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'Gustave Flaubert in Quest of the Absolute.'

Jean Dorothea Barron.

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Thesis for the Degree of Ph.D. submitted in October 1956.

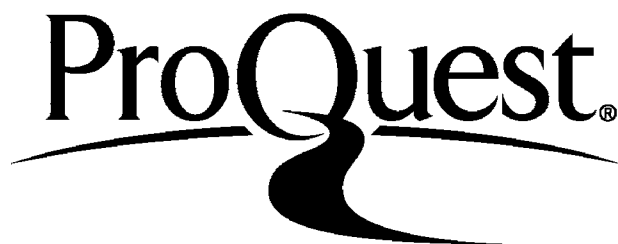
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ABSTRACT

The present study, in describing the various aspects of Flaubert's search for truth, seeks to illustrate the evolution and implications of his thought. With the exception of references in Chapter Two to an unpublished MS, it is based on Flaubert's published work, and not on any new material. It is concerned with the familiar facts of his biography only in so far as they influence or explain in some measure his personal evolution and the development of his ideas.

The first four chapters, in a detailed study of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, with particular reference in Chapter Three to the first Education Sentimentale, describe Flaubert's attempts, considerably influenced by Romantic doctrine and by Spinozist pantheism, to arrive at an understanding of his personal destiny and to discover some satisfactory philosophy of existence. The first of these problems was at least partially solved in the discovery of his artistic vocation and in the formulation of an aesthetic which was not only a literary doctrine, but a rule of life. The second continued to preoccupy him throughout life, and receives its fullest expression in the philosophical fantasy, la Tentation de Saint Antoine. This work is considered in its three successive versions in Chapter Five. Chapter Six,

a study of the characters of the three great novels and the Trois Contes, seeks to elucidate still further Flaubert's conception of man and society, whilst the two remaining chapters are concerned to show, with particular reference to the unfinished Bouvard et Pécuchet, that his final position represents the same uneasy combination of idealism and scepticism that was evident in the adolescent writings. For Flaubert's quest for the Absolute led him only to the Unknowable.

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INTRODUCTION.

- I. A brief account of Flaubert studies to the present date.
- II. The origins and aims of the present study.

I.

Flaubert often suggested as a motto for the perfect artist the device of the Ancients, 'cache ta vie'. Whether, given incidents like the 'Bovary scandal' and Louise Colet's vengeance in Lui, he can be said to have avoided publicity during his life-time is problematic; but certainly since his sudden death in 1880, and particularly since the turn of the century, scarcely an aspect of his life or work has remained unexplored.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century the few who had known Flaubert intimately committed to paper their memories and impressions of an artist whose reputation, if not yet established abroad, was undisputed in France. One might mention among these, as documents of particular interest, the

various articles on Flaubert by his disciple Guy de Maupassant,⁽¹⁾
 the Souvenirs Intimes⁽²⁾ of his niece Caroline (Mme Commanville),
 and the reminiscences of Maxime du Camp in his Souvenirs
Littéraires.⁽³⁾ Contemporaneously the novelist was finding his place
 in what were to become standard works of reference for students of
 nineteenth-century literature - Brunetière's Roman Naturaliste,⁽⁴⁾
 and Bourget's Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine.⁽⁵⁾ By 1892,
 Jules de Gaultier had invented the term bovarysme⁽⁶⁾ and established
 Flaubert criticism as such.

This same period, and the first decade of the present
 century, saw too the publication of various texts, and of an
 increasing number of letters. The correspondence between Flaubert
 and his 'cher maître' George Sand had appeared only a few years

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- (1) v. in particular. Maupassant. Gustave Flaubert dans la vie intime, Nouvelle Revue, VIII, 1881, and the study of Flaubert which prefaces the Quantin edition of Bouvard et Pécuchet, 1885, or the Charpentier edition of Flaubert's correspondence with George Sand, 1892.
- (2) First published 1895. Now prefaces Vol. I. of the Correspondance (edition Conard.)
- (3) 1882-3. Once intimate friends, du Camp and Flaubert quarrelled in the early fifties. Relations thereafter remained strained. Du Camp's picture of Flaubert is sometimes coloured by an ill-concealed envy, and his facts are not always reliable. But his chapters on Flaubert are none the less lively and interesting.
- (4) 1883.
- (5) 1883.
- (6) Le Bovarysme: la psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert.

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after his death, in 1884, to be followed in 1885 by the Quantin edition of the Oeuvres Complètes de Gustave Flaubert, in which were published for the first time various of the early Juvenilia and part of the journal written up after the travels with du Camp in Brittany in 1847.

The next publication of importance came in 1908, when Louis Bertrand obtained from Mme Commanville the MS of the second version of la Tentation, written in 1856; the same year the German critic E.W. Fischer published a comparative review of all three versions of la Tentation, along with a short but most interesting study of a novel Flaubert planned to write in the early 'fifties, but eventually renounced, la Spirale.

A year later Louis Conard began to publish what has since become the standard edition of Flaubert's works, though it has been to some extent superseded by revised editions of various of the novels and the Journal de Voyages, based on a new study of the original MSS. At the present date the student of Flaubert has at his disposal, in addition to the well-known works (Madame Bovary, Salammbô, the second Education Sentimentale, the three versions of La Tentation de Saint Antoine, and Bouvard et Pécuchet) three volumes of early writings, two volumes of travel notes, thirteen volumes of correspondence, and the text of various
(1)
note-books.

(1) Published by Mme. M.J. Durry in 1950 under the title Flaubert et ses projets inédits. Mme Durry announces in the preface her intention of publishing a further volume of this kind.

As far as critical and reference works are concerned it would seem, from a mere review of their titles, that they must constitute an exhaustive survey of the man, his life and his work. There have been biographies, general critical studies, works dealing with the interpretation of one or other of the novels, treatises on the Flaubertian aesthetic and the Flaubertian psychology, articles, monographs and theses concerned with all manner of subjects, from his politics to his nervous diseases. It would be tedious, and impossible in a short space, to list even the landmarks in a series of writings which can offer anything from Dumesnil's classic Gustave Flaubert; l'homme et l'oeuvre ⁽¹⁾ to a Freudian interpretation of la Tentation by a German doctor ⁽²⁾ Reik, or an American best-seller, Francis Steegmuller's Flaubert and Madame Bovary. ⁽³⁾ Many of the names figuring large in the bibliography of Flaubert criticism are familiar to all students of nineteenth-century French literature - Faguet, Seillière, Thibaudet, Maynial, Dumesnil, Descharmes, Demorest, Digeon.

(1) 1932.

(2) Flaubert und seine 'Versuchung des heiligen Antonius' Minden, 1912.

(3) 1939.

II.

But despite the broad scope of these numerous works, there seemed to the present writer to be room for a further study. The thesis began as an attempt to elucidate more fully than had been done previously the significance of Flaubert's philosophical fantasy, la Tentation de Saint Antoine; to assess its importance as an expression of the author's thought and to study its relationship with his other work. This latter aspect of the question involved a new examination of the other writings - not only the great novels, but more particularly the little known Oeuvres de Jeunesse and the posthumous and incomplete Bouvard et Pécuchet. Thus it was that the discussion of a particular work gradually developed into a study of the evolution of Flaubert's ideas.

Given the number of writings on Flaubert so far, it is inevitable that any new work should consist in some part of repetition of earlier findings. The present study obviously owes much to previous ones, though less perhaps to the general studies written in the early years of this century than to treatises dealing with an individual work or a particular problem - Demorest and Dumesnil on Bouvard et Pécuchet, Digeon on Flaubert's later years, Sez nec's studies of la Tentation, Guillemin's discussion of Flaubert's attitude to the religious problem.

The thesis might be said to have three focal points ; the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, la Tentation, and Bouvard et Pécuchet. As far as the Oeuvres de Jeunesse are concerned, Descharmes dealt half a century ago with the development of Flaubert's ideas and personality up to 1857 (the date of the publication of Madame Bovary, and the point at which Flaubert's personal evolution can be said to be complete.) But this critic had the disadvantage of being totally unacquainted with a work of major importance in any study of the early years, the first Education Sentimentale, which was published only two years after his above-mentioned work, in 1911.

Maynial's Jeunesse de Flaubert, which appeared in 1913, is selective, making only brief mention of works like Novembre and Mémoires d'un Fou, which are after all among the most important of the Juvenilia. No doubt this is because the author felt such writings to have been amply dealt with by Descharmes only four years previously. But it is strange that he should virtually ignore the first Education Sentimentale.

The next work of importance on this aspect of Flaubert was that of the American, Shanks, which appeared in 1927 under the title Flaubert's Youth. Shanks, like Maynial, had at his disposal all three volumes of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse as published by Conard, but his analysis of the works would appear in many places to be altogether too rapid. This is particularly true of his last chapter on l'Education Sentimentale, where his details are

descriptive rather than critical, and where problems of interpretation which are of importance to a deeper knowledge of Flaubert, as he was then, on the threshold of a literary career, tend to be glossed over.

The aim in the present study, therefore, has been to set before the reader a detailed examination of the ideas of the Juvenilia, and particularly of the hitherto neglected Education Sentimentale, in order to give a fuller account of the development of a mature personality and outlook, and at the same time to illustrate the high degree of continuity in Flaubert's thought.

With regard to la Tentation, we have already referred to the year 1908 as marking an important stage in the history of Flaubert studies, and more particularly in the elucidation of la Tentation, in that the hitherto unpublished first and second versions were introduced to the public, the 1856 version in toto, prefaced by a short study by Bertrand, and the 1848-9 in the descriptive account given of it by E.W. Fischer.

Fischer's study is a work of considerable importance. It offers a detailed comparison of the earlier and later versions, followed by a discussion of various problems connected with the work - in particular the attraction of the subject for Flaubert, and the importance of la Tentation as an expression of his

philosophy of life. But though it is in this way concerned with problems of general interpretation, it does not deal with the problems of interpretation raised by the individual episodes and allegories.

This lack continues to make itself felt in the subsequent studies of la Tentation, the most important of which are Thibaudet's chapter in his general study of Flaubert,⁽¹⁾ Lombard's La Tentation de Saint Antoine,⁽²⁾ and Digson's two chapters in his Dernier Visage de Flaubert, extremely interesting, but from which he completely omits the question of 'être la matière'. Only with the publication of Professor Sezneec's two works was the study of particular episodes really introduced. The first of these, L'Episode des Dieux dans la Tentation de Saint Antoine,⁽³⁾ is a study of sources rather than of interpretation, but in his Nouvelles Etudes sur Saint Antoine⁽⁴⁾ the author offers an article on the 'Monsters sequence' which is certainly the most illuminating discussion of any individual episode so far.

In view of all this, the aim of the present chapter on la Tentation has been to make a systematic study of the first and third versions, discussing each episode for its allegorical

- (1) 1922
 (2) 1934
 (3) Publication de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Lille, 1940.
 (4) Studies of the Warburg Institute, 1949.

significance, both in relation to the work as a whole and with reference to the evolution of Flaubert's ideas generally. We have dealt at some length with the enigma of 'être la matière', offering an interpretation which differs from that of many writers, but which seemed to be the only one consonant with the ideas and attitudes we have distinguished as characteristic of Flaubert and with the general trend of la Tentation.

At the same time, as previously indicated, we have dealt with another relatively unexplored aspect of the work in attempting to discover the relationship between la Tentation and Flaubert's other work. The novels and the Trois Contes are studied here, therefore, in relation to the scale of values and conception of man allegorically signified in la Tentation. We have dealt with these works comparatively rather than chronologically and consecutively, basing our study on detailed character analysis. It is hoped in this way that repetition of the many excellent studies of the novels has been avoided, and that this unaccustomed view-point may serve to show them in a new light.

We come finally to Bouvard et Pécuchet. The first important discussion of this work occurs in Guy de Maupassant's preface to it in the Quantin edition of 1885. Maupassant gave

various specific indications as to the origin of the work and Flaubert's aims in writing it, and at the same time published excerpts from the hitherto unknown Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues, stating that this was to have figured in the second volume of the novel.

The next contribution of any importance on the subject came in 1921 with Descharmes' long work, Autour de Bouvard et Pécuchet. This was, however, a study of sources rather than of interpretation. More relevant to the present discussion was the publication by Demorest in 1932 of some of the scenarios and notes for the second volume. Although these are brief, it would seem that they can shed light on various problems of interpretation. It is therefore strange that they should have found so little room in the subsequent studies of Bouvard et Pécuchet, with the exception of that of Dumesnil, who published his own text of the novel, preceded by a detailed and most interesting preface, in 1945.

Here we have tried to deal with the main problems raised by the novel itself - the controversial question of the role of the protagonists, the significance of 'copions comme autrefois', the purport of the second volume - and with the difficulty of assigning to Bouvard et Pécuchet a place in Flaubert's work as a whole. The majority of critics are agreed in seeing it as a violent affirmation of nihilistic scepticism.

which represents Flaubert's last word on life, his final pessimistic negation. This judgement would seem, however, to be incomplete, as we have tried to show in presenting the novel in the context of other indications of Flaubert's outlook at this period, and against the background of previous findings.

It would hardly be possible to present a startlingly new view of an author whom many previous works have already made adequately known to the student of literature. But it is hoped that the present study may shed more light on unaccustomed aspects of Flaubert's work and thought. We are all too familiar with 'the monk of Croisset' and the 'martyr of Art', the misanthropic railer of the bourgeois, the pessimist and the sceptic. But we are perhaps less well acquainted with Flaubert the Spinozist, speculating upon evolutionary problems, preoccupied with the theories of inter-relation between the physical and psychological. We do not remember that the mystic of Art was a mystic of nature too, whose pantheism plays an essential role in his experience and conception of the universe.

The view of Flaubert as a scientific determinist and sceptic has been somewhat modified in recent years, particularly

CHAPTER ONE.

THE SCHOOLBOY.

'J'ai passé vraiment une autre jeunesse, et par laquelle je ne voudrais pas revenir' (Corr.1.185)

I. Formative influences in childhood years. II. Main trends of thought in Coeuvres de Jeunesse. III. Detailed review of Coeuvres de Jeunesse. IV. Outlook and attitudes of the sixteen-year-old.

I.

'Ma vie, ce ne sont pas des faits; ma vie, c'est une pensée'⁽¹⁾; Flaubert wrote these words when he was almost seventeen, and they serve well to illustrate the trend of a chapter which is not concerned to give yet another biographical account of his childhood. Its interest is less in incidents than in ideas, the ideas of a boy which were to shape the pattern of his manhood.

We shall see that from an early age Flaubert was not only aware of, but at times desperately tormented by the various problems with which life in general, and his own existence in particular, confronted him. Man's ultimate destiny, the nature of his freedom, the existence of the soul, the mystery

(1) Mémoires d'un Fou, 1838. (Coeuvres de Jeunesse I, as all other compositions quoted in this chapter, unless otherwise stated.)

of death, the existence and attributes of God - all these are questions which present themselves to him in the course of his childhood and adolescent years, and on which he is to reflect all his life without ever reaching a satisfactory and positive solution.

By far the most revealing source for any study of these early years lies in the boy's first letters and writings. But before we turn to these, we may perhaps be permitted to recall to the reader the circumstances of Flaubert's upbringing and education, in order to see the Juvenilia in their precise context.

One might wonder, from what has just been said, if the child in question had not led some extraordinary life in which poverty, illness or social upheaval had figured large. But a first glance shows us a wealthy, eminently respectable and respected middle-class family, installed in a prosperous provincial town, Rouen. Here Dr. Flaubert, a brilliant surgeon, honoured and admired by his fellow citizens, had charge of the Hôtel-Dieu. He had married a quiet and devoted wife, who lavished upon her three surviving children a rather anxious affection. Achille was the eldest by several years. The younger two, Gustave and Caroline, were constant companions until the former was sent to school as a boarder at the age of ten. All three enjoyed all that a comfortable bourgeois home can give in the way of

stability, security and tenderness.

There are, however, two factors to which we must pay particular attention if we are to grasp the real significance of this period in Flaubert's development: first the hospital environment in which his childhood and youth were largely spent, and secondly, the role of his parents.

The family was installed in apartments in the hospital itself, a grim and austere building. All the sights and sounds of hospital life were familiar to the children from an early age. (1) Flaubert would see patients gazing out of upper windows, or when convalescent, walking under the trees; he would hear cries of pain and delirium, and watch with curiosity as orderlies carried a sheet-covered stretcher over to the mortuary. He remembered all his life having seen, when he was six or seven, a group of half-naked mad-women clawing at their faces in frenzy. (2) He and Caroline used to try to peep into the wards, scramble up the trellis to gaze into the dissecting-room, and on one occasion at least observed a post-mortem in progress until their father, catching sight of them, waved them angrily away.

(1) Corr.IV. 170. 30 mars 1857 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie. 'Je suis né à l'hôpital (de Rouen - dont mon père était le chirurgien en chef: il a laissé un nom illustre dans son art) et j'ai grandi au milieu de toutes les misères humaines - dont un air ne séparait. Tout enfant, j'ai joué dans un amphithéâtre. Voilà pourquoi, peut-être, j'ai les allures à la fois funèbres et cyniques'.

(2) Corr.III. 268. 7-8 juillet 1853 à Louise Colet.

Such experiences could not fail to mark any child, above all one so sensitive and impressionable that even the pictures in his painting-books could prevent him from sleeping at nights. (1) He could not but be aware of the continual suffering around him, whilst the accustomed sight of bodies laid out in the mortuary taught him, however confusedly, the transience of human beauty, and indeed the whole fragility of a life that apparently came to nothing in this terrible mystery of death. (2)

Moreover he seems to have confronted these bewildering and frightening experiences alone. His father, a disciple of Bichat and Cabanis, was of the physiological determinist school, content to ask 'how?' but excluding 'why?' as unscientific and therefore pretentious and futile. For the Doctor death was the consequence of physical disorder and disintegration: he pursued his inquiry no further. It was hardly to his father, therefore, that the young Flaubert, dissatisfied as we shall see by only partial explanations, could turn for an answer. And apart from this, a certain incompatibility of temperament seems to have been a barrier between father and son. (3)

(1) Corr.II 371. 3 mars 1852, à Louise Colet.

(2) In a letter to Tourgueneff many years later, discussing a recently published feuilleton entitled le suicide d'un enfant, Flaubert makes the following significant observation: 'L'auteur a oublié une chose capitale, à savoir la peur qu'un cadavre cause aux enfants' - (Supplément à la Corr.III.224 21 octobre 1875).

(3) Flaubert, who loved and deeply admired his father, suffered as much as the latter must have done at their differences. 'Que de fois' he wrote, shortly after Dr. Flaubert's death, 'sans le vouloir, n'ai-je pas fait pleurer mon père, lui si intelligent et si fin! Mais il n'entendait rien à mon idiome lui comme toi, comme les autres'. (Corr.I.239.11 août 1846).

We do not have the impression that the boy was any more intimate with his mother than with his father. Her reserve was probably such as to intimidate him - in any case he had inherited her extreme shyness and sensitivity. There seems no doubt that she readily concurred with her husband's materialist views, and that her children's baptism, like the religious ceremonies of her wedding, were a question of social conformity⁽¹⁾. Certainly she was not able to answer the child's questions any more satisfactorily than his father.

Seen in this context, a phrase from La Danse des Morts, written when Flaubert was sixteen, takes on a particular significance. "Je n'ai ni femme qui m'aime, ni mère, ni famille", the Poet laments - "le Poète est orphelin". The words denote not only a boy who writes in secret, half ashamed of his literary aspirations, but a boy who feels himself isolated from a community apparently unaware of, certainly not interested in, questions which for him were of impelling urgency.

At school (the Collège, now Lycée Corneille, in Rouen) he was even more conscious of his spiritual and intellectual solitude. He made few friends among his class-mates whom he

(1) The Journal des Goncourt (15 février 1872) records Flaubert as having said that his mother became an atheist in 1846, when within two months, and with tragic suddenness, she lost both her husband and her only daughter.

affected to despise. The harsh military discipline of this Napoleonic establishment, and, even more, the type of instruction it offered, served only to make him more unhappy. Naturally he was obliged to give his attention to subjects in which he had no spontaneous interest, and he seems to have regarded the majority of them as crass stupidities⁽¹⁾. Certainly this attitude sprang from the inherent pride of a hitherto undisciplined nature, but his rebelliousness probably has its roots too in the fact that all that was taught him seemed far removed from his real interests and problems.

In addition to all this we must bear in mind the important influence of so many books in which the boy sought to escape from the world about him. This need to lose himself in a dream-world, either of his own making or created by others, was at once the result of his sense of isolation and a contributory cause, in that it set him more and more at odds with his bourgeois family, classicist schoolmaster, and indeed with life in general in a busy and down-to-earth Rouen.

Madame Commanville's portrait of the little boy who would sit for hours sucking his finger, and quite lost in day-dreams is well known.⁽²⁾ We may learn from Flaubert himself how much he delighted in the store of Norman folk-tales which Julie, the housekeeper and nursemaid, was always ready to tell once again,

(1) Corr. I. Lettres 50 - 57.

(2) Corr. I. Mme Commanville. Souvenirs Intimes.

interspersing them with reminiscences of innumerable sentimental novels; now, whenever he could, he used to run across the road to 'l'oncle Mignot' who read to him from Don Quixote. (Thus providing the seven or eight year old with an irrefutable argument against those who tried to incite him to learn to read for himself. - 'A quoi bon apprendre', he would ask, 'puisque Papa Mignot lit' ⁽¹⁾).

The prospect of school at ten did, however, compel him to greater effort, and before long he was not only reading, but composing too. His first letters, addressed to his playmate and school-friend Ernest Chevalier, are full of reference to plays, often of his own composition, which he planned to act on the billiard-table. He appears to have a number of novels in mind, with exotic titles like La Belle Andalouse, Le Bal Masqué, Cardenio, Dorothee, and so forth, ⁽²⁾ whilst more serious historical works are not beyond his ambitions, as is proved by a letter written soon after his eleventh birthday:

'Je commencerai aussi une histoire d'Henri 4 de Louis 13 et de Louis 14 il faut que je travaille' ⁽³⁾

Indeed !

In the course of the next few years he reads Montaigne and Rabelais, Voltaire and Rousseau, Barante, Michelet, Quinet; Scott,

(1) Mme Commanville: Souvenirs Intimes, xi. (Corr.I)
 (2) Corr.1.2. 4 février 1831.
 (3) Corr.1.4. 15 janvier 1832. (punctuation sic)

Byron and Shakespeare; Le Marquis de Sade, Nodier, Gautier, George Sand, Mérimée, Dumas père, (to mention only the outstanding names) with equal enthusiasm. But in his letters to Chevalier we see above all a fervent Romanticist. Maxime du Camp, for several years one of Flaubert's most intimate friends, tells us that when he first met the latter during his student days in Paris he knew René and Ahasverus by heart, and was a passionate admirer of Dumas' ⁽¹⁾ Antony. (Like Antony he and his school fellows used to carry daggers in their pockets and sleep with them under the pillow). We know from Flaubert's own telling that his first reading of Faust was something in the nature of a revelation. ⁽²⁾ At thirteen he was buying and reading the current dramatic successes; Dumas' Antony, Don Juan de Marana, Catherine Howard; Delavigne's Les Enfants d'Edouard; Herbin's Jeanne de Flandre and Les Vieux Péchés. Hugo, to whom he proudly refers as 'notre ami Victor Hugo' ⁽³⁾ is his idol, whilst his non-de-plume - Gustave Antuoskothi Koclott ⁽⁴⁾ is worthy of any member of the Jeune-France.

(1) Maxime du Camp. Souvenirs Littéraires. I. 224-229.

(2) Mme. Communville. Souvenirs Intimes. xxxix.

(3) Corr. I.14. 29 août 1859 à Ernest Chevalier.

(4) Corr. I.18. 2 juillet 1855 à Ernest Chevalier.

The influences of this 'new' literature, its doctrine, themes and outlook, are to be traced in many a page of Flaubert's Juvenilia. It is for this reason sometimes suggested, and even taken for granted, that the problems and aspirations expressed in these first compositions are merely a transposition of what the boy discovered in his readings. Yet this is not the case, and our aim will be to show, without discounting the Romantic influence, that Flaubert only echoes contemporary writers in so far as their mood corresponds with his own. There can be no doubt that these early writings, from the odd fragments of a schoolboy's review to the attempts at autobiography and memoirs completed just before his seventeenth birthday offer, if sometimes in an over-dramatised and artificial style, a self-revelation which is of supreme importance to the understanding of the mature Flaubert.

II

The exterior events of family and school-life play but a slight part, if any, in the Oeuvres de Jeunesse. For these writings are concerned with an inner world, peopled with literary heroes and with the creations of a vivid imagination, agitated by all kinds of questions and doubts, full of wild enthusiasms and high ideals. 'Drôle de monde que ma tête !'

(1)

Flaubert exclaimed once to Chevalier.

One fact above all emerges from this chaos of hopes and fears, affirmations, hesitations and doubts. Even at this early stage, Flaubert shows himself acutely conscious of the inherent paradox in man, a finite being with an ineluctable aspiration to the Infinite.

Mgr. Guardini, the Italic-German theologian and scholar, in his treatise on the spiritual origins of melancholia and ennui, defines this suffering, 'que l'on peut suivre à travers toute l'histoire de la recherche et de la pensée humaines', with perspicacity;

'l'on cherche dans les choses, passionnément et partout, ce qu'elles ne possèdent pas ... On cherche et on essaye de prendre les choses comme on voudrait qu'elles fussent, de trouver en elles cette densité, ce sérieux, cette ardeur et cette capacité d'accomplissement dont on a soif - et c'est impossible. Les choses sont finies. Mais toute finitude est une défiance, et cette défiance est une déception pour le cœur qui réclame l'absolu. Cette déception s'amplifie et devient le sentiment d'un grand vide ...' (2)

(1) Corr. I, 36. 29 novembre 1858.

(2) Romano Guardini, De la Melancolie, (translated from the German and published in Les Editions du Seuil, 1958)

It is interesting to compare this passage with Maxime du Camp's reflections on Flaubert's innate pessimism:

'on eût dit ... que son projet n'avait plus de prise du moment que l'exécution en devenait certaine ... toujours dupe de la vision lointaine ... il imaginait des splendeurs, des merveilles, des jouissances infinies, se trompait lui-même et accusait l'art, la nature, le plaisir de le tromper parcequ'il avait rêvé qu'ils lui donneraient plus qu'ils ne peuvent comporter ...' (1)

We shall find in the Correspondance of Flaubert's later adolescence, and in subsequent years, many a passage to confirm this diagnosis. But it seems clear that even now, when he is still a schoolboy, it is not so much because of any particular circumstances that he suffers. His spiritual and intellectual solitude, his longing to write, his love for Maria, the fears, desires, ambitions of a turbulent adolescence are certainly contributory causes of his unhappiness, and themes which recur frequently in his writings. Fundamentally, however, his suffering is rooted in an aspiration to something which, as he writes in Mémoires d'un Fou, transcends words, harmony, form, is beyond the grasp of Art, a vaguely apprehended but indefinable 'infini'. If this son of a physiological determinist has any conception or conviction of the soul's existence it is because he is aware of an unfulfilled and spiritual aspiration in himself and in others ... 'quelque chose de vide et d'insatiable' ...

(1) Maxime du Camp. op.cit. I.407.

(2) 1838 - Flaubert was then sixteen.

'ce désir immodéré de l'infini et du vague que nous appelons
 l'âme'.⁽¹⁾

There are however two sides to the picture. This profound aspiration to transcendent and lasting values is offset by an apparent cynical materialism and aggressive scepticism. This can be disconcerting, not to say misleading, unless it is realised that they represent only an aspect of the struggle which is being waged within him, an attempt to escape from ideals which seem hopelessly inaccessible. For Flaubert is only a sceptic because he is at bottom an idealist.

(2)

What is symbolised in that maniacal figure Giacomo with his passion for rare editions, who allows neither God nor the salvation of his soul to stand in the way of his relentless ambition, if it is not an attempt to escape the aspiration to the unattainable in sacrificing all to an attainable end?

And in Mazza, the heroine of Passion et Vertu, completed a year later, we see the same fundamental human temptation -

(1) Also from Mémoires d'un Fou. cf. the Poet is La Danse des Morts: "... amo je te sens et je voudrais te nier, mais tu occupes trop de place car tu m'étouffes".

(2) Bibliomanie, 1836. Flaubert was then fourteen.

(1)
 'vouloir infiniment sans vouloir l'infini'. This unhappy
 (2)
 woman, clearly a proto-type of Madame Bovary, kills husband
 and children in a frantic pursuit of pleasure which leaves her
 constantly dissatisfied:

' "Oh, ce n'est pas là ce que j'avais rêvé", disait-elle, car
 il lui sembla ... que l'amour ne se borna pas là; se demandant
 enfin si derrière la volupté il n'y avait pas une plus grande
 encore, ni après le plaisir une plus vaste jouissance, car elle
 avait une soif inépuisable d'amours infinis, de passions sans
 bornes ... elle aurait voulu faire sortir son amour des bornes
 de la nature ...'

Then there are the many scenes of violence and debauchery,
 (where the young writer shows himself strongly influenced by
 the current literary fashion for 'l'orgie échevelée', a term
 he quotes with enjoyment). These are born of an attitude of
 revolt which we may describe in the adolescent's own words :

' C'est qu'il y a dans l'existence d'un homme de tels malheurs,
 des douleurs si vives, des désespoirs si poignants que l'homme
 abandonne pour le plaisir d'insulter celui qui nous fait

(1) M. Blondel, L'Action.

(2) A resemblance which seems to have escaped the notice of
 most writers, as M. René Hervel points out in a brief
 article on Passion et Vertu as a prefiguration of Madame
 Bovary, published in Les Amis de Flaubert. (Du nouveau
 sur Madame Bovary, Bulletin No. 8., Année 1954.)

souffrir et que l'homme jette avec mépris sa dignité comme un masque de théâtre, et l'on se livre à ce que la débauche a de plus sale, la vie de plus dégradant, et on expire en buvant et au son de la musique...' (1)

At the same time, though, he may be not aware of it, the characters depicted in these scenes convey in their "recherche de l'infini du plaisir", the need to surpass the human, to break through the limits of normal capacity -

'l'insatiabilité de l'homme dans la recherche du plaisir qui l'amène à sa suprême dégradation témoigne à sa manière de l'infinie noblesse de sa nature. Seul un être fait pour ce qui dépasse toute mesure, toute réalisation possible dans le (2) créé, peut ainsi chercher sans limite la satisfaction sensible'.

III

Having now acquainted ourselves with the context and general trend of ideas of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse, we may perhaps look more closely into these writings. The earliest manuscript yet brought to light consists of odd fragments of a newspaper or review Flaubert began at school (some time after his tenth birthday therefore). These for convenience sake have been grouped along with a series of short stories all

(1) La Poste à Florence, 1836

(2) Yves de Montcheuil, S.J.

written before the boy's fifteenth birthday, under the title Journal d'Ecolier.

(1) Journal d'Ecolier.

Perhaps the most interesting piece here is the first, Voyage en Enfer, an undated fragment from the young Flaubert's weekly review, Art et Progrès. The schoolboy imagines himself swept off by Satan into the heights, there to be shown the whole of Europe - a repulsive spectacle of treachery and vice. Finally he can bear it no longer and turns away:

'Montre-moi ton royaume, dis-je à Satan.
Le voilà!
Comment donc?
Et Satan me répondit; C'est que le monde, c'est l'enfer!'

The idea for the setting of this sketch probably came from Faust or Ahasverus. But despite the popularity of 'Satanic literature' at this time, one would hesitate to affirm that the composition is wholly imitative. Its bitter pessimism is of a type we shall meet again in Smarh, as is its dramatic form. And Smarh (written in 1839) in turn foreshadows, both in form and conception, La Tentation de Saint-Antoine.

Voyage en Enfer is followed by a series of miscellaneous stories, still grouped within the framework of the Journal d'Ecolier - lurid horror tales, wild adventures, what purport

to be biographical or historical studies, none of which show much originality. The young Flaubert's Hateo Falcone, for instance, is a grimmer version of Mérimée's conte, and in La dernière scène de la mort de Marguerite de Bourgogne he completes the story begun in La Tour de Nesle in matching style - the unfortunate queen is strangled with her own hair by a vengeful Lyonnet. There is an inevitable Portrait de Lord Byron, inspired no doubt by Pichot, in which we sense again an intense disgust with the self-seeking world and admiration for the soul that sacrifices to some lofty ideal.

(11) Opuscules Historiques.

The Opuscules Historiques of his fourteenth and fifteenth years are of negligible importance, probably only remnants of innumerable historical essays and sketches written with the encouragement of his history master, Cheruel, a disciple and friend of Michelet and one of the few teachers Flaubert liked and respected. But it is about the same time, (in 1836), that we find him embarking upon more important works, and the real substance of the Oeuvres de Jeunesse dates from this time. With the exception of a historical play, Louis XI, the interest in narrative fades now. Predominance is given not so much to events as to thoughts, reactions, feelings, and eventually (with La Dernière Heure, Agonies, and Mémoires d'un Fou), to

pure introspection. One may draw three fairly distinct divisions in these works. There are stories, or rather fantasies, with a strong macabre element; other more realistic compositions concerned on the whole with human suffering in its mental and spiritual rather than its physical aspect; and thirdly, as we have just indicated, the autobiographical and introspective works.

(iii) Fantasies.

These probably owe much to Faust and Ahasverus, and to the 'Satanic' tales of Gautier and Nodier, though there is nothing slavishly imitative about them. La Femme du Monde, for instance, scribbled off in the space of half an hour, portrays death as its fourteen-year-old author really knows it, 'la plus vraie de toutes les vérités de la terre', and with many a detail familiar from childhood experience. 'J'entends avec plaisir', says Death, exulting at the agony of a young girl, 'le bourdonnement des mouches qui viennent autour de sa tête comme signe de putréfaction'. And again, delighting in every aspect of the suffering she inflicts, she describes 'le hideux choléra ... avec ses ongles noirs, son teint vert, ses dents jaunes, ses membres qui se convulsionnent', as a child of ten had learned to recognise it in the terrible epidemic of 1832, when for weeks the Flaubert children dined in a room separated only by

a thin partition-wall from a ward where men, in Flaubert's own words, were dying like flies. (1)

Rêve d'Infer is a strange vision of which the hero, Arthur, is a creature superior to man, 'esprit céleste jeté sur la terre comme le dernier mot de la création'. He is 'fort et sans passion' : the constraints imposed upon men of flesh and blood are unknown to him - 'Arrière tout besoin de la vie, toute réalité matérielle, tout pour la pensée, pour l'extase..'. Even the love of Julietta, the little peasant girl (an obvious reminiscence of Marguerite in Faust) leaves him unmoved, for human passion and human beauty cannot satisfy his aspirations. By very reason of his superiority Arthur's destiny is one of intolerable suffering in a world too small for 'sa pensée qui volait vers les nues'.

No doubt Flaubert is indebted principally to Maschovius for his plot. (We may recall that in the opening scene of this last work God announces a new creation to supersede the present world - 'Je ferai cette fois l'homme d'une argile meilleure: je le pétrirai mieux'.) Yet this conception of a being who is neither body nor soul, 'qui avait quelque chose des anges', is typical of the adolescent in his revolt against all that is ignoble, vulgar, impure in man, and particularly of Flaubert, characteristically aspiring to some kind of idealised existence free from the limitations and needs

(1) Corr. IV. 444. 24 août 1861 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie.

imposed by the material and physical.

La Danse des Morts, a longer work again looking forward to Smorh, was written some twelve months later, Flaubert being then sixteen. Here again, in the setting at least, with midnight striking over the moon-lit graves and Satan rousing the myriad dead, there is evidence of a debt to Ahasvérus, where Mob, personification of Death, presides in Strasbourg Cathedral over the wedding of Ahasvérus and Rachel, surrounded by the host of those long dead. In its extreme pessimism Danse des Morts is reminiscent of the earlier Voyage en Enfer. Here again the world is wholly subjugated to Satan, whilst Christ, powerless, has returned to the bosom of the Father. We meet with the same almost Manichaean attitude to the physical as was evident in Rêve d'Enfer - the souls of the Elect as they ascend into heaven sing a song of triumph over the flesh, 'vile argile qui m'a souillée, qui m'a tant de fois abimée de ta fange, arrière!' And we find the Damned alike yearning for release from a life whose pleasures are incapable of satisfying them:

'Nous avons épuisé de la vie toutes les délices, toutes les voluptés et tous les crimes ... Quand la mort viendra-t-elle nous endormir pour toujours, loin des festins, des tièdes embrassements, de tout ce qu'on vend et qui s'achète?'

These might have been the words of Hazza, for she too had sought an escape from the constant dissatisfaction of life in death. And in the more realistic stories to which

we come now we meet with a whole series of suicides and murders.

(iv) Stories of Human Suffering.

The first among these works comes in 1836, and was no doubt suggested by Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris, the motto of which Flaubert borrows to introduce his story - Un Parfum à Sentir, ou les Baladins. The heroine is a circus dancer, Marguerite. Because she is ugly and sick she is the laughing stock of the crowds, and repudiated by her husband, penniless, half demented, she is eventually driven to suicide. Suidaid Volueris,⁽¹⁾ written the following year, tells the story of Djalich, half man, half monster, hideously ugly, and repulsive to the girl he loves (a blue-eyed Adèle not unlike the heroine of Antony). But gross and inarticulate as he may appear, he is endowed with a fine and artistic sensibility, and like Marguerite he suffers intolerably. At last, in a frenzy of despair, he murders Adèle and kills himself.⁽²⁾ Similar too is Garcia, the younger son of a noble Italian family, ill-favoured and dull-witted, a wretched and jealous spectator of the brilliant and happy career of his cardinal brother whom he finally assassinates.

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- (1) Djalich is reminiscent of the ape-like creature appearing in Balzac's Physiologie du Mariage, (Méditation V.) which Flaubert had certainly read.
 (2) La peste à Florence, 1836.

The epigraph of this last work - 'C'est que je te hais
 d'une haine de frère' ⁽¹⁾ - would suggest that the story is largely
 an expression of resentment towards a more tractable elder
 brother now a brilliant medical student, and perfectly at home
 in a life which was to prove not only irksome to Gustave, but
 eventually intolerable. We are concerned, however, not
 simply with a younger brother's jealousy and sense of inferiority.
 The roots of his suffering, here as in the other two stories
 just mentioned, are in his sense of isolation, an inability to
 share in the accepted pleasures of life and the presentiment
 of continued unhappiness. He himself is the outcast symbolised
 in Garcia as he stands alone on the threshold of a lighted
 ballroom where everybody is happy, or Djalioh at Adole's
 wedding, 'semblable à un condamné qu'on fait mourir de faim
 devant des vivres et que quelques barreaux de fer séparent de
 l'existence'.

Indeed, characters like Djalioh and Garcia are not really
 inferior at all, however unsuccessful and unhappy they may be.
 Their failure is only in their incapacity to translate into
 words and action their intellectual and spiritual superiority.
 No doubt this is an echo and transposition of the adolescent's
 own suffering in being unable to attain to the ideal of literary
 expression which his vocation already set before him. We
 shall find confirmation of this in the later adolescent writings,
 where he expresses himself more directly and personally.

(1) From Dumas père's Don Juan de Harana.

His sense of isolation and frustration is therefore calculated to induce sentiments of arrogant superiority, as well as to impress him with a certain inferiority at being unlike others. The early writings, like the letters, can be mordantly ironic at the expense of school-fellows, teachers, and the ordinary man-in-the-street. 'Ordinary' and 'contented' are already terms synonymous with 'mediocre' and 'self-satisfied'. The only adolescent composition to be published at the time of writing was a caustic study of the bourgeois entitled Une Leçon d'Histoire Naturelle: genre Commis. ⁽¹⁾ The typical clerk portrayed in the sixteen-year-old's article has many points in common with the heroes of his last and unfinished work, Bouvard et Pécuchet, in their most cruelly satirised aspects.

So far we have met with little religious interest in these stories. Apart from the autobiographical works, with which we shall be dealing in conclusion, only one composition really conveys the desperate struggle in Flaubert's mind to reach some kind of decision and certitude as to the existence of God. This is a horrific tale he wrote about the time of his fifteenth birthday - Rage et Impuissance. It describes the last torments of a man buried alive, waiting for death, and is in some ways typical of the writings Gautier characterised in Les Jeunes-France as 'l'école féroce'. But the prayers and pleadings of the victim are unmistakably personal:

(1) No doubt inspired, as far as the form was concerned, by the 'Physiologies' of Balzac, and of many other lesser writers at that time.

'fais-le, donne-moi la foi! pourquoi veux-tu que je ne croie pas en toi? tu vois que je souris, que je pleure: abrège mes souffrances, tarie mes larmes!'

Alternately calling for God's mercy and blaspheming, denying His existence, the unfortunate victim mocks eternity yet trembles before it. He does not believe, but finds himself incapable of the denial which would mark a final and irreversible decision.

'Ne croyez pas les gens qui se disent athées', the young author interjects, 'ils ne sont que sceptiques et nient par vanité. Eh bien, lorsqu'on doute et qu'on a des souffrances, on veut effacer toute probabilité, avoir la réalité vide et nue: mais le doute augmente et vous rongé l'âme.'

It is above all in the autobiographical works, however, that we see Flaubert face to face with the religious problem. We find him embarking a month later on what is as far as we know from the writings extant the first of the more introspective compositions on which he is to concentrate more and more exclusively in the next few years. It would seem, however, that he did not persevere for long, since we have only a few pages of it. ⁽¹⁾ La dernière heure, as it is entitled, shows us once more a character face to face with death. This time it is a nineteen-year-old, who has committed suicide out of sheer disgust with life. The theme, suggested by Werther perhaps, is certainly common enough, though we shall see from later writings that Flaubert did know the temptation of suicide

(1) Cœuvres de Jeunesse. II

in these years. Since, however, he was only fifteen at the time of writing, five years younger than his hero, it would seem rather that he was using the theme of suicide because it was a fashionable literary device. Perhaps on the other hand he is suggesting that this is what he will be led to at nineteen if life continues to be so wretched and disappointing. We learn little of the origins of his character's despair, except that he has known no peace of mind or happiness since the death of his little sister, when he first realised the utter finality of the tomb and the radical impossibility for any man to 'faire renaître le néant'. No doubt the death of his sister Caroline was one of the worst disasters the fifteen-year-old could picture to himself. Certainly this theme of death has become something of an obsession with him.

(v) Autobiographical Works.

La Dernière House is not therefore strictly speaking an autobiographical work, but merely illustrative of a trend to more introspective and subjective writing. The autobiographical works themselves come a year later, with Agonies, a fragment written in 1837, followed in 1838 by the longest work so far, Mémoires d'un Fou, and in 1842 by Novembre, with which

we shall deal in our next chapter, along with the other writings of the later adolescent period.

Agonies is a short and disjointed piece, again unfinished. It comprises in its author's estimation 'tout un immense résumé d'une vie morale bien hideuse et bien noire.' This phrase, amusing in its would-be Byronic cynicism and melodramatic despair, indicates that we are to be concerned rather with a moral biography than with the narration of incidents and events.

The work opens with a series of speculations on life which might be summarized in the vanitas vanitatis of the Prophet, were it not that there is no peace or confidence here, but bewilderment, resentment, and open revolt:

'On a souvent parlé de la Providence et de la bonté céleste; je ne vois guère de raisons d'y croire. Le Dieu qui s'amuserait à tenter les hommes pour voir jusqu'où ils peuvent souffrir, ne serait-il pas aussi cruellement stupide qu'un enfant, qui sachant que le hanneton va mourir, lui arrache d'abord les ailes, puis les pattes, puis la tête?'

Under the sub-title Angoisses we revert to the eternal problem of death, described with repellent details of physical decomposition. On the one hand the author denies, with scorn and ridicule, the existence of the soul, the possibility of an immortal destiny for man. But as previously he cannot rest content in his aggressive materialism. And here he takes positive action in his attempt to reach some kind of certainty; he seeks out a priest... 'un prêtre qui me dise, qui me prouve, qui me persuade que l'âme existe dans le corps de l'homme'.

But the clergy prove as unconcerned at his dilemma as is their God himself.

'Au secours! Hélas! Personne ne me répond.

Cherchons encore.

J'ai cherché, je n'ai pas trouvé: j'ai frappé à la porte, personne ne m'a ouvert, et on m'y a fait languir de froid et de misère, si bien que j'ai failli en mourir.'

Their faith is a mask, their pretended chastity and spirituality a covering for debauchery and stupid vulgarity. He finds one in the arms of a prostitute, his crucifix trampled in the mud; another, no sooner has the boy begun to explain himself, interrupts by shouting to the maid to keep an eye on the potatoes, obviously, the hyper-sensitive Flaubert infers, more intent upon the next meal than on his pastoral duties. How, Flaubert asks the reader, is he possibly to believe that this 'amateur de pommes de terre', with 'le nez de travers et tout bourgeonné' is possessed with the science of eternity?

'Dites-moi maintenant que la vie n'est pas une ignoble farce... la vertu c'est le masque, le vice c'est la vérité... la vie c'est le masque, la mort c'est la vérité; la religion c'est le masque, la fille de joie c'est la vérité ...'

It would be interesting to know how far this incident corresponds with actual experience. If we are to judge by Dr. Flaubert's friends and acquaintances, members of the clergy cannot have been frequent guests of the family. Flaubert remarks in later years that he is totally unacquainted with ecclesiastical circles. ⁽¹⁾ On the other hand he must have come

(1) Corr. IV.444. 24 août 1861 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

into contact with them from time to time, even if only at the dinner table, as was the case with Monsieur le curé de Trouville, (for whom Flaubert entertained a cordial dislike)⁽¹⁾ Certainly the passage suggests, if it is not true in every detail, some kind of experience, or even a series of experiences, resulting in Flaubert's bitter disappointment in the priesthood, and in the doctrine of Christianity. One does not know whether he really knew of profligate priests, though it is quite likely; on the other hand he may very well have been scandalised by some minor failing. A man cannot after all help his features, and a solicitude for what is in the oven does not necessarily denote a vulgarly materialistic outlook. In his inept mediocrity and incapacity to help the boy, the 'amateur de pommes de terre' is obviously to some extent a prefiguration of l'abbé Bournisien, similarly imprisoned in the materialities of life, quite unable to understand or help Emma.

After this incident there is little more of importance in Agonies. Flaubert takes up the theme of social distress already touched upon in Un Parfum à sentir; this passage, like the work just mentioned, is very reminiscent of Hugo and of Rousseau. Then, with a vision of sin copied almost textually from Voyage en Enfer, the manuscript comes to a sudden stop. One might recall, before leaving this composition, an introductory

(1) v.Corr. III.237. 15 juin 1853 à Louise Colet.

paragraph in which the author addresses the reader. If you are unfortunate enough to read these pages, he writes, do not say 'c'est l'oeuvre d'un insensé, d'un fou', but 'il a souffert...'. However over-dramatised and lacking in originality it may be in parts, it is indisputably sincere. In the bitter unhappiness and confusion of mind it expresses.

Mémoires d'un Fou has a much stronger narrative element, centred as it is on Flaubert's meeting with Maria. Maria was in real life Mme. Eliza Schlessinger, and Flaubert met her on holiday at Trouville (he was fourteen at the time) precisely as he recounts here, through casually rescuing her cloak from the incoming tide as he was strolling over the sands one morning. Later in the day, at lunch, she thanked him, and so he saw for the first time the woman for whom he was to conceive an almost mystic devotion, and whom he never forgot. More than twenty years later he wrote to a correspondent:

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- (1) A. Solomon, (Flaubert's Literary Development in the light of Mémoires d'un Fou, Novembre, and the first Education sentimentale, Baltimore 1918) affirms that Flaubert was consciously setting out here to imitate the Confessions of Rousseau. One may infer from the Correspondance that this is so, but it must be remembered that the memoirs are nonetheless based on an essentially personal and intimate experience.
- (2) See, on this previously disputed point, and on the whole question of Flaubert's relations with Mme. Schlessinger now and in the future, Gérard-Gailly. Les Fantômes de Trouville. 1930

'J'ai, dans ma jeunesse, démesurément aimé, aimé sans retour, profondément, silencieusement ... Chacun de nous a dans le coeur une chambre royale; je l'ai mariée, mais elle n'est pas détruite.' (1)

Three times Mme. Schléssinger is portrayed in his writings: here as Maria; in the first Education Sentimentale as Mme. Emilie; and in the Education Sentimentale of 1869 as his greatest heroine, Mme. Arnoux. 'Si je vous disais', he writes in Mémoires d'un Fou, 'que j'ai aimé une autre femme, je mentirais comme un infâme'.

Mme. Schléssinger's departure from Trouville at the end of the holiday was probably the greatest grief of Flaubert's adolescent years. He was twenty-one, and a student in Paris, when he next met her.

Mémoires d'un Fou opens with reminiscences of childhood years, of the loneliness and misery of schooldays, of the boy's increasing unhappiness, his sense of confusion and bewilderment. 'Oh! comme j'étais un pauvre fou sans idées fixes, sans opinions positives,' he writes.

One might pause to wonder how far these references to madness, recurrent in the adolescent writings, are significant. Doubtless they can be partly ascribed to literary, and particularly Romantic, convention. But they would seem to

(1) Corr. IV. 551-2. novembre ou décembre 1859 à Mlle. Amélie Bosquet (Flaubert's italics).

indicate too the extent to which a hypersensitive and morbidly imaginative youth felt himself an outcast, isolated in suffering unknown to his fellows, and how intense this suffering could be. 'Tu croiras peut-être', he writes to his friend Alfred le Poittevin in a dedicatory paragraph, '... que l'expression est forcée et le tableau assombri à plaisir; rappelle-toi que c'est un fou qui a écrit ces pages'. This is very similar to the warning which prefaced Agonies.⁽¹⁾

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- (1) One gathers from the later Correspondance, and from the Notes de Voyage written in 1845, that even in adolescence Flaubert was strongly impressed with the idea that there existed some peculiar relationship between himself and the mentally deranged, people of sub-normal intelligence, and even animals. (After personal experience of acute nervous disorder in 1844 his interest in these people was to become an almost morbid preoccupation.) It may be that the adolescent's acute fits of depression, his violent irritability and abnormally excitable temperament denote a nervous disequilibrium which the boy himself sensed well before it manifested itself in illness. We shall return to this question when discussing Flaubert's 'maladie des nerfs', as he termed it, in Chapter Three. The passages to which we refer in this note are to be found in Notes de Voyage, I.146. 155. (Société des Belles Lettres, 1943) and in the Correspondance, in particular I.178 and III.78. 218. 439.

The memoirs are divided into a series of very brief chapters, twenty-three in all. Mid-way through the ninth we come to a break in the manuscript, and what follows is headed: 'Après Trois Semaines d'arrêt.' It is very probable that Flaubert did in fact hesitate to set down this part of his story. As he is careful to point out, this is not another of those love affairs or passions borrowed from literature, but a real and unforgettable experience which he recalls 'avec une émotion toute religieuse'. He then describes how he first met Maria, how he became gradually acquainted with her entourage, and with her husband. He was invited to dine or to picnic with them. On one occasion they went for a sail by moonlight; afterwards Flaubert watched her lighted windows till dawn, tortured with jealousy. But the holidays came to an end - 'elle partit comme la poussière de la route qui s'envola derrière ses pas ... tout était passé comme un rêve.' He is left to muse over the past and contemplate an empty future.

There follow other reminiscences, speculations, dreams, and so the work ends. The whole story, as one might expect, is

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- (1) Maurice Schlesinger, Music Publisher, of whom Flaubert gives a vivid portrait.
 (2) A descriptive passage reminiscent of Lamartine's le Lac.

interspersed with pages which recall the fateful Werther and the melancholic René; there is much of the attitude humorously described by Maxime du Camp recalling his own youth:

' Il n'était permis que d'avoir une âme incomprise, c'était l'usage, on s'y conformait. On était fatal et maudit; sans même avoir goûté à l'existence, on roulait au fond du gouffre de la désillusion.' (1)

We should not, however, be justified in dismissing all that does not constitute pure narrative as artificial; the later chapters in particular are undeniably important in offering us a remarkably full account of Flaubert's ideas and outlook at this stage.

IV.

It has become increasingly evident that he does not believe man can ever attain happiness. Life is a succession of disillusionments, in which we discover the dreadful fragility of humanity and the relativity of its values. We are not destined to immortality, but to corruption; we are the playthings of some superior fate which we are powerless to resist, or at the mercy of brute instinct; our science is

(1) Maxime du Camp. op.cit. I.119.

so feeble and limited that we know neither the origin nor the end of life. Indeed, all those ideas of human dignity and greatness with which we delude ourselves are the invention of a proud imagination and fearful spirit that refuses to recognise the truth of our condition.

There is not always much coherence about this pessimistic picture. The combination of pagan fatalism and nineteenth century physiological determinism is an illogical one, and as far as the latter system goes Flaubert is somewhat ill at ease in it. In Quidquid Volueris, for example, characterising with scathing irony the 'bourgeois' M. Paul, 'un homme sensé par excellence', the fifteen-year-old author quotes as one of the stupid fellow's ridiculous ideas this very philosophy:

'Pour l'âme, il y a longtemps que Cabanis et Bichat nous ont prouvé que les veines donnent au cœur, et voilà tout.'

His fatalism, on the other hand, though doubtless coloured by the attitudes of Manfred and Antony, and many another Romantic hero, seems to be a more personal conviction, typically the resort of a mind that has failed to discover any rationally satisfactory order or aim in existence.

He maintains that man is incapable of knowing the good from the bad - 'ce que tu juges le bien, est-il le bien absolu, immuable, éternel?' - and that in any case every human act, however nobly disinterested it may seem, is founded in self-

seeking vanity. Yet he owes to Chevalier that it is a theory
 hard to accept, ⁽¹⁾ and we may suspect him of forcing himself
 into the idea, simply because it fits in with the cynically
 materialistic views that from time to time he claims to profess.

His scepticism with regard to the powers of human reason
 is perhaps surprising in an adolescent. It is not, however,
 incomprehensible in Flaubert's case. He was powerless to
 solve unaided the metaphysical problems which confronted him;
 but the wisdom of his elders afforded him little enlightenment.
 His father, as we have seen, like many of his contemporaries
 excluded these fundamental questions from the realms of
 investigation, and therefore from the knowable. The clergy
 could not or would not answer him; and when he turned to his
 favourite and well-thumbed Rabelais and Montaigne, he met with
 a non-committal Peut-être or a sceptical Que say-je. ⁽²⁾
 Apparently he did not find in any of his other readings anything
 which satisfied him. So he reasons that we must confine our-
 selves to the relative, and above all avoid these spurious
 explanations and futile efforts to understand 'ce qui n'est
 pas', or 'faire une science du néant', of which the most
 outrageous is the doctrine of Christianity. There is one thing
 of which we may be sure; that all will end in death.

(1) Corr.I.39. 26 décembre 1838.

(2) cf. Corr.I.62. 18 décembre 1839 à E.Chevalier
 'Le Peut-être de Rabelais et le Que say-je de Montaigne,
 tous deux sont si vastes qu'on s'y perd, et puis je
 deviens bête à tuer.'

Let us have no illusions about an immortal soul :

'Quand les vers t'auront mangé, quand ton corps s'est dissout dans l'humidité de la tombe et que ta poussière n'est plus, où es-tu, homme? où est même ton âme? ... De l'immortalité pour toi, plus lascif qu'un singe et plus méchant qu'un tigre et plus rampant qu'un serpent? Allons donc! faites-moi ... un paradis pour l'égoïsme, une éternité pour cette poussière, de l'immortalité pour ce néant. (1)

We are destined, not to share the eternal life of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but to perish in the grips of a Satanic trinity, death, corruption, and oblivion. Humanity's only justifiable claim to greatness lies in an infinite capacity for suffering.

Thus Flaubert touches the bottom of the pit. 'Je fus content, je n'avais plus de chute à faire'. He has no more illusions, and his present state, however dreadful, has at least some kind of certainty. But once again he finds that he cannot rest in a negative state of mind, though he is incapable of attaining to a positive belief. Doubt is an untenable position unless it be provisional - 'On y roule dans un vide incalculable'. He likens himself, and his whole generation, to the children of Israel in search of the Promised Land:

'Quand Rome se sentit à son agonie, elle avait au moins un espoir, elle entrevoyait derrière le linceul la croix radiante, brillant sur l'éternité. Cette religion a duré deux mille ans et voilà qu'elle s'épuise, qu'elle ne suffit plus, et qu'on s'en moque ... Et nous, quelle religion aurons nous? Etre si vieux, que nous sommes, et marcher encore dans le désert comme les Hébreux qui fuyaient d'Egypte. Où sera la terre promise?'

(1) cf. Corr.L.41. 24 février 1839 à Ernest Chevalier. 'je ne puis croire que notre corps de boue dont les instincts sont plus bas que ceux d'un porc ... renferme quelque chose de pur et d'immatériel quand tout ce qui l'entoure est si impur et si ignoble.'

Where indeed? Perhaps we may be permitted to discern one ray of hope in these pages.

After recounting the departure of Maria, Flaubert recalls having sought consolation with some other woman. But the experience merely repelled him. 'Si j'ai éprouvé des moments d'enthousiasme', he goes on 'c'est à l'art que je les dois'.

Literature had always been for him something more than an outlet for a vivid imagination and the possibility of an escape from reality. Even at thirteen he seems to have had some intuition of art as a value in itself, and as somehow connected with a transcendent ideal. 'Occupons-nous toujours de l'Art', he urges Chevalier, 'qui plus grand que les peuples, les couronnes et les rois, est toujours là, suspendu dans l'enthousiasme, avec son diadème de Dieu.'⁽¹⁾ The terms are vague, but the drift of the meaning is clear.

Later, as we have already indicated, though he retains his admiration for Art, he is overcome by the limitations of his meagre talent, feels himself inarticulate before the beauty he longs to express. 'Oh! si j'étais poète, comme je ferais des choses qui seraient belles!' he writes in Agonies.

'Je me sens dans le coeur, une force intime que personne ne peut voir. Serai-je condamné toute ma vie à être comme un muet qui veut parler et écume de rage?
Il y a peu de positions aussi atroces.'

1). l'art I, 14 août 1835.

Then gradually, he begins to realise that the problem lies not merely in the inadequacy of his own talent, but of art itself. 'Je ne ferai plus de vers' says the Poet in La Danse des Morts, 'cela est trop petit'; and now, in Mémoires d'un Fou, Flaubert himself gives expression to his enthusiasm for art, but at the same time affirms its inadequacy. The passage is too revealing not to be quoted at length:

'S'il y a sur la terre et parmi tous les néants une croyance qu'on adore, s'il est quelque chose de saint, de pur, de sublime, quelque chose qui aille à ce désir immodéré de l'infini et du vague que nous appelons l'âme, c'est l'art. Et quelle petitesse! une pierre, un mot, un son, la disposition de tout cela que nous appelons le sublime. Je voudrais quelque chose qui n'eût pas besoin d'expression ni de forme, quelque chose de pur comme un parfum, de fort comme la pierre, d'insaisissable comme un chant, que ce fût à la fois tout cela et rien d'aucune de ces choses. Tout me semble borné, rétréci, avorté dans la nature. L'homme avec son génie et son art n'est que le misérable singe de quelque chose de plus élevé. (1) Je voudrais le beau dans l'infini et je n'y trouve que le doute.'

(1) One wonders, on reading this passage, whether Flaubert was already acquainted with the neo-Platonic conception of Beauty expounded by Cousin in his immensely popular Cours de 1818, which had been published in 1836. There is, however, no evidence of Flaubert reading any of the latter's works until the year after this (1839), and then he does not specify what he has read. (v. Corr. I. 62. 18 décembre 1839 à E. Chevalier, and a vaguer reference in a letter to the same friend, I. 51. 15 juillet 1839). We shall see when discussing the aesthetic doctrines of Jules (First Education Sentimentale, 1845 - by which time Flaubert was certainly familiar with Cousin's above-mentioned work) the similarity between the young artist's theorising and the ideas propounded by the philosopher: though whether Cousin had any direct influence on Flaubert is an involved question.

One must not of course liken Flaubert's attitude at this stage to any rationally systematised philosophy. But one may certainly say that he is intuitively convinced of the existence of a transcendent value, Beauty, and that art is a means of approach to this ideal.

The adolescent Flaubert has been accused of being wholly and uniquely responsible for his unhappiness. We might quote particularly in this respect Deschannes, who after giving us an excellent analysis of the young author's state of mind at the time of writing his Memoires d'un Beau, continues :

'Nous pouvons à présent nous résumer et définir la cause générale de la tristesse de Flaubert; il n'y en a pas d'autre que sa propre imagination. En amour comme en toutes choses, il avait rêvé l'infini et s'était heurté à des limites trop prochaines.'

There is no real cause for his suffering, affirms the critic 's'il avait pris la peine de réfléchir avec calme sur sa destinée présente il n'y aurait trouvé aucun motif de souffrance.' He enjoyed a comfortable home, was surrounded by an affectionate family and friends to his liking; his health was thus far unimpaired. Instead of being content to 's'abandonner à l'impression spontanée, se contraindre à ne pas dépasser le présent pour rêver l'avenir ou le passé',

(1) R. Deschannes. Flaubert. Sa vie, son caractère et ses idées avant 1857. (Paris, 1909.)

he persisted in reflecting upon and brooding over 'les problèmes les plus angoissants de la destinée humaine.'

We have already dwelt amply on the fact that despite a normal home background Flaubert suffered increasingly from a sense of spiritual and intellectual isolation. Both now and in later years he shows himself well aware of the privilege he enjoys in the material security and quiet affection of his family life. But his suffering is on a different plane.

'Il fut un temps où je regorgeais d'éléments de bonheur', he wrote to Maxime du Camp in 1846,

'et où j'étais véritablement très à plaindre; les deuils les plus tristes ne sont pas ceux que l'on porte sur son chapeau. Je sais ce que c'est que le vide.' (1)

Doubtless an extreme hyper-sensitivity, and a vivid, even morbid imagination, both strongly influenced by Romantic literature contributed to make the slightest disappointments and anxieties exaggeratedly acute and fearful. But it is undeniable that the principal source of his unhappiness and torment lay in his inability to solve the problems of life and death with which, by the very circumstances of his upbringing, he had been confronted from an early age.

Deecharnes virtually suggests that the boy would have done better to close his eyes to it all, and blames him for

(1) Corr.I.24. avril 1846.

refusing to do so. Should one not say, on the contrary, that his suffering is not only legitimate, but laudable? 'C'est ... un grand mal que d'être dans[le] doute', wrote Pascal, 'mais c'est au moins un devoir indispensable de chercher ...' ⁽¹⁾ . In our next chapter we shall follow the further stages of Flaubert's journey in search of the Promised Land.

(1) Pascal, Pensées. (Brunschwig. No.194)

CHAPTER TWO

LATER ADOLESCENCE.

I. 1839: Smarh. II. 1839-41: Journal. III. 1842: Novembre.

I.

The period at present under consideration may be brought to a close with Flaubert's twenty-first birthday in December, 1842. We shall be dealing principally with two works: Smarh, which followed close on Mémoires d'un Fou and was completed in April, 1839: and Novembre, the next work of any importance, written during the summer vacation three years later.

Writing to his friend Chevalier in the Christmas holidays of 1838, Flaubert mentions having begun, apparently some time ago, 'quelquechose d'inoui, de gigantesque, d'absurde, d'inintelligible pour moi et pour les autres' - a mystery-play!⁽¹⁾ He does not disclose the title, but we know from later evidence that this was

(1) Corr. I. 37. 26 décembre 1838.

certainly Smarh. He is discouraged about it, has had to leave it because of his school-work, and hardly knows whether it is worth completing. He does not seem to have taken it up again until March of the following year, ⁽¹⁾ but then he persevered with it and finished it in April.

In the interim he had not been idle, however, for we have quite a long essay, entitled Les Arts et le Commerce, which is dated January, 1839. This obviously owes something to Gautier's Préface à Mademoiselle de Maupin, but it is an ardent profession of faith all the same, in which Flaubert pays unreserved homage to art. Art is at once the expression of the soul's longing and the fulfilment of its aspirations, he affirms, it is as essential to mankind as anything that nourishes and satisfies the body. You may fill a man with wine and cover him with diamonds, but 'il mourra triste, dégradé, avili.' -

'Car il faut une pâture à l'âme, invisible comme Dieu, mais forte sur nous comme il l'est sur sa création. L'art est donc la manifestation la plus haute de l'âme, c'est là son oeuvre. Qu'on ne l'insulte pas, ce serait un blasphème!'

Were we not already well acquainted with the continual

(1) Corr. I.44 mars 1839.

fluctuation of mood in the Juvenilia we should hardly expect this enthusiastic and essentially positive manifesto to be followed by a work as tormented as Smarh. For we meet here with all the doubts, questions and difficulties that are familiar to us from previous writings, particularly Agonies and Mémoires d'un Fou. And yet Smarh is not a mere recapitulation of past reflections; it contains, though as yet inchoate, new ideas which will be of fundamental importance to the outlook of the mature Flaubert.

The general setting of this so-called mystery-play, like the macabre fantasies of earlier years, owes much to Faust and Ahasvérus whilst in the course of the work we meet with obvious reminiscences of Byron's 'old mystery-play', Cain (both Smarh and Cain are borne off by the Devil to be shown a bird's-eye glimpse of the universe, and their reactions are in some ways similar) and of Gautier's Une Larme du Diable (when in the last scene of Smarh Satan sheds a solitary tear.)

There are three principal characters: Smarh, Satan, and Yuk. Smarh, an allegorical representation of man, and Satan, a personification of doubt, are neither of them particularly original or enigmatic creations; but Yuk is a strange and terrible figure.

(1) The name Smarh (Flaubert at first spells it Smar) may have been suggested by Nodier's conte, Smarra, though there is no evidence of Flaubert reading this before the summer holidays of 1839, two or three months after completing his mystery-play (v. Corr I.55. 13 septembre 1839 à E. Chevalier). Alternative - and perhaps less likely - sources have been suggested in the monk of the name of Smaragde mentioned in Guizot's Histoire de la Civilisation Française, or in a hagiographer of the same name: Flaubert would probably have heard of both in his history lessons.

Flaubert himself describes him to Chevalier as 'un personnage qui prend part à tous ces événements (he has just outlined the main incidents of the play) et les tourne en charge ... le dieu du grotesque ... C'est le rire à côté des pleurs et des angoisses, la boue à côté du sang.' (1)

He is omnipresent and all-powerful, defiling and corrupting all he touches, proving beauty to be a mask, showing virtue as a farcical outward show, and truth as cruel and intolerably ugly - for he himself claims to be the truth:

'je suis le vrai, je suis l'éternel, je suis le bouffon, le grotesque, le laid ... je suis ce qui est, ce qui a été, ce qui sera: je suis l'éternité à moi seul.'

The problem of the origin and significance of this characteristically Flaubertian creation is the more important in that it presents us for the first time with what is to become an integral part of the author's attitude and outlook - his sense of the

(1) Corr. I.44. 18 mars 1839 à E. Chevalier.

grotesque. (1)

The term 'grotesque' has its own peculiar connotation in the Flaubertian vocabulary, by no means easy to characterise. Briefly, it serves to describe the incongruous and the inconsistent, but in situations and effects that are rarely comic; corruption seeping through virtue, ugliness suddenly piercing a show of beauty. The grotesque for Flaubert is that canker he saw disfiguring sooner or later all that gave promise of perfection, purity, goodness, loveliness. Sometimes, it is true, it may present a ludicrous spectacle certainly not devoid of humour: as when M. Ernest Pinard, prosecut-

(1) One might mention the suggestion made by Shanks (op.cit.) that Yuk has his origin in the character invented by Flaubert in his schoolboy days and known as le Garçon. He, Ernest Chevalier, and le Poittevin used to take it in turns to impersonate this individual particularly out in the streets, emitting the loud and platitudinous remarks they judged to be characteristic of the bourgeois and indulging in long and noisy laughter which would cause passers-by to turn and stare. This often-repeated joke provided an outlet for a natural and healthy exuberance, but at the same time, for Flaubert at least, was a means of expressing his extraordinarily violent disgust with cant and stupidity, and of making it a less painful spectacle by turning it to ridicule. It would seem, however, that the connection that may exist between le Garçon and Yuk is of a tenuous nature. Yuk is a much more vicious figure, and his laugh is not an empty cackle but 'un rire cruel comme la mort'. Le Garçon was a mockery of certain opinions and attitudes, Yuk is a reductio ad absurdum of life itself.

Also of interest on this subject is a short article (the text of a broadcast talk) by Philip Spencer, entitled Flaubert and the Grotesque. (Printed in The Listener, November 8th. 1951.)

ing Flaubert on the charge of blasphemy and immorality in the Madame Bovary trial, was discovered years later to be the anonymous author of a volume of lewd verse. But it is more often 'une atroce chose lugubre'⁽¹⁾, and if Flaubert derives any humour from it it is of a peculiarly grim and bitter kind, little more than the ironic satisfaction of seeing his pessimistic expectations of life borne out yet again. It is in that sense that he can speak of the 'pleasure' he experienced at the funeral of his dearly loved Caroline in the Spring of 1846, when the coffin became wedged in the grave and was only eventually forced down by levering, pushing, banging, stamping on the very lid.⁽²⁾ He had once more been witness of that terrible irony which dogs man even into his grave.

Yuk is a personification of that irony, in which Flaubert sees an incomprehensible, illogical, but fundamental law of existence. 'Le dieu du grotesque' proclaims himself in the course of the play

(1) Corr. III. 290. 14 août 1853 à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr. I. 96. 23-24 mars 1846 à M. du Camp.
 'La fosse était trop étroite, le cercueil n'a pas pu y entrer. On l'a secoué, tiré, tourné de toutes les façons: on a pris un louchet, des leviers, et enfin un fossoyeur a marché dessus - c'était la place de la tête - pour le faire entrer. J'étais debout à côté, mon chapeau à la main: je l'ai jeté en criant. Je te dirai le reste de vive voix, car j'écrirais trop mal tout cela. J'étais sec comme la pierre d'une tombe, mais horriblement irrité. J'ai voulu te raconter ce qui précède, pensant que cela te ferait plaisir. Tu as assez d'intelligence et tu m'aimes assez pour comprendre ce mot 'plaisir' qui ferait rire les bourgeois.'

'un bon interprète pour expliquer le monde,' and to Flaubert in his present mood of revolt he is the only interpreter.

No doubt various of the authors Flaubert was reading at this time helped him to formulate more clearly to himself this notion of the grotesque element in life, though it is certainly an attitude born in him of experience, and essentially personal. It may be, for instance, that Quinet's *Mob* first suggested to him the idea of *Yuk*, though the former personification of death is genteel in comparison with the god of the grotesque. Again, we know from the Correspondance how much the young Flaubert read and admired for their satiric gifts Rabelais and Byron (though in the latter too he appreciated a great lyric poet and a true Romantic hero.) In an essay written shortly after Smarrh, he describes the creator of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as a lucidly destructive writer whose work epitomises the role of the grotesque in life - a strictly Flaubertian interpretation of Rabelais' jovial and open-hearted humour.

But it was above all in Hugo's Préface de Cromwell that he met with an actual theory of the grotesque, and he must have found himself in agreement both with the aesthetic theory qua se and with the conception of man and the universe on which Hugo bases his argument. The whole of creation, Hugo asserts, is a spectacle in which the combination of the sublime and the grotesque is constantly made manifest: we see 'le laid ... à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière.' Man himself (according to Hugo's Manichaeic interpretation of Christian doctrine) is

composed of two beings, one mortal, one immortal, one carnal, one ethereal: there are 'deux principes opposés qui sont toujours en présence dans la vie, et qui se disputent l'homme depuis le berceau jusqu'à la tombe.' Flaubert must have accepted this without difficulty: but in his present work he goes a stage further than Hugo in making the principle of darkness which moves abroad at the impulsion of Yuk triumph over the light to which Smarh strives in vain to reach.

We may consider the play as falling into two parts, of which the more interesting is certainly the second. Smarh, like Antoine, is a hermit, 'un homme saint entre les saints'. We are concerned first with the destruction of his ideals and hopes by Satan, then, in the latter part of the work, with the hero's search for a new ideal and directive in life.

There is an obvious Faustian trend in the opening scene, where Satan, as a final proof of his victory over heaven and earth, vows to drive the holy monk into a life of sin. He does this by tempting Smarh with the promise of infinite knowledge, and eventually carries him off into space (the usual device) to show him the universe as it really is, not as he imagines it to be in the

light of his own narrow experience and limited understanding. (1)

When he is brought back to earth again, he is made to witness a series of scenes which are meant to convince him of the hopeless misery of the human condition: Flaubert evokes the inevitable Rousseau-esque savage corrupted by civilisation, the poor man destroyed by the greed of the rich, and the ruin of man's only promise of joy in the gradual decline and ultimate death of Christianity. Each successive vision is heralded and dismissed by the cruel laughter of Yuk, for each degradation and each disillusionment is his work, the triumph of the eternal principal he incarnates.

Smarh is desperate. 'Pourquoi, comme tu dis, cela est-il manqué?' he asks Satan. 'Pourquoi le souffle du mal féconde-t-il la terre?' And Satan answers: 'C'est le mystère du mensonge et de la vie: le vrai n'est que le vautour que tu as en toi et qui te ronge.' And yet Smarh had known a semblance of happiness until now. 'Il n'y a de bonheur que pour ceux qui espèrent dans la joie de leur foi', as Satan tells him maliciously. Flaubert uses the term faith not in any doctrinal sense, of course, but with the connotation of confidence in some kind of ideal, belief, or system. From now on in the play we are concerned uniquely with Smarh's

(1) This part of the play bears a remarkably close resemblance with the scene in the first Tentation, written nine or ten years later, where Antoine is carried off into space by the Devil.

efforts to re-orientate his life, to seek out some new ideal and hope. But because he is in the grip of Satan, we shall see him constantly deluded into the pursuit of false satisfaction and illusory ideals. And thus we meet with a theme of fundamental importance to Flaubert's future work: it is only in adherence to a transcendent ideal that man can approach fulfilment. Material ends, be they sensual pleasure, fame, power, wealth, anything in fact attainable in this world, even love, can bring no true satisfaction.

Smarh is tempted first by sensual pleasures, 'des danses, des voluptés sans fin, des frénésies.' But though at first he yields to the temptations, he soon tires of their delights, for 'il avait appelé dans ses rêves quelque chose de surhumain et d'impossible.' Mocking the vanities of the flesh, therefore, he sets his hopes on a career of military glory which will win him power and fame, a name to outlive the centuries. There follows another scene of orgy, this time of bloodshed and cruelty. But this again comes to an end one day when Smarh, having swept through the entire world, reaches the limits of his human capacity and finite existence. He stands at last on the shores of 'l'infini Océan que l'homme ne peut franchir, au bord duquel il reste toujours, regardant s'il ne verra pas apparaître quelque cavale pour partir, quelque étoile pour l'éclaircir...' (1) 'Est-ce tout?' Smarh asks, 'est-ce que la

(1) Lines particularly reminiscent of Ahasvérus.

vie se bornerait là? J'ai dévoré le monde, je veux autre chose: l'éternité, l'éternité!' And eternity appears, a skeleton, accompanied by Yuk: the eternal oblivion of death, the eternal absurdity of life.

Smarh looks back over his past, all its confused doubts, its vain illusions. The burden of his aspirations has become too great and he sinks down, broken and exhausted.

'Sa croix, c'était son âme qu'il avait peine à porter ... et son tombeau ... le cadavre vivant de la pensée qui se remuait et se tordait sous le sépulcre de la vie et du fini.'

But if his body is defeated his soul is not, and, even in the midst of his desperate lassitude,

'il chercha ce qu'il n'avait jamais vu, désira ce qui n'existait pas, il tendit ses bras vers un infini sans bornes et se prit à rêver de belles choses inconnues.'

In the vision which follows, of a child growing to manhood, Smarh the hermit is virtually forgotten, and it is Flaubert's childhood and adolescence, Flaubert's hopes and dreams, Flaubert's literary ambitions that are recounted, often in terms almost identical with those of Angoisses or Mémoires d'un Fou. We are given a somewhat idyllic picture, strongly reminiscent of Rousseau, and of Paul et Virginie, of a small boy whose life is spent in dreamy solitude and ecstatic contemplation of the beauties of nature. But gradually his happiness is troubled by a strange disquietude, an indefinable longing, and so he leaves the countryside for the city, 'le coeur tout gonflé d'espérance ... marchant à grands pas dans la vie future qu'il comblait de félicités sans bornes et d'enthousiasmes immenses.' His dream was to become a

poet.

Though there is much that is factitious here, and even obscure, there are lines which show already present in the mind of the seventeen-year-old a specifically individual approach to art which will later form an integral part of his aesthetic doctrine.

'Oh! poète! se sentir plus grand que les autres, avoir une âme si vaste qu'on y fait tout entrer, tout tourner, tout parler, comme la créature dans la main de Dieu: exprimer toute l'échelle immense et continue qui va depuis le brin d'herbe jusqu'à l'éternité, depuis le grain de sable jusqu'au cœur de l'homme...
Quand je te verrai, ô poète, quand tu m'auras dit toutes les choses de l'âme, que j'aurai recouvré tes accents, je me mettrai à tes genoux, tu seras mon Dieu, je n'en ai point ...'

At least the drift of the meaning is clear. Apart from his insistence upon the incomparable superiority of the artistic vocation, there is implicit in the passage the conception of the artist as a second creator, transforming transient reality into a fixed and eternal truth. We shall find this idea developed and clarified by the artist Jules in the first Education Sentimentale, written some five or six years later. In the present work, as previously, this moment of enthusiasm is followed by a period of dejection and despair, because the young writer finds his talent, and the medium at his disposal, inadequate to the task of expressing that to which he aspires.

After this the passage tends to degenerate into a meaningless diatribe on the vanities of love and fame, the emptiness of all in which he has tried to pin his faith. But there are, too, unmistakable accents of sincerity:

'Comment aimer quelque chose, espérer, croire, puisque tout est si horrible ici, puisque le doute est là, à chaque mot, puisque chaque croyance est tombée ... tout me ment, tout me trompe, tout fuit et tout se met à rire ...
Tant mieux! je n'ai plus à descendre ... me voilà au fond du gouffre. Et cependant, est-ce que je puis rester ainsi toujours?

