fair number of German lyrics, and that he chose such poems to translate as best suited his mood at the time. For how else is to be explained his fancy for Schiller's "Erwartung"? The serene, almost naive atmosphere of this poem, full of wonder at the beauty of nature unadorned and unaffected in style, is rare² in Schiller:

"...Still hebt der Mond sein strahlend Angesicht,
die Welt zerschmilzt in ruhig grosse Massen;
der Gürtel ist von jedem Reiz gelöst,
und alles Schöne zeigt sich mir entblöszt."

It fitted in very aptly with the general tone of Ste. Beuve's

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1. Cp. Corresp., à M. and Mme. Juste Olivier, letters of 2nd July, 1838, and 6th Jan., 1839.
 2. Cp. Biese, Deutsche Literaturgeschichte, 12te Aufl., 1917, II, 218.

own poems, so that he must have known other lyrics of Schiller which he rejected as being foreign to his own temperament and requirements.

Schiller, in fact, apart from this one instance, does not seem to have made any appeal to Ste. Beuve, who mentions him only casually as being a poet of the second rank on a level with Marlowe, Ducis and Rotrou¹. A sweeping statement like this is of no value at all; it is indeed worse than useless, for to seek to put a man like Ducis on the same scale as Schiller, gives rise to grave doubts as to the critic's fitness for his task.² According to Ste. Beuve, Schiller's plays are too lyrical - sometimes even melodramatic³; that is to say, Schiller is not a dramatist in the best sense of the word: he is a poet who poses as a dramatist. There is, as a matter of fact, a large element of truth in his assertion⁴. "Wallenstein," for example, which Schiller had meant to be a drama, pure and simple ends in a dramatic poem; "Maria Stuart," "Die Jungfrau von Orleans," and "Die Braut von Messine," resemble historical dramas, but history furnishes merely the frame within which the action is poetic rather than dramatic. But what Ste. Beuve does not seem to see clearly - or, at least, what he does not let his readers see clearly - is the essential difference between the French theatre and the German - or, for that matter, the English - theatre. For the typical classical French

1. Port. litt., II, 49.

2. In this one respect, if in no other, he shares a resemblance to Brunetiere; cp. the latter's naive query: "Les drames de Schiller sont-ils très supérieurs à nos tragédies de second ordre?" (Etudes sur la litt. française, 7e série, 223.)

3. Cp. Port. litt., II, 49 ff.

4. "Der Dichter (Schiller) verwandelt historische Tatsachen in poetische Formen." Bellermann, Schillers Dramen, Berlin, 1898, 2te Aufl. II, p. 201 Cp. also Goethe-Schiller Briefwechsel, letters of 20th and 21st Aug., 1799.

tragedy, whether it be one by Corneille or one by Racine, deals with a conflict of passions whence arises the catastrophe; hence the simplicity of the drama, its disdain of extraneous matter, its narrow limits of time and space.

English drama, on the other hand, revels in an amplitude of action, the various scattered threads of which unite in the denouement where each character is more or less subjected to the consequences of his deeds. But the French and the English theatre have at least this point in common, that each possesses a form and a frame of its own, wholly recognisable and characteristic. The German drama, on the contrary, has no such form to itself and its very subjects are cosmopolitan.¹ Take, for example, Schiller himself: Spain, England, France, Italy, Switzerland - and, had he lived a year longer, Russia² would have been included in the cycle; "Wallenstein" alone is German.

"... a feature of the German drama is its varied character. Neither Goethe nor Schiller, Grillparzer nor Hebbel has written two plays on exactly the same lines; the ability to make the same mould serve again and again, a talent possessed by all the masters of the Romance drama, is absent in German literature.³ "Maria Stuart," "Tell" and the other great dramas of Schiller burn with an inner fire which seems to have kindled an existence of their own and to have separated them from the life of common reality. "And if they are sometimes lacking in that instinctive sympathy with human nature as it is they compensate for this by their splendid enthusiasm for human nature as it ought to be."⁴

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1. Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Gespräche, May 3rd, 1827.
 2. Demetrius.
 3. Robertson, Hist. of German Lit., Introduction, 27.
 4. Francke, op. cit., 385.

And since the German drama has no form specially its own, the dramatist is free to aggrandise the dimensions of his play, to modify its action, or to introduce personages unessential to the plot, and which are purely symbolic. The form, then, and the dramatic effect tend at least to become matters of secondary importance: it is the idea which predominates with all its poetic or philosophical development and which, often enough, outrunning the original intention of the author, ends up neither a tragedy nor a comedy but a dramatic poem. When Schiller is contrasted with Lessing, for example, it is obvious that each takes his 'point de départ' from two diametrically opposite springs, for where Lessing sought to establish contact between the theatre and life itself, Schiller's purpose was to elevate the drama into realms of idealism - in other words, to place it on terms of the highest poetry.

Thus, when Ste. Beuve grumbles at Schiller's poetic dramas, not only does he show a lack of understanding of the poet's intentions, but he also seems to deny that there is anything more interesting and more moving than the study of such works as his, born from the heart and mind of him "pour qui le bien et le beau n'étaient que les deux faces d'un même idéal."

In short, Ste. Beuve was unable properly to appreciate Schiller because he did not understand him; the fundamental characteristics which distinguish what Mme. de Stael called the "littérature du nord" and the littérature du midi" - two opposite poles of literary expression, were, for Ste. Beuve, too far apart in this case.

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1. E.g. Melville in 'Maria Stuart,' Lionel in the 'Jungfrau,' Johannes Parricida in 'Tell,' etc.
 2. Cp. Bossert, Goethe et Schiller, Paris, 1907, 271
 3. De la littérature, 134.

V. HEINE.

In a letter written in 1867¹ to Charles Berthoud who had sent him the newly issued "Correspondance de Heine," Ste. Beuve says: "J'ai connu autrefois Henri Heine; il me faisait beaucoup d'amitiés à la rencontre: il m'est même arrivé de parler, il y a bien longtemps, de ses Reisebilder dans la Revue des deux mondes.² Il me disait que, comme poète, je ressemblais un peu au poète allemand Hoelty."³

The further allusions Ste. Beuve makes to the German poet contain nothing which add to any important extent to the opinion expressed in the *National* and reprinted in the *Premiers lundis*. He admires Heine's flashes of wit and imagination, the brilliance of his colour, the wealth of his symbolism, and the richness and strangeness of his similes: but he seems more interested in repelling Heine's occasional gibes at the "bon sens, froid et sec" of the French.⁴ "S'il nous juge un peuple malin et dénigrant, il se trompe; nulle part on ne croit

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1. Corresp., II, letter of 11th Jan.
 2. The article which Ste. Beuve mentions seems to have been lost, if, indeed, he ever wrote it; in any case, no such article appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes*. When the above letter was written the critic was lying gravely ill and he might easily have been thinking, mistakenly, of the several references to Heine in the *National*, Aug. 8th, 1883, and which were reproduced in the *Prem. lundis*, II, 248. Cp. note by editor (anonymous) of the *Corresp.*, II, 119.
 3. This comparison between Ste. Beuve and Hoelty seems rather a strange one and it is difficult to understand what points of resemblance between the two poets were in Heine's mind. Cp. note by Charles Berthoud (*Corresp.*, 120): "La pensée de la mort, très-habituelle chez Hoelty, comme chez le poète français est sans doute ce qui avait donné à Heine l'idée de ce rapprochement curieux."
 4. *Prem. lundis*, II, 252 ff.
 5. Cp. "Das muntre Frankreich schient mir so trübe,
Das leichte Volk wird mir zur Last.
Nur der Verstand, so kalt und trocken,
Herrscht in dem witzigen Paris."
From "O Deutschland, meine ferne Liebe
Letzte Gedichte."

à la gloire comme chez nous."¹

More important for our present purpose is his admission that he has not read Heine in the original; more than that, indeed, for he expresses his keen regret not to be able to appreciate him worthily: "il faudrait, pour prétendre à le juger, parler autrement que par oui-dire de ses chansons, de ses impressions de Voyage."² This frank confession must necessarily diminish the value of his estimate of Heine, brief and tentative as it is, for it seems strange that Ste. Beuve did not find much more to say about one who not only was a great poet and, what would appear almost as much to Ste. Beuve, a master of irony, but also lived so long in Paris, serving as a kind of intermediary between France and Germany, and even writing much in French.³

VI. Hoffmann.

Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann⁴ seems to be one of those German writers whom Ste. Beuve knew and liked best. His tales were extremely popular in France and often enough translated into French;⁵ and his importance as a novelist of the Romantic

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1. One cannot but admire the robust defence which Ste. Beuve always maintains against foreign attacks upon his nation. During the onslaughts headed by the Quarterly Review, 1836 he retorts vigorously by firstly casting doubts on any foreigner's competence to judge adequately French contemporary literature, and then by boldly carrying war into the enemy's camp: "Faites la police chez vous, Messieurs," he cries; "vous avez bien commencé par Byron, Shelley, par Godwin, par plusieurs de vos vrais poètes et de vos grands hommes, que votre prudence a mis à l'index." (Prem. lundis, II, 308)
 2. Ibid, 254.
 3. Cp. L.P. Betz, Heine in Frankreich.
 4. Prem. lundis, I, 414 ff.
 5. The first translation by Loeve-Weimars appeared in 20 vols. between 1823 and 1833 while shorter editions of selected stories followed in 1838 (Toussenel, 2 vols.), 1843 (Marmier) and 1856 (Champfleury).

movement is as difficult to underestimate as is the somewhat gruesome charm of his stories. So popular indeed did he become in France, that when his reputation was declining in Germany, a host of French imitators arose, chief among whom were Nodier, Gerard de Nerval and Gautier, not only to re-establish his name and fame, but also, in some cases, to carry what was, after all, only one aspect of his literary genius to absurd lengths.¹ When Nodier playfully gave to this group the name of "l'école frénétique," he was nearer the mark than he thought.²

Ste. Beuve, however, sees Hoffmann from a juster angle.³ Amid the flood of novels and tales of all descriptions which had previously been poured out, he says, it would have been excusable to imagine that all possible sources of inspiration had been tapped; but along comes Hoffmann, a real inventor, to show us unseen and unsuspected corners in the land of romance. Hoffmann knew, continues Ste. Beuve, how to excite our imagination and superstitions without at the same time shocking too violently our good sense; and the critic points unerringly to the explanation of the novelist's popularity when he adds: "C'est dans ce mélange habile, dans cette mesure discrète du merveilleux et du réel que consiste une grande partie du secret d'Hoffmann pour ébranler et émouvoir."⁴ He is like the savage who, in his native forests, can see and hear and understand

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1. Even Balsac seems to have re-acted to the Hoffmann influence in novels of the "Peau de Chagrin" type (Melmoth réconcilié).
 2. At the same time, it must be remembered that this new school drew much from the English "School of Terror," for the works of Mrs. Radcliffe, C. P. Maturin and the rest were largely translated and, in some instances, dramatized.
 3. Prem. lundis, I, 417.
 4. Ibid, 418.

that to which we are insensible; like the savage, Hoffmann can gather up and interpret scattered tracks, imperceptible signs and faint sounds, so that to us it smacks of magic.

