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Preface to Cromwell
Victor Hugo (1827)

THE DRAMA contained in the following pages has nothing to commend it to the attention or the good will of the public. It has not, to attract the interest of political disputants, the advantage of the veto of the official censorship, nor even, to win for it at the outset the literary sympathy of men of taste, the honour of having been formally rejected by an infallible reading committee.

It presents itself, therefore, to the public gaze, naked and friendless, like the infirm man of the Gospel--*solus, pauper, nudus*.

Not without some hesitation, moreover, did the author determine to burden his drama with a preface. Such things are usually of very little interest to the reader. He inquires concerning the talent of a writer rather than concerning his point of view; and in determining whether a work is good or bad, it matters little to him upon what ideas it is based, or in what sort of mind it germinated. One seldom inspects the cellars of a house after visiting its salons, and when one eats the fruit of a tree, one cares but little about its root.

On the other hand, notes and prefaces are sometimes a convenient method of adding to the weight of a book, and of magnifying, in appearance at least, the importance of a work; as a matter of tactics this is not dissimilar to that of the general who, to make his battlefront more imposing, puts everything, even his baggage-trains, in the line. and then, while critics fall foul of the preface and scholars of the notes, it may happen that the work itself will escape them, passing uninjured between their cross-fires, as an army extricates itself from a dangerous position between two skirmishes of outposts and rear-guards.

These reasons, weighty as they may seem, are not those which influenced the author. This volume did not need to be *inflated*, it was already too stout by far. Furthermore, and the author does not know why it is so, his prefaces, frank and ingenuous as they are, have always served rather to compromise him with the critics than to shield him. Far from being staunch and trusty bucklers, they have played him a trick like that played in a battle by an unusual and conspicuous uniform, which, calling attention to the soldier who wears it, attracts all the blows and is proof against none.

Considerations of an altogether different sort acted upon the author. It seemed to him that, although in fact, one seldom inspects the cellars of a building for pleasure, one is not sorry sometimes to examine its foundations. He will, therefore, give himself over once more, with a preface, to the wrath of the *feuilletonists. Che sara, sara*. He has never given much though to the fortune of his works, and he is but little appalled by dread of the literary what will people say. In the discussion now raging, in which the theatre and the schools, the public and the academies, are at daggers drawn, one will hear, perhaps,

not without some interest, the voice of a solitary *apprentice* of nature and truth, who has withdrawn betimes from the literary world, for pure love of letters, and who offers good faith in default of good taste, sincere conviction in default of talent, study in default of learning.

He will confine himself, however, to general considerations concerning the art, without the slightest attempt to smooth the path of his own work, without pretending to write an indictment or a plea, against or for any person whomsoever. An attack upon or defence of his book is of less importance to him than to anybody else. Nor is personal controversy agreeable to him. It is always a pitiful spectacle to see two hostile self-esteems crossing swords. He protests, therefore, beforehand against every interpretation of his ideas, every personal application of his words, saying with the Spanish fablist:--

Quien haga aplicaciones
Con su pan se lo coma.

In truth, several of the leading champions of "sound literary doctrines" have done him the honour to throw the gauntlet to him, even in his profound obscurity--to him, a simple, imperceptible spectator of this curious contest. He will not have the presumption to pick it up. In the following pages will be found the observations with which he might oppose them--there will be found his sling and his stone; but others, if they choose, may hurl them at the head of the classical Goliaths.

This said, let us pass on.

Let us set out from a fact. The same type of civilization, or to use a more exact, although more extended expression, the same society, has not always inhabited the earth. The human race as a whole has grown, has developed, has matured, like one of ourselves. It was once a child, it was once a man; we are now looking on at its impressive old age. Before the epoch which modern society has dubbed "ancient," there was another epoch which the ancients called "fabulous," but which it would be more accurate to call "primitive." Behold then three great successive orders of things in civilization, from its origin down to our days. Now, as poetry is always superposed upon society, we propose to try to demonstrate, from the form of its society, what the character of the poetry must have been in those three great ages of the world--primitive times, ancient times, modern times.

In primitive times, when man awakes in a world that is newly created, poetry awakes with him. In the face of the marvellous things that dazzle and intoxicate him, his first speech is a hymn simply. He is still so close to God that all his meditations are ecstatic, all his dreams are visions. His bosom swells, he sings as he breathes. His lyre has but three strings--God, the soul, creation; but this threefold mystery envelopes everything, this threefold idea embraces everything. The earth is still almost deserted. There are families, but no nations; patriarchs, but no kings. Each race exists at its own pleasure; no property, no laws, no contentions, no wars. Everything belongs to each and to all. Society is a community. Man is restrained in nought. He leads that nomadic pastoral life with which all civilizations begin, and which is so well adapted to solitary

contemplation, to fanciful reverie. He follows every suggestion, he goes hither and thither, at random. His thought, like his life, resembles a could that changes its shape and its direction according to the wind that drives it. Such is the first man, such is the first poet. He is young, he is cynical. Prayer is his sole religion, the ode is his only form of poetry.

This ode, this poem of primitive times, is Genesis.

By slow degrees, however, this youth of the world passes away. All the spheres progress; the family becomes a tribe, the tribe becomes a nation. Each of these groups of men camps about a common centre, and kingdoms appear. The social instinct succeeds the nomadic instinct. The camp gives place to the city, the tent to the place, the ark to the temple. The chiefs of these nascent states are still shepherds, it is true, but shepherds of nations; the pastoral staff has already assumed the shape of a sceptre. Everything tends to become stationary and fixed. Religion takes on a definite shape; prayer is governed by rites; dogma sets bounds to worship. Thus the priest and king share the paternity of the people; thus theocratic society succeeds the patriarchal community.

Meanwhile the nations are beginning to be packed too closely on the earth's surface. They annoy and jostle one another; hence the clash of empires--war. They overflow upon another; hence, the migrations of nations--voyages. Poetry reflects these momentous events; from ideas it proceeds to things. It sings of ages, of nations, of empires. It becomes epic, it gives birth to Homer.

Homer, in truth, dominates the society of ancient times. In that society, all is simple, all is epic. Poetry is religion, religion is law. The virginity of the earlier age is succeeded by the chastity of the later. A sort of solemn gravity is everywhere noticeable, in private manners no less than in public. The nations have retained nothing of the wandering life of the earlier time, save respect for the stranger and the traveller. The family has a fatherland; everything is connected therewith; it has the cult of the house and the cult of the tomb.

We say again, such a civilization can find its one expression only in the epic. The epic will assume diverse forms, but will never lose its specific character. Pindar is more priestlike than patriarchal, more epic than lyrical. If the chroniclers, the necessary accompaniments of this second age of the world, set about collecting traditions and begin to reckon by centuries, they labour to no purpose--chronology cannot expel poesy; history remains an epic. Herodotus is a Homer.

But it is in the ancient tragedy, above all, that the epic breaks out at every turn. It mounts the Greek stage without losing aught, so to speak, of its immeasurable, gigantic proportions. Its characters are still heroes, demi-gods, gods; its themes are visions, oracles, fatality; its scenes are battles, funeral rites, catalogues. That which the rhapsodists formerly sang, the actors declaim--that is the whole difference.

There is something more. When the whole plot, the whole spectacle of the epic poem have passed to the stage, the Chorus takes all that remains. The Chorus annotates the tragedy, encourages the heroes, gives descriptions, summons and expels the daylight, rejoices, laments, sometimes furnishes the scenery, explains the moral bearing of the subject, flatters the listening assemblage. Now, what is the Chorus, this anomalous character standing between the spectacle and the spectator, if it be not the poet completing his epic?

The theatre of the ancients is, like their dramas, huge, pontifical, epic. It is capable of holding thirty thousand spectators; the plays are given in the open air, in bright sunlight; the performances last all day. The actors disguise their voices, wear masks, increase their stature; they make themselves gigantic, like their rôles. The stage is immense. It may represent at the same moment both the interior and the exterior of a temple, a palace, a camp, a city. Upon it, vast spectacles are displayed. There is--we cite only from memory--Prometheus on his mountain; there is Antigone, at the top of a tower, seeking her brother Polynices in the hostile army (*The Phoenician*s); there is Evadne hurling herself from a cliff into the flames where the body of Capaneus is burning (*The Suppliants* of Euripides); there is a ship sailing into port and landing fifty princesses with their retinues (*The Suppliants of Æschylus*). Architecture, poetry, everything assumes a monumental character. In all antiquity there is nothing more solemn, more majestic. Its history and its religion are mingled on its stage. Its first actors are priests; its scenic performances are religious ceremonies, national festivals.