Thus inconclusively Smarh's vision ends, and Flaubert decides at last to bring his play to an end too. The hermit, or the Poet, as he has now become, has lost all hope, and the world itself is approaching its end, 'ivre de fatigue et d'ennui'. Suddenly there appears before Smarh the figure of a woman, an angel of light. The world stirs with hope, Smarh, with joy, moves towards her, this spirit of Beauty bringing him inspiration and a new courage. But then, in a sudden shriek of laughter, Yuk sweeps on to the scene, envelops her in a monstrous, stifling embrace; Satan weeps, and Smarh is whirled away into oblivion - 'Il y roule encore'. So the play ends.

What are we to understand from this conclusion? Since it is unmistakably Yuk who triumphs, are we to take it as an affirmation of scepticism? Or is it merely a question of expediency, comparable with the sudden and very practical death of the hero at the end of Novembre? The decision to bring the play to an end is certainly purely arbitrary, in no way an internal necessity of the plot.

It is important not to study the conclusion outside its

context. We have seen represented, in Yuk and in Smarh, on the one hand the grotesque futility of life, and on the other Smarh's refusal to succumb to despair, his repeated efforts to give meaning and direction to life. This is typical of Flaubert's own dilemma as we have seen it in previous writings, where his negative scepticism never represented a definitive standpoint. Perhaps the function of Smarh could be said to be the exposition of a problem rather than its solution.

We may look at the work too in the context of Flaubert's particular problem at the time of writing - the question of a career. This was the most important decision he had yet had to make (in so far as it was his decision - naturally he was strongly influenced by his father's wishes). His immediate reaction was to evade the issue in a pose of sceptical resignation to the parental will. He will do nothing, he maintains - that is to say, nothing worth while: just take up law or medicine, 'une stupidité comme toutes les stupidités', and live in some backwater like a sensible fellow.

But he remains nonetheless undecided, and miserably unhappy. The letters suggest that his parents were well aware of his lack of enthusiasm for either law or medicine. But apparently when they tried to elicit from him what he really wanted to do he did not know:

'qu'en sais-je, mon Dieu! car je suis de ceux qui sont toujours dégoûtés le jour du lendemain, auquel l'avenir se présente sans cesse, de ceux qui rêvent ou plutôt rêvassent ... sans savoir ce qu'ils veulent, ennuyés d'eux-mêmes et ennuyants ...'(1)

No doubt he dared not suggest his real hope and ambition, to write. For he hardly dares suggest it to himself. In one letter he is affirming that he has given up the idea of a literary career altogether, in another he is undecided, in another he says he will write for his own satisfaction, but never attempt to publish. He is more and more lacking in confidence.

'J'ai rêvé la gloire quand j'étais tout enfant, et maintenant je n'ai même plus l'orgueil de la médiocrité. Bien des gens y verront un progrès: moi, j'y vois une perte. Car enfin, pourvu qu'on ait une confiance, chimérique ou réelle, n'est-ce pas une confiance, un gouvernail, une boussole, tout un ciel pour nous éclairer? Je n'ai plus ni convictions, ni enthousiasme, ni croyance.' (2)

Smarh is an echo of all this uncertainty, of the bitter disappointment and real suffering of a boy whose vocation is unmistakably literary and artistic, but who fears that he is deluded by childish dreams, and tries to force himself for life into a profession for which he is totally unsuited. It seems to him at times that he has lost confidence not only in himself, and in art, but in everything. All his hopes seem to have been shattered, made mock of, turned to derision. So in Yuk he takes his revenge by turning existence itself to ridicule.

(1) Corr. I.41. 24 février 1839 à E.Chevalier.

(2) Corr. I.54. 23 juillet 1839 à E.Chevalier.

II.

The period which follows Smarrh is a strangely silent one. We have already made brief mention of the essay, Rabelais, written soon after the mystery-play, and we may note, along with an essay on the actress Mademoiselle Rachel, the most lurid of Flaubert's horror-tales, Les Funérailles du Docteur Mathurin,⁽¹⁾ in which the dying philosopher embarks with his two disciples upon a Rabelaisian orgy of drink, as the most suitably cynical way to take leave of futile and meaningless existence. As far as the published texts go this is all that exists until Novembre, written in the summer of 1842.

There is, however, an as yet unpublished MS⁽²⁾ which is particularly valuable for the light it can shed on this hitherto obscure period of Flaubert's development. It takes the form of

(1) Dated August, 1839.

(2) I quote from this MS with the very kind permission of Mme. Chevalley-Sabatier, who is in possession of a type-script copy of it which she allowed Dr. G.B. West (of Royal Holloway College) to transcribe. It was through the kindness of Dr. West that I first heard of this MS. So far (July 1956) the original has proved impossible to trace. I do not presume to give an exhaustive description of it here, but merely to cite such passages as have bearing on the present study.

a kind of journal written between 1839 and 1841. The entries are for the most part fairly long, and appear often to have been made at night, on the return from a concert or a ball. They are hurried, and even written under stress, for there is little punctuation and less sequence of thought. Whenever he took it up again, Flaubert seems to have read through his previous entries, with dissatisfaction and even disgust; now and then a paragraph has been crossed out, or a comment added.

These disjointed meditations have several themes, but they are all the expression of an egocentric and typically adolescent attitude - 'je suis affamé de me conter à moi-même', the writer confesses at one point. He scrutinises his behaviour and examines his motives, describes his feelings, sets down his ideas, in an effort to understand himself and his life. But, Narcissus-like, he is unable to grasp his own image: 'je suis si difficile à connaître que je ne me connais même pas moi-même.' Any adolescent, and indeed many an adult, might say this of himself; but for Flaubert the problem of self-knowledge is made particularly acute and painful by his uncertainty about his artistic vocation.

During the school-year of 1839-40, when he was preparing to enter for the baccalauréat, it seems to have been decided by tacit agreement that he would study law in accordance with his father's wishes. He obtained his baccalauréat that summer, but for some reason - perhaps on grounds of ill-health - he only enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Paris in October, 1841, having

spent a whole year at home. He would have had ample time to write - but on the contrary the period is one of utter wretchedness. He hates Rouen, he is even more appalled by the prospect of three or four years at the Ecole de Droit: but above all he is tormented and miserably discouraged about the possibility of a literary career.

'Je n'écris plus', he writes in his journal in February 1840 (when he was still preparing for his examinations) -

'autrefois j'écrivais, je me passionnais pour mes idées, je savais ce que c'était qu'être poète, je l'étais en dedans du moins, dans mon âme ... Qu'importait la forme toujours défectueuse elle rendait mal ma pensée ... tout mon oeuvre était en moi, et jamais je n'ai écrit une ligne du beau poème qui me délectait. Je me rappelle qu'avant dix ans j'avais composé déjà - Je rêvais les splendeurs du génie ... et maintenant quoique j'aie encore la conviction de ma vocation; ou la plénitude d'un immense orgueil, je doute de plus en plus. Si vous saviez ce que c'est que cette angoisse-là! (1)

Certainly his discouragement is partly the result of parental dissuasion, as is clear from a letter written to Chevalier during the summer holidays of 1839:

'Quant à écrire, j'y ai totalement renoncé, et je suis sûr que jamais on ne verra mon nom imprimé; je n'en ai plus la force, je ne m'en sens plus capable ... Je me serais rendu malheureux,

(1) punctuation sic.

j'aurais chagriné tous ceux qui m'entourent.' (1)

But it is also the despair of a boy whose talent is immature, and who is unable to give adequate expression to his conceptions:

'Quand on écrit on sent ce qui doit être on comprend qu'à tel endroit, il faut ceci à tel autre on compose des tableaux qu'on voit, on a en quelque sorte la sensation qu'on va faire éclore ... et cette impuissance à rendre tout cela est le désespoir éternel de ceux qui écrivent la misère des langues qui ont à peine un mot pour cent pensées la faiblesse de l'homme qui ne sait pas trouver et à moi particulièrement mon éternelle angoisse.' (2)

Although in his family there was no-one to whom he could turn for advice or approbation, Flaubert seems at least to have had some help and encouragement from his former 'professeur de 5me', Gourgaud-Dugazon. It would appear that the latter had encouraged his pupil's literary ambitions when he was still a small boy ('Gourgaud me donne des narrations à composer', he writes to

(1) Corr. I. 54. 23 juillet 1839.

The following passage from l'Education Sentimentale (1845 version), describing the reactions of Jules' family to his literary ambitions, is instructive:

'Le dimanche, dans les grands diners de famille, dans ces bons vieux diners de bourgeois que tout homme en naissant est appelé à subir comme le service militaire et les impôts, ... les hommes établis, mariés, propriétaires et contents du gouvernement, se moquaient tous de ses prétentions littéraires et le raillaient finement en lui donnant des conseils: 'Où ça vous mènera-t-il? faites comme tout le monde, croyez-moi - Quelle idée avez-vous eue là! - Vous en seriez bien avancé! - C'est une folie! ... Puis venaient les anecdotes, les exemples, les preuves, et il était décidé qu'il avait tort.'

(2) Entry not dated, probably 1840: punctuation sic.

Chevalier in the summer of 1835).⁽¹⁾ Now in the journal we find Flaubert recounting a visit to the same teacher in Paris, in the summer of 1840, when he was on his way to Corsica for the holiday his father had promised him if he obtained his baccalauréat. 'Nous nous promenons autour de l'étang des Suisses', he writes, evoking the scene again, 'je lui communique mes doutes sur ma vocation littéraire, il me reconforte - '.

At no point does Flaubert reject art - 'ce qu'il y a de supérieur à tout', as he affirms in his journal in January, 1841. We shall see that he continues to have recourse to Gourgaud-Dugazon and that in 1842 he decides to put his vocation to the test by starting to write again, and trying to prove his talent to himself and to his former teacher. But his torment is to continue right up to 1844: only then will he at last find the way open before him.

One should mention before leaving the journal various of Flaubert's reflections on religious and moral questions. As we might expect, we are faced with the same conflicting attitudes we met with in the adolescent's literary compositions. What is interesting here is the spontaneity and intimate personal note of

(1) Corr. I.21. 14 août 1835. cf. I.19. 12 juillet 1835.

the discussion. He is writing for himself alone, in attempt to put his house in order, trying to be completely un-selfconscious and honest, and we are introduced as it were into an interior dialogue.

His whole metaphysical dilemma is summed up in the following aphorism, which he wrote in his journal in 1841 -

'Il n'y a ni idée vraie ni idée fausse. On adopte d'abord les choses très vivement puis on réfléchit puis on doute et on reste là.'

He affirms that he is neither a materialist nor a spiritualist, but adds that 'si j'étais quelque chose, ce serait plutôt matérialiste.' Christianity is on its death-bed, and although

'nous le défendons bien par opposition (a)? toutes les bêtises philanthropiques et philosophiques dont on nous assomme ... quand on vient à nous parler du dogme en lui-même, de religion pure, nous nous sentons fils de Voltaire.' (1)

And yet, as he says of himself, 'je ne crois à rien et suis disposé à croire à tout'.⁽²⁾ 'D'où vient.' he asks himself, 'que je veux que Jésus-Christ ait existé et que j'en suis certain - c'est que je trouve le mystère de la passion tout ce qu'il y a de plus beau au monde.'⁽³⁾ There is certainly a strongly emotional

(1) Entry made in 1841.

(2) " " " "

(3) " " " 1840

element in his passing enthusiasm for Christianity, and one thinks immediately of Emma Bovary when one reads lines such as the following:

'Je voudrais bien être mystique il doit y avoir de belles voluptés à croire au paradis, à se noyer dans des flots d'encens à s'anéantir au pied de la croix, à se réfugier sur les ailes de la colombe.'

But the passage continues with something which is perhaps more than pure emotion -

'la première communion est quelque chose de naïf ne nous moquons pas de ceux qui y pleurent - c'est une belle chose que l'autel couvert de fleurs qui embaument - c'est une belle vie que celle des saints, j'aurais voulu mourir martyr et s'il y a un Dieu, un Dieu bon, un Dieu le père de Jésus, qu'il m'envoie sa grâce, son esprit, je le recevrai et je me prosternerai - ' (1)

Finally, mingled with his fears and doubts about his talent as a writer, and the unceasing dialogue we have just described, there are, in the earlier pages at least, the passages filled with dreams of love, and reminiscences of a woman who can only have been the Maria of Mémoires d'un Fou, the Eliza Schlésinger of real life.

(1) Entry made in 1840.

'O l'avenir que j'ai rêvé, comme il était beau. O la vie que je me bâtissais comme un roman: quelle vie! et que j'ai de la peine à y renoncer - et l'amour aussi l'amour! - je me disais quand j'aurai vingt ans, on m'aimera sans doute, j'aurai rencontré quelqu'un ...

J'ai pourtant été amoureux tout comme un autre et aucune n'en a rien su! quel dommage comme j'aurais été heureux - je me prends souvent à penser à cela - et les scènes se déroulent amoureusement, comme dans un rêve -

Amour génie, voilà le ciel que j'ai senti que j'ai entrevu, dont j'ai eu des émanations des visions à en devenir fou - et qui s'est refermé pour jamais - qui donc voudra de moi - Ce devrait être déjà venu, car j'aurais tant besoin d'une amante, d'un ange'.(1)

III.

All this provides the background to the longest and best known of the adolescent works, a biography in Romantic style entitled Novembre. It was written towards the end of the summer of 1842. Earlier in that year, in January, Flaubert had written to Gourgaud-Dugazon a letter which was something of an ultimatum.⁽²⁾ 'Ma position morale est critique', he states - '... Je suis arrivé à un moment décisif: il faut reculer ou avancer ...' He explains

(1) Entry made in 1840: punctuation sic.

(2) Corr. I. 93. 22 janvier 1842.

that he has registered (the previous October) in the Faculty of Law in Paris, and that he will soon be obliged to start working seriously for the July examinations.

'Mais ce qui revient à moi à chaque minute, ce qui m'ôte la plume des mains si je prends des notes, ce qui me dérobe le livre si je lis, c'est mon vieil amour, c'est la même idée fixe: écrire!'

What is he to do? If he must choose the law 'je me ferai recevoir avocat'. And yet, 'quand on me parle du barreau ... je vous avoue que je me révolte intérieurement et que je ne me sens pas fait pour cette vie matérielle et triviale.' So he has resolved to put his talent and vocation to the test by writing three novels: he already has them planned out in his mind, and feels they should be sufficient 'pour me prouver à moi-même si j'ai du talent, oui ou non.'

We have no record of Gourgaud-Dugazon's reply, nor any indication as to what these works were, but it may well be that Novembre, written that same year, represents a conscious effort on Flaubert's part to prove himself as a writer. From a literary point of view it is certainly superior to former compositions, with descriptive passages indicative of outstanding talent. It is the only one of the early works to which Flaubert refers and from which he quotes in later years, though he seems to have valued it more as a document than for purely literary reasons, as we shall see subsequently. It does indeed represent a personal exposition of the various phases of his boyhood and adolescence, his own description of his emotional and intellectual development.

In common with all Flaubert's earlier compositions, Novembre bears the traces of various influences. Not only is this evident in the general tone of the work, but most particularly in specific passages which bear a close resemblance to parts of René and Atala, or of Senancour's Obermann, to mention only the outstanding sources. (1) But it is not a difficult task to establish the authenticity of Novembre as an expression of Flaubert's personal experience and outlook. We have already indicated that for the mature Flaubert the work represented a document of his youth: it is based on real and intimate experience, recounting situations and incidents with which we are often familiar from previous writings, from the letters, or from the journal just described.

Much of what Flaubert found in Romantic literature corresponded to his own intimate reactions and aspirations. He was no different from the rest of his school-fellows in his enthusiastic acclamation of the 'new' literature and his delight in the outward apparel of Romanticism. But already in 1842 he is conscious of a growing sense of isolation: for what in his friends has been a passing phase is in himself the expression of his real personality. There is a strangely significant incident in Novembre where the hero meets with a former school-fellow:

(1) Werther, Sainte-Beuve's Volupté, and Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin, should be added to any review of the sources, and this is not an exhaustive list, as Coleman's study (op.cit.) shows.

'C'était lui! son ancien ami, son meilleur ami, son frère, celui à côté de qui il était au collège, en classe, à l'étude, au dortoir: ... ils avaient juré autrefois de vivre en commun et d'être amis jusqu'à la mort.' (1)

But having greeted one another, they found they had nothing to say, were embarrassed by each other's presence.

'Ennuyés, à la fin, de s'être regardés l'un et l'autre dans le blanc des yeux, ils se séparèrent.'

Henry and Jules in the first Education Sentimentale, Frédéric and Deslauriers in the second, meet with a similar fate; and in his last years Flaubert's letters become a repetition of the same theme - 'je suis seul maintenant, absolument seul ...' (2)

Again, it is interesting to notice that when Flaubert borrows or adapts from his models - René, Atala, Werther, and the rest - he chooses only that which corresponds closely with his own reactions and outlook. Coleman has shown, for example, how the ideal of family life which is so strong in Werther and René awakes little response in Flaubert, continually, though not openly at odds with his family. One might note too the very different conception of death to be found on the one hand in René or Atala and on the other in Flaubert's writing. In recounting the death of his father René tells how for the first time 'l'immortalité de l'âme s'est

(1) Flaubert's italics.

(2) Supplément à la Corr. III. 156. 26 septembre 1874 à Mme. Roger des Genettes.

présentée clairement à mes yeux ... dans une sainte douleur qui approchait de la joie. j'espérai me rejoindre un jour à l'esprit de mon père.' But the sight of death has driven Flaubert not only to deny the possibility of eternal life, but even the dignity of man as a spiritual being. Chateaubriand's descriptions of the burial of Atala, or of the Indian mother with her dead child, are again very different from Flaubert's constant obsession with the physical corruption attendant upon death.

In the course of Novembre, describing his wretchedness and disillusionment, Flaubert adds:

'Ce n'était point la douleur de René, ni l'immensité céleste de ses ennuis ... je n'étais point chaste comme Werther ni débauché comme Don Juan: je n'étais, pour tout, ni assez pur ni assez fort. J'étais donc, ce que vous êtes tous, un certain homme ... bien renfermé en lui-même, et retrouvant en lui, partout où il se transporte, les mêmes ruines d'espérances ... la même poussière de choses broyées ...'

He admires, indeed idolises these literary heroes, but he does not identify himself with them, even if he expresses himself in their terms. He has his own sufferings and aspiration to write about. There is no need to view Novembre with untoward suspicion.

Novembre begins with an account of the writer's schooldays, a bored and unhappy time, but one which was lightened by the child's enthusiastic confidence in the future.

'Derrière la vingtième année, il y avait pour moi tout un monde de lumières, de parfums: la vie m'apparaissait de loin avec des splendeurs et des bruits triomphaux ...'

This is an echo of many a passage in the journal of 1839-41, and obviously quite authentic. He tells of his love of brilliance and colour, his passion for the theatre, which seemed to be the incarnation of the existence to which he aspired, a magical world of love and poetry, but one which was impenetrable - 'la rampe du theatre me paraissait la barriere de l'illusion.'⁽¹⁾

He had countless imaginary love affairs -

'je ne sais en quoi je les faisais consister ... c'était, je crois, le besoin d'un sentiment nouveau et comme une aspiration vers quelque chose d'élevé dont je ne voyais pas le faite.'

Above all he would seek to compensate for what his ordinary life lacked in identifying himself with literary heroes, sharing the passions and griefs of the poets he read and dreamed over:

'je ne vecus plus que dans un idéal sans bornes ... libre et volant à l'aise ...' But he always knew and became increasingly aware that this was an artificial existence, and 'par-dessus cette vie si

(1) A note written some three years later after his visit to la Scala in Milan provides interesting comment on this passion for the theatre:

'... un théâtre est un lieu tout aussi saint qu'une église, j'y entre avec une émotion religieuse, parceque là aussi, la pensée humaine, rassasiée d'elle-même, cherche à sortir du réel, que l'on y vient pour pleurer, pour rire ou pour admirer ..

Voyages I.141. Voyage en Italie et en Suisse, avril-mai 1845.

mouvante à la surface, si résonnante ... surgissait une immense amertume ...'

What was the cause of his suffering?

'Si vous m'aviez demandé ce qu'il me fallait, je n'aurais su que répondre, mes désirs n'avaient point d'objet, ma tristesse n'avait pas de cause immédiate: ou plutôt il y avait tant de buts et tant de causes que je n'aurais su en dire aucun.'

He was obscurely aware of immense potentialities in himself, but felt that they were continually dispersed in vague dreams. He longed for fame, for social success, for some splendid love affair. And yet he was convinced that none of these things would satisfy him, and so the enthusiasm aroused by these wild day-dreams would be superseded by a period of lassitude and disgust with life, in which he often contemplated suicide. For 'je ne voyais rien à quoi m'accrocher, ni le monde, ni la solitude, ni la poésie, ni la science, ni l'impiété, ni la religion: j'errais entre tout cela comme les âmes dont l'enfer ne veut pas et que le paradis repousse.'

It is impossible to convey in this brief description the forcefulness and acute perception of this self-analysis. We may smile at the grave declarations of noble resignation, at the passage which recounts how he would strive to accustom himself to the feel of the cold pistol against his pale brow, at his dreams of an everlasting resting-place 'sur un lit de feuilles sèches, au fond du bois.' But these are the effects of an immature talent strongly influenced by the literature of Romanticism, and of an adolescent's typical self-dramatisation. They mar the whole, but do not detract

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from its essential sincerity or effectiveness, well exemplified in passages like the following:

'j'étais ivre, j'étais fou, je m'imaginai être grand, je m'imaginai contenir une incarnation suprême, dont la révélation eût émerveillé le monde, et ses déchirements, c'était la vie même du dieu que je portais dans mes entrailles ... une création entière, immobile, irrévélee à elle-même, vivait sourdement sous ma vie: j'étais un chaos dormant de mille principes féconds qui ne savaient comment se manifester ni que faire d'eux-mêmes, ils cherchaient leurs formes et attendaient leur moule. J'étais dans la variété de mon être, comme une immense forêt de l'Inde, où la vie palpète en chaque atome et apparaît, monstrueuse ou adorable, sous chaque rayon de soleil ...'

Even the temptations to suicide, although very reminiscent of those of Werther, are not wholly fictitious, if we are to judge by Flaubert's reminiscences of his school-days as recounted in later years. 'Nous étions,' he wrote to Louise Colet in 1851, 'il y a quelques années en province, une pléiade de jeunes drôles qui vivions dans un étrange monde. Nous tournions entre la folie et le suicide. Il y en a qui se sont tués, d'autres sont morts dans leur lit, un qui s'est étranglé avec sa cravate, plusieurs qui se sont fait crever de débauche pour chasser l'ennui.'⁽¹⁾

(1) Corr. II. 327. novembre 1851.
cf. Corr. IV. 389. 5 août 1860 à Mme. Jules Sandeau, and the Préface aux Dernières Chansons de Louis Epuilhet, (Corr. VI. Appendice II. p.473.)

Of particular interest and importance are those passages in which Flaubert describes the rare experiences which have brought him complete happiness, if only for a brief moment - 'des jours ... dont je me ressouvrens délicieusement.' He recalls one time in school when, after a walk on a very cold winter's afternoon, he and a few class-mates sat round the stove toasting bread and discussing 'mille choses'. Very often in later years he refers to long afternoons spent in discussion, particularly with Alfred le Poittevin, as the happiest and most exhilarating times he has known.

Then he tells of a moon-lit evening when he fell asleep leaning up against a haystack, and of a whole afternoon spent lying in a field thick with daisies.

'j'ai regardé le soleil à travers mes mains appuyées sur ma figure, il dorait le bord de mes doigts et rendait ma chair rose, je fermis exprès les yeux pour voir sous mes paupières de grandes taches vertes avec des franges d'or.'

On one such unforgettable occasion, early one summer's morning, he experienced what can perhaps best be described as a mystic intuition of nature. What he recounts may be based on a single experience, or on many, for a most sensitive response to natural beauty is one of his most noticeable characteristics at this period. (1)

(1) We shall see in subsequent chapters of this study how this type of intuition plays an important part in Flaubert's efforts to evolve some kind of metaphysical system, particularly in his later twenties.

He tells, in one of the most beautiful passages of Novembre, how he set out soon after dawn for a certain village, and found himself eventually in a mown field overlooking the sea.

'la voûte commençait sur ma tête et s'abaissait derrière les flots, qui remontaient vers elle, faisant comme le cercle d'un infini invisible. Je me suis couché dans un sillon et j'ai regardé le ciel, perdu dans la contemplation de sa beauté.'

The scent of sea-weed and the warmth of the sun drifted over him, the cry of quails mingled with the murmur of the waves and the song of birds.

'je suis descendu en courant au bord de la mer ... l'esprit de Dieu me remplissait ... j'adorais quelque chose d'un étrange mouvement, j'aurais voulu m'absorber dans la lumière du soleil et me perdre dans cette immensité d'azur ... et je fus pris alors d'une joie insensée...

Et je compris alors tout le bonheur de la création et toute la joie que Dieu y a placée pour l'homme: la nature m'apparut belle comme une harmonie complète que l'extase seule doit entendre ... Alors tout me sembla beau sur la terre, je n'y vis plus de disparate ni de mauvais, j'aimai tout ...'

But this was a passing exaltation, however intense, and 'bien vite je me rappelai que je vivais, je revins à moi ... sentant que la malédiction me reprenait, que je rentrais dans l'humanité: la vie n'était revenue, comme aux membres gelés, que par le sentiment de la souffrance.' When he passed by the same spot on the way home, 'il me semblait que j'avais rêvé.'

At other times intense happiness came to him not through nature, but through art. That was in the days described quite early in Novembre, when he wrote spontaneously and fluently, was full of plans and ideas. But gradually he discovered in other

writers, not only the same ideas, but even the form in which he had dreamed of expressing them. And so, as we have seen from the journal,

'je passais ... de l'enivrement du génie au sentiment désolant de la médiocrité ... Dans de certains jours, j'aurais juré être né pour la Muse, d'autres fois je me trouvais presque idiot: et toujours passant ainsi de tant de grandeur à tant de bassesse j'ai fini ... par être et par rester misérable.'

Apart from this passage there is little mention of art in Novembre. Just as the hero's career is an issue which Flaubert evades, as we shall see, so too he tries to leave aside the whole question of art. Novembre is an escape from the crucial problems of the present into the experiences of the past.

His one other brief moment of happiness had been in a love affair. Strangely enough it is not Eliza Schlésinger who figures here, but a certain Eulalie Foucaud de Lenglade. Flaubert had met her in Marseilles two summers previously, when he was returning from his Corsican holiday and she was on her way to rejoin her husband in French Guiana. The affair had been brief but passionate; there was some correspondence between the two subsequently, and six years later Flaubert made a vague attempt to get into touch with her again. (1)

(1) v. Corr. I.327. and subsequent letters, 1846. - Flaubert had the unfortunate idea of renewing acquaintances with Mme. Foucaud de Lenglade through the good offices of Louise Colet.

All this is presented in wholly fictitious guise in Novembre, however. Flaubert recounts his own experience of love, but his narration is interrupted for some pages whilst Marie, the prostitute in whom Eulalie Foucaud is represented, tells the story of her life. Rcsanette's autobiography, which comes many years after this in the second Education Sentimentale, in some ways echoes that of Marie. But the latter's closer resemblance is with Emma Bovary. For she seeks a lover 'plus grand, plus noble, plus fort', than any she has yet known, and is at last driven to admit that this ideal hero is 'une chimère qui n'est que dans mon coeur et que je veux tenir dans mes mains.' We shall see in subsequent chapters how important to his feminine characterisations is this notion of woman's constant dissatisfaction.

And when, towards the end of this passage in Novembre, the young Flaubert compares himself with Marie, he defines his resemblance with his future tragic heroine of whom he once said (if we are to believe literary tradition) - 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi.' 'Comme moi aussi,' he concludes in the present work, 'elle avait marché de joies en chagrins, couru d'espérances en dégoûts ... sans nous connaître, elle dans sa prostitution et moi dans ma chasteté, nous avons suivi le même chemin, aboutissant au même gouffre ...' For, despite the ardour of his passion he had found in love no real and lasting joy. On the contrary -

'je fus pris d'une indéfinissable tristesse, j'étais plein de dégoût, j'étais repu, j'étais las ... Ce n'était donc que cela,

une femme! Pourquoi, ô mon Dieu, avons-nous encore faim lorsque nous sommes repus? pourquoi tant d'aspirations et tant de déceptions? pourquoi le cœur de l'homme est-il si grand, et la vie si petite?

After this it only remains for the pseudo-biography to be brought to a conclusion; 'le manuscrit s'arrête', Flaubert tells us (inferring for the first time that he has not been writing in his own name) 'sans doute que notre homme n'aurait plus rien trouvé à dire...' This indeed is so, for we have reached the point where he must embark upon a career. And yet there has to be some semblance of a conclusion to the work. So we learn that, 'résigné à s'ennuyer partout et à s'ennuyer de tout', the young man 'déclara vouloir faire son droit et aller habiter Paris.'

Much of the boredom and loneliness which is attributed to the hero in the next few pages must be a personal reminiscence of Flaubert's first year in the capital. He describes walks au Luxembourg, where he would shuffle through the leaves or sit staring at a pond, thinking of his school-days, of 'mille choses tendres et tristes.' He would wander through the museums and galleries, or lie smoking in his room. Sometimes on the contrary he would be filled with enthusiasm for some great work upon which he planned to embark. But one of the things he recounts here is of particular interest. 'Deux ou trois fois', he says of the young man 'ne sachant que faire, il alla dans les églises à l'heure du salut, il tâchait de prier: comme ses amis auraient ri, s'ils

l'avaient vu tremper ses doigts dans le bénitier et faire le signe de la croix!'

It is rarely that we find expressed in the adolescent's writings any inclination to religious practice, although we have just had occasion to indicate with reference to the journal the strong emotional appeal that Catholicism seems to have held for him at certain moments. Earlier in Novembre he had written of himself:

'Elevé sans religion, comme les hommes de mon âge, je n'avais pas le bonheur des athées ni l'insouciance ironique des sceptiques. Par caprice sans doute, si je suis entré quelquefois dans une église, c'était pour écouter l'orgue, pour admirer les statuettes... mais quant au dogme, je n'allais pas jusqu'à lui: je me sentais bien le fils de Voltaire.'

And now in the present passage it is again the music of the organ, the lighted candles and the glowing sanctuary lamps, the sense of warmth and peace whilst outside the rain beats down, that attract him. And yet all this inspires in him, like his experience in the field overlooking the sea, to which he specifically compares his present emotion, an intense exaltation ...

'l'orgue allait, et les voix reprenaient, comme le jour où il avait entendu sur les falaises la mer et les oiseaux se parler. Il fut pris d'envie d'être prêtre, pour dire des oraisons sur le corps des morts, pour porter un cilice et se prosterner ébloui dans l'amour de Dieu ... Tout à coup un ricanement de pitié lui vint au fond du cœur, il ... sortit en haussant les épaules.'

In a sense this was a stage which Flaubert outgrew, as he outgrew adolescence. But at the same time one remembers the occasion

more than thirty years later, at Christmas in 1876. 'J'ai été, cette nuit' he writes to his niece Caroline 'à la messe à Saint-Barbe, chez les bonnes religieuses ... N'est-ce pas d'un beau romantisme?'⁽¹⁾ But the passage he eventually wrote as an outcome of his romantic venture, as he calls it, is far removed in tone from the irony of his letter. It occurs in Bouvard et Pécuchet, at the end of Chapter Eight, and is unfortunately too long to quote in full. But we may perhaps be permitted to give an extract -

'Le serpent ronflait, l'encens fumait ... des cierges géants dressaient des flammes rouges ... on distinguait le prêtre dans sa chasuble d'or: à sa voix aiguë répondaient les voix fortes des hommes...

La tiède température leur procura un singulier bien-être ... tous priaient, absorbés dans la même joie profonde, et voyaient sur la paille d'une étable rayonner comme un soleil le corps de l'Enfant-Dieu. Cette foi des autres touchait Bouvard en dépit de sa raison, et Pécuchet malgré la dureté de son cœur.

Il y eut un silence: tous les dos se courbèrent, et, au tintement d'une clochette, le petit agneau bêla.

L'hostie fut montrée par le prêtre ... Bouvard et Pécuchet ... sentaient comme une aurore se lever dans leur âme.'

The parallels between this and the passages from Novembre are clear. And it would seem too that Flaubert remained all his life sensitive not only to the outward beauty of the Christian liturgy, but to that which it seeks to express.

(1) Corr. VII. 379. 25 décembre 1876.

After this relatively short description of his hero's student days Flaubert brings his work to an end - the young man conveniently dies, 'comme on meurt de tristesse'. His real trouble as the author says, was that he had no aim. But we shall see that Flaubert himself, in the years immediately following the composition of Novembre, at last discovers an ideal which is to serve henceforth as his directive in life - Art. It is the function of his next work, l'Education Sentimentale, to expose the various stages by which he attains to that certitude. 'Si tu as écouté Novembre,' he writes to Louise Colet in 1846, 'tu as dû deviner mille choses qui expliquent peut-être ce que je suis. Mais cet âge-là est passé, cette oeuvre-là a été la clôture de ma jeunesse.'⁽¹⁾

In another sense, however, Novembre characterises not only the adolescent Flaubert, but the Flaubert of maturer years. Much later, in the Autumn of 1853, we find him once more re-reading this favourite among his early works. And his comment to Louise Colet is as follows:

'J'ai relu Novembre mercredi, par curiosité. J'étais bien le même particulier il y a onze ans qu'aujourd'hui...'⁽²⁾

This is not, as it would seem, in flagrant contradiction with his

(1) Corr. I.416. 2 décembre 1846.

(2) Corr. III. 379. 28-9 octobre 1853.

observation of a few years back. For if Novembre marks the end of his adolescence (and that is a questionable statement) it does not mark the end of the search begun there. 'J'avais fait de moi-même un temple, pour contenir quelque chose de divin,' he had observed in the early pages of Novembre, and added 'le temple est resté vide.' Henceforth there will be a presence in the temple in the form of Art: but it is the presence of an idol.

CHAPTER THREE.

JULES' SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION.

I. 1842-3. An unsuccessful law-student. II. 1844. Flaubert's 'maladie des nerfs'. III. Context of the first Education Sentimentale, 1843-5. IV. L'Education Sentimentale. Chapters I - XX. Before the illness: a law-student hero. V. L'Education Sentimentale. Chapter XX to the end. After the illness: an artist-hero.

I.

By the time Flaubert had finished Novembre, in the autumn of 1842, his long vacation had come to an end. It was decided that he must spend the next academic year resident in Paris, for during the previous session he had been in the capital only at intervals, notably in the summer to prepare for his first-year examinations, which he failed.

He was no more reconciled to his law-studies now than he had been almost a year ago at the time of his letter to Gourgaud-Dugazon. 'Quand je pense que j'ai encore trois ans d'une aussi jolie perspective, c'est à crever de rage', ⁽¹⁾ he storms to Chevalier. But he had not sufficient confidence in his literary talent to be able to disregard the advice and admonitions of his family, and reluctant, but outwardly submissive, he left for Paris.

(1) Corr.I. 107. 25 juin, 1842.

In December he managed at last to satisfy his examiners and went home to Rouen for the Christmas vacation. The next hurdle was in August, a comfortable six months away, so that when he returned to la rue de l'Est early in the New Year of 1843, he spent an agreeable term 'disant que je vais à l'Ecole de Droit et n'y foutant pas les pieds, fumant beaucoup, dormant très bien, dînant volontiers en ville ... faisant de la littérature à toute heure du jour et de la nuit ...' - 'L'été que je vais passer dans le Code et dans la procédure m'épouvante déjà', he adds with a sigh... '... Je trouve que tout s'est arrangé pour le mieux afin que j'enrage...' (1)

Still, for the moment he was free to write, and in February he embarked upon his first attempt at the novel, l'Education Sentimentale (a title familiar to us from the much better known work published in 1869, for which reason the present composition is generally referred to as the first Education Sentimentale.) We may suppose that Flaubert worked at this for a month or so, and then put it aside to concentrate on his second-year examinations - which he failed. He may have taken it up again during the long vacation, or later in the year, but we have no certain evidence that he was writing until the following May, and then in totally different circumstances. The work begun by

(1) Corr. I. 131. 11 mars 1843 à E. Chevalier.

a rebellious young student lounging in his room in Paris, smoking thirty pipes a day and drinking far more black coffee than was good for him, was completed by a convalescent for whom the whole course of the future was changed.

II.

Early in the New Year (1844) he had spent a day or two at Pont l'Evêque, near Trouville. There had been a series of painful domestic scenes in the household in question, and he was relieved to get away.⁽¹⁾ Achilles, his elder brother, had come out to meet him with a gig and they were driving quietly back to Rouen when Flaubert suddenly collapsed - 'je me suis senti emporté tout à coup dans un torrent de flammes'.⁽²⁾ Achilles thought he was dead, but bled him, and when his patient eventually showed signs of consciousness rushed him back to the Hôtel-Dieu at Rouen. There Doctor Flaubert feared not only for his son's mental recovery, but for his very life. Each attack,

(1) Corr.I.147, fin janvier - début février, 1844, à E. Chevalier. 'J'ai manqué péter dans les mains de ma famille (où j'étais venu passer deux ou trois jours pour me remettre des scènes horribles dont j'avais été témoin chez H...)'

(2) Corr.III.329. 2 sept. 1853, à L. Colet.

a kind of convulsive fit, left its victim prostrate for days. (1)

The exact nature of this illness, which Flaubert himself generally described as 'ma maladie des nerfs', has been much disputed, though Maxime du Camp's first diagnosis of epilepsy would seem to have been refuted by the majority of subsequent studies, and the general tendency is to attribute the disorders to some form of hystero-neurasthenia. (2) A detailed discussion of the question would be out of place here, and is in any case a precarious task for a layman. But we may observe that a

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- (1) All this was first recounted by Maxime du Camp in his Souvenirs Littéraires (I.180-185), and it was not until the publication of certain of Flaubert's letters to Louise Colet, in 1927, that two errors of detail in the former narration became evident. Thus du Camp mistakes Pont-Audemer for Pont-l'Evêque, and gives the date of the first attack as October, 1843, instead of January 1844.
- (2) Amongst a number of writings and a variety of opinions on this subject we may indicate that the argument refuting the diagnosis of epilepsy is presented forcefully and convincingly by Dr. René Dumesnil in his thesis Flaubert, son hérédité, son milieu, sa méthode, (1905), and later in the appendix to Gustave Flaubert, l'homme et l'oeuvre, (1932). Dr. Louis Jourdan, in a thesis presented at Montpellier in 1932 under the title Essai sur la névrose de Flaubert, argues quite to the contrary. More recently, in 1951, Philip Spencer has quoted the opinion of Dr. D. Russell-Davis, Reader in Clinical Psychology at Cambridge, that the data are too slight and uncertain for any categoric conclusion, although there are good reasons to doubt whether Flaubert was epileptic (v. Flaubert. A Biography. Notes to chapter IV. p.170.)

plausible, and at least partial explanation of Flaubert's condition lies in the years of anxiety and frustration which preceded this breakdown. 'Pense si j'ai dû assez souffrir', he wrote to Louise Colet in 1846, 'pour gagner, malgré la robuste santé qui s'étale dans mon allure, une maladie de nerfs qui m'a duré deux ans, et dont je ne suis pas encore peut-être tout à fait quitte'.⁽¹⁾

We have seen that from childhood he was over-excitable, quick-tempered, morbidly imaginative, a boy who inherited his mother's nervous anxiety and sensitivity to an extreme degree. His father too was a man of violent moods and quick emotion. A passage from Mémoires d'un Fou shows us the state of intolerable nervous tension Flaubert knew even as a school-boy:

'Quoique ... d'une excellente santé, mon genre d'esprit perpétuellement froissé par l'existence que je menais et par le contact des autres, avait occasionné en moi une irritation nerveuse qui me rendait véhément et emporté ... j'avais des rêves, des cauchemars affreux.'

To this must be added the mental conflict and perplexity already obvious in his first compositions, his bewilderment and even torment at all that seemed inexplicable and fearful in life. His obsession with death was such that he experienced veritable

(1) Corr.I.309. 14 sept. 1846, à L.Colet.

hallucinations. 'Dans ma première jeunesse', he told Taine, many years later, 'je voyais toujours des squelettes à la place des spectateurs quand j'étais dans une salle de théâtre'.⁽¹⁾

And finally he had been more or less forced into a discipline radically opposed to his gifts and inclinations, not merely for a few years, but for life. Irritated, depressed, thoroughly wretched, he scribbles his letters to Chevalier or Caroline - 'le Droit me tue, m'abrutit, me disloque, il m'est impossible d'y travailler' - 'j'ai envie d'envoyer promener l'Ecole de Droit une bonne fois et de ne plus y mettre les pieds. Quelquefois il m'en prend des sueurs froides à crever'. And so on. - 'Définitivement, c'est trop d'embêtement pour un homme seul'.⁽²⁾

In a system already disposed to nervous instability this accumulated strain could certainly have contributed to, and even precipitated an eventual crisis. As far as we can gather, Flaubert himself seems to have imputed his illness to the double cause of a hyper-sensitive nature aggravated by a series of frustrations culminating in an enforced legal career. 'Si j'avais eu le cerveau plus solide je n'aurais point été malade de faire mon Droit et de m'ennuyer', he wrote to Louise Colet -

(1) Supplément à la Corr.III.94. 1 déc. 1866, à Taine.

(2) v. Letters 60-82. Corr.I. 105-144.

'J'en aurais tiré partie, au lieu d'en tirer du mal'.⁽¹⁾

Whatever its precise origin, the illness itself was a battle for sanity. For two months Flaubert struggled incessantly with recurrent attacks and dreadful hallucinations. On comparatively rare occasions in later years he described their horrors:

'Il y avait un arrachement de l'âme avec le corps atroce (j'ai la conviction d'être mort plusieurs fois). Mais ce qui constitue la personnalité, l'être-raison, allait jusqu'au bout; sans cela la souffrance eut été nulle, car j'aurais été purement passif et j'avais toujours conscience, même quand je ne pouvais parler'. (2)

He borrowed from his father's study various books on nervous diseases, (according to Maxime du Camp), and concluded that his case was hopeless. But progress, if slow, was undeniable, as the following letter to Chevalier, written in

(1) Corr.II.461. 5-6 juillet 1852.

The rest of the passage is not without interest. Flaubert continues, in a somewhat extraordinary diagnosis: 'Le chagrin, au lieu de ne rester sur le crâne, a coulé dans mes membres et les crispait en convulsions. C'était une *déviatio*n'. (Flaubert's italics). He then draws a parallel with children promising musical talent who nonetheless suffer when they hear music, are sickly, nervous, ill, and whose gift never develops. 'La *vocation* a été déplacée: l'idée a passé dans la chair où elle reste stérile, et la chair périt'. (again Flaubert's italics). This is a fantastic theory, but the paragraph remains significant as a clear indication that Flaubert saw his illness as precipitated by a thwarted vocation.

(2) Corr.III.270. 7-8 juillet 1853, à Louise Colet. (Flaubert's italics. Punctuation sic.)

June, will show:

'Quant à ton serviteur, il va mieux, sans précisément aller bien. Il ne se passe pas de jour sans que je ne vois, de temps à autre, passer devant mes yeux comme des paquets de cheveux ou des feux du Bengale. Cela dure plus ou moins longtemps. Néanmoins, ma dernière grande crise a été plus légère que les autres'. (1)

He moved from Rouen to Croisset, his father's newly acquired property bordering the Seine, and spent his time reading, boating, swimming, walking; though having once been taken ill when alone in the fields he refused to venture out unaccompanied.

One thing was evident, that the further pursuit of a legal career was out of the question. Flaubert did not even try to pretend that he was disappointed. Certainly he did not welcome his illness, nor the conditions it imposed upon him. He was, beneath the light-hearted bantering of his letters, anxious and often wretchedly depressed. 'Que voulez-vous faire d'un homme qui est malade la moitié du temps et qui est si ennuyé l'autre qu'il n'a ni la force ni l'intelligence d'écrire même les choses douces et faciles?' he wrote to Louis de Cormenin, a friend of his student days in Paris ... 'Connaissez-vous l'ennui? non pas cet ennui commun, banal, qui provient de la fainéantise ou de la maladie, mais cet ennui moderne qui ronge l'homme dans les entrailles ... Ah! je vous plains si cette lèpre-la vous est connue.' (2)

(1) Corr.I.150. 7 juin 1844 à E.Chevalier.

(2) Corr.I.151. 7 juin 1844.

His state of prostration was not only physical, but moral and intellectual, and in the monotonous, cloistered existence he was forced to lead there was nobody to help or amuse him, nobody in whom he could really confide. Du Camp, who had paid him intermittent visits at the beginning, left for the East in May; his other friends were in Paris; only his immediate family remained; his father, his mother, ill with anxiety, a much older brother, a younger sister. And yet there was one supreme consolation. 'Ma maladie aura toujours eu l'avantage qu'on me laisse m'occuper comme je l'entends, ce qui est un grand point dans la vie ...' ⁽¹⁾ . Indeed, once he seemed to be on the path to normal health, he could even qualify these years as the best of his life, writing to Chevalier in 1845:

'Je n'ai jamais passé d'années meilleures que celles qui viennent de s'écouler, parcequ'elles ont été les plus libres, les moins gênées dans leur entournure. J'y ai sacrifié beaucoup, à cette liberté; j'y sacrifierais plus encore' (2)

The crisis did not only mark an exterior break in Flaubert's existence. It was the beginning too of a psychological transformation, and of a change in outlook which was to lead to maturity. 'J'ai eu deux existences bien distinctes,' he affirmed, with some exaggeration perhaps... 'des événements extérieurs ont été le symbole de la fin de la première et de la naissance de la seconde; tout cela est mathématique. Ma vie

(1) Corr.I.159. janvier 1845, à Emmanuel Vasse.

(2) Corr.I.187. 13 août 1845.

active, passionnée, émue, pleine de soubresauts et de sensations multiples, a fini à vingt-deux ans. (1) A cette époque, j'ai fait de grands progrès tout d'un coup, et autre chose est venu'. (2)
 It is only in the light of this knowledge that the full significance of l'Education Sentimentale becomes apparent.

III.

At the outset (we may recall that the novel was begun in Paris early in 1843) it is concerned with Flaubert's immediate situation. The story opens with the picture of a rather dejected bachelier-ès-lettres newly installed in the capital for the purpose of studying law, his first experiences and impressions are clearly those of the author himself, who only a few months ago had been that same new arrival.

Flaubert had at first intended that his novel should centre upon this one character, Henry; but after only half-a-dozen pages we find another person intruding upon the scene, Jules, a less fortunate friend whom the student has left behind in the provinces. In a letter to Louise Colet some years later,

(1) Flaubert was twenty-two in December, 1843. His first nervous attack followed about a month later, in Jan: 1844.

(2) Corr.I.277. 27 août 1846, à Louise Colet.

Flaubert explains that 'la nécessité d'un repoussoir' first gave him this idea: Jules does indeed begin as a shadowy and ineffectual character seen only at intervals through his plaintive correspondence. We have, however, some justification for doubting that he was merely the product of an aesthetic sense of contrast, for, significantly enough, he embodies all those aspects of Flaubert's character and outlook which are conspicuously absent in Henry. And they are many. After the first few pages we are soon aware that the law student represents the would-be, rather than the real Flaubert. We watch him gradually attain to the status of a knowledgeable young man about town, the hero of sentimental adventures which have as their object and reward a second Eliza Schlesinger (it was precisely at this period that Flaubert had renewed contact with the Schlesingers in Paris) and we realise that here is an attempt on Flaubert's part, perhaps unconscious, to convince himself that all is not lost because one has embraced a legal career and renounced one's aspirations to literary genius. We may add, however, that until the moment comes to postpone his first-year examinations, Henry is virtually oblivious of the Law Faculty's existence! The inference is clearly happiness despite a legal career, not through it.

Jules, on the other hand, with his visions of Art and Love, his illusions and ideals, his eternal dissatisfaction and fatal

despair, is the boy Flaubert must forget, along with all his other provincial dreams summed up in that one recurrent phrase 'la vie d'artiste'.

But it is not so easy to put off the old man, much less put on the new, and for this very reason Flaubert's treatment of his characters fluctuates disconcertingly between sympathy and mockery, approval and deprecation. Yet it would seem, as the story progresses, that the writer's first attitude to his heroes is increasingly modified, and that even before the break occasioned by his illness, Flaubert's interest in the student has begun to wane.

When he takes up the novel again as a convalescent, there is of course no further need to make out a case for Henry, who is consequently withdrawn from the scene for chapters at a time. It is Jules, the young artist on the threshold of a career, who has the predominant role now, and we are almost exclusively concerned with the psychological, intellectual, and aesthetic problems facing Flaubert himself. Nowhere, indeed, is the gradual process of re-adaptation which had forced itself upon him more clearly described than in these last chapters, which can be said to expound a new philosophy of life.

If we keep this background and general outline in mind, the fortunes of our two heroes gain in significance what they may lack in intrinsic interest.

IV.

We have already recorded the law-student's disappointing debut in the capital, whilst Jules, in the obscurity of the provinces, continues to dream of 'la vie d'artiste' which Paris alone can offer. Prospects grow even darker when the unfortunate victim is propelled onto the bottom rung of the administrative ladder by a father who has no patience with other idle ambitions (an incident requiring no comment).

The initial contrast in situation is soon reflected in divergent courses of action and in the gradual revelation of very different personalities. Jules' first letter might well have figured in the correspondence of the adolescent Flaubert. He evokes the years he and Henry had planned to spend 'pensant en commun, nous occupant d'art, d'histoire et de littérature', sharing Jules' first dramatic success - 'de tous les gradins bravo! bravo! les mains battent, les pieds remuent, bravo! bravo! l'auteur! l'auteur! l'auteur!' (here is a cherished ambition that goes back to the billiard-table days.)⁽¹⁾

But Flaubert the law-student greets these reminiscences with the smiling scorn they deserve;

(1) We may compare this passage with lines from a letter to Louise Colet, showing just how far Jules is identifiable with the author himself: 'J'ai passé autrefois de longues heures à rêver pour moi des triomphes étourdissants, dont les clameurs me faisaient tressaillir comme si déjà je les eusse entendues'. Corr.I.385.23 octobre, 1846.

'Henry était encore dans son lit quand il lut cette lettre; les illusions qu'elle retraçait lui parurent si vieilles qu'elles ne le touchèrent point, et les misères dont son ami se lamentait si puériles qu'il ne le plaignit pas'.

Has he really changed so much? Is this, as it would seem, a disavowal once and for all of the literary ambitions he derided as 'une maladie de Province'? The answer comes only a few pages later in a volte-face we shall learn to recognise as characteristic of this part of the novel. With all the ardour of his remorse Flaubert defends the past he has just previously ridiculed. 'Non, il me semble que l'univers n'a jamais été pour d'autres aussi vaste et aussi sonore que pour nous deux', Jules writes to Henry. 'Nous causions de tout, nous aimions tout ... Pourquoi l'homme de vingt ans se raillerait-il de celui de quinze, comme plus tard celui-ci sera nié à son tour et bafoué par l'homme de quarante? à chaque âge de la vie, pourquoi maudire son passé? pourquoi le méconnaître et l'outrager? à quoi bon rougir de nos anciennes amours?

But we must come to the real theme of the narrative, for, as the title suggests, it is largely through their sentimental adventures that the two characters are portrayed. Not many weeks elapse before Henry, after a certain measure of provocation from the lady in question, is wildly in love with his tutor's wife, Madame Renaud, 'une femme charmante dont les

manières maternelles avaient quelque chose de caressant et d' amoureux'. With her dark meridional beauty and air of maturity, she bears a close resemblance to Maria of Memoires d'un Fou, in whom Flaubert had first portrayed Eliza Schlésinger as he had known and loved her at Trouville. Now, after an interval of several years, he had renewed acquaintance with the family in Paris, dining there regularly, and apparently on very friendly terms with the household. ⁽¹⁾ There seems little doubt that the heroine of these early pages is a conscious evocation of Eliza ... not so much as she actually was, but as Flaubert would have wished to find her; though this, as we shall see later, is a rather involved question.

As for Jules, his next letter will recount in exhaustive detail the arrival of a troupe of actors, amongst whom figures, in the inevitable role of Adèle Hervey, ⁽²⁾ the pale and ethereal beauty, Lucinde. What is more, 'on va jouer mon drame ... mon Chevalier de Calatrava' ! No only Jules, but Flaubert himself, is carried away in his enthusiasm.

(1) This is clear both from letters written at the time, and from reminiscences in the later Correspondance. See for example:

Corr.I.133. fin mars 1843, à Caroline.
 Corr.I.162. 2 avril 1845, à le Poittevin.
 Corr.I.188. 13 août 1845, à E.Chevalier.
 Corr.III.366. 12 oct. 1853, à Louise Colet.
 Corr.III.586. 24 nov. 1853, à Maurice Schlésinger.
 Corr.IV. 126. 2 oct. 1856, à Madame Schlésinger.

(2) v. Antony. Dumas.
 It seems likely that this part of the story was influenced by reminiscences of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, with which Flaubert was well acquainted, and we may see in Jules and Lucinde a certain transposition, though vague enough, of the roles of Wilhelm and Mariana.

He could afford to be superior over literary ambitions which were nothing more than vague dreams, (though not without remorse, as we have seen). But to allow his law-student to evince complete indifference here would be unpardonable. In any case, Madame Renaud is at this point besieged with the attentions of a certain Ternande, a most aggravating rival who is aided and abetted at every turn by a Providence ill-disposed towards Henry. The latter 'ne demanda pas mieux', therefore 'que de participer à toutes les joies exposées dans la lettre de son ami. Comme il était jeune, et encore facile à l'émotion je dois avouer qu'il les comprit et qu'il s'associa à son enthousiasme ...'

But Le Chevalier de Calatrava remains in its author's pocket, despite his assiduity in visiting Bernardi, the leader of the troupe, who has fallen sick. What humiliation, Jules ponders, to be obliged to flatter these people with one's attentions day after day, 'lui si fier et si noble!' Flaubert is still not above being ironic at the expense of his young playwright, although on the other hand it is with an obvious sympathy that he depicts Jules withstanding the battery of family prejudice in those conclaves around the Sunday dinner-table which he himself had so often endured.

Nor is the would-be dramatist more fortunate in his sentimental adventures, for if he worships Lucinde, it is from afar. Did he really love her, Flaubert wonders, or was this

not rather one of those idealised and imaginary passions such as only youth knows?. After all, he was scarcely more than a boy -

'aimant à aimer, voulant rêver de beaux rêves, facile à l'enthousiasme, admirant ce qu'on admire et plus encore ... Nature nerveuse et féminine, son coeur se déchirait à tout, s'accrochait à tout ... Sa vie jusqu'à présent avait été une vie plate et uniforme, resserrée dans des limites précises, et il se croyait né pour quelque large existence, toute remplie d'aventure et de hasards imprévus ...'

This is a remarkably penetrating analysis of Flaubert's own adolescent temperament, but it ends with a passage of even greater significance. 'Ce qui le rendait à plaindre,' the author remarks, 'c'est qu'il ne savait pas bien distinguer ce qui est de ce qui devrait être; il souffrait toujours de quelque chose qui lui manquait, il attendait sans cesse je ne sais quoi qui n'arrivait jamais'.

Here is the crux of the problem as Flaubert is beginning to see it. The secret of happiness and success, at least as understood by the world in general, would seem to lie in one's ability, and willingness, to come to terms with reality. Henry, as a projection of the author's would-be self, is admirably adaptable. After only a week in Paris he had realised that there was no place in the world around him for the illusions of his adolescent days and had begun to readjust his outlook. When he returns to the provinces for his Easter vacation, a change is already apparent. He is careful to

create the right kind of reputation for himself, steering a prudent middle course between the truth and deference to public opinion. 'Déjà plus au fait de la vie', if he still has his dreams about the future they are less precise than those of Jules, so that he is less likely to be disappointed.

Although he has dispensed with impractical artistic ambitions, he cultivates a vague interest in literature: but he has read the reviews and finds himself accordingly 'moins passionné pour les grands poètes et plus indifférent pour les mauvais'. The young provincial observes all this with pained bewilderment, and some resentment, which would suggest that Flaubert himself is not without misgivings. The desired adaptation can come very near to betrayal: and although, in order to justify his own situation, he must make a hero of his law-student, Henry is already condemned, for he has set foot on the path of compromise by which he will rejoin a host of other characters ...

(1)
les bourgeois.

(1) We might point out here the parallel between Henry and that other law-student, Léon Dupuis, (Madame Bovary). When the latter decides at last to break with Emma - ('D'ailleurs, il allait devenir premier clerc: c'était le moment d'être sérieux.') Flaubert adds the following significant reflection ... "tout bourgeois, dans l'échauffement de sa jeunesse, ne fut-ce qu'un jour, une minute, s'est cru capable d'immenses passions, de hautes entreprises. Le plus médiocre libertin a rêvé des sultanes; chaque notaire porte en soi les débris d'un poète". (Madame Bovary. pp.400-401.)

In Jules, on the other hand, the ability to adapt himself is totally lacking. Unreconciled to life as it presents itself to him, 'exagéré...entêté... absurde', he is an escapist and a dreamer. But because he is a character in whom the author has portrayed all his weaknesses (and what he dare not yet recognise as the seeds of his greatness) he comes much nearer than Henry to representing the real Flaubert of this period, and the Flaubert who is supposed to have remarked in later years - 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi.' For Jules is the first of those victims of an illusory happiness, of those characters like Mme. Bovary, Salammbô, Frédéric, each of whom 'souffrait toujours de quelque chose qui lui manquait, ... attendait sans cesse je ne sais quoi qui n'arrivait jamais.' Le Bovarysme existed long before Emma Bovary.

We may look forward to the second part of the novel for a moment to add that there we shall see Jules transformed; the deluded failure becomes a heroic idealist, 'continu avec lui-même et suivant une ligne droite ... en désaccord avec le monde et avec son coeur', a pre-figuration of those other characters whose path was unswerving and who sacrificed everything in the service of 'quelque chose de plus élevé que le bonheur' - Saint Antoine, Saint Julien, Mme. Arnoux, Félicité - and not ⁽¹⁾ least, Flaubert himself.

(1) Corr.IV. 57. 12-13 avril 1854, à Louise Colet.

The three patterns on which the whole of Flaubert's characterisation will be based in future are thus contained in this first attempted novel of a boy in his early twenties: in Henry, the despised bourgeois; in Jules-the-lover, the rate, the victim of an illusory ideal; and in Jules-the-artist, the idealist-hero.

If we return now to the narrative, and to the last chapters to be written before the break occasioned by the author's illness, we shall expect inevitably to see Henry's fortunes soar, whilst Jules' happiness lasts only as long as the illusion which is its source. When Bernardi and his company make a precipitated overnight departure, leaving their gullible young friend only their bills to pay, his dreams are shattered at a blow and his despair complete. He had made of Lucinde an idol, set her above 'toute la matérialité de la vie ... au septième ciel, sur des nuages à franges d'or', - centred on her all his hopes and plans. And what is she now? - 'le souvenir d'une illusion, le regret d'un rêve ... Je n'ai plus ni espérance, ni projet, ni force, ni volonté ...' (1)

(1) No doubt Flaubert is remembering here that time years ago when the Schlesingers had left Trouville at the end of the summer holiday. True, their departure had been neither hurried nor clandestine - nor is Lucinde in any way an evocation of Eliza. But Jules worshipped her as Flaubert worshipped Madame Schlesinger, and the whole tone of this passage is strongly reminiscent of the last chapters of Lémoires d'un Fou.

Jules' despair, like Flaubert's, embraces even his art: as Flaubert, under the pseudonym of Jasmin, had condemned Smarh, Jules, in a letter to Henry, condemns his play -

'... j'ai relu mon drame et j'ai eu pitié de l'homme qui l'avait fait; cela est faux et niais, nul et emphatique. Qu'importe l'art, après tout? c'est un mot vide de sens, dans lequel nous plaçons tout notre orgueil et qui nous crève dans les mains dès qu'on le pressure.'

And so to lines which echo a familiar cry:

'La vie est bonne pour ceux qui ont une passion à satisfaire, un but à atteindre, mais moi, quelle passion veux-tu que j'aie? ... quel but puis-je viser? ... tout cela est une absurdité horrible ...'

Not for Henry, 'Plus dans le vrai et moins soumis au subjectif', ⁽¹⁾ he has accepted Madame Renaud (now more familiarly, Madame Emilie) as she is, with all her whims and fancies, her friends and family, and he has not been disappointed. She has become his mistress - 'Nous nous promettons de vivre ensemble, de n'adorer que nous-mêmes, de mourir le même jour'. Two chapters on the daily fortunes of the lovers bring us to the end of chapter XIX and to the point at which the novel was temporarily abandoned, Jules in his despair, Henry and Madame Emilie in their mutual bliss.

What precisely does Flaubert think of these lovers? There are times when he appears distinctly sceptical as to the

(1) Flaubert's italics.

duration and real value of their present happiness.

'Puisqu'ils se croyaient heureux', he comments sardonically, 'ils l'étaient en effet, le bonheur ne dépendant que de l'idée qu'on s'en forme'. But let them not imagine it will last; happiness is like a cage, protective and secure, but limited, and sooner or later one must tire of it - 'que les barreaux soient resserrés ou élargis, il arrive un jour où l'on se trouve tout haletant sur le bord, regardant le ciel et rêvant l'espace sans limites'. And yet Henry's sentimental triumph is as much a projection of Flaubert's personal longing as was the anticipated stage success of his playwright, and he has shared in the enthusiasm of one as much as the other.

Perhaps we only glimpse at his real attitude in a scene at the end of Chapter XLX, just before the novel breaks off. The student is walking home one night with Morel, a hardened cynic who has appeared on previous occasions as a foil to the alternately exalted or desperate young lover. Henry is speaking:

'Non... non, vous ne savez pas ce que c'est que d'être aimé par une femme qu'on aime; quand vous aurez passé par là, vous saurez alors ce qu'on entend par le mot bonheur. Je ne vous parle pas des voluptés matérielles, celles-ci ne sont rien, mais cette intimité complète - cette ardente sympathie, qui vous remplit le coeur et vous grandit si bien qu'on n'a plus ni haine ni désir'.

"Il est vrai que je n'ai jamais connu cela", dit Morel ... Et il lui serra la main, hésitant à le quitter.

"Adieu heureux homme!"

"Vous m'appelez heureux?"

"Oui" reprit l'homme mûr au jeune homme. "Tenez, je vous envie, je voudrais être à votre place; adieu, "ajouta-t-il tristement, "adieu".

This combination of envy and resignation, the attitude of a man destined to look on from the outside, has a truer ring than the ironic pessimism of these other lines. Flaubert has been indulging in wishful thinking. At the time of writing he was, as we have seen, a frequent guest of the Schlesingers, on good terms with Maurice, and enjoying many an opportunity to see and converse with his wife. If she had been unaware of his feelings five or six years ago in Trouville, she could hardly remain ignorant now. It is even probable that Flaubert made open avowal of his love - the second Education Sentimentale, where Eliza is portrayed for the third and last time in Madame Arnoux, certainly suggests that this was so. We cannot know the precise nature of her response, though the novel just mentioned shows her neither unmoved nor unsympathetic. But it suggests too, as do all outward appearances, that sooner or later she made clear the

(1)
 impossibility of all but a Platonic friendship. This
 may already have happened, and it is perhaps on that account
 that Flaubert writes 'je voudrais être à votre place'; but
 whatever the case, it seems clear that he is beginning to
 tire of duping himself with the illusion that he will ever
 become the successful and confident young lover he has made
 of Henry

- (1) The precise nature of the relationship between Flaubert and Eliza Schlesinger, and its various stages, have been exhaustively treated by the two penetrating studies of M. Gerard Gailly; Flaubert et les Fantômes de Trouville (1930); and L'Unique Amour de Gustave Flaubert (1932). To deal with this question at greater length here would be an unwarranted digression. We may stress, however, that despite the indefatigable researches of the author just mentioned, only two facts can be maintained with certainty. First, that Mme. Schlésinger was aware of Flaubert's love, and sympathetic at least (for this we have the evidence of the largely autobiographical Education Sentimentale, 1869, and the tone of later Correspondance, particularly those letters written after the death of Maurice - ("vieille amie toujours chère, oui, toujours" - "ma toujours aimée" - "ma vieille amie, ma vieille tendresse" - written in capitals.) Secondly, it seems clear that no intimate union ever existed between them: a conclusion based on the fact that neither in thirteen volumes of Flaubert's Correspondance, nor in the correspondence, journals, writings of numerous friends and contemporaries is there even the slightest suggestion of such a relationship. Between these two virtually established facts there is room only for conjecture. It is, for example, impossible to know how far, if at all, Henry's flirtations with Madame Emilie are based on fact. Probably, in view of the "evidence" of the second Education Sentimentale they correspond only remotely with the real situation.

It is perhaps not exaggerated to suggest that even without the incidence of Flaubert's breakdown, transferring all attention from the student to the prospective artist, the predominant role would eventually have gone to Jules, with whom the author has tended to identify himself from the start, and to an extent which has become increasingly obvious. We have seen, however, that this process of self-identification was of a rather particular nature, Flaubert seeking to portray in Jules his deficiencies rather than qualities. Fundamentally it can be said to represent his first conscious and sustained effort at self-criticism. He is moving towards a new understanding of himself, a new attitude, 'moins soumis au subjectif', to borrow his phrase. And now, with his illness, what has begun as the normal passage from adolescence to a more mature outlook, becomes a vitally necessary transformation.

It is not enough to see and recognise his weaknesses as such he must remedy them, for only thus will he remedy a nervous condition for which they are at least to some extent responsible, and which they certainly contribute to perpetuate: his cure rests ultimately with himself. Instead of seeking to evade reality by conjuring up dream existences, he must cling to it with the whole force of his will and reason if he is to banish those hallucinations which with every attack sweep him back into that dark night in the gig driving towards

Rouen, into the nightmares of childhood, and all those horrific visions he had exploited in his earlier writings. Instead of seeking by every means to stimulate his imagination, which is now running riot in a whirl of images so that he feels the very unity of his personality disintegrating in the storm, he must learn to control it; and instead of exciting and exasperating his senses he must learn to master them, so that he is no longer tortured by the whispering of voices and the touch of hands when he knows nobody is there.

By a prodigious effort of will-power and unflinching perseverance he achieved all this. When, many years later, a correspondent asked him how he had overcome his nervous disorders he replied:

'Par deux moyens: 1. en les étudiant scientifiquement, c'est à dire en tâchant de m'en rendre compte, et 2. par la force de la volonté. J'ai souvent senti la folie me venir. C'était dans ma pauvre cervelle un tourbillon d'idées et d'images, où il me semblait que ma conscience, que mon moi semblait comme un vaisseau sous la tempête. Mais je me cramponnais à ma raison. Elle dominait tout, quoique assiégée et battue'.(1)

And he forced his reason to dominate in refusing to view his sufferings other than objectively, as coldly and dispassionately as the scientist observing the progress of his tests and experiments. Not only did he treat his hallucination in this way, but his slightest reaction, intent on mastering

(1) Corr.IV. 180. 18 mai 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie. (Flaubert's italics).

his impressions in order not to be mastered by them, or allowing himself to be moved only in so far as he was able to control the emotion.

Nor was this all. He sought too to break out of the little world of his own imagination and sensitivity into a wider generality, to broaden his interests and extend the range of his studies. Do as I have done, he urges this same correspondent (for whom he was something of a father-confessor) 'pensez moins à vous... Associez-vous par la pensée à vos frères d'il y a trois mille ans; reprenez toutes leurs souffrances, tous leurs rêves, et vous sentirez s'élargir à la fois votre cœur et votre intelligence ...Tâchez donc de ne plus vivre en vous'⁽¹⁾.

So, as he takes up his writing once again, he incorporates into his novel this attempt to surpass a subjective and narrowly individualist outlook - and shows us, in the completion of Jules' sentimental education, the pattern of his own. But we are not merely concerned with a sentimental education. Jules the man is to become wholly identified with Jules the artist, and any progress or discovery he makes will be closely concerned with and eventually only exist in function of his aesthetic education. In the words of Philip Spencer, Flaubert will seek now 'to integrate his personality through art',⁽²⁾ and the system which he eventually evolves will be so closely

(1) Flaubert's italics.

(2) Flaubert, A Biography. Ch.IV. p.64.

connected with his aesthetic doctrine that it is impossible to discuss one without having reference to the other. How should it be otherwise, since his whole scheme of things will be based on the conviction that Art represents for him the only means of attaining to 'la conscience de la vérité'.

V.

This is nevertheless a gradual realisation - or is depicted as such, for when Chapter XX opens we find that Jules has renounced poetry altogether, as being the source of his misfortunes. Nonetheless, in the midst of what Flaubert describes as 'cette période ... de désespoir réfléchi',⁽¹⁾ the young provincial turns for consolation to his literary heroes, Rencé, Werther, Byron, 'pour trouver quelque chose d'analogue à ce qui se passait dans son âme'; and it is precisely here that we have the first indication of a change of attitude in the author. He openly upbraids Jules for this selfish exploitation of literature 'qui n'a rien de commun avec la contemplation désintéressée du véritable artiste', comparing him to all those other third-rate critics who neither appreciate nor understand 'les lois fatales qui président à la formation d'une oeuvre d'art, ni les déductions qui

(1) Flaubert's italics.

découlent d'une idée'.

This double principle of complete objectivity and scrupulous respect for the work of art as existing in its own right, without reference to any other values, moral or religious, social or political, represents a point of view far different from that of the adolescent who, whilst affirming the sacred independence of art, (1) had nevertheless based his appreciation of any literary creation on the extent to which he could identify his own thoughts and feelings with those expressed by the writer. It will therefore entail a revaluation of former likes and dislikes, and we shall not be surprised in later pages to find that, surveying certain publications of the last thirty or forty years, 'Jules s'avoua franchement qu'il fallait être drôlement constitué pour trouver tout cela sublime'; though at the same time he began to discern a real beauty where hitherto he had found none, and to this end studied works which had no spontaneous attraction for him.

For the time being, however, he is far from having attained to so constructive an attitude. He remains a spectator of life, as incapable of remedying his situation as he is even of reflecting upon it - '... la moindre tentative pour entrer dans la vie active lui donnait des nausées, en même temps que la vie spéculative le fatiguait et lui

(1) We may remember particularly in this connection the essay written just before Smarh:- Les Arts et le Commerce.

semblait creuse'.⁽¹⁾ His solitude is complete: 'les gens auxquels il eût pu confier ses peines ne les aurait pas comprises, ... les natures assez intelligentes pour y sympathiser lui manquaient',⁽²⁾ and 'ce drame tout psychologique' of which he is victim follows its course unsuspected, unobserved by all around him. This is an obvious transposition of Flaubert's own experience: there are times, indeed, when Jules' situation seems to have slight logical connection with his previous story of unrequited love. The hero's independent existence is unashamedly sacrificed to the author's need for self-expression, so that the former is even presented to us as a convalescent, 'privé de plaisirs bruyants', and who has given up all thought or hope of a normal career!

In the same way Jules seeks to compensate for this monotonous and solitary existence in dreams of fictitious glory, as Flaubert did, not only in adolescence and now, but throughout life. The love of the fantastic and grotesque that finds its outlet in la Tentation, the magnificent splendours of Salambo, the visions of Emma and Frédéric, are all expressions of the same 'besoins d'orgies poétiques'⁽³⁾ and 'appétits

- (1) This is a clear echo of the letter to Louis de Cormenin, which must have been written about the same time, and which we have already quoted. (Ch. III, 8.)
- (2) A reference first to Flaubert's family, then to the friends du Camp, Chevalier, de Cormenin, le Poittevin, who, as we have already seen, were all occupied elsewhere.
- (3) Corr. II. 304. 9 avril 1851 à Louis Bouilhet.

d'imagination⁽¹⁾ which, as soon as his mind wanders from work, set him imagining lavish apartments lit with Chinese lanterns and furnished with 'des divans de peaux de cygne, et des hamacs en plumes de colibri'⁽²⁾.

'L'excès m'a toujours attiré, quelque'il soit',⁽³⁾ he wrote to Louise Colet; not only as a means of escaping the austerity and loneliness of his personal existence, but because he felt that life itself was deficient.

Thus is explained an apparent contradiction in his nature (of which he was well aware). For only seen in this perspective is his insatiable ambition for wealth⁽⁴⁾ at this particular period reconcilable with his violent condemnations of the bourgeois' lucrative interests and his own horrified scorn at any suggestion that he should make his writing, even incidentally, a financial concern. 'J'ai des besoins désordonnés qui me rendent pauvre avec plus d'argent qu'il n'en faut pour vivre', he wrote, again to Louise Colet, 'et je

(1) Corr.II.76. sans date (1847) à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.II.334. 17 déc.1851, and 67, sans date (1847) à Louise Colet.

(3) Corr.I.367. 10 octobre 1846 à Louise Colet.

(4) He even goes so far as to affirm to Louise Colet that at one time 'j'avais tant besoin d'argent que j'aurais épousé n'importe quoi' (Corr.I.384.21 octobre 1846)

prévois une vieillesse qui finira à l'hôpital, ou d'une manière plus tragique ... car alliant le désir d'or avec le mépris du gain, c'est une impasse où le petit bonhomme étouffe dans un étou. Enfin n'importe. Personne ne me comprend là-dessus: inutile dès lors d'en ouvrir la bouche'.⁽¹⁾ He sought money, not for the pride of possession, but to be able to satisfy what he called his imaginative needs ('les pires de tous ... j'ai voulu m'en corriger; impossible')⁽²⁾ and to realise in⁽³⁾ the concrete the beauty and splendour of which at present he could only dream. 'Oui, j'aurais voulu être riche parce que j'aurais fait de belles choses', continues another letter 'J'aurais fait de l'art pratique'. Philanthropists are satisfied if they provide shoes for the bare-foot and soup for the hungry - 'j'aurais fait mieux; j'aurais procuré le plaisir à ceux qui sont tristes et prodigué le superflu à ceux qui ont le nécessaire. Axiome: le superflu est le premier des besoins.'⁽⁴⁾

- (1) Corr.I.401. 6 novembre 1846.
- (2) Corr.I.324-5. 20 septembre 1846 à Louise Colet.
- (3) 'Si j'étais riche, c'est à dire si j'avais le moyen de m'entourer de statues, de musique et de fleurs, si j'avais enfin la réalisation, et on l'a, quoi qu'on dise, avec de l'argent quand on sait s'en servir... (Corr.II.73. 11-12 décembre 1847 à Louise Colet. Flaubert's italics.)
- (4) Corr.I.326. 20 septembre 1846 à Louise Colet.

Le superflu est le premier des besoins. This is a declaration which goes a long way to express the desolate emptiness of life as Flaubert saw it, and the intensity of his aspiration to something richer, more beautiful, greater.

It is interesting to see how closely Jules' ambitions for money are echoed in, or echo, these passages from the Correspondance. 'Il l'aima comme un prodigue', we are told. He wanted 'un palais à péristyle de marbre, avec des statues antiques et une galerie de vieux tableaux, une serre chaude où les palmiers poussent en pleine terre, où l'on peut manger ... des fruits inconnus, toucher des feuillages tout étranges...', and a list of further extravagances too long to quote, but obviously a delight to Flaubert. Yet Jules did not think how to obtain money, 'trop occupé à y rêver', and eventually he ceased to enjoy fantasies he could not hope to realise.

So, like the boy of Mémoires d'un Fou and Novembre, 'il se tourna vers la femme, demandant à cet autre rêve le bonheur qu'il cherchait'. It was, typically, an ideal and eternal beauty that he sought, 'intacte et pure comme le jour qu'elle sortit des mains de Dieu ... un type absolu'. But nowhere did he find more than a fleeting resemblance with the perfection he dreamed; 'indigné, désolé', he continued to evoke history's successive ideals of womanhood until at last 'il était las de cette chair toujours heureuse et du mensonge perpétuel de son sourire'.

Perhaps Flaubert is thinking of Eliza Schlessinger, whose place no other woman could fill; but above all he is indulging yet again in those dreams of passionate love in which he had hitherto sought to procure for himself the pleasures and gratifications that real experience never afforded him. Like all his other unfulfilled desires this too is transposed into terms of literature and finds its expression in the orgies and sensualities of the Flaubertian novel. ⁽¹⁾

'Voilà quelle était la vie qu'il menait' - hardly different from what has gone before. But as we turn the page we come abruptly, without any apparent transition, upon an unmistakably new attitude to life. Having realised, by a process of deduction that is not revealed to the reader, 'qu'il faut laisser les passions à leur place et la poésie à la sienne' Jules begins to forsake these essentially restricted ideals:

(1) One may note, with reference to this tendency to compensate for any deficiency in his personal existence through his writing (a process which in others Flaubert condemned with violence as a shameless exploitation of literature) the following avowal to Louise Colet: 'Voilà pourquoi j'aime l'art. C'est que là, au moins, tout est liberté dans ce monde des fictions. On y assouvit tout, on y fait tout ... (Je me suis souvent, ainsi, bien vengé de l'existence je me suis repassé un tas de douceurs avec ma plume; je me suis donné des femmes, de l'argent, des voyages) ...' (Corr.II.415-16. 15 a 16 mai 1852.)

'La masse d'amour que le ciel lui avait donné, il ne le jeta pas sur un être ou sur une chose, mais il l'éparpilla tout alentour de lui, en rayons sympathiques ... communiant avec le monde... Il se retirait petit à petit du concret, du limité, du fini, pour demeurer dans l'abstrait, dans l'éternel, dans le beau.'

He no longer seeks this infinitude and beauty in wild flights of the imagination and fantastic dreams, but in external reality, in the infinite perspectives of history and of nature -

'il voulait jouir du monde entier comme d'une harmonie complète.'