Hoffman himself attributed what he called his "excentrische Phantasie" to his mother's nervous malady, and not only his eccentric imagination, indeed, but also the depth of depravity to which he gradually sank towards the end of his life. Ste. Beuve would naturally seize upon such facts: gifts such as Hoffmann's, he points out, are peculiar "à ces natures fébriles et souffrantes qui peuvent en general se comprendre sous le nom d'artistes," and so Hoffmann has explained more clearly than anyone else the artist's nature. Himself a poet, painter, musician, and the heir not only of physical and nervous weakness but also of an upbringing amid sordid surroundings, he is equally at home in describing the sublimity of genius and the depth of depravity.¹

Here again it is evident that Ste. Beuve was more interested in the man than in his works, of which he mentions casually the "Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler" and two short stories, "Herr Johann Wacht" and "Der Botaniker." Are these the only ones he had read? It seems more than possible, for he makes no reference to Hoffmann's infectious humour which, had he read "Kater Murr," he could hardly have helped doing. There is likewise no mention of the "Fräulein von Soudery" which is, one imagines, easily the best of his tales. However that may be, the fact remains that, amid the welter of eccentric stuff produced in France under Hoffmann's alleged auspices, Ste. Beuve refuses to be dazzled, but sees clearly and sanely.

1. Ibid, 418.

VII. WERTHER'S LEIDEN.

1.

In this chapter and in those immediately following we reach the most important part of Ste. Beuve's criticism of German literature, for Goethe is the only writer with whom he seems to have had more than a 'bowing acquaintance' - although even that acquaintance is associated with very few of the great man's works.

The first sustained mention of Goethe deals with 'Werther's Leiden'^{1.} and the 'Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde'^{2.} but not from the literary point of view. The purpose of the 'Werther' Causerie is to "séparer les parties artificielles et factices d'avec celles qui étaient la vérité même."^{3.} Ste. Beuve points out that in the first pages of the novel Goethe and Werther are one and the same - "on se sent dans le vrai, on est avec Goethe tel qu'il était alors."^{4.} But objections soon crop up: Charlotte's candour respecting her relationship to Albert strikes, according to the critic, a false note, for no girl would, or could, have been so extraordinarily frank to a mere stranger. Nor, says Ste. Beuve, is the incident, in

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1. Caus. du lundi, XI, pp. 239-260, based on La Correspondance de Goethe et de Kestner, traduite par H.L. Poley, Paris, 1855. The article first appeared in the Revue Contemporaine, June 1855. For the quotations from Goethe's novel Ste. Beuve used P. Leroux' translation, 1844.
 2. Third ed., 1881.
 3. Cp. Caus. du lundi, XI, 240.
 4. With what degree of similitude Goethe portrayed himself in the character of Werther has been a matter of opinion. But it is admitted that the first part of the novel is an almost exact transcript of Goethe's own experience throughout his stay in Wetzlar. Cp. H. Brown, Youth of Goethe, pp. 189-190.

which Charlotte deals out punishment to those children who do not guess aright, in keeping with her character, which, he adds, was intended to be one essentially of gaiety and not of foolishness. To confirm his criticisms he refers to the data given by Kestner, the Albert of the novel, which fully bear forth his points.¹

The four delightful months, however, which Goethe spent at Wetzlar are all truly and admirably depicted; but Ste. Beuve takes rather a malicious pleasure in pointing out that as a matter of fact Goethe, "sage et fort jusque dans ses oublis, s'éloigne à temps" and that the two did not meet again till the poet was seventy and Charlotte was a respectable mother of twelve children!² This same malice - in the French if not in the English sense - is again seen in the statement that Goethe did not lose much time in falling lightly in love with someone else,³ which proves that his feeling for Charlotte "n'avait rien de furieux ni d'engagé." And it was not until a year after his departure from Wetzlar that Goethe began to write 'Werther' which was inspired as much by the suicide of Jerusalem (Oct. 1772) and the marriage of Kestner and Charlotte (Easter 1773) as by personal emotions.

Ste. Beuve is, therefore, not inclined, to say the least, to treat seriously Goethe's love affair. The letters to Kestner, judging from the gay quotations which Ste. Beuve selects from them,⁴ would certainly seem to have dispelled any such thought on Goethe's part, as does also the famous extract,

1. Cp. *ibid.*, 243.

2. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 244.

Cp. also two letters, Jan. 29th and Feb. 14th, 1774, from *Briefe aus dem Freundeskreise von Goethe*, Leipzig, 1847) and *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, Book XII, from which it is clear enough that Ste. Beuve's remark is not untrue.

3. A daughter of Madame de la Roche at Coblenz.

4. *Caus. du lundi*, XI, 245.

a favourite with Ste. Beuve, from the letter by Frau Goethe in which that rather unfortunate praise concerning "un fils des dieux" occurs. It is, at any rate, significant that the critic, who could have chosen any other and equally cheerful letter from Goethe's large correspondence of this time, should so inevitably have selected this one, for Frau Goethe, with a pride pardonable no doubt in the mother of such a son, wrote many of a similar kind.¹ This phrase - "Sohn der Gotter" - is obviously one which took and seized the impish fancy of Ste. Beuve who, at this early point in his critical relationship with Goethe, showed no pains to avoid anything not quite to his subject's credit. He adds, too, the "glorieux pendant" written by Goethe himself to Kestner in Feb. 1773: "mes Dieux vous saluent, nommément le beau Paris à ma droite et la Venus d'or de l'autre côté, et Mercure qui attacha hier à mes pieds ses belles et divines semelles d'or" This is indeed a "salut vraiment divin," says Ste. Beuve, adding with sly enjoyment, "c'est peut-être le même jour, où il comparait ses rapides patines aux semelles d'or de Mercure, que sa mère aussi le comparait, lui, à un fils des Dieux."²

It was thus, says Ste. Beuve, - and we know he speaks truly, - with no sense of gloomy despair that Goethe began the writing of 'Werther': "c'est plutôt l'ivresse bouillonnante et la joie et le génie de la force et de la jeunesse qui président."³ This point Ste. Beuve emphasises: "voilà le vrai du livre et son cachet immortel"; whereas the suicide and the rest, added "pour le roman et pour la circonstance" show

1. Cp. Keil's collection: Briefwechsel von Kath. Eliz. Goethe, Leipzig, 1871, and Stein's Briefe von Goethes Mutter, Leipzig, 1894.

2. Caus. du lundi, 249.

3. Ibid, 250.

Goethe's false side, the lover of Ossian rather than of Homer.

All this is doubtless trivial enough, but it serves Ste. Beuve as a stepping-stone to the stating of his real objection to 'Werther' - or rather to its influence. It was all very well for Goethe, he maintains,¹ to purge himself of such regrets as he may have entertained by writing this novel, but why did he not realise that, by its general tone of hopelessness and despair, and, above all, by its false and tragic ending, he was doing an ill turn to his readers? "Là est le vice de 'Werther' - and not the cowardly solution described in the novel. "La différence des impressions du lecteur à celles de l'auteur est ici par trop fort et criante: elle n'est pas juste."² Goethe recovered his serenity, but his early readers, finding "dans le prodigieux petit livre tous les sentiments, jusque-là confus, exprimés au vif et en traits de feu," confound the 'Werther-Goethe' with the 'Werther-Jerusalem,' and so were led to ideas of suicide.³

Was all this the result of Goethe's inexperience as an author? Perhaps so, admits Ste. Beuve, but he gloomily adds that Goethe, even had he been warned beforehand of the dire influence of his book, might not have been willing to change

1. Ibid, 250.

2. Ibid, 251.

3. In a footnote (ibid, 250) Ste. Beuve refers back to his article on Nodier, *Port. litt.*, I, 115, where he sketches the influences of the book in France, ("où nous n'avons longtemps connu 'Werther' que par ce côté exagéré et faux") from Ramond's 'Aventures du Jeune d'Olban,' (1777) to Nodier's 'Peintre de Salzburg,' (1803). "Les imitateurs français se sont surtout rattachés à 'Werther' par la fièvre de tête, par les dehors, enfin par les défauts." And he is in obvious disagreement with Montégut's enthusiastic review of 'Werther', (*Revue des deux mondes*, 15th July, 1855): "il a fallu 80 ans de tâtonnements, et j'ajouterai, l'éducation tout exotique de M. Emile Montégut, pour qu'on arrivât en France à une interprétation si intime et si exempte de danger."

Cp. also Mme. de Staël's remark that 'Werther' was responsible for far more suicides than the most beautiful woman had ever been. (Quoted by Hettner, 'Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im 18ten Jahrhundert, III, 165.)

anything: "il est difficile à un artiste de renoncer à un grand succès." ¹ And certainly, when the first red-hot passions which the book aroused have cooled down and we attempt to judge it solely on its literary merits, one must admit its conclusion spoils the book and mystifies us in the light of what Goethe subsequently accomplished.

2.

Our attention is next directed to the Letters which Goethe wrote to Kestner after the marriage, and while 'Werther' was being written.² Here again it is clear to see that the critic is inspired by no great feelings of liking for the poet. Various quotations which must strike the reader as petty and certainly not compatible with the character of a "fils des Dieux" are given from the correspondence in which "ce tutoiement sentimental ou poétique nous étonne un peu, mais qui probablement (note the adverb!) n'a rien de choquant de l'autre côté du Rhin."

A description follows of the effect which the publication of 'Werther' made upon the Kestners. This is perhaps the most interesting part of the *Causerie* from our point of view, for it is written with an undoubted passion, which, however, never once strays beyond the strict confines of actual truth, although it is cunningly expert in emphasising the rather unpleasant side of the whole matter.

In a few but pungent terms the critic sketches what must have been the feelings of the young couple, especially those of the husband. It is, indeed, not difficult to imagine how the

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 251.

2. Ibid, 253.

Kestners must have resented not only the distasteful publicity given to their private affairs, but also, and still more, the appearance in the novel of those fictitious passages which brought them letters of condolence - real and unreal - from inquisitive friends! That Kestner throughout played the better part is, of course, a well-known fact and one which Ste. Beuve is at no pains to hide.¹ The latter emphasises the astonishingly tolerant attitude of the husband, and contrasts it with the egotistical behaviour of the poet.²

When Kestner would pardon his friend for what he attributed to a youthful indiscretion, he showed he had not fully realised to what lengths the artistic temperament is sometimes prepared to go. "En effet, ce n'était ni étourderie ni vague exultation: c'était un acte de conquérant et de grand-prêtre de l'Art, qui prend ce qui est à sa convenance et met en avant je ne sais quel droit supérieur et sacré. Goethe en fait une doctrine." So there arise two points of view, says Ste. Beuve, - on the one hand, the right possessed by genius to express itself - in Goethe's own words - "trotz Gott und Menschen." "Il se compare," Ste. Beuve had already remarked with a sneer, "..... à l'artiste grec, qui composa sa Venus de traits divers empruntés à diverses beautés." On the other hand, there is that which concerns the rights of the individual to be protected from the blind ardour of genius, and "malgré l'influence de Shakespeare et d'Homère,"³ - (the bitterness which Ste. Beuve puts into these last words!).

It is, then, easy enough to see which point of view was Ste. Beuve's. We have already observed the jaundiced eye with

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 255.

2. Cp. letter to Kestner, Sept., 1772.

3. Caus. du lundi, XI, 240.

which he looked upon the book itself, the artistic and delightful beginning of which is forgotten in the falsity and dangers of its ending. Therefore, when he quotes Goethe's outburst, which was meant, partly at least, by way of excuse: "il faut que 'Werther' existe, il le faut!" - one can imagine the critic's retort trembling on his lips, and which, if not actually expressed in so many words, is everywhere implied: "je n'en vois pas la nécessité!" Notice, for example, his sneer, when Goethe cries to Kestner: "Oh, toi, tu n'as pas senti comment l'Humanité t'embrasse, te console!": "Kestner, dans son modeste intérieur fut quelque temps à se remettre de cette brusque invasion et de cette embrassade en masse de l'Humanité."¹

Later, when Goethe, "avec l'orgueil de celui qui est dans le secret des Dieux et qui tient le scèptre de l'Apothéose," makes "cette promesse mystérieuse qu'il n'a pas exécutée, d'inventer je ne sais quoi," but the object of which is to place his friends above all suspicion and slight, Ste. Beuve emphasises the fact that Goethe gradually drifted apart from them and became absorbed in his writings on the one hand and in his official duties at Weimar on the other. "Qu'avait-il affaire d'eux désormais! Il en avait tiré l'usage principal qu'il en désirait, l'oeuvre!"² Goethe was busy, to use his own words, in making himself useful to one of the noblest of hearts (i.e. the Duke) with whom he was bound "by the sincerest and most intimate soulful relationship." One imagines Ste. Beuve's sour smile at this touch of somewhat teutonic snobbery!