One last observation, which completes our demonstration of the epic character of this epoch: in the subjects which it treats, no less than in the forms it adopts, tragedy simply re-echoes the epic. All the ancient tragic authors derive their plots from Homer. The same fabulous exploits, the same catastrophes, the same heroes. One and all drink from the Homeric stream. The Iliad and Odyssey are always in evidence. Like Achilles dragging Hector at his chariot-wheel, the Greek tragedy circles about Troy.

But the age of the epic draws near its end. Like the society that it represents, this form of poetry wears itself out revolving upon itself. Rome reproduces Greece, Virgil copies Homer, and, as if to make a becoming end, epic poetry expires in the last parturition.

It was time. Another era is about to begin, for the world and for poetry.

A spiritual religion, supplanting the material and external paganism, makes its way to the heart of the ancient society, kills it, and deposits, in that corpse of a decrepit civilization, the germ of modern civilization. This religion is complete, because it is true; between its dogma and its cult, it embraces a deep-rooted moral. and first of all, as a fundamental truth, it teaches man that he has two lives to live, one ephemeral, the other immortal; one on earth, the other in heaven. It shows him that he, like his destiny, is twofold: that there is in him an animal and an intellect, a body and a soul; in a word, that he is the point of intersection, the common link of the two chains of beings which embrace all creation--of the chain of material beings and the chain of incorporeal beings; the first starting from the rock to arrive at man, the second starting from man to end at God.

A portion of these truths had perhaps been suspected by certain wise men of ancient times, but their full, broad, luminous revelation dates from the Gospels. The pagan schools walked in darkness, feeling their way, clinging to falsehoods as well as to truths in their haphazard journeying. Some of their philosophers occasionally cast upon certain subjects feeble gleams which illuminated but one side and made the darkness of the other side more profound. Hence all the phantoms created by ancient philosophy. None but divine wisdom was capable of substituting an even and all-embracing light for all those flickering rays of human wisdom. Pythagoras, Epicurus, Socrates, Plato, are torches: Christ is the glorious light of day.

Nothing could be more material, indeed, than the ancient theogony. Far from proposing, as Christianity does, to separate the spirit from the body, it ascribes form and features to everything, even to impalpable essences, even to the intelligence. In it everything is visible, tangible, fleshly. Its gods need a cloud to conceal themselves from men's eyes. They eat, drink, and sleep. They are wounded and their blood flows; they are maimed, and lo! they limp forever after. That religion has gods and halves of gods. Its thunderbolts are forged on an anvil, and among other things three rays of twisted rain (*tres imbris torti radios*) enter into their composition. Its Jupiter suspends the world by a golden chain; its sun rides in a four-horse chariot; its hell is a precipice the brink of which is marked on the globe; its heaven is a mountain.

Thus paganism, which moulded all creations from the same clay, minimizes divinity and magnifies man. Homer's heroes are of almost the same stature as his gods. Ajax defies Jupiter, Achilles is the peer of Mars. Christianity on the contrary, as we have seen, draws a broad line of division between spirit and matter. It places an abyss between the soul and the body, an abyss between man and God.

At this point--to omit nothing from the sketch upon which we have ventured--we will call attention to the fact that, with Christianity, and by its means, there entered into the mind of the nations a new sentiment, unknown to the ancients and marvellously developed among moderns, a sentiment which is more than gravity and less than sadness--melancholy. In truth, might not the heart of man, hitherto deadened by religions purely hierarchical and sacerdotal, awake and feel springing to life within it some unexpected faculty, under the breath of a religion that is human because it is divine, a religion which makes of the poor man's prayer, the rich man's wealth, religion of equality, liberty and charity? Might it not see all things in a new light, since the Gospel had shown it the soul through the senses, eternity behind life?

Moreover, at that very moment the world was undergoing so complete a revolution that it was impossible that there should not be a revolution in men's minds. Hitherto the catastrophes of empires had rarely reached the hearts of the people; it was kings who fell, majesties that vanished, nothing more. The lightning struck only in the upper regions, and, as we have already pointed out, events seemed to succeed one another with all the solemnity of the epic. In the ancient society, the individual occupied so lowly a place that, to strike him, adversity must needs descend to his family. So that he knew little of misfortune outside of domestic sorrows. It was an almost unheard-of thing that

the general disasters of the state should disarrange his life. But the instant that Christian society became firmly established, the ancient continent was thrown into confusion. Everything was pulled up by the roots. Events, destined to destroy ancient Europe and to construct a new Europe, trod upon one another's heels in their ceaseless rush, and drove the nations pellmell, some into the light, others into darkness. So much uproar ensued that it was impossible that some echoes of it should not reach the hearts of the people. It was more than an echo, it was a reflex blow. Man, withdrawing within himself in presence of these imposing vicissitudes, began to take pity upon mankind, to reflect upon the bitter disillusionments of life. of this sentiment, which to Cato the heathen was despair, Christianity fashioned melancholy.

At the same time was born the spirit of scrutiny and curiosity. These great catastrophes were also great spectacles, impressive cataclysms. It was the North hurling itself upon the South; the Roman world changing shape; the last convulsive throes of a whole universe in the death agony. As soon as that world was dead, lo! clouds of rhetoricians, grammarians, sophists, swooped down like insects on its immense body. People saw them swarming and heard them buzzing in that seat of putrefaction. They vied with one another in scrutinizing, commenting, disputing. Each limb, each muscle, each fibre of the huge prostrate body was twisted and turned in every direction. Surely it must have been a keen satisfaction to those anatomists of the mind, to be able, at their debut, to make experiments on a large scale; to have a dead society to dissect, for their first "subject."

Thus we see melancholy and meditation, the demons of analysis and controversy, appear at the same moment, and, as it were, hand-in-hand. At one extremity of this era of transition is Longinus, at the other St. Augustine. We must beware of casting a disdainful eye upon that epoch wherein all that has since borne fruit was contained in germs; upon that epoch whose least eminent writers, if we may be pardoned a vulgar but expressive phrase, made fertilizer for the harvest that was to follow. The Middle Ages were grafted on the Lower Empire.

Behold, then, a new religion, a new society; upon this twofold foundation there must inevitably spring up a new poetry. Previously--we beg pardon for setting forth a result which the reader has probably already foreseen from what has been said above--previously, following therein the course pursued by the ancient polytheism and philosophy, the purely epic muse of the ancients had studied nature in only a single aspect, casting aside without pity almost everything in art which, in the world subjected to its imitation, had not relation to a certain type of beauty. A type which was magnificent at first, but, as always happens with everything systematic, became in later times false, trivial and conventional. Christianity leads poetry to the truth. Like it, the modern muse will see things in a higher and broader light. It will realize that everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful*, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light. It will ask itself if the narrow and relative sense of the artist should prevail over the infinite, absolute sense of the Creator; if it is for man to correct God; if a mutilated nature will be the more beautiful for the mutilation; if art has the

right to duplicate, so to speak, man, life, creation; if things will progress better when their muscles and their vigour have been taken from them; if, in short, to be incomplete is the best way to be harmonious. Then it is that, with its eyes fixed upon events that are both laughable and redoubtable, and under the influence of that spirit of Christian melancholy and philosophical criticism which we described a moment ago, poetry will take a great step, a decisive step, a step which, like the upheaval of an earthquake, will change the whole face of the intellectual world. It will set about doing as nature does, mingling in its creations--but without confounding them--darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime; in other words, the body and the soul, the beast and the intellect; for the starting-point of religion is always the starting-point of poetry. All things are connected.

Thus, then, we see a principle unknown to the ancients, a new type, introduced in poetry; and as an additional element in anything modifies the whole of the thing, a new form of the art is developed. This type is the grotesque; its new form is comedy.

And we beg leave to dwell upon this point; for we have now indicated the significant feature, the fundamental difference which, in our opinion, separates modern from ancient art, the present form from the defunct form; or, to use less definite but more popular terms, *romantic* literature from *classical* literature.

"At last!" exclaim the people who for some time past *have seen what we were coming at*, "at last we have you--you are caught in the act. So then you put forward the ugly as a type for imitation, you make the *grotesque* an element of art. But the graces; but good taste! Don't you know that art should correct nature? that we must *ennoble* art? that we must *select*? Did the ancients ever exhibit the ugly or the grotesque? Did they ever mingle comedy and tragedy? The example of the ancients, gentlemen! and Aristotle, too; and Boileau; and La Harpe. Upon my word!"