In this gradual widening of his sympathies and interests, in this attempted transition from an individual to a universal consciousness, he comes to see himself and his own existence more objectively, as a part of an infinitely greater whole ...

'chez lui, comme chez les autres, il étudiait l'organisme compliqué des passions et des idées; il se scrutait sans pitié, se disséquait comme un cadavre... Il ne voulait respecter rien ...'. And consequently, discarding one by one his former illusions of 'la femme éthérée', 'un être qui comprit son coeur', '(une) croyance qui désaltérât son âme...', he begins to reap the first fruits of reward:

'N'aimant guère sa patrie, il comprit l'humanité; n'étant ni chrétien ni philosophe, il eut de la sympathie pour toutes les religions; n'admirant plus la Tour de Nesles et ayant désappris la rhétorique, il sentait toutes les littératures.'

There is no doubt that Flaubert has begun now to incorporate into his novel, in this rather idealised vision of Jules' metamorphosis the various stages of his own emotional and intellectual readjustment. The points of comparison are

clear: Jules refuses anything which might stimulate his imagination or excite his sensibility - 'il disait à son coeur de cesser ses orages et à sa chair d'amortir ses aiguillons;' he observes, analyses, classifies his every reaction relentlessly and dispassionately, and tries on the other hand to absorb himself in a plan of study which will draw him as far away from his personal concerns and experiences as possible.

But more important than all this is the theory of reality presented as the basis of his new line of conduct. Though only hinted at here, it would seem to have close affinities with the Spinozist system, for Jules' attempts to understand reality as an ultimate and perfect unity, to contemplate nature with 'une intelligence aimante', represent Flaubert's first gropings towards a form of intellectual pantheism which is in future to play an important part in his thought and work.

The later Correspondance, as we shall see subsequently, shows Flaubert to be well acquainted with the Ethic, but one cannot say whether he had read it at this stage, though it is very likely. He was certainly familiar with the Spinozist system in outline at least from his many and interminable discussions with his great friend Alfred le Poittevin, for whom Spinoza was the greatest of philosophers, and who, during his last illness and right up to his premature death, would

lie for long hours reading and reflecting upon the Propositions of the Ethic.

The briefest summary of this philosophy, a search, as Spinoza himself described it, for that 'by whose discovery and acquisition I might be put in possession of a joy continuous and supreme to all eternity'⁽¹⁾, makes evident enough the attraction it could have had for Flaubert, and its similarity with the theory exposed both now and subsequently in l'Education Sentimentale.

For Spinoza God is Being, and Being he defines as Substance, infinite, eternal, indivisible; so that the two known attributes of Substance, Thought and Extension (which we might describe more simply as mind and matter) are merely aspects of the same essence. Reality, therefore, is the manifestation in diverse forms of Substance, Being, or God. As far as man is concerned, since he is a constituent part of that reality, his fulfilment and peace will lie in as full a participation as is possible for a finite and imperfect being in the infinitude and perfection of the whole. He must not therefore live as a world within a world, knowing things only as presented to him in his restricted and limited individuality, imperfectly and inadequately, but attain to an intuitive grasp of their essential unity and harmony, in which neither good nor evil, beauty nor ugliness, as we understand them, are found, but where all appears as a manifestation of the one, eternal

(1) De Emendatione Intellectu.

and necessary Substance. So 'the wise man ... is scarcely ever moved in his mind, but, being conscious by a certain eternal necessity of himself, of God, and of things, never ceases to be and always enjoys true peace of soul.'⁽¹⁾

Though Flaubert is by no means a confirmed and convinced Spinozist, it seems nonetheless clear that his views have been coloured by this system. At a time when, both instinctively and by the force of circumstances, he was moving away from a purely egocentric attitude, and seeking even more urgently than in former years to set a rational interpretation on life, Spinoza presents him with a philosophy in which reality itself is endowed with the transcendence, the absolute existence, for which hitherto he had looked elsewhere, and in vain. It impresses upon him too the necessity he had already discovered of breaking out of his personal world, with its narrow and distorted perspectives and attaining to a wider and truer vision. So he incorporates these theories into the system he is evolving for his own direction. And yet, the real basis of his new outlook will be taken neither from Spinoza, nor from any other philosopher; it will be the essentially personal conviction that only art can give meaning to his life.

(1) Ethic. Part V. Prop. XIII. Schol. (Hale-White & Stirling transl. p. 283. O.U.P. 1930).

Jules' story is at this point interrupted for four chapters whilst the reader follows the fortunes of Henry and Madame Emilie on the other side of the Atlantic. When, with Chapter XXVI, we return to the young artist, we find him at grips not with the problem of the universe, but of his own life. Although he is beginning to see reality as an ordered harmony, as he meditates on his own existence he finds only 'une confusion ... un monde dont on ne pouvait comprendre le secret, l'unité ...' What could be the meaning of so many false starts, so many humiliations and disappointments? Gradually he realises that the present is but 'la somme de tous ces antécédents', the point to which this apparently incoherent series of failures had led him, and in the light of which they appeared in their true perspective, as a number of necessary stages. But this is only a partial solution. Where is the key to the whole, past and future? ... 'n'y a-t-il pas au monde une manière quelconque d'arriver à la conscience de la vérité?'

The reply comes in the next sentence, abruptly and without preparation, for it is an intuition rather than a logical conclusion, and something which at bottom Flaubert has always believed. 'Si l'art était pour lui ce moyen, il devait le prendre'. Surely, Jules continues, all his former experience has but contributed to the gradual recognition of this fact?

'aurait-il eu cette idée de l'art, de l'art pur, sans les douleurs préparatoires qu'il avait subies, et s'il eût été engagé encore dans tous les liens du fini? ... Donc tout ce qu'il avait senti, éprouvé, souffert, était peut-être venu pour des fins ignorées, dans un but fixe et constant, inaperçu mais réel.'

If this were so, then all those aspects of life which he had previously thought ugly and wretched might well have their particular harmony and beauty:

(1)

'en les synthétisant et en le ramenant à des principes absolus, il aperçut une symétrie miraculeuse rien que dans le retour périodique des mêmes idées devant les mêmes choses, des mêmes sensations devant les mêmes faits; la nature se prêtait à ce concert et le monde entier lui apparut reproduisant l'infini et reflétant la face de Dieu...'

To arrive at a detailed interpretation of these lines is difficult. What, for instance, are these 'principes absolus' to which Jules relates the ideas and sensations he observes in mankind? It is by no means certain that Flaubert himself could have explained what he really meant. (Perhaps he is remembering the third part of the Ethic, On the Origin and Nature of the affects, where Spinoza attempts to prove with geometrical precision how the same combination of circumstances, inevitably - 'by the universal laws and rules of nature' - produce the same emotional reactions?) But what is really important is that somehow Flaubert's hero has reached the conviction that the universe is not a fortuitous and incomprehensible combination of phenomena, but a perfectly ordered harmony reflecting the perfection of God. And having

e | (1) sic. l'Education Sentimental / . p 245

thus to some extent elucidated the problem of the universe he turns to elucidate the problem of his own existence, expanding his system to include art, which, as we have seen, is to be his individual vocation and means to attaining to truth.

If, Jules continues, the universe is a reflection of the infinite, or God, it is art which relates all its various forms and lines, rhythms and sounds, back to the Ideal from which they derive, art which elevates our minds to the knowledge and recognition of the infinite intelligence mirrored in reality, to the Beauty above all beauties.

"L'art dessinait toutes ces lignes, chantait tous ces sons, sculptait toutes ces formes, en saisissait leur proportions respectives, et par des voies inconnues les amenait à cette beauté plus belle que la beauté même, puisqu'elle remonte à l'idéal d'où celle-ci était dérivée, et qui produit en nous l'admiration, qui est la prière de l'intelligence devant la manifestation éclatante de l'intelligence infinie..."

This obviously has no connection with the Spinozist system which has seemed to influence and shape Jules' meditations so far. We indicated in our first chapter the possible influence of the eclectic philosopher Cousin on Flaubert's first attempts to formulate a theory of art and beauty. We may recall that in 1818 the former had delivered at the Sorbonne a series of lectures 'sur le fondement des idées absolues du Vrai, du

Beau, et du Bien; which had been published in 1836. (1)

Cousin postulates an ideal beauty essentially distinct from and above natural and aesthetic beauty - 'le beau .. est ... une des formes de l'infini qui nous est révélée à propos du visible, mais qui est elle-même invisible.' (2) It is the function of art to translate this invisible beauty into visible terms and thus bring man nearer to the infinite and absolute. 'Si vous cherchez à réaliser ce beau idéal, vous faites de l'art', Cousin affirms; and when, on the other hand, 'vous voyez que les formes, si pures qu'elles soient, altèrent la beauté, vous vous élevez à l'idée absolue, vous touchez presque à Dieu même.' (3)

The parallel with Jules' conceptions of ideal beauty and of the function of art is clear; and a little later, in the Correspondance of 1846, we shall see Flaubert quoting the theory exposed in the Cours de 1818 as one with which he

(1) Cousin, Cours de 1818 (Paris 1836). This text was established from notes taken by various of Cousin's students. It was not until 1853 that Cousin himself revised this first edition - so considerably that the difference is almost as much as between two separate works. There are several passages of the 1836 edition which do not appear in any form in the later work, whilst others have been considerably expanded. The Cours de 1818 becomes in its revised form the better known Du Vrai, du Beau, et du Bien.

(2) Cousin.op.cit. Vingt-Troisième Leçon.p.251.

(3) Cousin.op.cit. Vingt-Cinquième Leçon.p.262.

(1)
 wholly concurs. But how far he was actually influenced in the formulation of his aesthetic theory by the ideas of Cousin, and how far he merely found in the latter a conception similar to his own is very difficult to say. Cousin's theory of beauty was not an original one, and had been propounded and discussed by countless writers. Flaubert never suggest that he owes any debt to Cousin; later in the novel we find him poking mild fun at the eclectic, (2) and in the subsequent Correspondance he shows himself impatient with the latter's theories on everything except art.

Whatever the case, it is clear that Jules is attempting to combine two very different philosophies. There is no room in the Ethic for art, and the Spinozist absolute is immanent, whereas we are concerned in this neo-Platonic concept of Beauty with a transcendant absolute. But Flaubert was not a systematic thinker, and it is useless, as we have already seen, to seek a strictly logical sequence or cohesiveness in the reflections set down here. In Spinoza he found and was

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- (1) Corr.I.307. 13 septembre 1846 à Louise Colet. 'Tu diras au Philosophe (their nickname for Cousin) de t'expliquer l'idée du Beau pur, telle qu'il l'a émise dans son cours de 1819 et telle que je la conçois.' (Flaubert has obviously made a slip of the pen in writing 1819)
- (2) v.p.273. speaking of Jules ... 'M.Cousin lui semblait très drôle avant qu'il n'ait lu Pierre Leroux. Qu'est ce qui fera rire, en effet, quand tout est risible?...'

attracted by a sense of universal order and necessity, and an attempt to liberate the individual from the closed and inadequate world of his own personality. Cousin gave him the formulation of a principle he was only too ready to accept - 'l'art ... nous approche de l'infini, dont il nous manifeste une des formes.'⁽¹⁾ But he adheres exclusively neither to one nor the other. Ultimately he is concerned with one fact: art is his mission and his vocation, (as he will say of Jules later).⁽²⁾ He is no longer obliged to conceal the knowledge from himself or from others; the problem is to fit himself psychologically and intellectually for an artist's career, to attain to a true artistic vision and discipline. All that can help to speed this process is grist to his mill.

The way indeed would seem now to lie clear before him. But there follows in the novel an incident covering some seven or eight pages which has been variously interpreted, and which, in view of its length, can hardly be dismissed as gratuitous.

(1) Cousin op.cit. Vingt-Deuxième Leçon. p.226.

(2) p.309. 'il se concrétise dans sa vocation, dans sa mission ...'

Whatever its precise significance, it would seem to represent some last obstacle to be overcome, a fear or menace, symbolised in a lame dog⁽¹⁾ which persists in following Jules as he is walking home through the fields after the meditations recorded above. He tries in vain to drive it away, and even wonders, in an effort to explain its sudden appearance, if it can be Lucinde's spaniel. The creature grows more and more repellent, and Jules, unable either to disregard or to avoid it, in a fit of anger and exasperation tries to kill it - but it vanishes. On arriving in his room, still haunted by the thought and fear of it, he resolutely goes down and opens the door, to see if it is there. It is lying on the threshold. 'Ce fut son dernier jour de pathétique,' concludes the author, 'depuis, il se corrigea de ses peurs superstitieuses et ne s'effraya pas de rencontrer des chiens galeux dans la campagne'.

(2)

Coleman suggests that Jules' final mastery of this strange animal, which then disappears from the story, is symbolic of his rejecting the fantastic from literature ... or, at least, of his denying it a major role. This is not, however, a particularly satisfactory solution, since only a few pages later Flaubert will argue the necessity of the fantastic to express aspirations inexpressible in normal terms.

(1) The use of the dog as a symbol may possibly be a recollection of Faust.

(2) A.Coleman. op.cit. p.78-81.

(1)

Shanks more plausibly interprets the incident as affirming that 'one cannot escape one's past ... were it as hateful as a mangy dog'. To accept it face to face is the only way to progress.

Perhaps the most convincing hypothesis is that mentioned briefly by ■ Seillière, ⁽²⁾ which sees in this fearful and repellent creature, persistently reappearing, the symbol of Flaubert's nervous illness. Jules tries in vain to escape it - 'il tâchait de penser à autre chose, il marchait vite, le chien le suivait ... Il marcha plus vite encore, la bête le suivait toujours; il courut, elle se mit à courir...'. Unable therefore to shake it off, Jules does his utmost to understand it, to discover some meaning in its furious yet plaintive and incessant barks - 'il usait cependant toutes les forces de son esprit à tâcher de la comprendre, et il implorait au hasard une puissance inattendue, qui puisse le mettre en rapport avec les secrets révélés par cette voix...'. But to no avail.

Safe in his room, the door barred, 'il se mit à réfléchir sur ce qui venait de lui arriver, sur les émotions qu'il avait eues, et il essaya dans son souvenir ... de les scruter jusqu'au fond pour en avoir la cause et la raison...'. This certainly compares very closely with Flaubert's own description in the Correspondance, already quoted, of his efforts to dispel

(1) L.P.Shanks. Flaubert's Youth. (Baltimore, 1927) p.196.

(2) E.Seillière. Le Romantisme des Réalistes: G.Flaubert. p.174.

and dominate his hallucinations... 'en les étudiant scientifiquement, c'est-à-dire, en tâchant de m'en rendre compte.'⁽¹⁾

Again, Jules' triumph comes only when he at last turns to face the monster: '...il songeait toujours à sa rencontre: l'envie lui vint de la refaire pour tenter le vertige, pour voir s'il y serait plus fort'... and from that moment the dog had no further power to trouble or frighten him. It is interesting to compare this final victory with a further quotation from the letter just quoted '... je tâchais, par l'imagination, de me donner facticement ces horribles souffrances: j'ai joué avec la démanche et le fantastique comme Mithridate avec les poisons ... j'ai vaincu le mal à force de l'étreindre corps à corps.'

Flaubert did not in this way immediately banish any possibility of further attacks - nor did Jules avoid subsequent meetings with the dog - but neither had any ascendancy over their victim, and they gradually disappeared. The last obstacle was thus surmounted.

So we embark upon the concluding chapter, and the final stages of Jules' apotheosis. It is in some ways an idealised

(1) Corr.IV.180. 18 mai 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

and hazy vision; and since the theory is indisputably easier than the practice, it is not always possible to draw a close parallel between the progress of the hero and that of the author. But Jules' experience and achievements are always a pointer to the direction in which Flaubert is moving. These pages do indeed contain a remarkably full prefiguration of his literary doctrine, and the words of the critic A. Colling are hardly exaggerated when he says that Flaubert's first novel contains 'toute sa vie littéraire déjà conçue et projetée'.⁽²⁾

The conclusions Jules had reached during his meditations in the fields had been something in the nature of a revelation - 'Il lui sembla qu'il sortait d'un songe ...', the author tells us. Now he must consolidate this knowledge, and carry it into the realm of actual experience. He begins by renouncing once and for all 'cette façon toute subjective ... étroite parce-qu'elle est incomplète', and as we indicated previously, applies himself to the study of writings quite different from his own. It is in this way that he is led to observe the close interpenetration of idea and expression, 'fusion divine où l'esprit, s'assimilant la matière, la rend éternelle comme lui-même'. Like the tenets of literary criticism laid down

(1) As Shanks points out in this connection (Flaubert's Youth p.212) Flaubert expressly states (p.305 of the novel) that Jules is twenty-six, three years older than himself, as though suggesting that the perfection his hero has attained is an ideal towards which personally he must strive for some time yet.

(2) A.Colling. Gustave Flaubert. (Paris 1947) p.83.

earlier in the novel, this too will be a fundamental principle in Flaubert's aesthetic doctrine. There is, he maintained, only one particular way of rendering one particular notion; style and subject are as interdependent as music and the instrument on which it is played.⁽¹⁾

Gradually, 'à force de contempler les belles oeuvres', Jules learns to see the multitude of aesthetic and poetic theories in their true light. For they are purely relative values, momentary attitudes of a certain civilisation at a given epoch, and no more. Beauty is transcendent, and not to be classified and constrained within the limits of any particular set of rules and doctrines - 'vous voulez régler ce qui est la règle suprême, régir ce qui est la loi même... peser l'infini'.

In history and in nature too (for we may remember his plan to embark upon vast historical and scientific projects) he concludes that, if seen in a sufficiently wide context, all apparent conflict and disharmony fade - 'la laideur n'existe que dans l'esprit de l'homme, c'est une manière de sentir qui révèle sa faiblesse ... Mais la nature en est incapable, tout en elle est ordre, harmonie ...' The history of humanity itself, with its regular cycle of the same crises, the same ideas, the same effects proceeding from the same causes, is an ordered and rhythmic process, and all that we consider in it to be evil or ignoble has its particular function, if it is only

(1) We shall have occasion to discuss this theory at greater length in our next chapter, when examining Flaubert's aesthetic doctrine more closely than is possible here.

to show to greater advantage the virtuous and sublime.

It is the task of the artist to give expression to all this, synthesising and reproducing in an objective and general vision all the vast diversity of reality.

A few scattered quotations cannot possibly convey the lyrical enthusiasm of these last pages in which Flaubert describes the unimaginable plenitude of the artist's inner life - 'celui qui concentre dans son âme toutes les richesses du monde'. Jules, we are told 'se pénètre de la couleur, s'assimile à la substance, corporifie l'esprit, spiritualise la matière', to the extent that 'il perçoit ce qu'on ne sent pas, il éprouve ce qu'on ne peut point dire, il raconte ce qu'on n'exprime pas ...'. We are left to imagine by what mysteriously intuitive or mystical process he succeeds in thus penetrating reality, in assimilating himself to it; but it is in so doing that, like the boy of Novembre in his mystical intuition of nature, he attains to an understanding and knowledge hitherto withheld from him. ⁽¹⁾ In the same way,

(1) It has been pointed out in connection with Flaubert's pantheism that this idea of self-identification with nature was common to many writers and adepts of the Romantic school. But Flaubert's is not the negative attitude of the poet taking refuge in nature; it is a positive attempt to penetrate it and become identified with it in order to attain to complete knowledge and understanding. His attitude is therefore much more closely associated with Spinozist thinking than with any other. It is significant that in the passage quoted above he uses the term substance.

in each of the three versions of the Tentation, we shall see the hermit, Antoine, in a supreme longing to be totally identified with reality in order to attain to total knowledge, cry out 'être la matière!'.

It is not, however, sufficient, to have attained to this knowledge of reality. Jules, as an artist, must be able to translate it, to transform and crystallize what he knows and sees into art, into that beauty which is an evocation of the ideal, the infinite. He must therefore perfect in himself that discipline and receptivity which will ensure that nothing in himself can present any obstacle to the fulfilment of his task. It is only by unremitting and heroic effort that the vision and sensibility essential to the great artist are attained.

'Arrêtant l'émotion qui le troublerait, il sait faire naître en lui la sensibilité qui doit créer quelque chose; l'existence lui fournit l'accidentel, il rend l'immuable; ce que la vie lui offre, il le donne à l'art; tout vient vers lui et tout en ressort, flux du monde, reflux de lui-même. Sa vie se plie à son idée, comme un vêtement au corps qu'il recouvre...'

If inwardly his life is one of untold joy and splendour, outwardly it is austere and monotonous, a ceaseless and patient effort shared by none and understood by none.

'Deux choses arrivent: ou l'homme s'absorbe dans la société, en prend les idées et les passions, et disparaît alors dans la couleur commune: ou bien il se replie sur lui-même ... il vit seul, rêve seul, souffre seul, personne ne s'associe à sa joie...'

This ability and willingness to adapt oneself to the general trend of society had been the initial point of divergence between Henry and Jules. Now when Henry is re-introduced into the story (for the obvious and sole purpose of further extolling the young artist) the contrast is even more clear.

The elopement to America, to which we have already alluded, had brought the lovers freedom, but not that 'bonheur plus vaste, moins circonscrit' of which they had dreamed. Though Mme. Emilie had been content to centre her whole existence upon Henry, he had been tormented by the gradual realisation that his love for her was no longer the ardent passion of the first days. The more he had tried to widen the circle of her interests, the more he had grown aware of the gulf between them, until one day he had suddenly looked at her 'comme on regarde avec une terreur étonnée la cassette vide qui contenait un trésor. Plus rien! rien!' However, he had not made a tragedy of the affair, but, characteristically, had resigned himself and taken practical measures to readapt his life to a new situation. They had returned to France, where Mme. Emile had been unobtrusively and tearfully restored to her lawful spouse, whilst Henry made peace with his family. And so we meet him now, 'fort instruit et très expérimenté ... on voyait qu'il avait vu le monde, car il se conformait à ses convenances'.

The irony of these last pages is delightful, though the contrast between Jules and Henry is too long drawn-out; we even follow the two friends to Italy and back. We learn how Henry has perfected his education, sentimental and intellectual, by a series of liaisons which have been triumphs of social engineering, and by providing himself with a useful smattering of several subjects, completed by a detailed knowledge of one or two questions 'afin de s'y montrer profond.' But the real secret of his happiness lay in this, that 'il n'avait pas de grands espoirs, de sorte qu'il n'éprouvait jamais de grandes déceptions; il ne voyait rien qui ne fût à sa portée, ... ce qui est incompréhensible, il n'y pensait pas, ce qui est insurmontable, il ne faisait pas d'effort pour l'atteindre.' In short, he had voluntarily restricted himself for the rest of his life to the comfortable limits of immediate possibility.

For both Jules and Henry the first stage in their sentimental education had been the idealisation of a woman in whom each believed he would find complete happiness. When Jules had realised that this was an illusion, he had renounced love, but he had not renounced the search for some other ideal to which he could commit himself totally. Henry, on the other hand, had simply adapted himself to his disappointment; so successfully indeed that we leave him now about to make 'un riche, un puissant, un superbe mariage'. His bride is the daughter of a Minister - 'avant quatre ou cinq ans il [Henry]

sera député, une fois député où s'arrêtera-t-il?' The answer to that question lies with Dambreuse and Martinon of the second Education Sentimentale.

The last picture we have of Jules shows us a poor and solitary young man, careless of the world's opinion, be it praise or blame, concerned only to express his idea and give form to his conceptions as exactly and as perfectly as possible. But he has attained at last to that 'je ne sais quoi qui n'arrivait jamais'; he has become a great artist 'dont la patience ne se lasse pas et dont la conviction à l'idéal n'a plus d'intermittences.'

We have indicated previously that Jules is not always wholly identifiable with Flaubert, particularly since he is represented as being older than the writer. Clearly Flaubert does not imagine himself to be now the 'grave et grand artiste' he portrays in his hero, though such is his ideal and ambition. But the conclusion sets another, more involved problem. How far has Flaubert discovered in art, his avowed mission and vocation, the fulfilment and supreme peace of mind to which Jules seems to have attained? This is a question to which there is no short and simple solution, and as such it must be reserved for fuller discussion in the next chapter. But the gist of the answer is both implicit and explicit in the present text.

Perhaps we may look first at the implications of Flaubert's

conception of the work of art as formulated here. We may define it briefly as the objective expression of general truths, marked inevitably by the style and technique of the individual author, but in no way restricted or distorted by his personal view and temperament :

'...chaque artiste est appelé à reproduire ce qu'il y a de plus général dans le monde et dans la nature, suivant le caractère particulier de son talent et sous une forme concrète unique, sans laquelle la spécialité de l'oeuvre n'existerait pas...'

The work of art is a re-creation of reality, a crystallisation of life in which the world sees itself reflected. But it is not sufficient that the work of art should reflect and express reality: it must also reflect and elevate our minds to the ideal and infinite, relate the finite to the transcendent. The greatest artists are those 'chez lesquels l'infini s'est miré comme le ciel dans la mer'.

Ultimately, therefore, art cannot of itself bring true fulfilment, because its function is to render in visible and comprehensible terms an invisible and inaccessible ideal. Flaubert, carried away by his enthusiasm, may make it at times an end in itself, able to satisfy all Jules' aspirations. But in reality he himself is, and will remain, painfully aware of its insufficiencies.

We have already seen, for example, how Jules seeks to penetrate reality and become absorbed in it, in order to attain

to a fulness of knowledge in which he perceives the imperceptible, experiences the inexpressible, 'boit à ces torrents sans nom qui emportent l'idée au-delà d'elle-même'. Though we are not told by what process he attains to this state, it is not through the patient and silent labour of his writing. Jules never doubts of art as his personal vocation, any more than Flaubert himself will, but art, despite its promise to lead him to the truth, does not bring him the total understanding and fulfilment he seeks.

Again, there is a significant passage where Jules is trying to explain to himself the function of the fantastic in art. If, as he has tried to convince himself, reality represents a perfect and ordered harmony 'reproduisant l'infini et reflétant la face de Dieu', why does man seek to create so many unreal, chimeric forms which are mere inventions of his imagination? Why is the diversity that is offered by reality insufficient? And yet it is inadequate, and 'il faut accepter ... ce surnaturel', all these figments of the imagination, because they mark an effort to express something inexpressible, the longing for something beyond and outside reality, which nothing in reality can translate.

'N'arrive-t-il pas, à certains moments de la vie de l'humanité et de l'individu, d'inexplicables élans qui se traduisent par des formes étranges? Alors le langage ordinaire ne suffit plus; ni le marbre ni les mots ne peuvent contenir ces pensées qui ne se disent pas, assouvir ces étranges appetits qui ne se rassasient point: on a besoin de tout ce qui n'est pas, tout ce qui est devient inutile: tantôt c'est par amour

de la vie, pour la doubler dans le présent, l'éterniser au-delà d'elle-même: tantôt c'est par convoitise de l'infini... Notre nature nous gêne, on y étouffe, on veut en sortir, et notre âme, qui l'a comblée, en fait craquer les parois comme une foule mal à l'aise dans une enceinte trop étroite; on se rue à plaisir dans l'extrême, dans le monstrueux...'

There is clearly evident here that same sense of the fundamental deficiency of life with which we met so often in earlier writings and which we have already indicated to be the primary explanation for the constant reappearance of the fantastic in Flaubert's writings, both in the *Juvenilia* and later, in the Tentation, in Salambô, in Saint-Julien. Flaubert, as he wrote of Jules in the first part of the novel, 'souffrait toujours de quelque chose qui lui manquait...'

Nevertheless there is a sense of direction in life now, a point on which all converges, an end to which all is subordinated. Like Jules, he is following a straight line 'avec la rectitude d'un système particulier fait pour un cas spécial' (1)

It has been the function of l'Education Sentimentale to distinguish that end and elucidate the means by which it can be attained, whilst making at the same time a transformation

(1) Corr.I.230. 9 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

from adolescence to manhood which runs concurrent with, and is particularly influenced by illness and by the discipline it imposes within and without. Thus we have seen the genesis of a personality and style of life which will be those of maturity. But it has only been possible to discuss them with reference to the novel and in the measure in which the author has been identifiable with one or the other character, largely with Jules. In reviewing the two or three years which follow, leading up to the composition of la Tentation between 1848 and '49, we shall be able to take the present characterisation out of its restricted context and see, not Flaubert as shown in Jules, but Flaubert in the wider background of practical reality.

CHAPTER FOUR.

FLAUBERT'S SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION.

I. Background of external events 1844-48. II. The role of Art. III. The role of Love. IV. Fatalism, Determinism and Pantheism. V. Flaubert and Society.

CHAPTER FOUR.

FLAUBERT'S SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION.

I.

Jules' sentimental education had been achieved in ideally abstract conditions. The inevitable constraints of family and social life play a negligible role in his story, and the practical side of existence is either purposely or unconsciously ignored by the author. It is true that when Flaubert was writing the latter part of his novel, the totally independent seclusion which was at once a condition and consequence of his hero's apotheosis seemed an accomplished fact as far as he himself was concerned. Life continued securely monotonous; he was left to order his time and occupations as he thought fit. In accepting his enforced solitude he believed he had won for himself the

possibility of attaining, if not to happiness, at least to an invulnerable calm.

But he was soon to learn that his present state was of necessity transitory; that man cannot escape the context of his humanity. He may rebel, like the adolescent Flaubert, or, like Jules, invent a new context, selecting those elements that appeal to him and choosing to ignore the rest. But sooner or later that which he sought to evade or to deny will force its way into his seclusion, and by the spring of 1846 Flaubert had already realised this. 'En plaçant ma vie au delà de la sphère commune', he wrote then to his friend, Emmanuel Vasse, 'en me retirant des ambitions et des vanités vulgaires pour exister dans quelque chose de plus solide, j'avais cru que j'obtiendrais, sinon le bonheur, du moins le repos. Erreur! Il y a toujours en nous l'homme, avec toutes ses entrailles et les attaches puissantes qui le relient à l'humanité. Personne ne peut échapper à la douleur'.⁽¹⁾

The first presage of the future came well before this, however, with his sister's engagement announced in November, 1844, about the time when he must have been embarking on the last chapter of his novel. It was, to say the least, a shock to Flaubert. His future brother-in-law⁽²⁾ was a young bourgeois

(1) Corr. I.200. 5 avril 1846.

(2) Emile Hamard.

he had known as a student, a person for whom he entertained little sympathy and less respect. 'Elle s'est mariée à la vulgarité incarnée' he observed in later years,⁽¹⁾ though embittered then by subsequent events. But whoever Caroline had married, he would have been grieved by the separation that must inevitably ensue. From boyhood he had been particularly fond of his pretty and accomplished little sister, helping her with her lessons, sharing with her the plans and ambitions he hid timidly from his parents, inculcating in her, half unawares, an outlook strongly coloured by his own. He felt in a way responsible for her upbringing, and was immensely proud of her.⁽²⁾ The prospect of her departure reinforced his sense of isolation, and made Croisset seem an even more austere retreat.

Before he settled down to another summer there, however, he made his first journey to Italy. It had been decided that after the wedding, (in March, 1845), the bride's parents and their younger son, still convalescent, should accompany the young couple on their honeymoon. For Flaubert this was an opportunity long desired and long dreamed-of, and yet it was with mixed feelings that he left Rouen, and he had gone no farther than Marseille when he wrote to le Poittevin in

(1) Corr. II.430.9 juin 1852. à L.Colet.

(2) cf. in letter just quoted: 'Je l'avais élevée, c'était un esprit solide et fin qui me charmait...'

exasperation, urging him never to embark on a similar holiday. It is interesting to note how Jules' experiences in Italy foreshadow Flaubert's present reactions. Like his hero, the latter is conscious of an ever-widening gulf between himself and the rest of the world. 'Plus je vais', he writes to le Poittevin, 'et plus je me sens incapable de vivre de la vie de tous, de participer aux joies de la famille, de m'échauffer pour ce qui enthousiasme, et de me faire rougir à ce qui indigne'

To a greater or lesser extent this had always been so. Even as a little boy he had sought refuge in a world of his own. With adolescence he had become acutely conscious of the difference between his personal ideals and those of people around him; a difference accentuated by the heightened sense of individuality, the idealism and the rebelliousness habitual to that age, but real and fundamental nonetheless. If, true to the spirit of the Romantic poets, he had glorified in his solitude, he had suffered too, finding his inadaptability a source of humiliation and anguish. Only with the recognition of his artistic vocation had the gradual integration of his personality been effected, and the conviction of his superiority really established itself. His solitude had become then the token, condition, and consequence of his higher

(1) L'Education Sentimentale was completed in January 1845, two or three months before this .. (relevant pages 299-300).

(2) Corr.I.164. fin avril 1845.

calling, purposely accentuated, a splendid isolation. 'Je m'efforce tant que je peux de cacher le sanctuaire de mon âme', continues the letter to le Poittevin from which we have just quoted, 'peine inutile, hélas! les rayons percent au dehors et décollent le Dieu intérieur'.⁽¹⁾

When he returned to Croisset at the end of June, leaving Caroline and her husband in Paris, he settled down to a future of almost grim monotony. But 'à force de m'y trouver mal, j'arrive à m'y trouver bien; d'ici à longtemps je ne demande pas autre chose. Qu'est-ce qu'il me faut après tout? n'est-ce pas la liberté et le loisir? Je me suis sevré volontairement de tant de choses que je me sens riche au sein du dénuement le plus absolu... mon 'éducation sentimentale' n'est pas achevée, mais j'y touche peut-être'.⁽²⁾ He does not hope for what is generally accepted as happiness; but he believes there is a substitute for happiness in a life of ordered tranquillity. It is to that 'stagnation'⁽³⁾ that he aspires, and as the summer months pass by he gains a new serenity, born of a sense of

(1) Corr.I.164. fin avril 1845. *My italics.*

(2) Corr.I.184. fin juin - début juillet 1845, à A.le Poittevin

(3) Corr.I.187. 13 août 1845 à E. Chevalier.
'je crois, si le bonheur est quelque part, qu'il est dans la stagnation; les étangs n'ont pas de tempêtes'.

purpose and the assurance that he alone is master of his future; '...je ne sens plus ni les comportements chaleureux de la jeunesse, ni ces grandes amertumes d'autrefois', he writes to le Poittevin in September, '... Je suis mûr.' (1)

This is perhaps an imprudent claim to make at the age of twenty-three, but Flaubert has certainly attained now to a self-mastery and confidence hitherto unknown. In deliberately rejecting that for which he believed he could not compete - love, happiness, social brilliance - he had transformed his weakness into apparent strength, for the little world of his self-imposed isolation was one in which he had complete and undisputed control:

'Chaque jour ressemble à la veille; je puis dire ce que je ferai dans un mois, dans un an, et je regarde cela non seulement comme sage, mais comme heureux'. (2)

The conditions for an artistic apprenticeship as he conceives it are now perfectly realised, (even to the furnishing of his study, undertaken with the prospect and firm purpose of remaining there, if not to the end of his days, at least for many a year to come) (3) and we find him describing his newly

(1) Corr.I.191. septembre 1845, à A. le Poittevin.

(2) Corr.I.268. 26 août 1846, à Louise Colet - cf.I.185. juin-juillet 1845 à le Poittevin and I.204 avril 1846 à du Camp.

(3) cf. Corr.I.246. 12 août 1846 à E.Chevalier.
'Je travaille, je lis, je fais un peu de grec, je rumine de Virgile ou de l'Horace, et je me vautre sur un divan de maroquin vert que j'ai fait confectionner récemment; destiner à me mariner sur place, j'ai fait orner mon bocal à ma guise et j'y vis comme une huître rêveuse.'

achieved maturity in terms almost identical with those he had used to portray Jules at last on his way to becoming 'un grave et grand artiste'. He has one fear - that this serenity which, though partly imposed upon him as a physical and psychological necessity, is to a large extent maintained by sheer strength of will, may one day cease to hold him in its discipline - 'car il y a des jours où je suis d'une mollesse qui me fait peur'⁽¹⁾.

The test, however, was to come not in the form of an interior combat, but from without, from the reality he had tried so persistently to evade, or at least to ignore. In November of this same year, 1845, Doctor Flaubert was taken ill. Despite all efforts to save him, his condition rapidly deteriorated, and he died early in January 1846. Hardly a month later a daughter was born to Caroline. The baby survived, but Caroline became seriously ill and died in March ... 'ma pauvre Caroline que j'aimais tant, dont j'étais si fier!'⁽²⁾

If Flaubert was overwhelmed at the death of his father, it was at least an event for which he had prepared himself over the years, living and re-living it in his imagination as he did

(1) Corr.I.192. septembre 1845 à A. le Poittevin.

(2) Corr.I.198. 5 avril 1846, à E.Chevalier.

all the crises he foresaw in life, in order to meet them armed
 and equipped, not to be taken off the defensive. ⁽¹⁾ But
 'notre dernier malheur', as he writes to Vasse early in April
 'a été encore plus horrible que l'autre, en ce qu'il était
 moins prévu, moins probable. Et puis, voir mourir un être
 jeune, dans toute la plénitude de sa beauté et de son
 intelligence, c'est quelque chose qui révolte; on éprouve le
 sentiment d'une atroce injustice'. ⁽²⁾ It was a bitter sorrow
 of which he speaks rarely either now or in later years. He lost
 with her the confidante of childhood, and one with whom he would
 have most wished to share the artistic successes he had already
 lived with her in imagination. 'Avec elle j'ai enterré
 beaucoup d'ambitions, presque tout désir mondain de gloire'. ⁽³⁾

With his mother and Caroline's sickly, fretful baby,
 Flaubert retired to a leafless Croisset in the early Spring.

(1) cf. Corr. I. 414. 7 décembre 1846 à Louise Colet.
 'je m'afflige et m'effraie des maux à venir: quand
 ils viennent, ils me trouvent déjà tout résigné'.

(2) Corr. 200. 5 avril 1846 à E. Vasse.

(3) Corr. II. 430. 9 juin 1852 à Louise Colet.
 cf. Corr. I. 205. avril 1846 à H. du Camp.
 'Il est singulier comme, depuis la mort de mon père
 et de ma soeur, j'ai perdu tout amour d'illustration'.

'Il n'y a ni mot ni description qui te puisse donner une idée de l'état de ma mère ...', he wrote again to Vasse. ⁽¹⁾ For himself, the summer was to bring a further sorrow, different, but intense. Le Poittevin, his only really intimate friend in these years, 'l'homme que j'ai le plus aimé au monde', married in July. Not only did Flaubert feel it as a personal desertion, but as a disavowal of common ideals. 'Ça a été comme, pour les gens dévots, la nouvelle d'un grand scandale donné par un évêque'. ⁽²⁾

Le Poittevin moved first to Paris and then, his declining health giving increasing cause for concern, to the country. Flaubert saw him only intermittently, but already ⁽³⁾ in the summer of 1847 realised that his friend was dying. The illness dragged on until the following Spring, and Flaubert was present at the end...

'Il a horriblement souffert et s'est vu finir ... Encore un de moins, encore un de plus qui s'en va. Tout tombe autour de moi. Il me semble parfois que je suis bien vieux. A chaque malheur qui vous arrive, on semble défier le sort de

(1) Corr.I.199. 5 avril 1846.

(2) Corr.II.268. 15 décembre 1850 à sa mère.

(3) cf. Corr.II.35. août 1847 à Louise Colet.

'Un ami ... que j'ai démesurément aimé dans ma jeunesse et auquel je porte un attachement profond est malade d'une maladie incurable. Je le vois qui va se mourir. J'ai beaucoup vécu avec lui, et si jamais j'écris mes mémoires, sa place, qui y sera large, ne sera guère qu'un grand côté de la mienne'.

vous en donner plus, et à peine on a le temps de croire que c'était impossible qu'il en arrive de nouveaux ... et toujours, et toujours (1).

II.

Yet his own resolute calm stood the test. All this was part of an existence from which he had learned not to expect better things and he did not rebel. On the contrary, 'Je suis résigné à tout, prêt à tout: j'ai serré mes voiles et j'attends le grain, le dos tourné au vent et la tête sur ma poitrine' (2). His one desire, reiterated through these terrible weeks, is to return to 'ma pauvre vie d'art tranquille et de méditation longue', to work 'd'énormément et longtemps', to reconstruct the barrier between himself and an intolerable reality (3). If he can never be immune to suffering, he is determined to defend himself to the best of his ability. 'Savoir se préserver de tout cela' - there is the secret to the art of living ... and for that 'il... faut de l'Art, et surtout de la patience' (4).

(1) Corr.II.84. 10 avril 1848 à E. Chevalier.

(2) Corr.I.202. 7 avril 1846 à M. du Camp.

(3) cf. letters 105 to 109, Corr.I.pp. 196-206.

(4) Corr.I.372.13 octobre 1846. à Louise Colet.

The obvious solution for the artist is to seek refuge in his artistic activity, 'de s'enfermer dans l'art et de compter pour rien tout le reste'⁽¹⁾. Undoubtedly this demands a sacrifice, and it is important to grasp that it represented for Flaubert a real renunciation. 'Ne crois-tu pas qu'il y a bien des choses qui me manquent', continues this same letter, 'et que j'aurais été aussi magnanime que les plus opulents, tout aussi tendre que les amoureux, tout aussi sensuel que les effrénés?'. His solitude had till now been as much forced upon him as purposely sought after: he needed and desired affection, tenderness, acclamation, and his adolescent writings are sufficient witness to his ambitions for social brilliance, literary glory, splendid love affairs.

This attitude, which apparently reduces his vocation to a means of making life tolerable, is not to be interpreted as the disavowal of art as an ideal, though it certainly shows it for what it is, a modus-vivendi and not an absolute.

'Pour vivre, je ne dis pas heureux (ce but est une illusion funeste), mais tranquille, il faut se créer en dehors de l'existence visible, commune et générale à tous, une autre existence interne et inaccessible à ce qui rentre dans le domaine du contingent, comme disent les philosophes. Heureux les gens qui ont passé leurs jours à piquer des insectes sur des feuilles de liège ou à contempler avec une loupe les

(1) Corr.I.172. 13 mai 1845 à A.le Poittevin.

médailles rouillées des empereurs romains! Quand il se mêle à cela un peu de poésie ou d'entrain, on doit remercier le ciel de vous avoir fait ainsi naître'.

(1)

These lines were written to Emmanuel Vasse in 1846, but Flaubert was never to make a secret of the fact that 'c'est pour ne pas songer aux crimes et aux sottises de ce monde et pour ne pas en souffrir que je me réfugie dans l'art, à corps perdu...' (2) 'pour ne pas vivre' (3) that he tried desperately to absorb himself in his work; and there were, in later years, times not only of discouragement, but of painful lucidity, when 'la grande voix de l'art' proved powerless to charm his 'mélancolie native', and when he knew that 'la plaie profonde toujours cachée' (4) remained unhealed.

The pattern of his life is none the less one of unswerving devotion to the cult of beauty. Art, 'la seule

(1) Corr.I.309. 4 juin 1846.

(2) Corr.IV.315. 23 juillet 1867 à la Princesse Mathilde.

(3) Corr.IV.356. 18 décembre 1859 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie (Flauberts italics).

(4) Corr.IV.231. 4 novembre 1857 and V.158. 6 octobre 1864 à Mlle Leroyer Chantepie.

chose vraie et bonne de la vie,⁽¹⁾ offered him refuge only because it represented for him the one ideal worthy of his adherence, a unique certitude in a complexity of problems to which he could find no positive and enduring solution. It was for this reason that, consciously or unconsciously, he tended to endow it with all the attributes of an absolute and make it an end in itself. But in its fundamental conception, as L'Education Sentimentale has shown, it was only a means of adoring and of bringing man nearer to an ultimate, transcendant principle - l'Idée, l'Esprit, le Verbe.

These are enigmatic terms, and perhaps best to be understood if taken as purely mystic symbols, for it is well nigh impossible to set a closer interpretation upon them. L'Idée, a term popularised by the eclectic expositions of German idealist philosophy, had certainly become something of a slogan of the literary world, and no doubt Flaubert adopted it as he adopted the Christian terminology of l'Esprit and le Verbe without any strict connotation.

(1) Corr.I.306. 13 septembre 1846 à L. Colet.

In September, 1845, we find him announcing to le Poittevin his newly discovered conviction that 'le bonheur, pour les gens de notre race, est dans l'idée, et pas ailleurs,'⁽¹⁾ and thenceforth the term is used frequently. It would seem generally to imply some undefined, invisible absolute, the intuition and contemplation of which constitutes 'la Religion dans sa plus large extension'.⁽²⁾

It is interesting to note that about this time (1845-6) he seems to have been particularly concerned with preparatory studies for what he calls 'mon conte oriental' (probably la Tentation, which he began to write some two years later). His readings led him into both Chinese and Indian literatures, and though the references in the Correspondance are rather scanty, we know from la Tentation itself how well documented he was on these subjects by 1848. In his letters he mentions in passing 'un bon philosophe chinois' whom he finds boring;⁽¹⁾

(1) Corr.I.192. septembre 1845.

(2) Corr.I.310. 14 septembre 1846 à Louise Colet.

(3) Corr.I.193. septembre 1845 à A. le. Poittevin.
see also, with reference to his readings:
Corr.I.247. 12 août 1846 à H. Vasse.

but he shows himself to have been greatly excited by his
 (1)
 discovery of Brahmanism. It was particularly the stress laid
 upon the necessity of renouncing active life in order, by
 systematic contemplation, to penetrate to a consciousness of the
 ultimate which appealed to him here. Was not his own end and
 purpose to attain, through that 'délectation profonde et pure'
 which he experienced in the study of beauty expressed, to an
 intuition of beauty unexpressed and inexpressible, that per-
 fection for which no words are adequate, and which he can only

(1) cf. Corr.I.303.7 avril 1846 à Maxime du Camp 'Je rentre ...
 plus que jamais dans l'idée pure, dans l'infini. J'y aspire, il
 m'attire; je deviens brahmane, ou plutôt je deviens un peu fou.'
 Corr.I.427. 19 décembre 1846 à Louise Colet.
 'Tu m'appelles brahme! ... je voudrais bien l'être. J'ai vers
 cette vie-là des aspirations à me rendre fou.'

With regard to the question of the origin of this term idea in
 Flaubert's vocabulary, Edmund Wilson (The Triple Thinkers. Lon-
 don 1952. The politics of Flaubert, p.77.) goes so far as to
 assert that 'the idea which turns up in his (Flaubert's) letters
 of the fifties - (then he quotes Flaubert) - "genius like a power-
 ful horse drags humanity at her tail along the roads of the idea,
 in spite of all that human stupidity can do to rein her in" -
 is evidently, under its guise of art, none other than the Heg-
 elian Idea which served Marx and so many others under a variety
 of different guises'. Flaubert was certainly familiar by 1846
 with part of the translation of Hegel's Aesthetic, (five volumes
 published between 1840 and 1852, two of them actually printed in
 Rouen) but his one reference to the work suggests nothing but
 thorough disapproval. This is hardly surprising when we
 consider Hegel's definition of art as a lower manifestation
 of truth, or the Idea, than religion, or philosophy which was
 destined to supercede it. On the other hand Flaubert would
 no doubt have agreed with certain of the philosopher's
 postulates - that art proceeds from the absolute idea, and has
 as its end 'the sensuous representation of the absolute itself'.
 But the evidence seems altogether too slight to warrant so cat-
 egoric an affirmation as that quoted above, particularly when we
 note that there are only two other references to Hegel in the
 whole of the Correspondance (VI.364.1872, and VIII.187.1879) one
 of which is brief and derogatory, the other a mere mention.

attempt to render by poetic symbols - a blinding sun, the translucent purity of a spring, a dazzling sky, the glacial stillness of mountain summits, or in a mystic terminology:

'Au-dessus de la vie, au-dessus du bonheur, il y a quelque chose de bleu et d'incandescent, un grand ciel immuable et subtil dont les rayonnements qui nous arrivent suffisent à animer des mondes. La splendeur du génie n'est que le reflet pâle de ce Verbe cachée ... l'amour, l'amour, l'aspiration nous y envoie; elle nous pousse vers lui, nous y fond, nous y mêle'.(1)

The task is arduous, demanding an invincible will, unremitting effort.

'N'importe! Mourons dans la neige, périssons dans la blanche douleur de notre désir, au murmure des torrents de l'Esprit et la figure tournée vers le soleil!.' (2)

(1) Corr.III.389. 29 novembre 1853 à Louise Colet. We quote here, and in the pages immediately following, from letters written to Louise Colet several years after the period 1844-8 with which we are primarily concerned in this chapter. This is because it is precisely in these letters, rather than in any others, even those to Bouilhet, that we find the fullest expression of Flaubert's aesthetic - perhaps because he treats Louise as his literary disciple, whereas Bouilhet was an equal. But the attitudes and opinions explicit in these letters of 1852-1853 are already Flaubert's in the period at present under discussion. There are, for instance, several passages in the correspondence of 1852 which echo very closely the descriptions of Jules written at the end of 1844 or the beginning of 1845. (cf. as an example of this, p.307 of the first Education Sentimentale, and Corr.III.306. and 342 - both letters written in 1853).

(2) Corr.III.343. 16 septembre 1853 à Louise Colet.

And what of the work of art itself? If the artist's vocation is a priesthood (for Art and Religion are on a par, 'les deux grandes manifestations de l'Idée')⁽¹⁾ then his work is a prayer, 'un pur encens de l'Esprit' rising heavenwards 'vers l'Eternel, l'Immuable, l'Absolu, l'Idéal.'⁽²⁾ It must be primarily and essentially a creation of beauty, valid only in the measure in which it reflects 'cette beauté plus belle que la beauté même', as Jules had described it, 'puisque' elle remonte à l'idéal d'où celle-ci était dérivée'.⁽³⁾ It is interesting to see Jules' words echoed in a letter of some thirty years later. 'Je me souviens d'avoir ... ressenti un plaisir violent en contemplant un mur de l'Acropole ...', Flaubert wrote in 1876, remembering his travels in Greece in 1851, 'Je me demande si un livre, indépendamment de ce qu'il dit, ne peut produire le même effet'. For, if it is a thing of beauty, has it not thereby 'une vertu intrinsèque, une espèce de force divine, quelque chose d'éternel comme un principe?' And he adds in parenthesis - 'je parle en platonicien.'⁽⁴⁾

But to achieve such an effect the novel must be, as it

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- (1) Corr.III.368. 12 octobre 1853 à Louise Colet.
 (2) Corr.III.407. 23 décembre 1853 à Louise Colet.
 (3) L'Education Sentimentale p.246.
 (4) Corr.VII.294. 3 avril 1876 à George Sand.

were, an absolute itself, 'complet en lui-même ... indépendant de son producteur',⁽¹⁾ a self-contained entity developing in accordance with its own laws and founded in its own truth.

Once finished 'l'effet, pour le spectateur, doit être une espèce d'ébahissement. Comment tout cela s'est-il fait? doit-on dire, et qu'on se sente écrasé sans savoir pourquoi. L'art grec était dans ce principe-là ... le divin était le but.'⁽²⁾ Inevitably the work is based on the facts and situations of reality, but these latter must serve merely as a pretext, a 'springboard'⁽³⁾, as Flaubert said. 'L'artiste doit tout élever'⁽⁴⁾, and by the miracle of style transform the banal facts of existence into a formal perfection which is eternal. It is perhaps in this sense that he calls great art 'un affranchissement de la matérialité', and dreams of a work 'qui se tiendrait de

(1) Corr.II.379. 27 mars 1852 à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.III.62. 9 décembre 1852 à Louise Colet.

(3) Corr.VII.359. 8 novembre. 1857 à Tourgeneff.

(4) Corr.III.249. 25-26 juin 1853 à Louise Colet.
Flaubert's italics.

lui-même par la force interne de son style ... un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet, ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut'.⁽¹⁾

Thus liberated from the transience which is a condition of his humanity, the artist gains access for himself and for mankind to an immortal realm in which peace, order, and beauty are attainable, and in which he alone is master. In this way Flaubert translates into terms of artistic activity his metaphysical longing, his aspirations to the illimitable and the eternal. No one has more clearly defined his attitude than he did himself in a letter to Louise Colet written in 1852.

'Je tourne à une espèce de mysticisme esthétique ... et je voudrais qu'il soit plus fort ... les gens honnêtes et délicats sont forcés de chercher en eux - mêmes quelquepart un lieu plus propre pour vivre. Si la société continue comme elle va, nous reverrons, je crois, des mystiques comme il y en a eu à toutes les époques sombres.'

(1) Corr.II.345. 16 janvier 1852 à L. Colet.

One might quote in this connection an incident regarding the publication of Saint Julien l'Hospitalier, a work which is perhaps the most perfect embodiment of Flaubert's aesthetic doctrine, and in which the author creates out of the simple facts of a stained glass window, or the even simpler fact of a small statuette (for the MSS. of which he availed himself offered him only local colour and background) a poem of tragic destiny and heroic idealism. Writing to his editor three years after the first publication to discuss another edition Flaubert says: 'Je désirais mettre à la suite de Saint Julien le vitrail de la Cathédrale de Rouen ... Et cette illustration me plaisait précisément parceque ce n'était pas une illustration, mais un document historique. En comparant l'image au texte, on se serait dit: 'Je n'y comprends rien. Comment a-t-il tiré ceci de cela?' (Flaubert's italics) He might well have achieved a similar effect in prefacing La Tentation with Callot's engraving.

His yearnings no longer satisfied by a decadent Christianity, man will turn elsewhere:

Les uns chercheront dans la chair, d'autres dans les vieilles religions, d'autres dans l'art; et l'humanité, comme la tribu juive dans le désert, va adorer toutes sortes d'idoles.'(1)

Besides being a penetrating judgement on his generation this is a revealing statement as regards the author himself, clearly illustrating the double attitude to art which we have tried to bring out in the previous pages.

Flaubert's aesthetic is not merely a collection of literary doctrines but a rule of life, and for him 'Un homme qui s'est institué artiste n'a plus le droit de vivre comme les autres.'⁽²⁾ He exists solely in function of his art, 'un homme-plume' whose concern is not to live life, but to paint it, whose personal satisfaction is a mere incidental. For a considerable period Flaubert went so far as to refuse all idea of publication - 'un artiste qui serait vraiment artiste et pour lui seul, sans préoccupation de rien, cela

(1) Corr.III.16.17. 4 septembre 1852 à Louise Colet. Flaubert's italics.

(2) Corr.VII.328. 25 juillet 1876. à Guy de Maupassant.

(3) Corr.II.364. 8 février 1852 à Louise Colet.

(1)

serait beau', he wrote to du Camp in 1846. Above all he will admit of none of that compromise by which others have exploited not only their gifts, but Art itself, for the sake of gain and glory. 'La littérature a mal à la poitrine ... Il faudrait des Christs de l'Art pour guérir ce lépreux.' (2) Few phrases could more forcibly express the writer's conception of his mission, which becomes thus not only one of adoration, but of propitiation and sacrifice;

'On s'étonne des mystiques, mais le secret est là ... Si vous voulez à la fois chercher le Bonheur et le Beau, vous n'atteindrez ni à l'un ni à l'autre car le second n'arrive que par le sacrifice. L'Art, comme le Dieu des Juifs, se repaît de holocaustes. Allons! déchire-toi, flagelle-toi, roule-toi dans la cendre, avilis la nature, crache sur ton corps, arrache ton coeur!' (3)

(1) Corr.I.205. avril 1848.

(2) Corr.II.254.14 novembre 1850 à Louis Bouilhet.

(3) Corr.III.306. 21-22 août 1853 à Louise Colet.

This is no doubt the result, too, of a profound discouragement. His artistic apprenticeship, like that of Jules, takes the form of reading, making notes, studying, rather than writing. In the Autumn of 1846 he writes to Louise: '... je me suis vu ni assez haut pour faire de véritables oeuvres d'art, ni assez excentrique pour pouvoir en emplir de moi seul ... je me suis condamné à écrire pour moi seul, pour ma propre distraction personnelle, comme on fume et comme on monte à cheval ...' (I.336) but in December he had gone a stage further: 'Je n'écris plus: à quoi bon écrire?. Tout ce qu'il y a de beau a été dit et bien dit. Au lieu de faire une oeuvre, il est peut-être plus sage d'en découvrir des nouvelles sous les anciennes. Il me semble, à mesure que je produis moins, que je jouis mieux à contempler les maîtres.' (I.426)

It is important, however, not to overlook the psychological background in which this notion of an artistic priesthood also has its roots. . . As we have already seen, Flaubert's aesthetic is founded in a complexity of needs and aspirations in which it would be difficult to determine the precise interplay of physiological, psychological, intellectual and spiritual factors. 'Vous avez beau me prêcher', he wrote to George Sand in later years, 'je ne puis avoir un autre tempérament que le mien, ni une autre esthétique que celle qui en est la conséquence ...' ⁽¹⁾ His ideas regarding the celibacy of the artist, for instance, must be seen at once in conjunction with the Eliza Schlésinger affair (for Eliza, though inaccessible - perhaps because inaccessible - still hovers in the background), ⁽²⁾ in the light of subsequent brief and unhappy liaisons, and against the backcloth of all his painful experience of a life in which he seemed to have proved lamentably inadaptable.

When, in the summer of 1845, the sculptor Pradier, who had known Flaubert in his student days, sure for his part that a life of seclusion could only accentuate the boy's morbidity and nervous disequilibrium, tried to urge him into 'un amour normal, régulier et solide', Flaubert rejected his paternal

(1) Corr.VII.284. 6 février 1876.

(2) cf. Corr.I.275.27 ou 28 août 1846 à Louise Colet.
'... ceux qu'on croit ne plus aimer, on les aime encore. Rien ne s'éteint complètement. Après le feu, la fumée, qui dure plus longtemps que lui'.

advice, though he approved it in theory. It would be dangerous rather than helpful - 'où m'arrêtera[^]-je? ... je rentrerais dans la vie active ... et c'est ce qui m'a été nuisible toutes les fois que j'ai voulu... (le) tenter. (1)
D'ailleurs, si cela devait être cela serait', he adds weakly.

It is interesting to compare this incident with a letter written some five years later in answer to his mother's (2) tentative enquiry as to when he would think about marrying. Never, he replies; it would be an apostasy, a denial of the unique claims of Art, a disavowal he had never forgiven le Poittevin. And moreover, what folly! - 'rien que sous les rapports de l'hygiène ... L'artiste, selon moi, est une monstruosité, quelque chose hors nature. Tous les malheurs dont la Providence l'accable lui viennent de l'entêtement qu'il a à nier cet axiome'. Had he not tried to deny his vocation at the cost of an illness endangering not only his reason, but his very life?

(1) v.Corr.I.185-6. Fin juin - début juillet 1845 à le Poittevin.

(2) Corr.II.268-9. 15 décembre 1850 à sa mère.

III

(1)

In the light of all this the affair with Louise Colet dating from the summer of 1846, presents a delicate problem. In what sense was it, if at all, a consciously attempted compromise, perhaps with prophylactic motives? Or are we to see it as a temptation yielded to in weakness? The answer is perhaps indicated in a letter to Louise herself, written in the summer of 1853. 'L'Art est assez vaste pour occuper tout un homme', Flaubert affirms characteristically - 'En distraire quelque chose est presque un crime, c'est un vol fait à l'idée, un manque au devoir'. And then he qualifies these absolutist exigencies - 'Mais on est faible, la chair est molle ... On a des besoins d'air comme un prisonnier ... La sagesse consiste à jeter par-dessus le bord la plus petite partie possible de la cargaison, pour que le vaisseau flotte à l'aise'.⁽²⁾ Poor Louise! She could only be indignant, scandalised, at this conception of love as a mere side-line in existence, a necessary relaxation, but all in all a regrettable weakness, destined sooner or later to end, vastly inferior to the real joy and beauty which art alone can offer. 'Peux-tu préférer' he

(1) Flaubert met her in Pradier's studio at the end of July, and she became his mistress two days later. A woman famed for her beauty, and for her pretensions to poetic genius (unfounded) she had won considerable renown, largely through the influence of her protector, Victor Cousin. She was thirty-six at the time, and unhappily married to a mediocre and pretentious music-teacher. Infatuated, Flaubert believed he had found in her an artist and a kindred soul. The first break came in 1848, though throughout 1847 relations were strained. In 1851 on Flaubert's return from Egypt, the liaison was renewed until the final break in 1854.

(2) Corr. III. 306-7. 21 et 22 août. à Louise Colet.

asks her, scandalised in his turn, 'l'adoration d'une beauté relative au culte de la vraie? Eh bien, je le dis, je n'ai que ça de bon! (il n'y a que ça en moi que j'estime): j'admire'.⁽¹⁾

Whatever the basic motivation and real explanation of the liaison it is quite clear that Flaubert, however infatuated he may have been, however tenderly he cherished Louise, never intended the affair to interfere with his work, and this conviction of the indisputable primacy of art was bound to wreck the relationship from the outset. It meant that each asked and expected of the other what was in the circumstances impossible. For Louise love consisted in a continual and exclusive preoccupation one with the other, an exigency with which Flaubert obviously could not comply: not simply because to do so would have meant in his judgement a disavowal of his artistic ideals, but because it was impossible for him to leave his mother, ageing now, and morbidly fearful of his shortest absence, in order to instal himself in Paris as Louise wanted. 'Pourquoi faut-il que le seul sacrifice qui te soit agréable soit justement celui-là que je ne puis faire?' he would lament.⁽²⁾

Moreover, he sought in her not only a woman, but an artist - 'ce n'est pas tout que d'être aimé! La vie ne se passe pas en effusions de tendresse. Cela est bon, cela est exquis à des moments rares et solennels. Ce qui rend les jours doux, c'est

(1) Corr.I.506-7. 13 septembre 1846, à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.I.396. 15 novembre 1846, à Louise Colet.

l'épanchement de l'esprit, la communion des idées, les confidences des rêves qu'on fait, de tout ce qu'on désire, de tout ce qu'on pense'. (1)

True love is founded and matured as much in an identity of ideals and convictions as in physical attraction, a bond to which on the whole he refuses to refer as love, maintaining that love is 'quelque chose de plus haut'.⁽²⁾ Not only does it take its source in a higher reality, Art - or ultimately, the Idea - ('c'est par là qu'on s'aime quand on vit par là')⁽³⁾ but it is in itself a relationship enveloping and transcending all temporary liaisons and friendships, a changeless, inalterable, almost mystic union:

(1) Corr.I.306.

(2) Corr.II.139.27 mars 1853, à L. Colet - 'Je voudrais que nous gardassions nos deux corps et n'être qu'un même esprit. Je ne veux de toi, comme femme, que la chair. que tout le reste soit donc à moi, ou mieux, soit moi ... Comprends-tu que ceci n'est pas de l'amour, mais quelque chose de plus haut ...'

(3) Corr.IV.57-8. 12-13 avril, 1854. - A passage in which Flaubert explains to Louise why he loves her so deeply. Is it not because you are aware he writes, (and unfortunately she was not), that life holds 'quelque chose de plus élevé que le bonheur, que l'amour et que la Religion, parcequ'il prend sa source dans un ordre plus impersonnel, quelque chose qui chante à travers tout ... à qui les contingents ne font rien et qui est de la nature des anges, lesquels ne mangent pas: je veux dire l'idée? C'est par là qu'on s'aime quand on vit par là'. cf. also Corr.III.294.14 août, 1853. - 'Aimons-nous donc en l'Art comme les mystiques s'aiment en Dieu'.

les grandes passions ... les hautes, les larges, sont celles à qui rien ne peut nuire et dans lesquelles plusieurs autres peuvent se mouvoir. Aucun accident ne peut déranger une Harmonie qui comprend en soi tous les cas particuliers...!(1)

The whole dilemma is summed up in one paragraph from a letter of Flaubert's, seen in conjunction with a brief comment from Louise. 'Je m'étais formé de l'amour une toute autre idée', he writes. 'Je croyais que c'était quelque chose d'indépendant de tout, et même de la personne qui l'inspirait. L'absence, l'outrage, l'infamie, tout cela n'y fait rien. Quand on s'aime, on peut passer dix ans sans se voir et sans en souffrir'.⁽²⁾

'Que penser de cette phrase?' Louise scribbled in the margin, in bewilderment and desperation.

They were, as Flaubert himself realised at one point, radically incompatible both in outlook and temperament.⁽³⁾ The letters show Flaubert more and more wretched, tormented with scruples as to the sincerity and value of his love, full of remorse at having accepted a liaison for which, sooner or later, they must both pay the price of suffering:

(1) Corr.IV.59. 12-13 avril 1854.

(2) Corr.I.432. sans date. fin 1846-début 1847.

(3) Corr.II.12. 20 mars 1847 'Ce qui m'a profondément attristé, humilié, si tu veux, navré est plutôt le mot, c'est que j'y ai vu plus que jamais l'incompatibilité native de nos humeurs.'

'Il faut que chaque joie soit payée par une douleur, que dis-je? par une; par mille! Je n'ai donc pas tort de ne pas trop les rechercher. La félicité est un plaisir qui vous ruine' (1)

With his characteristically fearful suspicion of life he tries to induce Louise to resign herself from the outset to the possibility of a break, not to instal herself in her present happiness; and when she assures him that she will always love him he replies: 'Toujours! quelle présomption dans une bouche humaine!' (2) If he pleads with her to concentrate on her art it is not simply because he sees there an ideal far superior to love, but because in art alone she will find a refuge and a lasting peace. Filled with despair at her suffering (for she did suffer) yet virtually powerless to help, realising too how little she understood him, he becomes more and more convinced of man's inescapable solitude

'Entre deux coeurs qui battent l'un sur l'autre, il y a des abîmes; le néant est entre eux, toute la vie et le reste. L'âme a beau faire, elle ne brise pas sa solitude, elle marche avec lui!' (3)

Above all these letters betray the lassitude of a man fighting a losing battle to possess a happiness and love he is never destined to know. He is incapable of abandoning himself to present joys - 'sans cesse l'antithèse se dresse devant mes

(1) Corr.I.302. 12 septembre 1846, à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.I.222. 8 août 1846. (He had known Louise little more than a week ...)

(3) Corr.II.410. 8-9 mai 1852, à Louise Colet.

yeux' ⁽¹⁾ - but without hope for the future in a life "qui
 n'est complète que du côté de l'infortune" ⁽²⁾. In short,

'Je ne suis pas fait pour jouir. Il ne faut pas prendre
 cette phrase dans un sens terre-à-terre, mais en saisir toute
 l'intensité métaphysique' ⁽³⁾

IV

We have seen how the adolescent Flaubert sought on the one hand to protect himself against suffering by retreating into some kind of stoic resignation to events and circumstances, and on the other to make it more acceptable by rationalising it, adopting some form of determinist philosophy. At first this was of the physiological type inherited through his father from the *Idéologues*; later (in *l'Education Sentimentale*) he seems to have been drawn by a Spinozist conception of universal necessity. Both types of attitude are evident in the letters to Louise Colet, showing the combination of fatalism and determinism to be still an integral part of Flaubert's outlook.

It would seem, however, that they can be traced in origin to an evasive reaction to suffering, and are therefore

(1) Corr.I.221. 6 août 1846, à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.I.275. 27 août 1846, à Louise Colet

(3) Corr.I.231. 9 août 1846, à Louise Colet (Flaubert's italics)

fundamentally emotional rather than intellectual: Flaubert discovered in Cabanis and Spinoza a means of rationalising and justifying his own intimate response to events.

It seems to him, for instance, that he and Louise are so radically different in experience, in outlook, and in temperament, that they are inevitably at cross-purposes, powerless to avoid hurting or angering one another. 'Etiez-vous libre d'aimer autrement?' he asks her, again and again. 'Est-ce qu'on est ce qu'on veut?'⁽¹⁾ And for himself, 'est-ce ma faute?'⁽²⁾ 'ne m'en veux pas! ne m'en veux pas!' he pleads, 'Jamais je n'ai voulu te blesser, jamais, même au fond, même dans le recoin obscur pour tous, je n'ai eu pour toi un mouvement méchant ...'⁽³⁾ But at the same time he is able to adduce physiological determinist arguments in support of his attitude. Are not we all the product of our psycho-physiological make-up? To deny our nature, as to try to surpass it, is both futile and dangerous.

'est-ce que tous, tant que nous sommes, nous ne cherchons pas suivant nos instincts divers la satisfaction de notre nature? Saint-Vincent de Paul obéissait à un appétit de charité, comme Caligula à un appétit de cruauté. Chacun jouit à sa mode et pour lui seul ...' (4)

(1) Corr.II.33. 17 mai 1847 et passim.

(2) Corr.II.34. 11 juin 1847 et passim.

(3) Corr.II.38. 7 juillet 1847.

(4) Corr.I. 214-5. 6 août 1846.

No doubt these views are coloured too by the experience of his nervous illness, which, as we have seen, he believed to be the result of a thwarted literary vocation.

On the other hand he seeks to minimise his suffering in a fatalistic resignation to destiny, to 'la Providence du mal', as he describes it half mockingly, (but adding rebelliously 'c'est celle qu'on voit, j'y crois'.) He repeats to Louise that 'tout cela est arrivé parceque cela devait arriver';⁽¹⁾ there is cause neither for self-reproach nor remorse. Or he will argue that evil and misfortune are apparent, rather than real; suffering so often the result of an inadequate understanding. We must, after all, try to see our lives in their true perspective, as infinitesimal parts of a unique totality, instead of imagining that the function and end of creation is, or ever can be, in the ordering of our personal convenience and comfort. It is useless to lament over the catastrophes that are inflicted upon humanity, better to disregard them as far as one can:

'Je suis peu curieux des nouvelles... tout cela m'abrutit ou m'irrite. Tu ne parles d'un tremblement de terre à Livourne. Quand je serais à ouvrir la bouche là-dessus pour en laisser sortir les phrases consacrées en pareil usage: "C'est bien fâcheux! quel affreux désastre! est-il possible! oh! mon Dieu!" cela rendra-t-il la vie aux morts, la fortune aux pauvres? Il y a, dans tout cela, un sens caché que nous ne comprenons pas, et d'une utilité supérieure sans doute, comme la pluie et le vent; ce n'est pas parceque nos cloches à melon ont été cassées par la grêle qu'il faut vouloir supprimer les ouragans'.⁽²⁾

(1) Corr.I.240. 11 août 1846.

(2) Corr.I.269. 26 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

No doubt this last type of argument is linked with Flaubert's pantheistic views, which accord a very relative importance to the destiny of the individual. His pantheism is indeed more explicit now than either earlier or later in life. We find various professions of faith in the letters, the first coming shortly after the death of Caroline in the Spring of 1846:

'On dit que les gens religieux endurent mieux que nous les maux d'ici-bas. Mais l'homme convaincu de la grande harmonie, celui qui espère le néant de son corps, en même temps que son âme retournera dormir au sein du grand Tout pour animer peut-être le corps des panthères ou briller dans les étoiles, celui-là non plus n'est pas tourmenté'. (1)

Three or four months later, in the letters that begin to flow daily between Croisset and the capital, Flaubert is quite categoric.

- (1) Corr. I.202. 7 avril 1846 à M. du Camp. This passage, reminiscent of some of Jules' meditations, would seem to be a transposition into more poetic terms of the Spinozist conception of death Flaubert had learned from le Poittevin or read for himself: in a double disintegration of body and soul the molecules which had formed the body join with others to form another body (animal or human, there being no essential distinction between the two) and the molecules of the soul contribute similarly to the mosaic of another soul. (Spinoza, however, goes further than this, and postulates at the same time an individual immortality).

'Je suis le frère en Dieu de tout ce qui vit, de la girafe et du crocodile comme de l'homme, et le concitoyen de tout ce qui habite le grand hôtel garni de l'Univers'. (1)

Louise, amused rather than impressed, replies with irony,

accusing him of trying to appear original. But he protests:

(1) Corr. I.271. 26 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

Another passage in the same letter would seem to suggest that Flaubert's pantheism perhaps owes something to his study of Brahmanism. He is railing against the bourgeois' resentment at any natural phenomena not apparently designed for man's use and advantage: 'Que j'en ai entendu ... de ces magnifiques discours ...' Pourquoi cela est-il venu? Comment ça se fait-il? Conçoit-on ça?... Et les mêmes gens, qui disaient cela, parlaient tout en tuant des araignées, en écrasant des limaces, ou pour respirer seulement, absorbaient peut-être par l'aspiration de leurs narines des myriades d'atomes animés'.

It was largely in Creuzer's Les Religions de l'Antiquité etc., as translated and annotated by the French hellenist and archeologist Guigniaut between the years 1825-51 (eight volumes had appeared by 1849) that Flaubert studied Brahmanism and other Oriental religions. There are there passages stressing the pantheistic element of these religions which must have particularly appealed to him. cf. Creuzer. t.I.191 (on the subject of Brahmanism) 'Rien ne peut être absolument anéanti: la substance demeure, dans la variation perpétuelle des formes: tous les êtres retournent à la Divinité dont l'essence est leur source commune ...' or t.I.408.

'Tous les systèmes supérieurs des religions de l'Orient reposent sur une idée commune et fondamentale. C'est qu'on ne saurait concevoir ... la véritable existence sans admettre que l'Être suprême descend et réside en personne dans toutes les parties de cet univers, dans toutes les sphères dont il est composé'.

'il n'y a pas, dans tout cela, la moindre envie de t'amuser et de paraître original. Je n'affecte pas la bizarrerie'. (1)

No, indeed. Spinozist Pantheism offers him a metaphysical account of life and death which his neo-Platonic aesthetics are obviously inadequate to provide. It sets against the narrow span of human life the true perspective of eternity, against the fragile insignificance of man and all his works the peaceful rhythms of essential existence. (2) To the man who will free himself from the restricted vision of his human individuality it offers access to that ultimate reality in which in fact he already, though perhaps unconsciously, participates.

It would seem that Flaubert's pantheism, like his determinism, had its roots in intimate experience. We saw, for instance, in Novembre, how the adolescent's exceptionally sensitive and intense response to natural beauty could amount to a kind of ecstasy. Since then - this became evident in the

(1) Corr.I.288. 30 aout 1846.

(2) cf. Corr.I.271. 26 aout, 1846, a L. Colet. 'J'aime surtout la végétation qui pousse dans les ruines: cet envahissement de la nature, qui arrive tout de suite sur l'oeuvre de l'homme quand sa main n'est plus là pour la défendre, me réjouit d'une joie profonde et large. La vie vient se replacer sur la mort; elle fait pousser l'herbe dans les crânes pétrifiés et, sur la pierre où l'un de nous a sculpté son rêve, réapparaît l'éternité du Principe dans chaque floraison des ravenelles jaunes'.

Education Sentimentale - he has discovered in Spinozism a theory of existence which to a large extent fits his own emotional and intuitive apprehension of the universe. The journal of his travels in Brittany during the early summer of 1847⁽¹⁾ is extremely interesting on this account. On the one hand it shows that his pantheism is at times nothing more than a vague Romantic exaltation inspired by the sense of liberation he always experienced in the country, and by his deep appreciation of the beauties of land and sea-scapes.⁽²⁾ But on the other hand there are several reminiscences and transcriptions of Spinozist theory which show to what extent he was preoccupied with the system.

(1) Par les Champs et par les Grèves. (Voyages.I. Société des Belles Lettres, Paris 1948). This was written in collaboration with his fellow traveller, Maxime du Camp, each contributing alternate chapters. They left Paris on May 1st. on a walking tour which lasted until the beginning of August. The journal was written up during the following winter.

(2) cf. op.cit. p.278. 'Sortis de l'église enfin, nous retrouvâmes le soleil, le ciel, l'air, l'espace, et comme un oiseau joyeux qui s'échappe, quelque chose s'envolant de notre âme disait: C'est cela qu'il me faut, car Dieu est là et pas ailleurs'. and p.381. 's'il y a encore ... des cœurs avides que tourmente sans cesse le malaise de la beauté, qui toujours sentent en eux ce désespérant besoin de dire ce qui ne peut se dire et de faire ce qui se rêve, c'est là, c'est là pourtant, (dans la nature) comme a la patrie de l'idéal, qu'il leur faut courir et qu'il leur faut vivre!'

Witness, for instance, his reflections in the Museum at Nantes, where he and du Camp observe 'dans un bocal d'esprit de vin deux petits cochons unis ensemble par le ventre' (disturbingly like the specimen of two human foetus placed alongside, he adds). But his thoughts are more concerned with the abnormal specimen than with the comparison one might make between the two. Is it one of nature's mistakes, or does it not rather represent some stage in the formation of the species which can teach us, when we know how to interpret it, something of its origin, and even of our own?

'Quel est celui qui saura voir dans ces manifestations irrégulières de la vie, les expressions multiples et graduées de cet art inconnu, qui gît dans son immobilité mystérieuse au fond des océans, dans le foyer de la lumière, y variant les créations successives et y perpétuant l'Être'.

And he wonders whether

'le principe de notre forme à nous n'a pas couvé jadis au sein de la chrysalide universelle, avec la graine des chênes et les sources qui ont fait la mer'.(1)

We shall have occasion to refer again to this passage, and in greater detail, when commenting upon the Spinozist reflections of the hermit Antoine, for this problem of the relation between unique and indivisible Substance, or Being, and the individual forms in which it is manifested, is one which Flaubert found particularly interesting and perplexing.

(1) op.cit. p.203-5.

The weed-covered ruins of the château at Clisson inspire in him a long reverie, for it seems to him that he perceives there, in the two-fold rhythm of growth and decay, the essential harmony and oneness of reality.

Faced by such a spectacle,

'un enthousiasme grave et songeur vous prend à l'âme: on sent que la sève coule dans les arbres et que les herbes poussent avec la même force et le même rythme que les pierres s'écaillent et que les murailles s'affaissent. Un art sublime a arrangé, dans l'accord suprême des discordances secondaires, la forme vagabonde des lierres au galbe sinueux des ruines ... Toujours l'histoire et la nature révèlent ainsi... le rapport incessant, l'hymen sans fin... de l'humanité qui s'envole et de la marguerite qui pousse, des étoiles qui s'allument et des hommes qui s'endorment, du cœur qui bat et de la vague qui monte'. (1)

In moments of intense exaltation he feels that the longing awakened in him by the beauty of land and sea can only find its consummation in a complete self-identification with nature, and there are passages here, as in l'Education Sentimentale, of which Saint Antoine's 'être la matière' is only an echo.