For additional emphasis, he cites a letter from Frau Goethe who had written to the Kestners, apologising for her son's neglect of them: "Il est depuis trois mois à Weimar chez le Duc

1. Ibid, 256.

2. Ibid, 257.

et Dieu sait quand il reviendra." In this quotation an unfriendly eye might see a hint of a son's neglect of his mother; it is a point which Ste. Beuve seizes on, and which he tries to bring out more fully in the *Causerie* on Bettina and Goethe.¹

In 1783, Goethe thought of making some changes in 'Werther,' and Kestner was naturally not a little pleased, hoping, as he did, to see such modifications made as he had long wished for. But, says Ste. Beuve, scathingly, "I don't know whether he got them!"²

VIII. THE GOETHE-BETTINA CORRESPONDENCE.

1.

If, while reading the previous *Causerie* on 'Werther's Leiden,' one is forcibly reminded of Mr. Saintsbury's blunt assertion that Goethe was "a cultured but priggish snob,"³ we shall see that such an opinion is at no great variance with the general tone underlying this article on the Letters of Goethe and of Bettina.⁴ For here, Ste. Beuve is again writing in a tone of sarcasm which does not, however, swell to one of passion as we saw was the case when dealing with Goethe's treatment of the Kestners. Where, in the foregoing, Ste. Beuve

1. Caus. du lundi, II, cp. p. 152.

2. In the first complete edition of Goethe's works (1787) 'Werther' appeared with certain modifications which, though not organically affecting its original form, presented the characters of the two people in the book with whom readers identified Lotte and Kestner in a slightly more favourable light. The modifications did not, however, satisfy either Lotte or Kestner. Cp. H. Brown, *Youth of Goethe*, p. 189. Cp. also Lewes' *Life of Goethe*, 2nd ed., 1890, p. 246.

Though the recasting did not come up to Kestner's expectations, it made the novel less coarse and less personal than in its original form.

3. *Peace of the Augustans*, 181.

4. *Lettres de Goethe et de Bettina*, traduites de l'allemand par Sebastien Albain. (2 vols., 1843)

refers to Goethe as the "Docteur en Droit, jeune, beau, noble, aimable,"¹ now he calls him "un beau jeune homme, le plus beau de ceux de son âge."² and in both *Causeries* we have already pointed out, he quotes Frau Goethe's ill-starred phrase about "le fils des Dieux." In the 'Werther' article, and inspired by Virgil, he compares Goethe to "Neptune, lequel lève son front tranquille et pacifique à la surface des mers";³ in the other, "Goethe est un dieu supérieur, calme, serein, égal, bienportant, et bienveillant, le Jupiter Olympien qui regarde et sourit."⁴ That there is some sincerity in these compliments is doubtless true, but it is no less true that the sincerity is seasoned by a strong savour of sarcasm. In both are hints - and in the Bettina article, more than a hint⁵ - that the poet was not over-scrupulous in the observance of his filial duties. And, just as in the one, Ste. Beuve smiles at the sentimental or poetic "tutoiement qui probablement n'a rien de choquant de l'autre côté du Rhin," so in the other he maintains, no doubt with a twinkle in his eye, that the adjective "Olympien de l'autre côté du Rhin ne ferait pas sourire."⁶

The girl Bettina was talented and amiable, combining the picturesque imagination of an Italian with the dreamy exaltation of a German, but, says Ste. Beuve, crushingly, she lacked "le bon sens français." It would, indeed, be no exaggeration if one called her, in the words of Artemus Ward, "a gushing young female." She conceived a passionate and probably rather tiresome admiration for Goethe. Ste. Beuve relates with a

1. Caus. du lundi, XI, 240.

2. Caus. du lundi, II, 335.

3. Cp. *Aeniad*, I, 127.

4. Caus. du lundi, II, 351.

5. Cp. *ibid*, 336: "sa façon filiale n'est pas une de celles qui doivent se proposer en modèle."

6. *Ibid*, 331.

delightful humour, not unmixed with a good spice of malice, how, aided and abetted by Frau Goethe, the two women joined forces in this hero-worship; - how the pear-tree planted by Goethe dared do nothing but flourish - Ste. Beuve does not actually add "of course." or, "it goes without saying," but such a phrase is obviously implicit - ; how Goethe, even as a baby, according to his mother, walked "avec beaucoup de majesté."¹ The letter written by Goethe's mother, where she refers to her son looking like "un fils des Dieux" when clad in her velvet coat, was written to Bettina, and Ste. Beuve, in mock gravity, wonders whether the mother was not more like the wife of a senator of Rome, or, indeed, a Roman empress, instead of the spouse of a Frankfurt bourgeois.² When Ste. Beuve quotes from Bettina's letters, which indeed show a childish naivety, surprising in a talented young woman of nineteen, he remarks not without reason: "nous avons besoin de nous rappeler que nous sommes en Allemagne pour nous rassurer." In France, the critic hints, it is neither customary nor fitting, even for young girls, to talk "comme on parlerait à Jehovah."³

2.

In the middle of the *Causerie*,⁴ Ste. Beuve turns aside for a moment to attempt a definition of Goethe's particular genius. Its chief characteristic he says, is the extent and universality of its range. At once a great naturalist and a great poet, Goethe studies everything with insatiable curiosity and sees everything, therefore, as a realist as well as an idealist. But if anything displeases him he turns away, godlike, and looks

1. Ibid, 334.

2. Ibid, 340.

3. Ibid, 344.

4. Ibid, 341-344.

elsewhere. Sacrifice or distress, mental or physical, he would not understand. "Goethe comprenait tout dans l'univers - tout excepté le chrétien et le héros."¹ He was kindly in disposition, but always in a superior and aloof manner, and his every action had but one end in view - "l'agrandissement de son goût."

After this handsome if not enthusiastic encomium, Ste. Beuve takes up again the main thread of his article. Was there any other reason besides vanity, he asks, which caused Goethe to encourage Bettina in her correspondence? Yes. "Cette aimable et joyeuse enfant lui remet en pensée le temps où il était meilleur, plus véritablement heureux ... il lui doit un rajeunissement d'esprit ... elle lui fournit des thèmes de poésie: il les brode, il les exécute. Oserons-nous dire qu'il nous semble souvent que la fleur naturelle est devenue par là une fleur artificielle plus brillante, plus polie mais plus glacée, et qu'elle a perdu son parfum?"²

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1. Ibid, 345. Cp. also K. Franke, op. cit., 527-28: "And yet there is something uncanny, something one might say inhuman, in the quiet and composure with which Goethe lives through the succession of national catastrophes from 1806 to 1815. While the country is quivering under the blows of Jena and Tilsit, Goethe calmly pursues his studies in biology and the theory of colours. While Fichte and Heinrich von Kleist wring from themselves works of oratory and poetic inspiration in which there vibrates the deepest passion of a people imbued with the conviction that the moment for a final supreme effort of self-preservation has come, Goethe is held in the spell of..... themes utterly devoid of national motives."

Are not traces of sorrow at this attitude of his to be noted in the *Des Epimenides Erwachen* (23):

'Doch schäm' ich mich der Ruhestunden,
Mit euch zu leiden war Gewinn;
Denn für den Schmerz den ihr empfunden,
Seid ihr auch grösser als ich bin.'

2. Ibid, 345.

Goethe liked to receive the girl's letters all the more because his name was enshrined in them as in an aureole; so, more tactful than Rousseau would have been, he sent her replies just frequent and long enough to encourage her to continue in the singing of his praises. How Ste. Beuve must have chuckled, and how he makes us chuckle, at that description, written by the girl, and quoted at length, of the first meeting of Bettina and Goethe - the absurdly childish behaviour of the one contrasting with the somewhat complacent, somewhat heavy attitude of the other!

Obviously the critic thinks the whole affair between Bettina and Goethe a one-sided one, as indeed it probably was. "Goethe se montre mais il ne se donne pas."² But Bettina has moments of dreadful doubt in which Frau Goethe has to come to the rescue. Her hero, for example, does not rise to her heights of patriotism in connection with the revolt in the Tyrol in 1809. When she cries with, it must be confessed, a great lack of "le bon sens français," that she would like to join Hofer and like him die a hero's death, Goethe returns but cold rejoinders. The spectacle of men sacrificing their lives for great causes was to him, Ste. Beuve takes occasion to declare, "une transformation capricieuse de la vie"; and in the bloodshed so rife amongst those Tyrolese peasants, he sees only "un parfum de poésie."³ This, of course, is a point of view like any other, but Ste. Beuve is surely allowing his own "bon sens français" out of hand when he goes so far as practically to accuse Goethe of a lack of courage: "l'héroïsme n'est pas le côté supérieur de Goethe. On a dit de Goethe que c'était un dieu olympien, mais ce n'était certes pas un Dieu

1. Caus. du lundi, 345.

2. Ibid, 347.

3. Ibid, 348.

un Dieu de l'Olympe d'Homère: quand de telles batailles se livrent sous Ilion, Homère y fait descendre tous ses dieux."¹

Yet another time does Bettina become unfaithful in her worship for Goethe, for after Hofer comes the mighty figure of Beethoven. When "ces deux rois, ces deux mages" meet under the girl's auspices, it is Beethoven who "conserve manifestement la supériorité morale." It is a pity, Ste. Beuve hints, that Bettina did not turn some of her abundant affection to Beethoven who stood in more need of love and sympathy than did Goethe.² But in 1811, when Bettina marries; "il n'y avait plus moyen de continuer comme auparavant le rêve," and so the *Causerie* appropriately reaches its conclusion. But its last paragraph is delicious and must be quoted in full: "Mais le lendemain du jour où l'on a lu ce livre, pour rentrer en plein dans le vrai de la nature et de la passion humaine, pour purger son cerveau de toutes les velléités chimériques et de tous les brouillards, je conseille fort de relire la Didon de l'Énéide, quelques scènes de Romeo et Juliette, ou tout simplement, Manon Lescaut!"³

1. Ibid, 349.
2. Ibid, 350.
3. Ibid, 351-2.

Now that the original letters from Goethe to Bettina have been published (cp. G. von Loeper, *Briefe Goethes an Sophie von la Roche und Bettina Brentano*, Berlin, 1879), a much truer idea can be formed as to Goethe's position, and the mistake - which Ste. Beuve obviously made - can now be avoided of taking everything the girl wrote too literally. Cp. also Bossert, *op. cit.*, 626.

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Yet that/is not easy to deny a certain sympathy to Ste. Beuve in his attitude is evidenced not only by the above-mentioned 'mot' of Mr. Saintsbury, but also by the opinion of such a one as Max Beerbohm: "a man whose career was glorious without intermission, decade after decade, does surely try our patience Of Goethe we are shy for such reasons as that he was never injudicious, never lazy, always in his best form - and always in love with some lady or another just so much as was good for the development of his soul and his art, but never more than that by a tittle." (And Even Now, p. 201)

IX. ENTRETIENS DE GOETHE ET D'ECKERMANN.

1.