These arguments are sound, doubtless, and, above all, of extraordinary novelty. But it is not our place to reply to them. We are constructing no system here--God protect us from systems! We are stating a fact. We are a historian, not a critic. Whether the fact is agreeable or not matters little; it is a fact. Let us resume, therefore, and try to prove that it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born--so complex, so diverse in its forms, so inexhaustible in its creations; and therein directly opposed to the uniform simplicity of the genius of the ancients; let us show that that is the point from which we must set out to establish the real and radical difference between the two forms of literature.

Not that it is strictly true that comedy and the grotesque were entirely unknown to the ancients. In fact, such a thing would be impossible. Nothing grows without a root; the germ of the second epoch always exists in the first. In the Iliad Thersites and Vulcan furnish comedy, one to the mortals, the other to the gods. There is too much nature and originality in the Greek tragedy for there not to be an occasional touch of comedy in it. For example, to cite only what we happen to recall, the scene between Menelaus and the portress of the palace. (*Helen*, Act I), and the scene of the Phrygian (*Orestes*, Act IV).

The Tritons, the Satyrs, the Cyclops are grotesque; Polyphemus is a terrifying, Silenus a farcical grotesque.

But one feels that this part of the art is still in its infancy. The epic, which at this period imposes its form on everything, the epic weighs heavily upon it and stifles it. The ancient grotesque is timid and forever trying to keep out of sight. It is plain that it is not on familiar ground, because it is not in its natural surroundings. It conceals itself as much as it can. The Satyrs, the Tritons, and the Sirens are hardly abnormal in form. The Fates and the Harpies are hideous in their attributes rather than in feature; the Furies are beautiful, and are called *Eumenides*, that is to say, *gentle, beneficent*. There is a veil of grandeur or of divinity over other grotesques. Polyphemus is a giant, Midas a king, Silenus a god.

Thus comedy is almost imperceptible in the great epic *ensemble* of ancient times. What is the barrow of Thespis beside the Olympian chariots? What are Aristophanes and Plautus, beside the Homeric colossi, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides? Homer bears them along with him, as Hercules bore the pygmies, hidden in his lion's skin!

In the idea of men of modern times, however, the grotesque plays an enormous part. It is found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the abnormal and the horrible, on the other the comic and the burlesque. It fastens upon religion a thousand original superstitions, upon poetry a thousand picturesque fancies. It is the grotesque which scatters lavishly, in air, water, earth, fire, those myriads of intermediary creatures which we find all alive in the popular traditions of the Middle Ages; it is the grotesque which impels the ghastly antics of the witches' revels, which gives Satan his horns, his cloven foot and his bat's wings. It is the grotesque, still the grotesque, which now casts into the Christian hell the frightful faces which the severe genius of Dante and Milton will evoke, and again peoples it with those laughter-moving figures amid which Callot, the burlesque Michelangelo, will disport himself. If it passes from the world of imagination to the real world, it unfolds an inexhaustible supply of parodies of mankind. Creations of its fantasy are the Scaramouches, Crispins and Harlequins, grinning silhouettes of man, types altogether unknown to serious-minded antiquity, although they originated in classic Italy. It is the grotesque, lastly, which, colouring the same drama with the fancies of the North and of the South in turn, exhibits Sganarelle capering about Don Juan and Mephistopheles crawling about Faust.

And how free and open it is in its bearing! how boldly it brings into relief all the strange forms which the preceding age had timidly wrapped in swaddling-clothes! Ancient poetry, compelled to provide the lame Vulcan with companions, tried to disguise their deformity by distributing it, so to speak, upon gigantic proportions. Modern genius retains this myth of the supernatural smiths, but gives it an entirely different character and one which makes it even more striking; it changes the giants to dwarfs and makes gnomes of the Cyclops. With like originality, it substitutes for the somewhat commonplace Lernæan hydra all the local dragons of our national legends--the gargoyle of Rouen, the *graouilli* of Metz, the chair *sallée* of Troyes, the *drée* of Montlhéry, the *tarasque* of Tarascon--monsters of forms so diverse, whose outlandish names are an

additional attribute. All these creations draw from their own nature that energetic and significant expression before which antiquity seems sometimes to have recoiled. Certain it is that the Greek Eumenides are much less horrible, and consequently less *true*, than the witches in *Macbeth*. Pluto is not the devil.

In our opinion a most novel book might be written upon the employment of the grotesque in the arts. One might point out the powerful effects the moderns have obtained from that fruitful type, upon which narrow-minded criticism continues to wage war even in our own day. It may be that we shall be led by our subject to call attention in passing to some features of this vast picture. We will simply say here that, as a means of contrast with the sublime, the grotesque is, in our view, the richest source that nature can offer art. Rubens so understood it, doubtless, when it pleased him to introduce the hideous features of a court dwarf amid his exhibitions of royal magnificence, coronations and splendid ceremonial. The universal beauty which the ancients solemnly laid upon everything, is not without monotony; the same impression repeated again and again may prove fatiguing at last. Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful. On the other hand, the grotesque seems to be a halting-place, a mean term, a starting-point whence one rises toward the beautiful with a fresher and keener perception. The salamander gives relief to the water-sprite; the gnome heightens the charm of the sylph.

And it would be true also to say that contact with the abnormal has imparted to the modern sublime a something purer, grander, more sublime, in short, than the beautiful of the ancients; and that is as it should be. When art is consistent with itself, it guides everything more surely to its goal. If the Homeric Elysium is a long, long way from the ethereal charm, the angelic pleasureableness of Milton's Paradise, it is because under Eden there is a hell far more terrible than the heathen Tartarus. Do you think that Francesca da Rimini and Beatrice would be so enchanting in a poet who should not confine us in the tower of Hunger and compel us to share Ugolino's revolting repast? Dante would have less charm, if he had less power. Have the fleshly naiads, the muscular Tritons, the wanton Zephyrs, the diaphanous transparency of our water-sprites and sylphs? Is it not because the modern imagination does not fear to picture the ghastly forms of vampires, ogres, ghouls, snake-charmers and jinns prowling about graveyards, that it can give to its fairies that incorporeal shape, that purity of essence, of which the heathen nymphs fall so far short? The antique Venus is beautiful, admirable, no doubt; but what has imparted to Jean Goujon's faces that weird, tender, ethereal delicacy? What has given them that unfamiliar suggestion of life and grandeur, if not the proximity of the rough and powerful sculptures of the Middle Ages?

If the thread of our argument has not been broken in the reader's mind by these necessary digressions--which in truth, might be developed much further--he has realized, doubtless, how powerfully the grotesque--that germ of comedy, fostered by the modern muse--grew in extent and importance as soon as it was transplanted to a soil more propitious than paganism and the Epic. In truth, in the new poetry, while the sublime represents the soul as it is, purified by Christian morality, the grotesque plays the part of the human beast. The former type, delivered of all impure alloy, has as its attributes all

the charms, all the graces, all the beauties; it must be able some day to create Juliet, Desdemona, Ophelia. The latter assumes all the absurdities, all the infirmities, all the blemishes. In this partition of mankind and of creation, to it fall the passions, vices, crimes; it is sensuous, fawning, greedy, miserly, false, incoherent, hypocritical; it is, in turn, Iago, Tartuffe, Basile, Polonius, Harpagon, Bartholo, Falstaff, Scapin, Figaro. The beautiful has but one type, the ugly has a thousand. The fact is that the beautiful, humanly speaking, is merely form considered in its simplest aspect, in its most perfect symmetry, in its most entire harmony with our make-up. Thus the ensemble that it offers us is always complete, but restricted like ourselves. What we call the ugly, on the contrary, is a detail of a great whole which eludes us, and which is in harmony, not with man but with all creation. That is why it constantly presents itself to us in new but incomplete aspects.

It is interesting to study the first appearance and the progress of the grotesque in modern times. At first, it is an invasion, an irruption, an overflow, as of a torrent that has burst its banks. It rushes through the expiring Latin literature, imparts some coloring to Persius, Petronius and Juvenal, and leaves behind it the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius. Thence it diffuses itself through the imaginations of the new nations that are remodelling Europe. It abounds in the work of the fabulists, the chroniclers, the romancists. We see it make its way from the South to the North. It disports itself in the dreams of the Teutonic nations, and at the same time vivifies with its breath the admirable Spanish *romanceros*, a veritable Iliad of the age of chivalry. For example, it is the grotesque which describes thus, in the *Roman de la Rose*, an august ceremonial, the election of a king:--

"A long-shanked knave they chose, I was,
of all their men the boniest."