Thus one evening on the shores of Belle-Isle, particularly beautiful in the fading light of a magnificent sunset

'nous évoquions à nous tout ce qu'il y avait de couleurs, de rayons, de murmures... A force de nous en pénétrer, d'y entrer, nous devenions nature aussi, nous nous diffusions en elle, elle nous reprenait ... nous regrettions que nos yeux ne pussent aller jusqu'au sein des rochers, jusqu'au fond des mers, jusqu'au bout du ciel ... que nos oreilles ne pussent entendre graviter dans la terre la formation des granits, la sève pousser dans les plantes, les coraux rouler dans les solitudes de l'océan. Et dans la sympathie de cette effusion contemplative, nous aurions voulu que notre âme, irradiant partout, allât vivre dans toute cette vie pour revêtir toutes ses formes, durer comme elles, et se varier toujours, toujours pousser au soleil de

(1) op.cit. p.208.

l'éternité ses métamorphoses... Ah! que notre verre est petit, mon Dieu! Que notre soif est grande!(1)

V

We may therefore distinguish two main trends in Flaubert's outlook and thought during these three or four years leading up to the composition of the first Tentation.

Whilst he seeks in an uneasy alliance of pantheism, fatalism and determinism a means of dominating, or at least of accepting 'la constitution interne de la vie'⁽²⁾ which on the whole defies comprehension, he asks from art the meaning of his own existence, and at the same time a refuge from the problem of understanding life at all. There is nothing in all this which permits us to talk of a coherent philosophy of life: it is the fragmentary system of an intuitive and

(1) op.cit.p.256-7. (The Correspondance too bears witness to this same attitude to nature, cf. letter to le Poittevin, written during the Italian journey in 1845. 'Tu me dis que tu deviens de plus en plus amoureux de la nature: moi, j'en deviens éffréné. Je regarde quelquefois les animaux et même les arbres avec une tendresse qui va jusqu'à la sympathie ...

Nous avons traversé le Simplon jeudi dernier. C'est, jusqu'à présent, ce que j'ai vu de plus beau comme nature ... j'aurais voulu être dans l'âme de ces grands pins qui se tenaient tout suspendus et couverts de neige au bord des abîmes'. (I.178.26 mai 1845)

(2) Corr.II.68. sans date (1847) à Louise Colet.

eclectic seeker of truth, drawing on his wide reading and on the ideas he hears expounded by others to come to some understanding of the mysteries that confront him in life and death, nature and art, man and the universe: seeking consciously or unconsciously in the systems of others a formulation or rationalisation of his own intuitive convictions or inclinations. It is for this reason that he finds in art his most lasting and fundamental conviction, the ideal by which he will direct his life: and though in later years his inability to attain to a universally valid system will lead him into an increasingly bitter and resentful pessimism, he will always be consoled by the knowledge that at least he has never swerved in his vocation, ⁽¹⁾ never hesitated before any of the sacrifices he

(1) Corr.II.440. 12 juin 1852 à Louise Colet et passim.
 'Ma vie, du moins, n'a jamais bronché. Depuis le temps où j'écrivais en demandant à ma bonne les lettres qu'il fallait pour faire les mots des phrases que j'inventais, jusqu'à ce soir où l'encre sèche sur les ratures de mes pages, j'ai suivi une ligne droite, incessamment prolongée et tirée au cordeau à travers tout'.

In judging as his supreme merit this adherence to his literary ideals Flaubert surely implicitly denies the determinist theories we have just seen so vigorously affirmed in the letters to Louise Colet? It is true that he sees his vocation at times as an inescapable destiny, something imposed upon him - an attitude for which his nervous illness, coming precisely at the point where he had tried to deny that vocation, may be held largely responsible. But he still esteems himself, and anyone else for that matter, according to the measure in which he has sacrificed for and persevered in his particular mission by a series of choices which, in strict accordance with physiological determinist theories, he would not have been free to make.

cf. Corr.II.372. 20-21 mars 1852 à Louise Colet.

'J'ai vécu toute ma vie dans cet entêtement de maniaque, à l'exclusion de mes autres passions que j'enfermais dans des cages, et que j'allais voir seulement pour me distraire. Oh! si je fais jamais une bonne oeuvre, je l'aurai bien gagnée.'

believed art asked of him.

We have seen that these were many because from the start he believed that the free and happy development of his human potentialities was incompatible with the perfection of his artistic talent. 'J'ai repoussé les ivresses humaines qui s'offraient', he wrote in 1857, looking back over his twenties. 'Acharné contre moi-même, je déracinais l'homme à deux mains ... De cet arbre au feuillage verdoyant je voulais faire une colonne toute nue pour y poser en haut, comme sur un autel, je ne sais quel flamme céleste ... Voilà pourquoi', he continues after a pause, 'je me trouve à trente-six ans si vide et parfois si fatigué'.⁽¹⁾ It is in this context that one calls to mind his mother's celebrated reproach: 'La rage des phrases t'a desséché le cœur'.⁽²⁾ No doubt it was a remark made in a passing fit of exasperation or anger, and one would be wrong to attribute great importance to it. Flaubert bestowed upon his mother a tenderness and selfless vigilance which witness to one of the finest aspects of his character and personality, and her words must have hurt him bitterly.

(1) Corr.IV.234. 4 novembre 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

(2) Corr.IV.78. 28 juin 1855 à Louis Bouilhet.
'Sais-tu que ma mère, il y a six semaines environ, m'a dit un mot sublime (un mot à faire la Muse - (one of his names for Louise Colet) - se pendre de jalousie pour ne l'avoir point inventé): le voici, ce mot: "La rage des phrases t'a desséché le cœur"'

It is true that his refusal to throw in his lot with the rest of mankind, his determination to achieve immunity from the evil and ugliness of life, make him apparently less acutely aware of the outside world, less sensible to its problems and aspirations.

'Il n'y a pas d'ours blanc sur son glaçon du pôle qui vive dans un plus profond oubli de la terre ... Je me suis creusé mon trou et j'y reste ... Qu'est-ce que m'apprendraient ces fameux journaux que tu désires tant me voir prendre ...? J'ai un dégoût profond du journal, c'est à dire de l'éphémère, du passager ... Je ne m'apitoye pas davantage sur le sort des classes ouvrières actuelles que sur les esclaves antiques ... pas plus ou tout autant'.(1)

He is apparently closed to the suffering of an age in which child factory hands were dying in their thousands, and numbers of his compatriots eking out a sub-human existence in the newly formed industrial centres. Comparing his attitude with that of Hugo, Lamartine or George Sand, to mention only the outstanding names, his literary vocation would seem to be not only an evasion, but a desertion.

And yet, as l'Education Sentimental and as Bouvard et Pécuchet will show, he is not insensible to the sufferings and aspirations of the proletariat, any more than he remains unmoved by, or is purely ironical at, the efforts of socialist reformers, theoretical or practical. He objected to these last on the grounds that they blasphemed against man's highest

(1) Corr.I.270. 26 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

dignity in seeking a purely material good: ⁽¹⁾ and to the first because he held that no artist should accept to serve 'un autre but que l'Art même', ⁽²⁾ however worthy.

Again, he would maintain that human interests were narrow and fugitive compared with the eternal values he sought and served through art. So it was that he refused to be disturbed by the gossip and bickerings of daily papers, or even by the urgent questions debated there. He was exasperated and disgusted by most of what he observed of the life of the man in the street - the petty superficiality of so many ambitions, the self-satisfied and stupid prosperity that posed as happiness. ⁽³⁾ In any case he felt that he was powerless to remedy or to alter any of the conditions at the root of human suffering, and apparently callous outcries like 'Qu'est-ce que me fait le monde à moi?' have their counterpart in more revealing passages such as the following:

(1) Corr.III.208. 26-27 mai 1853 à Louise Colet. (et passim). 'C'est une chose curieuse comme l'humanité, à mesure qu'elle se fait autolâtre, devient stupide... O socialistes! C'est là votre ulcère: l'idéal vous manque et cette matière même, que vous poursuivez, vous échappe des mains comme une onde. L'adoration de l'humanité pour elle-même et par elle-même (ce qui conduit à la doctrine de l'utile dans l'Art, aux théories du salut public et à tous les retrécissements, à l'immolation du droit, au nivellement du Beau)...

(2) Corr.II.322. 21 octobre 1851 à M. du Camp.

(3) cf. Corr.I.215. 6 août 1846 à Louise Colet et passim. 'Être bête, égoïste, et avoir une bonne santé, voilà les trois conditions voulues pour être heureux: mais si la première vous manque, tout est perdu.'

'Il est permis de tout faire si ce n'est de faire souffrir les autres; voilà toute ma morale. Mais quand les autres souffrent malgré vous? Quand cela est le résultat d'une volonté fatale et au-dessus de la nôtre, et comme la pure expression de la constitution interne de la vie, que dire? Que faire? Quel remède?' (1)

In short, 'personne plus que moi n'a le sentiment de la misère de la vie'; ⁽²⁾ not only of all that is weak, corrupt, false in humanity, of his own limitations and wretchedness, but of the fragility, the transience, the meaninglessness of life itself. This sentiment comes very close to that sense of the grotesque we have already had occasion to discuss with reference to the adolescent's mystery-play Smarrh. 'Ce qui m'empêche de me prendre au sérieux', he wrote to Louise Colet in the summer of 1846, 'c'est que je me trouve très ridicule, non pas de ce ridicule relatif qui est le comique théâtral, mais de ce ridicule intrinsèque à la vie humaine elle-même, et qui ressort de l'action la plus simple ou du geste le plus ordinaire. Jamais, par exemple, je ne me fais la barbe sans rire, tant ça me paraît bête. Tout cela est fort difficile à expliquer et demande à être senti...'⁽³⁾ It is certainly not the expression of a normal and healthy sense of humour, but of a distorted view of life in which nothing really fits together, and where the easiest escape is sometimes in a

(1) Corr.II.68. sans date. novembre - décembre? 1847 à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr.I.220. 8 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

(3) Corr.I.262. 21-22 août 1846. cf. a long passage in a letter to Louise Colet of the same year, Corr.I.421.

reductio ad absurdum. One wonders what has become of Jules' convictions of the universal harmony and essential unity of reality ...

Much of this extraordinarily acute pessimism can be attributed to Flaubert's morbid hyper-sensitivity, as can much of what is apparently egoistic and unfeeling in his outlook. If he is harsh and impatient in his attitude to others it is because he suffers inordinately at their hands. 'Il n'y a que seul que je ne souffre plus', he wrote to Louise Colet in 1847 '... j'ai beau me retenir, il en sort trop. Je trouve que le monde a raison de me trouver intolérant; mais il ne sait pas, en revanche tout ce que je tolère sans rien dire'.⁽¹⁾

For this reason alone it was indisputably necessary, if he was to put his talent to its best use, that he should be able to maintain a certain calm tranquillity in the ordering of his life, and enjoy at Croisset a refuge of inviolable seclusion.

Given all these considerations, however, one might still object and regret that Flaubert deliberately sought to avoid suffering on his own account by refusing to contemplate the spectacle of the suffering of others. But this is only true in a certain measure. He refused to occupy himself with social misery. But who has better understood the desolation of an Emma Bovary, or shown a deeper compassion for an old servant like *Félicité* ?

(1) Corr.II. 28.7, juillet 1847.

The only characters he despises and condemns, for whom he has neither pity nor mercy, are those who do not know what suffering is - the Homais and Bournisien of this world.

But the suffering portrayed in his novels is none the less something which he can control and dominate, being in a sense his own creation. It is that which he cannot control, the ugliness, pain and grief constantly intruding upon his own life, that he seeks so rigourously to evade. Even so, if he rejects suffering on the one hand, he accepts it on the other, gladly embracing the perpetual dissatisfaction of the soul in search of perfection and truth. 'Nous ne valons peut-être quelque chose que par nos souffrances', he wrote to Louise Colet, some time after the completion of Madame Bovary, 'car elles sont toutes des aspirations. Il y a tant de gens dont la joie est si immonde et l'idéal si borne, que nous devons bénir notre malheur, s'il nous fait plus dignes'.⁽¹⁾ La Tentation de Saint Antoine, upon which he embarks in the Spring of 1848, and which is to occupy him intermittently over the next twenty-five years, will be the expression in terms of poetic drama of that suffering and search.

(1) Corr. IV. 232. 4 novembre 1857.

CHAPTER FIVE.

SAINT ANTOINE.

- I. Introduction to a comparative study of the three versions

- II. The 1849 and '56 versions.
 - (i) Summary
 - (ii) Part One: The Heresies.
 - (iii) Part Two:
 - a) The Vices and Virtues.
 - b) Science.
 - c) The Visions.
 - d) The Monsters.
 - (iv) Part Three:
 - a) Spinozism.
 - b) The Dispute of Death and Lust.
 - c) The Procession of the Pagan Gods.
 - d) Concluding remarks.

- III. The 1872 version.
 - (i) Background to the third version.
 - (ii) Science and Religion.
 - (iii) Spinozism.
 - (iv) The enigma of 'être la matière'.
 - (v) Concluding remarks.

The chronological sequence of Flaubert's works as seen in connection with the three successive versions of La Tentation.

A prefiguration of La Tentation.
Smarh. 1839.

Oeuvres de Jeunesse.
pre-1835-42.

La Tentation I. 1848-9

1st. Education Sentimentale. 1845.

Madame Bovary. 1851-6.

La Tentation II. 1856

Saint Julien l'Hospitalier.
(draft) 1856.

Salammbô. 1857-62.

2nd Education Sentimentale.
1864-69.

La Tentation III. 1869-72

Trois Contes. 1875-6.

Bouvard et Pécuchet.
(unfinished)
documentation 1872-4.
composition 1877-80.

I

It has become a commonplace to quote in connection with La Tentation Flaubert's description of it as 'l'oeuvre de toute ma vie',⁽¹⁾ and to point out how the three successive versions mark three successive stages in manhood - the first now, at the age of twenty-seven; the second, after the completion of Madame Bovary, when he was thirty-five; and the last after an interval of some fifteen years - (it was finally concluded in 1872, and published early in 1874). If one compares these dates (1848-9: 1856: 1872) with the dates of composition of Flaubert's other works (a sequence perhaps better illustrated by means of a diagram)⁽²⁾ La Tentation is seen as a pre-occupation to which the author reverts at irregular intervals, a link between the principal works, and between the early writings and the works proper.

But it is not only in the chronological sense that it constitutes a life's work: it is at the same time an ideological focal point. We shall see that the early

(1) Corr. VI. 385. 5 juin 1872 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie. '... j'achève mon Saint Antoine. C'est l'oeuvre de toute ma vie, puisque la première idée m'en est venue en 1845, à Gênes, devant un tableau de Breughel et depuis ce temps-là je n'ai cessé d'y songer et de faire des lectures afférentes.'

(2) v. Fig. 1.

compositions represent so many stages in the development of an outlook eventually given full expression in 1848-9, and that this 'vieille toquade philosophique' provides an invaluable background to the study of the great novels. It will be the function of our next chapter to trace its connection with these: here we must attempt to distinguish and elucidate the conceptions on which this most enigmatic but most revealing of Flaubert's works is based.

One might pause at the outset to wonder why the life of a fourth-century desert father about whom the few known and established facts are contained in the short pages of Saint Athanasius' Vita Antonii should have proved a subject of such attraction to Flaubert. He himself tells us that it was Breughel's painting in Genoa that first inspired him, and we know that he obtained what he believed to be Callot's engraving of the picture, (really an engraving of a painting entitled la Tentation de France, for there exists no such reproduction of Breughel's work), and hung it in his study about a year later.⁽²⁾

(1) cf. also letter written from Milan, 13 mai 1845 to le Poittevin. 'J'ai vu un tableau de Breughel représentant La Tentation de Saint-Antoine, qui m'a fait penser à arranger pour le théâtre la Tentation de Saint-Antoine: mais cela demanderait un autre gaillard que moi'. (Corr. I.173).

(2) Corr. I.261. 21-22 août 1846 à Louise Colet. 'J'ai débarrassé ma Tentation de Saint-Antoine et je l'ai accroché à ma muraille... J'aime beaucoup cette oeuvre. Il y avait longtemps que je la désirais. Le grotesque triste a pour moi un charme inouï: il correspond aux besoins intimes de ma nature bouffonnement amère'.

But in actual fact he had made his first acquaintance with Saint Antoine many years back at the puppet shows of the annual Foire Saint-Romain. And although the hermit does not himself figure in the schoolboy writings, they show, like Flaubert's reading at that stage, an evident predilection for the medieval mystery-play type of theme in which both imagination and speculation could be given free rein. Faust, Ahasvérus, Cain, were works he read and re-read, and we have seen their mark on compositions where the titles alone give sufficient indication of the content - Voyage en Enfer, Rêve d'Enfer, Danse des Morts. Saath above all, with its theme of temptation and spiritual combat, and a holy recluse as its central figure, foreshadows this present work.

The story of Saint Anthony offers him therefore the type of subject towards which he has always been drawn. The author is free to give expression to his love of magnificence and luxury, and he can bring to bear his historical and oriental predilections, penetrating still further into the antiquity which, particularly in its period of decadence, he claimed no man had sought to understand more than he. There is full scope too for his interest and delight not only in the manners of the past,

(1) Corr.III.5. 27 juillet 1858 à Louise Colet.
 'Y-a-t-il quelqu'un qui aime mieux l'antiquité que moi, qui l'ait plus rêvée, et fait tout ce qu'il a pu pour la connaître?'.
 cf. Corr.III.18.

but in its thought and belief.

Above all, as with the Must he so much admired, it is a subject ideally suited to the expression of the metaphysical conflict which in one form or another has been Flaubert's concern since boyhood. The hero, by the very nature of his calling, is set in a context in which, ultimately, only the inner life has any significance. We saw Flaubert try to do this with Jules in virtually ignoring the social background in which the young artist must supposedly have moved; here there are no such irksome restrictions. On the contrary, it is a theme with unlimited possibilities, which can comprise a panorama of the spiritual evolution of mankind. It offers him in fact, though he was not at first fully aware of this, the occasion to express himself completely - intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. ⁽¹⁾

The first version is for this reason more or less unreadable, a teeming, colourful, disjointed work which leaves the reader bewildered. It was only after Flaubert realised that his drama had no objective unity, but merely the subjective unity of a kind of allegorical autobiography, that he was able to make of it

(1) One might add that if the 'Temptation theme' attracted Flaubert from a literary and philosophical point of view ('ce qui n'est naturel à moi, c'est le non-naturel pour les autres, l'extra-ordinaire, le fantastique, la hurleuse métaphysique, mythologique'. Corr.III.156) it held a personal and almost clinical interest too. He was still suffering from hallucinations and he no doubt uses this present work both to explore and to exploit the experience of his nervous illness.

at least a more orderly composition (though one may still prefer the first, simply because of its profusion and spontaneity)

'J'ai été moi-même dans Saint Antoine le saint Antoine et je l'ai oublié', he wrote to Louise Colet in 1852 about the manuscript he had lent her. 'C'est un personnage à faire...' (1)

And it was always with regret that he looked back on the eighteen months spent on the first Tentation, because it was a time when he wrote spontaneously, as his imagination and thought inspired him.

'C'était un déversoir: je n'ai eu que du plaisir à écrire, et les dix-huit mois que j'ai passés à en écrire les 500 pages ont été les plus profondément voluptueux de toute ma vie'. (2)

But when, at the end of these eighteen months, Flaubert read his newly completed work to du Camp and Bouilhet, and asked them for their opinion, they advised him to burn it. If their judgment

(1) Corr. 362. 1er février 1852.

(2) Corr. III. 156. 6 avril 1853 à Louise Colet. cf. Corr. II. 344. 16 janvier 1852 à Louise Colet. 'Prenant un sujet où j'étais entièrement libre comme lyrisme, mouvements, désordonnements, je me trouvais alors bien dans ma nature et je n'avais qu'à aller. Jamais je ne retrouverai des éperduments de style comme je m'en suis donné là pendant dix-huit grands mois.'

was harsh, it was understandable. (1)

The author submitted to this verdict inasmuch as he put the manuscript away in a drawer. But long before he had finished Madame Bovary he was planning to revise La Tentation, even with a view to publication. Thus it is that we have the second version, written in the summer of 1856 ... and again locked away in a drawer. For with 'the Bovary scandal' at its height, it was folly to risk a composition such as this in print. So the way was paved for a third and final version which Flaubert took up in 1869.

As far as the Tentations of 1849 and 1856 are concerned, the differences are almost exclusively in matters of structure and sequence, and for the purposes of the present discussion we may class them as one. Indeed, the second is for the most part so condensed that it offers us little or no additional material. The third version, however, shows more than stylistic and technical alterations: it was written after an interval of some fifteen

(1) This celebrated incident is recounted at length in du Camp's Souvenirs Littéraires. Flaubert had insisted on finishing his work before leaving for Egypt with du Camp. In September '49 he summoned him along with Bouilhet, and in a four-day session read La Tentation to them ... 'après la dernière lecture, vers minuit, Flaubert, frappant sur la table, nous dit, " ... dites franchement ce que vous pensez." And the reply - 'Nous pensons qu'il faut jeter cela au feu et n'en jamais reparler'. According to du Camp it was at this point that, after having stressed Flaubert's need for a subject which would discipline rather than encourage his flights of fancy - something like La Cousine Bette or Le Cousin Fong - Bouilhet suggested the story of Madame Delamare, the wife of one of their student contemporaries, and who does indeed serve to some extent as a model for Emma.

years, a period during which Flaubert had become familiar with and been affected by new findings in the scientific world, new theories in the realms of philosophic thought. If his fundamental position as expressed in 1849 does not undergo any radical change (and there has been a tendency to exaggerate the difference between the first and third versions) it is modified and enriched by reappraisals of former opinion and new trends of argument. We shall indicate and discuss the nature and import of these differences in due course, but our first concern must be to define Flaubert's outlook in the earlier versions.

II.

(1) Summary.

A summary of the work, in which it is often difficult to distinguish any logical plan, is at least facilitated by its being divided, if somewhat arbitrarily, into three parts.

The first of these, perhaps the least interesting, shows the hermit assailed by the Seven Deadly Sins and by a distinctly more dangerous figure. Logic, Quick-witted and erudite, the latter soon succeeds in undermining Antoine's faith, and thus prepares the ground for the Heresies, a bewildering horde in which Gnostics, Ophites, Manichaeans, mingle with Simon the Magician, Montanus, Appollonius, to quote only the better known among them. Scandalised and terrified, the poor hermit cries to heaven for help, and the three Theological Virtues appear on the scene, to lead him away into his anachronistic chapel.

Thus the scene is set for the second part, which opens with the arrival of the Devil, 'tel que le moyen-âge l'a rêvé.' The subsequent few pages are among the most interesting and important of the work. They contain a dialogue between the Devil and his retinue of Seven Sins: each sin is characterised in a penetrating analysis which is particularly revealing as far as Flaubert's personal ideas are concerned, and when, inevitably, battle engages with the virtues, they are characterised in their turn. The repartee continues until, reinforced by Logic and Science (a whimpering, white-haired child) and led by Pride, the forces

of evil eventually prevail, and the Theological Virtues are put to a trembling retreat.

Now the temptations take the form of visions - immense wealth, a courtesan of Ancient Greece, the mysterious Queen of Sheba with exotic gifts, the Poets and Troubadours, the Sphinx and the Chimera, a long procession of fantastic half-men and strange legendary monsters, and finally the Sea-Creatures, swarming and whirling in a vast, sonorous multitude to which all the other creatures join themselves in one immense, tangled conglomeration pulsing with the life Antoine feels in his own veins. He is carried away into a kind of pantheistic ecstasy -

'je voudrais ... être en tout, m'émaner avec les odeurs, me développer comme les plantes, vibrer comme le son, briller comme le jour, me modeler sous toutes formes, entrer dans chaque atome, circuler dans la matière, être matière moi-même pour savoir ce qu'elle pense.'

In a sudden swoop the Devil is there: 'Tu vas le savoir, je vais te l'apprendre!' Antoine, like his predecessors Faust, Ahasvérus, Cain, Smarh, is borne off into the air.

So the third and last part opens with the hermit penetrating further and further into space and into an intuitive awareness of the mystery of reality and being. Hitherto he had accepted that mystery as comprehended in a series of indisputable doctrinal affirmations. Now, in a remarkable exposition of the Spinozist system, the Devil opens out new vistas to the enraptured saint. But before he leaves Antoine he has succeeded in turning it all to ridicule.

The hermit sinks into a stupor of despair, but he is roused by a vision of Death. She is the symbol of peaceful

oblivion, who disputes for the possession of her victim with Lust, an incarnation of the life-force. He refuses to yield to either, though Death, in a last attempt to prove her omnipotence and the absurdity of his resistance drives before him a procession of the countless divinities men have called eternal, a procession which ends with the lamentations of Jehovah ... 'J'étais le Dieu des armées, le Seigneur, le Seigneur Dieu ...'

Antoine falls to his knees, refusing the conclusion to which Logic presses him - 'Puisqu'ils sont tous passés - et alors - le tien-?' And now day dawns. A beam of sunlight pierces the clouds and floods over the hermit. The Devil's hideous laughter as he promises to return fades into the distance. 'Antoine continue sa prière.'

The battle is over. But has it ended in defeat or victory? What is its real and profound significance? La Tentation is clearly something more than the story of the overthrow or triumph of faith in the soul of an Egyptian hermit. It is a work to be understood and interpreted on two levels, which one might call the literal and the allegorical.

On the one hand, as we have already indicated, Flaubert was undoubtedly attracted by Antoine as a historical figure, a key to a period in which he was particularly interested. Again, the temptations which assail the hermit are of intense interest to Flaubert qua se, his means to working out in literary form ideas on which he had pondered for several years, and of setting out a whole panorama of ancient belief.

But in another sense the hermit's story is of purely symbolic interest, and Flaubert is concerned with it not in itself, but for its pattern of unswerving adherence to an ideal. 'Ce qu'il y a de sûr, c'est qu'il y a en moi du moine,' he wrote to Louise Colet in 1853, 'J'ai toujours beaucoup admiré ces bons gaillards qui vivaient solitairement, ... Cela était un joli soufflet donné à la race humaine, à la vie sociale, à l'utile, au bien-être commun.' (1) He could have said of his hermit, as he said of Jules and of himself, that he had followed 'la ligne droite', and seen in this light the conclusion to la Tentation represents an indisputable victory of perseverance, the poetic vindication of the idealist.

(11) Part One:
The Heresies.

It is significant therefore that the hermit's first temptation should be to cede to a movement of impatience with the self-imposed discipline of his daily life. 'Puisque je suis libre cependant, pourquoi ne ferais-je pas un peu ce que je veux?' This is a fatal moment of hesitation (2) which sets in motion the whole series of assaults of which he is to be victim.

(1) Corr.III.396-7. 14 décembre 1853.

(2) A moment of hesitation which recalls too that passage from a letter to le Poittevin from which we have already had occasion to quote, written in September, 1845: 'Tu me parles de ma sérénité... Il est vrai qu'elle peut étonner:... Je n'étais pas comme cela autrefois. Ce changement s'est fait naturellement. Ma volonté aussi y a été pour quelque chose. Elle me mènera plus loin, j'espère. Tout ce que je crains: c'est qu'elle ne faiblisse, car il y a des jours où je suis d'une mollesse qui me fait peur.' (Corr. I.191-2.)

The first of these comes in the apparently innocuous form of alternative solutions for the ordering of his life, possibilities he had previously rejected, but which continue in moments of weakness to present themselves. His mind is filled with dreams of sensuality, power, fame, visions of quiet domestic happiness or the ordered harmony of the cloister, of glory in combat or honour in the priesthood. So many means to the happiness he so rarely knows ... 'ce n'est pas une vie, je le sais,' he moans, 'une agonie plutôt. J'ai bien eu, il est vrai, des éclairs de joie suprême ... mais qu'ils ont été rares, ces moments-là!' His days have passed in prayer and fasting, but he knows no peace of soul:

'Je ne t'aime pas, Seigneur, pas autant que je le désire; accorde-moi donc la dilection de ta majesté, l'enivrement de ta grâce; tu accordes bien au corps ce qu'il lui faut, donne à l'esprit la pâture dont il a faim...

Oh! si je pouvais partir vers toi, si je pouvais, porté par le désir, y monter comme un souffle! Où est l'élan qui me poussera, l'idée qui m'enlèvera?... j'essaie pourtant à absorber mon âme dans une adoration permanente, je suis l'ombre d'une pensée profane, j'ose à peine respirer, j'ai honte de vivre, je suis humilié de mon corps.'

There is in these lines the same sense of hopeless conflict between the human condition and human aspiration, the same scorn, and even hatred, of the physical, and of all that constitutes participation in material reality, as was evident in the adolescent's writings - though here, by reason of the context, it is expressed in religious terms. It is not therefore surprising that Antoine should refuse the alternatives of material and physical consolation offered by the Seven Sins, and that the Devil should change his tactics by introducing temptations of a spiritual order.

These come in the form of a series of new creeds, each purporting to be a unique revelation of truth. Antoine has already confessed that his faith has never satisfied his spiritual aspirations; now the slick arguments of Logic make short work of proving the inadequacy of Christianity even as a rational explanation of existence.

In an attack which, whilst undoubtedly exposing Flaubert's personal difficulties and objections, savours strongly of his readings in Voltaire, and of the whole attitude to revelation and to the supernatural inherited from eighteenth-century rationalism, Antoine's religion is shown as powerless to substantiate the hypotheses on which it is based, and as unaware of or indifferent to the self-evident contradictions it conceals; it is a system in fact which the critical examination of human reason shatters at a blow.

Then the long procession of the Heresies, with their conflicting yet similar creeds, their disturbing similarities and subtle divergencies, heightens the confusion sown by Logic, as each seeks either to establish its superiority over the hermit's faith or to discredit by its very resemblance with Christianity what he had held till now to be an unique revelation. This again is an attitude of the eighteenth-century philosophe, inclined by a widening knowledge of other sects and creeds to see them all as relative truths; and now the philological and ethnological researches of the nineteenth-century, and the many studies of comparative religions were already contributing a foundation of

scientific, and in the eyes of many, absolute, proof to these surmisals.

Antoine is as ill-equipped to vanquish the Heresies as he was to defend himself against the insidious attacks of Logic: his resistance is scarcely more than a passive endurance. He clings desperately to an ideal he cannot rationally justify and which on his own avowal has brought him none of the fulness to which he aspires. The serried ranks of the Heresies and Sins draw closer until, overcome with terror, the hermit falls to his knees and pleads for deliverance. It is then that the Virtues appear, and that the first part of la Tentation comes to a close.

(ii) Part Two.
 (a) The Vices and Virtues.

Part Two is by far the most interesting, and obscure, section of this work. In its early stages it presents, in the allegory of the Vices and Virtues, a picture of humanity in all the diverse aspects of its suffering and aspiration; later, in the allegory of the Monsters, it is concerned with the metaphysical problem of the origin and nature of being. In all this Antoine seems to be more or less forgotten; even when he reappears on the scene it is scarcely in his own right, but rather as a peg on which to hang ideas.

The study of the human condition which is presented to us here is based on conceptions familiar from the earlier writings.

but constitutes a far more penetrating analysis of behaviour and motivation than anything we have met so far.

The general conception of man as seen in the Juvenilia was that of a being constantly dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction and the incapacity to attain to any but a momentary fulfilment, is the curse of human nature. The tragedy becomes a double one, however, when the individual seeks to satisfy this "sacra fames" with the fruits of earth, and demands of the material finite what only the spiritual infinite can give. The author of the Tentation sees every form of human activity and thought as the expression of this spiritual aspiration directed towards illusory ends, be they of material satisfaction, as typified in the Vices, or supernatural fulfilment as represented in the Virtues.

The allegory of the Vices and Virtues, despite traces of the melodramatic, and of that Byronic Satanism evident in the adolescent compositions, ⁽¹⁾ attains at times to tragic force. It opens with an acrimonious dispute between the Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins, incarnations of the material and sensuous appetites, 'les cupidites du monde', as Satan calls them. Despite all the promises of happiness with which they tempt mankind, they are wretched and tormented, being of their essence insatiable.

(1) of.p.319. 328. where we have the customary picture of hell filled with kings and prelates, popes and saints, all the great ones who remain in honoured memory here on earth.

'Nous sommes tristes', they moan, 'nous nous ennuyons de nous-mêmes, nous voudrions fuir hors de nous, nous déverser dans des courants plus nombreux, descendre plus avant, nous rassasier plus encore.'

Their constant craving is expressed with an intensity which can only have its source in Flaubert's own intimate suffering, in the sense of a complete incapacity for self-fulfilment, and the conviction of the futility of all that material reality has to offer. 'Je voudrais jouir longtemps, éternellement plus fort,' cries Lust. '... Quand aurais-je ce que j'attends? Quand saisis-je donc ce que j'effleure? je ne sais où se trouve cette chose vague qu'il me semble poursuivre à travers la possession même, car le bonheur que j'ai n'est pas le bonheur que j'attends; il doit y avoir une autre ivresse dans l'ivresse, et j'entrevois par les fissures du plaisir, comme par la fente d'une porte, des perspectives prolongées dont les rayonnements m'éblouissent...'

But although they can bring man no real satisfaction, they are possessed of an irresistible attraction. For they appear to offer immediate access to a visible and tangible fulfilment which demands no sacrifice to be attained. 'Vous seriez tous faibles comme des vertus, vides comme des principes, sottés comme des idées, s'il n'y avait en permanence, derrière vous, l'éternelle illusion que j'y ai mise..,' Satan tells them. It is the power of this illusion that draws their victim further and further into their

mesh, believing as he does, because he makes of them an absolute, that eventually they will satisfy him, that they hold some possibility of fulfilment he has not yet attained to. 'Il me faudrait ensemble la digestion et l'appétit,' cries Gluttony, car je me désole d'être repu et je suis continuellement dévorée par le besoin de me repaître.'

Not only does man seek to possess through the Vices an infinite fulfilment they cannot offer, but he longs to find in their pursuit the possibility of losing of himself, of abolishing the interval between himself and the object of his desire. 'J'ai retiré du trou mon argent,' murmure Avarice, 'je l'ai caché dans mon matelas: comme j'avais peur, je l'ai mis dans ma poche: comme ma poche n'était pas sûre, je l'ai placé dans mon linge, je le sens là qui se touche la peau, je voudrais l'y coudre, le faire entrer dans ma chair, l'encoffrer dans mon coeur, être argent moi-même.' (1)

(1) My italics. This last phrase provides significant commentary on the passage which comes as the conclusion and climax of Part Two ('je voudrais ... circuler dans la matière, être matière moi-même ...') Both indicate an urge for self-abdication which M. Georges Poulet, in his most interesting study of Flaubert figuring in his Etudes sur le Temps Humain (Edinburgh University Press, 1949. Ch. XV, p. 318.), has shown to be characteristic of Flaubert's, and of what one might generally describe as the mystic temperament. 'Flaubert', the author writes, 'n'éprouve, dans sa plénitude, conscience de lui-même que dans le moment où il sort de lui-même pour s'identifier, par... la perception, avec l'objet, quelqu'il soit, de cette perception.' We shall have occasion to refer to this study in greater detail in subsequent pages of this chapter.

But it is vain to seek this possibility in the realm of the Vices; man cannot lose himself in the restricted finite, nor wholly identify himself with the material.

If, however, the individual eventually realises the total inadequacy of all that is represented by the Seven Sins to pacify his 'éternelle inquiétude' and heal his 'peine démesurée', Pride will blind him to their insufficiency and steel him against admitting to his suffering. She knows too how to disguise their base materiality under the cover of a false virtue, and thereby lull the misgivings of their victims. She builds churches with the treasures amassed by Avarice, and has instituted fasting as a refinement of Gluttony.

Thus is exposed the irredeemable futility of all materialistic preoccupations when conceived of as a unique end in life. We have seen the roots of this extreme pessimism in experience dating from childhood, and are familiar with the theme of omnia vanitas from many a page of the Juvenilia. What is of real interest in these pages, particularly in view of many of Flaubert's future characterisations, is the idea of the spiritual impulsion underlying all man's activity, and of the inadequacy of that activity to satisfy him. The parallel between the allegoric portrayal of Lust here, and the characterisation of Emma Bovary, will have been obvious to the reader: in the same novel Lheureux will recall Avarice, and much later, in the last of the Trois Contes, Aulus Vitellius will be as it were a re-incarnation of Gluttony.

Moreover, as we have indicated, it is not the prerogative

of the Vices alone to offer an apparent fulfilment. When we turn to the Virtues, with whom, it may be remembered, Antoine had taken refuge, we see that their promise too is of consummation 'l'éternelle délectation d'une attente assouvie' the perfect knowledge and supreme joy which come when self is identified with the illimitable for which it longs. 'Un jour tu sauras tout, tu te délecteras de clartés, et ta joie grandira sans cesse', promises Hope. Even now, Charity assures him, this identification is possible - '... pense à Dieu, rien qu'à lui, anéantis ton être sous le poids de sa miséricorde, afin qu'en deçà de la mort même tu te dissipes tout entier dans l'immense amour.' Thus will be attained 'cette compréhension incompréhensible' in which the soul lies still as an unruffled lake. 'Enfermée dans ma loi' Faith affirms to the hermit, 'comme un lac entre les montagnes, l'âme en sa pureté reflètera les cieux.'

But Antoine knows that despite his fervent prayer and constant mortification, his religion has brought him only momentary ecstasies, serving but to intensify his longing. And now Logic and Science are quick to prove the Virtues as false to their promise as the Seven Deadly Sins.

(111) Part Two.
 (b) Science.

We are already acquainted with the former of these allegoric figures, but Science is a newcomer. He is presented as the offspring of Pride, 'enfant en cheveux blancs, à la tête

demesurée et aux pieds grêles' in whose outward appearance are symbolised at once the immensity of his ambitions and potentialities, the meagreness of his achievement heretofore, and the painful slowness with which he advances. For he is surrounded by mystery, weary and rebellious under the rule of Pride... 'Tu m'as promis que je serais heureux, que je trouverais quelque chose, mais je n'ai rien trouvé. je cherche toujours, j'entasse, je lis.'

'Arrête! repose-toi!' cries Sloth, but she asks the impossible... 'ma pensée va d'elle-même accomplissant son irrésistible voyage,' replies the child, with a light as of dawn in his eyes, 'et sans savoir où nous allons, nous tournons dans des cercles parallèles.' He is seeking for knowledge, and through knowledge, for truth, and despite the immensity of his task and the obscurity of the path that lies before him, his triumph is assured.

Thus it is that he is set up in opposition to Faith, as aspiring to and destined to grasp the truth which she purports to possess but which in reality she does not know, and fears - '... tu es la négation, l'étouffement, la haine,' accuses Science. 'Moi, je suis le grand amour inquiet, qui s'avance pas à pas dans ce chemin de l'esprit que tu te plais à bouleverser...' So far she has reigned serene and unchallenged, but the time is coming now when she will find herself an outcast... 'j'expliquerai le corps comme l'âme'. Science continues, 'la matière comme l'esprit, le péché comme la pénitence, le crime comme la vertu, le mal comme le bien, et je rajeunirai sans cesse tandis que tu te courberas vers la décrépitude.... Alors tu te traineras sur ta béquille,

tu branleras le chef en pleurant, tu marmotteras ta colère, et tu resteras comme une pauvre à la porte de l'église...'

Faith has no answer to make, and does not attempt to defend herself, though she tries feebly enough to keep the hermit from 'L'enfant de l'ambîme, la malédiction même', showing him her robe in tatters round the hem: 'Tiens, vois-tu, c'est elle', she murmurs, designating Science, 'qui a fait ces trous que je cache en marchant.'

This radical opposition of Faith and Science, and the supreme confidence in the potentialities of the latter, is an attitude typical of the period, and perfectly exemplified in Renan's Avenir de la Science, (written the same year as Flaubert's first Tentation, though only published in 1890). It seemed that Christianity, already in the last stages of its decadence, was about to be superseded by truth, truth as gradually revealed and eternally established by an infallible Science, irresistible in its progress and to some, in the first flush of enthusiasm, illimitable in its possibilities. (1)

(1) cf. Zola's Docteur Pascal (published in 1893, but expressing with regard to science, opinion prevalent in the mid-century). 'La poursuite de la vérité par la science est l'idéal divin que l'homme doit se proposer: je crois que tout est illusion et vanité en dehors du trésor des vérités lentement acquises et qui ne se perdront jamais plus'. (quoted by M.R. Fath. L'Influence de la Science sur la Littérature Française dans la deuxième moitié du 19^{ème} Siècle. Lausanne, 1901.)

Flaubert certainly believed that Christianity as a spiritual force was dying, if not dead. In adolescence he had tended to look upon its passing with regret, not knowing by what it would be replaced, in what the new generation should put their faith. But here, and in one or two passages in the Correspondance of the fifties, ⁽¹⁾ he seems to show himself the true son of an Ideologist father, and even, despite his scorn for the philosophy of Comte, something of a disciple of that deviation of true Positivism which has come to be known as Scientism. For he acclaims Science as the hope of the future, the key to all that is still hidden from us - 'ce qui est obscur resplendira, ce qui est informe se complètera, ce qui semble monstrueux apparaîtra superbe', the child Science promises Faith.

But despite such affirmations, Science for the Flaubert of this middle period of the century is still in its childhood, a potential rather than a real force. For the time being, as Flaubert wrote in 1852, humanity is at a transitional stage, 'dans un corridor plein d'ombre: nous tâtonnons dans les ténèbres.'⁽²⁾

(1) cf. in particular Corr. III. 271. 7-8 juillet 1853: and later Corr. IV. 357. 18 décembre 1859. We shall return to the question of Flaubert's attitude to and conception of the functions of Science in subsequent pages of this chapter, dealing more fully there with his confusing oscillations between an enthusiastic scientism and a more strictly positivist outlook.

(2) Corr. II. 396. 24 avril 1852 à Louise Colet.

The old beliefs have fallen into decay, but the journey towards the light has only just begun - 'Nous sommes venus, nous autres, ou trop tôt ou trop tard. Nous aurons fait ce qu'il y a de plus difficile et de moins glorieux: la transition.'⁽¹⁾

Destructive rather than constructive therefore, the role of Science in these first Tentations is a negative one: with the aid of Logic to banish Faith. Their combined attack closely resembles that preceding the arrival of the Heresies in the First Part: an expression of the author's own questions and difficulties, strongly coloured by a Voltairian scepticism. When the Virtues are finally put to flight, Logic, Science and Pride preach a naturalistic humanism again typical of the eighteenth century: 'Qu'as-tu besoin de rester dans les temples?' asks the latter, 'la main des hommes a-t-elle donc pu enfermer Dieu et plus que toutes ces pierres n'es-tu pas toi-même le temple saint où réside sa grâce?' And Logic urges him out of his chapel: 'Pour te rapprocher de lui d'avantage, franchis donc ce qui te sépare de ses oeuvres.... Sors donc, hume l'air!' So Antoine moves out into the night, unprotected, and a new series of temptations begins.

(iii) Part Two.
(c) The Visions.

They come in the form of visions, for the most part

(1) Corr. II. 279. 19 décembre 1850 à Louis Bouilhet.

hardly relevant to the progression of the work, and serving rather as an outlet for the author's amazingly fertile imagination; they are a concession to his love of the fantastic, the exorbitant, and even the brutally sensuous. Antoine discovers immense treasure in the sand (a repetition of a sequence already figuring in Part One). He is transported into the streets of Ancient Athens and into the dwelling of one of her courtesans, to the court of Nebuchodnezzar, to scenes of orgy and lechery. In a passage omitted from the 1856 version a troupe of actors, poets and troubadours celebrate the glittering enthusiasms of their strange and solitary existence. All the bitterness and suffering attendant on the artistic vocation are expressed in this harsh allegory.

'Nous nous tenons en équilibre au milieu des airs... nous nous précipitons la tête en bas pour amuser ceux qui nous regardent. Quelque chose nous pousse à faire ce métier. Nous avalons des lames tranchantes, nous mettons sur nous des fardeaux qui nous écrasent, nous vivons avec des choses dangereuses.' (1)

(1) There is a rather curious echo of this comparison of the artist to the circus performer in the Journal des Goncourt (I.226. 15 novembre 1859):

'Nous n'allons qu'à un théâtre. Tous les autres nous ennuiant et nous agacent... Le théâtre où nous allons est le Cirque... Et nous les voyons, ces braves, risquer leurs os dans les airs pour attraper quelques bravos, nous les voyons avec je ne sais quoi de féroce curieux en même temps que de sympathiquement apitoyé, - comme si ces gens étaient de notre race, et que tous, bobèches, historiens, philosophes, pantins et poètes, nous sautions héroïquement pour cet imbécile publique...'

They are men who have lost hope in an art which is a thing of devices and artificialities, a combination of the same outworn themes and threadbare phrases...

'Avons-nous assez comparé les feuilles aux illusions, les hommes à des grains de sable, les jeunes filles à des roses? Comme nous avons abusé de la lune, du soleil, de la mer!'

There is nothing of intrinsic value in it, only the outward show of form -

'les faux diamants brillent mieux que les vrais; les maillots roses valent les cuisses blanches; les perruques sont aussi longues que les chevelures...'

From the pen of one for whom Art was the supreme value, this would seem at the least disconcerting: but fundamentally it is only an expression of Flaubert's recurrent fear that his art is inadequate, that Art itself is inadequate, to express the transcendent Beauty to which it aspires. Even the noblest forms of human activity are but a travesty of what man really seeks to make of them and attain through them. (1)

(1) It is interesting to compare this passage with one of Flaubert's first letters to Louise (Corr.I.224-5.8 août 1846.)

'Je te dois une explication franche de moi-même,' he writes, '... Le fonds de ma nature est, quoi qu'on dise, le saltimbanque. J'ai eu dans mon enfance et ma jeunesse un amour effréné des planches. ... Encore maintenant, ce que j'aime par-dessus tout, c'est la forme, pourvu qu'elle soit belle, et rien au-delà... j'admire autant le clinquant que l'or. La poésie du clinquant est même supérieure, en ce qu'elle est triste.'

An affirmation which is again disorientating in one who purported never to separate form from idea, but perhaps to be understood in the same sense as his allegory: neither the glitter of spangles nor the brilliance of gold can render the brightness of that dazzling sky to which he likens 'l'Idée', 'le Verbe', ultimate Beauty.

The chant of the poets ends, however, on a note of hope, for they can always find salvation in the pride of their conviction... 'relevons la tête, soyons beaux, soyons fiers...': the 'idea' is always ready to bear them aloft to new triumphs. And so they disappear with a last, frenzied cry which represents yet again that same invincible desire to surpass self, to reach beyond one's human condition in a final and exultant liberation...

'Chantons, imitons la voix de tous les êtres... bariolons-nous de plumes d'oiseaux, teignons-nous du suc des plantes... tordons nos corps dans des poses hors nature, lançons-nous en l'air comme des boules de cuivre, et que notre âme, partant avec nos cris, s'envole bien loin, dans une hurlée titanique. Ohé! Ohé!'

Immediately after the Poets and Dancers comes the Queen of Sheba, laden with exotic and magical gifts, a fantastic vision of the stuff of dreams.

She is at once the incarnation of Seduction and a symbol of opulent luxury, a characterisation in which we see yet again that persistent need and temptation of Flaubert's to compensate in imaginary creations for all that reality lacked - brilliance, splendour, and successful love.

But Antoine repudiates her, and now, as her mysterious caravan winds away into the distance, he comes to himself again. The subsequent monologue forms the link (tenuous indeed in the first version, but expanded in the second) between the dream-visitations just described and the hallucinations which follow.

(iii) Part Two.
 (d) The Monsters.

It seems to the hermit as he struggles back from the world of illusion to that of material phenomena that the accepted distinction between the two may well be false. 'Quelle est la limite du rêve et de la réalité?', he asks himself in the first Tentation. How can he know whether the visions of which he was not only a spectator, but in which apparently he participated, are less real than his experience in the world of sense perception?... 'la création n'est peut-être pas plus vrai qu'une de ces illusions qui m'éblouissent,' he ponders in the 1856 version - 'Sais-je d'abord ce que c'est qu'une illusion, moi? En quoi consiste la réalité?... où commence l'une, où finit l'autre?'

It is not difficult to see the purely personal interest and application such a problem could hold for Flaubert. In the course of his nervous illness he had experienced to an intense degree the encroachment of the illusion on reality, had known, and still knew, periods when the world of physical phenomena was completely eliminated by the invasion of hallucinatory apparitions. 'Il me semble,' Antoine reflects, 'que les objets du dehors pénètrent ma personne, ou plutôt que mes pensées s'en échappent comme des éclairs d'un nuage, et qu'elles se corporifient d'elles-mêmes...'

We have already seen that he made a scientific study of his own nervous disorders, but apart from this strictly personal and clinical interest, the whole subject of psycho-pathology, a field of research newly opened to nineteenth-century medical science, seems to have fascinated Flaubert. A letter to Mlle. Leroyer de

Chantepie, written in 1859. ⁽¹⁾ is revealing on this score;

'... je suis revenu incidemment à ces études psycho-médicales qui m'avaient tant charmé il y a dix ans, lorsque j'écrivais mon Saint-Antoine. A propos de ma Salammbô, je me suis occupé d'hystérie et d'aliénation mentale. Il y a des trésors à découvrir en tout cela.'

As we indicated previously, this aspect of the Temptation theme must certainly have contributed to determining Flaubert's choice of subject, and there are other signs of a particular interest in, and even a desire to exploit, psychic phenomena of this nature. Witness his projected novel La Spirale, an undated manuscript presumed, on the grounds of a possible reference to it in the Correspondence of 1853, to have been written in that year. ⁽²⁾ This was to have been the story of an artist who, able to transport himself at will into a dream-world, eventually lived exclusively in the realms of the illusion - 'Dans sa folie il se sent délivré de tous les liens, il dépasse les limites de la nature humaine... il se persuade d'avoir atteint l'absolu et pénètre les vérités suprêmes.' ⁽³⁾

(1) Corr. IV.314. 18 février 1859. A Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

(2) Corr. III.146. 31 mars 1853 à Louise Colet.
'Ma maladie des nerfs... m'a fait connaître de curieux phénomènes psychologiques, dont personne n'a l'idée, ou plutôt que personne n'a sentis. Je m'en vengerais à quelque jour, en l'utilisant dans un livre (ce roman métaphysique et à apparitions dont je t'ai parlé). Mais comme c'est un sujet qui me fait peur, sanitairement parlant, il faut attendre, et que je sois loin de ces impressions-là.'

(3) v.E.W.Fischer. Etudes sur Flaubert inédit. (Leipzig 1908). p.127.

And surely Flaubert's initial conception of the theme of Madame Bovary shows once more an attempt to deal, if from a different angle with this type of problem ... 'l'idée première que j'en avais eu était d'en faire une vierge ... vieillissant dans le chagrin et arrivant ainsi aux derniers degrés de la passion révée'. He rejected this plan 'pour rendre l'histoire plus compréhensible et plus amusante, au bon sens du mot...'⁽¹⁾

In the present context however, this question of relating the world of illusion to that of sense perception is not merely a psychological, but a metaphysical problem, a search to understand the true nature of reality. Flaubert leaves the world of visions and hallucinations for that of the creative imagination. In the strange procession of legendary creatures which follows, we are concerned not with the figments of the individual's mental delirium, but with the creations of centuries of literary and artistic tradition. Nothing here is of the author's invention: it is all the result of careful documentation in medieval Bestiaries, where he found described in detail creatures which, he is sure, are as much a part of our history as those of the natural world ... 'N'adorez-vous pas les longs cheveux glauques des Naiades et la voix des Sirènes... Qu'est-ce qui n'a pas trouvé la Chimère charmante... Ne croyez-vous pas, comme s'ils avaient existé, aux Satyres ricaneurs...?' he had asked in le Voyage en Bretagne.

(1) Corr. IV. 169. 30 mars 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie

The problem of the fantastic and the grotesque, or, more widely, of all apparent negations of order and harmony in existence, was one which had long preoccupied him. This was particularly evident in l'Education Sentimentale, where one of Jules' first triumphs was to understand that 'le monstrueux et le bizarre avaient aussi leurs lois comme le gracieux et le sévère.' that 'la science ne reconnaît pas de monstre', and that in nature 'tout ... est ordre, harmonie'. Then he had tried to trace that same principle of universal harmony 'dans le monde moral', and had come to see that ugly and evil, as much as abnormal and fantastic, are relative concepts, the result of an inadequate knowledge, disappearing when reality was viewed in the perspective of the absolute and 'sub specie aeternitatis'. The answer seemed in fact to lie in Spinozist pantheism... not in any strict sense, but in the general principles of universal harmony which it expounds and in its ability to integrate all anomalies and exceptions.

So we have here an old problem - the attempt to attain to a deeper understanding of reality through the apparently unreal. But it was not only the unreal as such, as a phenomenon to be integrated into the general order of things, that interested and perplexed Flaubert. Clearly he saw in the fantastic and the grotesque a more profound significance, and he seems to have cherished the dream that these so-called monsters might somehow be or represent the primordial forms from which the creatures of the natural world derived.

Where did he meet with this idea? One might note that the full title of Creuzer's work, to which we have already referred, was Les Religions de l'Antiquité considérées principalement dans leurs formes symboliques et mythologiques. The German scholar is particularly concerned with the role of the fantastic in ancient and primitive cults, devoting lengthy considerations to the various hybrid animals figuring in this or that religious symbolism and worship. But he puts forward no theories as to the possible metaphysical or scientific and evolutionary significance these 'êtres mystérieux' may have for the modern scholar, and it is certainly not from him that Flaubert borrows his ideas on the subject.

On the other hand the idea of the existence of primordial forms is to be found in various ancient cosmogenies. Creuzer mentions, for instance, with reference to Mazdaism, a form of Zoroastrianism particularly prevalent in Persia, beings termed Fervers.

'Les Fervers sont les idées, les prototypes, les modèles de tous les êtres, formés de l'essence d'Ormuzd, et les plus purs émanations de cette essence... par eux tout vit dans la nature... Ils sont aussi nombreux et aussi diversifiés dans leurs espèces

que les êtres eux-mêmes.' (1)

Again there may be some reminiscence of the Platonic concept of Forms, though it is certainly a far cry from that to the notion that the key to an understanding of the nature of our origin and essence is in the monsters which figure in primitive cults and ancient mythologies.

(1) Creuzer, op.cit. tome I.p.361.
 In Salammbô (begun immediately after the revision of la Tentation, in 1857), there are two passages where this same interpretation of the function of the monster is evident. In both Flaubert's documentation comes principally from Creuzer, as Hamilton has shown in his study entitled Sources of the Religious Element in Flaubert's Salammbô (Elliott Monographs, Baltimore, 1917). But it is clear, when one compares Flaubert's text with its source, that he has introduced his own theory into the facts offered by Creuzer, or others. The passages in question occur on pages 63 and 97 of the novel, and the phrases to which we particularly refer are:

- (a) 'la Matière primitive ... était une eau bourbeuse, noire, glacée, profonde. Elle enfermait des monstres insensibles, parties incohérentes des formes à naître et qui sont peintes sur la paroi des sanctuaires' (p.63).
- (b) (a description of the monsters figuring on the walls of Tanit's temple)... 'et toutes les formes se trouvaient là, comme si le receptacle des germes, crevant dans une éclosion soudaine, se fût vidé sur les murs de la salle.' (p.98)

One may note too that the hero of La Spirale, in his final apotheosis and ecstasy, believes he has actually penetrated to a complete knowledge of being, 'croit voir les choses dans leur type premier...' (E.W. Fischer. op.cit. p.127.) All this indicates how much Flaubert was concerned with this idea and with the notion that an understanding of being was to be attained only through a study of the animal world, or even a mystic identification with it.

In the field of scientific speculation one should mention the article brought to light by Professor Sez nec, entitled Histoire Naturelle des Animaux Apocryphes. It is known that this was published in the Revue Britannique in 1853, but Professor Sez nec shows that there is good reason to believe Flaubert had read it before the composition of the first Tentation.⁽¹⁾

The author attempts to prove that the monsters of legend and mythology had existed in pre-history, and that science is not justified in rejecting them. All this was obviously grist to Flaubert's mill, and such a vindication of the fantastic on scientific grounds must have rejoiced him. But it is not so much in an evolutionist as in a metaphysical context that the question of the significance of the monsters is treated here.

Spinozist pantheism, from a purely intellectual view-point, and leaving aside all the other reasons for which it failed to satisfy Flaubert, presented him with a problem he never solved, a problem which is indeed inherent in the system. Spinoza posits as the sole reality an eternal, infinite, indivisible Substance from which he derives the multiplicity of finite forms constituting the universe as we know it. But how does the finite derive from the infinite? How do the two known Attributes of Substance,

(1) Sez nec. op. cit. p.78.

Extension and Thought, both ipso facto infinite, express themselves in finite modes? Spinoza himself, apparently aware of this anomaly, interposes between the Attributes and the finite modes infinite modes - but this is only begging the question.

Although not formulated in terms of Spinozist pantheism (it is only in the third version of la Tentation that it will be thus expressed) this problem is already apparent in l'Education Sentimentale, where we find Jules attempting to correlate and trace back to the types from which they derive all the diverse forms of life which he is led to observe.

'Du cèdre aux primevères, du serpent à la femme, du pâtre... au monarque, des peuples qui bégayaient leur nom aux sociétés qui se résument dans les lois... il remonte les échelons, parcourt tous les chemins, se promène dans tous les labyrinthes, s'inquiétant du moule premier de toutes ces formes, du type de tous ces visages.'

But it is in the Voyage en Bretagne (in a passage to which we have already referred in another context) that we find the question of primeval forms linked with the problem of the monsters: 'nous les contemplons', Flaubert writes of the Satyrs, Sirens, Naiads, Chimera, 'avec un ébahissement inquiet, et retrospectif, cherchant peut-être au-delà du souvenir si, avant notre vie, comme eux aussi nous n'avons pas existé, si nos pensées n'ont pas cohabité dans une patrie commune avec ces pensées devenues formes, si le principe de notre forme à nous n'a pas couvé jadis au sein de la chrysalide universelle, avec la graine des chênes et les sources qui ont fait la mer.' And now in the present work, the author takes up the same theme; Antoine, wondering over the corporeal form which his hallucinations take, reflects that 'c'est peut-être ainsi que Dieu a pensé la création?'... and is utterly

bewildered by the multiplicity of these 'formes incessantes, infinies' moving continually over the backcloth of reality.

The visions which float before Antoine as he stands now, wondering over the disappearance of the mysterious queen, and his night of strange and fearful visitations, are indeed of creatures 'dépassant toute conception'... 'comme des types vagabonds qui cherchent de la matière', as they are described in 1856. 'ou bien des créatures s'évaporant en idées!' Ce sont des regards qui passent, des membres incomplets qui palpitent, des apparences humaines plus diaphanes que des bulles d'air'. There are the Astomi - 'un peu plus que des rêves, et pas des êtres tout à fait'; the Nisnas, half men; the Sciapodes who live in the shade of their own feet; the acephalous Elenmyes; the Pygmies; and the

Gynocephales, ape-men with dogs' heads. ⁽¹⁾ Then come the fantastic creatures of the animal world - the Sadhuzag, 'grand cerf noir à la tête de bœuf'; the Unicorn, the Griffin, the Phoenix, the Basilisk, the Martichoras 'a figure humaine, avec ... une queue de scorpion et des yeux verts'; the Catobeplos, 'buffle noir, avec une tête de pourceau'; and at last the equally strange, but this time real, Sea-Creatures ... 'Quelle quantité, quelle variété, quelles formes! ... leurs regards ont des profondeurs où mon âme tourbillonne, on dirait que ce sont des âmes.' And now, in an overwhelming concentration of the forces of

(1) There is in the first part of this strange procession an obvious satirical intention. Flaubert elaborates upon the details offered him by Pliny or the medieval Bestiaries with the same type of rather heavy humour to which he so often subjects his bourgeois victim in the Correspondance. The Nishas, one-eyed, one-eared, one-legged, with only half a body, are a people who live at ease 'dans nos moitiés de maisons ... Nous avons au patron de nous-mêmes arrangé toutes choses, pour qu'elles puissent tenir dans nos demi-cerveaux; il faut que les gazons soient raccourcis et que les chiens soient tondu.' - Lines which immediately call to mind the letter to Louise Colet in which Flaubert rails against his fellow citizens ... 'Quels demi-caractères. Quelles demi-volontés! Quelles demi-passions!' (Corr.III.19.) The Flemmys, with eyes and mouth imprinted on their chests, 'gaillarde et bien portants', proclaim with satisfaction that 'rien ne nous distingue, ne nous égare, ne nous arrête; ... le vertige n'est pas pour nous, et c'est là ce qui fait que nous sommes les gens les plus laborieux, les plus vertueux, et les plus heureux.' 'Quels êtres... Quelle sérénité!' echoes the Correspondance (III.19). Thirdly the Pygmies, 'terribles par la quantité,' with their dwarf ambitions and stunted ideals, content with their diminutive existence until the inevitable end when 'le petit malade creve et le petit médecin dîne. Alors on fait un petit coffre, on répand de petites larmes, et avec une petite pompe, on va, dans un petit coin de terre, mettre pourrir la petite charogne'.

nature, where hail, rain and snow beat down through a whirling sandstorm, where lightening flashes through sun and moon-light, and clouds scud over a twilit sky, Antoine sees this infinite diversity of form vibrating with the rhythm of a single pulse. 'un grand tas remuant de corps divers, dont chaque partie s'agite de son mouvement propre, et dont l'ensemble complexe oscille d'accord'. The fabulous and the fantastic, the monstrous, and the grotesque, participate, in perfect harmony with the creatures of physical reality, in the life-beat of essential being.

But it is not sufficient to the hermit to perceive this unity as from the outside. The final elucidation of the mystery, the knowledge of what reality actually is, and how it comes to be expressed in such diversity remains hidden from him.

At the outset of this strange parade of legendary creatures there figured a dialogue which for the sake of clarity we omitted to discuss in its chronological sequence. It consisted in an exchange between the Sphinx and the Chimera, the precise significance of which has been variously interpreted. The Sphinx, crouching motionless on the sand, is shown to possess inaccessible knowledge ... 'C'est que je garde mon secret, je rumine les choses ... je songe et je calcule, je dilate ma prunelle dans la contemplation de l'infini.' But the Chimera is never still,

darting, twisting, turning, soaring and whirling into the far distances and back again. It is her force and inspiration that drives man to all that is extravagant and fanciful in his activity and thought -

'je découvre aux hommes des perspectives éblouissantes, avec des paradis dans les nuages et des félicités lointaines: je leur souffle à l'âme les éternelles manies, projets de bonheur, plans d'avenir, rêves de gloire et les serments d'amour et les résolutions vertueuses.'

Inevitably in conflict with one another, these two creatures seek none the less an impossible union. 'O fantaisie! fantaisie! emporte-moi sur tes ailes...' pleads the Sphinx. 'O inconnu! inconnu! je suis amoureuse de tes yeux...' sighs the Chimera.

The allegory, as we have said, permits of diverse interpretations, nor are these necessarily exclusive one of the other. At its simplest it may be said to represent the two principal, and seemingly irreconcilable aspects of the mind's activity: metaphysical speculation and creative imagination. ⁽¹⁾ The Sphinx is the source of meditation and conjecture - 'des théories confuses qui bourdonnent en moi, comme le sang des existences qui battraient dans mes tempes.' But the Chimera keeps company with

(1) This is the interpretation of Professor Sezneo (op.cit.p.30). The Sphinx/Chimera dialogue expresses, in his opinion 'l'impossible conciliation de la fantaisie et de la pensée logique - problème déchirant pour Flaubert, perpétuel tourment de son âme et de son art.' (p.75).

the poets -

'Autour du flambeau des poètes je voltige en délire, mon haleine passe dans leur chevelure, et ils bondissent au contact soudain des pensées qui les frôlent...'

Seen in this light, however, the episode has apparently slight bearing on the scene which follows, and it seems justifiable to seek in it a profounder significance, and one more in keeping with the theme of subsequent pages. Surely the Sphinx is the symbol not only of speculative thought, but of the object of that thought? In this perspective she may well represent, in her inaccessibility, the mystery which the human intellect can never penetrate, despite all its efforts and longing, and the absolute to which man can never accede. 'Tous ceux que le désir de Dieu tourmente, je les ai dévorés', she claims in the third version. And the Chimera therefore would symbolise human activity in all its fever and restlessness, its desire for the strange and new, for anything surpassing the known and the experienced, all our illusory satisfactions. This again is brought out more clearly in the 1872 version. 'Je cherche des parfums nouveaux, des fleurs plus larges, des plaisirs inédites. Si j'aperçois quelque part un homme dont l'esprit repose dans la sagesse, je tombe dessus et je l'étrangle.' Her only real fulfilment would be to possess and to be one with the Sphinx, and this union, as

we have seen, is impossible. (1)

Thus understood the allegory serves both to introduce and to elucidate the conclusion and climax to which we now come.

Antoine has perceived the ultimate oneness of all phenomena as proceeding from the same principle and participating in the same flow of life, where the accepted distinctions between real and unreal, normal and abnormal, material and immaterial have no meaning, where the Phoenix and the Basilisk, creations of the mind, have their function and significance as much as the Dolphin and the Sea-Urchin. But what that function and significance are, the fundamental mystery of existence itself, he has not grasped, and this is the knowledge for which he cries out at the end of the scene: a knowledge inaccessible to the intellect. (as the Sphinx/Chimera allegory has shown) and only to be attained by a mystic intuition, a complete identification of self with Being.

(1) Cf. the interpretation of Cl. Digeon (Le Dernier Visage de Flaubert) Ch.1. p.46. 'Dans le dialogue Sphinx-Chimère, sous l'apparence allégorique il s'agit donc de la relation Etre-Pensée... l'Etre c'est le mystère, l'Inconnu... La pensée sait que l'Inconnu existe, elle pressent qu'il y a là un secret, mais elle ne peut le découvrir.'

Cf. also Lombard. La Tentation de Saint Antoine. (Paris. Neuchâtel 1934.) - 'alors se présentent le sphinx et la chimère qui symbolisent la fantaisie ailée et l'énigme immobile de la matière.' (p.70).

It seems equally justifiable to see here as a third possibility of interpretation yet another allegory of the Ideal/Illusion theme. The Sphinx representing man's effort towards the truth, towards a fulfillment which only the absolute can bring, and the Chimera all the deviations of that effort.

'Je voudrais m'en aller, partir, fuir! ... être en tout, m'émancer avec les odeurs, me développer comme les plantes, vibrer comme le son, briller comme le jour, me modeler sous toutes formes, entrer dans chaque atome, circuler dans la matière, être matière moi-même pour savoir ce qu'elle pense.'

It is not with matter as such that Antoine wishes to be identified, and this is a far cry from the materialist proclamation it has been claimed to represent. On the contrary, the temptation to identify himself with matter alone, is presented to Antoine in an interpolation made in 1856. It is Sloth who is speaking:

'Enfouis sous le sommeil, plonge-toi dans les béatitudes de l'inaction! Ta pensée, comme un vautour hors d'haleine, ira de plus en plus rétrécissant son vol, pour s'abattre sur la terre. Tu savoureras l'immobilité du néant dans le bonheur de vivre et tu arriveras à n'être plus qu'une sorte de palpitation, et comme une plante humaine.'

We are concerned here with a wholly Spinozist conception of matter as the unique Substance of reality, and in which mind remains immanent, since one is inseparable from the other.

Ultimately however, as always with Flaubert, this conclusion has its roots not in the abstract theory of Spinozist convictions: but in personal experience. We have already had occasion to remark that his turn of mind was in a sense instinctively towards that which lay beyond self, in that he sought not the isolation and protection of his individuality, but its fusion and identification with all that lay outside and painfully separate from it. ('Ne te sens-tu pas abandonné au milieu de toute la création?' Death had asked Antoine.) He was able, however, generally in moments when

his particularly sensitive response to natural beauty was intensified to the point of an ecstasy, bringing a sense of communion with the life of exterior reality, to pass beyond the limits of self and time into some mysterious experience of the universal and eternal. — 'moment d'extase,' in the words of M.G. Poulet, 'où, dans l'union du sentiment intime de la sensation pure, le moi s'identifie avec l'univers et fait dans un instant l'expérience de l'éternité.' Each of the mystic intuitions of nature we have seen described in Smarr, Novembre, l'Education Sentimentale, Le Voyage en Bretagne, is in some ways a pre-figuration of Antoine's ecstasy, and an expression of the same constant desire to attain, in a complete identification of self with exterior reality, not oblivion, disintegration, but fulness and possession.

(iv) Part Three.
 (a) Spinozism.

We shall find now as we turn to Part Three, that this problem of the knowledge of Being, presented allegorically in the final section of Part Two, is taken up again in theoretical form, so that the themes hitherto implicit now become explicit.

The reply to Antoine's 'être la matière' had come from the Devil, who had promised to reveal to him the understanding he sought. The hermit now finds himself being swept through the air by Satan to the heights of 'des immensités froides' where sea and

land disappear in an infinity of radiant blue. In an ever-widening vision he is conscious of an intellectual and spiritual liberation in which he is drawn nearer to that intuition of infinity to which he has always aspired. But, prisoner of his individuality, 'ta pensée s'agitait dans un cercle restreint', the Devil tells him - 'elle y tournait, s'y perdait, et s'affaissait épuisée sans plus vouloir avancer'. His very conception of God was by reason of this limitation wholly inadequate, a transposition of the divine into human terms - 'tu allais ramenant l'infini aux proportions de ta nature ... et le Dieu ravalé et l'homme déchu s'écartaient l'un de l'autre.' The Godhead, however, is not immortality and eternity personified in a particular and superior being; for it would thus be limited. - On the contrary, it is immanent in all things, in every manifestation of mind or matter.

It is in fact the mark of its participation in an inapprehensible infinite which makes any and every aspect of reality impenetrable to the human intellect, for we can never arrive by force of reason at anything even approaching an elucidation of the mystery of existence. 'La fiente de ton cochon ... suffisait tout comme Dieu à torturer ta pensée,' the Devil reminds his victim - 'L'infiniment petit est aussi difficile à saisir que l'infiniment grand; ... c'est qu'il y a dans l'un comme dans l'autre un insaisissable infini qui les lie d'une vie commune...'

The way to understanding lies therefore not in a rational grasp of things, but in a communion with them, since they like us

participate in the same essential being: - a drop of water, a shell, a hair, the minutest object is a gateway to the absolute. 'une cristallisation de l'infini'. How many times, Satan asks Antoine, in the contemplation of some such object, have you not experienced 'une immense harmonie qui s'engouffrait dans ton âme ... et tu éprouvais dans sa plénitude une indicible compréhension de l'ensemble irrévélé: ... un degré de plus et tu devenais nature, ou bien la nature devenait toi.'

Systematically and surely the Devil thus proceeds to destroy the hermit's conception of God, the conception Flaubert believed to be that expounded by Christian doctrine of a Maker and Judge whom he would so often compare to an Oriental Potentate. And he offers in place of this anthropomorphic deity imprisoned in a series of superstitious dogmas, the God of Spinoza, immanent Being, sole Reality ... 'L'abstraction de ceux qui pensent, ... la passion de ceux qui sentent, ... l'action de ceux qui font ... C'est lui qui vous regarde dans le regard, qui bruit dans le son, brille dans la couleur, étincelle dans la lumière ...' God is all and all is God - 'tout se lie, s'emboîte, se fond et se confond. Fini, infini, âme, corps, idées, forme se confondent ...' and every existent phenomena participates in the same essence. 'N'y-a-t-il pas', the Devil asks, 'des existences inanimées, des choses inertes qui paraissent animales, des âmes végétatives, des statues qui rêvent et des paysages qui pensent?' - Man himself is a composite of eternal elements which at the dissolution of his individuality in death 'repartent en liberté vers leur patrie première', and which in life are still, ipso facto,

part of God.

This eventual realisation of his participation and even partial identification with the absolute inspires in Antoine a delirium of joy which is in a way an echo of, and an answer to his 'être la matière'. He had longed to be identified with matter in order to attain to an intuition of Being. Now he is taught that he is himself that Being - 'mon corps est de la matière de toute matière, mon esprit de l'essence de tout esprit ... je me sens Substance! je suis Pensée! ... Et je n'ai plus peur; non, je comprends, je vois, je respire dans une plénitude ... comme je suis calme!'

Thus are recapitulated the themes allegorically presented in the Sphinx/Chimera dialogue, the procession of the Monsters, and the pantheistic ecstasy in which the scene culminated. The passage we have just described constitutes one of the most forceful and moving expositions of Spinozism literature must surely possess. The heightening exaltation and increasing rhythm with which the argument is led convey admirably the sense of liberation and transport of joy which Satan's revelations inspire in the hermit.

But it is at the same time a Spinozism strongly coloured by Flaubert's own interpretation. The logical structure of the intellectual pantheism exposed in the Ethic is retained merely as a framework, and infused with a naturistic mysticism which is purely Flaubertian. The Devil's exposition brings Antoine more than a passive understanding of a universal harmony of phenomena

in which he himself participates and will eternally participate: it is yet another revelation of the possibility of an active fusion with, and thereby in a sense possession of, essential Being. Such intuitions are however of their nature short-lived, and we know from Novembre in particular the painful desolation of the ensuing darkness. In any case we have already had ample indication of the fact that however acceptable a theory of existence Spinozism offered Flaubert, and however closely it appeared to correspond to his ideals and aspirations, his temperament and outlook, it can never be said to have represented for him an unique and exclusive conviction.

So now, as we might expect, Antoine, at the height of his enthusiasm, is assailed by the temptation of doubt. 'As-tu ... pour atteindre à la vérité, autre chose que ton idée de ce qui est vrai?' the Devil asks him. '... si tout cela n'était que dérision infinie, qu'il n'y eût que néant?... qui te dit que ce n'est pas l'absurde, au contraire, qui est le vrai, qu'il y ait même quelque chose de vrai? on ne prouve rien, et quand même on prouverait tout, jamais une preuve n'existe que par rapport ... à l'intelligence qui la perçoit...'

This revolt of nihilistic scepticism, and the old reductio ad absurdum refrain, are themes familiar from the early works, and at the end of this passage Satan's laughter echoes that of

Yuk. Obviously this still represents a temptation to Flaubert, the resort of a mind which despairs of attaining to a rational conviction of order and meaning in existence. As with Jules, we might parallel Antoine's hopeless apathy with many a passage from the schoolboy's, the student's, and the invalid's correspondence. There is the same element of dramatisation, with strains of the Romantic hero's lamentations, mingled with a real suffering; the same sense of the stupid futility of life, with the conviction that 'le bonheur n'est pas dans ce qu'on rêve. Comme une flèche lancée contre un mur, toujours le désir échappe, rebondit sur vous et vous traverse l'âme'.

(iv) Part Three.

(b) The Dispute of Death and Lust.

There is one last and obvious solution - Death. She appears now, an horrific vision in true Romantic style, offering at once the oblivion of 'l'immuable vide' and the final revelation of 'la connaissance suprême!' Clearly, although both here and in the Correspondance Flaubert is seen to profess a Spinozist interpretation of death, he remains fundamentally as much at a loss before the problem as he was in boyhood. The only real consolation the vision has to offer here is the possibility of an evasion - but evasion into the unknown, 'si tu veux le néant, viens! si tu veux la béatitude, viens! Ténèbres ou lumière, annihilation ou extase,

inconnu quel qu'il soit, ce n'est plus la vie, donc ça vaut mieux!

More interesting and revealing than this familiar configuration of Death is the conflict for possession of the hermit's soul which now engages between Death and Lust.

Lust is an incarnation of the life-force calling Antoine to a purely physical and sensuous fulfilment. 'Tu ne la connais seulement pas, cette vie que tu abandonnes... tu n'as pas savouré les fruits variés de ses ivresses'. And these fruits are many: luxury in every form, debauchery with all the refinements of sensuality it can invent, the voluptuous delights of Nature ... 'à la moisson les grappes sont enflées, et des gouttelettes suintent à travers la peau des figues; le sang bat, la sève coule, ... la mouche bourdonne sur les buissons ... couche-toi sur la mousse, baigne-toi dans les fontaines ... étreins la Nature par chaque convoitise de son être, et roule tout amoureux sur sa vaste poitrine.'⁽¹⁾

(1) This last passage makes an interesting pendant to the experiences of pantheistic ecstasy which have figured in previous pages of the Tentation, showing that there is a strong element of purely sensuous pleasure in Flaubert's appreciation of natural beauty and, as we indicated in Ch. iv., a certain emotional background to his pantheism.

It is the driving force of Lust which lies at the source of all action, all life and growth, all flowering and fruitfulness. She embodies a will to life and action so strong that the present is never sufficient to man ... 'n'a-t-il pas besoin d'autres mondes à perspectives plus reculées, pour courir plus avant et se mouvoir plus à l'aise?' She is the principle of eternal renewal which makes her victor over Death herself - 'J'ai fait pousser les marguerites sur leurs tombeaux, je perpétue de ma semence l'éternelle floraison des choses...'

But she is a physical, material force, the denial of spirit, the triumph of matter, the vengeance of the flesh over all attempted disavowals of its claims. 'Reconnais donc ma figure!' she calls to Antoine in the 1856 version. 'Viens! c'est moi! Tu m'appelais à travers les convoitises de l'amour mystique, et tu aspirais mon haleine dans le vent chaud des nuits...'

All this is the allegorical expression of an intimate personal conflict which was never ultimately resolved. There is on the one hand in Flaubert the urge to find a physical and affective fulfilment in normal human and sexual relations. '...il étouffe, ton pauvre coeur!' Lust tells Antoine, '... Pourquoi, tel qu'un homme possédé d'avarice, as-tu enfoui dans un trou les trésors de toi-même? Te voilà dénudé maintenant, et misérable tout à fait ... tu n'as jamais rien eu, ni un baiser sur les lèvres, ni la sympathie de personne...'. But on the other hand we have seen right from adolescence his impelling desire to be freed from the demands of the flesh, as from all that was likely to involve him

in the material, the practical, the social side of life, and which he as much feared as despised. A passage from a letter to Louise Colet written in 1852 typifies this attitude:

'Moi aussi je voudrais être un ange: je suis ennuyé de mon corps, et de manger, et de dormir et d'avoir des désirs. J'ai rêvé la vie des couvents, les ascétismes des brachmanes etc. ... C'est le dégoût de la guenille qui a fait inventer les religions, les mondes idéaux de l'art.'