The first of this series of three *Causeries*¹ opens with an expression of regret that Goethe did not come to Paris, according to his intention, towards the year 1786. Had he done so, says Ste. Beuve, the advantages would have been two-sided. The German would have been able to appreciate de visu the French character, which, however well it may be realised from a distance, gains upon closer acquaintance. "Pour nous Français, c'eût été un grand avantage; on n'aurait pas eu à le découvrir plus tard à travers Mme. de Stael, et à l'étudier, à l'épeler cruellement."

This last sentence is significant, for it demonstrates the great change which had come over Ste. Beuve's attitude towards Goethe during the six or seven years which separate the present articles from those written on 'Werther' and on the 'Bettina-Goethe Correspondence.' When we recall the slighting manner in which he had referred to the poet, and the malicious jokes and gibes which he had been not unwilling to direct across the Rhine, we are conscious of a big difference brought about in the interval during which he had gradually developed a truer and juster outlook. His knowledge and admiration of German literature generally had, as we shall see, increased to a very great extent; and here, at the beginning almost of this present article, we have Goethe hailed as "le

1. *Nouv. lundis*, III, (6th Oct., 1862; "traduits pour la première fois en français par M. Charles, 1862.")

Ste. Beuve read the Goethe-Eckermann Conversations in Charles' translation, "en m'aidant moins encore de la traduction de M. Charles que de l'original lui-même, auquel une intelligence amie a bien voulu m'ouvrir un entier et facile accès. *Ibid.* 269-70.

This "intelligence amie" was probably Emile Delérot who brought out a complete translation of the Goethe-Eckermann Conversations in 1863.

2. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 265.

plus grand des critiques modernes et de tous les temps!"¹

There is, no doubt, in this praise a symptom that the pendulum is swinging a little too far in the other direction, but it is a symptom which, as we shall also see, soon corrects itself.

The appearance of nearly all Goethe's works in a French translation by Porchat, Charles's complete version of the Goethe-Eckermann Conversations, and thirdly, the publication of a translation of Schiller's works by A. Régnier, afforded Ste. Beuve a good opportunity to read and learn about the great German and his contemporaries.² We are warned, however, that Goethe "est toujours resté pour nous un étranger, un demi-inconnu, une sorte de majestueuse énigme, un Jupiter-Ammon à distance dans son sanctuaire,"³ and that any attempt to popularise him in France has been, and will be, a failure.

One obvious reason of Goethe's unpopularity in France - a popularity of which Goethe himself was fully aware - is the essential difference in taste between France and Germany. Ste. Beuve remarks that French taste, with the best will in the world, "reste le plus opposé aux habitudes, aux lecteurs et à la bonne foi germaniques." It is no wonder, therefore, that the French version of the Goethe-Eckermann Conversations should be abridged "à l'usage de notre pays."⁴ Even an English translation of the same work,⁵ he continues, is also abridged, though to a lesser degree: this seems to show that "en fait de germanisme, le goût

1. Ibid, III, 265.

2. Ste. Beuve bewails the lack of a complete French translation of the Goethe-Schiller Correspondence. There had been, previously to 1862, only a few scattered articles published by Saint-René Taillendier in *Le Magazin de Libraire* on this Correspondence and Ste. Beuve himself availed himself largely of their help.

3. Ibid, 265.

4. Ibid, 268.

5. In 1839, by Miss Margaret Fuller, later the Marquise Ossoli, (1810-1850).

anglo-saxon lui-même ne peut pas tout porter, mais il est plus robuste. Il est moins 'petite bouche' que le nôtre, et il permet de mordre davantage."¹

After this half-smiling comparison, Ste. Beuve settles down to the matter in hand - the Conversations between Goethe and Eckermann. He gives a sketch of the latter, calling him "une de ces natures secondes, un de ces esprits nés disciples et acolytes, et tout préparés, par un fonds d'intelligence et de dévouement, par une première piété admirative, à être les secrétaires des hommes supérieurs."²

Ste. Beuve foresees the possibility of an attempt to depreciate the importance of these Conversations on the ground that Goethe was, when Eckermann first met him, in his seventy-fifth year. He carefully points out, therefore, that although Goethe was indeed "dans son heureux déclin, dans le plein et doux éclat du soleil couchant," he had still nearly nine years to live. "Il revenait sur lui-même, il revoyait ses écrits, préparait ses Oeuvres complètes, et, dans son retour réfléchi sur son passé qui ne l'empêchait pas d'être attentif à tout ce qui se faisait de remarquable autour de lui et dans les contrées voisines, il épanchait en confidences journalières les trésors de son expérience et de sa sagesse."³

Hence the importance and justification of Eckermann's task. Two long quotations from Eckermann, full of hero-worship,

1. Ibid, 269.

2. Ste. Beuve may seem here a trifle hard on Eckerman, who was, after all, gifted in more ways than one, and who, as a result of his war service, suffered from continual ill-health. The autobiography which prefaces his volumes (cp. 6th ed., 1885, edited by Duntzner) gives the picture of a gay and courageous yet sensitive spirit, struggling against much undeserved ill-fortune. Ste. Beuve's later remarks, however, showed that he fully appreciated his character, cp. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 274.

3. Ibid, 275.

follow, and it is easy to see how completely Ste. Beuve is in agreement with their tone. He sums them up in all sincerity - "C'est bien là l'effet que produisent en général la lecture et le commerce de Goethe: étendre les vues, élargir l'intelligence."¹

Next comes a translation of Eckermann's description of his first meeting with Goethe, delightfully and even touchingly done; of Goethe's instant thought of engaging so sincere an admirer to act as a kind of barometer indicative to an old but very much alive man of the changes and chances of the passing days. Ste. Beuve, in order to disperse any last doubts as to the necessity of such an appointment, again hastens to proffer a reason. He points out the difference which maintained at that time between France and Germany: in France, that is, in Paris, "on a la main sur tout et à tout instant; on est informé, éveillé, excité, au risque d'en être harcelé..... la difficulté est bien plutôt de s'isoler, de se défendre du trop d'information qui, de droite ou de gauche, n'est qu'une distraction perpétuelle."² In Germany, however, or at least in Weimar, and during his declining years, Goethe felt the need of some-one and something to counter-balance the reproach that Cousin had made against him - his too marked propensity to "rester toujours à la maison."

So we have a glimpse of Goethe, surrounding himself with as many interests as possible in order to make of himself "une noble et plus complète créature."³ Literary men, artists, musicians, politicians and scientists are always around him, while Eckermann acts the part of the 'fidus Achates,' the whole forming "un petit système planétaire très bien monté, très bien

1. Ibid, 278.

2. Ibid, 281

3. Ibid, 284.

monte, très bien étendu dont il (Goethe) est le soleil."

It cannot be gainsaid that Ste. Beuve was fully justified in thus thrusting upon his readers the extreme importance and value to the world of Goethe's last years. No period of the great poet's life is fuller of moral incentive, richer in spiritual visions and fraught with greater national significance than the years from the end of the Napoleonic wars to 1832. The hope for a new era of national greatness brings back to the septuagenarian all the joyfulness and vigour of his youth; and at the same time there rests on him "the halo of deeper wisdom and broader sympathies acquired in the trials of his manhood. Whatever there was of earthly dross in his nature seems now to have been cast aside. His whole being seems illumined, and he seems to illumine whatever comes within his ken." He was able, in matchless terms, to convey to others his conception of the universe² as "a grand living whole, the loving tenderness for all that draws breath, the divine trust in the ever-ascending and ever-widening path of human perfection."

2.

The first Conversation⁴ to which Ste. Beuve alludes is that

1. K. Franke, op. cit., 531.

2. In 'Wilhelm Meister's Travels' (1829) and the Second Part of 'Faust' (1832) he gave to the world his last message and final legacy. Both these works are symbolic suggestions of what, for him, was the life to be striven for.

3. K. Francke, op. cit., 531-32.

Cp. 'Schillers Schadel' (1826) :

"Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen,
Als dass sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare,
Wie sie das Feste lässt zu Geist zerrinnen,
Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre."

4. Sept. 18th, 1823.

in which Goethe warns his friend against attempting a large work. "It is that," Goethe had replied, "which injures the best mind, even those distinguished by the finest talents and the most earnest efforts. I have suffered from this cause and know how much it injured me ... the Present must have its rights, the thoughts and feelings which daily press upon the poet will and should be expressed. But if you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it, all other thoughts are repelled and the pleasure of life itself is, for the time being, lost..... But if the poet daily seizes the present and always treats with a freshness of feeling what is offered to him, he is always making sure of something good, and if he sometimes does not succeed, he has at least lost nothing." Ste. Beuve heartily agrees with this advice: "combien de talents et d'esprits poétiques," he cries, "dans le temps de la vogue des tragédies ou des poèmes descriptifs, s'y sont épuisés, qui auraient pu toucher ou plaire dans des genres moindres et plus vrais!"

Again he quotes Goethe (from the same Conversation): "the world is so great and rich, and life so full of variety that you can never want occasions for poems all my poems are occasional poems,¹ suggested by real life and having therein a firm foundation. I attach no value to poems snatched out of the air. Let no one say that reality lacks poetic interest; the poet proves his vocation only when he has the art of winning an interesting aspect from a common subject."

Ste. Beuve's comments on the above remarks are full of praise and agreement, in which is also clearly to be seen his sense of contrition for the early attitude he had adopted and

1. The actual word Goethe used is "Gelegenheitsgedichte"; Ste. Beuve translates it "poésie de circonstance."

which he now sees was essentially false. Although he partly excuses himself on the ground of imperfect knowledge due to the mistaken beliefs of those "premiers témoins et visiteurs qui nous en ont parlé," he now makes full and honourable amends. "Moi-même, il m'est arrivé de l'appeler en un endroit le Talleyrand de l'art, voulant indiquer par là qu'il tirait à temps son épingle du jeu et qu'il était homme à tricher quelquesfois avec les passions mêmes qu'il exprimait." He acknowledges his mistakes fully and generously. Goethe, he says, "n'évitait en rien l'émotion, il y restait ouvert et accessible par tous les pores, mais dans les limites de l'art autant que possible." Such an observation is the exact opposite of those so plentiful in the *Causeries on Bettina*, and on *Werther*, as is also the following which occurs a page or two further on: "Son calme n'était pas de l'insensibilité, mais de la force."²

He goes on to point out how Goethe, with the help of Herder and his passion for the great gods of Greece, was in the long run pervaded by such a hatred of ugliness that he came to revolt at any manifestation of its abstract side, such as grief and suffering, and was able to check any emotion the violence of which threatened to become too painful. In this he differed fundamentally from Schiller, who all his life retained the first fine frenzy of his youthful revolutionary and anti-social ideas. As an example of this, Ste. Beuve refers to the incident associated with Schiller's desire to bring the Duke of Alba on the stage during the prison scene of "Egmont"; Goethe objected on the score that such an arrangement would be not

1. Cp. *Port. litt.*, II, 49.

2. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 296.

only false to Alba's character but, above all, inartistic in the impression of gloating cruelty which it would involve.

What a difference between Ste. Beuve's criticism here and that of the odd half-dozen years before! Gone are the sneers at the "fils des Dieux," and "le beau jeune homme, le plus beau de ceux de notre âge," at the high and mighty aloofness of the Olympian, the insinuations against Goethe's poverty of human kindness and lack of courage. He has not lost his distaste for 'Werther' - "exceptons 'Werther,'" he says, - but it is clear that he has now come to possess a fuller knowledge of the man, almost to see him steadily and see him whole.

This first Causerie is rounded off with a little joke, as if to add a touch of variety to its general tone of eulogy. Ste. Beuve refers to Goethe's distaste at seeing anyone wearing spectacles because spectacles would look out of place on the nose of a Pericles or Sophocles! But it is a little joke that has none of the sarcasm which is so often marked in the earlier article and which could so easily have been employed here.¹

3.