More especially it imposes its characteristic qualities upon that wonderful architecture which, in the Middle Ages, takes the place of all the arts. It affixes its mark on the facades of cathedrals, frames its hells and purgatories in the ogive arches of great doorways, por- trays them in brilliant hues on window-glass, exhibits its monsters, its bull-dogs, its imps about capitals, along friezes, on the edges of roofs. It flaunts itself in numberless shapes on the wooden façades of houses, on the stone façades of châteaux, on the marble façades of palaces. From the arts it makes its way into the national manners, and while it stirs applause from the people for the *graciosos* of comedy, it gives to the kings court-jesters. Later, in the age of etiquette, it will show us Scarron on the very edge of Louis the Fourteenth's bed. Meanwhile, it decorates coats-of-arms, and draws upon knights' shields the symbolic hieroglyphs of feudalism. From the manners, it makes its way into the laws; numberless strange customs attest its passage through the institutions of the Middle Ages. Just as it represented Thespis, smeared with wine-lees, leaping in her tomb, it dances with the *Basoche* on the famous marble table which served at the same time as a stage for the popular farces and for the royal banquets. Finally, having made its way into the arts, the manners, and the laws, it enters even the Church. In every Catholic city we see it organizing some one of those curious ceremonies, those strange processions, wherein religion is attended by all varieties of superstition--the sublime attended by all the forms of the grotesque. to paint it in one stroke, so great is its vigour, its energy, its creative sap, at the dawn of letters, that it casts, at the outset, upon

the threshold of modern poetry, three burlesque Homers: Ariosto in Italy, Cervantes in Spain, Rabelais in France.

It would be mere surplusage to dwell further upon the influence of the grotesque in the third civilization. Everything tends to show its close creative alliance with the beautiful in the so-called "romantic" period. Even among the simplest popular legends there are none which do not somewhere, with an admirable instinct, solve this mystery of modern art. Antiquity could not have produced *Beauty and the Beast.*

It is true that at the period at which we have arrived the predominance of the grotesque over the sublime in literature is clearly indicated. But it is a spasm of reaction, an eager thirst for novelty, which is but temporary; it is an initial wave which gradually recedes. The type of the beautiful will soon resume its rights and its rôle, which is not to exclude the other principle, but to prevail over it. It is time that the grotesque should be content with a corner of the picture in Murillo's royal frescoes, in the sacred pages of Veronese; content to be introduced in two marvellous *Last Judgments*, in which art will take a just pride, in the scene of fascination and horror with which Michelangelo will embellish the Vatican: in those awe-inspiring representations of the fall of man which Rubens will throw upon the arches of the Cathedral of Antwerp. The time has come when the balance between the two principles is to be established. A man, a poet-king, *poeta soverano*, as Dante calls Homer, is about to adjust everything. The two rival genii combine their flames, and thence issues Shakespeare.

We have now reached the poetic culmination of modern times. Shakespeare is the drama; and the drama, which with the same breath moulds the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy--the drama is the distinguishing characteristic of the third epoch of poetry, of the literature of the present day.

Thus, to sum up hurriedly the facts that we have noted thus far, poetry has three periods, each of which corresponds to an epoch of civilization: the ode, the epic, and the drama. Primitive times are lyrical, ancient times epical, modern times dramatic. The ode sings of eternity, the epic imparts solemnity to history, the drama depicts life. The characteristic of the first poetry is ingenuousness, of the second, simplicity, of the third, truth. The rhapsodists mark the transition from the lyric to the epic poets, as do the romancists that from the lyric to the dramatic poets. Historians appear in the second period, chroniclers and critics in the third. The characters of the ode are colossi--Adam, Cain, Noah; those of the epic are giants--Achilles, Atreus, Orestes; those of the drama are men--Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello. The ode lives upon the ideal, the epic upon the grandiose, the drama upon the real. Lastly, this threefold poetry flows from three great sources--The Bible, Homer, Shakespeare.

Such then--and we confine ourselves herein to noting a single result--such are the diverse aspects of thought in the different epochs of mankind and of civilization. Such are its three faces, in youth, in manhood, in old age. Whether one examines one literature by itself or all literatures *en masse*, one will always reach the same result: the lyric poets before the epic poets, the epic poets before the dramatic poets. In France, Malherbe

before Chapelain, Chapelain before Corneille; in ancient Greece, Orpheus before Homer, Homer before &Ælig;schylus; in the first of all books, *Genesis* before *Kings*, *Kings* before *Job*; or to come back to that monumental scale of all ages of poetry, which we ran over a moment since, The Bible before the *Iliad*, the *Iliad* before Shakespeare.

In a word, civilization begins by singing of its dreams, then narrates its doings, and lastly, sets about describing what it thinks. It is, let us say in passing, because of this last, that the drama, combining the most opposed qualities, may be at the same time full of profundity and full of relief, philosophical and picturesque.

It would be logical to add here that everything in nature and in life passes through these three phases, the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic, because everything is born, acts, and dies. If it were not absurd to confound the fantastic conceits of the imagination with the stern deductions of the reasoning faculty, a poet might say that the rising of the sun, for example, is a hymn, noon-day a brilliant epic, and sunset a gloomy drama wherein day and night, life and death, contend for mastery. But that would be poetry--folly, perhaps--and *what does it prove?*

Let us hold to the facts marshalled above; let us supplement them, too, by an important observation, namely that we have in no wise pretended to assign exclusive limits to the three epochs of poetry, but simply to set forth their predominant characteristics. The Bible, that divine lyric monument, contains in germ, as we suggested a moment ago, an epic and a drama--*Kings* and *Job*. In the Homeric poems one is conscious of a clinging reminiscence of lyric poetry and of a beginning of dramatic poetry. Ode and drama meet in the epic. There is a touch of all in each; but in each there exists a generative element to which all the other elements give place, and which imposes its own character upon the whole.

The drama is complete poetry. The ode and the epic contain it only in germ; it contains both of them in a state of high development, and epitomizes both. Surely, he who said: "The French have not the epic brain," said a true and clever thing; if he had said, "The moderns," the clever remark would have been profound. It is beyond question, however, that there is epic genius in that marvellous *Athalie*, so exalted and so simple in its sublimity that the royal century was unable to comprehend it. It is certain, too, that the series of Shakespeare's chronicle dramas presents a grand epic aspect. But it is lyric poetry above all that befits the drama; it never embarrasses it, adapts itself to all its caprices, disports itself in all forms, sometimes sublime as in Ariel, sometimes grotesque as in Caliban. Our era being above all else dramatic, is for that very reason eminently lyric. There is more than one connection between the beginning and the end; the sunset has some features of the sunrise; the old man becomes a child once more. But this second childhood is not like the first; it is as melancholy as the other is joyous. It is the same with lyric poetry. Dazzling, dreamy, at the dawn of civilization, it reappears, solemn and pensive, at its decline. The Bible opens joyously with *Genesis* and comes to a close with the threatening *Apocalypse*. The modern ode is still inspired, but is no

longer ignorant. It meditates more than it scrutinizes; its musing is melancholy. We see, by its painful labour, that the muse has taken the drama for her mate.

To make clear by a metaphor the ideas that we have ventured to put forth, we will compare early lyric poetry to a placid lake which reflects the clouds and stars; the epic is the stream which flows from the lake, and rushes on, reflecting its banks, forests, fields and cities, until it throws itself into the ocean of the drama. Like the lake, the drama reflects the sky; like the stream, it reflects its banks; but it alone has tempests and measureless depths.

The drama, then, is the goal to which everything in modern poetry leads. *Paradise Lost* is a drama before it is an epic. As we know, it first presented itself to the poet's imagination in the first of these forms, and as a drama it always remains in the reader's memory, so prominent is the old dramatic framework still beneath Milton's epic structure! When Dante had finished his terrible *Inferno*, when he had closed its doors and nought remained save to give his work a name, the unerring instinct of his genius showed him that that multiform poem was an emanation of the drama, not of the epic; and on the front of that gigantic monument, he wrote with his pen of bronze: *Divina Commedia*.

Thus we see that the only two poets of modern times who are of Shakespeare's stature follow him in unity of design. They coincide with him in imparting a dramatic tinge to all our poetry; like him, they blend the grotesque with the sublime; and, far from standing by themselves in the great literary *ensemble* that rests upon Shakespeare, Dante and Milton are, in some sort, the two supporting abutments of the edifice of which he is the central pillar, the buttresses of the arch of which he is the keystone.

Permit us, at this point, to recur to certain ideas already suggested, which, however, it is necessary to emphasize. We have arrived, and now we must set out again.

On the day when Christianity said to man: "Thou art twofold, thou art made up of two beings, one perishable, the other immortal, one carnal, the other ethereal, one enslaved by appetites, cravings and passions, the other borne aloft on the wings of enthusiasm and reverie--in a word, the one always stooping toward the earth, its mother, the other always darting up toward heaven, its fatherland"--on that day the drama was created. Is it, in truth, anything other than that contrast of every day, that struggle of every moment, between two opposing principles which are ever face to face in life, and which dispute possession of man from the cradle to the tomb?