So we find Flaubert from time to time, by a curious paradox, attempting to resolve his dilemma in professing the crudest type of materialism, and proclaiming man to be the helpless victim of sensuous appetite. We have an example of this reaction here, where Lust, at the outset symbolic of the force of life and action, as opposed to death and repose, becomes eventually an incarnation of brute sexual instinct holding absolute sway over mankind...

'Il n'y a pas d'obstacle ni de volonté que je ne brise, et comme l'action est insuffisante au désir, je me déborde sur le rêve,' she affirms to Antoine in the 1856 version; and in 1849 - 'je suis la fatalité de l'existence, je possède les êtres, qu'ils se débattent ou qu'ils veuillent. Est-ce que l'on me résiste? est-ce que l'on m'évite? qui peut me vaincre?'

An obvious corollary to this hypothesis is the claim already made by Satan and Logic earlier in the work, and quoted a few pages back in the words of Lust, ⁽¹⁾ that all religious experience is to be accounted for in the sublimation of purely physical and emotional needs, and that the practices of asceticism are in reality the expression of a perverted and morbid sensuality.

(1) p. 51.

This is a theory Flaubert must have met frequently in the course of his 'études psycho-médicales' to which we have had occasion to refer earlier in this chapter. Nineteenth-century experimental psychology, in stressing the relation between psychic and physical factors, and in establishing the affinity of hypnotic and mystic phenomena, had given foundation to the opinion that religious experience was to be accounted for precisely as were the diverse forms of psychic experience in which medical research was now beginning to interest itself. Digeon⁽¹⁾ points out how Renan, for instance, had made particular use of such theories in his exposition of the origins of Christianity, and although his eight volumes on the subject date from the sixties and seventies, the assumptions on which he works were already coming to be known and accepted among certain sections of the intelligentsia in the forties and fifties. Thus it is that Flaubert himself could class Saint Teresa of Avila on a par with Hoffmann and 'Edgar Poe'.⁽²⁾

But he was not merely expounding text-book theory in all this. The problem of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual in man had preoccupied him since boyhood. The adolescent writings oscillate between revolts of crude materialism

(1) Digeon. op. cit. p. 40.

(2) Corr. IV. 169. 30 mars 1857 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie. 'Tout ce qu'il y a dans sainte Thérèse, dans Hoffmann et dans Edgar Poe, je l'ai senti, je l'ai vu, les hallucinés me sont fort compréhensibles.'

and a Manichaean spiritualism, and we have seen that this dilemma of the apparently irreconcilable claims of body and soul was never really resolved. The Spinozist system did however bring him something approaching a theoretical solution in affirming the ultimate oneness of mind and matter, and this view was reinforced by medico-scientific findings as to the close relation between psychic and physical factors. Over and above all this his systematic and painstaking observation both of his own psychological make-up and of that of others had taught him that 'tout est lié dans l'homme',⁽¹⁾ that 'les médecins sont des imbéciles d'une espèce comme les philosophes le sont de l'autre. Les matérialistes et les spiritualistes empêchent également de connaître la matière et l'esprit, parcequ'ils scindent l'un l'autre. Les uns font de l'homme un ange et les autres un porc.'⁽²⁾ This persuasion of the indissoluble link between the physical and the spiritual, the physiological and the psychological, the emotional and the intellectual, is really much more fundamental to his conception of man than the intermittent materialist proclamations such as we have just witnessed in the allegory of Lust.

(1) Corr. II. 406. 8-9 mai 1852 à Louise Colet.
'Je n'adopte pas, quant à moi, toutes ces distinctions de coeur, d'esprit, de forme, de fond, d'âme ou de corps: tout est lié dans l'homme.'

(2) Corr. III. 271. 7-8 juillet 1853 à Louise Colet.

We have already seen in the allegory of the Vices the diagnosis of materialist activity as having its source in a spiritual hunger, and indicated then the importance of this idea to future characterisations. Now we meet with a theory which will be equally important; that all spiritual and religious experience has its roots in material and physical needs. A passage from a letter written a few years after the second Tentation, in 1859, admirably resumes this two-fold conviction:- 'Je suis convaincu', Flaubert affirms, 'que les appétits matériels les plus furieux se formulent insciemment ⁽¹⁾ par des élans d'idéalisme, de même que les extravagances charnelles les plus immondes sont engendrées par le désir pur de l'impossible, l'aspiration éthérée de la souveraine joie.' ⁽²⁾ But he cannot claim to understand this inter-action, to know what constitutes the physical and what the spiritual ... 'je ne sais', the letter continues, '(et personne ne sait) ce que veulent dire ces deux mots: âme et corps, où l'une finit,

(1) Flaubert's italics.

(2) Corr. IV. 313. 18 février 1859 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie. We might add that this passage occurs in a discussion of feminine psychology, and that the theory expressed there is of fundamental importance to Flaubert's female characterisations. We have already seen with reference to his first conception of Emma Bovary the sublimation theme where unfulfilled human needs are transposed to a spiritual plane. 'Ne voyez-vous pas', Flaubert asks his correspondent, 'qu'elles sont toutes amoureuses d'Adonis? C'est l'éternel époux qu'elles demandent. Ascétiques ou libidineuses, elles rêvent l'amour, le grand amour...' And again in a letter to George Sand: 'Depuis quand peuvent-elles se passer de chimères? Après l'amour, la dévotion; c'est dans l'ordre. Dorine n'a plus d'hommes, elle prend le bon Dieu. Voilà tout.' (Corr. V.407. fin septembre 1868).

où l'autre commence. Nous sentons des forces et puis c'est tout.'⁽¹⁾

The question remains for him, like so many problems, an impenetrable mystery.

In the text the dispute is brought to an inconclusive end by Antoine repudiating both Death and Lust. The one is a gateway to the unknown which he dare not penetrate, the other to pleasures which he fears will be only too soon exhausted, leaving an even more desperate unhappiness in their wake.

(iv) Part Three.

(c) The Procession of the Pagan Gods.

So Satan musters his final assault. Antoine is made to watch the formidable and desolate procession of the heathen gods being driven into oblivion under the lash of Death. There is in this panorama of pagan belief and practice a wealth of erudition and descriptive talent. We see 'les cinq idoles d'avant le déluge', the gods of the Orient and of the North, the divinities of Egypt, Greece and Rome, and last of all Jehovah. 'Eh bien.' murmurs Logic to the hermit. 'puisque'ils sont passés tous, le tien...'

(1) cf. Corr. V.366. fin mars 1868 à sa nièce Caroline.
 '... je ne sais ce que veulent dire ces deux substantifs Matière et Esprit: on ne connaît pas plus l'une que l'autre. Ce ne sont peut-être que deux abstractions de notre intelligence. Bref, je trouve le Materialisme et le Spiritualisme deux impertinences égales. (Flaubert's italics.)

As elsewhere in la Tentation it is only in the light of more explicit opinion as expressed in the Correspondance that we are able to distinguish the full significance of this allegory.

Certainly there is here an undeniable element of hostility, particularly in evidence in the cheap mockery of Death as she drives the procession of idols and gods past the horrified Antoine.


But it is a hostility rooted not so much in a sense of superiority and self-sufficiency as in resentment and frustration, and there is in the 1856 version a revealing interpolation in which is visualised the resurrection and last judgment of the gods. There man will avenge himself on this pale and silent army ...

'le Nègre approchera de son idole, et ... lui crachera au visage. Le Grec, avec dédain, renversera du bout de sa sandale, ses statues blanches... et les Olympes s'écrouleront au tonnerre des rires, que la vengeance humaine poussera! parcequ'ils n'ont rien donné, parcequ'ils étaient durs comme la pierre de leurs temples et plus stupides que les boeufs de l'holocauste.'

The tragedy and grotesque error of all religion is in the attempt to explain the inexplicable and to know the unknowable. Each particular sect offers only an absurd travesty of the truth it claims to possess, and lures man with the promise of a fulfilment it cannot possibly give. 'Une tristesse infinie me submerge', moans the hermit as the procession draws to its end. '... Où êtes-vous maintenant, pauvres âmes tout altérées d'espairs qui ne furent pas assouvis? Il éclate en sanglots.' ...

But in condemning religious systems Flaubert does not condemn religion itself, still less deny the suffering in which he sees its roots and the ideal towards which it purports to lead mankind.

'... ce qui m'attire par-dessus tout, c'est la religion', he wrote to Mlle. L. de Chantepie in 1857. 'Je veux dire toutes les religions, pas plus l'une que l'autre. Chaque dogme en particulier m'est répulsif, mais je considère le sentiment qui les a inventés comme le plus naturel et le plus poétique de l'humanité. Je n'aime point les philosophes qui n'ont vu là que jonglerie et sottise. J'y découvre moi, nécessité et instinct: aussi je respecte le nègre baisant son fétiche autant que le catholique aux pieds du Sacré Coeur.'⁽¹⁾

It is of course necessary to bear in mind that he was here addressing a person brought up as a Catholic and for whom the Christian Faith was a living reality, not an outmoded myth; his professed respect for the adherents to that Faith is relative, or in any case an attitude towards which he was moving, rather than one already acquired. As  Digeon has written, in connection with the first Tentation, 'il est de ses phrases que le pharmacien Homais aurait certainement aimé déclamer'. The Flaubert who wrote Un Coeur Simple is a man of wider vision than the author of Par les Champs et par les Grèves describing a procession of the Blessed Sacrament through the streets of Quimper with undisguised and mordant irony,⁽²⁾ or who, commenting on a similar occasion in Rouen in 1852 added: 'Quelle bête chose que le peuple!'⁽³⁾

(1) Corr. IV. 170. 30 mars 1857.

(2) op. cit. 299.

(3) Corr. II. 433. sans date. (juin 1852).

This is not to suggest that he ever had any sympathy for the Church: he remained an anti-clerical to the end of his days. But his attitude towards religion in any of its manifestations becomes, as we shall see in the third Tentation, more comprehensive and more favourable as he accepts the fact that, if none in his view possess the whole truth, each presents an aspect of truth, and an effort to reach it. And even now his hostility is not that of the materialist denying the absolute, but of the seeker who cannot attain to it.

Antoine, however, refuses to draw the conclusion to which Logic has tried to compel him. We have seen throughout the drama the opposition of Faith and Logic, Faith and Science, typical both of eighteenth century rationalism and of nineteenth century ideologist and scientist thought. It is to this theme that we revert when Antoine, in his first and only reaction of active opposition, tries to drive Logic away shouting 'Non! pas de raisonnement, pas de pensée: tu es la damnation, laisse-moi tranquille, fuis, fuis..'. And as he returns to prayer dawn breaks over a radiant sky, the tumultuous night fades into the peace of morning. 'Merci, merci mon Dieu qui m'avez délivré!' Satan is powerless but undefeated: for temptation is primarily from within, not from without ... 'les péchés sont dans ta poitrine, la désolation dans ta tête, la malédiction est ta nature', he warns. Antoine's present victory is only a momentary truce in a perpetual war.

(v) Concluding remarks. If we are left with a sense of relief at the eventual resolution of this spiritual combat, the dominating impression is still perhaps bewilderment at the amazing profusion and variety of the work. It purports to be centred on one particular historical figure, and to deal with a specified period; but we have seen that the main character is in fact for the most part the passive spectator of a series of allegoric visions, and that the background of fourth century Alexandria is, after the parade of the Heresies, largely abandoned for a panoramic view of earlier civilisations. The figure of Antoine fades before the visions constantly assailing him, and his story is apparently forgotten in the series of speculations on the origin and destiny of man, on the nature and essence of life.

And yet the key to the unity of the work, in so far as it has any, is in the figure of the hermit. What has been presented to us is surely, fundamentally, what we have already learned to recognise as Flaubert's conception of heroism: the steadfast perseverance of the individual in the pursuit of a chosen ideal endowing his existence with a significance and purpose transcending material reality, and for which he has sacrificed all other possibilities and potentialities.

The theme is one of suffering too, the double suffering of an incomplete understanding and an unfulfilled aspiration. Antoine, tormented from the outset by this constant desire for light, becomes increasingly conscious of the mystery of existence, which neither the doctrines of his faith nor the free enquiries

of his mind can compass. The temptations offer him alternative solutions, either spiritual, as with the Heresies, or intellectual, as with the Devil's exposition of Spinozist pantheism and the promises of Science. But whilst these serve to strengthen his conviction of the inadequacy of his own choice as a revelation of truth, they do not elicit from him any disavowal of that choice.

On the other hand he is faced with the possibility of refusing the problem - of evasion into the various types of activity represented in the Vices, or the final despair of nihilistic scepticism with its logical conclusion in suicide. These temptations too he rejects, mistrusting the known and fearing the unknown.

So the final scene shows him still set in the way of his choosing. Dawn breaks and he is rapt in ecstasy; but his victory, indisputable, is inconclusive. For until he has attained to the fulness of absolute truth he will remain the prey of temptation and the victim of constant suffering. And that absolute, as the long procession of Heresies and pagan divinities and the vast survey of human activity were meant to show, remains inaccessible to man. Even the communion of a pantheistic ecstasy, in which he had come nearer than on any other occasion to an intuition and possession of life in its essence and mystery, was a thing of short duration, and the perception of what a complete fusion with Being would bring rather than its actual revelation. The last stage was never accomplished... 'je voudrais...'⁽¹⁾ être la matière pour savoir ce qu'elle pense'. - 'je me sens Substance! je suis

(1) My italics.

Pensée!' - but he does not know what Substance or Thought are.

Antoine's victory is therefore not a vindication of his faith as absolute truth, but a triumph of adherence to his self-appointed mission. It compares only too obviously with the apotheosis of Jules once he had made his option for Art, and even more with Flaubert's own conception of his vocation and of the function of his ideal, as the means of adoring and approaching a transcendent, infinite and eternal principle to which he could never accede.

Here is the frame-work and main theme of the Tentation in its early stage.

III.

(1) Background to the third version.

Apart from passing references we have not thus far had occasion to consider the 1874 version, but we shall find now that it not only confirms, but clarifies the theses which we have attempted to distinguish in the first Tentations. It has been described as a completely new work. It does indeed present very considerable structural and stylistic changes, and there are modifications too in attitude and judgments, new conceptions of old themes, new formulations of theories we have already met, above all a conclusion which sets the work in a slightly different light. But basically it presents the same problems and is an expression of the same fundamental outlook.

It was in 1869, after the completion of the second Education Sentimentale, that Flaubert began to work on the manuscript he had put away some fifteen years ago. He revised his documentation, and in the summer of 1870, despite his bitter grief at the death of Bouilhet, started to write. Then came the Franco-Prussian war and compulsory evacuation from Croisset, and it was not until the Spring of 1871 that he was free to return there. He found his papers untouched by the occupying Prussian officers, and in the course of the next year rewrote the whole work. It was published after an interval of several months early in 1874.

During the interim period, which covers the late fifties and

the sixties, Flaubert had kept abreast with most current publications, and we should mention particularly in this connection the writings of Taine and Renan, with both of whom, as with Littré, he conversed and corresponded at intervals. It was at this time too that he acquainted himself with the theories of Darwin and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, though the Correspondance does not reveal whether this was by direct contact with the works, or by means of articles and critical writings. (1)

It would seem, however, despite the contrary opinion of some critics, (2) that most of what Flaubert read served rather to confirm or to help him formulate views he had already evolved than to effect any radical change in his outlook.

(1) The first translations of Spencer date from 1871-2 (Premiers Principes, 1871; Classification des Sciences, 1872); but, as Digeon shows, there appeared in 1864 a detailed account of the First Principles in an article by Laugel (Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 fév.) concurrent with numerous articles in English periodicals. It is probably in this way that Flaubert first acquainted himself with the philosophy of the Unknowable, though he may have read the First Principles in English.

The reference to the writings of Darwin comes in a letter to George Sand (Corr.VII.163. 3 juillet 1874) à propos of Haeckel's Création Nouvelle which Flaubert was then reading in translation - '... le darwinisme m'y semble plus clairement exposé que dans les livres de Darwin lui-même'.

(2) Cf. Digeon op. cit.

If, for example, he found in Taine the principles of a purely experimental method in literary biography, which refuses all that is not historical and proven fact, and demands the scientific organisation and objective expression of material, and if it was on these principles that he rewrote the story of his fourth-century hermit, it must be remembered too that this was a method which he had himself evolved in the course of a painful apprenticeship which had begun with the composition of Madame Bovary.

And as far as Taine's thought was concerned, Flaubert was far from finding himself in complete agreement, particularly now, when his trust in the infinite progress of Science had been more or less completely abandoned, and his outlook bore close affinities with that of a philosopher Taine categorically rejected... Herbert Spencer. Even with regard to the former's literary theory, Flaubert had decided reservations to make -

'j'en blâme le point de départ. Il y a autre chose dans l'art que le milieu où il s'exerce et les antécédents physiologiques de l'ouvrier. Avec ce système-là on explique la série, le groupe, mais jamais l'individualité ... on nie toute volonté, tout absolu.' (1)

He admired and respected the critic, extolled the erudition, the lucidity and fine perception of his work, but its influence on him was distinctly relative. (2)

(1) Corr. V.160. octobre? 1864 à Mme Roger des Genettes.

(2) The following passage from a letter to la Princesse Mathilde (Corr.V.384. juillet 1868) is both interesting and revealing: 'Quant à l'ami Taine... Je ne le crois pas capable de sentiments violents. Une grande souffrance et une grande ivresse doivent lui être étrangers. Tant mieux pour lui. Ne trouvez-vous pas qu'il a l'air né marié? C'est un homme moderne; moi, je suis un fossile. Il est plein de calme et de raison. Moi, un rien me trouble et m'agite. Donc je l'envie profondément.'

Flaubert had closer affinities with Renan, and by the time he embarked upon the third Tentation, which they discussed together at intervals, he was familiar with most of the latter's writings published thus far ... Etudes d'histoire religieuse:⁽¹⁾
La vie de Jésus⁽²⁾ (to which, however, he preferred the work of Strauss ... 'J'aime que l'on traite ces matières-là avec plus d'appareil scientifique'); Les Apôtres - ('Je trouve cela superbe');⁽³⁾ Essai de Morale et de Critique: Saint Paul:⁽⁴⁾
Questions Contemporaines:⁽⁵⁾ and he continued to read him, generally speaking with whole-hearted approbation.⁽⁶⁾

What appealed to and interested him here was the apparently scientific, objective and unprejudiced approach to problems which, we have seen, had long preoccupied him. But the attitude and theories expressed tended rather to coincide with those he already held than to offer him new solutions. For indeed, as far as the questions of the origins of Christianity and the nature of religious experience were concerned, Renan only formulated ideas already current, particularly in Germany, amongst a large section of the educated and thinking public. It is said that the views expressed in the third Tentation, on the function and value of

- (1). published 1857. Corr. IV. 242. 12 décembre 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.
 (2). " 1863. Corr. V.106. fin juillet 1863 à J. Duplan.
 (3). " 1866. Corr. V.211. 24 Avril 1866 à sa nièce.
 (4). " 1859. Corr. V.326. septembre - octobre 1867 à la Princesse Mathilde.
 (5). " 1869. Corr. VI.29. 20-30 juin 1869 à sa nièce.
 (6). " 1868. Corr. VI. 286 4 - 5 octobre 1871 à George Sand.

religious belief, as opposed to the more negatively critical outlook of the earlier versions, owe much to the influence of Renan. This may be so, though we shall see that Flaubert's attitude on this score fluctuates more than such affirmations would suggest. But, with the exception of 'mon vieux et trois fois grand Spinoza', ⁽¹⁾ the thinker who most fired Flaubert's enthusiasm in these later years was Herbert Spencer, in whose philosophy he discovered the reconciliation of scientific thought and religious belief, and the recognition of the ultimate truth as inaccessible. The various creeds, Spencer maintained, however diametrically opposed in detail, are all agreed that the creation in which we move is the manifestation of a power surpassing human understanding, that the existence of the world is an unexplained mystery. Science, on the other hand, in revealing to us all that is explicable in ourselves and in the universe, shows the more clearly all that lies beyond the range of human understanding. Both therefore express a part of truth, but both admit, explicitly or implicitly, that there lies beyond the known and knowable the Unknowable. Our duty is to submit humbly to the limitations of our nature, not claiming to possess a revelation we cannot possess, but not denying the existence of a reality and force beyond the rationally demonstrable.

If Flaubert had not himself arrived at an explicit reconciliation of Faith and Science ... (indeed we have seen how the first

(1) Corr. VI.364. fin mars 1872 à George Sand.

Tentations present the two forces as radically opposed) ... he had always held as one of his most intimate convictions the fundamental thesis of this philosophy of the Unknowable - the inaccessibility of absolute truth.

We must therefore expect to find as we turn to the text of the last Tentation a modification rather than a revolution in outlook, affecting most particularly the roles of religion, as represented in the Heresies and in the pagan gods, and of science as personified in a new character, Hilarion.

(ii) Science and Religion.

The basic problem remains the same: the quest after a perfect understanding which will bring the fulfilment to which the hermit aspires. And it is because he is conscious of an intellectual and spiritual dissatisfaction that the temptations have a hold over him - 'engourdis ou furieuses, elles demeurent dans ma conscience. Je les écrase, elles renaissent, m'étouffent; et je crois parfois que je suis maudit.'

As in the earlier versions he is offered the possibility of evasion into a material or sensuous fulfilment, though the Vices have now disappeared from the scene and the temptations take the subtler form of mental images. A luxuriant profusion of delicacies beyond all imagining offers itself to his appetite; immense

treasure solicits him with the illusory promise of measureless power ... 'Rien d'impossible, plus de souffrance!' He dreams of orgies of carnage and vengeance, enjoys in imagination the adulation of the multitudes and the intoxication of fame, and knows at last the final revolt of voluntary self-abasement where 'repu de débordements et d'exterminations l'envie le prend de se rouler dans la bassesse'. Then he comes to himself again, and enraged by his own weakness in temptation begins to flagellate himself in a masochistic fury which culminates in a vision of the Queen of Sheba, the incarnation of Luxury and Seduction as she was in the first Tentations.

All this, constituting Parts One and Two of the work (which is this time sub-divided into seven sections), is expressed with that graphic force we have become accustomed to find in these attempts to compensate in literature all that was lacking to his daily existence. Perhaps only to be expected in an adolescent on the threshold of life, it approaches the tragic in an adult who has reached maturity.

But as always the lure of material satisfactions is superseded by a horror and disgust of the physical and all that appertains to it, and with Part Three we embark upon a series of intellectual and spiritual temptations. It is the role of

Science to offer these means to liberation, introducing himself this time in the person of Hilarion, a former disciple of the hermit, in outward appearance the same dwarfed, white-haired child of the earlier versions. He is however vastly different from the sickly and aggressive creature we met previously, and when he finally reveals his true identity we see him transfigured with the light of an angelic beauty. His disguise is not for long deceptive in any case, and he soon shows himself Antoine's mentor rather than pupil, though the overweening assurance and slick arguments of 1848 and '56 have been abandoned for a calm and apparently humble reasoning. No longer a potential but a real force, he has come nonetheless to the realisation of his limitations, and he seeks not to convert the hermit to some new system or creed, but to prove to him the relativity of all our knowledge and to lead him beyond the narrow limits of his present belief into a more adequate representation of that part of truth which is accessible to us.

It is with this end in view that the Heresies are made to appear one by one before Antoine, in an effort to lever him out of the comfortable certitude which is the fruit of ignorance and pride - 'On dit: "Ma conviction est faite, pourquoi discuter?" et on méprise les docteurs, les philosophes, la tradition, et jusqu'au texte de la Loi qu'on ignore. Crois-tu tenir la sagesse dans ta main?' Hilarion asks his victim. But as we have seen, Antoine is only too conscious of the inadequacy of his faith to satisfy him rationally or spiritually, and although he

attempts to resist the disquieting argumentation of his supposed disciple his fundamental uncertainty invites temptation in the form of alternative solutions... the Heresies.

In the earlier Tentations Antoine had been confused and terrified by them, unable to assimilate their teaching, refusing even to listen to them. Here too, as he hears their increasingly fantastic claims and observes their strange practices, he founders for a moment in bewilderment and fear - 'Quels cris! Quels yeux! Mais pourquoi tant de débordements de la chair et d'égarements de l'esprit?' But this is a rhetorical question to which he supplies his own answer: 'C'est vers Dieu qu'ils prétendent se diriger par toutes ces voies. De quel droit les maudire, moi qui trébuche dans la mienne?' To dismiss as false and even abhorrent another's vision of the absolute is rationally indefensible; what is more, an objective and comprehensive attitude is in a sense a liberation. 'C'est comme s'il y avait dans mon intelligence plus d'espace et plus de lumière. Je suis tranquille...'

When we turn to the pagan gods who now join the procession we find a similar modification in the manner of their presentation. They form an even more grotesque and terrifying multitude than the Heresies, and leave the hermit aghast, filled with pity for 'toutes les âmes perdues par ces faux dieux', and revolted - 'Mon coeur se soulève de dégoût devant ces dieux bestiaux, occupés toujours de carnage et d'incestes!' But Hilarion, unmoved, forces upon him the conclusion he had drawn for himself with regard to the schismatic sects, reminding him too of all

those things in the Scriptures which scandalise him because in his ignorance he does not know how to interpret them ... 'De même, ces dieux, sous leurs formes criminelles, peuvent contenir la vérité.' Had he not already warned Antoine that 'il faut, pour son salut ... écouter toutes les raisons, ne dédaigner rien, ni personne?'

As the voice of Jehovah, the last of the procession, dies away in the distance 'il se fait un silence énorme, une nuit profonde'. 'Tous sont passés,' murmurs Antoine. But Hilarion, 'transfiguré, beau comme un archange, lumineux comme un soleil' at last reveals his true identity.

'Il reste moi! Mon royaume est de la dimension de l'univers, et mon désir n'a pas de bornes. Je vais toujours, affranchissant l'esprit et pesant les mondes, sans haine, sans peur, sans pitié, sans amour, et sans Dieu. On m'appelle la Science.'

Many critics have seen an important change of emphasis in the relation of Science and Religion as presented in the third version. In 1849 the two were in radical opposition, Faith destined to be completely destroyed by the progressive and indisputable revelations of Science. Certainly the crude mockeries of Death as she drove the pagan gods before her, the blustering menaces of Science and the ironies of Logic are expressions of an attitude no longer in evidence in 1872. Hilarion is widely comprehensive in outlook: he is only careful to point out to the

hermit that 'La Religion seule n'explique pas tout; et la solution des problèmes que tu méconnaissais peut la rendre plus inattaquable et plus haute.' He himself, though he has grown from a sickly child to the radiant figure who stands before Antoine at the end of Part Five, makes no claim to be able to penetrate the mystery of which all the creeds and beliefs he mustered before the saint purported to hold the secret.

But even in 1848 Flaubert's confidence in the potentialities of Science was a relative and intermittent conviction, never, for example, approaching that of Renan's middle years. And on the other hand, his attitude towards religion in general, or towards Christianity, oscillated continually between indignant scorn at its naive presumptuousness and respect for the spiritual need and aspiration in which he believed it had its source. 'C'est ce besoin-là qui est respectable, et non les dogmes éphémères.'⁽¹⁾

If in 1872 Hilarion no longer directly attacks Christianity, (the Theological Virtues having been withdrawn from the scene), the inference that it is about to share the fate of all the other sects and cults which are now only a part of history is abundantly clear.⁽²⁾ And Science remains none the less the

(1) Corr.V.148. été 1864 à Mme. Roger des Genettes.

(2) Both Fischer (op.cit.p.71) and Bertrand (Gustave Flaubert, 1912 - Ch.V.p.126) describe a passage originally intended for this last version, and found in Flaubert's first attempt to revise the 1856 Tentation, dating from 1869, where Christ was seen to die unheeded under the weight of the cross in the busy streets of Paris.

hope of the future, working continually towards the emancipation of the human intellect from false absolutes, though it is powerless to accede to the true Absolute.

For Flaubert has indeed only one ultimate and unchanging conviction, as clear in the first Tentation as it is now in the third ... that the truth is inaccessible. And his impatience with those who claim to possess it, be they pagan, Christian, Voltairian (and these, in his estimation, had no connection with Voltaire except in name), or would-be Positivist, is equally indignant. For they are all alike beset with 'la rage de vouloir conclure ... une des manies les plus funestes et les plus stériles qui appartiennent à l'humanité.'⁽¹⁾ It is precisely on this account that he claims to value science above religion or metaphysics, which, because they seek to explain the inexplicable, inevitably arrive at false conclusions. 'Chaque religion et chaque philosophie a prétendu avoir Dieu à elle, toiser l'infini et connaître la recette du bonheur', continues the letter from which we have just quoted, and which has its echo in previous and later pages of the Correspondence. But 'les sciences naturelles ... ne veulent rien prouver.'⁽²⁾ And as soon as Science attempts to draw conclusions, to put herself at the service of a system, a preconceived notion, a particular end, she invalidates her method and her findings. The Science Flaubert admires and extols is

(1) Corr. V.III. 23 octobre 1863 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

(2) Corr. III. 154. 31 mars 1853 à Louise Colet.

'le grand amour inquiet', untrammelled by prejudice, calm, objective, comprehensive, advancing step by step in patient examination of and rigorous submission to fact, a principle which Voltaire, the Idéologues, Littré, Claude Bernard, Taine, had all sought to inculcate in their readers and disciples.

The cry for science and for scientific men, in this sense of the practice of a particular method and approach when dealing with problems of any kind ... human, political, metaphysical, aesthetic... is heard again and again in the Correspondance.

Witness the following passage from a letter of December, 1857 -

'Il faut pourtant que les sciences morales prennent une autre route et qu'elles procèdent comme les science physiques, par l'impartialité... Nous manquons de science avant tout; nous pataugeons dans une barbarie de sauvages; la philosophie telle qu'on la fait et la religion telle qu'elle subsiste sont des verres de couleur qui empêchent de voir clair parce que 1° on a d'avance un parti-pris; 2°. parce qu'on s'inquiète du pourquoi avant de connaître le comment; et 3° parce que l'homme rapporte tout à soi.' (1)

But in his respect and admiration for the scientific method Flaubert falls into the trap of Scientism now as he did earlier, claiming for example that a scientific attitude to human problems could do more good to mankind than all the charity of a Saint Vincent de Paul, and that the salvation of French civilisation after the defeat of 1871 lay in the hands of men of science like Renan and Littré, and not in any political or religious formula.

(1) Corr. IV.243, 12 décembre 1857 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie.

The Correspondance of 1869-70 in particular is full of demands for 'scientific' government such as might have come from the pen of any disciple of Comte. In 1869 he writes to George Sand:

'Il ne s'agit plus de rêver la meilleure forme de gouvernement, puisque toutes se valent, mais de faire prévaloir la Science. Voilà le plus pressé. Le reste s'ensuivra fatalement. Les hommes purement intellectuels ont rendu plus de service au genre humain que tous les saint Vincent de Paul du monde! Et la politique sera une éternelle niaiserie tant qu'elle ne sera pas une dépendance de la Science. Le gouvernement d'un pays doit être une section de l'Institut, et la dernière de toutes.' (1)

The same theme is evident in 1871:

'Tant qu'on ne s'inclinera pas devant les mandarins, tant que l'Académie des Sciences ne sera pas le remplaçant du Pape, la politique tout entière et la société, jusque dans ses racines, ne sera qu'un ramassis de blagues écœurantes ... Pour que la France se relève, il faut qu'elle passe de l'inspiration à la Science, qu'elle abandonne toute métaphysique, qu'elle entre dans la critique, c'est-à-dire dans l'examen des choses.' (2)

The very fact that Renan is in his estimation a 'man of science' a Positivist on a par with Littré, shows how near his own so-called Positivism can come to the Scientist attitude he condemns and mocks in Comte.

Although therefore the acrimonious and aggressive tones of Science have disappeared in this later version, to be replaced by the quiet and authoritative words of Hilarion, if we take into account the evidence of the Correspondance it would seem that Flaubert's attitude both to Science and Religion has undergone no very radical change. Despite his attack on Faith in 1849 he always professed understanding and respect for the aspiration

(1) Corr. VI. 33. fin juin- début juillet 1869.

(2) Corr. VI. 281. 8 septembre 1871 à George Sand.

cf. Corr. VI. 138. 228. 243. 265. 286-7. 289.

and need of which that Faith was an expression, as we have indicated when discussing that passage of the first version. And on the other hand, he still believes in 1872 that the Vatican is destined to be superseded by the Academy of Science, and the saints by the scholars like Renan and Littré. Again Hilarion is far less presumptuous than the Science of 1849, but he is an archangel of light, not a whimpering and ragged child. Flaubert has lost none of his respect for Science, if he has perhaps lost some of his enthusiasm.

(iii) Spinozism.

After the procession of the Heresies and of the Pagan Gods commented by Hilarion, and the sudden transfiguration of the latter at the end of Part Five, we revert with Part Six to an old theme, the exposition by the Devil of the system of Spinozist pantheism. The hermit is carried off again into space, and at first he experiences a sense of liberation from materiality, from the limits hitherto imposed by his finite and human condition. 'Plus de pesanteur! Plus de souffrance!... 'Il se rappelle avec dédain,' the author adds, 'l'ignorance des anciens jours, la médiocrité de ses rêves.'

But as reality in its limitless continuity is gradually revealed to him, his exaltation changes to fear and anguish, the intense suffering of a limited intellect invaded by a vision of

the infinite and eternal. One by one Antoine's notions of a personal and anthropomorphic deity meting out the reward of everlasting happiness or the punishment of everlasting pain are shattered. He is shown the indivisible oneness of an immanent Godhead manifested in an infinite series of forms. The love of God, His justice, His mercy, His anger, are human designations by which man tries to restrict within comprehensible limits the mystery of the divine. But 'l'exigence de ta raison fait-elle la loi des choses?' Satan asks - '... le mal et le bien ne concernent que toi, - comme le jour et la nuit, le plaisir et la peine, la mort et la naissance, qui sont relatifs à un coin de l'étendue, à un milieu special, à un intérêt particulier. Puisque l'infini est seul permanent, il y a l'Infini: - et c'est tout!'

In the previous versions this revelation had brought joy and freedom, the sense of participation in the life of the Godhead. Here, on the contrary, it brings pain, and more than pain - a sense of disintegration ...

'Cela excède la portée de la douleur! C'est comme une mort plus profonde que la mort... Je roule dans l'immensité des ténèbres. Elles entrent en moi. Ma conscience éclate sous cette dilatation du néant!'

For what has been revealed is a concept beyond the grasp of the mind, an infinite which the finite cannot possibly embrace, an absolute inapprehensible to the relative ... the Unknowable.

This passage, or rather section, constitutes perhaps the most striking of the differences between the first and third Tentations. The effusions of pantheist ecstasy have disappeared;

the Substance of which Antoine momentarily knew himself an eternal and indestructible part has become an inaccessible ultimate the very concept of which he is unable to grasp, and he remains in fearful, solitary darkness.

Is this, as some would have it, a disavowal of Spinoza and an option in favour of Spencer? Was the tendency which we described earlier in this chapter as mystic - that instinctive desire to abolish the interval between self and exterior reality, to break out of a painful isolation into a communion with and intuition of life in its totality - merely a characteristic of adolescence? We have tried on the contrary to show what an integral trait of Flaubert's personality this pantheistic inclination was, how closely it corresponded to his temperament. And as far as Spinoza is concerned, some of the most enthusiastic appraisals of the philosopher date from the seventies, years concurrent with and subsequent to the time of his composing this third Tentation.

The supposed change of attitude in the present text is in fact apparent, rather than real, and the final pages of the work, to which we now come, will be seen to bear out this claim. This is in fact another example of the more scientific and logical ordering of material giving the impression of a fundamental and not merely formal difference. We saw in the first versions how the exposition of the Spinozist system was strongly coloured by a personal interpretation in which the philosophy of an intellectual pantheism became something more akin to Flaubert's own naturalistic

mysticism. Here in the third version we have a much briefer and more objective statement making a purely rational appeal. And it is for this precise reason that Antoine is bound to reject it. For the way to the fulness of understanding he seeks cannot lie, as the Tentations of 1848 and 1856 so clearly revealed, in a rational grasp, but only in a mystic communion.

Antoine therefore refuses the Spinozist system as a rational apprehension of truth; but, like Flaubert himself, he will find in a particular interpretation of it the sole means of approaching an intuition of complete knowledge.

As we turn to the seventh and final part of the Tentation, we shall see the theme of a pantheist communion with Being, so surprisingly absent from the previous exposition of Spinozism, fully worked out in the climax and conclusion to the work.

It may be recalled that in the earlier versions Satan had shattered with a blow of scepticism the intense joy which his revelation had brought Antoine, and that the struggle between the will to live and the temptation of evasion into death had followed from that. The present text offers a similar sequence; here, however, Satan's last words serve, not to destroy an elation which was transient and belonging only to the initial stage of the hermit's journey through space, but to reinforce his despair.

'les choses ne t'arrivent que par l'intermédiaire de ton esprit. Tel un miroir concave il déforme les objets; - et tout moyen te manque pour en vérifier l'exactitude. Jamais tu ne connaîtras l'univers dans sa pleine étendue.... La Forme est peut-être une erreur de tes sens, la Substance une imagination de ta pensée. A moins que le monde étant un flux perpétuel des choses, l'apparence au contraire ne soit tout ce qu'il y a de plus vrai, l'illusion la seule réalité. Mais es-tu sûr de voir? es-tu même sûr de vivre? Peut-être qu'il n'y a rien!'

But Antoine still refuses to abandon himself to despair... 'il lève les yeux, par un dernier mouvement d'espoir.' And Satan abandons him.

As the hermit regains consciousness, overcome with a hopeless lassitude, he finds himself reflecting on the Devil's words -

'le Diable! je m'en souviens; - et même il me redisait tout ce que j'ai appris chez le vieux Didyme des opinions de Xénophane, d'Héraclite, de Mélisse, d'Anaxagore, sur l'infini, la création, l'impossibilité de rien connaître!'

This enumeration of early Greek philosophers is an obvious attempt on the author's part not only to indicate the sources of his hermit's temptations to scepticism, but to account too for the anachronism of Spinozist pantheism in a fourth-century Alexandrian setting. (1)

There would seem, as in the other versions, to be only one issue to Antoine's continual fight against temptation, only one way to peace - in suicide.

(1) Xenophanes' teaching was summed up by Theophrastus as 'All is One and One is God', and Anaxagorus postulated that all things have existed from the beginning, originally in an indistinguishable mass, and that even now, though phenomena have become to some extent isolated and separate one from the other, they remain ultimately inseparable. Apparent decrease and growth were according to him only new aggregations or disintegrations. The superficial resemblance of such ideas with some of the theses of Spinozism makes it possible for Flaubert to account for the Devil's exposition of the Ethic in this way.

The prodigiously old, gaunt figure of Death, whom Antoine momentarily mistakes for his mother, is very different in appearance from the horrific Romantic vision of the first Tentations. But like her predecessor she offers herself as the oblivion to which he secretly aspires, the way of escape from the monotonous fut-
 ility of existence, the revelation of the mystery he has long sought to penetrate and the eternal prolongation of the 'Nirvanah' to which, in contemplation of her secrets, he sometimes acceded...

'Je te découvrirai ce que tu tâchais de saisir à la leur des flambeaux, sur la face des morts, - ou quand tu vagabondais au delà des Pyramides, dans ces grands sables composés de débris humains ... Tu prenais de la poussière, tu la faisais couler entre tes doigts; et ta pensée, confondue avec elle, s'abîmait dans le néant'.

She represents to the hermit too the dignity of suicide as a final act of vengeance over the flesh, and the supreme affirmation of an inalienable liberty. We met the last of these themes in the adolescent writings, if not in 1848 and 1856; the former is yet another striking illustration of the perpetual conflict in Flaubert between body and spirit and his incapacity to reconcile the two.

Each of the claims of Death is disputed by Lust, again a configuration of sensuous appetite, but more widely the symbol of all that life can offer in physical beauty, material riches, the elation of adventurous and new experience; that insatiable desire which is at once a source of suffering and inventive of new pleasures.

But whereas in the previous versions they remained in apparent opposition, each claiming victory over the other, here they are shown as essentially in harmony, and ultimately one:-

'Elles se prennent par la taille, et chantent ensemble; ...
 "Tu détruis pour mes renouvellements!"
 "Tu engendres pour mes destructions!"'

But Antoine is unmoved by their sollicitations, rejecting the pleasure offered by Lust, fearless of Death because he knows himself part of eternal Substance -

'Je repousse le bonheur, et je me sens éternel. Ainsi la mort n'est qu'une illusion, un voile, masquant par endroits la continuité de la vie'.

Though he apparently rejected Spinozism in Part Six, the hermit is in fact merely repeating the lesson Satan taught him:

'... les êtres qui peuplent la terre y viennent successivement. De même au ciel des astres nouveaux surgissent... Le néant n'est pas! le vide n'est pas! Partout il y a des corps qui se meuvent sur le fond immuable de l'étendue...'

And it is precisely this problem of the multiplicity of forms as opposed to the oneness of Substance which is now introduced, and with it the whole question of the nature of reality, in what it consists, how it may be apprehended.

This, a theme of major importance in the compositions of 1848 and '56, constitutes now the conclusion and climax of the work for which all the rest was a preparation. And logically so. For we have been shown how science, religion, metaphysics are all powerless to bring man the knowledge he seeks, and which indeed he scarcely knows how to formulate. Here at last we have the problem formulated ... and the way to understanding indicated. And all this in Spinozist terms.

First, the problem: life and death being merely two aspects of the same ultimate, continuous existence, to understand that existence would be to understand life in its totality. That ultimate existence is made manifest to us in a series of forms, visible and tangible (as the Sea Creatures), or cognoscible (as the Monsters). But a fulness of understanding can only come through the knowledge of how, by what intimate process, those forms derive from the ultimate Substance ... in other and more forceful words to understand the act of divine creation and thereby to understand God.

We have seen how Spinoza attempted to solve the problem by interposing between unique Substance and multiple, finite Forms or Modes, infinite modes: and how Flaubert evolved a theory postulating the existence of archetypal forms ... 'Il doit y avoir, quelquepart', Antoine ponders, 'des figures primordiales, dont les corps ne sont que les images. Si on pouvait les voir on connaîtrait... en quoi l'Être consiste!' Flaubert experimented then with the idea that these primordial forms might well be represented in all the fantastic and otherwise completely incomprehensible creatures that figure in man's history and pre-history, and have been handed on to us by a wealth of artistic and literary tradition. 'Ce sont ces figures - là qui étaient peintes à Babylone sur la muraille du temple de Bélus, et elles couvraient une mosaïque dans le port de Carthage ...' the hermit continues.

Then it is that, following the same pattern as the other versions, the Sphinx and Chimera are introduced, and after them

the long procession of monsters until with dawn arrive the Sea Creatures. There is little to add to our previous analysis of this scene as regards the Sphinx/Chimera allegory, or indeed as regards the procession of the monsters until the actual finale is reached. The dialogue of the former is considerably abbreviated, as indeed is the whole sequence, but all the main themes are still present - the impenetrability of Being (the Sphinx) to the human intellect, (the Chimera), and the deviations of that intellect into all forms of activity in an attempt to fulfil elsewhere a longing for an absolute which has proved inaccessible; the gradation from the creatures of myth and legend (often presented with an underlying satirical intention) to those of physical reality; and the final vision where in one vast conglomeration Antoine perceives the fundamental identity of all these phenomena, be they creations of the mind or of nature, Astomi, Basilisk, Dolphin or Sea-Urchin.

There is, however, in this last vision, a certain change of emphasis which in the interpretation of some critics completely alters the significance of the passage as compared with this same vision and ecstasy midway through the Tentations of 1848 and 1856. One might describe it as evolutionist - we witness not only the close inter-relationship of the monsters and Sea Creatures, but the fundamental unity of the animate and inanimate, as animals become indistinguishable from plants and plants merge with shells and stones, which in their turn appear to be infused with life and breath:-

'Les végétaux maintenant ne se distinguent plus des animaux ... Des insectes, pareils à des pétales de roses, garnissent un arbuste; des débris d'éphémères font sur le sol une couche neigeuse. Et puis les plantes se confondent avec les pierres... Dans des fragments de glace, il distingue des efflorescences, des empreintes de buissons et de coquilles ... Des diamants brillent comme des yeux, des minéraux palpitent.'

And intent upon these transformations, Antoine finds himself no longer afraid.

'et retenant son haleine, il regarda ... Enfin il aperçoit de petites masses globuleuses, grosses comme des têtes d'épingles et garnies de cils tout autour. Une vibration les agite.'

Then it is that he cries out in a delirium of joy - 'O bonheur! O bonheur! j'ai vu naître la vie, j'ai vu le mouvement commencer..'

and longs to become identified with the life he thus observes ...

'Je voudrais ... pénétrer chaque atome, descendre jusqu'au fond de la matière, - être la matière!' With this last cry the dawn breaks, 'et dans le disque même du soleil, rayonne la face de Jésus-Christ. Antoine fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières.' So ends la Tentation.

(iv). The enigma of 'être la matière'.

What is the significance of this conclusion? Does it constitute a defeat for the hermit... and if so in what sense? Critics have tended to show the Flaubert of later years either as a convert to scientific materialism or as professing a radical scepticism ... or as something of a materialist and a sceptic.

Those in favour of the former thesis base their argument on the final scene of the drama, in which Antoine, having rejected, or having been shown the futility of all the spiritual and metaphysical approaches to truth, turns to a system resembling Darwinian transformism as the one valid explanation of his existence, believing that only in a return to the matter from which he derived he will find peace - the peace of oblivion, an abdication of mind and of consciousness. (1) Those who argue for the sceptical interpretation point out on the other hand that whilst science and religion alike are powerless to reveal the truth the hermit seeks, the apparent triumph of materialism in the conclusion is paralleled by the vision of Christ which follows immediately upon 'être la matière' and is the symbol of unvanquished spirit ... and that furthermore Antoine apparently reasserts his spiritual nature as he turns again to prayer, this being our last vision of him. So that the finale is purposely inconclusive, and fully in accordance with the precepts of one who professed never to conclude in anything. (2)

One may, however, be permitted to see the work in a more positive light, and as totally in keeping with Flaubert's outlook as we have traced it through adolescence and into maturity -

(1) cf. Seznec. op. cit. p.85.
Thibaudet. G. Flaubert, sa vie, ses romans, son style. 1922.
(v.p.206.)

(2) cf. Lombard. op. cit. p.57.
Fischer. op. cit. p.111.

neither materialist nor radically sceptical. (1)

There is evidence to support each of these interpretations, though it would seem that the balance tips in favour of the last.

The view of la Tentation as a profession of absolute doubt would seem to rest most particularly on one of its major theses - the inaccessibility of absolute truth. There is no need to stress more than we have done in the study of the text the importance of this conviction in Flaubert's general outlook. But when Lombard writes of him: 'La suprême sottise était selon lui de vouloir conclure, de croire à un absolu' (2) ... he is equating two very different ideas - the inaccessibility and the existence of the absolute. And it is not the existence of the absolute that Flaubert denies, but the claim of any individual system or creed, to possess it. (3) What is more, he does not refuse to any of these their value as an approach to truth ... nor their greatness as an expression of the aspiration to truth - 'Nous n'avons de mérite que

(1) cf. Guillemin. op.cit.p.199.

(2) Lombard op.cit. p.57.

(3) cf. Digeon. op. cit. p.47.
 'Flaubert n'a jamais abandonné ce fondement de sa pensée, la conviction que, d'une part, derrière le relatif et l'accidentel existe l'essence, l'Absolu, que, d'autre part, cet Absolu dépasse infiniment les capacités humaines...'

par notre soif du Vrai.' Hilarion told Antoine. This is the glory of Science, that whilst confessing to her limitations, (unlike the self-sufficient theological and metaphysical systems), she continues in her efforts to deepen her understanding and widen her vision, to draw nearer to an apprehension of truth. And in her is reflected the duty of every individual. It is no abandonment to fruitless despair that Flaubert advocates, though he knows the temptation often enough - but the search for light ... 'Il m'est resté de ce que j'ai vu - senti - et lu, une inextinguible soif de vérité', he wrote in 1857. 'Goethe s'écriait en mourant: "De la lumière! de la lumière!" Oh! oui, de la lumière! dût-elle nous brûler jusqu'aux entrailles.' (1) For him light came first and foremost through his artistic vocation and the transcendent principle of ideal Beauty. His apprehension of truth, his joy, the whole meaning of his existence came to him through his art, as he writes in this same letter ...

'C'est une grande volupté que d'apprendre, que de s'assimiler le Vrai par l'intermédiaire du Beau. L'état idéal résultant de cette joie me semble une espèce de sainteté, qui est peut-être plus haute que l'autre, parce qu'elle est plus désintéressée.'

And yet, as we saw particularly in connection with l'Education Sentimentale, Flaubert's religion of Beauty was inadequate to his wants. Art, if it endowed his own life with purpose and meaning, did not explain life in general. Beauty did not account for ugliness and evil. So he had recourse to other, not necessarily

(1) Corr. IV.171. 30 mars 1857 à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie.

compatible, theories and systems which we have fully discussed in previous chapters. Above all we have dwelt on the importance of Spinozist pantheism in offering a representation of the universe at once rationally acceptable and coinciding with an instinctive pantheistic tendency. But none of these systems satisfied him, as their very multiplicity proves. Indeed there seems to have been only one means by which he approached a true understanding, and that was in comparatively rare moments when, in a mystic intuition of nature, he seemed to experience reality in its totality and know eternity while still a prisoner of time. (1)

We must understand and interpret Antoine's final vision in the light of all this. For, as in the first versions, it is the one moment in the drama when, in a contemplation so intense that it becomes almost a communion with life, he arrives at some kind of intuition of the nature of reality.

(1) We have seen in previous chapters the various references to this type of experience. But it is impossible to know whether Flaubert knew similar experiences later in life. The Correspondance shows a keen sensitivity to natural beauty, but no more. Indeed there are times when nature bored or irritated him; the measure of his appreciation seems to have been dependent on his mood.

It may be that these mystic intuitions were confined to his adolescent years, at least, to his twenties; or that he did not speak of them in later life. Whatever the case, it is clear from the essential role they play in each version of la Tentation that they impressed him deeply, and that he believed they brought him in an intuitive experience of being, knowledge which was rationally inaccessible.

But he is still separate from the life he observes, limited by a finite individuality from wholly embracing an infinite and eternal principle, from attaining to that fulness of knowledge which would be his completion. And his cry to penetrate, to be identified with matter is as before a longing to break through an imprisoning humanity to the ultimate liberation of union with the limitless divine. It is matter understood as essential being, sole reality, infused with life and consciousness, the ultimate and divine principle, that is represented here ... not inanimate mass in which spirit and consciousness dissolve into ensuing oblivion.

Antoine is therefore defeated by matter, but not in the sense understood by the materialist interpretations of the work; not because scientific materialism destroys his spiritual conviction (what then would be the sense of his final vision of Christ, indisputably a recompense, unless it were the gift of grace, as **Emile Faguet** would have it), ⁽¹⁾ not because he renounces the battle of the spirit against the flesh; - but because in matter is contained the mystery which he cannot penetrate.

He is shown, it is true, to have witnessed the birth of life in perceiving the first infusion of movement into the apparently inanimate - the fusion of mind and matter. But even here he remains an observer, on the outside. He has seen the first oscillation of life in the cell, but his desire is to enter into

(1) La Tentation de Saint Antoine
préface E. Faguet. p.XII.

the cell, 'pénétrer chaque atome'.. He has reached the farthest point to which he can go, the limit to his understanding, rational or intuitive. It is perhaps in this sense that we are to understand Flaubert's affirmation to Edmond de Goncourt one day in 1871 that 'la défaite finale du saint est due à la cellule, la cellule scientifique'...? ⁽¹⁾ Antoine is defeated, but by the Unknowable, not by the temptations.

And he is also victorious. For what of the vision of Christ that breaks through the clouds with the light of dawn? We have mentioned one possible interpretation - that Antoine, about to yield to the final temptation of matter, 'le désir de s'absorber en elle, se diluer dans ⁽²⁾ son sein'...'reçoit le don gratuit de la grâce pleine et absolue'. But grace, a gratuitous gift, was hardly part of Flaubert's conception of things. On the contrary, he rails against it in the Correspondance as an outrageous injustice. ⁽³⁾ It seems much more likely that the grace Antoine

(1) v. Journal des Goncourt. Vol.IV.p.352. 18 oct.1871.

(2) Faguet. op.cit.pp.x-xii.

(3) Corr. V.412. 17 octobre 1868 à George Sand.
Corr.VI.281. 8 septembre 1871 à " "

We shall have occasion to discuss Flaubert's ideas on the subject of grace at greater length in a subsequent chapter.

receives is that grace of which Flaubert wrote in the oft-quoted letter to Louise Colet ...

'Soyons religieux. Moi, tout ce qui m'arrive de fâcheux, en grand ou en petit, fait que je me resserre de plus en plus à mon éternel souci. Je m'y cramponne à deux mains et je ferme les deux yeux. A force d'appeler la Grâce, elle vient.' (1)

Grace in Flaubert's estimation is a just recompense to the persevering, not a free gift of mercy to the weak.

More acceptable perhaps is the theory of Lombard, that this final apparition is necessitated by the Christian framework of the story. 'parceque c'est malgré tout la victoire du saint qui dans l'histoire chrétienne donne son sens au drame de la Tentation.' (2)

Flaubert was certainly intent in this last version on offering a wholly objective and scientifically accurate rendering of the drama. Antoine would therefore emerge triumphant from the night of battle, but only by reason of a technical necessity.

There would seem, however, to be a third possibility of interpretation. As for the author himself, Antoine's pantheistic ecstasy was a short-lived experience, a passing glory. The normality of a life lived nobly consisted for Flaubert in steady perseverance along a straight and endless road. It is perhaps this that is represented in Antoine's return to prayer, showing that he has not renounced his self-appointed duty and chosen ideal. The apparition of Christ would thus symbolise the just recompense merited by the

(1) Corr. III.16. 4 septembre 1852. à Louise Colet. (my italics)

(2) Lombard. op.cit. p.79.

saint, not the gift of mercy bestowed upon a sinner.

Antoine's faith may be rationally indefensible, and perhaps he knows its inadequacies better than those who try to argue and mock him into disavowing it. No matter. 'La vocation, grotesque ou sublime, doit se suivre.'⁽¹⁾ These are Flaubert's own words, taken from a letter written in 1854. They are equally applicable to Saint Antoine. 'Tu me parles de ma quiétude,' the letter continues, 'on n'a jamais parlé de rien de plus fantastique. Moi, de la quiétude! Hélas! non! Personne n'est plus trouble, tourmenté, agité, ravagé. Je ne passe pas deux heures ni deux jours de suite dans le même état. Je me ronge de projets, de désirs, de chimères....'⁽¹⁾ But these torments and distractions, part of a daily suffering, are temptations to be fought and conquered - 'il faut avant tout faire son métier, suivre la vocation, remplir son devoir en un mot.'⁽²⁾ The saint of the third Tentation is still the hero of 1848 and 1856 in his perseverance along 'la ligne droite'.

(1) Corr. IV. 50. 4 avril 1854 à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr. IV. 251. 6 avril 1858 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

(v) Concluding remarks.

The third Tentation offers us, as did the other two, but in a more lucid condensed, wholly impersonal form than they; a series of allegories in which are contained ideas fundamental to Flaubert's outlook on life, his conception of man and his destiny, his reflections on the nature of reality, his convictions as to the nature of the absolute.

We are shown man as destined to suffer, aspiring always to an understanding and consummation he cannot attain. He is a creature in whom body and spirit are perpetually at war, each making their conflicting demands, each seeking the satisfaction of an insatiable hunger. He struggles to evade this constant disquietude, intensified at times to the point of anguish, proudly denying his want, trying to lose himself in all manner of activities spiritual or material, basely degrading or nobly dignified, but all illusory. Wisdom lies in the acceptance of the relativity of our knowledge and capacities and 'l'insuffisance de la vie'; virtue in the search for an approach to truth, and in the steadfast adherence to that ideal once discovered.

For the absolute is unknowable, beyond our rational grasp, an ultimate reality in which creation and dissolution, like mind and matter, are seen in their fundamental oneness. It is only approachable through a mystic intuition, in which, entering into communion with nature, man may experience totality in part and eternity in time. But since he is not able to maintain this state,

nor to attain a complete fusion and identification with nature - that is with matter, or Substance, he never attains, even in this way, to perfect knowledge.

We shall find as we turn to a consideration of the principal works that, whilst the more strictly personal speculations and experiences of La Tentation are no longer in evidence, the themes concerning human nature and destiny are of fundamental importance to an understanding of the characters we meet there. Since Flaubert's whole aim in these novels was to avoid anything approaching a revelation of his personal attitude either to the world of his creation or to life itself, La Tentation may be said to represent the cipher not only of the man, but of his work.

CHAPTER SIX.

THE NOVELS

- I. HEROES AND HEROINES.
- (i) The Saint: Saint-Julien.
 - (ii) Heroes of the 1848 Republic:
Dussardier and Sénécal.
 - (iii) Carthaginian Heroes:
Hamilcar and Giscon.
 - (iv) Heroines: Félicité and Madame Arnoux.
- II. VICTIMS AND FAILURES.
- (i) Madame Bovary.
 - (ii) Salammbô, and the lesser women characters
in the three great novels.
 - (iii) Mâtho.
 - (iv) Frédéric Moreau.
- III. FLAUBERT'S BOURGEOIS.
- (i) 'La grêle génération':
Arnoux, Hussonnet, Pellerin,
Regimbart and Deslauriers.
 - (ii) The classic bourgeois:
Dambreuse and Martinon.
 - (iii) The bourgeois villains: Lheureux.
 - (iv) A Carthaginian bourgeois: Hannon.
 - (v) A Greek bourgeois: Spendius.
 - (vi) Bourgeois lovers:
Rodolphe Boulanger and
Léon Dupuis.
 - (vii) Bourgeois officialdom:
The Tetrarch Herod.
 - (viii) Bourgeois artists:
Delmar and Binet.
 - (ix) The bourgeois man of God and the
bourgeois man of science:
L'abbé Bournisien and
M. Homais.
 - (x) An exceptional bourgeois:
Charles Bovary.

If one were attempting to make a broad distinction between the subject matter of the Tentation and that of the novels, one might say that whilst the first is concerned with a metaphysical exploration of life, the latter represent as it were an empirical investigation. In the first we have, in allegoric form, speculations on all manner of questions, from the nature of reality to the motivation of human behaviour. In the latter we are presented with apparently objectively recorded fact, as it concerns a series of characters and situations: only very rarely is there a personal reflection on the part of the author.

The problem of the Unknowable may seem therefore, at a first glance, to have no place here: certainly it receives no explicit mention in the course of any of the novels. Yet it is only in the light of what we have already learned of Flaubert's quest for truth that we may hope to understand the ideas that underlie each of his characterisations, or see his work as a unity. And conversely, it would be unthinkable to attempt any study or account of Flaubert's thought without reference to this section of his work, his greatest work. Each particular novel and each individual character represents an aspect of his conception of man and of existence. It is as though the outline of his thought as we have distinguished it so far, with particular reference to la Tentation, were filled out and coloured in by a study of the novels, so that what was a pencilled

sketch becomes a life-size portrait.

The Tentation indicated, we may recall, perhaps implicitly rather than explicitly, various patterns of life which may be numbered three. There was the saint, living in strict adherence to a chosen ideal: then, represented by the Vices and Theological Virtues, there were those attempting to discover in material or physical activity, or in a metaphysical system, the satisfaction of their aspirations. Lastly we saw, in some of the Monsters, the satirical portrayal of half human forms, comfortably installed in their existence, happy in the easy satisfaction of their wants, securely at rest.

Without trying to dispose of the multitude of Flaubert's characters within these three strictly differentiated categories, one can affirm never the less that they represent the basic patterns of characterisation in each of his mature works, and the hierarchy according to which he judges the world of his creation and the world about him. The idealist, whatever his ideal, is to be admired, and is therefore in some sense a hero. The securely happy, those who seek no further than the immediate present and all it has to offer, are the despised 'bourgeois'. And between the two are the numbers of those living in the illusion of future happiness, sacrificing to idols, suffering for values which prove false: these are the objects of their creator's compassion, and even respect

- at their greatest, tragic heroes.

We have already seen these various patterns hinted at in the works prior to the Tentation, the Juvenilia proper and the first Education Sentimentale. We indicated the proto-types of Emma Bovary and Rodolphe in Mazza and Ernest of Passion et Vertu⁽¹⁾; the crudely drawn 'bourgeois' in M. Paul of Quidquid Volueris⁽²⁾, or in the 'commis' of Une Leçon d'Histoire Naturelle⁽³⁾, the prefiguration of the saint in Smarh⁽⁴⁾, and the opposition of idealist and 'bourgeois' in Jules and Henry of the first Education Sentimentale⁽⁵⁾. Now we shall follow the various configurations of these patterns of characterisation in the works of Flaubert's maturity.

(1) 1837.

(2) 1837.

(3) 1837.

(4) 1839.

(5) 1845.

I.

HEROES AND HEROINES.

No doubt Flaubert would have had strong objections to this term as applied to any of his creations ... 'pas de monstres et pas de héros!' he warned George Sand. ⁽¹⁾ But he was referring to those unreal figures whom the author has obviously set out to make wholly laudable or irredeemably wicked, characters perceptibly modelled and directed according to their creator's intentions instead of being as it were observed and recorded by an impartial chronicler of their lives. Much of Flaubert's greatness and originality as a novelist lay in this capacity to set a character in a particular environment, and then leave him, as it were, to live out the events with which he is presented, the situations which he himself creates or which are created by forces beyond his control.

Nevertheless, as we have already indicated, the author has some attitude to his creations just as he has an attitude to the

(1) Corr. VII. 281. décembre 1875. cf. (Corr. V.253. 5 - 6 décembre), also to George Sand 1866. 'Je ne crois pas (contrairement à vous) qu'il y ait rien à faire de bon avec le caractère de l'Artiste idéal. Ce serait un monstre. L'Art n'est pas fait pour peindre les exceptions ...'

men and women around him, and Flaubert's heroes and heroines - or at least, the characters he admires or respects - are on the whole easily recognisable. We shall see that they represent a wide diversity of personalities, of backgrounds, of ideals. The measure of their diversity is a reflection of the measure of Flaubert's appreciation of human values. Too often he is taken, on the strength of Madame Bovary, for a haughty pessimist looking down in pity or contempt upon the spectacle of humanity's irremediable wretchedness and corruption. It is true that when he considered mankind in general he saw there nothing but wretchedness. But as he looked upon individuals he was conscious of those standing out from the general mediocrity of the mass. One must set beside his misanthropic vituperations against the 'bourgeois' his ready respect for courage of conviction and strength of mind; his admiration for the generous-hearted and enthusiastic; his esteem for silent dignity, his tenderness and compassion for the humble and unassuming. For such are the claims to virtue of the characters we are about to review.

(1) The Saint: Saint Julien. (1)

Saint-Julien was a figure who, like Saint-Antoine, haunted Flaubert's imagination for many years. It would seem that as early as 1846 he had reflected on the possibility of writing his own version of the medieval legend concerning the saint, and certainly in 1856, after the completion of Madame Bovary, he was working not only on a revision of the Tentation, but on a composition he describes as Saint Julien l'Hospitalier, with a view to publishing it the following year. (2)

Then we hear nothing more of it until some twenty years later, in 1875. Ageing, and in poor health, Flaubert had spent most of the year in desperate efforts to stave off the catastrophe of bankruptcy which menaced the Commanvilles. (3) He had sold most of his property

(1) There is of course a third saint figuring in Flaubert's work: Iakannan, or more familiarly, Saint John the Baptist, of Hérodias (Les Trois Contes). But he is a purely symbolic and background figure, as we shall see with reference to this work in the third section of this chapter.

(2) Corr. IV. 105. 1 juin 1856 à Louis Bouilhet.
'Si j'étais un gars, je m'en retournerais à Paris au mois d'octobre avec le Saint-Antoine fini et Saint Julien l'Hospitalier écrit. Je pourrais donc en 1857 fournir du moderne, du moyen-âge, et de l'antiquité.'

(3) Caroline (the only child of his dearly loved sister) had married Ernest Commanville, an apparently prosperous wood-merchant, in 1863. Since the Franco-Prussian war their financial security had grown increasingly precarious, and in April 1875 bankruptcy seemed inevitable.

(it even seemed at one point that he would have to give up Croisset), taken every possible means of reducing his own expenditure, arranged loans and guarantees from personal friends, and had saved Commanville's name, abandoning everything to him in return for a small allowance.

But he seemed completely broken by the affair, which had only intensified the sorrow of the years that followed the Franco-Prussian war. Since his mother's death in 1872 he had been living quite alone. Though the young Edmond Laporte to some extent replaced Bouilhet (who had died in 1869), of his old friends only George Sand and Tourgueneff remained, and he saw them at very infrequent intervals. Since 1869 he had been trying desperately to lose himself in his new work, Eouvard et Pécouchet, and in the vast documentation it involved. 'Dès que je ne tiens plus un livre ou que je ne rêve pas d'en écrire un, il me prend un ennui à crier,' he wrote to George Sand in 1873⁽¹⁾. 'La vie ne me semble tolérable que si on l'escamote.' But he was beset with doubts and hesitations as to the value of this strange work, and sometimes indeed questioned not only his present course, but the direction of his whole life. Now more than ever he needed his art as a form of evasion, but never had it proved so powerless to help him. For the first time in all these years Flaubert is assailed with a

(1) Corr. VII. 38. 20 juillet 1873. Flaubert's italics.

certain regret, and openly avows it. It was implicit in many a passage of his earlier writings, in all the attempts to compensate in literature for the tenderness and warmth, the physical and emotional fulfilments he refused himself in life. Now he is counting the cost, and it is with a resigned but inconsolable sense of loneliness that he views the domestic happiness about him, be it that of Nohant, where George Sand was installed with her son and his charming family, or Croisset where his man-servant Emile 'est dans le ravissement d'avoir un fils, joie que je comprends, que je trouvais autrefois très ridicule, et que maintenant j'envie.'⁽¹⁾

'Ah! si j'avais une petite fille (à moi) à embrasser', he writes to George Sand in 1875. 'Maurice est dans le vrai. Il a bien arrangé sa vie. Que n'ai-je fait comme lui!'⁽²⁾

This is not to suggest that Flaubert in any way repudiated his artistic vocation towards the end of his life as the stress of personal suffering grew greater. There was never any question of that. But we shall see that the story of Saint-Julien takes on an added significance when we remember the context of its composition.

(1) Corr. VII. 316. 1er juillet 1876 à sa nièce Caroline.

(2) Corr. Supplément III. 216. 3 octobre 1875 à George Sand.

Ostensibly it was undertaken as a pastime, an evasion, Flaubert's effort to prove, at least to himself, that he was still capable, despite the precarious state of his health and the intolerable nervous strain of these months, of writing good prose. He had temporarily abandoned Eouvard et Pécuchet, and chosen this subject of easy compass, 'une petite bêtise moyen-âgeuse' which he planned would not cover more than thirty pages.

He was of course working on a given theme, the legend as recorded in the Legenda Aurea, and which he had read in his school-boy days in Langlois' account of the legends illustrated in the stained glass of French cathedrals.⁽¹⁾ Research on the sources of his short story in recent years has shown that he was considerably aided too by two thirteenth century manuscripts, which he studied at the Bibliothèque Nationale early in 1876.⁽²⁾ But there was, in Flaubert's view, all the difference between the story in its

(1) Langlois. Histoire de la Peinture sur Verre etc. published in Rouen 1832. It was to this work that Flaubert first referred his niece in 1875, to give her an idea of the story he was about to write. No doubt he had been acquainted with the figure of Saint-Julien before this, from a stained-glass window in the cathedral in Rouen: and he was particularly struck by a statue of the saint in the little church at Caudebec which he mentions having visited in 1835, and again in 1846. He may well have been there earlier in childhood too.

(2) v. article by Professor Vinaver in the John Rylands Library Bulletin Sept., 1954.

medieval form and the version he gave to it. He would have liked to stress this in prefacing his work with a reproduction of the window in Rouen Cathedral, so that the reader would ask in amazement - 'comment a-t-il tiré ceci de cela?'⁽¹⁾ Indeed, he insisted to Edmond de Goncourt that the window had no connection with his version of the legend.⁽²⁾

By very reason of his adopting a Christian legend, Flaubert is obliged to address us in terms of Christian symbolism. But the extent to which he adapts and fundamentally alters the original has not always been realised: it is as much of a mistake to praise this work, exceptionally beautiful as it is, as a perfect rendering of the medieval outlook, as it is to see in it indications of the author's increasing sympathies with Christianity. He has in fact taken the framework of the story, but transposed it into terms of his own values, and this nineteenth century version of the legend has a very different application from the medieval one, based in Flaubert's opinion on an outmoded apprehension of truth.

In the Legenda Aurea, as in the stained-glass window in Rouen, we are concerned with Julien's rise to sanctity through the penitential expiation of his sin of patricide. We are scarcely told anything of his existence prior to his voluntary exile to a life of

(1) Corr. VIII. 207. 16 février 1879 à Charpentier.

(2) Goncourt. Journal. VI. p.76.

penance. Caxton's translation says 'he gladly went for a hunt' and that on one such occasion it was predicted that he would kill his parents. The manuscripts Flaubert consulted at the Bibliothèque Nationale enlarge upon this with other details, but there is no real attempt to prepare or account for the crime of parricide. Julien's responsibility and guilt are none the less clearly inferred. Although he kills his parents unwittingly, he kills them through his fault, and immediately seeks to expiate his crime; God eventually accepts his expiation and grants him an eternal reward.

In Flaubert's version of the story, on the contrary, there is a most intricate interplay of free-will and an exterior force described as Destiny, or as 'un pouvoir supérieur', or as the will of God. This last terminology is used by reason of the Christian background to the legend, but has no doctrinal significance, and is in no way to be interpreted literally. It is essential to bear this in mind in order not to become involved in inextricable difficulties over sentences such as: 'elle avait obéi à Dieu en occasionnant son crime' or: 'Il ne se révoltait pas contre Dieu qui lui avait infligé cette action, et pourtant se désespérait de l'avoir pu commettre.' which, if taken literally, impute to God responsibility for an act directly contrary to Divine Law.

Julien is born under the double prediction of fame as a warrior and glory as a saint. The very setting of his birth,

the castle with its pots of basil, symbols of cruelty and anger, and the sunflowers, symbols of divine inspiration, set in every casement, signifies the nature of his destiny, the seeds of love and of cruelty at conflict even in the small child. Gradually a lust for bloodshed asserts itself over the boy's gentle piety. But it is apparently only able to do so because he wilfully cedes to it. His first 'murder' is that of a mouse: the victim is insignificant enough but the motive of the child's act is identical with the motives for the much graver acts of the youth and of the man. The sight of the little animal exasperates him, we are told - 'il résolut de s'en défaire'. He experiences, that is, an instinctive hatred which involves, without his knowing it, the desire to kill, and he yields to the impulse.

Thereafter his passion for the hunt grows: but it is in reality a passion for bloodshed, and the climax comes in that strange scene when Julien finds himself on a morning of wintry mist on a stretch of unknown country, surrounded by 'une infinité de bêtes, à chaque pas plus nombreuses'.

'Elles tournaient autour de lui, tremblantes, avec un regard plein de douceur et de supplication...

Mais Julien ne se fatiguait pas de tuer ... ne pensait à rien, n'avait souvenir de quoi que ce fût. Il était en chasse dans un pays quelconque depuis un temps indéterminé, par le fait seul de sa propre existence, tout s'accomplissant avec la facilité qu'on éprouve dans les rêves.'

After a terrible massacre, which the youth himself contemplates aghast, 'ne comprenant pas comment il avait pu le faire', the last of his victims, a stag, prophesies his fearful destiny:

'Maudit! maudit! maudit! Un jour, coeur féroce, tu assassineras ton père et ta mère! ...'

Julien fut stupefait, puis accablé d'une fatigue soudaine: un dégoût, une tristesse immense l'envahit. Le front dans les deux mains, il pleura longtemps.'

We are here in an atmosphere where the miraculous and supernatural replace the normality of previous scenes. There is no play of liberty. Julien is transported into a strange and unreal world, into a kind of nightmare in which he is completely at the mercy of an instinctive, overwhelming urge to kill. (1)

One might argue that, if he has no immediate responsibility,

(1) At the same time this scene has a profound psychological truth. It is a striking symbolic rendering of the sway of passion; reason and will are wholly subjugated to the youth's exasperated thirst for carnage. There is a gradual progression from cold-blooded killing to the frenzied massacre of the deer ('L'espoir d'un pareil carnage ... le suffoqua de plaisir.') then the gradual growth of awareness ('Julien s'adossa contre un arbre. Il contempla d'un oeil béant l'énormité du massacre, ne comprenant pas comment il avait pu le faire.') and at last, the clear realisation of the implications of his act, symbolised in the warning of the stag. Then it is that he weeps - sated, nauseated, terrified - 'La solitude qui l'enveloppait lui sembla toute menaçante de périls indéfinis.'

Julien is still ultimately responsible for the present situation. He has created it, through the series of events leading to it - first killing the mouse, then strangling a pigeon, later hunting from morning until night, coming home 'couvert de sang et de boue .. sentant l'odeur des bêtes farouches', refusing his mother's embrace. This was certainly the attitude of the medieval recorders of the legend.

But one would hesitate to attribute it to Flaubert. It seems more likely that he is depicting a predetermined temperament which the boy and youth are powerless to alter - 'est-ce que tous, tant que nous sommes, nous ne cherchons pas suivant nos instincts divers la satisfaction de notre nature?' he had asked, a long time ago. ⁽¹⁾ We shall have occasion to return to this question shortly.

When, after the scene of the hunt, we emerge as it were from a nightmare into daylight, we find Julien, tortured and obsessed by the prediction of the stag, filled with the presentiment of its inevitability.

'Non! non! non! je ne peux pas les tuer!

Puis il songeait;

Si je le voulais, pourtant?...

Et il avait peur que le diable ne lui en inspirât l'envie.'

He refuses to hunt or to wield arms, and finally, having accidentally

(1) Corr. I.214-5.6 août 1846 à Louise Colet.

almost killed his father, then his mother, he takes flight in a supreme effort to evade his terrible destiny.

As in the medieval legend he becomes a great warrior, a knight who accomplishes mighty feats in the service of the oppressed, and who is protected through all dangers by a mysterious power. At last he wins a princess in marriage and a beautiful marble palace. He continues to try to avert his destiny, refusing, despite a torturing desire, to hunt, 'Croyant, par cette sorte de pénitence, détourner son malheur', for 'il lui semblait que du meurtre des animaux dépendait le sort de ses parents'. But he cannot rid himself of the lust to kill which conjures up in his dreams visions of carnage - 'il se reveillait en roulant des yeux farouches'. His lady tries to console him, to pacify his fears, even to persuade him to hunt, but he remains adamant, until one summer evening 'la tentation était trop forte'. He takes his bow and arrows and goes out into the dark.

Once outside, he finds himself as in childhood in an unreal and unknown country, surrounded by all manner of beasts. But this time his arms are powerless against them ... 'un pouvoir supérieur détruisait sa force.' He tries to turn back, 'glacé de terreur, incapable du moindre mouvement'. It is only by a supreme act of will that he is able to move forward, and, mocked, blinded, stifled by a swarm of animals and insects, to grope his way back. Cock-crow

breaks the spell, the animals disappear, but the raging desire to kill is all the stronger, and 'les bêtes manquant, il aurait voulu massacrer des hommes'. His childhood terror that he should be inspired against his will with the desire to kill his parents is thus realised.

As he enters his chamber in the first dim light of dawn, and approaches the bed to greet his sleeping wife, he feels under his touch the bearded face of a man. His rage knows no bounds. He throws himself upon the sleeping figures 'avec des hurlements de bête fauve'. Only afterwards does he discover that his victims are his father and mother, who had arrived in search of him during his few hours absence.

His destiny as predicted by the stag has been realised: his efforts to evade the fate of which he is victim have proved vain. Is the crime his own responsibility or that of the 'pouvoir supérieur' driving him to desperate rage in that nightmare chase through the dark wood to cock-crow? He ceded of his own free-will to the fateful temptation to go out into the night and track down the beast he could hear padding by under his window. And yet, given the fatalistic nature of his destiny, how far was it possible for him to resist? Julien himself, though desperate at the thought of his crime, believes somehow that he was powerless to avoid it. Flaubert has made of him, not the sinner rising to sanctity through the willing expiation of his crime, but the tragic figure of humanity at grips with a fate unasked for and unmerited, turning

that fate to good despite all the obstacles it sets in his path. Julien is the victim of that 'fatality' with which every man must contend: on the one hand his inherited and pre-determined temperament, on the other hand the context in which life places him, the series of events and situations for which he is in no way responsible and which he can do nothing to alter, which he must learn to use, to accept, to endure. Flaubert was at times so acutely conscious of his helplessness when faced by the unavoidable or the unforeseen that he would categorically deny the existence of free-will. It is with the conviction that 'la vie ... est plus forte que nous' and that 'il faut la suivre', as he had written to Louise Colet some twenty years before this, that he hastens to affirm to George Sand now in 1875 that things could not have been otherwise - 'on n'arrange pas sa destinee, on la subit.'⁽¹⁾ The sage's attitude is one of resignation, and Flaubert extols the dignity of a silent and impassible acceptance of what life brings, of one's human condition with all its limitations, of one's individual calling with the suffering and sacrifice it imposes.

But we have already pointed out in connection with Flaubert's fatalism and determinism how his whole ethic, demanding an initial choice of ideal and complete sacrifice in the service of that ideal posits not only a degree of liberty but the corollaries of responsibility and morality.