And what of the criticism? It is admirable, indeed, and packed with truth. As one instance, compare his pronouncement upon the difference existing between Schiller and Goethe with Carlyle's view. "The mind of one (Goethe)," says Carlyle, "plays calmly in its capricious and inimitable graces over all the provinces of human interest; the other (Schiller) concentrates powers as vast, but far less various on a few

*subjects; the one is catholic, the other is sectarian. The one is endowed with an all-comprehending spirit fighting for no class of men or principles. The other is

1. Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Conversations, April 5th, 1830 for the whole of this incident.

earnest and devoted, struggling with a thousand mighty projects of improvements; feeling more intensely as he feels more narrowly."¹

It is interesting to remember Schiller's own words: "It is curious to see how Goethe clothes everything he had read in his own manner of style he had none of the hearty enthusiasm that openly professes attachment to a cause. To him all philosophy is subjective and that, of course, ends all conviction and argument at once."²

And is there not perhaps an echo in Ste. Beuve's remarks from Madame de Staël when she says: "En Allemagne, il n'y a de goût fixe sur rien, tout est indépendant, tout est individuel. L'on juge d'un ouvrage par l'impression qu'on en reçoit et jamais par les règles, puisqu'il n'y en a point de généralement admises."³

It would seem that Ste. Beuve had here the desire, which he had already shown while speaking of Cowper, to bring home to his readers the necessity for greater freedom of subject and sentiment in French poetry, of the opener atmosphere in which poets like Cowper and Wordsworth and Goethe breathe and have their being. Goethe's poetry he compares to a "vaste prairie de fleurs et de verdure où, quelque part que le regard tombe, chaque point vit, reluit ou scintille de sa couleur propre."⁴

The secret, he says, of true poetry, poetry like Goethe's, clear from its conventions and artificialities, is known also to the English; "Les Anglais, depuis William Cowper, le savent bien, eux à qui nous devons tant de recueils vrais, variés, autant d'âmes!"⁵

1. Carlyle's Life of Schiller, London, 1845, p. 113.
2. Schiller's Briefwechsel mit Körner, latter dated Nov. 1st, 1790.
3. De L'Allemagne, II, 1; cp. also Hume Brown, Youth of Goethe.
4. Nouv. lundis, III, 288.
5. Ibid, 286.

4.

The second *Causerie*¹ opens with a just and extremely sympathetic appraisal of Goethe's claims as a scientist. While recognising that the poet did not reach the heights to which he aspired, Ste. Beuve is prompt with consolation: to dethrone Newton as well as to equal Voltaire, to say the least, and to approach Shakespeare - that is too big a task for any one mortal; and if Goethe's study of natural science made him "le premier des amateurs" it conferred upon him also enormous benefits with respect to his literary work.

Ste. Beuve is quite frank in declaring how bitterly hurt Goethe was at the poor reward which his scientific labours brought him. But into his frankness Ste. Beuve allows no trace of "malice" to enter, a thing which he would certainly have done not so many years before this. He terms Goethe's comparative lack of success in this province the secret sorrow of the poet's life and quotes the poet's wistful remarks: "People," Goethe said, "have never fully been pleased with me but always wished me otherwise than it has pleased God to make me."² But this touch of bitterness must not be regarded as a blemish: "ses conversations nous prouvent, que son calme n'était pas de l'insensibilité, mais de la force; qu'il savait faire taire son indignation et se contenir. C'est un bel exemple."³

That Goethe would not have been greatly to blame, had he been prone to dwell upon his many trials and sorrows, Ste. Beuve seems to believe, for part of the next *Conversation*⁴ is given in which Goethe declares that during all his seventy-five

1. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 295.

2. *Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Conversations*, Jan. 4th, 1824.

3. *Ibid*, 296; already quoted p. 163.

4. *Thst* of Jan. 27th, 1824.

years he has never had one month of genuine happiness and that even his smallest joys were constantly disturbed and limited. And so, in sympathetic strain, Ste. Beuve continues both to sing Goethe's praises and to defend him against the charges of a 'critique envieuse et mesquine.' Is, for example, the reproach sometimes levelled against Goethe of immorality a just one? No: the alleged immorality is merely "une très grande étendue de coup d'oeil jointe à une très grande sincérité d'artiste."¹ It was even more than that, for unlike Byron, Goethe was ever careful to avoid defying prejudices of which, none the less, he was so often an innocent victim. Ste. Beuve quotes the remark to Eckermann: "What the ancient Greeks were allowed to say is no longer suitable to us, and the Englishmen of 1820 can no longer tolerate what pleased the vigorous contemporaries of Shakespeare: to such a degree that nowadays the need is felt of 'Family Shakespeares'!

Conceit? No: Goethe was superior to many critics in his ability to 'class' authors and "s'il classait les autres, il se classait lui-même"; he knew his own worth but always with fit and proper modesty. Tieck, for example, he classed below himself and rightly, just as Shakespeare rose high above him. "Ce sont les jugements d'un tel homme," remarks Ste. Beuve emphatically, "sur la littérature qu'il nous est précieux et intéressant de recueillir."² By way of a sample of Goethe's impartiality as a literary critic, he quotes the judgment on Schlegel and echoes it in his own words later: "Schlegel, qui est tout raisin et toutes figues quand il nous parle de la Grèce, ne nous a guère offert, à nous Français,

1. *Nouv. lundis*, III, 299.

2. *Ibid.*, 300.

quand il a daigné s'occuper de nous et de notre grand siècle littéraire, que ses épines et ses chardons."¹

5.

The next ten pages of this Second Causerie deal with Goethe's criticisms of French Literature, and it is clear that Ste. Beuve's high opinion of Goethe the man is equally high in his admiration for him as a critic.

He lays it down that Goethe's judgment on French Literature may be regarded from two different standpoints. In his earlier days Goethe's real task was to lead Germany from sterile imitations and to teach her to build for herself a house on its own foundations. Yet despite the importance of this task and his intense absorption in it, Goethe always found time to appreciate and love French Literature of the 18th century. No-one, states Ste. Beuve categorically, has ever better defined the genius of men like Voltaire, Buffon, and Diderot.² And not only the giants of these days, but the secondary and minor writers such as Olivet, Troublot, Le Blanc and others, received his discriminating praise.

After the Revolution, however, Goethe's admiration underwent a change. For Mme. de Staël and Chateaubriand, Goethe seemed to entertain no great liking.³ Ste. Beuve is not prepared to object to Goethe's faint praise of either. Rather the reverse indeed: "les génies purement d'art et de forme, et de phrases, dénués de ce genre d'invention fertile, et doués

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1. Ibid, 302. Cp. also Port. litt., II, 307 and Nouv. lundis, II, 30 (already quoted on p. 135.) for similar references by Ste. Beuve to Schlegel's lack of sympathy with French Literature. Ste. Beuve evidently missed Goethe's remark upon Schlegel's harsh criticism of Molière: "He (Schlegel) felt that had he lived in the time of Molière, the latter would have made fun of him." (Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Gespräche, March 28th, 1827)
 2. Cp. especially the Conversations dated Dec. 16th, 1828 and Jan. 3rd, 1830.
 3. Cp. also Nouv. lundis, II, 288, 299; Lewes's Life, 449; and Schiller-Goethe's Gespräche, Dec., 21st, 1803.

d'une action simplement viagère, se trouvent en réalité bien moins grands qu'ils ne paraissent, et, le premier bruit tombé, ils ne revivent pas."¹

Yet if Goethe did not too highly esteem these two elders, what did interest him was the younger school of 1824 whose literary organ was 'The Globe.' "Ah!" says Ste. Beuve, with a touch, no doubt, of pardonable vanity, and also with a touch of exaggeration, "ici Goethe se montra vivement attiré et intéressé. Il se sentait compris, deviné par des Français pour la première fois: il se demandait d'où venait cette race nouvelle qui importait chez soi les idées étrangères, et qui les maniait avec une vivacité, une aisance, une prestesse inconnues ailleurs."² Ste. Beuve is most anxious to point out the good influence which his former journal exercised upon Goethe. It is true, however, that he quotes Goethe's critical remarks which immediately follow, in which the French are accused of a lack of any solid basis, but whose literature the German influence is gradually improving. But Goethe's next remarks show his increasing approbation, thanks to the influence upon him of 'The Globe' or, at any rate, so Ste. Beuve would have it! "The contributors," Goethe had said, "are men of the world, cheerful, clear in their views and bold to the last degree. In thier censure they are polished and 'galant'; whereas our German critics, on the contrary, imagine they must hate those who do not think like themselves. I consider 'The Globe' amongst the most interesting of our journals and I could not do without it."³ And Goethe is again quoted:⁴ "The French are improving

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 304. Here, as well as in so many other places, it is clear to see that Ste. Beuve never gets over his dislike for Chateaubriand.

2. Ibid, 304.

3. Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Convers., 24th Nov., 1824, and June 11th, 1825.

4. Ibid, 1st June, 1826.

and deserving of study. I have lately been striving to form an opinion of the present state of French Literature: and if I succeed I shall express what I think..... It is very interesting to see that these influences which we experienced long ago are now beginning to work on the French."¹

It is indeed amusing to observe the meek way in which Ste. Beuve receives these somewhat patronising remarks: "Le mouvement romantique," he says, docilely, "se confondait un peu alors, en France . . . avec le mouvement religieux et néo-catholique . . ."² What could and would he not have said some six years before if so fine an opportunity was thus thrust into his hands of exercising his powers of sarcasm! But it cannot be denied that Goethe's observations are correct; for Germany, which had so long toiled in heavy imitation of France was now reaping her revenge, and the tables were turned. Nevertheless the fact that Ste. Beuve not only quotes Goethe's praise - which cannot but appear, at least, condescending - but actually and obviously agrees with it, is yet another convincing proof of his frank honesty as a critic as well as of his sincerity as a Goethe-lover.

Again, how ready is Goethe to pay tribute to real talent, exclaims Ste. Beuve. He quotes part of a letter³ which Ampère wrote to Mme. Récamier. The quotation deals with Goethe's profound respect for men like Molière and Racine, La Fontaine and Béranger, and at the same time, glows with admiration on the part of Ampère for Goethe. There follows another lengthy

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1. Ibid, Jan. 21st, 1827; cp. also Convers. of 6th March, 1830
 2. Nouv. lundis, III, 306.
 3. May 9th, 1827; cp. also Goethe-Eckermann Convers., May 4th, 1827, describing Ampère's visit to Goethe who was inspired thereby to fresh interest in French Literature.

extract from the Conversation of May 3rd, 1827, in which Goethe had praised the social life of France to the disadvantage of Germany. "In Germany," he had said, "we all lead a very miserable kind of life, our talents and men of brains are scattered through all Germany each a hundred miles from the other so that personal contact and personal exchange of ideas may be regarded as the exception. But now conceive a city like Paris, where all the highest talents of a great kingdom are gathered together in a single place not the Paris of a dull spiritless time, but the nineteenth century Paris, in which, during three generations, such men as Molière, Voltaire, Diderot and the like have kept up such a flow of intellect as is not to be found twice in one place throughout the whole world."

"Certes," says Ste. Beuve with relish, "de tels témoignages rendus avec cette magnificence, et venant de quelqu'un qui s'est toujours passé de Paris, ne sont pas humiliants pour cette noble tête de France!"¹ And the noble head of France would have been still further from humiliation if Ste. Beuve had quoted a little more of this speech of Goethe's. For the German poet goes on to attack his own country: "on the other hand what a pitiful figure we Germans cut! we Germans are of yesterday a few centuries more must still elapse before so much mind and elevated culture will become universal amongst our people that they will appreciate beauty and that it will be said of them 'it is a long time since they were barbarians.'" It is significant of the great advance which Ste. Beuve had made in his knowledge and appreciation of Goethe and of Germany that he should have refrained from adding these last remarks to his quotation.