The poetry born of Christianity, the poetry of our time, is, therefore, the drama; the real results from the wholly natural combination of two types, the sublime and the grotesque, which meet in the drama, as they meet in life and in creation. For true poetry, complete poetry, consists in the harmony of contraries. Hence, it is time to say aloud--and it is here above all that exceptions prove the rule--that everything that exists in nature exists in art.

On taking one's stand at this point of view, to pass judgment on our petty conventional rules, to disentangle all those scholastic labyrinths, to solve all those trivial problems which the critics of the last two centuries have laboriously built up about the art, one is struck by the promptitude with which the question of the modern stage is made clear and distinct. The drama has but to take a step to break all the spider's webs with which the militia of Lilliput have attempted to fetter its sleep.

And so, let addle-pated pedants (one does not exclude the other) claim that the deformed, the ugly, the grotesque should never be imitated in art; one replies that the grotesque is comedy, and that comedy apparently makes a part of art. Tartuffe is not handsome, Pourceaugnac is not noble, but Pourceaugnac and Tartuffe are admirable flashes of art.

If, driven back from this entrenchment to their second line of custom-houses, they renew their prohibition of the grotesque coupled with the sublime, of comedy melted into tragedy, we prove to them that, in the poetry of Christian nations, the first of these two types represents the human beast, the second the soul. These two stalks of art, if we prevent their branches from mingling, if we persistently separate them, will produce by way of fruit, on the one hand abstract vices and absurdities, on the other, abstract crime, heroism and virtue. The two types, thus isolated and left to themselves, will go each its own way, leaving the real between them, at the left hand of one, at the right hand of the other. Whence it follows that after all these abstractions there will remain something to represent--man; after these tragedies and comedies, something to create--the drama.

In the drama, as it may be conceived at least, if not executed, all things are connected and follow one another as in real life. The body plays its part no less than the mind; and men and events, set in motion by this twofold agent, pass across the stage, burlesque and terrible in turn, and sometimes both at once. Thus the judge will say: "off with his head and let us go to dinner!" Thus the Roman Senate will deliberate over Domitian's turbot. Thus Socrates, drinking the hemlock and discoursing on the immortal soul and the only God, will interrupt himself to suggest that a cook be sacrificed to Æsculapius. Thus Elizabeth will swear and talk Latin. Thus Richelieu will submit to Joseph the Capuchin, and Louis XI to his barber, Maître Olivier le Diable. Thus Cromwell will say: "I have Parliament in my bag and the King in my pocket"; or, with the hand that signed the death sentence of Charles the First, smear with ink the face of a regicide who smilingly returns the compliment. Thus Cæsar, in his triumphal car, will be afraid of overturning. For men of genius, however great they be, have always within them a touch of the beast which mocks at their intelligence. Therein they are akin to mankind in general, for therein they are dramatic. "It is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous," said Napoleon, when he was convinced that he was mere man; and that outburst of a soul on fire illumines art and history at once; that cry of anguish is the résumé of the drama and of life.

It is a striking fact that all these contrasts are met with in the poets themselves, taken as men. By dint of meditating upon existence, of laying stress upon its bitter irony, of pouring floods of sarcasm and raillery upon our infirmities, the very men who make us

laugh so heartily become profoundly sad. These Democrituses are Heraclituses as well. Beaumarchais was surly, Molière gloomy, Shakespeare melancholy.

The fact is, then, that the grotesque is one of the supreme beauties of the drama. It is not simply an appropriate element of it, but is oftentimes a necessity. Sometimes it appears in homogeneous masses, in entire characters, as Daudin, Prusias, Trissotin, Brid'oison, Juliet's nurse; sometimes impregnated with terror, as Richard III, Bégears, Tartuffe, Mephistopheles; sometimes, too, with a veil of grace and refinement, as Figaro, Osric, Mercutio, Don Juan. It finds its way in everywhere; for just as the most commonplace have their occasional moments of sublimity, so the most exalted frequently pay tribute to the trivial and ridiculous. Thus, often impalpable, often imperceptible, it is always present on the stage, even when it says nothing, even when it keeps out of sight. Thanks to it, there is no thought of monotony. Sometimes it injects laughter, sometimes horror, into tragedy. It will bring Romeo face to face with the apothecary, Macbeth with the witches, Hamlet with the gravediggers. Sometimes it may, without discord, as in the scene between King Lear and his jester, mingle its shrill voice with the most sublime, the most dismal, the dreamiest music of the soul.

That is what Shakespeare alone among all has succeeded in doing, in a fashion of his own, which it would be no less fruitless than impossible to imitate--Shakespeare, the god of the stage, in whom, as in a trinity, the three characteristic geniuses of our stage, Corneille, Molière, Beaumarchais, seem united.

We see how quickly the arbitrary distinction between the species of poetry vanishes before common sense and taste. No less easily one might demolish the alleged rule of the two unities. We say two and not *three* unities, because unity of plot or of *ensemble*, the only true and well-founded one, was long ago removed from the sphere of discussion.

Distinguished contemporaries, foreigners and Frenchmen, have already attacked, both in theory and in practice, that fundamental law of the pseudo-Aristotelian code. Indeed, the combat was not likely to be a long one. At the first blow it cracked, so worm-eaten was that timber of the old scholastic hovel!

The strange thing is that the slaves of routine pretend to rest their rule of the two unities on probability, whereas reality is the very thing that destroys it. Indeed, what could be more improbable and absurd than this porch or peristyle or ante-chamber--vulgar places where our tragedies are obliging enough to develop themselves; whither conspirators come, no one knows whence, to declaim against the tyrant, and the tyrant to declaim against the conspirators, each in turn, as if they had said to one another in bucolic phrase:-- Alternis cantemus; amant alterna Camenæ.

Where did anyone ever see a porch or peristyle of that sort? What could be more opposed--we will not say to the truth, for the scholastics hold it very cheap, but to probability? The result is that everything that is too characteristic, too intimate, too local, to happen in the ante-chamber or on the street-corner--that is to say, the whole drama--

takes place in the wings. We see on the stage only the elbows of the plot, so to speak; its hands are somewhere else. Instead of scenes we have narrative; instead of tableaux, descriptions. Solemn-faced characters, placed, as in the old chorus, between the drama and ourselves, tell us what is going on in the temple, in the palace, on the public square, until we are tempted many a time to call out to them: "Indeed! then take us there! It must be very entertaining--a fine sight!" to which they would reply no doubt: "It is quite possible that it might entertain or interest you, but that isn't the question; we are the guardians of the dignity of the French Melpomene." and there you are!

"But," someone will say, "this rule that you discard is borrowed from the Greek drama." Wherein, pray, do the Greek stage and drama resemble our stage and drama? Moreover, we have already shown that the vast extent of the ancient stage enabled it to include a whole locality, so that the poet could, according to the exigencies of the plot, transport it at his pleasure from one part of the stage to another, which is practically equivalent to a change of stage-setting. Curious contradiction! the Greek theatre, restricted as it was to a national and religious object, was much more free than ours, whose only object is the enjoyment, and, if you please, the instruction, of the spectator. The reason is that the one obeys only the laws that are suited to it, while the other takes upon itself conditions of existence which are absolutely foreign to its essence. One is artistic, the other artificial.

People are beginning to understand in our day that exact localization is one of the first elements of reality. The speaking or acting characters are not the only ones who engrave on the minds of the spectators a faithful representation of the facts. The place where this or that catastrophe took place becomes a terrible and inseparable witness thereof; and the absence of silent characters of this sort would make the greatest scenes of history incomplete in the drama. Would the poet dare to murder Rizzio elsewhere than in Mary Stuart's chamber? to stab Henri IV elsewhere than in Rue de la Ferronerie, all blocked with drays and carriages? to burn Jeanne d'Arc elsewhere than in the Vieux-Marché? to despatch the Duc de Guise elsewhere than in that château of Blois where his ambition roused a popular assemblage to frenzy? to behead Charles I and Louis XVI elsewhere than in those ill-omened localities whence Whitehall or the Tuileries may be seen, as if their scaffolds were appurtenances of their palaces?