(1) v. Corr.IV.56. 12-13 avril 1854. and Corr. VII.240. 10 mai 1875.

Within the limits of one's personal option in life there is plenty of room for talk of will and liberty. 'Mon conseil permanent', he writes to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie in 1858, 'est celui-ci: voulez! ... Si je vous parle tant de volonté, c'est que je suis sûr que cela vous manque. Ayez un idéal de vous-même et conformez-y votre personne'⁽¹⁾. And this he did himself accomplish - 'J'ai mon but (un seul, la littérature)', he wrote to George Sand in 1875, 'sans regarder ni à gauche ni à droite.'⁽²⁾

If we look back now at Saint-Julien in the light of this, we shall see that though on the surface we are represented with the sinner's expiation, his life of penance and mortification, fundamentally Flaubert is portraying his own conception of sanctity. Julien's search is not so much for a means of expiating as for means of accepting his past.⁽³⁾ He does not revolt against God who has thus afflicted him, but tries at first to rid himself of a life which is an intolerable burden to him, and that having failed, finds at last an end to which he can use it, ferrying men and beasts over a tempestuous river.

There are in this last part of the story many echoes of the solitude and the sufferings of Flaubert's daily existence. Julien

(1) Corr. IV. 271. 11 juillet 1858.

(2) Corr. VII. 240. 10 mai 1875.

(3) Since his responsibility is so mitigated as to be well-nigh impossible to calculate, his extreme penance, necessary in the medieval version, has become here something of an illogicality.

longs to have some part in the warmth and tenderness of the simple families from whose joys he is for ever excluded: and his delight in the birds and flowers that surround him in his solitude, his tenderness for young animals, are all echoed in the Correspondance of these later years. On the other hand, when he goes down from his hillside into the town to escape momentarily from his loneliness 'l'air bestial des figures, le tapage des métiers, l'indifférence des propos glaçaient son cœur' - as the brief visits Flaubert made to Rouen so often filled him with wretched dejection.

But there is one point above all where Flaubert and Julien are one, and that is in the dogged perseverance and unremitting will with which Julien bends his every effort to the attainment of his newly conceived end. Before he can even start his task of ferrying to and fro he has to build a sort of causeway.

'il se brisait les ongles à remuer les pierres énormes, les appuyait contre son ventre pour les transporter, glissait dans la vase, y enfonçait, manqua périr plusieurs fois.'

He is at work at all hours of the day and night, prompt to answer any call, offering his services gratuitously, accomplishing a super-human labour in complete solitude. In the face of every kind of suffering he remains at his self-appointed duty. There is no need to dwell on the obvious similarities⁽¹⁾. Flaubert's work too was an

(1) cf. Corr. VIII.55. 27 juillet 1877 à la princesse Mathilde. 'Ma vie (austère au fond) est calme et tranquille à la surface. C'est une existence de moine et d'ouvrier. Tous les jours se ressemblent.'

incessant task, appreciated and understood as he would have it understood by so very few, accomplished with slight encouragement from others now that Bouilhet was dead, certainly bringing no financial gain and undertaken in any case with no thought of material reward.

One night Julien is called out to row across his last and most terrible burden - a strange leper who bears himself as a king. The passage is harder than he has ever known it, the boat being carried adrift by a current beyond his control:

'Mais comprenant qu'il s'agissait d'une chose considérable, d'un ordre auquel il ne fallait pas désobéir, il reprit ses avirons... Et cela dura longtemps, très longtemps!'

Without question and without hesitation Julien goes to the final limit of sacrifice - offering to the leper his bread, his water, his pallet and at last in an effort to keep the sick man warm, his own body, stretching himself out over the ulcerated limbs of his stricken guest. And then it is that 'une abondance de délices, une joie surhumaine descendait comme une inondation dans l'âme de Julien pâmé ... Le toit s'envola, le firmament se déployait:- et Julien monta vers les espaces bleus, face à face avec Notre-Seigneur Jésus, qui l'emportait dans le ciel.'

(1) It is not without interest to compare this last ordeal of Julien with Faith's encouragement to Saint Antoine:
'Pour traverser d'un bord à l'autre, n'aie donc souci ni des éclairs qui t'éblouissent, ni des vagues qui t'assourdissent, ni de la rame, ni de la voile, ni de la nuit, ni de l'orage.
Le Seigneur n'est-il pas là?'
(la Tentation 1849 p.334.)

This is of course the end of the story as it is found on the stained-glass window, as it were a technical necessity. But like the remainder of the story it has its allegorical significance. For the single-minded who will persevere to the utmost limit in the service of the transcendent there is a reward: a glimpse of the divine, which was for Julien, as for the hermit Antoine, a vision of the Saviour - for Jules and for Flaubert an intuition of Beauty. One is reminded of the letter he wrote nearly twenty years back, to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie:

'C'est une grande volupté que d'apprendre, que d'assimiler le Vrai par l'intermédiaire du Beau. L'état idéal résultant de cette joie me semble une espèce de sainteté, qui est peut-être plus haute que l'autre, parcequ'elle est plus désintéressée.'⁽¹⁾

Coming at a time when he was intensely conscious of the price he had paid in his self-oblation to art, and when he feared that his last undertaken work would cost him his life (as indeed in a sense it did)⁽²⁾, the story of Saint-Julien is in its way Flaubert's reaffirmation of his vocation to his own particular form of sanctity

(1) Corr. IV. 171. 30 mars 1857.

(2) Bouvard et Pécuchet, begun in 1872, had been abandoned now at the time of the Commanville's financial crisis. Flaubert took it up again in 1877 and died still at work on it in 1880.

(ii). Heroes of the 1848 Republic:
Dussardier and Sénécal.

There is a comparatively strong resemblance between Saint-Antoine and Saint-Julien. In both lives we have the same pattern of sacrificial perseverance to a final apotheosis, both are dedicated to a transcendent ideal expressed in a Christian symbolism. But the other heroes are concerned with the here and now, be it with pre-Christian Carthage or the 1848 Republic. Their ideal and end in life is neither transcendent nor symbolic, in no way a reflection of Flaubert's personal choice and vocation - in fact in two cases at least entirely opposed to the author's way of life. It is therefore both interesting and profitable to discover why their creator admired them, as he indisputably did.

Dussardier. There can surely be no character to whom Flaubert is more obviously sympathetic than 'le brave commis' of L'Education Sentimentale. 'si loyal, si doux, si héroïque, si fort'. The constant repetition of the epithets 'bon' and 'brave' are sufficient illustration of the author's attitude to the generous-hearted Dussardier. Radically opposed as he was to the various socialist doctrines out of which so much of the unrest in mid-nineteenth century sprang, sceptical as to their possible efficacy and mordantly ironic at the expense of their exponents, Flaubert has entered profoundly in his portrayal of Dussardier into the

enthusiasms and hopes of an ignorant but fervent proletariat.

Dussardier greets the advent of the Republic as a new dawn for humanity - 'elle signifiait, croyait-il, affranchissement et bonheur universel': above all the establishment of the reign of justice. He had hated the July Monarchy, which he saw as an incarnation of injustice, hated it for the suffering of the exploited and oppressed, 'd'une haine essentielle, permanente, qui lui tenait tout le coeur et raffina sa sensibilité' ... but never on his own account, never in the hope of personal advancement or even to avenge real personal affronts and injustices. When the June Insurrection against the newly established Republic breaks out, Dussardier fights with heroism to defend her against the rebels. And yet, afterwards:

'Il avoua ... à Frédéric l'embarras de sa conscience. Peut-être qu'il aurait dû se mettre de l'autre bord, avec les blouses; car enfin on leur avait promis un tas de choses qu'on n'avait pas tenues. Leurs vainqueurs détestaient la République: et puis, on s'était montré bien doux pour eux! Ils avaient tort, sans doute, pas tout à fait, cependant: et le brave garçon était torturé par cette idée qu'il pouvait avoir combattu la justice.'

Thus are aroused in Dussardier's mind the first doubts that the Republic is not the incarnation of Justice and Liberty he had dreamed of and struggled for. The events of the next three years bring him to despair - despair not only with the political forces

in power, but much more radically, with the humanity he had fought to save. His suffering renders him at the end articulate as he had never been before, and the last time we hear him is in a long conversation with Frederic -

'Si on tâchait, cependant!' he ends, 'Si on était de bonne foi, on pourr_ait s'entendre! Mais non! Les ouvriers ne valent pas mieux que les bourgeois, voyez-vous! ... il n'y a pas moyen! pas de remède! Tout le monde est contre nous! Moi, je n'ai jamais fait le mal: et, pourtant, c'est comme un poids qui me pèse sur l'estomac. J'en deviendrai fou, si ça continue. J'ai envie de me faire tuer.'

He falls a few months later, a victim of the December Coup d'Etat, proclaiming at the last the Republic for which he had lived and died, the Republic he fought for but had never seen established, a reign of freedom and justice in which all wrongs would be redressed and all evils righted. And he dies, symbolically, 'sur le dos, les bras en croix'. For he is in his way a martyr.

It was a constant cry of Flaubert's that 'le bon peuple français' no longer existed -

'89 a démoli la royauté et la noblesse. '48 la bourgeoisie et '51 le peuple. Il n'y a plus rien, qu'une tourbe canaille et imbécile. Nous sommes tous enfonçés au même niveau dans une médiocrité ⁽¹⁾ commune!

We have seen Dussardier, who carefully treasured and then returned

(1) Corr.III.349. sept. 1853 à Louise Colet.

the cigars handed over to him by his student acquaintances when he was arrested on a false charge, and who refused the offer of a loan from Frédéric because 'avec sa place de caissier, il n'avait besoin de rien', painfully lose faith in the men for whom and with whom he had struggled, gradually forced into the realisation that their fight was not for freedom and justice but for power and gain. Whole-heartedly generous in his enthusiasms, absolutely loyal in his convictions, the soul of simple honour and dignity, he is the incarnation, and the only representative in Flaubert's work, of values once characteristic of the class he no longer typifies.

Sénécal. It is one of the police officers of the new regime who cuts down Dussardier, a certain Sénécal. He too had been a man of Republican convictions, greatly admired and sincerely befriended by 'le brave commis'. Utterly disinterested, completely committed to his cause, a man of rigid loyalties and inflexible principles, Senecal, who 'chaque soir ... cherchait dans les livres de quoi justifier ses rêves', was convinced that the application of certain theories to the re-organisation of society could change the world, and bring about that equalitarian democracy which for him represented perfection on earth. He had worked indefatigably for an opportunity to apply the panacea he had evolved from his socialist readings, plotting, fighting, in prison, in dire penury.

Unlike Dussardier, in the June Rising he fought against the Republic he had previously struggled to establish, because it had failed him in proving inadequate to the task of bringing about that reign of absolute equality which was his ideal. And in the December Coup d'Etat he rallies to an even more repressive government, to what he hopes will prove to be a totalitarian regime. For 'la fin des choses les rend légitimes. La dictature est quelquefois indispensable. Vive la tyrannie, pourvu que le tyran fasse le bien!' The rebel, the revolutionary, the fanatic of the bomb plots, has thrown in his lot with authority. But he still remains true to his ideal - the establishment of an equalitarian democracy, by whatever means it can be attained. Sénécal fights and sacrifices himself for theories and systems against which Flaubert inveighed all his life: universal suffrage, the necessity for art to be strictly didactic, the denial of individualism, the foundation of a geometrically organised society permitting of no distinction between man and man. There is scarcely an affirmation, a point of argument, an objection in all his conversation which Flaubert has not railed at when he has met it in real life. There is nothing even in his personality which can have attracted his creator: he is hard-headed, rigid, fanatical - ready to perpetrate abominable cruelties to further the advent of the Republic, quick to counter with the punishment of death the slightest opposition to Authority when he joins the forces of order. And yet Frédéric expresses the author's

own attitude to Sénécal when he learns from Dissardier of the latter's imprisonment as a result of an incendiary plot:

'Sénécal lui apparut plus grand qu'il ne croyait. Il se rappela ses souffrances, sa vie austère: sans avoir pour lui l'enthousiasme de Dissardier, il éprouvait néanmoins cette admiration qu'inspire tout homme se sacrifiant à une idée.'

He is, for all his denial of individuality, himself an individual who stands out above the shallow mediocrity, the vacillations, the self-seeking of his contemporaries, an incarnation of inflexible will and indomitable purpose. 'L'infinie stupidité des masses me rend indulgent pour les individualités, si odieuses qu'elles puissent être.' Flaubert wrote to George Sand when he was still engaged on L'Education Sentimentale.

(iii). Carthaginian Heroes:
Hamilcar and Giscon.

The lines just quoted are even more aptly applied to the Carthaginian general Hamilcar ... 'cet homme qui faisait trembler les légions', ruthless, intrepid, a military and political genius. His sureness and strength are born of no cheap self-satisfaction but of a fearless assessment of his own capacities - and of those of other men. All he possesses contributes to sustain him in his sense of fearless invulnerability. In his underground chambers,

surrounded by his fabulous wealth. 'Hamilcar debout souriait, les bras croisés: et il se délectait moins dans le spectacle que dans la conscience de ses richesses. Elles étaient inaccessibles, inépuisables, infinies. Ses aïeux, dormant sous ses pas, envoyaient à son cœur quelque chose de leur éternité. Il se sentait tout près des génies souterrains. C'était comme la joie d'un Kabyle: et les grands rayons lumineux frappant son visage lui semblaient l'extrémité d'un invisible réseau, qui, à travers des abîmes, l'attachait au centre du monde' (1).

He despised the anthropomorphic deities of the common crowd: he worshipped - in times of sudden weakness and incertitude - stones of a mystic significance, 'le culte des gens d'un esprit supérieur'. When he prayed, '... il s'efforçait à bannir de sa pensée toutes les formes, tous les symboles et les appellations des dieux, afin de mieux saisir l'esprit immuable que les apparences dérobaient. Quelque chose des vitalités planétaires le pénétrait, tandis qu'il sentait pour la mort et pour tous les hasards un dédain plus savant et plus intime. Quand il se releva, il était plein d'une

(1) cf. Tentation 1872. ed. Conrad p.10., p.20.

'Je me figure ... qu'on voyait entassés jusqu'au plafond des pierres fines, des diamants, des dariques. Un homme qui en possède une accumulation si grande n'est plus pareil aux autres. Il songe, tout en les maniant, qu'il tient le résultat d'une quantité innombrable d'efforts et comme la vie des peuples qu'il aurait pompée et qu'il peut répandre.'

'Rien d'impossible! Plus de souffrance! et ces rayons qui m'éblouissent ... Je garderai tout ... je me ferai creuser dans le roc une chambre ... et je viendrai là, pour sentir les piles d'or s'enfoncer sous mes talons...'

intrepidité sereine, invulnérable à la miséricorde, à la crainte..⁽¹⁾

But it was above all in his young son, who represented for him 'le prolongement de sa force, une continuation indéfinie de sa personne', and the very thought of whom could calm him 'comme l'attouchement d'un dieu', that Hamilcar found the source of his fearless strength.

He is cunning, ambitious, merciless, and yet a man of honour, hating the corruption and greed of his city, the cupidity and hypocrisy of her leaders. He is in fact the incarnation of the great soldier, whose ruthless strength and impassible courage had first thrilled Flaubert as a schoolboy and adolescent, when he dreamt of the battle-heroes of Petrarch and the exultant conquerors riding back into the city of Rome. Hamilcar is his portrayal of 'la tyrannie antique, que je regarde comme la plus belle manifestation de l'homme qui ait été'⁽²⁾. His quality is that which Flaubert describes as pride, and 'on n'en a jamais trop'⁽³⁾, as he would affirm. He meant, not an overweening

(1) The idea of some mystic intuition of the universe which is conveyed in this description of Hamilcar at prayer is perhaps not dissimilar from the various intuitions of nature which we have met with in other parts of Flaubert's work, and which we had occasion to discuss particularly with reference to la Tentation.

(2) Corr.I.225. 8 août 1846. à Louise Colet.

(3) Corr.VII. 10 à Mme. Gustave de Maupassant, 23 février, 1837. 'Le principal en ce monde est de tenir son âme dans une région haute, loin des fanges bourgeoises et démocratiques. Le culte de l'Art donne de l'orgueil: on n'en a jamais trop.' (et passim.)

presumptuousness and self-satisfied complacency, but inflexible purpose, the refusal to compromise with self or others, scorn of the common herd and its idolatrous values, the cold invulnerability which distinguishes a man from other men and sets him above them.

It is fitting that there should be amongst Flaubert's 'heroes' this incarnation of wholly masculine strength, closer to his creator than Dussardier or Sénécal, as close in his way as the saints. For we may see in him a projection of the self Flaubert denied, the man of action, the man of power - power symbolised in wealth or in leadership of men - the virile force tamed and held prisoner in the sedentary, solitary, hyper-sensitive writer of books.
(1)

Giscon. There was one man in Carthage revered and honoured by Hamilcar, the one just and noble member of the Ancients, Giscon, in whom Flaubert portrays the patriot. He is a minor figure, and yet in his brief appearances he symbolises the Carthage men like himself and Hamilcar had loved and served, a Carthage now decadent and corrupt, though he believes in her still. He is willing to sacrifice his entire wealth that she may honour her agreed

(1) It may be remembered that one of the principal temptations of Smarh was a military career which would win him immense power and immortal fame. Saint Antoine too knew the same temptation.

terms with the Mercenaries, be preserved as an honoured and honourable civilisation. But Carthage will sacrifice nothing to protect or defend him, and he falls into the hands of these same Barbarians he had commanded, a symbol of his city's honour now in chains. Hands and feet fettered, 'coiffé d'une tiare grotesque', he stands immobile, a figure of patrician dignity: and the Carthaginian troops from the distance of their camp slowly recognise the stately prisoner, 'en sentant au fond de leur coeur comme l'éroulement de la République'.

But Giscon retains his conviction of her grandeur, still believes in her renaissance and rise to future glory. Only when he thinks Salammbô has betrayed her city and dishonoured her royal blood in offering herself of her own accord to the Barbarian leader Mâtho does he see in this act of desecration a sign of the inevitable ruin of Carthage:

'J'ai cent ans, bientôt, dit-il. J'ai vu Agathoclès: j'ai vu Régulus et les aigles des Romains passer sur les moissons des champs puniques! ... Mes compagnons, l'un après l'autre, sont à mourir autour de moi ... et pourtant pas un seul jour je n'ai désespéré de Carthage! Quand même j'aurais vu contre elle toutes les armées de la terre, et les flammes des sièges dépasser la hauteur des temples, j'aurais cru encore à son éternité! Mais, à présent, tout est fini! tout est perdu! Les dieux l'exécrent! ...
Ah! sacrilège! Maudite sois-tu! maudite! maudite!'

We do not hear him again; he dies a few days later decapitated by the Barbarians who hold him captive. When they find him, still in the exact spot where he had cursed Salammbô - 'il avait l'air d'un mort disposé pour le sépulcre ... cependant ... ses yeux ... regardaient d'une façon continue et intolérable.' They precipitate themselves upon him and the deed done, sling the noble head over the palissade into the Carthaginian camp, a silent messenger of the city's future degradation and ruin.

Like Dussardier, Giscon represents ideals and loyalties which no longer govern the mass of his fellow citizens. But he is the representative of different values; he is an aristocrat, the flower of a civilisation which has given him the heritage of virtues, honour and dignity, austere beauty, the power to command and lead. The contrast between the qualities he represents and the brute courage of the passionate, clamouring horde of Barbarians is brought out in his first appearance in the gardens of Hamilcar, amidst the orgy of the Mercenary celebrations of victory. - A figure of immense dignity, crowned with a gold mitre and draped in the ample folds of a black cloak, he addresses the mob, adroitly flatters them, reasons with them, and calmly refuses their extravagant requests. But incited by Spandius the crowd continue their shouting and gesticulation -

'Giscon haussa les épaules: son courage serait inutile contre des bêtes brutes, exaspérées. Mieux valait plus tard s'en venger dans quelque ruse, donc il fit signe à ses soldats et s'éloigna lentement.'

He does not realise that Carthage has to contend not only with the Barbarian hordes from without, but with a worse barbarism within, in the gradual degradation and corruption of the values for which she once stood. There is little doubt that Flaubert saw in the lonely figure of Giscon a configuration of his own solitude in a world where the values for which he lived were so often spurned or ignored, a world which he believed to be yet again on the verge of an 'irremédiable barbarie'.

(iv) Heroines: Félicité and Madame Arnoux.

It would not be possible to conclude this survey of the quality of 'greatness' in the Flaubertian conception without reference to two women characters, each of whom the author looked upon with respect and admiration, tenderness and compassion. They are the servant Félicité portrayed in Misère d'un Cœur Simple, and the celebrated Madame Arnoux of l'Education Sentimentale.

Félicité. It is well known that the former work was written at the instigation of George Sand. Flaubert had been troubled by her reactions when she had heard of his Saint-Julien. 'Toi, à coup sûr, tu vas faire de la désolation,' she had written, 'et moi de la consolation.' 'Je ne fais pas de la désolation à plaisir,' he had

replied, 'mais je ne peux changer mes yeux!' He did not set out on purpose to create a starkly pessimistic picture of life, ⁽¹⁾ and in fact he did all he could not to allow his personal view to obtrude into his writing: but he could only reproduce the reality he saw, which was not the idyllic and consoling world portrayed in George Sand's later work. She had offered him none the less her advice which he could not and did not wish simply to ignore: a recipe for the success which she rightly judged him to need after the failure of l'Education Sentimentale:

'Il te faut un succès après une mauvaise chance qui t'a trouble profondément: je te dis où sont les conditions certaines de ce succès. Garde ton culte pour la forme: mais occupe-toi d'avantage du fond. Ne prends pas la vertu vraie pour un lieu - commun en littérature. Donne-lui son représentant, fais passer l'honnête et le fort à travers ces fous et ces idiots dont tu aimes à te moquer. Montre ce qui est solide au fond de ces avortements intellectuels: enfin, quitte le convenu des réalistes et reviens à la vraie réalité, qui est mêlée de beau et de laid, de terne et de brillant,

(1) Corr.VII. 280. décembre 1875. or alternatively Corr. entre George Sand et Gustave Flaubert: P.436.

(2) Not at any rate until he came to write Bouvard et Pécuchet.

mais où la volonté du bien trouve quand même sa place et son
 emploi.'⁽¹⁾

Félicité is in Flaubert's view the incarnation of those virtues of loyalty and strength, of 'la volonté du bien' which Madame Sand urges him to show the reader - but his own conception of those virtues, not hers.

Like Julie, who had been Flaubert's nurse-maid and whom remained with the family all her life, like Catherine Leroux, the old farm servant in Madame Bovary, Félicité too represents 'un demi-siècle de servitude'. Nothing, however extraordinary, had ever been allowed to prevent her fulfilling painstakingly and perfectly the ordinary duties of her day. When her little nephew leaves on his first long voyage, it is only 'après le diner de Madame' with her day's work done, that she sets out to cover the four leagues to Honfleur, arriving just in time to see the gang-planks removed and the ship sail. Six months later comes news of the boy's death: 'Félicité tomba sur une chaise, ... le front baissé, les mains pendantes, l'œil fixe, elle répétait par intervalles: "Pauvre petit gars! pauvre petit gars!"'

(1) Corr. entre George Sand et Gustave Flauberts. 15 janvier 1876.
 P.445.

Staring through the window she sees women passing by with their barrows full of washing -

'elle se rappela la lessive: l'ayant coulee la veille, il fallait aujourd'hui la rincer: et elle sortit de l'appartement.'

The perfection of her service springs not from fear of her mistress, but from love. All her tenderness is centred on the children, all her devotion on Madame Aubain. Virginie, the delicate little girl, had been in particular her exclusive occupation.

'Avec l'imagination que donnent les vraies tendresses', the nursemaid had entered into and shared the child's experience to the point of feeling herself identified with her charge in moments of particular stress or excitement. Her grief at the little girl's death was only equalled by her sorrow for her nephew a few months later.

But she turned then to comforting her distraught mistress, and 'la bonté de son coeur se développa'. She looked after the Polish refugees, nursed cholera victims, completely provided for an old villager afflicted with a hideous cancer. And when at last her mistress died -

'Félicité la pleura comme on ne pleure pas les maitres. Que Madame mourût avant elle, cela troubla ses idées, lui semble contraire à l'ordre des choses, inadmissible et monstrueux.'

The house is put up for sale, the furniture taken. Félicité, quite alone now, stays on in her dark little attic under a leaking roof, afraid to ask for repairs, afraid to go out, for fear some-

body should try to evict her from her only home. She had grown deaf many years before her mistress died; now her sight fails and she limps badly. Her sole consolation and company is that of a stuffed parrot.

Loulou had been presented to Madame Aubain years ago, but she, soon exasperated by the bird, had given him to Félicité, and the servant, delighted with him, had taught him to speak - 'Charmant garçon! Serviteur, monsieur! Je vous salue, Marie!' Soon Loulou alone could make himself audible, and in the silence of her world he had become her unique source of conversation, 'presqu'un fils, un amoureux.' When he had died she had been inconsolable until her mistress suggested she might have the bird stuffed. And henceforth he had a place of honour in her little room, filled with souvenirs of those she had honoured and loved, and with all manner of pious objects.

Among these figured one of those vividly coloured images d'Epinal representing the Baptism of Our Lord. It seemed to Félicité, whenever she studied the picture, as when she looked at the stained-glass window in church, that the Holy Spirit bore a much closer resemblance to Loulou than to the dove Monsieur le Curé told them about at Virginie's catechism. She had always had extreme difficulty in figuring to herself the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, for -

'il n'était pas seulement oiseau, mais encore un feu, et d'autres fois un souffle. C'est peut-être sa lumière qui voltige la nuit au

bord des marécages, son haleine qui pousse les nuées, sa voix qui rend les cloches harmonieuses ...'

Moreover, she muses -

'le Père, pour s'enoncer, n'avait pu choisir une colombe, puisque ces bêtes-la n'ont pas de voix, mais plutôt un ancêtre de Loulou.'

In the confusion and frightened loneliness of her last years, she tends to pray to the Holy Spirit not looking at the picture, but, at least now and then, at Loulou, until -

'elle ... contracta l'habitude idolâtre de dire ses oraisons agenouillée devant le perroquet. Quelquefois le soleil, entrant par la lucarne, frappait son oeil de verre, et en faisait jaillir un grand rayon lumineux qui la mettait en extase.'

When her last illness comes to an end, Félicité dies as quietly and unobtrusively as she had lived: and it seems to her, as she breathes her last breath, that she can see 'dans les cieux entr'ouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête.'

However distasteful or distressing this rapprochement may be to the individual reader, it is certainly not to be interpreted as deliberately aggressive or provocative on Flaubert's part. His attitude to Félicité, as to Julie his nurse or to Catherine Leroux, is one of tender respect. He is never ironic at her expense, least of all as regards her religion. Her faith as he conceives it is that 'croyance... a quelquechose de supérieur à la vie et le besoin de se mettre sous sa protection'⁽¹⁾, which he held to be the common

(1) Corr. III. 149. 31 mars 1853 à Louise Colet.

basis of all religions. As soon as she is presented with the story of Christian revelation (when she first takes Virginie to catechism) Félicité accepts it - 'pour de pareilles âmes le surnaturel est tout simple', Flaubert writes of her. As far as doctrine was concerned 'elle n'y comprenait rien, ne tâcha même pas de comprendre'. But she understands the wrath and power of the Most-High, the gentleness and kindness of Christ, retains from the lessons of Monsieur le Curé all that has an echo in her own life and character: a humble and unquestioning respect and fear of the Almighty, a tender compassion and love for the Crucified Christ. Only the incorporeal Spirit 'elle avait peine à imaginer', until the likeness between the dove in her picture and Loulou solves her problem. We have seen in our study of la Tentation how Flaubert believed this urge to represent the transcendent and eternal in finite and material form was a basic factor in revealed religions - their raison d'être in fact. In Félicité's ultimate confusion he is portraying a fundamental temptation of man, but in no way making mock or suggesting contempt of the old servant.

On the contrary, there is conveyed in the last lines of the story something of the sense of an apotheosis. Félicité's death is tranquil, beautiful -

'Les mouvements de son coeur se ralentirent un à un, plus vagues chaque fois, plus doux, comme une fontaine qui s'épuise, comme un écho qui disparaît...'

She is happy: Monsieur le Curé has accepted Loulou. 'sa seule

richesse', to keep after her death. And supremely happy in her last blurred vision of the opening heavens and a parrot, even more bright and beautiful than hers. We are reminded of the last lines of Saint-Julian - ('le toit s'envola, le firmament se déployait') and have perhaps the same kind of impression of a servant rewarded.

No doubt Mme. Sand would have found Flaubert's story one of desolation, not consolation. It is in the author's own words 'tres ⁽¹⁾ sérieux et tres triste.' Félicité's love never finds its fulfilment, is never allowed its full expression: all those she loves and cherishes leave her or die, until she is left half-blind, stone deaf, lame, in complete solitude.

And yet Flaubert meant the story as one of consolation: not because it portrayed a happy life, but because it showed a good life. Ignorant, timid, totally unassuming, Félicité is ignored, ill-treated, exploited, forgotten. Nobody ever penetrates her solitude, it is she who gives, to receive nothing in return. But

(1) Corr. VII. 307. 19 juin 1876 à Madame Roger des Genettes. - The whole passage is interesting. Madame de Genettes had apparently mistaken the promised 'conte' for an ironic characterisation of some pious spinster. Flaubert is quick to correct her: 'L'Histoire d'un coeur simple est tout bonnement le récit d'une vie obscure, celle d'une pauvre fille de campagne, dévote mais mystique, dévouée sans exaltation et tendre comme du pain frais. Elle aime successivement un homme, les enfants de sa maitresse, un neveu, le vieillard qu'elle soigne, puis son perroquet: quand le perroquet est mort, elle le fait empailler, et, mourant à son tour, elle confond le perroquet avec le Saint-Esprit. Cela n'est nullement ironique comme vous le supposez, mais au contraire très sérieux et très triste. Je veux apitoyer, faire pleurer les âmes sensibles, en étant une moi-même.'

she is neither bitter nor resentful, never complaining, never demanding - 'la bonté de son cœur se développa.' In all the griefs and sorrows of the hardest of lives she had still known happiness because she has continued to give, regardless of herself, because she had always lived in others, and not in herself.

Indeed, in his attempt to convey the measure of Félicité's self-effacement and transparent simplicity, Flaubert can use expressions which leave some readers ill at ease, evocative as they are of something animal-like or automatic, and unpleasantly ill-suited, it would seem, to the description of a human being. Thus it is that he eventually characterises the old servant in the much discussed phrase:

'toujours silencieuse, la taille droite et les gestes mesurés, elle semblait une femme en bois, fonctionnant d'une manière automatique.' We are told too that she cherished her mistress 'avec un dévouement bestial et une vénération religieuse'. As for the two children - '(ils) lui semblaient formés d'une matière précieuse: elle les portait sur son dos comme un cheval, et Madame Aubain lui défendit de les baiser à chaque minute, ce qui la mortifia.'

One might recall that Flaubert uses the same type of comparison to convey the silent, unquestioning humility of Catherine Leroux:

'Quelque chose d'une rigidité monacale relevait l'expression de sa figure... Dans la fréquentation des animaux elle avait pris leur mutisme et leur placidité.'

It is quite certain that none of these parallels were in Flaubert's view pejorative. For him Félicité, like Catherine, was an incarnat-

ion of that unassuming selflessness he saw as the basis of Charity, and she is perhaps nowhere better characterised than in Charity's own description of herself in la Tentation:

'humble d'esprit et vaste de coeur, sans espoir que l'on me rende, ni que la pénitence me serve, ni que Dieu me récompense, je donne pour donner, je prie pour prier, car je n'aime que pour aimer.'⁽¹⁾

Madame Arnoux. These lines would apply equally well to Madame Arnoux, who, though very different from Félicité in background, experience and destiny, has yet that same simplicity of heart and quality of inherent selflessness, of unquestioning love given to the last, the quiet sacrifice of a wife and mother dedicated to her family. Flaubert's attitude to Félicité was one of compassion, of tender respect too: but Marie Arnoux he loved. First in the adolescent composition Mémoires d'un Fou, and again in his first Education Sentimentale, he had portrayed, at least in some measure, the woman with whom he had fallen in love at the age of fourteen and who represented the ideal of womanhood to which he remained mysteriously and irrevocably attached - Eliza Schlesinger. The portrait we have in the present work is the last and fullest. Not

(1) La Tentation (1849) p.335.

that we have anything approaching the roman à clef in L'Education Sentimentale. It is only since Flaubert's death and the discovery of all manner of autobiographical documents that the prototype of this gentle, dignified, mature woman, Marie Arnoux, has been recognised. Flaubert would have shrunk from any hint at, least of all revelation of this most intimate wound: in any case Madame Schlessinger was still alive. And besides, like all his characters, Madame Arnoux is essentially an original creation of his own.

What did he transpose from life into the novel then? On the one hand the situation of a woman unhappily married, mother of two children, wife of an irresponsible and unfaithful husband who is all the same undeniably 'bon garçon', no more approaching the traditional villain of the piece than Madame Arnoux is a conventional heroine. And on the other hand those qualities of mind and heart which, with the penetrating understanding and sympathy of a mature man who had spent half a life-time in the observation of human character, he reads into the life of Eliza Schlessinger. (1)

(1) Whilst he could not but realise that she was unhappy in her marriage, it is highly improbable that he knew of her real situation which he could only have learned from herself - and as we saw earlier it seems improbable that such a degree of intimacy existed between them. She had been married originally to a certain Judee: he, because of some dire misfortune - perhaps financial - was obliged to disappear from public and social circles. Schlessinger saved him - but asked in return his young wife, already his mistress. She lived the rest of her life therefore under a false name. It was essential to conceal her past. It has been said that she still loved Judee - in which case her position must have been well nigh intolerable.

He weaves out of this the tender, delicately drawn character study of Mme. Arnoux.

She is a reserved and quiet figure: her presence is likened to an accompanying music, 'grave et presque religieuse'. We are shown more often than not portraits of her seated against the light, in profile, occupied with some sort of domestic task, her children near at hand. This calm simplicity of her outward mien is the reflection of her sincerity of heart.

'Elle plaignait les désastres de la passion, mais était révoltée par les turpitudes hypocrites: et cette droiture d'esprit se rapportait si bien à la beauté régulière de son visage, qu'elle semblait en dépendre'.

There is nothing of the duplicity of feminine vanity in her, 'aucune exagération de la bêtise maternelle'. She is in fact untouched by 'le puritanisme, la bégueulerie, la bigotterie, le système du renfermé, de l'étroit', the whole system of feminine education against which Flaubert would rail and which, he claimed, 'a dénaturé et perd dans sa fleur les plus charmantes créatures de Bon Dieu.'⁽¹⁾

For Flaubert women are creatures of heart and sensibility, judging and acting in accordance with the dictates of feeling and intuition. Madame Arnoux is not exempt from these limitations:

(1) Corr.II.257. 14 novembre 1850 (le Constantinople) à sa mère.

'elle croyait aux songes', for instance: she admires orators rather than writers - 'on devait sentir ... une plus forte jouissance à remuer les foules directement, soi-même, à voir passer dans leur âme tous les sentiments de la sienne'. In fact 'elle s'exaltait peu pour la littérature' - but 'son esprit charmait par des mots simples et pénétrants'. When Frédéric tries once to open up a more intimate conversation by having recourse to a volume of Musset, to 'l'amour, ses désespoirs et ... ses emportements', Madame Arnoux tersely condemns it all as 'criminel ou factice'. 'Quelles maximes bourgeoises vous avez', Frédéric, exasperated, reproaches her a few minutes later. 'Mais je ne me vante pas d'être une grande dame' she replies simply.

And with all this goes a deep tenderness; 'une bonté infinie' in the expression of her eyes, 'des intonations caressantes' in her voice. Above all in her dealings with the children there is about her 'un air de bonté plus délicat'. It is rare in fact to see her without them. Almost always Frédéric would find her 'montrant à lire à son bambin, ou derrière la chaise de Marthe qui faisait des gammes sur son piano'. Her attitude in dismissing Frédéric on his first attempt to declare his love for her is symbolically 'debout, sur le seuil de sa chambre, avec ses deux enfants à ses côtés.' When, some time previous to this, in one of the most painful domestic crises, he had suggested her separation from Arnoux, she had refused the idea immediately - 'pour l'amour de ses enfants, jamais elle n'en viendrait à une telle extrémité.'

Yet eventually she allows the young man to declare his love

for her. How is this? Is it a denial of the loyalty and sacrifice, the reserve and dignity, all she has embodied so far?

The marriage of the Arnoux has been revealed as one of incompatibles: 'ils en étaient à cette période où... une invincible lassitude ressort des concessions que l'on s'est faites et rend l'existence intolérable. Madame Arnoux se retenait pour ne pas éclater, Arnoux s'assombrissait'. It is as a confidant for one and the other that Frédéric becomes an intimate friend of the household, even 'le parasite de la maison'. As soon as Arnoux leaves the apartments, after a dinner 'où Monsieur et Madame, en face l'un de l'autre, n'échangeaient pas un mot', Madame Arnoux turns to Frédéric - not for solace, for she neither sees nor seeks a solution to her suffering ('aucun changement ne pouvait survenir, et son malheur à elle était irréparable.') - but simply to express herself:

'Ce n'était pas son inconduite qui l'indignait, Mais elle paraissait souffrir dans son orgueil, et laissait voir sa répugnance pour cet homme sans délicatesse, sans dignité, sans honneur'.

It is in fact not his vices to which she objects, but all his ways, tactless, indelicate, unrefined: his good-humoured but vulgar expansiveness, so different from her own reticent dignity and calm.

In all this there is no conscious thought of Frédéric as anything other than a sensitive and sympathetic friend in whom she can trust. When therefore he makes his first open avowal of love she receives it coldly - 'lorsqu'une femme appartient à un autre, on s'éloigne', she tells him: 'pour celles qui oublieraient le devoir ou la religion, le simple bon sens' should be a sufficient

deterrent in temptation, the egoism which sets domestic peace above a momentary personal happiness, however great.

The second time she turns him away, it is in very different circumstances. She has scarcely seen Frédéric in the interval since the scene recounted above. But she has been brought to the realisation that she loves him. This was when Deslaurier, in a last desperate and fumbling effort to win her favour, tried to deceive her into believing Frédéric married. 'Elle porta sa main sur son coeur, comme au choc d'un grand coup ... C'était comme une désertion immense.'

And then, sitting motionless in her empty apartments, in the heat of a summer's afternoon, she suddenly realises the truth.

'Il lui semblait descendre dans quelque chose de profond, qui n'en finissait plus ... Et elle restait au bord de son fauteuil, les prunelles fixes, et souriant toujours.'

It is some months later when Frédéric meets her by chance in Arnoux's shop. The subject of his supposed marriage having been broached, he denies it, emphatic, indignant, taking her head between his hands, vowing that he will never marry. 'Elle acceptait ces caresses, figée par la surprise, et par le ravissement'. They are suddenly interrupted. The next day Frédéric returns and renews his declarations of love: but this time Madame Arnoux is prepared. She beseeches him to leave - and herself flees Paris for the country.

Thus begins the third and last act in their drama. Frédéric follows her. But wiser now, 'il ne parla point de son amour. Pour

lui inspirer plus de confiance il exagéra même sa réserve....'

'Il était bien entendu qu'ils ne devaient pas s'appartenir. Cette convention, qui les garantissait du péril, facilitait leurs épanchements'. And thus it was that Madame Arnoux 'sûre de ne pas faillir... s'abandonnait à un sentiment qui lui semblait un droit conquis par ses chagrins... Quel abîme entre la grossièreté d'Arnoux et les adorations de Frédéric!'

When, back in Paris, she is pressed by the latter into accepting a rendez-vous, it is with hesitation and shame. She certainly does not understand the nature of his intentions. 'Qui donc l'empêchait de se montrer à son bras devant tout le monde', he had asked - and without waiting for a reply had arranged the place and time of their meeting. On the actual day all thought of Frédéric is forgotten in the anguish of her child's illness, and it is only after long hours of watching, when she is at last told that the baby is saved, that she suddenly remembers. Then, 'd'une façon nette et inexorable' she perceives the danger of her situation... the danger which she formulates not as it concerns her, but in terms of the harm it could do to the son she has so nearly lost now. 'Sans doute on insulterait son fils à cause d'elle: et Madame Arnoux l'aperçut jeune homme, blessé dans une rencontre, rapporté sur un brancard, mourant. D'un bond, elle se précipita sur la petite chaise: et de toutes ses forces, lançant son âme dans les hauteurs, elle offrit à Dieu, comme un holocauste, le sacrifice de sa première passion, de sa seule faiblesse.'

Circumstances help in the consummation of her sacrifice - the knowledge that Frédéric has deserted her for Rosanette, to her the incarnation of vulgarity. Yet, as she confesses many months later, when each is able to explain to the other the circumstances which had been the cause of their bitterness towards one another, she never ceases to believe that he loves her and that their misunderstandings will be cleared away. In the bitterness of her solitude she opens her heart to him once more: but they are interrupted by an imperious Rosanette, demanding Frédéric's return, and Madame Arnoux welcomes the interruption with a kind of desperate relief - 'C'est une occasion. Partez! Partez!'

On hearing of the Arnoux' bankruptcy some time after this Frédéric hastens there, to find nobody. It is almost twenty years later that she confides to him that she had seen him, and hidden - for fear of herself, of him. She has come now to pay at last her husband's debts, and to see Frédéric for the last time - 'ma dernière démarche de femme.' This is the last image we have of her, one in which are resumed all her qualities, her loyalty, her delicacy, her suffering, the mingled reticence and abandon of her love for Frédéric as she accepts his compliments, hears 'avec ravissement ces adorations pour une femme qu'elle n'était plus.' Now she is really 'sûre de ne pas faillir' and can savour with impunity the delicate distinction of his devotion to her. She kisses him - 'au front comme une mère,' and cutting off a lock of her hair takes her leave.

Madame Arnoux is the incarnation of feminine perfection for Flaubert. A figure whose mature and dignified beauty, yet tenderly gentle, reflects her quiet acceptance of suffering, her purity of heart, her sensitivity and love. She does not ask or seek happiness, which is granted her only in rare moments, but simply to fulfil her duties as a wife and mother and accomplish her silent sacrifice, without bitterness, without resentment, wholly unassuming.

II.

VICTIMS AND FAILURES.

If we look back at the men and women whose lives have been unfolded before us in these pages, it is evident that they represent extreme differences in race, in time, in temperament, in destiny. But they are alike in that they all, by virtue of some quality or other, stand out from the crowd of their contemporaries. For some this distinction, which attains sometimes to greatness, lies in the imperious strength and bold courage of a statesman and soldier; for others a simple generosity of heart, an instinctive compassion and humility, an innate goodness; and though differently and to a greater or lesser degree, Flaubert admires them all.

There are, however, other characters who stand out from the mediocrities around them: who have in their own way a heroic and tragic destiny, although they are not heroes; and upon whom their author looks with compassion and sympathy, even if he cannot always admire them.

We saw in the Vices and Virtues of la Tentation, and in the victims of the Sphinx and the Chimera, an allegorical representation of characters who, aware of the insufficiency of their present state, set their hearts on finding happiness in some future state which they are constantly attempting to bring into being. But this dream, once realised, proves as unsatisfactory as the

condition which drove them to conceive of it, a source of enervation and despair, even of ruin, since the Chimera strangles her victims and the Sphinx wearies his to death. Characters like these are doubly misled. Not only do they seek their fulfilment in an end which can never satisfy them, but they are tragically mistaken from the start in believing the perfect consummation of their desires to be possible.

This type of theme expressed in terms of human love is fundamental to the three novels of Flaubert's maturity. In each case, despite the differences of background and plot, we are concerned with the close inter-relationship between the love of a man for a woman, or woman for a man, and that individual's aspiration at the same time to something further, infinite and inaccessible. We meet again, in short, with those themes of idealisation and sublimation with which we are already familiar from earlier works. Emma Bovary has her prototype in the fifteen year-old's creation Mazza, of Passion et Vertu, as in the prostitute Maria of Novembre: Frédéric is the young hero of Mémoires d'un Fou who had fallen in love with the beautiful Marie, and the artist Jules who had idealised his Lucinde. The themes of Madame Bovary and of Salammbô are already hinted at in the literary projects of 1850 when, after the failure of the first Tentation, Flaubert was wondering to what subject to turn. He finds three:

'1. Une nuit de Don Juan à laquelle j'ai pensé au lazaret de Rhodes: 2. L'histoire d'Anubis, la femme qui veut se faire aimer par le Dieu. C'est la plus haute, mais elle a des difficultés

atroces: 3. mon roman flamand de la jeune fille qui meurt vierge et mystique, entre son père et sa mère, dans une petite ville de province...'

But these subjects are in a sense so akin to one another that he wonders if they could not, should not, be merged in to a single work.

'Ce qui me turlupine', he goes on, 'c'est la parenté d'idées entre ces trois plans. Dans le premier, l'amour inassouvissable sous les deux formes de l'amour terrestre et de l'amour mystique. Dans le second, même histoire: mais on se donne, et l'amour terrestre est moins élevé en ce qu'il est plus précis. Dans le troisième, ils sont réunis dans la même personne, et l'un mène à l'autre: seulement mon héroïne crève d'exaltation religieuse après avoir connu celle des sens.'⁽¹⁾

If none of these plans is worked on qua se they are obviously closely connected with those basic to Madame Bovary and Salammbô, where we are concerned in either case with 'l'amour inassouvissable' in its human aspect or in a sublimated form.

(1) Corr. II. 253. Constantinople, 14 novembre 1850 à Louis Bouilhet.

(1) Madame Bovary.

Few heroines of literature can have been more sadly misunderstood and condemned than Emma Bovary, on whose account Flaubert was brought to trial for 'outrage aux moeurs' before the novel had appeared in complete form. With the notable exception of Baudelaire, (1) most contemporary critics took her for a hysterical woman whose sole distinction lay in her beauty. They treated her as being stupid, egocentric, unnatural to the point of rejecting her own child, completely at the mercy of her unbridled passions and imagination.

It was only some thirty years after the publication of the novel that critics like Paul Bourget, (2) and later Jules de Gaultier, (3) succeeded in raising her reputation, by showing her to be not a criminal but a victim: 'une âme délicate', in the words of the

(1) Baudelaire's remarkably penetrating article was published in L'Artiste in October, 1857 - several months after the publication of the novel and a year after its first appearance in the Revue de Paris. This article can now be found in Baudelaire's l'Art Romantique.

(2) Bourget. Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine, I. (iii. Gustave Flaubert), 1883.

(3) Jules de Gaultier: Le Bovarysme, 1892. (enlarged edition 1902)

former, condemned to move in a gross world where none of the poor pleasures at her disposal are able to fill 'l'abime profond et trop plaintif de son coeur'. It was Jules de Gaultier who first used, to describe her psychological dilemma, the term which has now become current - 'le bovarysme'. Expanding Bourget's idea of her suffering resulting from the disproportion between the life she experienced and that of which she dreamt, this latter critic shows Emma Bovary as having a double personality, an actual self and an ideal self which eventually so imposes itself on her imagination that she becomes completely divorced from life as it is, and so sinks into the degradations of adultery and debt, almost into theft and prostitution, whilst never seeing them as such. Her suicide is at once the expiation and logical culmination of this impossible double existence.

Thereafter critics have enlarged upon these theories in offering explanations for this phenomena of double existence, blaming her education above her social state, her early acquaintance with the literature of Romanticism, filling her with illusions as to the life she will eventually have to live, portraying it as one of great passions and splendid adventure. They have shown too how her vividly imaginative and passionate nature would have inevitably sought, in the restricted monotony of the life she was destined to lead in a Norman village or small town, to compensate for its emptiness and disillusionment in dreams and fantasies.

All this is true. She was put to school 'chez les Ursulines' where the company of girls from an aristocratic milieu with all the refinements and elegances she has never known in her own peasant home, and the vistas opened up by the sentimental novels and tearful pieties, all contribute to exasperate her sensibilities and excite her imagination, to paint for her a picture of life far removed from the reality of her provincial and agricultural background. More important, the longings within the child are formulated in terms of passionate love or of mystic piety, and it is always in these terms that they will find expression. When she finds in marriage none of the refinements of sentiment or the ecstasies described in the novels which represented the ideal happiness she longs to attain, she turns to the religion of her childhood. When that fails her because the village priest no more understands her than does her husband, she seeks outside marriage the promised happiness: 'ces joies de l'amour' which had been 'la longue rêverie de sa jeunesse,' realising at last, in the status of a woman who has a lover, the dreams of girlhood, the ambitions of the unhappy wife... 'Elle entrait dans quelque chose de merveilleux, où tout serait passion, extase, délire: une immensité bleuâtre l'entourait, les sommets du sentiment étincelaient sous sa pensée, et l'existence ordinaire n'apparaissait qu'au loin, tout en bas, dans l'ombre... N'avait-elle pas assez souffert! Mais elle triomphait maintenant, et l'amour, si longtemps contenu, jaillissait tout entier avec des bouillonnements joyeux. Elle le savourait sans remords, sans

inquietude, sans trouble.'

It is precisely now that the crisis of Emma's drama occurs, and that she is shown for the tragic heroine she really is and not the petty adulteress she has been taken to be. And it is here that we see the real roots of her suffering, of her attempted evasion, of her future degradation and suicide.

Only a few weeks after her first rendez-vous with her lover, we find her musing over a letter from her father and regretting the past, which so very recently, in the intoxicated happiness of the first days with Rodolphe, she had been only too eager to forget. She looks back on it as a time of dreams and illusions, but a happy time.

'quel bonheur dans ce temps-là! quelle liberté! quel espoir! quelle abondance d'illusions! Il n'en restait plus maintenant! Elle en avait dépensé à toutes les aventures de son âme ... dans la virginité, dans le mariage et dans l'amour... Mais qui donc la rendait si malheureuse? où était la catastrophe extraordinaire qui l'avait bouleversée? Et elle relevait la tête, regardant autour d'elle, comme pour chercher la cause qui la faisait souffrir.'

She finds no satisfaction in this new love, any more than she had in marriage. Rodolphe himself is puzzled and irritated by 'tout ce trouble dans une chose aussi simple que l'amour', and senses 'un motif, une raison, et comme un auxiliaire à son attachement'. For she seeks in their relationship more than he does, and asks more. It is Rodolphe who represents the vulgar exploiter of sensual pleasure, the libertine - all, in fact, that Emma, as an adulteress, has been mistaken for. But when she says to him 'tu es tout pour moi', it is not an empty phrase: she has made of him an absolute.

His desertion of her is therefore a sudden obliteration of her reason for existing. The fortuitous arrival of Charles saves her from suicide, but her collapse is complete. She lies for weeks as if dead - neither speaking, seeing, hearing, seeming not even to suffer.

It is now that for the second time she turns to the only other issue she knows, religion. At the height of her illness she had received the sacraments, and had experienced in the enervated weakness of her state a kind of vision, the sense of no longer belonging to her body.

'Il existait donc à la place du bonheur des félicités plus grandes, un autre amour au-dessus de tous les amours, sans intermittence ni fin, et qui s'accroîtrait éternellement! Elle entrevit, parmi les illusions de son espoir, un état de pureté flottant au-dessus de la terre, se confondant avec le ciel, ou elle aspira d'être.'

As previously she had tried to 'se donner de l'amour', so now she tries to 'faire venir la croyance', and to withdraw from the world about her into an ethereal atmosphere of purity and prayer, to become lost in that everlasting love which could not fail her. In long prayers she tries to evoke it, even addressing to the Lord 'les mêmes paroles de suavité qu'elle murmurait jadis à son amant.' But she has at the end of it all only 'le sentiment d'une immense duperie' and little by little she abandons hope and interest.

It is only a question of time now, and of the concurrence of external events, before she is driven to a lucid awareness of her state, and, in despair, to suicide, before she realises that

neither passionate love affairs nor the ethereal beatitude she had tried to induce by pious practices bring her the fulfilment to which she aspires.

There is certainly a sense in which one may speak of the fatality of her situation. Given her temperament, her education, her milieu, imposing upon her certain needs and offering her only restricted possibilities of fulfilment, it is inevitable that, having once exhausted those possibilities, she will be reduced to despair. She sees, by reason of her upbringing and sex, only two means to happiness - love or religion. When these fail her in their normal forms she tries them in abnormal forms - exchanges marriage for adultery, and the ordinary piety which she rejected in her school-days for a kind of false mysticism. And she is doomed to sink further and further into degradation and corruption as she continues to seek in her love affairs, having abandoned religion altogether, the perfect happiness to which she aspires.

She is not a mere plaything of events, The fact that Charles takes her at the end of her convalescence to the theatre in Rouen, where she meets Léon, the clerk she had loved virtuously before she knew Rodolphe, does in a sense put temptation in her way and is instrumental to her fall. But even had she not met Léon her situation would have been as tragic and as desperate, for she carried within her the seeds of her destruction. 'On n'a jamais

tenté personne', Flaubert wrote, ⁽¹⁾ 'on se tente soi-même'. The fatality of which she is victim is the fatality which pursued Saint-Julien - on the one hand her given temperament, on the other 'la constitution interne de la vie' ⁽²⁾ condemning us to live in a world which, however vast, is always less in its dimensions than our desire.

Emma therefore succumbs for a second time to the illusion of an all-satisfying love. It is not she who is possessed by Léon, but she who possesses him, dominates him in an all-absorbing subjugation which must sooner or later inspire both fear and revolt in the young man. 'Où donc,' he asks himself, 'avait-elle appris cette corruption, presque immatérielle à force d'être profonde et dissimulée?' 'Il ne savait pas quelle réaction de tout son être la poussait d'avantage à se précipiter sur les jouissances de la vie.' She tries desperately to prolong or to revive an illusion of happiness, promising herself with each journey to Rouen to meet her lover 'une félicité profonde', only to return disillusioned. But 'cette déception s'effaçait vite sous un espoir nouveau, et Emma reveçait à lui plus enflammée, plus avide.'

(1) Corr. VII. 378. 25 décembre 1875 à Mme. Tennant.

(2) Corr. II. 68. Sans date (1847) à Louise Colet.

Then one summer's afternoon as she makes her way to the coach for the return journey, she catches sight of the convent walls, and subsiding on to a seat, in the shade, remembers the quiet of her schooldays, and all her dreams of love - the first months of her marriage, Rodolphe, Léon ...

'elle n'était pas heureuse, ne l'avait jamais été. D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait?...

She pauses in her thoughts. Then comes the eternally recurring question. If there existed somewhere a strong and valorous being with 'un coeur de poète' why should they not be brought together? 'Oh! quelle impossibilité! Rien, d'ailleurs, ne valait la peine d'une recherche; tout mentait! Chaque sourire cachait un bâillement d'ennui, chaque joie une malédiction, tout plaisir son dégoût, et les meilleurs baisers ne vous laissaient sur la lèvre qu'une irréalisable envie d'une volupté plus haute.'

This realisation is as much the signing of her death warrant as is the appearance of the emissary on her return home with the bill for debts she was unable to pay. Her financial ruin, the result of heedless extravagance by which she had tried now to compensate for the monotony of her life, and of the money-lender Lheureux's merciless exploitation of her weaknesses, is the ostensible cause of her suicide and has often been claimed to be its sole cause. But it is symbolic of a much more catastrophic, annihilating spiritual bankruptcy. For a time she had held both at bay. Vaguely aware of her perilous financial state, she would

try sometimes to look at it and understand it - 'mais elle découvrait des choses si exorbitantes qu'elle n'y pouvait croire. Alors elle recommençait, s'embrouillait vite, plantait tout là et n'y pensait plus'. Just so in her liaison with Léon she had refused to recognise the truth. Humiliated by 'la bassesse d'un tel bonheur', tired of him to the point of disgust, and with the whole affair which is merely a repetition of the boredom of marriage, she continues none the less because she can see no way out, perhaps because she has reached a state of corruption such that she does not want to see a way out - 'elle se sentait perdue, roulant au hasard dans des abîmes indéfinissables.'

When, the morning after her return from Rouen, notice of her bankruptcy is posted throughout the village, and she has exhausted every possibility of help, she tries, as a last resort, to borrow from Rodolphe. But he refuses, and in so doing shows his love for what it really was - a temporary attachment to a woman of whom he has tired. It is this final disillusionment, and not her bankruptcy, which reduces Emma to despair.

'elle ne se rappelait point la cause de son horrible état, c'est-à-dire la question d'argent. Elle ne souffrait que de son amour, et sentait son âme l'abandonner par ce souvenir...'

She runs to the apothecary's, crams her mouth with arsenic, and returns home to await the end, 'subitement apaisée, et presque dans la sérénité d'un devoir accompli.'

Despite the horror of her physical suffering there is a calm finality, an immense relief about her agony.

'Elle en avait fini, songeait-elle, avec toutes les trahisons, les bassesses et les innombrables convoitises qui la torturaient.' When the last sacraments are brought to her she experiences a sudden joy, a reminiscence of her former illness and its 'vision', and above all the hope of an eternal beatitude. She kisses the crucifix offered to her with all the force of a desire still seeking its fulfilment, but sure now that that fulfilment approaches.

However, this is not the end. Her last hope is destroyed, as all her other illusions of happiness have disintegrated turn by turn. At the very moment of death there appears under her window the hideous beggar whom she had been wont to meet on her journeys to her lover in Rouen, singing his lewd refrain.

'Et Emma se mit à rire, d'un rire atroce, frénétique, désespéré, croyant voir la face hideuse du misérable qui se dressait dans les ténèbres éternelles comme un épouvantement.'

The beggar is the symbol of her sin: but even more of her suffering, of the corruption which had seeped into and destroyed all her hopes, all her illusions, even to the last. She dies in despair, a death which might well be said to be out of all proportion to her sin as her suffering was out of all proportion to her responsibility. She is one of the vast sisterhood of those 'ennuyées de tout et rassasiées de tous les amours'⁽¹⁾, imprisoned

(1) la Tentation. 1849. p.219.

within the limits of her environment and education, above all within the limits of life, which does not afford to anyone the happiness she sought.

It has become a commonplace to show Emma Bovary as a projection of her creator. Both are actuated by a desire to attain to the infinite and eternal, at once to lose themselves in and to possess a transcendent absolute. Both suffer constantly at their isolation in the world, the disproportion between it, between all attainable pleasures, and that which they desire. Flaubert, articulate, conscious of his need and of the impossibility of fulfilling it, at least turns away from the material finite into a world of ideal and lasting values. But Emma, inarticulate, unconscious of her real need, transposes her desires from the start into terms of the Romantic and pious literature of her childhood, sees her fulfilment always in terms of passionate love. In the words of the critic who has perhaps understood her and her creator's intentions more profoundly than any other:

'Emma Bovary est, en son fond ultime, une mystique: ... soumise à la condition humaine et malheureuse; et c'est la peinture de sa bassesse que Flaubert entreprend: sa grandeur ne pouvant être exprimée'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Digeon. op. cit. p.161.

(ii). Salammbô.

In Salammbô, the novel following almost immediately upon Madame Bovary⁽¹⁾, we are concerned, as we have indicated, with a similar, and in some ways identical theme: the sublimation of physical and sensuous desire into spiritual aspiration, and the corresponding expression of spiritual longings in terms of emotional and physical need and satisfaction. But the background has changed: we find ourselves not only in a completely different setting and civilisation, but in a different world. We have moved from the realm of psychological truth and individual characterisation to one of symbolic representations and what M. Thibaudet so adequately describes as subliminal truth.⁽²⁾

It is often claimed that the Carthaginian princess is a much less subtle and profound characterisation than the nineteenth century provincial doctor's wife. Certainly there is something strictly logical and schematic about her life-span and experience

(1) After the completion of Madame Bovary Flaubert undertook, it may be remembered, to revise la Tentation with a view to its publication, and thus produced what is known as the 1856 version. But after the 'Bovary scandal' he feared to put before the public so original and unaccustomed a composition as was his philosophical fantasy, and abandoning too the story of Saint Julien, on which he also embarked, he turned to Salammbô as a conventional subject less likely to create a scandal.

(2) In so far as the characters of Mâtho and Salammbô are concerned. In the historical reconstitution of Carthage we are back in the world of the realist and psychological novel.

as shown to us. We see first her mystic aspirations to the moon-goddess Tanit, then her sudden disillusionment, and Tanit superseded by the young warrior Mâtho. And the novel ends with the highly symbolic death of Salammbô when Mâtho is killed before her eyes.

But Salammbô is not so much the literary resuscitation of a Carthaginian maiden in her individual, personal, and intimate reality, as an evocation of womanhood abstracted from particularities of time and place, of the female and feminine role, of all that is symbolised by the moon-goddess Tanit with whom she is constantly compared and even identified - 'éternel silence et ... éternelle fécondité.' In the same way Mâtho, the young Barbarian chief, is a symbolic creation of virility, violence, force, an incarnation of that other deity ruling Carthage, the sun-god Moloch, and 'entouré des mêmes fulgurations.' And between the two, between Salammbô and Mâtho, between Tanit and Moloch, moves the high-priest and eunuch Schahabarim, who losing faith in Tanit and power over Salammbô loses everything, because he cannot as a eunuch be admitted to the cult of Moloch, nor recover Salammbô from the domination of Mâtho.

The author weaves through his novel a pattern of unfulfilled desires, in Salammbô expressed first religiously and then in terms of human love, in Mâtho formulated in a love which is now an idealisation, now a desire for possession, whilst Schahabarim, 'le prêtre désormais sans dieu' shows in the expression of his

eunuch's face 'un désir éternel'.

Salammbô had been brought up in the seclusion of her father's palace, with no other company than that of her women and the eunuch priests of Tanit. Tanit is her sole preoccupation, and the object of all her aspirations and longings. 'O Tanit! tu m'aimes, n'est-pas? Je t'ai tant regardée! Mais non! tu cours dans ton azur, et moi je reste sur la terre immobile.' She is tormented by a sacrilegious desire to see 'au plus secret du temple' Tanit's idol and its jewelled mantle, a vision reserved for the priests of the moon-goddess. But Salammbô believes that to see this hidden representation of her goddess will be to penetrate the secret of Tanit's inaccessibility. The veil is a symbol of all that she desires to know and to possess, all that is lacking to her. When however her ambition is at last realised, and, sent by Schahabarim to retrieve the zaimph from Mâtho, she holds it in her hands - 'elle fut surprise de ne pas avoir ce bonheur qu'elle s'imaginait autrefois. Elle restait mélancolique devant ce rêve accompli.'

The revelation is for her a cause of melancholy disillusionment, but not of despair: it is not, as ■ Bourget suggests, because she has seen le zaimph that 'il faut mourir.' On the contrary, she is, when she returns from her mission to the Barbarian camp strangely pacified, transformed despite herself.

'Les angoisses dont elle souffrait autrefois l'avait abandonnée.'

Une tranquillité singulière l'occupait. Ses regards, moins errants, brillaient d'une flamme limpide. ... La fille d'Hamilcar ne prolongeait plus ses jeûnes avec tant de ferveur. Elle passait des journées au haut de sa terrasse...'

From the height of her terraced gardens she looked out every day beyond the wall over the Barbarian camp. And although she hated him she wanted to see Mâtho again.

She had seen him first among the horde of Barbarians feasting in the palace gardens, men who had been under her father Hamilcar's command, and who now dared to desecrate his property by killing the sacred fish it was his privilege to keep there.

'Elle promena sur eux un long regard épouvanté...

-Qu'avez-vous fait! qu'avez-vous fait! ... Où êtes-vous donc, ici? Alors elle se mit à chanter les aventures de Melkarth (Moloch), dieu des Sidoniens et père de sa famille.'

The Barbarians, without understanding her, are silent,

'et montés autour d'elle sur les tables, sur les lits, dans les rameaux des sycomores, la bouche ouverte et allongeant la tête, ils tâchaient de saisir ces vagues histoires qui se balançaient devant leur imagination, à travers l'obscurité des théogonies, comme des fantômes dans les nuages.'

The whole inaccessible mystery and beauty of virgin womanhood is symbolised in this scene: when Salammbô, decked with jewels, cloaked in 'son grand manteau de pourpre sombre, taillé dans une étoffe inconnue', sings to the Barbarian armies in an old Canaanite tongue - her gaze seemingly fixed 'au-delà des espaces terrestres.' And all the while 'un Libyen de taille colossale', Mâtho, watches

her -

'des éclaboussures de sang lui [achetaient la face, il s'appuyait sur le coude gauche; et, la bouche grande ouverte, il souriait.'

As she finishes Salammbô is aware of 'l'agitation de tous ces hommes', moved, filled with pride. Mâtho leans towards her.

'Involontairement elle s'en approcha' and as a token of her reconciliation with the Barbarian army offers him 'dans une coupe d'or un long jet de vin'.

The second time she sees him he comes to her by night, bringing her the veil of Tanit which he has stolen from the temple. She is at first amazed, conscious only of the glittering folds of the veil - 'Laisse moi voir! disait-elle. Plus près! plus près!' And then suddenly she is filled with horror, a fear as much of the presence of the warrior as of the mysterious mantle. She shrieks imprecations at him, curses him - and he flees for his life. Thereafter she knows no peace. She is in despair, yet filled with a proud elation. She has seen the forbidden sight, the secret she aspired to know and has not yet penetrated ('s'en faisant horreur à elle-même, (elle) regrettait de ne l'avoir pas soulevé.'): But though consciously Salammbô attributes her torment and joy to having at last set eyes on the zaimph, subconsciously it is the warrior Mâtho she fears and yet desires to know; it is the mystery of his presence she regrets not having penetrated. The aspirations expressed in her cult for Tanit have found a new outlet, although she is as yet unaware of it. Significantly she seeks comfort in the presence of Schahabarim, ceaselessly

calling him to her, conscious with gratitude of 'la singulière volupté qu' elle trouvait près de lui', although at the same time she bates him.

When finally he imposes upon her the duty of retrieving the veil from Mâtho she is terrified, for she fears 'cet homme à taille de géant... maître du zalmph' as she fears Moloch himself - 'ils étaient mêlés l'un à l'autre: elle les confondait: tous deux la poursuivaient'. And yet she finds herself suddenly at peace, filled with joy. Again she expresses herself in terms of the veil. 'elle ne songeait plus qu'au bonheur de revoir le zalmph.' But subconsciously her joy is at the certitude of seeing Mâtho again. Once in the Barbarian camp she is dazed by the very presence of the warrior, accustomed as she is only to the company of her women or of eunuchs. She abandons herself to the Barbarian's caresses,

Thus it is that when a little later Mâtho, roused by the sentinels and by the sight of flames licking over the tents, leaves her alone, she can consider without emotion the veil which formerly represented the fulfilment of her greatest desire. Henceforward her cult for Tanit is without fervour, she herself is freed from the anguish that had tormented her. She is unmoved by the gracious Numidian warrior to whom she is to be espoused: 'jeune homme à voix douce et à taille féminine': for she seeks in vain 'comme un reflet de cette violence' she had seen in Mâtho and which dazzled her still. She is intolerably obsessed by the thought of Mâtho, convinced that she hates him and that his death only can deliver her from this obsession, unaware that in reality her

life depends on his, and that just as formerly 'une influence était descendue de la lune sur la vierge', so now she was subject to 'l'influence de Moloch circulant autour d'elle.'

Her desire to see him again is satisfied only when, captive, in bonds, he is driven through the streets of Carthage to the Temple where he is to be sacrificed. 'Dès le premier pas qu'il avait fait, elle s'était levée...' and soon the crowds, the shouts, the vapour of incense, the glitter and colour fade, as she becomes conscious of one being, a man 'qui n'avait plus, sauf les yeux, d'apparence humaine' moving towards her, his gaze fixed on her. Only now, as 'la conscience lui surgit de tout ce qu'il avait souffert pour elle', does she become obscurely aware that he is the object of her desire, that she loves, not hates him.

'Bien qu'il agonisât, elle le revoyait dans sa tente, à genoux, lui entourant la taille de ses bras, balbutiant des paroles douces: elle avait soif de les sentir encore, de les entendre; elle allait crier; il s'abattit à la renverse et ne bougea plus.'

And Salammbô herself, as she stands to drink to Carthage, falls back 'blême, raidie, les lèvres ouvertes, et ses cheveux dénoués pendaient jusqu'à terre. Ainsi mourut la fille d'Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit.'

Salammbô's death is as highly symbolic as her life, which is, as we have indicated, a poetic representation of the theme given

realistic expression in Madame Bovary.

'Ne voyez-vous pas', Flaubert wrote in a frequently quoted letter to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie in 1859, when he was still engaged on the composition of Salammbô, 'qu'elles sont toutes amoureuses d'Adonis?' (he was writing of women in general) 'C'est l'éternel époux qu'elles demandent. Ascétiques ou libidineuses, elles rêvent l'amour, le grand amour. Et pour les guérir (momentanément du moins) ce n'est pas une idée qu'il leur faut, mais un fait, un homme, un enfant, un amant.'⁽¹⁾ Here is the whole pattern of Salammbô: having transferred (unconsciously) her aspirations from Tanit to Mâtho, when Mâtho dies there is nothing more for which she can live. And the passage, as the pattern of characterisation in Salammbô, is basic to Flaubert's portrayal of women throughout the novels.

Already in the first Tentation he had described

'... la fille des consuls qui languit d'ennui sous les grands pins de ses villas; ... la Grecque curieuse, qui désire un dieu nouveau; ... la Lydienne épuisée, qui se lasse d'Adonis; la Juive en inquiétude, qui cherche son Messie.'

and the hermit of the third version has the same vision of women who come to him, driven by 'le besoin d'une volupté surhumaine... elles voudraient mourir, elles ont vu dans leurs songes des

(1) Corr. IV. 313. 18 février 1859.

dieux qui les appelaient.'

We may remember in Madame Bovary la Guérine, for whom neither doctor nor the cure could find a remedy, and who would go and weep on the sea shore. But, Félicité reassures Emma, 'après son mariage, ça lui a passé, dit-on'. The story of that other servant Félicité, of Un Coeur Simple, is similarly illustrative of the need for some exclusive sollicitude, be it child or mistress, invalid or pet. In l'Education Sentimentale the little Louise, who 'toute petite... s'était prise d'un de ces amours d'enfant qui ont à la fois la pureté d'une religion et la violence d'un besoin', had made of Frédéric an ideal. When he tacitly refuses her in marriage, she marries the clerk Deslauriers (no doubt because he is Frédéric's closest associate) and later elopes with a singer, still in search of her Romantic ideal. In the same novel Mademoiselle Vatnatz is one of those 'célibataires parisiennes' who, the day's work finished and the solitary evening meal cooked and eaten in silence 'rêvent un amour, une famille, un foyer, la fortune, tout ce qui leur manque.' She hailed the Revolution as her great opportunity, and had become a fanatic for feminine emancipation. But she soon abandons it all - 'la littérature, le socialisme, "les doctrines consolantes et les utopies généreuses"... tout' - when a glimmer of hope dawns in the possibility of her marriage with 'le bon Dussardier' (a possibility upon which she alone counts, and which is never realised). 'Une pareille bonne fortune à son âge était inespérée. Elle se jeta dessus avec un appétit d'ogresse...'

Madame Dambreuse, after a long and unhappy marriage, has the same

reaction to Frédéric's suit, though it is couched in terms appropriate to her social status, and therefore less crude.

Closely allied to this pattern of feminine behaviour is that fundamental trait of feminine character Flaubert described as 'leur besoin de poétisation' -

'Un homme aimera sa lingère et il saura qu'elle est bête, il n'en jouira pas moins. Mais si une femme aime un goujat, c'est un génie méconnu, une âme d'élite etc.'⁽¹⁾

Not only do they idealise the opposite sex, but existence in general, and above all themselves -

'Demander des oranges aux pommiers leur est une maladie commune. Maximes détachées: elles ne sont pas franches avec elles-mêmes: elles ne s'avouent pas leur sens...'⁽¹⁾

This absence of lucidity as to themselves or others can result, as it does in characters like Emma Bovary, Mademoiselle Vatnatz, the prostitute Rosannette, in an unconscious hypocrisy and stupidity

(1) Corr. II. 400 24 avril 1852 à Louise Colet. Hence Emma's failure to see Rodolphe in his true light: Mademoiselle Vatnatz' hero-worship of the scoundrel Delmar (whom we shall have occasion to describe later), and the fact that she has to wait until she can see the quiet Dussardier as a hero before she can decide to fall in love with him: - and finally the characteristic of the little seamstresses who worked for Madame Regimbart and who never failed to interrupt their work as Monsieur went by with a serious mien and a moralising word of encouragement or some maxim - 'plus tard, dans leur ménage, elles se trouvaient malheureuses parcequ'elles l'avaient gardé pour idéal'.

for which one cannot reproach them, but which is either disagreeable or exasperating, and not infrequently ridiculous. But on the other hand it can take the form of that purity and candour such as we saw in Salambo, convinced that she hated Mâthe and attributing all her torment to the veil. Similarly both Emma and Madame Arnoux fall in love without being conscious of it.

'Emma ... ne s'interrogea point pour savoir si elle l'aimait. L'amour, croyait-elle, devait arriver tout à coup, avec de grands éclats et des fulgurations... Elle ne savait pas que, sur la terrasse des maisons, la pluie fait des lacs quand les gouttières sont bouchées, et elle fut ainsi demeurée en sa sécurité, lorsqu'elle découvrit subitement une lézarde dans le mur.'

'Madame Arnoux suffoquait un peu...

"Il va se marier! est-ce possible!"

Et un tremblement nerveux la saisit.

"Pourquoi cela? est-ce que je l'aime?"

Puis, tout à coup:

"Mais oui, je l'aime! ... je l'aime!"

Il lui semblait descendre dans quelque chose de profond, qui n'en finissait plus. La pendule sonna trois heures. Elle écouta les vibrations du timbre mourir. Et elle restait au bord de son fauteuil, les prunelles fixes, et souriant toujours.'

They are enigmas to themselves and to others - in Madame Arnoux this quality is part of her beauty, a reserve and quiet which makes Flaubert liken her at one point to a sphinx; in Emma Bovary it is part of her tragedy.

We have made little mention so far in this review of Flaubert's women characters of Madame Arnoux, precisely because she is exempt from the exasperating and pitiful weakness of the rest (as at one time Flaubert believed Louise Colet to be, ⁽¹⁾ and as he must have considered Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, to whom he wrote the letter quoted from at the beginning of this discussion). Yet ^{as} an image of beauty and purity Madame Arnoux does reflect, in terms of her maturity, the beauty and innocence of the young Carthaginian maiden: with her 'majesté tranquille' and 'légereté de brise', and 'sa robe se confondant avec les ténèbres', her presence is likened to 'un clair de lune par une nuit d'été, quand tout est parfum, ombres douces, blancheur, infini.'

But the link between Salammbô and Madame Arnoux is less in this vague outward resemblance than in the roles they play, the one in relation to the Barbarian chief Mâtho, the other in relation to the student and dilettante, Frédéric Moreau.

(iii) Mâtho.

Like Salammbô, Mâtho is a symbolic figure, and his story one

(1) cf. Corr. III.139. 27 mars 1853, et passim.
 'Toi, tu n'es pas une femme, et si je t'ai plus et surtout plus profondément aimée ... que toute autre, c'est qu'il m'a semblé que tu étais moins femme qu'une autre.' (Flaubert's italics)

in which we see the transformation wrought in youth by a passion which is at once a religious adoration and the obsession of desire. Mâtho is as it were bewitched by his first sight of the mysterious Carthaginian princess.

'Elle me tient attaché par une chaîne que l'on n'aperçoit pas. ... Elle m'entourne, elle me pénètre. Il me semble qu'elle est devenue mon âme! - Mais je la veux! Il me la faut! J'en meurs!'

In her apparent inaccessibility she is identified for him at once with Tanit, and with the impregnable city of Carthage. That is why he can be driven by Spendius to steal the moon-goddess's veil from the temple, committing a sacrilege which at the same time fills him with horror and fear, and why the war with Carthage becomes 'sa chose personnelle'. Mâtho, formerly mild and hesitant, 'même si doux que je portais pour les autres du bois sur mon dos' becomes the leader of the Barbarian host, in whom his courage and strength inspire 'comme une crainte mystique'. Cruel and terrible, he is driven by 'une ardeur d'action folle et continuelle', an incarnation of the spirit of the sun-god Moloch, burning and devastating the country-side.

When therefore Salammbô appears before him one night in the camp, to reclaim the veil, he is overwhelmed by the sudden presence of this veiled and glittering figure, the incarnation of all that he desires. He forces her to stay, pleads with her to follow him - 'J'abandonne l'armée! je renonce à tout! Au delà de Gadès ... on rencontre une île couverte de poudre d'or ... l'air est si doux qu'il empêche de mourir. Oh! je la trouverai, tu verras. Nous

vivrons dans des grottes de cristal taillées au bas des collines.'

But when he returns to his camp after the alarm she has gone.

Thereafter he is implacable, fighting until in the Barbarian army only a handful of men remain, until in a last desperate fight he is left sole survivor. Then, understanding that his quest is at an end, that there is nothing left but to die,

'il leva vers le ciel ses deux mains vides, puis il ferma les yeux, et ouvrant les bras, comme un homme du haut d'un promontoire qui se jette à la mer, il se lança dans les piques'.

But the Carthaginians wish to preserve him for a worse death, and it is eventually, having been driven through the streets by a raging, frantic mob, at Salammbô's feet that he dies, overwhelmed by 'une tristesse écrasante'.

(iv) Frédéric.

There would seem to be slight connection between this all-consuming passion of a primitive Barbarian driven to a torturing but noble death and the disillusioned banality of Frédéric's maturity.

'Il voyagea.

Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, l'étourdissement des paysages et des ruines, l'amertume des sympathies interrompues.

Il revint.

Il fréquenta le monde, et il eut d'autres amours encore. Mais le souvenir continuel du premier les rendait insipides; et puis la véhémence du désir, la fleur même de la sensation était perdue. Ses ambitions d'esprit avaient également diminuées ... il supportait le désœuvrement de son intelligence et l'inertie de son cœur ... ayant mangé les deux tiers de sa fortune, il vivait en petit bourgeois.'