So the Second Causerie closes with a blaze of dazzling

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 309.

names - Cousin, Guizot, St. Simon, David, Mérimée and Béranger - on all of whom Goethe had passed judgment and on all of whom Ste. Beuve tells us "Goethe avait les jugements les mieux fondés et les plus équitables."¹

6.

The Third Causerie opens with the assertion that Goethe was never a genuine romantic and did not share "dans le sens et l'esprit du moyen-âge."² The assertion is a true one, for his only real masters were Herder and Classical antiquity;³ and Ste. Beuve points out that Goethe, despite his Goetz von Berlichingen and his admiration for Scott's novels, did not really approve of the romantic movement.⁴ Ste. Beuve, quoting Goethe's own words, shows that the German poet had never any liking for political poetry - although he made a rather curious exception in the case of Béranger.

Eckermann's rather tactless remark about the reproaches sometimes levelled against Goethe for not taking up arms during the Napoleonic wars is next referred to, evidently with the aim of allowing Goethe to rebut it.⁵ And here again is a significant difference between the manner in which Ste. Beuve deals with the reproach and that in which he dealt with one of a similar nature in the Bettina Causerie. In the latter case, one felt that Ste. Beuve found a certain malicious enjoyment in alluding to Bettina's nonsensical gush in connection with Andreas Hofer.⁶ In the present article, however, he hastens to quote almost in full Goethe's eloquent

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 312

2. Ibid, 313; cp. also Goethe-Eckermann Convers., April 2nd, 1822.

3. Cp. Bosset, op. cit., 415.

4. And even Goetz "becomes a rebel not because he wants to revolutionize the present, but because he wants to uphold the past." K. Francke, op. cit., 341.

5. Cp. Goethe-Eckermann Convers., March 14th, 1830.

6. Vide supra, p. 155.

reply. Brushing aside all sneers, Ste. Beuve commands his readers to honour Goethe's lofty sentiments and not to join in the chorus of detraction.

Another insinuation against Goethe, namely, that he was jealous of Victor Hugo and Byron, Ste. Beuve also repudiates with fine scorn. The objections which Goethe entertained for Notre Dame de Paris and for Byron's disregard of the unities meet with Ste. Beuve's warm approval. And the French critic goes on to warn his readers that "la nature de Goethe était la plus opposée possible à cet étroit sentiment de rivalité et de jalousie qu'on lui prête comme il sent les larges natures! comme il est loin des dénigrement des esprits inférieurs!"¹ Other quotations follow with the purpose of showing forth Goethe's all-comprehending and all-embracing judgment and his unstinted admiration for genius in any form; Mirabeau, Napoleon, Mozart, Phidias, Raphael, Voltaire, Molière, - "à quiconque la mérite il la donnera."²

And so - "Je m'arrête: j'ai fait raisonner bien des touches, et sur toutes, le génie de Goethe a répondu comme un orgue immense."³

Little can be said of Ste. Beuve's estimate here of Goethe, save that it is done with a most infective enthusiasm. The great poet has been put vividly and sympathetically before our eyes. The truth of every dictum is proved by exact references to Goethe's own words: each critical remark is carefully documented, and the whole is solidified and unified by a smooth and gracious understanding which can indeed come only from

1. Nouv. lundis, III, 324.

2. Ibid, 324.

3. Ibid, 328.

genuine knowledge and affection. One might perhaps regret that hardly anything has been said about Goethe's actual works. But it is obviously the man and not the writer which has chiefly interested the critic: Ste. Beuve's tendency to concentrate on the personal equation was a favourite one, and has been noted before now in these pages. But if little has been said about Goethe's works, much has been said, and rightly, on his powers of criticism. For his glory as a poet and dramatist is sometimes apt to make us forget that in literary criticism he was also a consummate master.¹ What is, however, the important thing for us to note here is that Ste. Beuve has at length reached the highest point in the development of his knowledge and understanding of Goethe.

X. GOETHE AND GERMANY.

1.

Let us now endeavour to sum up Ste. Beuve's various utterances on Goethe.

It is clear that the great German writer was at first too remote from Ste. Beuve for the critic to have any real understanding of him. And even had Ste. Beuve had the desire to understand, his blindness to everything but Goethe's alleged egoism would have still proved an insurmountable obstacle. This is shown - to take one instance from many - by the absurd statement he made so early as 1834 that the poet's contemptuous calm (*Ruhe*) introduced a new conception of greatness, more so even than did Byron's irony.² How firmly Ste. Beuve believed this may be seen from his repetition of it in other words and

1. Cp. Hume Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

2. Quoted by Baldensperger, *Goethe en France*, Paris 1904, p.272.

in another place: Goethe's outward calm "domine son talent il s'en pique; cette supériorité de calme jusque dans la verve n'est pas un don seulement en lui, c'est une prétention. Cela se raffine et va à la malice, nuisible à toute grandeur: entre deux portes toujours Méphistophélès s'entrevoit."¹ In similar vein is the strange contrast he makes between the spiritual elevation of Pascal with the complete lack of it in Goethe and Talleyrand!²

Well may one exclaim at the slight knowledge of Goethe which Ste. Beuve possessed at this time, and yet upon which he did not hesitate to found such sweeping statements. The positiveness with which he ventures to judge the inmost heart of a world-genius is equal only by the length he is distant from the truth!

There are, indeed, times when Ste. Beuve usually so just and moderate, seems completely to lose his temper. In the above-mentioned passage from the 'Port Royal' he goes on to abuse Goethe as an unbeliever, whose moral principles are nil and whose inspirations are false, one of those who, like Byron, Retz, Voltaire and Fontenelle, are "mal vus en ce monde."³

It was not until almost after thirty years that the critic withdrew his taunts and insults and admitted that Goethe's "calme n'était pas de l'insensibilité, mais de la force."⁴ Ste. Beuve's understanding of the great German was thus a long and

1. Port Royal, III, 356; quoted by W. Kuchler in the Zeitschrift für französische Sprache, Bd. XI, s. 198.
2. How fond Ste. Beuve was of bracketing together Goethe and Talleyrand! Cp. Goethe, le Talleyrand de l'art. (Port. litt., II, 49, already quoted p.163).
3. Cp. on the other hand, the judgment of a critic, far inferior to Ste. Beuve in general literary matters, but superior to him in knowledge of the German spirit: Quinet had said, six years previously, with what we now know to be the merest justice:- "L'infinité du doute se cache en lui l'infinité de la foi." (Revue des deux mondes, 15th Feb., 1834, p. 357: quoted by Carré, Goethe en France, 73).
4. Nouv. lundis, III, 296, already quoted p. 163.

hesitating process, but it has, at least, the advantage of giving ample evidence of the continuous and ever-increasing development of his critical powers

In the end he completely turns round, and whereas he had once been the carping critic, he now becomes, towards the end of his life, the perfervid admirer. Witness his humility: "Il (Goethe) avait le calme, il habitait naturellement les sommets. J'étais l'homme des vallées."¹ And here is the footnote added to the last edition of the *Portraits Contemporains* which appeared in the year after his death: "Goethe, que je jugeais trop sévèrement d'après des documents incomplets, s'est dessiné plus ample, plus accueillant et tout à fait meilleur comme génie, à la lumière des nombreux témoignages biographiques familiers qui ont entouré et éclairé à nos yeux sa vieillesse."²

So in the end, Ste. Beuve is able to rid himself of his deep-set prejudices and to see in Goethe no longer a dark phantom, powerful and sinister, but a mighty soul, strangely rich and beautiful - "an immense lake, a vast and calm mirror."³

2.

And in the same way as the critic had for long cherished blind prejudices against Goethe, so he entertained a strong parti-pris against Germany, although here, perhaps, he had more excuse on his side. France and Germany he always held to be essentially opposite in nearly every way, but especially in all

1. Corresp., II, letter of April 5th, 1865.

2. Port. contemp., II, footnote p. 284.

3. Nouv. corresp., undated letter, 380.

that pertains to the arts. We have already seen that he possessed a strange indifference to the theatre; music he never mentions; and it is in Italy that he finds the greatest painters and sculptors. As for literature "Le plus calculé des Allemands a encore de la naïveté, si on le compare à nos grands hommes." Thus it is that he will approve of Villemain's neglect of German literature and of his refusal to allow himself to be influenced by it.² Quinet he rebukes for following a course opposite to that of Villemain, and he will blandly assert "Je ne me figure pas qu'on dise 'les classiques allemands!'"³

But step by step and year by year, his natural shrewdness as well as his growing tolerance make him realise the absurdity of maintaining this hostile attitude towards German art; and it is amusing to find him writing later of Villemain; "J'ai connu de près beaucoup de ces hommes, M. Villemain en tête: ont-ils jamais daigné, pour la science, regarder au-delà du Rhin?"⁴ And finally we find him declaring: "Cette connaissance d'Outre-Rhin et de tout ce qui s'y passe est de plus en plus indispensable, et c'est être manchot dans les choses de l'esprit que d'en être privé"⁵

Thus we have seen Ste. Beuve pass through three stages of mind with regard to Germany: in his hot youth, his enthusiasm bids him see that art has no frontiers; but that enthusiasm is not long lived and we find him for many a year coldly indifferent to Germany; his prejudices, however, melt slowly before his

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1. Cp. Caus. du lundi, XV, 368. The enthusiasm of his early days on 'The Globe' (referred to on p.1 30) was not long-lived.
 2. Cp. Revue des deux mondes, Jan. 1st, 1836; quoted by Kùchler, op. cit., 198.
 3. Quoted by Kùchler, op. cit., idem.
 4. Nouv. lundis, XI, 444.
 5. Nouv. Corresp., letter of 12th Feb., 1867.

growing knowledge which, if at no time deep, was yet gaining in insight and tolerance.¹

3.

Ste. Beuve's knowledge of Goethe was, then, almost entirely associated with the man himself and not with his literary output; there is no evidence to show that the critic ever possessed at the very most anything but a vague, limited and second-hand knowledge of Goethe's masterpieces. For, apart from 'Werther', the Goethe-Bettina Letters and the Goethe-Eckermann Conversations, there remains nothing but a few brief allusions to 'Faust' which cannot be interpreted as proof of a knowledge of any other sort.

And may one not be excused the suspicion that, as Ste. Beuve had been almost at the one extreme in his ignorance and disdain of Goethe, so, later, he tends to turn to the opposite, and that his praise for the great man savours of fulsomeness - that it resembles too closely the backward sweep of the pendulum? Certainly if the critic had had a sounder foundation of knowledge of German literature the praise would appear to us more discriminating, more firmly convincing.

It is indeed fairly certain that Ste. Beuve had a very superficial knowledge both of German and German literature, and it is possible to define the limits of that knowledge of literature with a reasonable degree of exactness

Prior to the eighteenth century, he knew practically nothing, and this, despite his fleeting references to the 'Nibelungenlied', to Hans Sachs, Walther von der Vogelweide and the like. Of the eighteenth century, however, he must have been acquainted with its general course and tendencies. For in

1. Q.Nouv. Corresp., letter of Feb. 12th, 1867.

addition to the labels he attaches to various authors,¹ but which help us not at all, he most likely understood the parts played by such outstanding men as Lessing, Herder, Klopstock and Winckelmann. While one can neither definitely deny him such understanding nor, on the other hand, fully credit him with it, yet the probability is that he knew more than his scattered utterances would tend to show; and it is fairly safe to assume that to a critic of his powers, literary reformers like those just mentioned, who were not so very far distant from him in time, were almost bound to excite his interest even although he never actually wrote about them. For he was certainly one of whom it is true to say that he was always learning, always keeping a quick eye on the literary horizon even up to his last days. As we have already, and more than once had occasion to remark, the fact cannot be too strongly emphasised that his personal literary inclinations were always more or less limited by those of his public. Had his knowledge been not so entirely and firmly based on French culture, and especially if he had observed more strictly his own dictum "Etudions avant de nous prononcer," then the bridges which he has built from one mind to another and from one people to another would have been broader and stronger and led more surely and directly to the truest kind of humanism.