Unity of time rests on no firmer foundation than unity of place. A plot forcibly confined within twenty-four hours is as absurd as one confined within a peristyle. Every plot has its proper duration as well as its appropriate place. Think of administering the same dose of time to all events! of applying the same measure to everything! You would laugh at a cobbler who should attempt to put the same shoe on every foot. to cross unity of time and unity of place like the bars of a cage, and pedantically to introduce therein, in the name of Aristotle, all the deeds, all the nations, all the figures which Providence sets before us in such vast numbers in real life,--to proceed thus is to mutilate men and things, to cause history to make wry faces. Let us say, rather, that everything will die in the operation, and so the dogmatic mutilaters reach their ordinary result: what was alive in the chronicles is dead in tragedy. That is why the cage of the unities often contains only a skeleton.

And then, if twenty-four hours can be comprised in two, it is a logical consequence that four hours may contain forty-eight. Thus Shakespeare's unity must be different from Corneille's. 'Tis pity!

But these are the wretched quibbles with which mediocrity, envy and routine has pestered genius for two centuries past! By such means the flight of our greatest poets has been cut short. Their wings have been clipped with the scissors of the unities. and what has been given us in exchange for the eagle feathers stolen from Corneille and Racine? Campistron.

We imagine that someone may say: "There is something in too frequent changes of scene which confuses and fatigues the spectator, and which produces a bewildering effect on his attention; it may be, too, that manifold transitions from place to place, from one time to another time, demand explanations which repel the attention; one should also avoid leaving, in the midst of a plot, gaps which prevent the different parts of the drama from adhering closely to one another, and which, moreover, puzzle the spectator because he does not know what there may be in those gaps." But these are precisely the difficulties which art has to meet. These are some of the obstacles peculiar to one subject or another, as to which it would be impossible to pass judgment once for all. It is for genius to overcome, not for treatises or poetry to evade them.

A final argument, taken from the very bowels of the art, would of itself suffice to show the absurdity of the rule of the two unities. It is the existence of the third unity, unity of plot--the only one that is universally admitted, because it results from a fact: neither the human eye nor the human mind can grasp more than one ensemble at one time. This one is as essential as the other two are useless. It is the one which fixes the view-point of the drama; now, by that very fact, it excludes the other two. There can no more be three unities in the drama than three horizons in a picture. But let us be careful not to confound unity with simplicity of plot. The former does not in any way exclude the secondary plots on which the principal plot may depend. It is necessary only that these parts, being skilfully subordinated to the general plan, shall tend constantly toward the central plot and group themselves about it at the various stages, or rather on the various levels of the drama. Unity of plot is the stage law of perspective.

"But," the customs-officers of thought will cry, "great geniuses have submitted to these rules which you spurn!" Unfortunately, yes. But what would those admirable men have done if they had been left to themselves? At all events they did not accept your chains without a struggle. You should have seen how Pierre Corneille, worried and harassed at his first step in the art on account of his marvellous work, Le Cid, struggled under Mairet, Claveret, d'Aubignac and Scudéri! How he denounced to posterity the violent attacks of those men, who, he says, made themselves "all white with Aristotle!" You should read how they said to him--and we quote from books of the time: "Young man, you must learn before you teach; and unless one is a Scaliger or a Heinsius that is intolerable!" Thereupon Corneille rebels and asks if their purpose is to force him "much below Claveret." Here Scudéri waxes indignant at such a display of pride, and reminds the "thrice great author of *Le Cid* of the modest words in which Tasso, the greatest man

of his age, began his apology for the finest of his works against the bitterest and most unjust censure perhaps that will ever be pronounced. M. Corneille," he adds, "shows in his replies that he is as far removed from that author's moderation as from his merit." The young man *so justly and gently reproved* dares to protest; thereupon Scudéri returns to the charge; he calls to his assistance the *Eminent Academy*: "Pronounce, O my Judges, a decree worthy of your eminence, which will give all Europe to know that *Le Cid* is not the chef-d'œuvre of the greatest man in France, but the least judicious performance of M. Corneille himself. You are bound to do it, both for your own private renown; and for that of our people in general, who are concerned in this matter; inasmuch as foreigners who may see this precious masterpiece--they who have possessed a Tasso or a Guarini--might think that our greatest masters were no more than apprentices."

These few instructive lines contain the everlasting tactics of envious routine against growing talent--tactics which are still followed in our own day, and which, for example, added such a curious page to the youthful essays of Lord Byron. Scudéri gives us its quintessence. In like manner the earlier works of a man of genius are always preferred to the newer ones, in order to prove that he is going down instead of up--*Mélite and La Galérie du Palais* placed above *Le Cid*. and the names of the dead are always thrown at the heads of the living--Corneille stoned with Tasso and Guarini (Guarini!), as, later, Racine will be stoned with Corneille, Voltaire with Racine, and as to-day, everyone who shows signs of rising is stoned with Corneille, Racine and Voltaire. These tactics, as will be seen, are well-worn; but they must be effective as they are still in use. However, the poor devil of a great man still breathed. Here we cannot help but admire the way in which Scudéri, the bully of this tragiccomedy, forced to the wall, blackguards and maltreats him, how pitilessly he unmasks his classical artillery, how he shows the author of *Le Cid* "what the episodes should be, according to Aristotle, who tells us in the tenth and sixteenth chapters of his Poetics"; how he crushes Corneille, in the name of the same Aristotle "in the eleventh chapter of his *Art of Poetry*, wherein we find the condemnation of Le Cid"; in the name of Plato, "in the tenth book of his *Republic*"; in the name of Marcellinus, "as may be seen in the twenty-seventh book"; in the name of "the tragedies of Niobe and Jephthah"; in the name of the "Ajax of Sophocles"; in the name of "the example of Euripides"; in the name of "Heinsius, chapter six of the *Constitution* of *Tragedy*; and the younger Scaliger in his poems"; and finally, in the name of the Canonists and Jurisconsults, under the title "Nuptials." The first arguments were addressed to the Academy, the last one was aimed at the Cardinal. After the pin-pricks the blow with a club. A judge was needed to decide the question. Chapelain gave judgment. Corneille saw that he was doomed; the lion was muzzled, or, as was said at the time, the crow (*Corneille*) was plucked. Now comes the painful side of this grotesque performance: after he had been thus quenched at his first flash, this genius, thoroughly modern, fed upon the Middle Ages and Spain, being compelled to lie to himself and to hark back to ancient times, drew for us that Castilian Rome, which is sublime beyond question, but in which, except perhaps in *Nicomède*, which was so ridiculed by the eighteenth century for its dignified and simple colouring, we find neither the real Rome nor the true Corneille.

Racine was treated to the same persecution, but did not make the same resistance. Neither in his genius nor in his character was there any of Corneille's lofty asperity. He submitted in silence and sacrificed to the scorn of his time his enchanting elegy of *Esther*, his magnificent epic, *Athalie*. So that we can but believe that, if he had not been paralyzed as he was by the prejudices of his epoch, if he had come in contact less frequently with the classic cramp-fish, he would not have failed to introduce Locuste in his drama between Narcisse and Neron, and above all things would not have relegated to the wings the admirable scene of the banquet at which Seneca's pupil poisons Britannicus in the cup of reconciliation. But can we demand of the bird that he fly under the receiver of an air-pump? What a multitude of beautiful scenes the *people of taste* have cost us, from Scudéri to La Harpe! A noble work might be composed of all that their scorching breath has withered in its germ. However, our great poets have found a way none the less to cause their genius to blaze forth through all these obstacles. often the attempt to confine them behind walls of dogmas and rules is vain. Like the Hebrew giant they carry their prison doors with them to the mountains.

But still the same refrain is repeated, and will be, no doubt, for a long while to come: "Follow the rules! Copy the models! It was the rules that shaped the models." One moment! In that case there are two sorts of models, those which are made according to the rules, and, prior to them, those according to which the rules were made. Now, in which of these two categories should genius seek a place for itself? Although it is always disagreeable to come in contact with pedants, is it not a thousand times better to give them lessons than to receive lessons from them? and then--copy! Is the reflection equal to the light? Is the satellite which travels unceasingly in the same circle equal to the central creative planet? With all his poetry Virgil is no more than the moon of Homer.

And whom me are we to copy, I pray to know? The ancients? We have just shown that their stage has nothing in common with ours. Moreover, Voltaire, who will have none of Shakespeare, will have none of the Greeks, either. Let him tell us why: "The Greeks ventured to produce scenes no less revolting to us. Hippolyte, crushed by his fall, counts his wounds and utters doleful cries. Philoctetes falls in his paroxysms of pain; black blood flows from his wound. Oedipus, covered with the blood that still drops from the sockets of the eyes he has torn out, complains bitterly of gods and men. We hear the shrieks of Clytemnestra, murdered by her own son, and Electra, on the stage, cries: 'Strike! spare her not! she did not spare our father.' Prometheus is fastened to a rock by nails driven through his stomach and his arms. The Furies reply to Clytemnestra's bleeding shade with inarticulate roars. Art was in its infancy in the time of Æschylus as it was in London in Shakespeare's time."