Frédéric is not indeed an incarnation of virile force, but on the contrary 'l'homme de toutes les faiblesses'. The passion which in Matho is transformed into action and inflexible purpose, paralyzes this sensitive, timid, character, 'immobilisé par la peur de l'insuccès'. He is a man of dreams who, like Emma, lives only partially in the world of reality, and mostly in an anxious and indolent waiting for the realisation of vague hopes, ambitions, desires, few of which he attempts to achieve. And if ever one of his ambitions is attained it brings only disappointment and ensuing apathy. When, for example, he has penetrated 'cette chose vague, miroitante et indéfinissable qu'on appelle le monde', he finds it as boring and ordinary as any other society: when he has achieved the conquest of one of the richest of its ladies he is obliged to recognise 'la désillusion de ses sens', the absence of all the refinements of sentiment and of passion he had expected to find in a woman of her class. He abandons her as he abandons the prostitute Rosanette, 'perdu dans les décombres de ses rêves, malade, plein de douleur et de découragement.' Like Emma he is left reflecting on the past, the time when so many possibilities, hopes and dreams

lay still before him. 'C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur', he concludes to Deslauriers.

But there is one ideal to which he remains constant, Madame Arnoux. Was she not, he asked himself after many years had passed, and when he was suddenly faced with the possibility of her leaving Paris, even France, 'comme la substance de son coeur, le fond même de sa vie?'

His love is, like Matho's, at once an idealisation and a desire: 'il ne pouvait se la figurer autrement que vêtue, tant sa pudeur semblait naturelle, et reculait son sexe dans une ombre mystérieuse. Cependant il songeait au bonheur de vivre avec elle ... Il aurait fallu pour cela, subvertir la destinée: et, incapable d'action, maudissant Dieu et s'accusant d'être lâche, il tournait dans son désir, comme un prisonnier dans son cachot.'

Three times he declares his love to her before he obtains permission to see her every day, alone, - 'c'était une beauté indéfinie'. Then, as we have seen, his plans to draw her to a rendez-vous are thwarted by the illness of her child, and she, suddenly aware of the danger, refuses to see him again. So it is that in vengeance, in despair, he turns to Rosanette, to Louise, to Madame Dambreuse - as he had previously flirted and dallied with Louise or Rosanette out of sheer hopelessness or cowardice. And yet 'je n'ai jamais aimé qu'elle', he says of Madame Arnoux towards the end of the book.

When at their last meeting Frédéric rightly or wrongly

'soupçonna Madame Arnoux d'être venue pour s'offrir', he refuses her: at once because he is repelled by the idea, because he fears a subsequent disillusion, and 'pour ne pas dégrader son idéal'. The decision and its motivation are typical of Frédéric's greatness and his weakness. If it is partly cowardice, egoism and apathy that make his life such a failure, it is also his intense sensitivity, his profound respect and immense tenderness for the woman he loved. In situations where many others would have made their conquest, Frédéric desists from the slightest advance: when she beseeches him to leave her he does so, because 'il l'aima tellement'. From the very beginning his love is something illimitable, penetrating 'dans les profondeurs de son tempérament', closely akin to suffering.

His ideal is preserved in its integral purity, and to that extent Frédéric himself is preserved, saved from utter disillusionment or complete banality, the fate of the 'bourgeois' Henry who abandoned Madame Emilie for the rich dowry of a politician's daughter, of Léon who left Emma for Mademoiselle Léocadie Leboeuf de Bondeville, and the post of notary at Yvetot. Frédéric has like Flaubert 'dans le cœur une chambre royale' which remains inviolate. For Frédéric is in a certain measure Flaubert, who had loved since adolescence a woman from whom he was separated for the greater part of his life, an ideal of beauty and tenderness personified now in Madame Arnoux.

But Flaubert believed, and the three novels we have been discussing here are an expression of that belief, that it was a mistake of possibly tragic consequence to make of love 'la première chose dans la vie' - 'une préoccupation exclusive.'⁽¹⁾ Love is destined to be inadequate to human wants - 'inassouvisable'. For it is at once an idealisation of the being loved, expressing aspirations to something transcending human qualities, and a purely physical desire for possession. When the latter is attained the ideal is sooner or later degraded, destroyed, and the unfulfilled aspirations remain without the possibility of objectifying them. If the ideal remains intact, and is voluntarily relegated to the inaccessible, the worshipper is still deprived of the fulfilment which could only come through the attainment of it.

This close connection between human love and an aspiration to something greater is illustrated by the attempts to sublimate it into some mystic form, or to satisfy on the contrary in human love and physical possession aspirations previously expressed in terms of religious longing. But in none of these subterfuges is satisfaction and happiness to be found.

Emma and Frédéric, Salammbô and Matho are each in their own way victims of this type of illusion, believing perfect happiness to be attainable in one of the forms mentioned above. But each of them dies empty-handed, having spent a life-time clutching at shadows.

(1) Corr.II. 1 and 19. Letters to Louise Colet written early in 1847.

III.

FLAUBERT'S BOURGEOIS.

So far we have been concerned with characters who stand out from the people around them as in some way distinctive, and sometimes great. But they form, both in Flaubert's work and in society as he saw it, a minority. What of the rest?

The term 'bourgeois', though applicable to the large majority of the minor characters, covers a diversity of attitudes and a multitude of sins. Though first applied, in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, to a comfortably prosperous middle-class outlook which was intent upon and fully satisfied with the business of amassing wealth and maintaining an order of things most propitious to that pursuit, for Flaubert the word has wider connotations. It no longer describes a particular class of society, but an attitude and way of life that has infiltrated everywhere: 'bourgeois', he wrote in 1852, is a term applicable to 'l'humanité entière maintenant, y compris le peuple.'⁽¹⁾

The mob which loots the Tuilleries in the February Revolution is as greedy for gain and as Philistine as the industrialists and bankers against whose regime they are revolting, though in the name of liberty and equality. There is little difference between

(1) Corr. III. 52. 22 nov. à Louise Colet.

'oes grosses faces blanches épanouies' of the farmers and peasants arriving for Emma Bovary's wedding, and the gathering of society ladies at one of the Dambreuse soirées, where 'la decence des figures temperait les provocations du costume' and where their expressions denote 'une placidité bestiale'. Madame Dambreuse herself is a pious society lady who can pass unmoved before the most abject beggar, and whose sole ambition is to lay hands upon her husband's fortune once death has conveniently removed him from her way. But the poor are no better. Emma Bovary's servant squanders the household's money and goods, and after her mistress's death runs off with the larger part of her wardrobe. The fisher family in Un Coeur Simple exploit that other servant Félicité unscrupulously. And the aristocracy are represented by the fop de Cisy whose chief ambition was to attain 'le chic', or the d'Andervillier gentlemen of Madame Bovary:

'Dans leurs regards indifférents flottait la quiétude des passions jour nellement assouvies: et à travers leurs manières douces, perçait cette brutalité particulière que communique la domination des choses à demi faciles, dans lesquelles la force s'exerce et où la vanité s'amuse, le manie ment des chevaux de race et la société des femmes perdues.'

Nor is the cupidity, the cheapness, the apathetic stupidity, the baseness denoted by the term 'bourgeois' confined to the society of nineteenth century France. Flaubert had found in the East, contrary to all he might have hoped and expected, the same banality

of a life 'à faire vomir de tristesse quand on la regarde de près',⁽¹⁾ the same 'vieille canaillerie immuable et inébranlable',⁽²⁾ And although he often used to say, towards the end of his life in particular, that the world had entered into the last stage of its decrepitude,⁽³⁾ his portrayal of society in pre-Christian Carthage or in first-century Palestine offers the same pattern of 'l'infini tissu de ... petitesesses, de ... finasseries, d'... hypocrisies, de... misères',⁽⁴⁾ as does the world of Emma Bovary or Frédéric Moreau.

Carthage represents, as much as the reign of Louis Philippe, an incarnation of 'cet éternel souci de gain' which was the downfall of both: All power and all esteem, in either society, are based on wealth: corruption is rife, the energies of the middle classes drained by the constant sollicitude for their fortunes. In the Dambreuse salon 'les visages, ou empourprés ou très blêmes, laissaient voir dans leur flétrissure la trace d'immenses fatigues', in the council of the Rich, the rulers of Carthage, 'ceux qui vivaient continuellement au fond de leurs comptoirs avaient le visage pâle ... Tous étaient ... impitoyables et riches. Ils

(1) Corr. II. 288. Patras 9 fév. 1851 à sa mère.

(2) Corr. II. 253. Constantinople 14 nov. 1850 à Louise Bouilhet.
(et passim)

(3) Corr. VI. 201. 11 mars 1877 à Madame Régner.
'Paganisme, christianisme, muflisme. Telles sont les trois grandes évolutions de l'humanité. Il est désagréable de se trouver dans la dernière.'

(4) Corr. III. 250. 25-26 juin 1853 à Louise Colet.

avaient l'air fatigués par de longs soucis.' The rule of the Tetrarch Herod is maintained by cunning and flattery, threatened by rivalries and fanaticisms. The Tetrarch is a lecherous coward, the Pro-consul Vitellius dependent for his fortune on the degradation of his son, the Jewish leaders characterised by 'leur intolérance, leur rage iconoclaste, leur achoppement de brute'. Far worse is the religious fanaticism of Carthage in times of reverse and drought. Their gods were 'comme des maîtres cruels, que l'on apaisait avec des supplications et qui se laissaient corrompre à force de présents'. Moloch, greatest of them all, was only to be appeased by offerings of human flesh: hence the atrocious scenes of the sacrifice of children to the frenzied approbations of a howling, dancing, half-swooning, ecstatic mob.

There is therefore in humanity an inherent and omnipresent wretchedness. It may find its expression in a vain superficiality or in real corruption, and the author's attitude to his 'bourgeois' characters varies from amused disdain to positive disgust.

(i) La 'grêle génération':

Arnoux, Hussonnet, Pellerin, Regimbart and Deslauriers.

There is no doubt that he was to a certain extent indulgently amused by the odd collection of individuals who form the circle of Frédéric Moreau's friends and acquaintances: Jacques Arnoux, expansive and generous, popular as being a good fellow at bottom:

Hussonnet, who begins as a comic and quick-witted Bohemian; Pellerin the artist, in search of 'une théorie du Beau', as full of outrageous and ridiculous ideas as he was of angry contempt for 'le commun et le bourgeois', and whose reverence for the great masters 'le montait presque jusqu'à eux'; 'le citoyen Regimbart', a would be politician who in his youth had wandered from café to café to expound his views, but now, reduced to a lugubrious silence, sat for hours over the newspaper or a glass of something, reflecting on the possibilities of 'un coup infallible pour faire pêter la boutique'. All these represent types Flaubert must have known in his student days, and whom he tolerated with good humour to a certain point.

But beyond that point they irritated and angered him. Arnoux, an art-dealer, was an excellent business-man because he knew how to cheat, exploit, deceive and browbeat anyone with whom he had dealings, though he was convinced of his honesty and of the services he rendered to art. Hussonnet, would-be dramatist or poet, finally journalist, was exasperatingly, incredibly vain about his talent and totally blind to real genius which he spitefully resented. His once humorous conversation became futile to the point of being nonsensical. He rose eventually to 'une haute place, où il se trouvait avoir sous ses mains tous les théâtres et toute la presse.' The artist Pellerin, having been refused at every Salon for the past twenty years, aspires to a political revolution as a means to establishing his unrecognized genius and is equally anxious to earn a fortune which would be 'un démenti à la

critique, un raffermissement pour lui-même'. He ends as a photographer. As for Regimbari, admired by his hard-working little wife whose earnings support the entire household, and indeed by all the other bourgeois, (impressed, be it said, more by his silence than by any other quality), his life is spent in morose wanderings from café to café and is so utterly futile as to be absurd.

They are men of 'la grêle génération' typified in Frédéric, failures in Flaubert's eyes, (though they may succeed in the eyes of the world), through their 'défaut de ligne droite' - feverishly active or absurdly inactive, their energies dispersed over a hundred different causes or wasted on abortive dreams.

Deslauriers, the other member of the group, is a man whose energies are neither wasted nor dispersed. His ambition is power, the influential role of a man who has climbed higher than other men; and every situation, event, person is acceptable to him in so far as it or he can be used to this end. If he worked for a revolution it was not to establish the order of justice and liberty in the name of which Dussardier died, not to establish the equalitarian democracy for which Sénécal fought, but because 'il attendait avec impatience un grand bouleversement où il comptait bien faire son trou, avoir sa place.' If he wished to penetrate into the Arnoux or the Dambreuse households it was in the hope of making 'des con-

naissances profitables'. His primary ambition is a newspaper 'le bonheur inexprimable de diriger les autres' - 'fortune et reputation, d'ailleurs, s'ensuivraient'.

Deslauriers bears with poverty and danger, with loneliness and disillusionment. He is convinced that with determination and will-power 'on triomphe de tout'. And yet he remains a mediocrity and a 'bourgeois'; He has neither the material assets nor the moral qualities of greatness: neither the wealth and social status which would have enabled him to impose himself from the start, nor the subtle strength of leadership and shrewd intelligence by which he could have learned to bend others to his will. To have achieved greatness in Flaubert's eyes Deslauriers would have had either to have achieved the super-human strength and power of Hamilcar⁽¹⁾ or to have failed nobly, like Senecal or Dussardier.

Deslauriers is of the school of Rastignac:

'N'ayant jamais vu le monde qu'à travers la fièvre de ses convoitises, il se l'imaginait comme une création artificielle, fonctionnant en vertu de lois mathématiques. Un diner en ville, la rencontre d'un homme en place, le sourire d'une jolie femme pouvaient, ... avoir de gigantesques résultats. Certains salons parisiens étaient comme des machines qui prennent la matière à

(1) cf. Corr.III.355. 26 sept. 1853 à Louise Colet.

'Je ne pardonne point aux hommes d'action de ne pas réussir, puisque le succès est la seule mesure de leur mérite. Napoléon a été trompé à Waterloo: sophisme, mon vieux. Je ne suis pas du métier. Je n'y connais goutte: il fallait vaincre. Or, j'admire le vainqueur, quel qu'il soit'. (Flaubert's italics).

l'état brut et la rende centuplée de valeur. Il croyait aux courtisanes conseillant les diplomates, aux riches mariages obtenus par les intrigues, au génie des galériens, aux docilités du hasard sous la main des forts.'

But Flaubert had slight patience with the company of those whose heads had been turned by 'les héros pervers de Balzac', and whose ambitions were now guided by 'l'admiration bête d'une certaine immoralité bourgeoise' symbolised in characters like Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré. Not only were their ambitions and ideal stupid, but ineffective in that none of them ever achieved the triumphs of their heroes in any case.

'Quand j'en aurai vu un seul, un seul de ceux-là, avoir gagné par tous les moyens qu'ils emploient seulement un million, alors je mettrai chapeau bas. D'ici là qu'il me soit permis de les considérer comme des épiciers fourvoyés.'⁽¹⁾

Yet Flaubert's attitude to characters such as these is generally speaking one of mild contempt rather than real hostility. We feel that at least he could have tolerated the company of such men and that, even if angered by them from time to time, he can accept them at other times with good humoured indulgence. But there are other characters, often harshly caricatured, whom he treats with unqualified contempt.

(1) Extracts from the same letter.

(ii) The classic bourgeois:
Dambreuse and Martinon.

We might put first among these the classic 'bourgeois' represented in those for whom wealth spells that security which is all they ask of life - people like the banker Dambreuse and his protégé Martinon, who begins as a law-student and ends as a Senator.

Willing to go to any lengths to preserve their fortune, they do so in the name of high principles, the honour of religion and the good of the country.

'Quand les basses classes voudront se débarrasser de leurs vices', Martinon maintient, 'elles s'affranchiront de leurs besoins. Que le peuple soit plus moral et il sera moins pauvre!

Suivant M. Dambreuse, on n'arriverait à rien de bien sans une surabondance du capital. Donc, le seul moyen possible était de confier, comme le voulaient, du reste, les saints-simoniens (mon Dieu, ils avaient du bon! soyons juste envers tout le monde), de confier, dis-je, la cause du Progrès à ceux qui peuvent accroître la fortune publique.'

M. Dambreuse 's'appelait de son vrai nom le comte d'Ambreuse', but he had judiciously and gradually abandoned his title and his party after 1825, and turned to the more profitable enterprise of amassing a fortune in industrial concerns. He is representative of an entire class of political turn-coats, men who by the reign of Louis-Philippe had served with equal unctiousness and zeal at least four governments, who would have sold 'la France ou le genre humain, pour garantir leur fortune, s'épargner un malaise, un embarras, ou

même par simple bassesse, adoration instinctive de la force.'

The complacent and pacific Martinon, who at school had never once been punished for breaking rules, who had never failed an examination, never disagreed with his teachers, never criticised the reigning order, is an incarnation of the spirit of immediate submission to authority and base compliance with the order of the day which characterises this class of parvenus or fallen aristocracy. He ends, appropriately enough, as a Senator under the Second Empire.

(iii) The bourgeois villain: Lheureux.

The usurer Lheureux, with none of the veneer of whited sepulchres like the banker and his protégé, but simply a ruling ambition for gain, is perhaps a character one would attribute more easily to Balzac or to Dickens than to Flaubert, so black a villain is he. In all his dealings an utter rascal, obsequious and lying into the bargain, his one aim and interest is the speedy elimination of any commercial rival and the complete exploitation of his debtors, two of whom he drives to ruin and death ... (Emma and le père Tellier) - 'tout ... lui réussissait'. He is without pity or scruple, never hesitating to use the misfortune or weakness of another to his own ends. When Emma's illness is at its crisis, 'profitant de la circonstance pour exagérer la facture', Lheureux

harrasses Charles for payment of goods his wife had ordered in preparation for her elopement. After her death (he attends her funeral and even proffers his sympathies - 'Cette pauvre petite dame! quelle douleur pour son mari!') he continues to exploit her former debts and drive Charles to ruin. His very name makes him more a figure of melodrama than of the psychological novel.

And yet to Flaubert he is a real figure: the scheming and grasping salesman and moneylender of any Norman village or small town. As with Homais and Bournisien, we have here a prefiguration, of the violently satirical portraits of background figures like the priest, the count, Madame de Noarès, Foureau the mayor, Vaucorbeil the doctor, and so on, in Bouvard et Fécuchet, though these latter are less important and therefore more sketchily portrayed than the characters of Madame Bovary. Their similarity consists in the fact that they are all born of the same indignation and revulsion on the part of the author.

(iv) A Carthaginian bourgeois: Hannon.

We have already indicated how the society portrayed in L'Education Sentimentale has its parallel in the picture of decadent Carthage presented in Salammbô. As the banker Dambreuse is representative of the ruling force of the July monarchy, so Hannon typifies a hard and powerful aristocracy preserving its own

fortune and prestige at the price of the slow ruin of Carthage. 'C'était un homme dévot, rusé, impitoyable aux gens d'Afrique, un vrai Carthaginois. Ses revenus égalaient ceux de Barca. Personne n'avait une telle expérience dans les choses de l'administration.' The nauseating leprosy which he conceals in the splendour of magnificent robes and rich jewels is symbolic of his own base corruption covered by a show of fine motives and prudent wisdom. It is symbolic above all of his ultimate destiny from which he tries by every means to hide death ... '(Oh! oui, n'est ce pas? répéta le Suffète, je n'en dois pas mourir!') gorging himself with delicacies of every kind, surrounding himself with exorbitant wealth, desperately greedy for power ('il exigea des provisions d'armes exorbitantes, il ordonna même la construction de quatorze galères dont on n'avait pas besoin.. Il perdit encore trois lunes à équiper les cent douze éléphants..')

In this fear of and refusal to recognise death, the characterisation of Hannon reaches beyond that of Dambreuse and the rest, with their purely commercial ambitions, and symbolises the fundamental weakness of all lesser men.

Hamilcar and Giscon despised death: Dussardier accepted it fearlessly and Félicité in quiet humility: for Saint-Julien it represented an apotheosis. But for Hannon it is degradation and defeat. The hideous corruption of his body is at last exposed as he is nailed to a cross, and with it the naked fear of his soul, an utter desolation. The proud, cruel, and cunning leader 'comprenant qu'il fallait mourir, pleura... et les larmes qui ruisselaient entre les tubercules de ses joues donnaient à son visage quelque chose

d'effroyablement triste, ayant l'air d'occuper plus de place que sur un autre visage humain. Son bandeau royal, à demi dénoué, traînait avec ses cheveux blancs dans la poussière.' In Hannon we meet 'le bourgeois' not as one to be derided and condemned, but as an object of pity, an aspect of humanity's 'irremédiable misère'

(v). A Greek bourgeois: Spendius.

As Hannon is a symbol of the avarice of Carthage, Spendius embodies the shrewd commercialism of the Greek. He is at once terrible, in his shrewd and unhesitating capacity to exploit men and situations to his own ends, his complete absence of principle or scruple, and a base coward. Before his capture by the Carthaginians 'il s'était enrichi à vendre des femmes'; once freed he sees in the speedy amassing of a fortune the best guarantee of his liberty, and sets about establishing himself as an influential member of the Barbarian army. The height of his ambition is to have slaves of his own, the gist of his philosophy that 'Le malheur doit servir à nous rendre plus habiles. A force de travail on assouplit la fortune. Elle aime les politiques.'

Spendius is perhaps first and foremost, like Hannon, Hamilcar, Giscon, the other Barbarian leaders, even Mitho, a study in race and nationality. But it is a study revealing, as did Flaubert's travels

in the east, the same corruption and poverty of human nature.

'Il ne ressort de ce livre qu'un immense dédain pour l'humanité',
 Flaubert wrote of Salammbô - 'il faut très peu la chérir pour
 l'avoir écrit'. (1)

(vi) Bourgeois lovers:
Rodolphe Boulanger and Léon Dupuis.

Closely allied in temperament to these fortune-hunters is the pleasure-seeker and libertine characterised in Rodolphe Boulanger of Madame Bovary. He has the same shrewd perspicacity and energy of will in the pursuit of his ends, the same cold disregard for persons or principles unless they can serve his purpose. Emma is a thing of his pleasure, and their liaison one which he conducts 'selon sa fantaisie', exploiting it to its limits and then rejecting it ...

'Quel tas de blagues! ...

Ce qui résuma son opinion: car les plaisirs, comme des écoliers dans la cour d'un collège, avaient tellement piétiné sur son coeur, que rien de vert n'y poussait, et ce qui passait par là, plus étourdi que les enfants, ne laissait pas même, comme eux, son nom grave sur la muraille.'

It was only at the hour of death that Spendius had realised the

(1) Corr.IV. 445. 24 août 1861 à Mademoiselle Amélie Bosquet.

infinite futility of his feverish ambitions, his scheming and struggling, his cunning and indefatigable efforts to obtain the favours of Fortune 'qui aime les politiques'. M. Dambreuse, Arnoux, Martinon, Hannon and the rest had been too occupied in constant activity of one form or another to be conscious of anything lacking to them. Rodolphe is different in that he is dissatisfied, bored, irked by his pleasures. Once the novelty of a liaison has worn off he is aware yet again of 'l'éternelle monotonie de la passion, qui a toujours les mêmes formes et le même langage'. Emma is not prepared to accept disappointment and disillusionment; she tries again and again, in perversions and degradations of passion, to attain to the happiness she desires, and at last despairing commits suicide. Jules, of the first Education Sentimentale, was not prepared to accept them either, but realising the irremediable insufficiency of love he rejected it altogether for a lasting value, art. But Rodolphe, like Henry, is too lazy, too weak, too apathetic to do anything but resign himself. It is as much, this voluntary restriction of himself to so base and futile an existence, as the end and ambition he sets himself, which marks him as a 'bourgeois'.

Léon, Emma's other lover, has in a way closer affinities with Henry than Rodolphe. The latter remains in the eyes of the world a wastrel; the two law students eventually embark upon prosperous

marriage and a steady, even in Henry's case a brilliant, career. Each abandons his mistress, and with her all the dreams of a sensitive and idealist youth, in order to conform to the exigencies of a serious and prosperous career and in order not to jeopardise the chances of their 'établissement' in life.

'Léon ... considérait tout ce que cette femme pourrait encore lui attirer d'embarras et de discours ... D'ailleurs, il allait devenir premier clerc: c'était le moment d'être sérieux. Aussi renonçait-il à la flûte, aux sentiments exaltés, à l'imagination, - car tout bourgeois, dans l'échauffement de sa jeunesse, ne fût-ce qu'un jour, une minute, s'est cru capable d'immenses passions, de hautes entreprises. Le plus médiocre libertin a rêvé des sultanes; chaque notaire porte en soi les débris d'un poète.'

If Léon's artistic pretensions were little more than an outlet to his sentimentality, he had none the less been distinguishable from the gross and hard bourgeois world of Yonville by a refinement of feeling and alertness of intellect which eventually made the narrow horizons of the village intolerable to him. Emma personifies the delicacy and beauty so far lacking in his life and to which he aspires. 'Il se torturait à découvrir par quel moyen lui faire sa déclaration': but he is at once too timid, too vacillating, too weak to bring his projects to a successful end. And so she becomes for him an inaccessible figure, and he loves her with one of those 'sentiments purs ... que l'on cultive parcequ'ils sont rares'. But sooner or later he must tire of this love which

brings no reward, and at the same time of 'la répétition de la même vie, lorsque aucun intérêt ne la dirige et qu'aucune espérance ne la soutient.' So he leaves for Paris, and it is some three years later that he meets Emma for the second time, and, with the confident superiority of a man who knows the capital, undertakes and achieves the conquest of this mere provincial doctor's wife. At first 'ils étaient complètement perdus dans la possession d'eux-mêmes'. But eventually Léon, who in Paris had been 'le plus convenable des étudiants', and had always abstained from excesses 'autant par pusillanimité que par délicatesse', is not only revolted by Emma's domination over him, but afraid of the violence of her passion, and of the possible consequences of his liaison.

Typically he does not break with her because he does not know how - but Emma's suicide solves his problem. And a few months later Charles receives notice of the marriage of M. Léon Dupuis, 'notaire à Yvetôt, avec Mlle. Leocadie Leboeuf, de Bondeville'. Flaubert's ridicule is almost too violent to be amusing.

(vii) Bourgeois officialdom: the Tetrarch Herod.

The Tetrarch Herod, whose story is told in the third of the Trois Contes, is the last of this group, a figure in whom is

embodied the cowardice, irresolution, political and social ambition of Henry or Léon, and the sensuality of Rodolphe. As with the novel Salammbô, we are concerned at once with a reconstruction of racial conflict, the interest of which is historical and psychological, and with a symbolic and general truth represented in Iakannan (John the Baptist) and Herod. The figure of the Prophet represents the challenge of an ideal: Herod stands for humanity faced with the choice of acceptance or rejection, and who out of sheer weakness refuses the challenge, renounces the ideal. This renunciation is symbolised in the murder of the Prophet.

The whole setting has its symbolic value - Herod's isolated citadel high on the rock 'suspendue au-dessus de l'abîme', as he himself is alone and suspended in indecision. The surrounding landscape of desert and rock, and the waters of the Dead Sea in which were buried the accursed cities, all these 'marques d'une colère immortelle, effrayait sa pensée'. And close at hand is the insistent voice of the imprisoned Prophet - 'le Tetrarque était las de réfléchir'. Herodias, his sister-in-law and niece whom he has taken in unlawful marriage, demands the death of the Jew who does not cease to denounce her: Herod at once longs to be rid of this prisoner who has ordered him to repudiate his wife, but fears him as perhaps a man of God, and even loves him. He dare not set him free - 'il craignait Herodias, Mannaël (the Samaritan servant who execrates the Jew) 'et l'inconnu'.

When therefore the Roman pro-cousul Vitellius and his train

arrive on a visit of inspection of the Tetrarch's province, despite all his political fears he has one supreme consolation -

'Ioakanann ne dépendait plus de lui; les Romains s'en chargeaient. Quel soulagement! Phanael se promenait alors sur le chemin de ronde. (He is the Essene and Jew who has come to demand the deliverance of the Baptist) Il l'appela, et, désignant les soldats: Ils sont les plus forts! Je ne peux le délivrer! ce n'est pas ma faute!

But he has not escaped. At the banquet held in honour of Vitellius and the Tetrarch's birthday, Hérodias makes her daughter Salome dance before the company and before Herod, until, beseeching, he offers the girl half his kingdom, all that she asks. And she asks for the head of the Baptist

'Le Tetrarque s'affaissa sur lui-même, écrasé. Il était contraint par sa parole, et le peuple attendait'.

But if the Prophet really was a reincarnation of Elijah, as some of his followers claimed, then he would have the power to escape death somehow. If he were not, 'le meurtre n'avait plus d'importance'. Moreover, it had been predicted that somebody would die this night. To sacrifice the Jew might be to preserve his own life. He gives the order. 'Ce fut un soulagement. Dans une minute, tout serait fini!'

The head is brought in and exhibited. The story ends with the Tetrarch, his head between his hands in a deserted banquet hall, his face streaming with tears - 'et regardant toujours la tête coupée' with the vain remorse of a man who is an embodiment of moral cowardice.

Herod is a man who denies and rejects the ideal. So to a lesser extent did Henry and Leon, in choosing the successful path of social conformity and abandoning on the way any dreams of art or love which would have led them from that way. So too does Rodolphe in refusing to seek outside his chosen course a more noble or satisfactory pursuit. Pellerin spent some years in search of Beauty, but eventually preferred the financial profits and relative celebrity of a photographer's studio. Even Arnoux had once thought himself a painter, but abandoned art for art-dealing. This lack of perseverance, this selfishness and vacillation, in short, this 'défaut de ligne droite', is a sure and certain mark of 'le bourgeois'.

We have seen that there are others, however, like Deslauriers, Lheureux, M. Dambreuse, Martinon, who are wholly bent on one ambition, unhesitating and unscrupulous in its realisation. It is their ambition itself which is their degradation, the acquisition of wealth and power, a wholly material end not only excluding the possibility of a higher ideal but even any conception of it.

Before concluding this attempt to characterise Flaubert's 'bourgeois' there remains for our consideration a third form of ignominious conduct exemplified in characters who purport to serve a high ideal - Art, Science, Religion - but who in reducing it

to their own convenient measure, distort and degrade it beyond all recognition.

(viii) Bourgeois artists:
Delmar and Binet.

The first of these is 'un beau jeune homme, trop gras et d'une blancheur de cire ... l'air orgueilleux comme un paon, bête comme un dindon', Delmar of l'Education Sentimentale. (Originally Auguste Delamare, but calling himself 'Antenor Dellamarre, puis Delmas, puis Belmar, et enfin Delmar, modifiant ainsi et perfectionnant son nom, d'après sa gloire croissante'). He is in the theatre world a caricature of all that, rightly or wrongly, Béranger represented for Flaubert in the literary world - the prostitution of Art.

His popularity is immense:

'les gamins, pour le voir, l'attendaient à la porte des coulisses: et sa biographie, vendue dans les entr'actes, le dépeignait comme soignant sa vieille mère, lisant l'Évangile, assistant les pauvres, enfin sous les couleurs d'un Saint Vincent de Paul mélangé de Brutus et de Mirabeau. On disait: "Notre Delmar". Il avait une mission, il devenait le Christ.'

After the February Revolution he joins the ranks of candidates for the elections.

'Dans une affiche adressée "au Peuple" et où il le tutoyait, l'acteur se vantait de le comprendre, "lui", et de s'être fait, pour son salut, "crucifier par l'Art", si bien qu'il était son incarnation, son idéal'.

The last time we see him he is declaiming 'une poésie humanitaire' to a group of admiring women.

One might quote Pellerin as another pseudo-artist, as indeed he is ... 's'il eût cru à l'excellence de son oeuvre, il n'eût pas songé peut-être, à l'exploiter.' But at least he is sincere and enthusiastic in his admiration for great art, his 'religion' for the masters - and with 'cette exaltation à la fois factice et naturelle qui constitue les comédiens', he is more a figure of good-humoured and indulgent fun than of ridicule.

The same type of theme - this time the diminution of transcendent Art to the level of a perfectible technique - is hinted at in the characterisation of Binet, a minor character in Madame Bovary. Here again we have art at a 'bourgeois' level. A former carabinier now tax-collector, 'il avait chez-lui un tour, où il s'amusait à tourner des ronds de serviette dont il encombrait sa maison avec la jalousie d'un artiste et l'égoïsme d'un bourgeois.' It is not only the futility of his occupation at which Flaubert

mocks, but above all the satisfaction it brings him. There is, towards the end of the novel, a long description of Binet up in his attic at work ...

'Il était en train d'imiter, avec du bois, une de ces lavoiereries indescriptibles ... et il entamait la dernière pièce, il touchait au but! ... les deux roues tournaient, gonflaient: Binet souriait, le menton baissé, les narines ouvertes et semblait enfin perdu dans un de ces bonheurs complets, n'appartenant sans doute qu'aux occupations médiocres, qui amusent l'intelligence par des difficultés faciles, et l'assouvissent en une réalisation au delà de laquelle il n'y a pas à rêver.'

Later in the Correspondence, as we shall see subsequently, without mentioning Binet by name, Flaubert likens his constant output of sentences to some bourgeois' constant output of serviette rings. It is perhaps because of passages like these that critics, of whom the first seems to have been Jules de Gaultier, have maintained that Flaubert saw in Binet - as opposed to Emma Bovary - a personification of wisdom, in his prudent resignation to his capacities and situation. But in comparing himself with such a character Flaubert is merely drawing an ironic parallel between their respective occupations, both apparently futile to an onlooker. He is writing at a time when he has been bitterly disappointed by the relative failure of his second Education Sentimentale, when many of those who shared his interests and ideals have died, when he is approaching the end of a work he

has written three times without having published it and is about to embark on another (Bouvard et Pécuchet) which he knows will be understood by few, if any, and which he fears is a completely foolish undertaking. There is no question of his approving, even less of his comparing himself with the easily and completely satisfied Binet whose art is nothing more than a copy of somebody else's.

(ix) The bourgeois man of God and the bourgeois man of science: l'abbé Bournisien and M. Homais.

After Art, we are left with the exponents of Science and Religion - Science and Religion as understood by the 'bourgeois'. These are the celebrated Homais and Bournisien, of Madame Bovary. They are to a large extent complementary figures and caricatures, each representing in his own way a form of obscurantism and dogmatic prejudice as narrow and presumptuous as that which he abhors in the other. Both have that rubicund good health and absence of profound cares which for Flaubert characterise the general mass of the 'bourgeoisie'. Homais offers a satiric portrait of the anti-clerical, whilst the priest is, ironically enough, a caricature of the clergy drawn by the more intelligent but none the less prejudiced anti-clerical, Flaubert.

Bournisien is in fact much more sketchily drawn than the chemist. He is simply a good-natured, practical, country fellow of

mediocre intelligence and slight sensitivity, dispensing salvation according to the rules and irritated more than distressed that anyone should dispute them. His conversation is a series of commonplaces and stereotyped phrases delivered in a paternal and moralising tone, whilst in the pulpit 'il fulminait contre l'esprit du siècle, et ne manquait pas, tous les quinze jours, au sermon, de raconter l'agonie de Voltaire, lequel mourut en dévorant ses excréments, comme chacun sait'. He is incapable of understanding, let alone of finding words to help the suffering of a soul such as Emma's.

The priest of Bouvard et Pécuchet, as we shall see, is a much more radically hostile caricature than Bournisien. But nowhere in Flaubert's work more than here do we have so strong an impression of the utter meaninglessness of Christian doctrine, the outmoded decrepitude of the Church, reduced to a series of empty formulas presented in the 'bavardage câlin' of this slow-witted, good-humoured peasant.

If l'abbé Bournisien represents decadence, Homais embodies Progress. Nothing indeed excites and preoccupies him more, unless it be 'la croix d'honneur' which after years of indefatigable agitation he finally obtains. He is an excellent business man and a proud father of four offspring (bearing names which would always call to mind 'un grand homme, un fait illustre, ou une conception

généreuse') - 'le plus heureux des pères, le plus fortuné des hommes'. His mission in life is to combat the forces of reaction represented in the clergy ('les prêtres ont toujours croupi dans une ignorance turpide, où ils s'efforcent d'engloutir avec eux les populations') and to bring about the reign of enlightenment and science ...

'toujours guidé par l'amour du progrès et la haine des prêtres il établissait des comparaisons ... dénonçait des abus, lançait des boutades ... bientôt il lui fallut le livre, l'ouvrage! Alors il composa une Statistique générale du canton d'Yonville, suivie d'observations climatologiques, et la statistique le poussa vers la philosophie. Il se préoccupa des grandes questions: problème social, moralisation des classes pauvres, pisciculture, caoutchouc, chemins de fer, etc. ...

Il n'abandonnait point la pharmacie: au contraire! il se tenait au courant des découvertes. Il suivait le grand mouvement des chocolats. C'est le premier qui ait fait venir dans la Seine-Inférieure du cho-ca et de la revalentia...'

Beside the absolute self-satisfaction and confidence of the chemist, 'florissant et hilare', the stupidity and ineptitude of the priest is almost tolerable. Certainly the more mordant and merciless ridicule is showered upon Homais, one of Flaubert's most violently hostile caricatures.

For Bournisien is comparatively harmless in that he represents an outmoded past: Homais on the other hand represents the present and the future, an alert intelligence and a prosperous business,

with the energy and ability to impose himself upon society with his own views and his own plans. It is for that reason that his like inspire in Flaubert such hostile contempt.

'Nous ne souffrons que d'une chose: la Bêtise. Mais elle est formidable et universelle. Quand on parle de l'abrutissement de la plèbe, on dit une chose injuste, incomplète. Conclusion: il faut éclairer les classes éclairées.'⁽¹⁾

(x) An exceptional bourgeois:
Charles Bovary.

We have been concerned in this third part of Chapter Six with a series of characters ranging from the irritating and disagreeable to the wholly objectionable. We have seen them subjected to the author's irony, ridicule, contempt - or simply good-natured humour. Rarely have there been signs of sympathy or compassion.

There is however one study of the 'bourgeois', the 'bourgeois' with all his limitations of stupidity, ineptitude, vulgarity, but who is finally neither an object of humour nor of contempt. This is Charles Bovary, who along with Deslauriers is the most detailed

(1) Corr. VI. 307. 14 nov. 1871 à George Sand.

and profoundly characterised of all the 'bourgeois' who figure in Flaubert's pages. For unlike Homais and Bournisien, Binet and Delmar, Martinon and Hussonnet, Charles suffers. And he suffers in the real sense of the word: not as M. Dambreuse, agitated and distressed by political vicissitudes, not like the increasingly morose and hyponchondriac Regimbart, not even as does the disillusioned and embittered Deslauriers. He suffers for his wife, at whose death-bed he was 'plus agonisant qu'elle', for his child ('il souffrait, le pauvre homme, à la voir si mal vêtue ... car la femme de ménage n'en prenait guère de souci ...): and above all because the failure of his marriage is incomprehensible to him. - 'Pourquoi?' he asks Emma, when he discovers that she has poisoned herself - 'Qui t'a forcée? ... Est-ce ma faute? J'ai fait tout ce que j'ai pu pourtant!' And Emma answers - 'Oui ..., c'est vrai ..., tu es bon, toi!'

He worshipped Emma. Before he had married her he had not been unhappy because he did not know what happiness was. At school he had been 'un garçon de temperament modéré'; as a medical student he had worked conscientiously without understanding anything much, 'à la manière d'un cheval de manège, qui tourne en place les yeux bandés, ignorant la besogne qu'il broie.' But now, 'sans souci de rien au monde, l'esprit tranquille, la chair contente', he can imagine no greater felicity. She is all he asks of life, and

'l'univers, pour lui, n'excédait pas le tour soyeux de son jupon'.
He loves her 'infiniment'. When at last she bears him a child he finds his happiness complete.

'Rien ne lui manquait à présent. Il connaissait l'existence humaine tout du long, et il s'y attablait sur les deux coudes avec sérénité'.

And so he is radically incapable of understanding Emma's suffering, unaware of it until some catastrophe like her collapse or her increasingly obvious ill-health forces the knowledge upon him. His generosity towards her knows no bounds: he nurses her night and day, yields to her slightest whim, gives up a flourishing practice to take her elsewhere, commits himself to impossible debts to satisfy her. But with his 'incurable ineptie' he serves only to make things worse. He is completely lacking in perspicacity - 'Charles n'était pas de ceux qui descendent au fond des choses' - and quite absorbed in his own peaceful contentment until it is too late to remedy what his blind complacency has allowed to be destroyed.

When it is all over and Emma is dead, he meets Rodolphe one day. After a conversation which Charles, lost in memories, does not even follow, he addresses Rodolphe, 'la tête dans ses deux mains, ... d'une voix éteinte et avec l'accent résigné des douleurs infinies;

- Non, je ne vous en veux plus!

'Il ajouta même un grand mot, le seul qu'il ait jamais dit:

- C'est la faute de la fatalité!

Rodolphe, qui avait conduit cette fatalité, le trouva bien débonnaire pour un homme dans sa situation, et même un peu vil.'

But Charles, stupid, blind ('N'était-tu pas heureuse?' he asks Emma as she is dying) had lacked the power to organise or forestall events because he had never foreseen them, never understood what was happening. How many times had he been filled with a distress that had brought him to tears, on realising that Emma was ill in some way - 'cherchant ce qu' elle pouvait avoir, imaginant une maladie nerveuse, pleurant, et sentant vaguement circular autour de lui quelque chose de funeste et d'incompréhensible'.

But as soon as she had appeared to be physically fit again he had forgotten.

He dies of grief, and the last pages of the novel offer a parallel between 'la lassitude funèbre' of the bereaved and solitary Charles and the beaming prosperity of the chemist. It is Homais now who is the incarnation of the 'bourgeois', complacent and content, radiant with health and self-importance. Charles, if he has been in his own way as 'bourgeois' as the chemist, is transformed by his bewildered suffering into one of the most moving of Flaubert's characters, and a character more profoundly true than the Homais and Bournisien to whom the author denies the essential human quality of a capacity for suffering.

Yet Charles remains a 'bourgeois' in that he had always accepted with unquestioning and complete satisfaction the life which was offered him, and was content to instal himself in life without even imagining a greater felicity than that of his home

with a pretty wife and a daughter. This is an essentially 'bourgeois' characteristic as far as Flaubert is concerned. Equally typical is the attitude which knows itself dissatisfied with the narrow horizons of a 'bourgeois' existence but refuses, out of apathy, sheer weakness, to seek further. Again, the 'bourgeois' may be all that is contrary to apathy and weakness - he may work with zeal and intelligence for the attainment of his end. But his ambitions are always within the limits of his own conception of life as a commercial battle, a chase for power and influence, a struggle to become established, immutably, in the world of utilitarian values and 'idees reçues' in which he is content to move.

Flaubert despises any man who can achieve happiness in so low a form, who is satisfied to restrict his life to the material and commercial. Emma and Frédéric, may be weak-willed and selfish, unintelligent, vacillating and worse. But they are irked and exasperated by their environment and by its values, revolted by the limited perspectives of so many lives, including their own, by the absence of beauty and splendour and joy. Frédéric in a sense resigns himself; but Emma cannot do so - hence her suicide.

The Flaubertian novel would appear in this light to be the work of a man in revolt. We find that it is not so much for the end he has in view that the author admires or despises a character, as for the pattern of his life, something we might describe as a distinction of soul. We have seen how he respects characters as

different as the humble servant Félicité and the ruthless Carthaginian Hamilcar: how he sets the dilettante Frédéric above Deslauriers, although the latter perseveres through all manner of hardships and sacrifices to achieve his end; how he makes of the adulteress Emma a character who has a greatness of soul denied to the prostitute Rosanette, a woman who decides to settle down in marriage with a rich old gentleman in order to have a home and as respectable a name as any other 'bourgeoise'.

Maubert is ready to admire, or at least to respect, any characteristic which distinguishes a man from the mediocrity and conformity into which he saw the majority of his fellows sinking deeper year by year.

His sympathy and compassion go out immediately to any for whom the pettiness and ugly monotony of life is a cause of suffering. His whole attitude to characters like these, condemned or at least criticised by most of his contemporaries (witness Emma Bovary) is expressed in a passage from a letter written in 1847, but which is representative of his attitude ten and twenty years later -

'La contemplation d'une existence rendue misérable par une passion violente, de quelque nature qu'elle soit, est toujours quelque chose d'instructif et de hautement moral. Ça rabaisse ... tant de passions banales et de manies vulgaires que l'on est satisfait en songeant que l'instrument humain peut vibrer jusque là et monter

à des tons si aigus'.⁽¹⁾

He is not a Revolutionary: he accepts the social order because he does not (on the whole) believe any amelioration of life possible through purely political or sociological changes. But he is in revolt against the values of his fellow men, against their ambitions, and against their creeds, against all that encourages them in the high opinion they have of themselves in spite of their wretchedness -

'il me semble que nous ne pouvons jamais être assez méprisés selon notre mérite. J'aime à voir l'humanité et tout ce qu'elle respecte, ravalé, bafoué, honni, sifflé. C'est par là que j'ai quelque tendresse pour les ascétiques. La torpeur moderne vient du respect illimité que l'homme a pour lui-même.'⁽²⁾

The work we shall be discussing in our next chapter, Bouvard et Pécuchet, is the ultimate and most virulent expression of this same revolt and resentment. It is not only a moral satire, but a destructive attack on the whole edifice of contemporary thought.

(1) Corr. II. 32. août 1847 à Louise Colet.

(2) Corr. IV. 33. 2-3 mars 1854 à Louise Colet.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

BOUVARD ET PECUCHET.

- I. Introduction to Bouvard et Pecuchet.
- II. Summary of the work.
- III. The role of the protagonists.
- IV. Bouvard et Pecuchet as a critique of contemporary thought.
- V. The lesson of Bouvard et Pecuchet.

I

It was on July 1st., 1872 that Flaubert announced the completion of his third and last Tentation. His manuscript contained the essence of some twenty-five years' work and thought on the subject, and, as he wrote to George Sand two years later, when he had at last yielded up his copy to the printing press - 'Il en coûte de se séparer d'un vieux compagnon.'⁽¹⁾ The companionship of the hermit had, however, been replaced almost immediately by that of two middle-aged clerks, Bouvard and Pécuchet. Not a fortnight after finishing the Tentation we find Flaubert writing a short note to George Sand (from Bagnères-de-Luchon where he had accompanied his niece on a cure) to say that he has decided upon the subject of his next novel. Explaining that it is a work demanding vast erudition, he asks her whether she knows 'à Paris un libraire quelconque qui pourrait me louer tous les livres que je lui désignerais?'⁽²⁾ Though he makes no mention of a title he is obviously referring to Bouvard et Pécuchet.

To come to a decision so quickly Flaubert must have had this subject in mind when he was still working on the Tentation.⁽³⁾

(1) Corr. VII.117. 7 février. 1874.

(2) Corr. VII. 394-5. 12 juillet 1872.

(3) Judith Gautier recalls in her Souvenirs (Le Second Rang du Collier, Paris 1906) a conversation at Neuilly in which Flaubert talked to his hosts of the two 'bonshommes' and the novel for which he was already making notes. She does not specify a date, but it must have been prior to July, 1869, since Bouilhet, who died on eighteenth of that month, was present at the conversation.

though the letters we know give no hint of what is to be his next undertaking. However, it is not a new idea. Not only are there specific references to a work of this type in the Correspondance of the early fifties, ⁽¹⁾ but the careful researches of M. Demorest, ⁽²⁾ and later of Mme. Durry, ⁽³⁾ amongst Flaubert's papers, files and notebooks, show that in 1863 the author was engaged not only on a plan for his second and great Education Sentimentale, but, simultaneously on a plan for Bouvard et Pécuchet, then designated by the title Les Deux Cloportes, or alternatively and more prosaically, Les Deux Commis. Indeed these two good fellows, under an ingenious variety of names - Dumolard et Pécuchet, Dubolard et Bécuchet, Bolard et Manichet! - can claim almost as long an acquaintance with their creator as Saint Anthony.

Hardly out of school, Flaubert had warned his friend Chevalier that his function in existence, if ever he accepted a function, would be 'démoralisateur', to lay bare the cruel truth of life. ⁽⁴⁾

(1) These will be referred to again and commented on later.

(2) D-L. Demorest. A travers les plans, manuscrits et dossiers de Bouvard et Pécuchet, 1931.

(3) M-J Durry. Flaubert et ses projets inédits, Paris 1950. The scenario examined by Mme Durry is, she affirms, an earlier one than any of those discussed by M. Demorest, although it is impossible to ascribe a definite date to it.

(4) Corr. I. 41. 24 février 1839.

We may recall too his admiration for Byron and Rabelais, because he saw them as the only two great artists who had dared to laugh in the face of humanity. ⁽¹⁾ We had occasion in discussing the adolescent writings to show how often Flaubert's laughter was angry and bitter, and how it was the more harsh and contemptuous in the measure in which he suffered at the object of his ridicule. If then, and now, he seems to take a cruel delight in revealing and making mock of the sins and stupidities of his fellows, it is because from childhood he has been bitterly disappointed in his human relationships, and because he has found in irony and ridicule the most effective armour of protection against such suffering. 'Le sentiment du comique est un bon soutien dans les fanges de la vie', he wrote to la princesse Mathilde towards the end of his life - 'Si je ne l'avais pas eu depuis longtemps je serais mort enrage'. ⁽²⁾ Not only is this sometimes strange sense of humour a weapon of defence, but also it gives him the means to attack first and so avoid being taken unawares. How else explain that painstaking recording of human weakness, stupidity,

(1) Corr. I.29. 13 septembre. 1838.

(2) Corr. VIII. 59. août. 1877.

vulgarity and perversion, ⁽¹⁾ which is certainly morbid to a degree? Indeed, the intensity of his suffering when confronted with unintelligent prejudice, conventional hypocrisies, petty or avaricious self-seeking, must remain to some extent a mystery for many of us, at once less sensitive, more fortunate in our human relationships, more comprehending too perhaps - or simply watching mankind from the vantage point of a completely different philosophy of life. Flaubert himself described it as an illness, only three or four months before his death. ⁽²⁾

These last eight years during which he was engaged on the composition of Bouvard et Pécuchet were, it is true, the most lonely and the most depressing of his life. His mother had died in April, 1872, so that of his family only his niece remained. She, as we have already mentioned, was married and spending most of the year between Dieppe and Paris. Bouilhet, his dearest friend, and many of his contemporaries in the literary world, had died in the early 1870's - Sainte-Beuve, Duplan, Jules de Goncourt, his dear 'Theo'

(1) v. entry concerning Flaubert in the Journal des Goncourt (II. 127-8 1 novembre. 1863).

Henri Ceard, in an article published in L'Express of April 9th. 1851, describes Flaubert's enthusiasm in collecting texts for his 'Scottisier' as follows:- 'Et quelle joie retentissante il exhalait en ces démarches où on allait le voir ... Quand sa semaine avait été féconde et abondante la récolte de niaiseries, il ouvrait sur sa table de grands dossiers de papier bleu et ... il lisait les extraits de bêtise qu'il avait tirés des auteurs les plus célèbres, heureux des défaillances qu'il constatait chez les meilleurs et des contradictions qu'il recueillait chez les mieux équilibrés.'

(2) Corr. VIII.357. 25 janvier 1880. à Mme Roger des Genettes. 'L'insupportabilité de la sottise humaine est devenue chez moi une maladie, et le mot est faible. Presque tous les humains ont le don de m'exasperer, et je ne respire librement que dans le désert.'

Gautier, Feydeau. The Franco-Prussian war, was, he believed at the time, 'le fond de l'abîme',⁽¹⁾ 'Comment n'en suis-je pas crevé?' he wrote to G. Sand.⁽²⁾ ... 'J'ai eu de mauvais moments dans ma vie, j'ai subi de grandes pertes, j'ai beaucoup pleuré, j'ai ravalé beaucoup d'angoisses. Eh bien toutes ces douleurs accumulées ne sont rien en comparaison de celle-là. Et je n'en reviens pas. Je ne me console pas. Je n'ai aucune espérance. Je ne me croyais pas progressiste et humanitaire, cependant. N'importe! j'avais des illusions! Quelle barbarie! Quelle reculade! ... Le fiel m'étouffe. Ces officiers qui cassent les glaces en gants blancs, qui savent le sanscrit et se ruent sur le champagne... ces civilisés sauvages me font plus horreur que les cannibales.' Was this perhaps the last of his illusions to be shattered? Until he had seen 'les docteurs-es-lettres' of the Prussian army 'se livrant à un pareil métier et obéissant à une pareille discipline'⁽³⁾ he had at least had confidence in an intellectual élite, though he had scarcely realised it. 'Quel effondrement! quelle chute! quelle misère! quelles abominations! Peut-on croire au progrès et à la civilisation devant tout ce qui se passe? A quoi donc sert la science? puisque ce peuple, plein de savants, commet des abominations dignes des Huns et pires que les leurs, car elles sont systématiques, froides, voulues...'⁽⁴⁾

(1) Corr.VI.380.18 mai 1872 à la princesse Mathilde.

(2) Corr. VI.202. 11 mars 1871.

(3) Corr. VI. 225. 27 avril(?) 1871 à Mme Roger des Genettes.

(4) Corr.VI.184. 30 octobre 1870 à George Sand.

Experiences such as these make the intellectual scepticism of Bouvard et Pécuchet more violently pessimistic than it might otherwise have been.

But worse than the Prussian invasion was to follow (at least in Flaubert's opinion). After the war came the Commune, and after the Commune the proclamation of the Republic, on September 4th, 1872 - 'jour ... le plus maudit de l'histoire de France.' Then the Commanville's bankruptcy, the threat of losing Croisset. 'J'ai passé ma vie à priver mon coeur des pâtures les plus légitimes. J'ai mené une existence laborieuse et austère. Eh bien! je n'en peux plus! je me sens à bout. Les larmes rentrées m'étouffent et je lâche l'écluse ... l'idée de n'avoir plus un toit à moi, un home, m'est intolérable.'⁽¹⁾

And in all this 'il me manque "une vue bien arrêtée et bien étendue sur la vie"' (he is quoting to George Sand a letter she has written him) 'Vous n'éclairerez pas mes ténèbres avec de la métaphysique', he goes on, '... ni les miennes, ni celles des autres. Les mots religion ou catholicisme, d'une part; progrès, fraternité, démocratie de l'autre, ne répondent plus aux exigences spirituelles du moment. Le dogme tout nouveau de l'égalité, que prône le radicalisme, est démenti expérimentalement par la physiologie et par l'histoire. Je ne vois pas le moyen d'établir aujourd'hui un principe nouveau, pas plus que de respecter les anciens. Donc je cherche, sans la trouver, cette idée d'où

(1) Corr. VII. 245. 9 juillet 1875, à sa nièce.

doit dépendre tout le reste.

En attendant, je me répète le mot que Littré m'a dit un jour: "Ah! mon ami, l'homme est un composé instable, et la terre une planète bien inférieure!" (1)

Bouvard et Pécuchet presents an objectified and symbolic expression of the revolt, the hopelessness, and the bewilderment we have seen in these few passages, distorted into satiric and comic form. It is an ironic caricature of men and manners and at the same time an attempted critique of contemporary thought, (2) a monument of intellectual scepticism which Flaubert saw as a pendant to the religious scepticism of his newly completed Tentation. (3)

This double aspect of Bouvard et Pécuchet, at once a moral and an intellectual caricature, is evident in the first reference to a work of this type back in the fifties. 'J'ai quelquefois des

(1) Corr.VII. 282. décembre 1875 à George Sand.

(2) Corr.VIII.336. 16 décembre 1879 à Mme Tennant.
'Bref, j'ai l'intention de faire une revue de toutes les idées modernes.'

(3) Corr.VI.456. 4 décembre 1872 à George Sand.
'Si je le fais paraître. (Saint-Antoine) j'aime mieux que ce soit en même temps qu'un autre livre tout différent. J'en travaille un maintenant qui pourra lui faire pendant.' (Bouvard et Pécuchet).
cf.402. letter to Mme Roger des Genettes, 18 août 1872.

prurits atroces d'engueuler les humains', he wrote to Louise Colet in a characteristic fit of rage with the bourgeois, 'et je le ferai à quelque jour, dans dix ans d'ici dans quelque long roman à cadre large ...' (1) In the meantime he will make do with another work,

the Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues which he and Bouilhet had already begun to compile some time before 1850, (2) and to which he intends

(1) Corr. III. 66-67 17 décembre 1852.

(2) cf. Corr. II. 237-8. 4 septembre 1850 à Louis Bouilhet. 'Tu fais bien de songer au Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues. Ce livre complètement fait et précédé d'une bonne préface ... arrangée de telle manière que le lecteur ne sache pas si on se f... de lui, oui ou non, ce serait peut-être une oeuvre étrange et capable de réussir, car elle serait toute d'actualité.' (Flaubert's italics)

- One might note that Maxime du Camp, whose evidence is always interesting but not necessarily reliable, says that Flaubert began the Dictionnaire when he was twenty - some time in 1841, that is. (v. du Camp. Souv. Litt. I.69)

On the subject of earlier prefigurations of Eouvard et Pécuchet and its possible sources, one should recall the study of the bourgeois in Leçon d'Histoire Naturelle: genre commis which Flaubert had published in a local review in 1837, and the burlesque, Jenner ou la découverte de la vaccine, begun in collaboration with du Camp and Bouilhet in 1846, but never finished. We shall note later the obvious connections between these bourgeois caricatures Eouvard and Pécuchet, and le Garçon. Finally many references in the Correspondance of the early fifties show that this possible amplification of the Dictionnaire into a complete book was a constant preoccupation.

The only possible literary source seems to have been a short story similar in outline to Eouvard et Pécuchet, Les Deux Greffiers by a certain Maurice. This was published in different reviews in 1841 and 1858. It seems probable that Flaubert knew it, though in any case it could offer him nothing more than a brief scenario. The question is exposed in detail in Dumesnil's preface to his own edition of the text of Eouvard et Pécuchet (Société des Belles Lettres 1945) along with a detailed commentary of the prefigurations of the novel mentioned above.

to add a long preface which will really be a book itself.

This was to be a moral satire - 'la glorification historique de tout ce qu'on approuve ... une apologie de la canaillerie humaine sur toutes ses faces.' But above all Flaubert meant to establish each ironic affirmation by means of texts and quotations collected from his readings (in the famous Sottisier) so that the reader would be utterly bewildered by the whole thing.

'Il faudrait ... qu'une fois qu'on l'aurait lu on n'osât plus parler, de peur de dire naturellement des phrases qui s'y trouvent.'

Clearly this would not be a straightforward attack in the style of Monnier or Champfleury. Joseph Prudhomme is an easy butt for humour, as the success of Monnier's work amongst the bourgeois themselves proves. But Monnier, as Baudelaire said, 'a une faculté étrange, mais il n'en a qu'une ... la limpidité du miroir, d'un miroir qui ne pense pas et qui se contente de réfléchir les passants.'⁽¹⁾ Nothing could be further from describing Flaubert's work, 'une satire', in the words of M. Dumesnil, 'dont la trivialité voulue cache la profondeur philosophique et voile les intentions sous l'apparence d'un innocent récit dont l'ironie même se dissimule.'⁽²⁾

Eouvard et Pécuchet has neither plot, action, nor characterisation in the general acceptance of the terms. Its interest for the

(1) Baudelaire: Quelques Caricaturistes Français.

(2) Dumesnil. op. cit. p.ix.

ordinary reader is slight, as Flaubert himself realised. It was written for the few, the initiated elite, and even to these it must sometimes seem that the author has the last laugh. How indeed, without an erudition as vast as Flaubert's, are we to appreciate all the humour of his work? What, for instance, can the uninitiated in organic chemistry find amusing, or even comprehensible in the following:

'Après les couleurs, et les corps gras ce fut le tour de la fermentation. Elle les conduisit aux acides, - et la loi des équivalents les embarrassa encore une fois. Ils tâchèrent de l'éclaircir avec la théorie des atomes: ce qui acheva de les perdre.'

Flaubert was only too well aware of the pitfalls of this 'entreprise écrasante et épouvantable'.⁽¹⁾ 'Il faut être absolument fol pour entreprendre un pareil livre. J'ai peur qu'il ne soit, par sa conception même, radicalement impossible.'⁽²⁾ 'J'ai peur que ce ne soit embêtant à crever'⁽³⁾ - 'C'est de la conception même du livre que je doute'.⁽⁴⁾ So his anxieties and doubts are repeated month after month, year after year. At times his courage fails him. After twelve months he half abandons it and seeks

(1) Corr. VI. 404. 22 août 1872 à sa nièce. (Flaubert's italics)

(2) Corr. VII. 206. 26 septembre 1874 à G. Sand.

(3) Corr. VIII. 82. 5 octobre 1877 à E. Zola.

(4) Corr. VIII. 126. 9 juillet 1878 à Mme R. des Genettes.

recreation in play-writing:⁽¹⁾ two years later, (1875), in the midst of grave financial difficulties occasioned by Commanville's bankruptcy, he is obliged to give it up altogether. Then it is that he turns to Saint-Julien, and to the other two stories which are to make up the volume of Trois Contes. It is only in April, 1877, that he begins work again on the actual composition of Eouvard et Pécuchet, though he has been reading and making notes for it for some months. For the next three years it is his sole occupation, despite periods of deep depression and utter weariness. 'quel livre!' he writes to Caroline in March, 1880. '... il y a des jours où j'en pleure de fatigue.'⁽²⁾ Three months later, in the middle of April, he estimates that it will take him to the end of the year to finish it. 'Je me hâte pourtant: je me bouscule pour ne pas perdre une minute et je me sens las jusqu'aux moelles'. On May 8th he died suddenly, still at work.

Eouvard et Pécuchet had been a task beyond his strength.

'Savez-vous à combien se montent les volumes qu'il m'a fallu absorber pour mes deux bonshommes?' he asks Madame Roger des Genettes, -

(1) le Candidat. Throughout the spring of 1873 Flaubert had been intermittently occupied with Bouilhet's le Sexe Faible - he had in fact written it from the scenario left among the latter's papers. Play-writing had been a favourite pastime in boyhood, and something of a temptation ever since. Having completed Bouilhet's play, Flaubert embarked upon a comedy of his own. The winter of 1873-4 was spent in negotiations and rehearsals. The play was put on in March 1874 and was a complete failure. Apart from innumerable scenarios sketched out with the collaboration of du Camp and/or Bouilhet in earlier years, Flaubert had written only one other play, le Château des Coeurs, (1862-3). Despite sixteen years' effort he never managed to persuade any theatre to accept it. Neither of the works has any important contribution to make to the present study.

(2) Corr. IX. 12.

(3) Corr. IX. 22.

(1)
 'à plus de 1500!' When he died it was found that the material he had collected for his novel amounted to some sixty files, not to mention piles of loose papers. But the work was not merely an intellectual feat. However justifiably satisfied Flaubert may have been at the immense and scrupulously conscientious labour he had put into his work, what really concerned him was that the final result should be a work of art. Indeed, he affirmed that if he succeeded as he hoped it would be not only a work of art, but 'le comble de l'Art'. (2)

It is a hazardous task to judge an unfinished work, and difficult to say how near Flaubert came to achieving his aim. Though few would go so far as Rémy de Gourmont in an enthusiastic acclamation of Eouvard et Pécuchet as one of the greatest masterpieces of literature, most would concede that it represents not only a remarkable literary achievement in the welding together of so vast an amount of material, but a rich and original satire with an interesting, if enigmatic diversity of themes.

(1) Corr. VIII. 355-6. 25 janvier 1880.

It is difficult to know how accurate this estimation is. Demarest, for example, (op.cit.) found listed in Flaubert's various files 324 works, and suggests that he was referring in this letter to all that he had read over the years, having the novel in mind. On the other hand Flaubert expressly states in a letter to Mme. Roger des Genettes written in June 1874 (Corr.VII.153) that he has already read and summarised 294 volumes ... and at that point his documentation was by no means complete.

(2) Corr. VII. p.213. 15 octobre 1874 à sa nièce. (Flaubert's italics).

II.

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the work, we may perhaps be permitted to describe it in outline. As it stands it contains ten chapters, the last incomplete. These, perhaps expanded to eleven or more, would have constituted a first volume, whilst the material copied by Bouvard and his companion when they reverted to their former occupation would have made a second. (1)

Roughly speaking each chapter shows the two protagonists exploring a particular branch of knowledge: each undertaking always proves eventually to be a source of disappointment and even grief. After a first introductory chapter we find them dealing with

(1) There has been much inconclusive discussion as to the precise form this second volume would have taken. We have seen that Flaubert had already compiled a Dictionnaire des Idées reçues as early as 1851, perhaps even before. At the same time, and throughout the subsequent years, he had been collecting texts for an album of 'sottises' - a 'sottisier' as he called it. In his thesis Le Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues (Sorbonne 1913), E-L Ferrere suggests that this same dictionary constituted the second volume of Bouvard et Pécuchet. Deschannes and Dumesnil, at various times and in various places, have both argued that a dictionary is an original composition and not a series of excerpts and texts that are copied. Strictly speaking only the 'sottisier' could have been copied. However, the dictionary was found amongst the Bouvard et Pécuchet dossiers, and is also mentioned in all the early plans. It seems indisputable that Flaubert intended to insert it somewhere. Perhaps therefore, Dumesnil suggests, in his introduction to the novel (Société des Belles Lettres, Paris 1945-), the second volume would have consisted first of the 'sottisier', and then, coming as a kind of post-script, and marking a definite intellectual evolution on the part of the two copyists, the dictionary. This is an ingenious, but of course hypothetical solution.

agriculture in Chapter Two, the physical sciences in Chapter Three, archeology and history in Chapter Four, literature in Five, political and social science in Six. Chapter Seven provides an interlude for their respective love affairs. In Chapter Eight they are concerned with metaphysics, and in Nine with religion. The last deals with schemes for social regeneration, though in the work as it exists they have progressed no further than an unsuccessful experiment in child-education and rehabilitation.

The actual story, if such it may be termed, runs as follows. Eouvard and Pécuchet, copying clerks, having discovered each in the other a most congenial and instructive companion, retire to the country on the combined capital of the one's inheritance and the other's savings to enjoy a rustic old age. They are not, however, devoid of energy or ambition, and encouraged by some slight success in the kitchen garden they undertake to exploit the farm which is part of their small estate. They have no practical experience, but study laboriously and apply conscientiously and indiscriminately all that they cull from the numerous and often contradictory volumes in their possession. When they are eventually bound to admit to disastrous failure they attribute it not to any particular mistake, nor even to the inclement weather, but to the absence of any general and infallible rule in any branch of agriculture. Look at their misshapen and barren fruit-trees: ... 'non

seulement chaque espèce réclame des soins particuliers, mais encore chaque individu, suivant le climat, la température, un tas de choses! ou est la règle, alors? et quel espoir avons-nous d'aucun succès ou bénéfice?

... Pécuchet baissa la tête.

- L'arboriculture pourrait bien être une blague!

- Comme l'agronomie! répliqua Houvard.'

They turn back to the more humble venture of the vegetable garden, but here again they are thwarted at every turn by what they believe to be the insufficiency of their learning, and when an attempt to bottle their produce ends in an explosion they abandon the project altogether and turn to the sciences. For, as Pecuchet suggests, the reason for their latest misfortune lies perhaps in their ignorance of chemistry.

Chemistry soon defeats them, and from the study of the elements they turn to that of man. They deal in turn with anatomy, physiology, medicine, even practising this last in the village. But it is a haphazard affair, and Houvard at least is radically dissatisfied with the little his impatient researches reveal: 'Les ressorts de la vie nous sont cachés, les affections trop nombreuses, les remèdes problématiques, et on ne découvre dans les auteurs aucune définition raisonnable de la santé ...'

The preservation of one's health is such a complex and constant problem that they begin perforce to wonder how they have managed to survive so long. They abandon the whole question, and turn successively to astronomy, zoology, geology, wondering 'comment

l'univers s'est fait' and trying to find an answer. But every scientific theory is established 'suivant les données fournies par un coin de l'étendue. Peut-être ne convient-elle pas à tout le reste qu'on ignore, qui est beaucoup plus grand, et qu'on ne peut découvrir'. They conclude that the findings of any branch of science are too slight to establish indisputable certitudes, and decide that 'mieux vaudrait nous occuper d'autre chose'.

With the next chapter (four) they have become archeologists and from there they are led inevitably to history. What begins as a mere curiosity about the past becomes an imperative urge to discover the truth, and finally a cause for despair. Truth does not exist. How many historians, for example, have had as their sole aim a scientifically accurate and objective reconstruction of the past? And even if they had, 'on ne peut tout dire, il faut un choix. Mais dans le choix des documents, un certain esprit dominera, et comme il varie, suivant les conditions de l'écrivain, jamais l'histoire ne sera fixée'. There is one possibility, Pecuchet suggests, and that is to select some limited and slight subject of which it is possible to make an exhaustive survey. So they attempt a monograph of the Duke of Angoulême. Major obstacles are, however, quick to present themselves. How for instance are they to solve the problem of the gentleman's hair? Was it straight or curly? They have evidence to support both propositions! They renounce an insoluble problem and agree that in any case 'les faits extérieurs ne sont pas tout. Il faut compléter par la psychologie. Sans l'imagination l'histoire est defectueuse. - Faisons venir

quelques romans historiques'.

And in this way they penetrate into the realms of art. The novel, the drama, literary criticism, aesthetics, occupy them in turn. They go so far as to attempt to write a play, and failing that, a novel. But either there are no rules for these things, or the existing rules are an insufficient guide. Even grammarians are at odds. As for a definition of style, of taste, of beauty, nothing could be more chimeric and self-contradictory than 'la science ou'on nomme esthétique', the function of which is to distinguish between these qualities. Like all the rest it is 'une blague'.

With Chapter Six we find ourselves in 1848. News of the Revolution and of the proclamation of the Republic has interrupted the heroes' studies. Eouvard rejoices in this 'triomphe du peuple', and Féouchet goes so far in the expression of liberal sentiments that he is accused of communism. It is only by a near chance that they miss being able to present themselves (at least, one of them) for election to the new Chamber. For a time their political fervour remains at its height, until their faith in the people is badly shaken by the election of Louis Napoleon. Universal suffrage is not after all the key to liberty. But worse is to come. When the two devotees of liberty see the Second Empire proclaimed with the same enthusiasm as had greeted the new-born Republic, and by the same shameless people, their disillusionment is complete.

'Eouvard songeait:

- Hein, le Progrès, quelle blague!

Il ajouta:

- Et la Politique, une belle saleté! ... Tout me dégoûte.'

So begins a period of hopeless apathy. What is the point even of reading? 'Ils n'étudiaient plus dans la peur des déceptions! With no hope of intellectual satisfaction they turn to the physical. Each has his grotesquely unsuccessful love affair: then they renounce women and try gymnastics. But it is too strenuous an occupation for men of their age.

They embark on an exploration of the psychic and spiritual. The phenomena of magnetism, electricity, Swedenborgism, water-divining, hypnosis, occupy them in turn, and they are led on to profound metaphysical problems: the distinction between mind and matter, the soul, the existence and attributes of God, the problem of evil, theories of epistemology. They work through countless philosophical treatises, materialist, spiritualist, idealist, Christian: they try to master the rudiments of logic and of ethics. But the more they advance the more they are bewildered. 'Nous allons tomber dans l'abîme effrayant du scepticisme', Pécuchet fears. 'C'est qu'il est difficile de ne pas douter', concludes Houvard a little later. Finally 'tous deux s'avouèrent qu'ils étaient las des philosophes. Tant de systèmes vous embrouillent. La métaphysique ne sert à rien. On peut vivre sans elle'.

They discover however that it is no longer so easy to abandon the search for understanding: with Pécuchet the urge for truth had

become 'une soif ardente'. Bouvard 'apercevait l'insuffisance du matérialisme et tâchait de s'y retenir, déclarant du reste qu'il en perdait la boule.' They both arrive at a scepticism so absolute as to be absurd - 'la certitude que rien n'existe' - and recall with wretchedness the days of their enthusiasm. 'Un abîme les en séparait. Quelque chose d'irrévocable était venu'. Is suicide the only way out? They are on the point of hanging themselves when Bouvard remembers 'nous n'avons pas fait notre testament'! It is Christmas Eve, and they can see the long procession of country-folk moving towards the church ... 'une curiosité les y poussait.'

In this way they come to examine the doctrines of Christianity and, for purposes of comparison, religions in general (in their own summary fashion, of course)... 'les deux bonshommes, après toutes leurs déceptions, éprouvaient le besoin d'être simples, d'aimer quelque chose, de se reposer l'esprit.' Pécuchet, exalted, practices the most stringent physical mortifications. Bouvard on the other hand finds himself not a whit transformed, as he had expected to be, and is in addition harrassed by all kinds of intellectual doubts. 'Adorons sans comprendre', the priest insists, and Bouvard inclines before his judgment. But the doubts remain, and when Pécuchet's ardour calms, he too is full of questions to which they find no satisfactory answer. 'Quand on songe que le christianisme a pour base une pomme!' Little by little they abandon their religious practices, and even more thankfully the company of the bien-pensants and the clericals.

During their period of intimacy with these latter, 'les gens du château', they had seen two small children, the offspring of a convict, whom one of the ladies had found wandering in the vicinity and taken in. The boy and girl prove so recalcitrant and undisciplined, however, that it is decided to hand them over to the care of appropriate institutions. Eouvard and Fécuchet, touched with pity and excited at the idea of cultivating young minds, take the children into their charge. Numerous volumes are once more consulted, and the efforts of the two are tireless, painstaking, and ingenious. But despite their hopes and ambitions they find it is hardly possible to instil into their pupils the rudiments of the three R's, and their persevering efforts to correct the children's grave faults of character are a complete failure. The boy turns out to be viciously cruel, violent, radically dishonest: the girl is deceitful, calculating and immoral.

'Ils récapitulèrent tout le mal qu'ils s'étaient donné ...

Ah! quelle déception! ...

Hélas! reprit Fécuchet. Mais il y a des natures dénuées de sens moral, et l'éducation n'y peut rien.

Ah! oui, c'est beau, l'éducation!

Never the less they refuse defeat, and though they abandon hope of reforming the children, they are enthusiastic in a project for adult education.

At this point the manuscript comes to a sudden stop. But we know from a detailed plan left among his papers how Flaubert intended to continue and end the story. The education Eouvard and

his friend were to offer the villagers was to be a form of emancipation for men and women alike. At the general meeting which they convene in order to expose their plan (and which ends in tumult) they attack the various forms of restraint imposed upon the individual, be it by civic law or by accepted moral convention. All this results in a warrant for their arrest. The house is invaded by their acquaintances and former friends who, encouraged by the presence of the gendarme, feel free to avenge themselves for past slights and disappointments in all kinds of accusations and calumny. Disorder reigns until it transpires that the summons was a false alarm meant to frighten them into silence henceforth. They are considered unfit to have the children in their care, and these latter as they are taken away 'montrent une insensibilité révoltante'. The plan continues: 'B. et P. en pleurent. Ainsi tout leur a craqué dans la main. Ils n'ont plus aucun intérêt dans la vie.'

It is then that each admits to the other the ambition he has cherished for some time, and which Flaubert writes in italics: 'Copier comme autrefois.' They procure the necessary materials, and set about it. Here the first volume, Bouvard et Pécuchet proper, so to speak, was to have ended.

III.

Even so brief an account of the work is sufficient to bring out its disconcerting variety of aspects. The two protagonists are now idiotic in their behaviour and reactions, now pathetic; now grotesque, now worthy of our respect, our sympathy, or even our admiration. The text itself is a mixture of crude physical humour, burlesque, pathos, wit, irony, bitterness, cynicism. And all this in the exposition of innumerable scientific and medical theories, a diversity of metaphysical systems, questions of aesthetic doctrine and historical method - and how many more subjects?

It has always been characteristic of Flaubert that his idealism should be off-set by a mocking scepticism. His work offers us, in the words of Signora Maranini, 'un univers fantastique et lyrique, un élan effréné vers le rêve, une convoitise d'une vie supérieure à la vie se critiquant, se contraignant, se moquant... d'eux-mêmes, s'organisant dans une vision tragique: l'immense amertume des choses.' (1) It is this basic Weltanschauung which makes compositions as apparently different as Madame Bovary, Un Coeur Simple, and the present work, fundamentally one. Here however, the author is concerned as he has not been previously, to

(1) L. Maranini: Novembre. An article translated from the Italian and published in Les Amis de Flaubert, Bulletin No.7. (pp.2-14) 1955.

express his view in comic form. This is to be the mark of the novel's originality and greatness, and it is this which at once fills him with enthusiasm as a 'superb' possibility and terrifies him as an attempt to realise the impossible. For how does one make comedy out of 'l'immense amertume des choses'?

Clearly Eouvard et Pécuchet is not a comic novel in the generally accepted sense. Not only is its main theme as pessimistically serious as that of the Tentation, but the whole work is the outcome of a long-pent up, bitter exasperation with men and with the human condition. 'Le 4 Septembre (proclamation of the Third Republic) a inauguré un état de choses qui ne nous regarde plus', he wrote to Ernest Feydeau soon after the death of Gautier ('celui-là, je ne le plains pas: au contraire, je l'envie profondément') -

'Nous sommes de trop. On nous hait et on nous méprise, voilà le vrai. Donc, bonsoir!

Mais avant de crever, ou plutôt en attendant une crevaïson, je désire "vuider" le fiel dont je suis plein. Donc, je prépare mon vomissement. Il sera copieux et amer, je t'en réponds.' (1)

In his portrayal of society, in so far as he is concerned with its petty sins and stupidities, Flaubert is mercilessly satirical. But despite their violence, such passages are generally speaking humorous. Witness Maitre Gouy, the peasant to whom Eouvard and Pécuchet have let their farm, asking for a reduction in the rentals:

(1) Corr. VI. 436-7. 28 octobre 1872.