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1. Kant is "le type entier et accompli de métaphysicien," (Caus. du lundi, XIII, 310); Jacobi is "un philosophe aimable, délicat et pur," (Ibid. V, 368); Klopstock's *Messias* - did Ste. Beuve ever read it? - "est une fille des grandes oeuvres, de la Divine Comédie, du Paradis perdu..." (Chateaubriand et son groupe litt., II, 183). This last opinion offers a good example of the manner in which Ste. Beuve repeats a cliché which seems to be generally admitted. If he had really known Klopstock's lengthy poem, would he have insisted on placing it so close to the masterworks of Milton and Dante? Cp. Selss: "... from all the discoveries of heavenly beings and evil spirits, from all the descriptions of celestial spheres, and the sentiments of the author no less than from his heroes, we become almost bewildered, and miss too often the stirring action required in epic poetry. The performance, indeed, resembles rather an oratorio than an epopee." (Lit. of Germany, 109). Cp. also to the same effect, Bossert, (op. cit., 307-8); Scherer, (Geschichte der deutschen Lit., 424); and Macaulay's reference to "the fee-faw-fum of Klopstock." (Essay on Milton).

XI. CONCLUSION.

1.

"Ma vraie ambition dans mon genre a été celle-ci: étendre la critique littéraire à tous ceux qui ont écrit de cette façon, on étend le champ de la critique littéraire autant que possible, on n'est fermé par aucun côté et l'on est, par conséquent, dans le véritable esprit moderne."¹ Thus Ste. Beuve wrote towards the end of his life, and the practice which followed up this theory led, almost inevitably, to a certain vagueness and indecision of outline which was bound to detract from such influence as these tenets exercise. Intolerance, he maintained, was a fault essentially French and was due to the tendency of Frenchmen to carry their sense of logicity to extremes². That fault was but seldom one of his own failings,³ for he dealt with life and literature with a maximum of good sense and a minimum of mere logical exclusiveness.

This lack of definite system has naturally its own decided advantages, since his frequent changes of mind generally resulted for himself, in a clearer insight and understanding; they explain one of his favourite mottoes, "Nous sommes mobiles et nous jugeons des êtres mobiles."⁴

On the other hand, the reader is too often left "floating - undecided even as to what his (the critic's) own definite views of the man's or the work's value, relation, position, may be."⁶ Too often indeed the reader cannot see the wood for the trees.

1. Corresp., II, letter of Jan. 16th, 1867.

2. *Nouv. lundis*, X, 197; cp. also Sarolea, *Essais de philosophie et de litt.*, 92.

3. Much of the envy and bitterness so often attributed to him has now been proved to be largely false. Cp. Choisy. *Ste. Beuve: L'homme et le poète*, 1921. pp. 2 and 3.

4. "Sans doute, il n'a jamais exposé un système: un critique comme lui a peur des affirmations trop vastes, trop précises." (*Taine, Essais de critique et d'hist.*, 53).

5. Cp. Brandes, *op. cit.*, 324-5.

6. *Saintsbury, Hist. of Crit.*, III, 327-8.

And this indistinctness, this vagueness of formulas, could not directly lead to the creation of a genuine school of literary criticism based on his methods. Those later critics who did endeavour to imitate Ste. Beuve, but who lacked his keenness and gifts for psychological analysis, tended to degenerate into anecdote and description of trivial incidents. Those who most nearly approached him in intellectual attainments and who were his avowed disciples, tended to move away from him so far as methods of literary criticism are concerned. Schérer, for instance, who worked with Ste. Beuve's bust always before him, is clearly interested in the general rather than in the particular; his criticism is truer to type than that of his chosen master.¹ It is, perhaps, not very fair to Ste. Beuve to compare his knowledge of foreign literature with Schérer's, since the latter was, chiefly owing to the accident of birth a master of many languages besides his own. It is true, however, that the student in search of accurate cosmopolitan information regarding the nineteenth century will consult Schérer with more advantage than Ste. Beuve.

Taine, who was by no means an admirer of Schérer, was at one with him in the heartiness of his homage to Ste. Beuve, and it is curious, and even amusing, to contrast his eagerness to be the continuer of Ste. Beuve with the latter's own anxiety to mark the points wherein he and Taine diverge.

Brunetière, again, like Schérer, had almost a greater passion for the general that Ste. Beuve had for the particular. "The epigraph of Brunetière's 'Evolution de la poésie lyrique' was evidently directed against Ste. Beuve: "Whenever we are trying to get at the meaning of a complex phenomenon, it is

1. Schérer realised that Ste. Beuve's methods would not and could not lead to the creation of a genuine school 'sui generis'. Cp. his *Etudes*, IV, lll, where he goes so far as to say that Ste. Beuve himself felt this in the end.

useless, if not dangerous, to go too minutely into details."¹

Lemaître, although he often reminds us of Ste. Beuve, entirely differs from him in that he cultivates literary criticism wholly as an art;² and his interests lie almost exclusively in the theatre, which attracted Ste. Beuve not at all.

Renan, too, can reduce a vast and imperfectly-known subject like Buddhism to a few sweeping generalisations which "resemble Taine's in that they are as falacious often as they are plausible."³

If, then, as we have tried briefly to indicate, Ste. Beuve's influence, though paramount, was much less than might have been expected from so outstanding a writer - a veritable Prince of Critics, as Taine calls him - it will be clear that in the comparatively narrow domain of his dealings with English and German literature, the effects of these will not be numerous. It cannot be asserted of him that he popularised either of these literatures to anything like the same extent which Ph. Chasles, a critic not to be compared with Ste. Beuve on general grounds, did as regards English literature. The latter's "XVIIIe. siècle en Angleterre" (1840), and his various studies on the literature and manners of England in the sixteenth and in the nineteenth centuries, as well as other works dealing especially with the English novel, accomplished much in this respect.

Taine, of course, created enormous influence to the same end, and it is not an exaggeration to assert that for fifty years after the appearance of his History, the French have based the greater part of their conceptions regarding us, as well as

1. Quoted by Babbitt, op. cit., 301.

2. Lemaître was, however, a "homme de sa terre" if there ever was one!

3. Babbitt, op. cit., 277.

our literature, upon his work. We should be glad, incidentally that he offered them so pleasing a judgment. Whatever be the actual value of his critical pronouncements - and it is, after all, a delicate matter to lay down the law in what is so largely an affair of personal taste - the work itself was immensely popular, and to its influence must be attributed, to no small degree, the fact that from the seventies and eighties onwards, France received much more from us than she gave in return.

"Et certes, si les nations avaient le sentiment de la reconnaissance historique, les Anglais dresseraient des statues à l'illustre historien de la littérature anglaise. Jamais écrivain, pas même Voltaire, n'a plus fait pour servir l'influence britannique. Grâce à Taine, l'influence anglaise est devenue un des facteurs les plus importants dans l'évolution contemporaine de la France, et l'on peut dire que jamais l'Angleterre n'a été mieux connue que de nos jours."¹

Another who did much in the same direction was Montégut with his three stout volumes on modern English writers (1885), as well as his numerous contributions to the 'Revue des deux mondes'. Others which might be grouped under this heading are Pilon, Jusserand, Planche, Rémusat, Texte, and Mezières.²

2.

As to German literature, it is not to be expected in view of what we have seen, that Ste. Beuve did much to make it known to his countrymen. Renan, with his bias towards German methods of research and criticism, naturally did far more to make German scholarship and speculation more or less familiar in France. So did J.-J. Weiss with his epigrammatic essays on

1. Sarolea, op. cit., 42 and 43.

2. Cp. Lanson, op. cit., 1106.

German literature and manners; Caro, despite the vogue in fashionable circles which reacted so injuriously upon his reputation, was another critic of distinction who brought the inwardness of Goethe before his compatriots; and Chuquet, from his chair at the Collège de France, has opened for many students a gateway into the fields of German literature. The Franco-Prussian War had naturally a restraining effect upon the free exchange of ideas between the two countries, and intellectual commerce was never so lively as between France and this country.¹

These remarks are not, it need hardly be said, to be taken in any way derogatory sense. We know that Ste. Beuve was not a "specialist" in foreign literatures like most of the above-mentioned writers. It is only to be expected, therefore, that this fact, combined with his lack of any very definite cut-and-dried system, should have led him to make only modest attempts in the matter of popularising foreign works. His own domain was, of a truth, wide and important enough to demand his guiding hand always safely at the helm. To study French literature, to propagate and defend it, was his great concern; and the marvel will always be that he accomplished so much with respect to other literatures as he did. That accomplishment may be summed up in his own words: "En littérature, je suis un grand reconaisseur de terres nouvelles. Je passe en vue, je les signale; quelquefois j'y débarque, rarement je n'y établis."² In other words, it was his mission as regards English and German literatures to continue what he so nobly did for his own - to point out the way to others - not in the sense that he was first in the field or that he was always the most enthusiastic of guides - but that he, above all others, introduced that

1. As far back as 1840 Becker wrote his "Deutscher Rhein" and dedicated it - it is difficult to see why! - to Lamartine; A. de Musset at once retorted with his well-known patriotic verses.

2. Cahiers, 11.

"luminosity" of which Lowell^{1.} so often speaks, and which makes his readers "savoir lire ... en jugeant, chemin faisant, et sans cesser de goûter."^{2.}

To feel the virtue of the poet, to disengage it, to set it forth - these are the three stages of the critic's duty, declared Pater.^{3.} Read again the spirited defence of Pope and observe how nobly has Ste. Beuve fulfilled his duty! We have seen that, upon occasion, he stumbled, and that his knowledge in foreign fields was sometimes meagre. But we have also seen how much he knew and how, again and again, he rings triumphantly true. These flashes of psychological insight, almost godlike in their perception, such as meet us in the articles on Cowper - essentially an English type of intelligence altogether foreign to the French - more than make amend for any sins of omission and commission. As for system - "Away with systems... let us breathe the air of the Enchanted Island."^{4.}

Ste. Beuve's influence at its closest is to be associated with the popularising of English poetry. In wishing to introduce into his own literature the sweeter, fresher English atmosphere, he was striving against the evils wrought by the too rapid development of industry which, profiting by the discoveries of science, was indeed raising the 'bourgeoisie' to a condition of physical well-being; but, instead of re-acting favourably upon the mental and moral faculties of the masses, this physical well-being was doing the opposite. Ste. Beuve saw everything being transformed into terms of materialism, so that literature was losing both force and dignity.^{5.} "Les Anglais ont une

1. Cp. Prose Works, II, 166.

2. Quoted by Pelissier, op. cit., 305.

3. Cp. The Renaissance, 11-12.

4. Cp. Meredith, Ordeal of Richard Feverel, ch. 19.

5. Cp. 'De la litt. industrielle' (Port. contemp. I,) and 'Quelques vérités sur la situation de la litt.' (ibid, III).

littérature poétique supérieure à la nôtre et surtout plus saine, plus pleine."¹ Again, "Ce que j'ai voulu en critique, ç'a été d'introduire une sorte de charme, et en même temps plus de réalité qu'on n'en mettait auparavant."² Recall his allusions to Cowper and the Lake poets - these "elder brothers" of his - whose simple, unadorned, domestic poetry he so loved and admired. As a poet himself, he had already done his best to this end: "Une gloire poétique comme celle de Goldsmith ou de Cowper serait la couronne de mes rêves,"³ and he added, exclamationarily, "Goldsmith ou Cowper chez les modernes, Catulle ou Théocrite chez les anciens!"