Whom shall we copy, then? The moderns? What! copy copies! God forbid!

"But," someone else will object, "according to your conception of the art, you seem to look for none but great poets, to count always upon genius." Art certainly does not count upon mediocrity. It prescribes no rules for it, it knows nothing of it; in fact, mediocrity has no existence so far as art is concerned; art supplies wings, not crutches. Alas! D'Aubignac followed rules, Campistron copied models. What does it matter to art? It

does not build its palaces for ants. It lets them make their ant-hill, without taking the trouble to find out whether they have built their burlesque imitation of its palace upon its foundation.

The critics of the scholastic school place their poets in a strange position. On the one hand they cry incessantly: "Copy the models!" On the other hand they have a habit of declaring that "the models are inimitable!" Now, if their craftsman, by dint of hard work, succeeds in forcing through this dangerous defile some colourless tracing of the masters, these ungrateful wretches, after examining the new *refaccimiento*, exclaim sometimes: "This doesn't resemble anything!" and sometimes: "This resembles everything!" and by virtue of a logic made for the occasion each of these formulæ is a criticism.

Let us then speak boldly. The time for it has come, and it would be strange if, in this age, liberty, like the light, should penetrate everywhere except to the one place where freedom is most natural--the domain of thought. Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general laws of nature, which soar above the whole field of art, and the special rules which result from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition. The former are of the essence, eternal, and do not change; the latter are variable, external, and are used but once. The former are the framework that supports the house; the latter the scaffolding which is used in building it, and which is made anew for each building. In a word, the former are the flesh and bones, the latter the clothing, of the drama. But these rules are not written in the treatises on poetry. Richelet has no idea of their existence. Genius, which divines rather than learns, devises for each work the general rules from the general plan of things, the special rules from the separate ensemble of the subject treated; not after the manner of the chemist, who lights the fire under his furnace, heats his crucible, analyzes and destroys; but after the manner of the bee, which flies on its golden wings, lights on each flower and extracts its honey, leaving it as brilliant and fragrant as before.

The poet--let us insist on this point--should take counsel therefore only of nature, truth, and inspiration which is itself both truth and nature. "Quando he," says Lope de Vega,

"Quando he de escrivir una comedia,
Encierro los preceptos con seis llaves."

To secure these precepts "six keys" are none too many, in very truth. Let the poet beware especially of copying anything whatsoever--Shakespeare no more than Molière, Schiller no more than Corneille. If genuine talent could abdicate its own nature in this matter, and thus lay aside its original personality, to transform itself into another, it would lose everything by playing this rôle of its own double. It is as if a god should turn valet. We must draw our inspiration from the original sources. It is the same sap, distributed through the soil, that produces all the trees of the forest, so different in bearing power, in fruit, in foliage. It is the same nature that fertilizes and nourishes the most diverse geniuses. The poet is a tree that may be blown about by all winds and watered by every fall of dew; and bears his works as his fruit, as the fablier of old bore his fables. Why

attach one's self to a master, or graft one's self upon a model? It were better to be a bramble or a thistle, fed by the same earth as the cedar and the palm, than the fungus or the lichen of those noble trees. The bramble lives, the fungus vegetates. Moreover, however great the cedar and the palm may be, it is not with the sap one sucks from them that one can become great one's self. A giant's parasite will be at best a dwarf. The oak, colossus that it is, can produce and sustain nothing more than the mistletoe.

Let there be no misunderstanding: if some of our poets have succeeded in being great, even when copying, it is because, while forming themselves on the antique model, they have often listened to the voice of nature and to their own genius--it is because they have been themselves in some one respect. Their branches became entangled in those of the near-by tree, but their roots were buried deep in the soil of art. They were the ivy, not the mistletoe. Then came imitators of the second rank, who, having neither roots in the earth, nor genius in their souls, had to confine themselves to imitation. As Charles Nodier says: "After the school of Athens, the school of Alexandria." Then there was a deluge of mediocrity; then there came a swarm of those treatises on poetry, so annoying to true talent, so convenient for mediocrity. We were told that everything was done, and God was forbidden to create more Molières or Corneilles. Memory was put in place of imagination. Imagination itself was subjected to hard-and-fast rules, and aphorisms were made about it: "to imagine," says La Harpe, with his naïve assurance, "is in substance to remember, that is all."

But nature! Nature and truth!--and here, in order to prove that, far from demolishing art, the new ideas aim only to reconstruct it more firmly and on a better foundation, let us try to point out the impassable limit which in our opinion, separates reality according to art from reality according to nature. It is careless to confuse them as some ill-informed partisans of *romanticism* do. Truth in art cannot possibly be, as several writers have claimed, *absolute* reality. Art cannot produce the thing itself. Let us imagine, for example, one of those unreflecting promoters of absolute nature, of nature viewed apart from art, at the performance of a romantic play, say *Le Cid*. "What's that?" he will ask at the first word. "The Cid speaks in verse? It isn't *natural* to speak in verse."--"How would you have him speak, pray?"--"In prose." Very good. A moment later, "How's this!" he will continue, if he is consistent; "the Cid is speaking French!"--"Well?"--"Nature demands that he speak his own language; he can't speak anything but Spanish."

We shall fail entirely to understand, but again--very good. You imagine that this is all? By no means: before the tenth sentence in Castilian, he is certain to rise and ask if the Cid who is speaking is the real Cid, in flesh and blood. By what right does the actor, whose name is Pierre or Jacques, take the name of the Cid? That is *false*. There is no reason why he should not go on to demand that the sun should be substituted for the footlights, *real* trees and *real* houses for those deceitful wings. For, once started on that road, logic has you by the collar, and you cannot stop.

We must admit, therefore, or confess ourselves ridiculous, that the domains of art and of nature are entirely distinct. Nature and art are two things--were it not so, one or the other would not exist. Art, in addition to its idealistic side, has a terrestrial, material side. Let it

do what it will, it is shut in between grammar and prosody, between Vaugelas and Richelet. For its most capricious creations, it has formulæ, methods of execution, a complete apparatus to set in motion. For genius there are delicate instruments, for mediocrity, tools.

It seems to us that someone has already said that the drama is a mirror wherein nature is reflected. But if it be an ordinary mirror, a smooth and polished surface, it will give only a dull image of objects, with no relief--faithful, but colourless; everyone knows that colour and light are lost in a simple reflection. The drama, therefore, must be a concentrating mirror, which, instead of weakening, concentrates and condenses the coloured rays, which makes of a mere gleam a light, and of a light a flame. Then only is the drama acknowledged by art.

The stage is an optical point. Everything that exists in the world--in history, in life, in man--should be and can be reflected therein, but under the magic wand of art. Art turns the leaves of the ages, of nature, studies chronicles, strives to reproduce actual facts (especially in respect to manners and peculiarities, which are much less exposed to doubt and contradiction that are concrete facts), restores what the chroniclers have lopped off, harmonises what they have collected, divines and supplies their omissions, fills their gaps with imaginary scenes which have the colour of the time, groups what they have left scattered about, sets in motion anew the threads of Providence which work the human marionettes, clothes the whole with a form at once poetical and natural, and imparts to it that vitality of truth and brilliancy which gives birth to illusion, that prestige of reality which arouses the enthusiasm of the spectator, and of the poet first of all, for the poet is sincere. Thus the aim of art is almost divine: to bring to life again if it is writing history, to create if it is writing poetry.

It is a grand and beautiful sight to see this broad development of a drama wherein art powerfully seconds nature; of a drama wherein the plot moves on to the conclusion with a firm and unembarrassed step, without diffuseness and without undue compression; of a drama, in short, wherein the poet abundantly fulfills the multifold object of art, which is to open to the spectator a double prospect, to illuminate at the same time the interior and the exterior of mankind: the exterior by their speech and their acts, the interior, by asides and monologues; to bring together, in a word, in the same picture, the drama of life and the drama of conscience.

It will readily be imagined that, for a work of this kind, if the poet must *choose* (and he must), he should choose, not the *beautiful*, but the *characteristic*. Not that it is advisable to "make local colour," as they say to-day; that is, to add as an afterthought a few discordant touches here and there to a work that is at best utterly conventional and false. The local colour should not be on the surface of the drama, but in its substance, in the very heart of the work, whence it spreads of itself, naturally, evenly, and, so to speak, into every corner of the drama, as the sap ascends from the root to the tree's topmost leaf. The drama should be thoroughly impregnated with this colour of the time, which should be, in some sort, in the air, so that one detects it only on entering the theatre, and that on going forth one finds one's self in a different period and atmosphere. It requires some

study, some labour, to attain this end; so much the better. It is well that the avenues of art should be obstructed by those brambles from which everybody recoils except those of powerful will. Besides, it is this very study, fostered by an ardent inspiration, which will ensure the drama against a vice that kills it--the *commonplace*. to be commonplace is the failing of short-sighted, short-breathed poets. In this tableau of the stage, each figure must be held down to its most prominent, most individual, most precisely defined characteristic. Even the vulgar and the trivial should have an accent of their own. Like God, the true poet is present in every part of his work at once. Genius resembles the die which stamps the king's effigy on copper and golden coins alike.