'... il se mit à beugler plutôt qu'à parler, attestant le bon Dieu, énumérant ses peines, vantant ses mérites. Quand on le sommait de dire son prix, il baissait la tête au lieu de répondre. Alors sa femme ... recommençait les mêmes protestations, en piaillant d'une voix aiguë comme une poule blessée.'

There is, however, nothing even approaching humour in the descriptions of the utter, lamentable wretchedness of the poor or the sick. Towards the beginning of the novel we see a game of bowls interrupted by the appearance of a tramp who asks for a glass of wine. 'Allons Corju! éloignez-vous', cries one of the party, 'on ne demande pas l'aumône.' ' - Moi! l'aumône! s'écria l'homme exaspéré. J'ai fait sept ans la guerre en Afrique. Je relève de l'hôpital. Pas d'ouvrage! Faut-il que j'assassine? nom d'un nom!

Sa colère d'elle-même tomba, et, les deux poings sur les hanches, il considérait les bourgeois ... La fatigue des bivouacs, l'absinthe et les fièvres, toute une existence de misère et de crapule se révélait dans ses yeux troubles. Ses lèvres pâles tremblaient en lui découvrant les gencives. Le grand ciel empourpre l'enveloppait d'une lueur sanglante, et son obstination à rester là causait une sorte d'effroi.'

Later we are shown the underpaid, 'priest-ridden' schoolmaster: 'Sa femme ... allaitait un enfant. Une petite fille se cacha derrière sa jupe, un mioche hideux jouait par terre, à ses pieds: l'eau du savonnage qu'elle faisait coulait au bas de la maison ... On avait, pour s'asseoir, une chaise, un tabouret, et une vieille caisse à savon: il affectait d'en rire. Mais la misère

plaquait ses joues ...'

The over-dramatisation of these passages, a fault we are unaccustomed to find in Flaubert, is indicative of the intensity of his compassion and indignation. The adolescent writings revealed the same passionate sympathy with the outcast and the oppressed, and though he would purport to be unmoved and uninterested by the problems and suffering of the proletariat we have seen how the characterisations of Dussardier, Sénécal, Deslauriers, show a deep understanding of and compassion for such men. Now in his last work Flaubert no longer attempts to conceal his anger or pity: it is 'une chose où j'exhalerai ma colère ... je me débarrasserai enfin de ce qui m'étouffe.' (1)

The descriptions of the sick and deformed are such as to fill us not only with pity, but with revulsion. Here again the violence of their horror is the measure of the writer's compassion and resentment that such degradation should be possible.

Bouvard and Pécuchet's man-servant, hare-lipped, hideously ugly, almost inarticulate,

'avait grandi dans les champs et conservait de sa longue misère une faim irrassasiable. Les bêtes mortes de maladie, du lard en pourriture, un chien écrasé, tout lui convenait, pourvu que le morceau fût gros: il était doux comme un mouton, mais entièrement stupide.'

(1) Corr. VI. 425. Octobre 1872 à Mme. Roger des Genettes.

Then there are the incurables they attempt to heal at one time or another - 'une femme à figure d'albino épongeait des glandes suppurantes de son cou: le visage d'une petite fille disparaissait à moitié sous des lunettes bleues: un vieillard, dont une contracture déformait l'échine, heurtait de ses mouvements involontaires Marcel ...' - and the sick they visit 'au fond des chambres, sur de sales matelas ... avec les narines pincées, la bouche tremblante, et des rales, des hoquets, des sueurs, des exhalaisons de cuir et de vieux fromage.'

Here again one remembers the adolescent and his daily contact with illness and suffering at the Hôtel-Dieu in Rouen, making pain, ugliness and evil much more of a reality than the happiness he believed even then to be unattainable.

Nor are the two protagonists always laughable. Humour is banished as soon as a serious emotional reaction is aroused, and although M. Digeon affirms that we feel no pity or sympathy for Eouvard and Pecuchet, ⁽¹⁾ not all readers would agree with him. It may be only for an instant, for immediately the tone changes and we are made to smile, but we are surely moved by passages like the following - Fire has broken on the farm, the haystacks have

(1) Cf. Digeon: Le Dernier Visage de Flaubert. (Paris, 1946) p.145. - 'Nous n'éprouvons guère de pitié pour eux: qu'ils échouent, nous ne les plaindrons pas: ils restent fort loin de nous ...'

gone up in flames and with them a large part of the heroes' fortune). 'Bouvard contemplait l'incendie en pleurant doucement. Ses yeux disparaissaient sous leurs paupières gonflées, et il avait tout le visage comme élargi par la douleur ... Pécuchet ne pleurait pas. Très pâle, ou plutôt livide, la bouche ouverte et les cheveux collés par la sueur froide, il se tenait à l'écart, dans ses réflexions.'

Again, in the last chapter, when after tireless efforts they are obliged to admit their failure not only to instruct the children, but to bring about the slightest improvement of character, one can hardly remain insensible to their sincere distress. 'Bouvard et Pécuchet causèrent longuement de Victor. Le sang paternel se manifestait. Que faire? ... Quel plaisir pourtant que d'avoir eu près de soi un adolescent curieux de vos idées, dont on observe les progrès, qui plus tard devient un frère; mais Victor manquait d'esprit, de cœur encore plus! et Pécuchet soupira, le genou plié dans ses mains jointes. - La sœur ne vaut pas mieux, dit Bouvard. Il imaginait une fille de quinze ans à peu près, l'âme délicate, l'humeur enjouée, ornant la maison des élégances de sa jeunesse; et comme s'il eût été son père et qu'elle vint de mourir, le bonhomme pleura.'

And, as a final instance, if their attempted suicide is grotesque, the suffering which precedes it is real enough.

'Des jour tristes commencèrent.

Ils n'étudiaient plus dans la peur des déceptions: les habitants de Chavignolles s'écartaient d'eux .. leur solitude était profonde, leur

désœuvrement complet ... Ils vivaient dans cet ennui de la campagne, si lourd quand le ciel blanc caresse de sa monotonie un cœur sans espoir. On écoute le pas d'un homme en sabots qui longe le mur, ou les gouttes de la pluie tomber du toit par terre. De temps à autre une feuille morte vient frôler la vitre, puis tournoie et s'en va. Des glas indistincts sont apportés par le vent. Au fond de l'étable une vache mugit.' These are lines which might have come straight from Madame Bovary.

Indeed, one might wonder how far Pouvard and his companion are ever comic. J. Barbey d'Aurevilley⁽¹⁾ and Emile Faguet⁽²⁾ are notorious for having judged them idiotic fools, so idiotic in the opinion of the former that the novel is 'sans gaieté' ... illisible, insupportable' !⁽³⁾

(1) Article published in Le Constitutionnel, 20 mai 1882. republished in Lemerre: Le Roman Contemporain 1902.

(2) Faguet: Flaubert. ch. viii. Le Réaliste; Pouvard et Fécuchet. (Paris 1899)

(3) It is difficult to credit that a book in which there are so many purely ludicrous situations could have been described as 'sans gaieté' ... Pouvard, who in most of these undertakings 'avait pour obstacle son ventre', and Fécuchet, huddled inside his 'gilet de santé', in the various phases of their gymnastics craze or training for the 'garde nationale', to quote only two instances, are nothing less than hilariously funny. And this is not to mention a wealth of humour in parody, wit, irony, all of which seems to have escaped the notice of critics too intent on understanding the novel to enjoy it.

Descharmes⁽¹⁾ and Dumesnil,⁽²⁾ on the contrary, argue with conviction that if the two bourgeois begin as grotesque caricatures they are eventually identified with Flaubert, representative of his views, and for the most part serious characterisations. Seillière⁽³⁾ Thibaudet⁽⁴⁾ and Maynial⁽⁵⁾ incline to this interpretation too.

Digeon and Demorest see not a gradual and complete transformation, but a constant alternation between ironic caricature in which Eouvard and Pecuchet are rendered wholly ridiculous, and entirely serious characterisation in which Flaubert more often than not attributes to them his own outlook and his own suffering. Most of the critics, however, explain the origin and significance of this double character rather differently.

We have already quoted sufficient to prove the judgment of the first mentioned writers summary, if not completely unfounded. The two bourgeois are gullible, prejudiced, at times incredibly stupid; but on the other hand they can give proof of shrewd common-sense and subtle insight. And from the very outset their stupidity is redeemed by their refusal to accept it and their ability to suffer because of it.

(1) Descharmes. Autour de Eouvard et Pecuchet: ch. IX. Conclusion. Paris 1921.)

(2) Dumesnil. op. cit. pp. cvi - cxiii.

(3) Seillière. Le Romantisme des Réalistes: Gustave Flaubert. (1914)

(4) Thibaudet. Gustave Flaubert. ch. ix. Eouvard et Pecuchet. (1922).

(5) Maynial. Eouvard et Pecuchet. Introd. E. Maynial. (1938)

In the case of the second hypothesis we are shown Flaubert setting out to create two figures who were to be uniquely the butt of his irony and ridicule, scape-goats for the narrow-minded ineptitude he was out to pillory once and for all. But his work being an expression of personal suffering and personal conviction, the author finds himself transferring his own reactions and experience to his two copyists. And at the same time, as the years pass, and the intensity of his creative effort makes 'les deux bonshommes' more and more real to him, they become sympathetic too. He is no longer able to view them in the hostile and distorting perspectives of caricature - they have become characters.

It is quite true that there is evidence both of an intellectual development and of a moral evolution as the story of the heroes unfolds. Right at the beginning they are shown to be of inquiring and alert mind, and we are told that 'par cette curiosité leur intelligence se développa'. This curiosity is gradually transformed into a true desire for knowledge. At first, as they dabble in various branches of science and the arts, they are led from one subject to another haphazardly, at the instigation of a nonchalant 'I wonder' or an excited 'Supposing ..?' But from their readings and research arise a new need and a new suffering, new at least in its intensity - the desire for understanding and truth and the resentment at all that purports to be truth and is mere charlatanism. In the early stages 'la comparaison qu'ils firent d'eux-mêmes avec les autres les consolait: ils ambitionnaient de souffrir pour la science'. But later 'une faculté impitoyable se développa dans

leur esprit, celle de voir la bêtise et de ne plus la tolérer. Des choses insignifiantes les attristaient: les réclames des journaux, le profil d'un bourgeois, une sotte réflexion entendue par hasard. En songeant à ce qu'on disait dans leur village, et qu'il y avait jusqu'aux antipodes, d'autres Coulon, d'autres Marescot, d'autres Foureau, ils sentaient peser sur eux comme la burdeur de toute la Terre.

Ils ne sartaient plus, ne recevaient personne.'

In the first chapter the gradual widening of their intellectual horizons brings its énevitabile consequence - 'ayant plus d'idées, ils eurent plus de souffrances': in proportion as their desire for knowledge becomes more intense, their capacity for suffering grows, until they reach the point of attempted suicide. And the temporary conversion to Christianity which follows is only another form of evasion from an intolerable, bewildered scepticism.

It is on this evidence that Dumesnil bases a firm conviction that Flaubert 'à mesure qu'il avanca dans sa tâche, modifia la conception qu'il s'était fait de ses deux héros.' And yet he is obliged to add:- 'ependant Bouvard et son ami conservent quelques traits de stupidité.' He argues that this apparent contradiction of his thesis is the result of Flaubert's suddenly remembered determination that the work must be comic at all costs.

For despite the evolution just described, Bouvard and Pécuchet show themselves as absurd in the latter part of the book as they had been in its first eight pages, where they appear as highly amusing caricatures of two particular types - Bouvard the

rotund and rubicund materialist half ruined by 'les amis, la bonne chère, et surtout la paresse'; Pécuchet the thin and timorous bachelor intent upon not catching cold. Delighted to exchange their new ideas, anxious above all to acquire knowledge, they spend their leisure in museums and picture galleries with the admirable and wholly serious intent of educating themselves. But the means they take to attaining this end are a continual source of humour, not only now, but throughout the book. They do not, as their experience and knowledge widen, become less prone to blunders and absurdities. The last chapter shows them the same wild optimists they had been at the outset in their farming venture. Having embarked upon the education of their two young proteges - 'Un rêve magnifique les occupa: s'ils menaient à bien l'éducation de leurs élèves, ils fonderaient plus tard un établissement ayant pour but de redresser l'intelligence, dompter les caractères, ennoblir les coeurs. Déjà ils parlaient des souscriptions et de la bâtisse.'

Their disgust with the stupidity and treacherous hypocrisy of their fellow villagers does not prevent them stopping passers-by to try to inculcate, 'par besoin de pédagogie', a few principles of hygiene - ('ils en vinrent à inspecter les nourrices') just as in Chapter Two they had tried to reform farming methods in the vicinity. They invent a new system of social organisation based on three principal reforms - 'remplacer le nom de famille par un numéro matricule: hiérarchiser les Français, et pour conserver son grade, il faudrait de temps à autre subir un examen: plus de

châtiments, plus de récompenses, mais, dans tous les villages, une chronique individuelle qui passerait à la postérité'.

When the local newspaper, the Prefect, the Chamber and the Emperor all fail to react to their proposals, they turn to a project à la Haussmann for the rebuilding of Chavignolles.

'Les trois quarts des maisons seraient démolies, on ferait au milieu du bourg une place monumentale, un hospice du côté de Falaise, des abattoirs sur la route de Caen et au "Pas de la Vaque" une église romane et polychrome'. And finally when this comes to nought they work out a system for the re-education and regeneration of the villagers, which ends in their attempted arrest. Far from showing, in the words of Dumesnil, 'quelques traits de stupidité' in the last chapters, they are surely more consistently ridiculous here than in many of the previous pages.

We have already indicated that one may contest Dumensil's interpretation on the grounds that there is no real evolution of character, using in evidence passages such as we have just quoted. And this evidence can be enlarged upon by further indications from another source. Demorest has shed new light on the question by means of quotations from the four different scenarios for the novel which he was the first person to examine. Notes such as the following suggest that from the outset Flaubert had in mind neither wholly grotesque caricatures nor completely serious figures. In the first plan he has written and then crossed out -

'Leur grotesque est surtout dans leurs discours et dans leurs façons plus que dans leurs idées'.

Elsewhere we find:

'Ce ne sont pas précisément deux imbéciles, ils ont beaucoup de sentiments et d'embryons d'idées qu'ils ont du mal à exprimer. Par le seul fait de leur contact ils se développent.'

The very fact of their being two would seem to have a double reason: it is an excellent comic device (we have noted the physical contrast between the two which is a frequent source of humour, and Thibaudet has gone so far as to see in them a satirical portrayal of the human couple man and wife): it is at the same time a portrayal of a profound and rich friendship, even if Flaubert's tone in the actual text is more often than not ironic. 'Par le seul fait de leur amitié', he notes and underlines in one of his plans, 'ils se développent intellectuellement.' And the note continues - 'L'amitié de deux hommes. Tout ce qu'il y a de plus beau.' Then, crossed out - 'Les amants se regardent.' In the novel itself we are shown a profound and spontaneous relationship '... leur rencontre avait eu l'importance d'une aventure. Ils s'étaient, tout-de-suite, accrochés par des fibres secrètes. D'ailleurs, comment expliquer les sympathies? Pourquoi telle particularité, telle imperfection, indifférente ou odieuse dans celui-ci, enchante-t-elle dans celui-là? Ce qu'on appelle le coup de foudre est vrai pour toutes les passions. Avant la fin de la semaine ils se tutoyèrent.'

Their quarrels are few, and though trivial and burlesque, at the

same time such that we cannot remain wholly insensible. This is particularly true of the one which ends in their decision to commit suicide - 'Et Pécuchet fut pris de colère, ou plutôt de démence. Fouvard aussi. Ils criaient à la fois tous deux ... La gorge de Pécuchet n'émettait plus qu'un râle.

- C'est infernal, une vie pareille: j'aime mieux la mort. Adieu! Il prit le flambeau, tourna les talons, claqua la porte.'

Demorest, accepting the theory which seems to have been first expounded by Seillière, and which has been accepted to a greater or lesser degree by every other critic, sees in Fouvard and Pécuchet a prolongation of the boyhood fantasy, *le Garçon*. Just as the latter had been as capable of expressing Flaubert's own views as he was of enunciating the worst bourgeois prejudice, so 'les deux bonshommes' parody now the man-in-the-street, now the author himself, and even put forward the latter's opinions in all seriousness. (1) Fouvard and Pécuchet are therefore, says Demorest, like *le Garçon* - 'le grossissement parodique de Flaubert lui-même en ce qu'il avait de mieux et de pire dans sa nature ... en partie dirigé contre l'anti-artiste en général, mais aussi contre

(1) 'This last characteristic surely represents a development of *le Garçon*'s role, or an unconscious lapse on Flaubert's part? For the bourgeois caricature of early years only represented Flaubert's opinion ironically and negatively, in condemnation and criticism, and never in straightforward seriousness.'

les velléités bourgeoises et les travers de toute sorte qu'il n'arrivait pas à chasser de chez-lui.'

For this reason he is at once sympathetic and hostile to them.

There seems no doubt that le Garçon represents one, though not necessarily the sole, origin of the two bourgeois. It was in the former creation that the boy Flaubert, and the young man, expressed what we can only describe as an urgent need to identify himself with that which hurt and angered him - not only ineptitude, prejudice, vulgarity - but physical degradation. We may recall his imitations of a certain beggar at Trouville which his father eventually forbade him to continue, so painful were they. It would be interesting to have a psychologist's comment and possible explanation of this impulse. No doubt it is at once a form of self-defence and of self-liberation. Thibaudet sees this same process in Flaubert's gradual identification of himself with the protagonists in the present work. It begins as 'une mise à nu de la bêtise chez deux damnés de l'intelligence': but as the book progresses the author is no longer looking on at the spectacle of his characters' stupidity, he has entered into it ('à mesure que son roman s'avanceit ... il se mettait dans leur peau, s'y précipitait comme on se jette à l'eau.') As with le Garçon, however, this apparent self-identification with stupidity is not a complete self-abdication, but on the contrary a duplication of self into 'réalité de la bêtise et conscience de la bêtise'. In so far as Flaubert identifies himself with the stupidity of his heroes he identifies them with his intelligence: 'après s'être

fait eux, il les fait lui'. Thus is explained their 'double' character and function.

Digeon likewise agrees that Bouvard and Pécuchet have strong affinities with le Garçon: his reasons are, however, once again different. In his view le Garçon is above all the man who comes to conclusions, who propounds with assurance, who is dogmatic, who knows - 'celui qui est toujours grotesque quoiqu'il soutienne ... celui qui conclut décidément et qui donc s'éloigne de la vérité des choses'. Bouvard and Pécuchet are ridiculous in so far as they do the same sort of thing. Did not Flaubert say that the sub-title of his work would be 'Du défaut de méthode dans les sciences'? His heroes are absurd because they are continually taking the wrong means to their end, and constantly under the delusion of having arrived when they have hardly set out. But they are at the same time serious and admirable figures in their desire for knowledge, their suffering on account of their ignorance, and their angry indignation or despair at the self-complacency of others equally ignorant. There is no fundamental inconsistency or contradiction in their character, Digeon maintains - and at the same time no real transformation. They are, and they remain, in the words of Guy de Maupassant, 'deux esprits lucides, médiocres et simples': lucid as to their condition, mediocre and simple in their incapacity to rise above it.

It would seem as impossible as it is unnecessary to be conclusive on this question. It is important not to exaggerate one aspect of the characters at the expense of another: Barbey d'Aurevilley and Faguet certainly ignore the serious aspect, whilst Dumesnil and Deschammas pass over their absurdities too lightly when they describe them, as does the latter, as 'une sottise un peu surajoutée et superficielle', the sole function of which is to preserve the novel's 'caractère de farce'. This farce is an integral part of the novel and of the characterisation from beginning to end, as the subsequent pages of this study will attempt to show. But having accepted the evidence of a constant 'double' character in the protagonists, various interpretations of Flaubert's aims and inspiration present themselves, none of which necessarily invalidate the others.

One might suggest, in addition to the hypotheses quoted, that the complexity and even illogicality of these characterisations is the result of Flaubert trying to use them to two different ends. They are on the one hand a means to ridiculing the bourgeois, caricatures, even pure figures of fun from whom the author derives immense amusement - in all these cases existing in their own right. But on the other hand they are a means to the ridicule of ideas and systems, unimportant in themselves, and inconsistent: for it is now through their unbiased common-sense and shrewd intelligence, now through their stupidity and credulity, that the writer will attain his end.

And again, could it not be that their odd combination of

perspicacity and ineptitude represents not an illogicality of characterisation, but a conscious achievement on Flaubert's part - an extraordinarily effective comic device? He is intent on making a laughing stock not only of his heroes, but of his public too, and our constant uncertainty as to whether we are meant to take the affirmations of the two seriously or not is one of his chief weapons against us. This is bewildering and disconcerting - but such was his explicit aim: witness the following lines to Mme. Brainne in 1878: 'Il y aurait de quoi me conduire à Charenton ... D'ailleurs c'est mon but (secret): ahurir tellement le lecteur qu'il en devienne fou.'⁽¹⁾

For whilst accepting the fact that neither the novel nor its characters are consistently comic, one must not become so involved in analysis and dissection that one loses sight of the author's first aim and the work's outstanding characteristic - satirical comedy. It was by this means, and this means alone, that he meant to attain his end - to castigate the cheap stupidity which he saw as more and more characteristic of the general outlook, to reveal the essential limitations of the human intellect by setting up in answer to the 'scientiste' optimism of his period a monument of stupefied bewilderment. 'Je crois qu'on n'a pas encore tenté le comique des idées', he wrote to Mme. Brainne in 1877. 'Il est possible que je m'y noie, mais si je m'en tire, le globe terrestre ne sera pas digne de me porter.'⁽²⁾

(1) Corr. VIII. 175. 30 décembre 1878.

(2) Corr. VIII. 26. 2 avril 1877. - this is a rather odd statement for so great an admirer of *Candide*, a work which is surely founded on 'le comique des idées'. No doubt Flaubert was referring to contemporary literature and to the fact that nobody had attempted a satirical review of modern thought so far.

IV.

The question of how far the weapon of reductio ad absurdum is effective and proper to the end to which it is employed here, how far, that is to say, Eouvard et Féouchet represents a valid critique of the human intellect and its achievements, is an interesting one, and which, qua se has found relatively small place in the many critical studies of the work.

Flaubert comes to the attack, as it were, in various ways. One might mention the purely stylistic devices, one of the most common being the use of strange-sounding or unaccustomed words to comic effect. Eouvard, on a tour of the Count's estate, 'fit l'éloge de sa luzerne. Elle était assez bonne, en effet, malgré les ravages de la ouscoute: les futurs agronomes ouvrirent les yeux au mot ouscoute.' Proper nouns can be used in the same way: 'dessaécher par la fermentation, genre hollandais, système Clap-Meyer' - 'Tull exalte les labours au préjudice des engrais, et voilà le major Beetson qui supprime les engrais avec les labours!' Again the author may obtain a Rabelaisian effect by drawing up long lists (of equipment, for instance) or by the piling up of numerous and generally obscure terms: 'Le cerveau leur inspira des réflexions philosophiques. Ils distinguaient fort bien dans l'intérieur le septum lucidum, composé de deux lamelles, et la glande pinéale, qui ressemble à un petit

pois rouge: mais il y avait des pedoncules et des ventricules, des arcs, des piliers, des étages, des ganglions et des fibres de toutes sortes, et le foramen de Pacchioni, et le corps de Paccini, bref, un amas inextricable, de quoi user leur existence.'

As a final example, we may take the instances of direct quotation from the works consulted by Bouvard and Pecuchet, lines and phrases cited out of context and introduced into Flaubert's text for purely comic purposes -

'Pour savoir la chimie, ils se procurèrent le cours de Régnault et apprirent d'abord "que les corps simples sont peut-être composés". On les distingue en métalloïdes et en métaux, différence qui n'a 'rien d'absolu' dit l'auteur.'

None of this of course constitutes rationally effective criticism of the subject concerned; but since the immediate impact is comic our rational faculties hardly come into play. We have a general impression of something rather ridiculous, which neither we nor the heroes have understood, but which is too absurdly complicated or superfluous for us to need to understand - and this 'something' eventually proves to be a whole branch of science.

(1)
 Then there are the minor characters. Each, in so far as and when he represents a political party, a creed, a certain idea, is the means to its ridicule. The priest is an obvious example, a pitiless caricature upon whom is concentrated not only Flaubert's intellectual criticism of Catholic doctrine but the whole bitterness of his anti-clericalism - a vice from which he imagined himself to be free. This smoothly hypocritical, blindly dogmatic, ambitious and avaricious 'jésuite', (as Pécuchet calls him), serves by his superficial arguments, empty catch-phrases and unpleasant personality to satirise and ridicule both the Catholic Church and Christianity in general. Madame de Noarès is in a sense his feminine counterpart a caricature of the faithful as l'Abbé Juefroy is of the priesthood. 'Personne, comme elle, ne connaissait tous les chapelets et les indulgences qu'ils procurent, l'effet des reliques, les privilèges des eaux saintes... Son temps se passait à écrire des lettres, à visiter les pauvres, à dissoudre les concubinages, à répandre des photographies du Sacré-Coeur... Elle contait des miracles sans but, comme si Dieu les eut faits pour ébahir le monde.' The peasant Couy, ploughing up Mme Bordin's flower-beds despite her anger and distress because 'C'est de cette manière qu'il entendait le droit au travail', has his aristocratic parallel in le comte de Faverges, defender at all costs of 'les choses les plus saintes, la famille, la propriété, le mariage', still propounding in so far as he dare the divine right of kings, and convinced that 'les abeilles prouvent la monarchie.'

These minor characters are generally described as pure

caricatures. But it is interesting to notice that in actual fact two of them at least, have, like the protagonists, a double role. They are stupid and petty or shrewd and common-sensical according as Flaubert chooses: an object of ridicule in themselves or a means to making others and the theories they expound ridiculous. Gouy, just mentioned, is an ignorant yokel, but a moderately successful farmer, certainly more so than his masters Bouvard and Pécuchet, despite all the theory with which they have so painstakingly acquainted themselves. Similarly the doctor, Vaucorbell, is a mediocrity with a limited knowledge of his subject, inordinately proud of his meagre qualifications. He is often unable to counter Bouvard and Pécuchet's arguments, or to explain points they do not understand, but he is indisputably more successful in the practice of medicine than they are. This type of situation and contrast both depreciates and diminishes in the reader's eyes the value of the science concerned, although again it cannot be said to offer any valid criticism. If an ignoramus like Gouy and a mediocrity like Vaucorbell can succeed, whilst in apparent ignorance of and contradiction with the theory of experts,⁽¹⁾ then both agriculture and medicine must be relatively haphazard techniques, inadequately

(1) Whether these experts are really such, and whether the theories are really authoritative statements by specialists we do not generally know. Sometimes they are obviously not, and only Bouvard and Pécuchet could take them seriously. But because they do so we tend to see the eventual fiasco as a refutation of theory in general. It is again a question of an over-all impression.

understood even by specialists.

On the whole, however, Flaubert's ridicule of an idea is achieved by means of the protagonists.

They can make a theory sound absurd simply by transposing it into their own terms: witness Pécuchet on a geological expedition propounding the plutonian theory of the formation of the terrestrial globe: 'Le feu central avait brisé la croûte du globe, soulevé les terrains, fait des crevasses. C'est comme une mer intérieure ayant son flux et reflux, ses tempêtes; une mince pellicule nous en sépare. On ne dormirait pas si l'on songeait à tout ce qu'il y a sous nos talons. Cependant le feu central diminue et le soleil s'affaiblit, si bien que la terre un jour périra de refroidissement. Elle deviendra stérile ... et aucun être ne pourra subsister.

- Nous n'y sommes pas encore, dit Bouvard.

- Espérons-le, reprit Pécuchet.'

There is nothing they like better than a general rule, and they are constantly guilty of absurd over-simplifications. They will take a theory valid in a particular case, for instance, and apply it generally. One day Bouvard picks up from a pedlar a leaflet by Raspail, and both he and Pécuchet are so excited by its contents that they send for the complete work to which it refers:

'La clarté de la doctrine les séduisit. Toutes les affections proviennent des vers. Ils gâtent les dents, creusent les poumons,

dilatent le foie, ravagent les intestins, et y causent des bruits. Ce qu'il y a de mieux pour s'en délivrer, c'est le camphre. Bouvard et Pécuchet l'adoptèrent. Ils en prisèrent, ils en croquaient et distribuaient des cigarettes, des flacons d'eau sédative et des pilules d'aloès. Ils entreprirent même la cure d'un bossu.'

On the one hand they will attack a subject in its most complex form, ignoring the rudiments: on the other hand they omit essential points as unduly complicated and boring, more often than not concentrating meanwhile on pure irrelevancies. 'Aucune démarche ne leur coûtait, aucun sacrifice', we are told of their archeological expeditions. 'Bayeux, dit M. de Caumont, devait avoir un théâtre. Ils en cherchèrent la place inutilement. Le village de Montrency contient un pré célèbre par des trouvailles de médailles qu'on y a découvertes autrefois. Ils comptaient y faire une belle récolte. Le gardien leur en refusa l'entrée. ... A l'auberge de Mesnil-Villement, en 1816, M. Galeron eut un déjeuner pour la somme de quatre sols. Ils y firent le même repas, et constatèrent avec surprise que les choses ne se passaient plus comme ça!' In all these situations Bouvard and Pécuchet are made a laughing-stock. But at the same time the branch of study concerned is quite effectively ridiculed by the author's creating yet again a general impression of something unreasonably complex, or simple to the point of futility.

Incidents where theory is shown to be completely divorced from practice are also frequent. This is partly because the two

would-be farmers, chemists, doctors and so on accept the written word in blind faith, apply indiscriminately all that they have read. Often therefore they fail through their own fault: but sometimes it is because the expert consulted is proposing a sheer impossibility, and sometimes again simply because it suits the author's purpose. We do not always know for which of these reasons an experiment has failed so disastrously or ludicrously - and therefore their ineffectiveness seems as much an indictment of the text-book authorities as of the gullible and blundering students.

Finally, as we indicated earlier, the heroes often act as Flaubert's mouthpiece in exposing as such what he judged to be the absurdity or illogicality of a system. When they are trying to acquaint themselves with socialist theory Bouvard, who, like Flaubert, has little patience with so many 'Utopistes', marks various passages of the works he has consulted and hands them over to the enthusiastic Pécuchet:

- LES toi-même. Ils nous proposent comme exemple les Esséniens, les frères Moraves, les jésuites du Paraguay, et jusqu'au régime des prisons. Chez les Icariens, le déjeuner se fait en vingt minutes, les femmes accouchent à l'hôpital: quant aux livres, défense d'en imprimer sans l'autorisation de la République.

- Mais Cabet est un idiot.

- Maintenant, voilà du Saint-Simon: les publicistes soumettront leurs travaux à un comité d'industriels: et du Pierre Leroux: les lois forceront les citoyens à entendre un orateur: et de l'Auguste Comte: les prêtres éduqueront la jeunesse, dirigeront

toutes les oeuvres de l'esprit, et engageront le pouvoir à régler la procréation.'

This is a perfect example of the technique of reductio ad absurdum: the piling up of meaningless detail, out of context, a process which from the point of view of reasoned argument is wholly inadequate, not to say indefensible - but it is effectively destructive in the present context.

The few pages that follow to the end of this 'political' chapter, are equally typical of a much more subtle destructive criticism. A combination of anti-climax, bathos, sarcasm, irony, leads to an affirmation of absolute scepticism in the politico-sociological field which the reader is tempted to share, but for the fact that it is made to sound absurd no sooner than it has been expressed. We may perhaps be permitted a rapid analysis of this text, in which are to be found examples of all those devices by which Flaubert succeeds so eminently in the 'aburissement' of his reader and victim.

Immediately after Bouvard's indictment of the Utopians, Pécuchet comes to their defence with a passage we have already quoted in a previous chapter in connection with Senecal and Dussardier of l'Education Sentimentale, and which we know to be as representative of the writer's view as were the criticisms of Bouvard. 'Qu'il y ait, chez les Utopistes, des choses ridicules, j'en conviens: cependant ils méritent notre amour. La hideur du monde les désolait, et pour le rendre plus beau, ils ont tout souffert. Rappelle-toi Morus décapité, Campanella mis sept fois à

torture. Buonarroti avec une chaîne autour du cou, Saint-Simon crevant de misère, bien d'autres. Ils auraient pu vivre tranquilles: mais non! ils ont marché dans leur voie, la tête au ciel, comme des héros!

Bouvard comes back to the attack, ironically. Does Pecuchet think the world will change 'grâce aux théories d'un monsieur'? And Pecuchet's impassioned retort, however valid fundamentally, is made ridiculous through the use of the pompous cliché 'Qu'importe! ... il est temps de ne plus croupir dans l'égoïsme!' and the absurdly simplified solution - 'Cherchons le meilleur système!' When in addition he affirms that he is capable of finding it Bouvard collapses into helpless laughter, the very description of which incites our own hilarity. Pécuchet slams the door and the scene ends with a picture of him in an arm-chair, without fire and without a light, his cap well down over his nose - 'il n'était pas malade mais se livrait à des réflexions.' We were momentarily moved and convinced by his apology for social reformers: but by now it has become associated with a scene in which he has been proved ridiculous, and we are left with a general impression of the latter as a collection of wholly impractical eccentrics.

There follows an interlude of pure burlesque, amusing in itself, but doubly so in that it stresses the incredible gullibility and lack of practical sense of these two good fellows who have none the less undertaken to reform the world - for they are now embarked on a study of 'la question du Progrès'. Bouvard accepts the idea in the scientific sphere, but cannot see the validity of

its application to literature. Pécuchet offers a theoretical explanation reasonable enough: '-Je trace obliquement une ligne ondulée. Ceux qui pourraient la parcourir, toutes les fois qu'elle s'abaisse, ne verraient plus l'horizon. Elle se relève pourtant, et malgré ses détours, ils atteindront le sommet. Telle est l'image du Progrès. Mme. Pordin entra.'

The sudden anti-climax of the appearance of this plump and dimpled lady has an immediate comic effect. And the comedy changes to mordant irony in the next sentence.

'C'était le 3 décembre 1851. Elle apportait le journal.'

They are as horrified by her nonchalant reception of the news as she is shocked by their disregard for her presence - they even forget to offer her a seat. Out in the village they discover that the coup d'état has earned universal approval for reasons each as stupid or selfish as the next.

'Dès qu'on se révolte on est un scélérat.'

- Remercions la Providence! disait le curé, et après elle Louis Bonaparte. Il s'entoure des hommes les plus distingués! Le comte de Faverges deviendra sénateur.' And so on. Thus it is that Pécuchet arrives at the same conclusion as Deslauriers, and a conviction which we have heard repeated in the Correspondance.

'Puisque les bourgeois sont féroces, les ouvriers jaloux, les prêtres serviles, et que le Peuple enfin accepte tous les tyrans, pourvu qu'on lui laisse le museau dans sa gamelle, Napoléon a bien fait...'

- Houvard songeait:

- Hein, le Progrès, quelle blague!

Il ajouta:

- Et la Politique, une belle saleté!

But immediately their disillusion and scepticism are turned to ridicule - 'Ce n'est pas une science, reprit Fécuchet. L'art militaire vaut mieux, on prévoit ce qui arrive, nous devrions nous y mettre?' 'Ah! merci! répliqua Houvard. Tout me dégoûte. Vendons plutôt notre baraque et allons "au tonnerre de Dieu, chez les sauvages"! - Comme tu voudras!

And there, to all intents and purposes, the chapter ends.

These pages are, as we have said, characteristic of the work in general. A close examination of them has shown how rarely, if ever, we are concerned with straightforward argument as such. Passages from the chapters dealing with metaphysics or religion have often been compared with the dialogue between Logic or Science and the hermit in la Tentation, and certainly the arguments used are well-nigh identical. But in the present work there is always an over-tone of irony, a sudden anti-climax, a nonsensical interjection, immediately detracting from the serious impact of an affirmation or criticism and leaving us to wonder whether the author ever meant what he appeared to mean. Our bewilderment is moreover heightened by the initial obscurity of many of the subjects concerned: we are unable to judge for ourselves how far statements are reasonable or not, and may sometimes feel that the writer is taking unfair advantage of us.

If therefore we set before ourselves the question out of which this prolonged discussion arose - how far has Flaubert succeeded in making his novel a monument of destructive criticism - it is evident that from a purely rational standpoint he failed.

The character and function of the protagonists is sufficient proof of this. Many critics have pointed out that their failure in one or another undertaking is no proof of its being a sheer impossibility: nor is their inability to fathom this or that scientific, theological or philosophic problem any indication that a solution does not exist - much less that the discipline in question is radically inadequate to the task it has set itself. We have dwelt at length on the absurd ways in which the two men attack their various problems, and even the serious objections they put forward, for example in the sections dealing with metaphysics or Christianity, are far from being in every case unanswerable or even valid.

Again, the satirising of various ideas and beliefs through the caricature of minor figures does not really constitute valid criticism of the ideas themselves: at most it only indicates their possible deviation. Similarly the obscure and minor authorities from which Flaubert so often chooses to quote, by very reason of their superficiality, bias, erroneous judgments and so on, prove strictly nothing against the branch of learning which they are chosen to represent. Henry Céard pointed out that the book was 'encyclopédique seulement par l'apparence': that a truly destructive critical review and logically argued scepticism could not have

afforded to ignore so many great names in the various disciplines involved.

But Eouvard et Pécuchet does not purport to be a logically argued affirmation of scepticism - nor does it need to be to attain its end. Our attitude as we come to a book is not necessarily a strictly and exclusively rational one: above all it is conditioned by the atmosphere the author creates in his work. In Eouvard et Pécuchet we are plunged into a series of burlesques in which we forget facts and situations as they actually are and tend to condemn on the evidence of a travesty: into a flow of apparent contradictions in which we are rarely sure what the author means us to think, nor even of what we do think. We are utterly bewildered by a disorganised and unassimilated mass of learning, by so many questions without answers, so many answers to the same questions. We leave the novel 'ahuris', with the immediate impression of a work of highly destructive scepticism, built up on a sound basis of erudition. Flaubert has succeeded with consummate mastery in constructing something which has every appearance of a devastating attack on contemporary thought.

V.

We come now to the question of Flaubert's intention in drawing up this indictment of contemporary thought. Is it simply an attack on a particular period or outlook, or does it constitute 'une déclaration de la faillite de la science et de la pensée humaine'? Both Deschamps and Dumesnil interpret the work as being solely 'anti-scientiste'. La Tentation, says the latter, was an affirmation of the Unknowable in the religious sphere: Eouvard et Pécuchet is the same affirmation made with regard to the Doctrine of Scientific Progress - 'Une protestation contre le scientisme comme Candide est un pamphlet tournant en dérision les idées de Leibnitz.'⁽¹⁾

Yet metaphysics and religion have as large a part here as any of the sciences, physical, medical, social or political, and Eouvard et Pécuchet represents as devastating an attack on Christianity as does la Tentation. A more accurate description therefore, would seem to be that of Digeon, who interprets the novel entirely in the light of the philosophy of the Unknowable expounded by the English positivist Herbert Spencer, and to which we referred at length in our discussion of the third Tentation. Eouvard et Pécuchet, in Digeon's view, is the affirmation in comic form of

(1) Dumesnil. op. cit. p. CLV.

Flaubert's final conviction, that though man may desire and seek the absolute, he is equipped only to attain to the relative, in any sphere of his activity: and any attempt to set up the relative as universal and absolute is as foolish as it is grotesque.

Bouvard and Pécuchet are to be respected and admired in so far as they refuse to accept their ignorance, and suffer because of it. But they are ridiculous in their constant attempts to attribute to the relative and particular an absolute and universal value. They expect the study of chemistry or geology to reveal to them the secrets of the universe, they ask of aesthetics the key to literary genius: they believe that a course of gymnastics will cure them of all ills, that an understanding of phrenology will enable them to re-educate and regenerate the whole of France. They are always sure at the outset that if they read a sufficient amount, comply with the right rules, work hard enough, and experiment for long enough, they will bring their quest to a successful and positive conclusion.

If the text itself is sometimes enigmatic, and the main theme obscured, as ■ Digeon remarks, by Flaubert's 'prétention de "tout (1) dire", de fustiger la gymnastique en même temps que la philosophie', nothing could elucidate the author's intentions more than the

(1) Digeon. op. cit. p.112.

running commentary on the various ideas he was trying to incorporate into his work provided by the Correspondance.

'Je lis maintenant des livres d'hygiène', he announces to George Sand early in 1874. 'Oh! que c'est comique! quel aplomb que celui des médecins! quel toupet! quels ânes pour la plupart!' (1)

For the next three years we hear relatively little of Fouvard et Fécuchet: Flaubert is occupied with his and Bouilbet's plays, the financial problems of the Commanville, his Trois Contes published in 1877. In 1878 we find him reading up the Restoration period ... 'aveuglement ... bêtise', and looking forward to the chapter on education ... 'le livre de mon ami Robin sur l'Education m'a fort déplu. Les positivistes français se vantent: ils ne sont pas positivistes! Ils tournent au matérialisme bête, au d'Holbach!' (2) By the summer 'c'est la grammaire française qui m'occupe. Est-ce bête, mon Dieu!' (3) and at the same time the politics of 1848 - 'droit au travail' et autres bêtises ...' (4) - 'jamais on n'a été plus bête...' (5)

At the beginning of 1879 we find him embarked upon the study

(1) Corr.VII.122-3. 28 février 1874.

(2) Corr.VIII.107. 12 ou 19 janvier 1878 à M^{me}. Roger des Genettes.

(3) Corr.VIII.125. juin-juillet 1878 à Guy de Maupassant.

(4) Corr.VIII.130. 23 juillet 1878 à la princesse Mathilde.

(5) Corr.VIII.133. 15 août 1878 à Emile Zola.

of metaphysics, a subject 'qui ne contribue pas médiocrement à ma sombreur. Ce défilé d'absurdités est vraiment attristant! J'ai rarement travaillé sur des matières plus ardues ... Le bon Pouchet m' a envoyé un nouvel ouvrage sur Berkeley: j'en alterne la lecture avec celle de Kant et d'un résumé de philosophie matérialiste par Lefebvre, lequel déchire ces pauvres sceptiques.'⁽¹⁾

A month later he writes to Mme. Roger des Genettes:

'je suis de plus en plus dégoûté de ce qu'on appelle la religion et la métaphysique. Voilà deux grands maux que je ne lis pas autre chose. Quel néant! et quel aplomb! Connaissez-vous le Catéchisme de persévérance de l'abbé Gaume? C'est "hénaurme".'⁽²⁾

And again to his niece:

'mes lectures philosophiques et religieuses me soulèvent le cœur de dégoût, tant je trouve l'aplomb de ces messieurs outreucidant. Mais la palme, comme bêtise et comme impudence, appartient aux apologistes modernes. Quels ânes! ou quelle mauvaise foi!'⁽³⁾

By the end of the year he has more or less finished. We may perhaps be permitted to quote as a final and most revealing of his comments the following passage from a letter to Mme. Roger des Genettes, to which we have already referred in an earlier chapter:

(1) Corr. VIII.178. début janvier 1879 à sa niece.

(2) Corr. VIII. 203. mi-février 1879 à Madame Roger des Genettes.

(3) Corr. VIII. 220. 22 février 1879 à sa niece.

'Vous n'avez pas compris le sens de mon indignation: je ne m'étonne pas de gens qui cherchent à expliquer l'incompréhensible, mais de ceux qui croient avoir trouvé l'explication, de ceux qui ont le bon Dieu (ou le non-Dieu) dans leur poche. Eh bien oui! tout dogmatisme m'exaspère. Bref, le matérialisme et le spiritualisme me semblent deux impertinences.

Après avoir lu dernièrement pas mal de livres catholiques, j'ai pris la philosophie de Lefebvre ("le dernier mot de la science"): c'est à jeter dans les mêmes latrines. Voilà mon opinion. Tous ignorants, tous charlatans, tous idiots qui ne voient jamais qu'un côté d'un ensemble, et j'ai relu (pour la troisième fois de ma vie) tout Spinoza. Cet "athée" a été, selon moi, le plus religieux des hommes, puisqu'il n'admettait que Dieu. Mais faites comprendre ça à ces messieurs les ecclésiastiques et aux disciples de Cousin!⁽¹⁾

It is not only Bouvard and Pécuchet, with their complete lack of method and their gullible optimism, who are the butt of the author's ridicule in this novel: it is anybody who purports to have found the truth, to have established absolute and universal certitudes in any sphere, be it scientific, philosophic, religious. It is an attack on the self-assured as on the unthinking, an indictment of apathetic intellectual passivity and hypocritical prejudice, born of the conviction that: 'nous crevons par la blague, par l'ignorance, par l'outrage, par le mépris de la grandeur, par l'amour de la banalité et le bavardage imbécile.'

1.) Corr. VIII. 327. novembre 1879.

It is a distorted and partial view of things, but it was meant to be so. ⁽¹⁾ intended as negative, destructive, disturbing.

'Maintenant, je prépare mon dernier chapitre, l'Éducation'.

Flaubert wrote to Guy de Maupassant in January 1880. '...Il me faudrait des choses caractéristiques comme programmes d'études et comme METHODES. Je veux montrer que l'éducation, quelle qu'elle soit, ne signifie pas grand'chose, et que la nature fait tout, ou presque tout.' ⁽²⁾ Bouvard and Pécuchet are in a sense defeated at the outset, because it is the author's express purpose that each of their undertakings shall be a failure, leading them to the point where, in the second volume, they adopt a form of scepticism so absolute as to be absurd.

However, it is not sufficient to stop short at defining the novel as an expression of intellectual and religious scepticism, an affirmation in comic form of the Unknowable. That would be to account for only one aspect, and there is another equally important, though perhaps less evident in the work as it at present stands.

(1) Corr. VII. 208. 26 septembre 1874 à George Sand.

(2) Corr. VIII. 353. 22 ou 23 janvier 1880.

Eouvard et Pécuchet is a resentful and angry attack on those who presume to think they know where life is leading them. But paradoxically, it contains the admission, expressed at various points in various ways, that only when one has a particular end in view, a particular rule of life to follow and a particular aim to be fulfilled, is existence tolerable. 'On ne vit pas sans religion', although most religions are gross superstitions or false idolatries. This last novel is therefore an expression of the double theme fundamental to Flaubert's philosophy of life.

The seemingly paradoxical lesson of Eouvard et Pécuchet may be clearly illustrated by reference to Flaubert's portrayal of Christianity there. His caricature of the priest and his flock is merciless, as we have seen: 'Les réponses de M. Juefroy étaient simples: Ne vous tourmentez pas. A vouloir tout approfondir, on court sur une pente dangereuse.'

'Que voulez-vous? disait le curé, c'est une de ces vérités dont tout le monde est d'accord, sans qu'on puisse en fournir les preuves...'

'Adorons sans comprendre.'

'La science lui inspirait des sarcasmes:

- Fera-t-elle pousser un épi de grain, votre science? que savons-nous? disait-il. Mais il savait que le monde a été créé pour nous: il savait que les archanges sont au-dessus des anges: il savait que le corps humain ressuscitera tel qu'il était vers la trentaine.'

There is no need to prolong this list, in which is evident the same exasperated indignation at obscurantism and self-righteous stupidity

as we saw in the several passages from the Correspondance quoted some pages back.

There are, however, signs of a rather different attitude. A little later in the text we find Bouvard asking Pécuchet, who is now in the heights of pious exaltation and now as sceptical as Bouvard himself, what he really does think about Christianity.

'Crois-tu, oui ou non?' And Pécuchet replies in all seriousness: 'Je ne sais'. The passage continues: 'Il alluma une chandelle; puis ses yeux tombant sur le crucifix dans l'alcôve:

- Combien de misérables ont eu recours à celui-là! Et après un silence: - On l'a dénaturé! C'est la faute de Rome: la politique du Vatican!' Immediately the tone changes and there follows some ridiculous anecdote. But at the end of the chapter we find a similar episode. Coming in, Bouvard and Pécuchet find their servant Marcel praying fervently before a statue of the Madonna.

'La tête renversée, les yeux demi-clos, et dilatant son bec-de-lièvre il avait l'air d'un fakir en extase.

-Quelle brute! dit Bouvard.

-Pourquoi? il assiste peut-être à des choses que tu lui jalouserais si tu pouvais les voir. N'y a-t-il pas deux mondes tout à fait distincts? L'objet d'un raisonnement a moins de valeur que la manière de raisonner. Qu'importe la croyance! Le principal est de croire. Telles furent, à la remarque de Bouvard, les objections de Pécuchet.'

The reader is as usual left to understand from these passages

precisely what he will, and if we take them as they stand we can argue almost any conclusion from them. But seen in the context of other writings, and of a life-times' Correspondance, it seems clear that we are no longer concerned with the hostility evident in other passages. Many years ago, in 1857, Flaubert had written to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie 'Les gens légers, bornés, les esprits présomptueux et enthousiastes veulent en toute chose une conclusion: ils cherchent le but de la vie et la dimension de l'infini. Ils prennent dans leur pauvre petite main une poignée de sable et ils disent à l'Océan: "Je vais compter les grains de tes rivages". Mais comme les grains leur coulent entre les doigts et que le calcul est long, ils trepignent et ils pleurent. Savez-vous ce qu'il faut faire sur la grève? Il faut s'agenouiller ou se promener. Promenez-vous.'⁽¹⁾

If there is in you the capacity for a deeper understanding of truth than religion can offer you, then you are in duty bound to seek that understanding. But let Marcel, like Felicity, like Catherine Leroux, believe if he can, and all the other poor, simple, wretched beings like them. There is no presumptuousness, no pride, no comfortable self-satisfaction about 'des coeurs simples' such as they are. Did not Spinoza himself encourage the simple people with whom he lived to practise their Protestant faith in humble piety.

(1) Corr. IV. 183. 18 mai 1887.

to obey their pastor and fulfil their religious duties loyally? It is, however, characteristic of the bitter pessimism of this work and of its cruelly satiric distortions that this attitude of humble acceptance which the author respected and even admired should be portrayed in so degraded a creature as Marcel.

The same type of parallel of scepticism and idealism occurs in the passage already quoted where Feuchet hotly defends the social reformers of whom Bouvard has made a laughing stock. They are men devoted to an ideal, as were Sénécal and Dussardier, be that ideal valid or no in the eyes of Bouvard/Flaubert.

But above all the fate of the heroes themselves is continual proof that 'la vie est quelque chose de si abominable qu'il faut la déguiser pour l'aval⁽¹⁾er'. Nothing is more intolerable than to be idle. However disappointed and disgusted they may become with their present occupation, they are obliged to seek another, 'leur esprit ayant besoin d'un travail, leur existence d'un but.' At one point they become so completely sceptical as to the value of their existence that they are tempted to commit suicide. In the end they have the justifiable impression that everything has failed them, or that they have failed in everything. What are they to do? We are already acquainted with the celebrated and enigmatic answer:

(1) Corr. Supp. IV. 15 août 1875 à Mme. Brainne.

Copier comme autrefois.

This brief indication leaves us with many problems, although it would seem that for the most part these have either escaped the notice of the critics or been judged of slight importance, since few have seen fit to devote to them more than a paragraph or so. In the case of those writing before the publication of the plans for the second volume of Eouvard et Pécuchet,⁽¹⁾ this is understandable. The only evidence they had of Flaubert's intentions were, along with the heroes' decision to copy, the indications regarding the Sottisier and Dictionnaire in an article by Guy de Maupassant published in 1844.⁽²⁾ He describes both compilations in some detail, but makes little mention of Eouvard et Pécuchet, apart from saying that they reverted to copying 'par désespoir'.

The indications afforded by the scenarios published or described all too briefly by D-L Demorest are neither detailed nor abundant, but they do allow of various interesting and profitable speculations as to the role of the heroes in the second volume, the extent to which they would have been identified with Flaubert, and

(1) Demorest. A travers les plans, dossiers et manuscrits de Eouvard et Pécuchet. (Paris 1931)

(2) His preface to the first edition of Flaubert's Correspondance with George Sand, published by Charpentier. This preface is also to be found in the Quantin edition of the complete works of Flaubert, published in Paris in 1885. (v. Vol. VIII. Eouvard et Pécuchet.)

the interpretation of the novel as a whole.

We have seen earlier in this chapter that the result of the copyists' labours would have been the compilation generally referred to as the Sottisier, and probably in addition the Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues, and even a Dictionnaire des Idées chics. The actual source of the material to be copied seems to have varied from plan to plan. The early ones indicate that the two companions, in dire penury, unable to afford books, collected waste paper of all descriptions and copied down all items of interest they found there. In another plan we find them buying up waste paper from a paper-mill: yet another suggests that they would have copied passages from the many volumes they had used over the past years. Would Bouvard and Pécuchet actually have appeared on the scene? It seems probable from the later scenarios that not only the protagonists, but various minor characters would have had their role there, these latter, unscrupulous and increasingly prosperous, being shown in ironic contrast to the humbly situated and hard-working copyists. These plans indicate too that various texts and quotations would have been interspersed with discussions and comments from the protagonists. But on the other hand, a loose sheet of paper found by ■ Demorest, immediately following the latest of the plans, bore the following note:

'Avant la copie, après l'introduction, mettre en italiques ou en note: Ce a retrouvé par hasard leur copie: l'éditeur la donne afin de grossir le présent ouvrage.'

It is therefore possible that after an introductory chapter or so the second volume would have comprised a list of texts and definitions without commentary.

Precisely what would the two heroes have deemed worthy of their attention, and why? Would they have been the dupes of high-sounding nonsense as they often had been in the first volume, when 'tous les lieux communs leur semblaient de la plus haute importance'? Would they on the contrary have recorded error and prejudice knowing it to be such, but as a form of vengeance and a consoling mockery, as Flaubert himself had recorded it over the years? Or would they perhaps have retained that 'double' character, now copying out absurdities in good faith, now choosing a text for the ironic pleasure of preserving the nonsense it expressed?

According to the plans Fouvard and Peouchet were to have copied at first indiscriminately, overcome with happiness. 'Ils copient au hasard les papiers, tout ce qu'ils trouvent.' 'Plaisir qu'il y a dans l'acte matériel de recopier'. But eventually they feel bound to introduce some sort of order into their work, and they attempt to classify the texts under various headings.

'Specimens de tous les styles...'

'Parallèles - crimes du peuple, des rois, bienfaits de la religion, crimes de la religion.'

'Beautés...'

'Dictionnaire des idées reçues. Catalogue des idées chics.'

This classification presents them with all kinds of problems, but

they persevere. The two conclusions published by Demorest run as follows:

(i). 'Mais quelquefois ils sont embarrassés de ranger la chose à sa place, et ont de grands cas de conscience.

Allons! pas de réflexions! il faut que la page s'emplisse - égalité de tout, du bien et du mal, du farce et du sublime, du Beau et du Laid, de l'insignifiant et du caractéristique. Exaltation de la statistique - il n'y a que des faits, que des phénomènes. Joie finale (et éternelle)' - the last two words are crossed out.

(ii). 'Un jour ils trouvent (dans les vieux papiers de la manufacture) le brouillon d'une lettre de Vaucorbeil à M. le Préfet ... expliquant que ce sont deux imbéciles inoffensifs.' ...

Qu'allons-nous en faire? Pas de réflexions! Copions! Il faut que la page s'emplisse, que 'le monument' se complète - égalité de tout etc.' (as in previous plan until last line) -

'Finir par la vue des deux bonshommes penchés sur leur pupitre, et copiant.'

One may distinguish three stages in the progression of the second volume, therefore. At the outset Fouvard and his companion are delighted to find themselves back at a task in which their competence is indisputable. Then they begin to meet with various 'cas de conscience', the most serious of which seems to have been the letter from the doctor, Vaucorbeil, to M. le Préfet. But they resolve the dilemma by deciding to copy it for its documentary interest, whether it be true or not. Thus we reach the third and final stage: the heroes have eliminated any possible future

difficulties in selecting their material by the resolution of this test case, and we leave them feverishly busy at their work.

It is when we attempt to discover the significance of these stages that the difficulties present themselves. The writers who have been concerned with interpreting the scenarios have tended to be clear and conclusive at the cost of a certain partiality and incompleteness.

The fact, for instance, that Bouvard and Pécuchet are in the first place lyrically happy, copying indiscriminately and almost mechanically, may be intended as a mark of their absurdity, a rich source of humour in the completed work. On the other hand it may simply represent the sudden relief and relaxation which comes when a difficult and disappointing undertaking is exchanged for some easy task. If one were to accept Dumesnil's view that the protagonists are by now convinced sceptics and wholly identified with Flaubert, this would seem to be the only possible explanation of their happiness.

Thibaudet suggests in passing that in choosing for his heroes this task of feverish scribbling Flaubert was enjoying a rather bitter joke against himself. Certainly one is reminded of those passages of the Correspondance of later years when he ironically compares himself in his constant preoccupation with sentences to the bourgeois whose sole occupation is the manufacture of serviette

ring - to Binet, in fact.⁽¹⁾ And we are reminded of Binet in another sense, for are not the two copyists, like the maker of serviette rings, happily satisfied because they are engrossed in an undertaking in which they cannot fail to succeed? In this sense they would certainly seem to be branded as mediocrities, not to say bourgeois.

But the situation changes when in the second stage they begin to attempt some selection and classification of material. We have seen how they were to have drawn up lists of texts classified under various headings: there were to have been different types of style (here Flaubert intended to combine true quotations with pastiches of his own composition): incidents from history ironically paralleled one with another: the gross errors and incredible stupidities Flaubert used to describe as 'beautés': and so on. It is on the strength of these indications that Dumesnil in particular has argued the complete identification of the protagonists with the author. But there would seem to be insufficient evidence for so categorical an affirmation. Given the double role of Euvard and Pécuchet in the first volume, it seems more probable that some, at least, of the texts copied in the second would have been as much a joke against the two companions as against their original authors.

Finally, in the last part, the decision to copy the letter from Vaucorbeil describing them as harmless fools could be a mark in the protagonists' favour, since there is a certain dignified humility in agreeing to record so adverse and unjust a misconception of their lives. Some critics see there the mark of heroism. On the

other hand we have seen how, having made this decision, the two are agreed henceforth to reserve judgment on a text, to copy it regardless of its truth or beauty, or even of its importance. They record for the sake of recording an amorphous collection of material which has become an end in itself. In this light the conclusion might be thought to make not the apotheosis of Eouvard and Pécuchet, but their decline to complete idiocy.

Yet their refusal to pass judgment on a text, as Demorest has stressed, does not necessarily imply their incapacity to do so. It could represent a conscious abdication, in which, convinced of the relativity of all the standards by which they can judge a text, they manifest a new-found humility and wisdom, their conviction that 'leur attitude théorique doit être impassible, parnassienne, flaubertienne, en présence de l'éternelle énigme des choses et des idées.'

There seems no doubt that in their resignation to a limited task, (represented in the decision to copy) and in it the acceptance of their limited judgment (symbolised in this apparent abstention from the appreciation of the material at their disposal), the heroes are meant to point the moral clearly indicated in the first volume - 'ne pas conclure'. 'Il faut', in the words of a letter written some twenty years back, 'si l'on veut vivre, renoncer à avoir une idée nette de quoi que ce soit ... Abandonnez l'espoir d'une solution.'⁽¹⁾ It has been suggested, and seems very likely, that

(1) Corr. IV. 181. 18 mai 1857 à Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie.

in the final picture of the two copyists hunched over their desks there is a reminiscence of Candide. Throughout the Correspondance we find Flaubert quoting the moral of 'cultivons notre jardin' as the only possible principle of action for 'des gens comme nous, pour ceux qui n'ont pas trouvé'.⁽¹⁾ But one may still object that Candide in his garden was at least cultivating something: Eouvard and Féouchet are engaged upon a wholly futile task. This is probably partly owing to the destructively satirical aim of the work, in which the themes are so often consciously distorted by the author's 'volonté de grotesque triste'. At the same time we are concerned with a far more bitterly pessimistic outlook than in Voltaire. Flaubert understood the latter's moral in his own way, as is evident from the following lines written to Edmond de Goncourt in 1874:

'Quand on réfléchit un peu sérieusement, on est tenté de se casser la gueule. C'est pourquoi il faut agir. Le livre qu'on lit a beau être bête, il importe de le finir. Celui qu'on entreprend peut être idiot, n'importe! Ecrivons-le! La fin de Candide: "Cultivons notre jardin" est la plus grande leçon morale qui existe.'⁽²⁾

Certainly it is necessary to have an ideal in order to live nobly, but on the whole men spend their lives in pursuit of mistaken ends.

(1) Corr. IV. 353. novembre ou décembre 1859 à Mlle. Amélie Bosquet

(2) Corr. VII. 203.

having at best a strictly relative value. Bouvard and Pécuchet copy because they must have an end in life: the fact that it is such a futile end is simply an ironic expression of bitter pessimism on the part of their creator.

It would seem none the less that the conclusion was meant to teach more than the attitude summed up in the celebrated aphorism 'ne pas conclure'. Demorest himself, proposing this interpretation, remarks that if Bouvard and Pécuchet are to be identified with Flaubert in their apparent impassibility and refusal to draw conclusions, on the other hand they can be neither identified with not approved by Flaubert in their refusal to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly, the insignificant and the distinctive, the good and the bad, in their proclamation of 'l'égalité de tout', of the importance of facts and statistics, in their determination to fill the pages at all costs.

Clearly the novel as a whole preaches the moral of Candide in its merciless satire of all those who are far too ready to come to conclusions and to imagine that they can know the Unknowable. But it would seem that in this last part - 'N'importe! pas de réflexions! copions!' and so forth - Flaubert is attacking, not the stupidity of overweening pride, but the apathetic mediocrity of a period incapable, in his view, of distinguishing between the pretty-pretty and the beautiful, the truly great and the cheap popularity which posed as greatness: a period in which the refusal to criticise and condemn was born of a complete inability to assess a situation or a man.

There could be no more enlightening commentary on this aspect of Eouvard et Pecuchet than the following extract from a letter to George Sand in 1871:

'La France, du reste, vivait, depuis quelques années, dans un état mental extraordinaire ... à force de mentir, on était devenu idiot. On avait perdu toute notion du bien et du mal, du beau et du laid. Rappelez-vous la critique de ces dernières années. Quelle différence faisait-elle entre le sublime et le ridicule?... cette fausseté s'appliquait surtout à la manière de juger ... On demandait à l'Art d'être moral, à la philosophie d'être claire, au vice d'être décent, et à la Science de se ranger à la portée du Peuple.'⁽¹⁾

And again we find him writing the following year to la princesse Mathilde:

'Il ne faut rien oublier, ni bienfait ni offense. Cette égalité entre le bien et le mal, le beau et le laid, cette douceur niaise, ce bénissage universel est une des pestes de notre époque. La haine est une vertu!'⁽²⁾

From its earliest conception he had meant his work to be an expression of his violent disapproval, and even hatred of this general mediocrity he believed to be the inevitable concomitant of

(1) Corr. VI. 229. 29 avril 1871.

(2) Corr. VI. 447.

a democracy based on universal suffrage. 'J'immolerais les grands hommes à tous les imbéciles', he had written to Louise Colet back in 1852 when he was describing to her the kind of moral satire he would like to write:

'... pour la littérature, j'établirais, ce qui serait facile, que le médiocre, étant à la portée de tous, est le seul légitime et qu'il faut donc honnir toute espèce d'originalité comme dangereuse, sottise, etc. Cette apologie de la canaillerie humaine ... est dans le but, dirais-je, d'en finir une fois pour toutes avec les excentricités, quelles qu'elles soient. Je rentrerais par là dans l'idée démocratique moderne d'égalité, dans le mot de Fourier que les grands hommes deviendront inutiles ... '(1)

At the same time one might add, this affirmation of the importance of facts in themselves, for themselves, is perhaps a parody of the 'scientiste' attitude to truth, which in affirming that the only existing phenomena are those which can be observed and are verifiable in human reason, reduces truth to the gospel of fact. Flaubert knew, had indeed based his life, on the conviction that there existed truths infinitely more important than those lending themselves to observation.

Fouvard et Pecuchet is then, an expression of scepticism, ironic, negative, for the most part ~~destructive~~ destructive. But in a

(1) Corr. III. 66-67. 17 décembre 1852 à Louise Colet.

sense it is only because the author was so firmly convinced of and dedicated to certain positive values that he could satirise in so mercilessly destructive a way. In a general plan of the work he sets down his intention to show how each of the secondary characters represents a denial and betrayal of Science, of Truth, of Beauty, of Justice. These were the values he saw disappearing from nineteenth century democracy, denied and betrayed by the numbers of 'charlatans, idiots, ignorants' writing, preaching, teaching and ruling in the France of his day. It is only set against this background that Bouvard et Pécuchet can be said to represent Flaubert's last word on life. Seen outside its context, simply as it stands, it is only a partial expression of its creator, affirming in a particular form a particular aspect of his outlook.

And if this is not evident from what has already been said, it must surely be made clear by the fact that nowhere in the pages of Bouvard et Pécuchet is there an affirmation of the supreme value in the author's life - Beauty. 'Et pourtant il n'y a dans le monde que cela d'important', as he wrote to Tourgueneff.⁽¹⁾ This was a conviction in which he never faltered, the positive belief without mention of which no portrayal of Gustave Flaubert can be complete. We have seen the bitter pessimism of his last years, his

(1) Corr. VII. 312. 25 juin 1876.

intermittent declarations of 'L'inutilité universelle', his impression of 'une solitude sans fin' leading he knows not where. But he is still able to write, a year before his death, in his characteristically bantering tone - which in no way detracts from the truth of the statement -

'le fond du bonhomme garde sa jeunesse. Oui, riez de moi, je suis aussi troubadour qu'à dix huit ans. L'amour du Beau m'a conservé, comme le vinaigre fait aux cornichons!' ⁽¹⁾

Nevertheless, as we have often had occasion to remark with reference to Flaubert, a conviction of ideal Beauty does not explain the existence of ugliness. It does not account for pain and suffering. It does not explain man to himself, nor the universe. Eouvard et Péouchet is a last reiteration and reaffirmation that all this is in fact inexplicable, a total and absolute mystery: that outside the conviction of a valid ideal which alone can make life tolerable for the thinking man, lies the unknown and the Unknowable.

(2) Corr. VIII. 226 mars 1879 à la princesse Mathilde.

CONCLUSION

We are by now fully acquainted with the Flaubertian dilemma and with the double Weltanschauung which is its consequence. Although, as we have shown, it would seem unjustified to conclude on the evidence of Bouvard et Pécuchet that Flaubert's final position was one of nihilistic scepticism, it is certainly true to say that the novel is the work of a sceptic and a defeatist. On the other hand we know that its author was a man of high ideals with the firm conviction of certain transcendent values, and in a sense it was only because he was so wholly dedicated to those values that he could write so virulent a work as his last.

As his thought and work combine the opposites of scepticism and idealism, so his life itself constitutes at once a defeat and a victory. In a sense death found him no further advanced in the search for understanding than he had been in adolescence. But it would not be true to say that his life is wholly accounted for in the negative terms of one

who sought but never found.

One might describe Flaubert's metaphysical quest as having a dual aspect. He sought, as much as any thinking man, a rationally satisfactory explanation of the universe and of man. But at the same time he aspired to more than a rational understanding, and it is this aspiration which finds its expression both in his pantheistic experiences of nature and in the intuitive knowledge of a transcendent ideal which came to him through art.

It is clear that in his search for a rational understanding of the universe Flaubert met with defeat. We have seen how his philosophy of life was fragmentary and incohesive, how his final position was one of pessimistic scepticism.

He had sometimes been tempted to put his faith in Science as capable eventually of revealing all truth and uncovering all mysteries. He had had since childhood, inculcated in him by his father, a deep respect for the scientific and experimental methods, and he always held that no postulate could have the value of certitude for the human intellect unless verified by these same methods. Yet he did not deny the possibility, nor even the existence of a reality beyond that open to exploration and definition by man's

reason. He had himself too strong an intuition, and even in a sense experience, of the transcendent. What he did reject were the claims of creeds and systems to describe that reality in terms accessible to the human intellect.

All claims, that is, but those of Spinoza; and it is perhaps because his intellectual relativism was so violently in contradiction with the most profound of his spiritual aspirations that he could except from his own rule, as it were, this one philosopher.

We have seen from the first Education Sentimentale in particular, how in his earlier years Flaubert had tried in some measure to adopt the postulates of universal reason and necessity and the intellectual pantheism of the Ethic. But this was in fact less out of rational conviction than because Spinoza's vision of reality corresponded closely with his own intuitive experience of nature and his strong sense of the absolute. Though he continued to read Spinoza all his life, and to admire him with all the enthusiasm of his youth, he was in no way a convinced Spinozist; and the peace and joy to which the philosopher invited all those who could learn to accept his vision of man and the universe were never granted to Flaubert.

The influence of other philosophers is negligible, though Flaubert's knowledge of them appears to have been quite considerable. Particularly with reference to his first and third Tentation, he assiduously read and compiled voluminous notes on philosophic treatises of all kinds and all times. But apart from Spinoza, the only philosophers who could be said to have influenced him are the Idéologues, to whom no doubt his father recommended him. He ridicules the materialistic aspect of their system of thought, but partially adopts their theories of physiological determinism, even though these are often in contradiction with his idealist's scale of values.

The Positivist Herbert Spencer, to whom we have referred in the last chapters of the present study, really only formulated in terms of a philosophic system an outlook which had been Flaubert's for years, and in our opinion can hardly be said to have had a strong influence on him. Finally, we have seen how at the end of his life Flaubert had come to the point of reading the philosophers with the express purpose of turning them to ridicule. His comments are irritated and mocking - and for the most part wholly superficial.

It does not seem, in fact, that he was ever drawn to seek a solution to his metaphysical problems in philosophy.

It was only through le Poittevin that he had become acquainted with the Ethic; nor was it the philosopher of rigorous deductions and 'geometric' method who attracted him, but the breadth of vision and sense of the absolute that pervaded this system of intellectual pantheism. Flaubert was always of a reflective mind, but he was hardly given to philosophical speculation for its own sake : as an artist, his convictions were based on sensible experience and on intuition rather than on logical deduction.

He consulted more readily therefore the experience of others as recorded in literature, and particularly in the literature of the Romantic period. But he found there only the despair of *Wetter* and *René*, the sorrows of *Oberman*, the torments of *Ahasverus*. Nor did his other favourites, *Montaigne* and *Rabelais*, at least as construed by Flaubert and by traditional literary criticism, have a more constructive view to offer - *Que say-je? Peut-être? ...*

The third realm into which his enquiry led him was that of the Christian Church. Given the indifferentism or anti-clericalism of the circles in which he moved as a boy, it may perhaps seem strange that he should have sought in Christianity an elucidation of his problems. He was attracted to some extent by its exterior forms - its art and

liturgy - but no doubt what drew him more were the Church's absolute claims to truth.

We have little indication as to the form his enquiry took. It would seem from Agonies that on at least one occasion he went to see a priest, but he makes no reference, for example, to what he may have read. It remains, however, clear that he reflected a great deal on the subject with little, if any, outside help or sympathy. He continued after adolescence to read a considerable amount concerning doctrine and morals and the history of Christianity, But it was generally with a precise end in view, and that end was not the elucidation of personal problems. Jules, of the first Education Sentimentale, is concerned with Spinozist pantheism and art, but never with the Church. In 1846 Flaubert writes to Louise Colet (he was then collecting material for his first Tentation) that he is studying Christianity 'non pas du tout dans l'intention de me donner la Foi, mais pour voir les gens qui ont la Foi'⁽¹⁾. This remark would seem to be typical of his attitude henceforth. One has the impression that he read the Fathers, as he read the Gospels, with the⁽²⁾

(1) Corr.I.415. 7 décembre 1846.

(2) With at least one notable exception, however, the occasion in Jerusalem when having visited some of the Holy Places Flaubert re-read and was considerably moved by the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

purpose of discovering quips for Logic and Satan or problems for Bouvard and his friend, rather than as a serious examination of their teaching, although it would be unreasonable to suggest that he never reflected seriously on what he read there. Certainly a number of the objections put forward by Logic, Satan and Hilarion or the two clerks, are an echo of Flaubert's own sincere difficulties.

To speculate on what one might term the psychology of Flaubertian scepticism is perhaps dangerous, but not necessarily unprofitable. One is tempted to ask how far, after the adolescent period ending with the 1845 Education, he was not a man convinced, or rather defeated, a priori? For when, in his late twenties, and even earlier, he resorts to the moral of Candide and the maxim of 'ne pas conclure', does he not virtually speaking eliminate all possibility of further enlightenment? Having recognised his own incapacity to fulfil his need, he rather tends to make of his personal dilemma a law of universal necessity, and his so called tolerant width of vision is perhaps in reality a refined form of intolerance as blinding as any prejudice or fanaticism. Not only this, but he remains satisfied with his dissatisfaction, counting it as his greatest virtue, and scorning those who have attained to a more positive outlook without pausing to discover whether there may not be in their understanding a possibility of understanding for himself. It would seem

that neither intellectually nor spiritually is the way left open for the light which he at once desires but rejects a priori as insufficient or illusory.

All this, however, is a delicate matter on which one can do no more than proffer certain suggestions. It is far from our intention to pass judgement on Flaubert, even less to condemn. His attitude was strongly influenced and conditioned by the materialism and relativism of the period, by the anticlericalism of his childhood background and the indifference of the circles in which he moved later. If he was to some extent responsible for his own darkness it is impossible to know how far, and Mauriac's indictment of him as one who deliberately and consciously substituted for the worship of the true God an ethic and mysticism based on the adoration of Art (1) would seem to be not only presumptuous, but wholly unjustified.

Neither the 'religion of art' nor the pantheism of Flaubert's earlier years are consciously created substitutes for something he refused to recognise; they are the two means of approach to truth through which, on rare occasions, he received some mysterious apprehension of the absolute.

(1) Mauriac. Trois Grands Hommes devant Dieu, 1930. In his preface to Guillemin's Flaubert devant la vie et devant Dieu, published in 1939, Mauriac withdraws this judgement. But he does not see fit, in the reprint of his book in 1947, to make any alterations to his original study of Flaubert, nor even to add a footnote indicating his change of attitude after having read Guillemin.

What we have described earlier as Flaubert's mystic intuitions of nature must remain to some extent impenetrable. We have noted the strongly emotional element in his intense appreciation of natural beauty; but we have seen too that his pantheistic experiences were for him a genuine apprehension of an ultimate reality, sufficiently important to become a basic theme of la Tentation, where Antoine attains to a momentary perception of ultimate reality precisely through this type of experience. It has been observed that Flaubert's pantheistic mysticism as expressed here in Antoine's 'être la matière' is a fundamentally illogical desire: to become one with reality in order to know it would be to be deprived of the cognitive faculties which are concomitant with individuality. But this is to consider from a purely intellectual and strictly logical view-point what is a spiritual aspiration poetically expressed. The important and indisputable fact emerging from the 'être la matière' sequence is the intensity of this fundamental desire in Flaubert to achieve personal fulfilment through a complete intuition of the ultimate, the absolute. It is this, in the words of Digeon, which constitutes 'le fond de l'âme de Flaubert'.

The same aspiration is fundamental to the aesthetic, though here what was previously expressed in terms of

pantheism is now expressed in terms of a new platonic idealism. As we have indicated earlier, ⁽¹⁾ there would seem to be some illogicality in this alliance of Spinozist pantheism, which sees the absolute as immanent, inseparable from reality, and in which there is no room for art, and an aesthetic which, in the Platonic tradition, makes art a means of rendering an ideal and eternal Beauty Transcending reality. Here again, however, we are concerned not with a logically constructed system of thought, but with a spiritual aspiration which finds its expression in the two most profound experiences of the Flaubertian temperament - the contemplation of nature and the activity of ~~the~~ artistic creation.

Art is for him a means of access to a transcendent ideal - 'l'Idée, le Verbe, l'Esprit' as we have seen him try to describe it - and the rare intuitions he received of this ideal were for him a joy surpassing, he would claim, that of the saints in ecstasy. The occasions on which he attained to this 'état idéal' were however rare, and had art brought him no more than this its rôle would have been similar to that of nature which procured him his pantheistic experiences. But art, on the contrary, was a permanent and all-demanding pursuit, an ethic and an ideal. It imposed upon him the

(1) Chapter Three. p. 122.

strictest of personal disciplines, it was an end to which he subordinated all else. At the same time it was a means by which he escaped from the relativism of his intellectual position, the incompleteness and imperfection of reality, the aimlessness of 'une solitude sans fin, menant je ne sais où'. In the realm of style there was a unique way of expressing an idea, and it was to this 'truth' that he would strive to attain in his hour-long and day-long search for 'le mot juste'.

Guillemin has described in moving tones this aspect of Flaubert's quest for truth, and he concludes in the following words:

'L'art, la poursuite de la Beauté, c'est sa façon à lui, la seule qui lui reste, de croire en ce qui domine le monde, l'enveloppe, l'explique, l'accomplit. Ce mouvement qui l'emporte vers le Beau, ... cet élan sur lequel il a jeté sa vie, c'est bien, littéralement un amour, sa voie d'accès, à lui, vers l'Unique Nécessité, son affirmation de l'Absolu'.

This would seem to be a nearer approximation to his real position than the harsh judgement of Mauriac.

Flaubert had an extraordinarily acute sense of man's spiritual destiny, without the conviction of his supernatural calling. His life for that reason comes so close to a truly religious life that it has inspired in non-Christians exalted

comparisons with that of the monk, the martyr or the saint, whilst it provokes the Christian Mauriac to an attack upon what he deemed to be Flaubert's conscious parody of the Christian asceticism. It is all this which gives him his claim to victory and to greatness - not so much in the sense that it earned him lasting literary fame - but because it constitutes a life of perseverance in the 'ligne droite' which he extolled, a series of sacrifices and a rigorous discipline by which he gave himself to something greater than self.

His weakness, and his defeat, lie in the fact that he never attained to a true understanding of his destiny, not as 'un homme-plume', but as an adopted son of God. The resentment of his later years and the bitter sterility of a labour such as his last novel, a task which virtually speaking killed him, were the fruits of this failure. But it is not on these alone that we judge him, and the fruits of his victory are far more abundant and lasting.

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