We have seen how willingly he gave a hand to check the influence of Byronism; M. Estève maintains that Ste. Beuve's "Consolations" helped to "éteindre le romantisme."⁴ How much more then must his cool reception of the Byronic genre and his ardent propaganda for the Lake school have accomplished! In 1825, Pichot⁵ had presented Wordsworth as "un être à part, qui devait avoir des adeptes plutôt que des lecteurs," and Ste. Beuve was certainly a whole-hearted "adepte." When, ten years later, the influence of Romanticism in its individualistic form gradually diminished, and people, tiring of the outpourings of the ego, looked around for the other interests, can it be denied that the poetic doctrines preached by Ste. Beuve did not play their part in causing middle-class virtue - the "lyrisme du pot-au-feu" -

1. Letter to the Abbé Constantin, March 26th, 1861.
2. Prem. lundis, III, 546.
3. Cahiers, 124.
4. Cp. op. cit., 251.
5. Voyage hist. et litt. en Angleterre et en Ecosse, II, 366.

- to triumph over Romantic aberrations?¹

And so, beside the signal services he rendered all his readers - French-speaking and otherwise - by bringing before them in these vivid and delightful word-pictures, Cowper and Pope and Goethe and Gibbon, his other benefits to his own literature in widening and sweetening its scope may well make us say of him, as Dryden said of Shakespeare, "Here is God's plenty." No wonder Taine wrote: "J'ose ajouter, en pesant exactement toutes mes paroles, qu'en France et dans ce siècle, il (Ste. Beuve) a été un des cinq ou six serviteurs les plus utiles de l'esprit humain."²

1. It is a curious coincidence that Ste. Beuve should, on the one hand, have encouraged the "School of Decay" by his "Joseph Delorme," and, on the other, through his "Consolations" gone to the other extreme.

2. Derniers Essais, 1896, p. 61.

A P P E N D I X.

It has been said that French turned into English is always a woeful spectacle, - "the pale corpse of what was once rare and radiant".¹ The opposite can also hold good, but he would surely be hypercritical who maintained that Ste. Beuve, in the following translations, was a murderous 'traditore' and not a careful 'traduttore'. In any case, they are not the work of one whose knowledge of English was merely mediocre. (Cp. p.14). It will be remembered, too, that Ste. Beuve deliberately termed his versions from the German 'free'.

The translations given here are of some of those pieces in which Ste. Beuve took special pleasure.

I. COWPER.

'To Mary'.

The twentieth year is well-nigh past,
Since first our sky was overcast;
Ah, would that this might be the last!
My Mary!

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
I see thee daily weaker grow;
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary!

Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary!

Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language uttered in a dream;
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary!

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary!

And still to love, though prest with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

A Marie.

"La vingtième année est bien près d'être écoulée, depuis que pour la première fois notre ciel s'est obscurci; ah! puisse cette fois être la dernière,

Ma Marie!"

"Tes esprits ont un cours moins rapide; je te vois chaque jour devenir plus faible; c'est ma détresse qui t'a ainsi réduite si bas,

Ma Marie! "

1. Cp. Birrell, Collected Essays, II, 207.

"Tes aiguilles, toute une collection brillante, infatigable jusqu'à présent pour moi, maintenant se rouillent inutiles et brillent plus,

Ma Marie!"

"Tes paroles indistinctes semblent comme un langage murmuré dans un rêve; pourtant elles me charment, quel qu'en soit le sens,

Ma Marie!"

"Tes boucles argentées, autrefois d'un chatain luisant, sont encore plus belles à mes yeux que les rayons dorés du soleil levant,

Ma Marie!"

"Et toujours aimer, bien qu'accablée de maux, dans l'hiver des ans ne sentir aucun froid de coeur, pour moi c'est être la plus aimable toujours,

Ma Marie!"

C.L. XI, 118.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, April 16, 1780.

Since I wrote my last we have had a visit from I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise, they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears, during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. could have killed them both in another hour.

W.C.

"AU REVEREND JOHN NEWTON."

Olney, 16 avril, 1780

"Depuis que je vous ai écrit la dernière fois, nous avons eu une visite de M..... Je ne me suis point senti grandement disposé à l'accueillir avec cette prévenance d'où un étranger peut conclure qu'il est le bienvenu. A sa manière, qui est plutôt hardie qu'aisée, j'ai jugé que ce n'était point la peine

ici, et que ce ne serait qu'un soin futile qui, en manquant, lui ferait peu de faute. Il a l'air d'un homme qui a vu du pays plutôt que d'un homme comme il faut qui a voyagé; il a tout à fait secoué cette réserve qui entre si ordinairement dans le caractère anglais; et cependant il ne s'ouvre point doucement par degrés comme font les gens de manières polies, mais il vous éclate au visage tout à la fois. Il parle très-haut, et quand nos deux pauvres petits rouges-gorges entendirent ce grand bruit, ils furent pris aussitôt d'une émulation de le surpasser. En levant leur voix, ils le firent encore hausser la sienne; et cette voix grossie leur devenait, à son tour, un nouveau stimulant. Aucune des deux parties n'entendait abandonner la lutte, qui devint de plus en plus inquiétante pour nos oreilles de toute la visite. Les oiseaux, cependant, y survécurent, et nous aussi. Ils se flattent peut-être d'avoir remporté une complète victoire, mais je crois bien que le monsieur les aurait tués tous les deux s'il était resté encore une heure."

C.L. XI.

II. POPE.

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
 Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
 Unbiass'd, or by favour, or by spite;
 Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right,
 Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere,
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe:
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
 Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfinn'd;
 A knowledge both of books and humankind:
 Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
 And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Essay on Criticism, ll. 631-642.

"Mais où est-il celui qui peut donner un conseil, toujours heureux d'instruire et jamais enorgueilli de son savoir; que n'influencent ni la faveur ni la rancune; qui ne se laisse point sottement prévenir, et ne va point tout droit en aveugle; savant à la fois et bien élevé, et quoique bien élevé, sincère; modeste jusque dans sa hardiesse, et humainement sévère; qui est capable de montrer librement à un ami ses fautes, et de louer avec plaisir le mérite d'un ennemi; doué d'un goût exact et large à la fois, de la double connaissance des livres et des hommes; d'un généreux commerce; une âme exempte d'orgueil, et qui se plaît à louer avec la raison de son côté?"

H.L. VIII, 121.

A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit
 With the same spirit that its author writ;
 Survey the Whole, nor seek slight faults to find
 Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
 The gen'rous pleasure to be charm'd with Wit.

ll. 233-238.

"Un juge parfait lira chaque oeuvre de talent avec le même esprit dans lequel l'auteur l'a composée: il embrassera le tout et ne cherchera pas à trouver de légères fautes là où la nature s'émeut, ou le coeur est ravi et transporté: il ne perdra point, pour la sotte jouissance de dénigrer, le généreux plaisir d'être charmé de l'esprit".

N.L. VIII, 121.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an Echo to the sense;
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er th'unbending corn, and skims along the main.

ll. 364-373.

"Ce n'est pas assez de n'offenser par aucune rudesse: le son doit sembler n'être que l'écho du sens. Doux est le courant du vers quand zephyr souffle avec grâce, et l'humide ruisseau coule avec plus de mollesse encore; mais quand les fortes lames fouettent la côte retentissante, le vers rude et rauque devra rugir comme un torrent. Quand Ajax s'efforce de lancer quelque énorme quartier de rocher, le vers aussi travaille et les mots marchent pesamment: autre chose, quand la légère Camille rase la plaine, vole sans les courber sur la tête des épis, ou effleure la cime des vagues."

N.L. VIII, 125

Note Ste. Beuve's modesty as to the merits of his translations of lines of Pope "que je rougis de n'offrir ici que dépolis et dévernés en quelque sorte, dépouillés de leur nette et juste élégance."

N.L. VIII, 120.

III. WORDSWORTH.

Highland Cot.

See what gay wild flowers deck this earth-built Cot,
Whose smoke, forth-issuing whence and how it may,
Shines in the greeting of the sun's first ray
Like wreaths of vapour without stain or blot.
The limpid mountain-rill avoids it not;
And why shouldst thou? - If rightly trained and bred,
Humanity is humble, finds no spot
Which her Heaven-guided feet refuse to tread,
The walls are cracked, sunk is the flowery roof,
Undressed the pathway leading to the door;
But love, as Nature loves the lonely Poor;
Search, for their worth, some gentle heart wrong-proof,
Meek, patient, kind, and, were its trials fewer,
Belike less happy, - stand no more aloof!.

La Cabane du Highlander.

Elle est bâtie en terre, et la sauvage fleur
 Orne un faite croulant; toiture mal fermée,
 Il en sort le matin, une longue fumée,
 (Voyez) belle en soleil, blanche, et torse en vapeur!
 Le clair ruisseau des monts coule auprès; n'ayez peur
 D'approcher comme lui: quand l'âme est bien formée,
 On est humble: on le sait, pauvre race, semée
 Aux rocs, aux durs sentiers, partout ou vit un coeur!
 Sous ce toit affaissé de terre et de verdure,
 Par ce chemin rampant jusqu'à la porte obscure,
 Venez; plus naturel, le pauvre a ses trésors;
 Un coeur doux, patient, bénissant sur sa route,
 Qui, s'il supportait moins, bénirait moins sans doute...
 Ne restez plus ainsi, ne restez pas dehors!

Poésies, deuxième partie p. 246
 and in Port. C., I, 342-343.

IV. UHLAND.

Die Zwo Jungfrauen.

Zwo Jungfrauen sah ich auf dem Hügel droben,
 Gleich lieblich von Gesicht, von zartem Baue;
 Sie blickten in die abendlichen Gaue,
 Sie sassen traut und schwesterlich verwoben.
 Die eine hielt den rechten Arm erhoben,
 Hindeutend auf Gebirg und Strom und Aue;
 Die andre hielt, damit sie besser schaue,
 Die linke Hand der Sonne vorgeschoben.
 Kein Wunder, dass verlangen mich bestrickte
 Und dass in mir der susse Wunsch erglühete:
 "O, säss' ich doch an einer Platz von beiden!"
 Doch wie ich länger nach den Trauten blickte,
 Gedacht ich im besänftigen Gemüte:
 "Nein, wahrlich, Sünde wär' es, sie zu scheiden."

Deux Jeunes Filles.

Deux jeunes filles, là, sur la colline, au soir,
 Sous le soleil couchant deux tiges élancées,
 Légères, le front nu, comme soeurs enlacées,
 S'appuyaient l'une à l'autre et venaient de s'asseoir.
 L'une, aux grands monts, au lac, éblouissant miroir,
 Du bras droit faisant signe, et disant ses pensées;
 L'autre, vers l'horizon aux splendeurs abaissées,
 De sa main gauche au front se couvrait, pour mieux voir.
 Et moi qui les voyais toutes deux ... et chacune,
 Un moment j'eus désir: "Oh! pourtant près de l'une
 Etre assis!" me disais-je; et j'allais préférer.
 Mais regardant encor les deux soeurs sous le charme,
 Mon désir se confond, tant mon coeur se désarme:
 "Non, ce serait péché que de les séparer!"

Poésies, 2e partie p. 415.

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