We do not hesitate--and this will demonstrate once more to honest men how far we are from seeking to discredit the art--we do not hesitate to consider verse as one of the means best adapted to protect the drama from the scourge we have just mentioned, as one of the most powerful dams against the irruption of the commonplace, which, like democracy, is always flowing between full banks in men's minds. and at this point we beg the younger literary generation, already so rich in men and in works, to allow us to point out an error into which it seems to have fallen--an error too fully justified, indeed, by the extraordinary aberrations of the old school. The new century is at that growing age at which one can readily set one's self right.

There has appeared of late, like a penultimate branching-out of the old classical trunk, or, better still, like one of those excrescences, those polypi, which decrepitude develops, and which are a sign of decomposition much more than a proof of life--there has appeared a strange school of dramatic poetry. This school seems to us to have had for its master and its fountain-head the poet who marks the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the man of wearisome description and periphrases--that Delille who, they say, toward the close of his life, boasted, after the fashion of the Homeric catalogues, of having made twelve camels, four dogs, three horses, including Job's, six tigers, two cats, a chess-board, a backgammonboard, a checker-board, a billiard-table, several winters, many summers, a multitude of springs, fifty sunsets, and so many daybreaks that he had lost count of them.

Now, Delille went into tragedy. He is the father (he, and not Racine, God save the mark!) of an alleged school of refinement and taste which flourished until recently. Tragedy is not to this school what it was to Will Shakespeare, say, a source of emotions of every sort, but a convenient frame for the solution of a multitude of petty descriptive problems which it propounds as it goes along. This muse, far from spurning, as the true French classic school does, the trivial and degrading things of life, eagerly seeks them out and brings them together. The grotesque, shunned as undesirable company by the tragedy of Louis the Fourteenth's day, cannot pass unnoticed before her. *It must be described*, that is to say, ennobled.

A scene in the guard-house, a popular uprising, the fish-market, the galleys, the wine-shop, the *poule au pot* of Henri Quatre, are treasure-trove in her eyes. She seizes upon this canaille, washes it clean, and sews her tinsel and spangles over its villainies; *purpureus assuitur pannus*. Her object seems to be to deliver patents of

nobility to all these roturiers of the drama; and each of these patents under the great seal is a speech.

This muse, as may be imagined, is of a rare prudery. Wonted as she is to the caresses of periphrasis, plain-speaking, if she should occasionally be exposed to it, would horrify her. It does not accord with her dignity to speak naturally. She *underlines* old Corneille for his blunt way of speaking, as in,--

"A *heap of men* ruined by debt and crimes."
"Chimène, *who'd have thought it*? Rodrigue, *who'd have said it*?",
"When their Flaminius *haggled* with Hannibal."
"Oh! do not *embroil* me with the Republic."

She still has her "tour beau, monsieur!" on her heart. and it needed many "seigneurs" and "madames" to procure forgiveness for our admirable Racine for his monosyllabic "dogs!" and for so brutally bestowing Claudius in Agrippina's bed.

This Melpomene, as she is called, would shudder at the thought of touching a chronicle. She leaves to the costumer the duty of learning the period of the dramas she writes. In her eyes history is bad form and bad taste. How, for example, can one tolerate kings and queens who swear? They must be elevated from mere regal dignity to tragic dignity. It was in a promotion of this sort that she exalted Henri IV. It was thus that the people's king, purified by M. Legouvé, found his "ventre-saint-gris" ignominiously banished from his mouth by two sentences, and that he was reduced, like the girl in the old *fabliau*, to the necessity of letting fall from those royal lips only pearls and sapphires and rubies: the apotheosis of falsity, in very truth.

The fact is that nothing is so commonplace as this conventional refinement and nobility. Nothing original, no imagination, no invention in this style; simply what one has seen everywhere--rhetoric, bombast, commonplaces, flowers of college eloquence, poetry after the style of Latin verses. The poets of this school are eloquent after the manner of stage princes and princesses, always sure of finding in the costumer's labelled cases, cloaks and pinchbeck crowns, which have no other disadvantage than that of having been used by everybody. If these poets never turn the leaves of the Bible, it is not because they have not a bulky book of their own, the *Dictionnaire de rimes*. That is the source of their poetry--*fontes aquarum*.

It will be seen that, in all this, nature and truth get along as best they can. It would be great good luck if any remnants of either should survive in this cataclysm of false art, false style, false poetry. This is what has caused the errors of several of our distinguished reformers. Disgusted by the stiffness, the ostentation, the *pomposo*, of this alleged dramatic poetry, they have concluded that the elements of our poetic language were incompatible with the natural and the true. The Alexandrine had wearied them so often, that they condemned it without giving it a hearing, so to speak, and decided, a little hastily, perhaps, that the drama should be written in prose.

They were mistaken. If in fact the false is predominant in the style as well as in the action of certain French tragedies, it is not the verses that should be held responsible therefore, but the versifiers. It was needful to condemn, not the form employed, but those who employed it: the workmen, not the tool.

To convince one's self how few obstacles the nature of our poetry places in the way of the free expression of all that is true, we should study our verse, not in Racine, perhaps, but often in Corneille and always in Molière. Racine, a divine poet, is elegiac, lyric, epic; Molière is dramatic. It is time to deal sternly with the criticisms heaped upon that admirable style by the wretched taste of the last century, and to proclaim aloud that Molière occupies the topmost pinnacle of our drama, not only as a poet, but also as a writer. *Palmas vere habet iste duas.*

In his work the verse surrounds the idea, becomes of its very essence, compresses and develops it at once, imparts to it a more slender, more definite, more complete form, and gives us, in some sort, an extract thereof. Verse is the optical form of thought. That is why it is especially adapted to the perspective of the stage. Constructed in a certain way, it communicates its relief to things which, but for it, would be considered insignificant and trivial. It makes the tissue of style finer and firmer. It is the knot which stays the thread. It is the girdle which holds up the garment and gives it all its folds. What could nature and the true lose, then, by entering into verse? We ask the question of our prose-writers themselves--what do they lose in Molière's poetry? Does wine--we beg pardon for another trivial illustration--does wine cease to be wine when it is bottled?

If we were entitled to say what, in our opinion, the style of dramatic poetry should be, we would declare for a free, outspoken, sincere verse, which dares say everything without prudery, express its meaning without seeking for words; which passes naturally from comedy to tragedy, from the sublime to the grotesque; by turns practical and poetical, both artistic and inspired, profound and impulsive, of wide range and true; verse which is apt opportunely to displace the cæsura, in order to disguise the monotony of Alexandrines; more inclined to the *enjambement* that lengthens the line, than to the inversion of phrases that confuses the sense; faithful to rhyme, that enslaved queen, that supreme charm of our poetry, that creator of our metre; verse that is inexhaustible in the verity of its turns of thought, unfathomable in its secrets of composition and of grace; assuming, like Proteus, a thousand forms without changing its type and character; avoiding long speeches; taking delight in dialogue; always hiding behind the characters of the drama; intent, before everything, on being in its place, and when it falls to its lot to be *beautiful*, being so only by chance, as it were, in spite of itself and unconsciously; lyric, epic, dramatic, at need; capable of running through the whole gamut of poetry, of skipping from high notes to low, from the most exalted to the most trivial ideas, from the most extravagant to the most solemn, from the most superficial to the most abstract, without ever passing beyond the limits of a spoken scene; in a word, such verse as a man would write whom a fairy had endowed with Corneille's mind and Molière's brain. It seems to us that such verse would be as *fine as prose*.

There would be nothing in common between poetry of this sort and that of which we made a *post mortem* examination just now. The distinction will be easy to point out if a certain man of talent, to whom the author of this book is under personal obligation, will allow us to borrow his clever phrase: the other poetry was descriptive, this would be picturesque.

Let us repeat, verse on the stage should lay aside all self-love, all exigence, all coquetry. It is simply a form, and a form which should admit everything, which has no laws to impose on the drama, but on the contrary should receive everything from it, to be transmitted to the spectator--French, Latin, texts of laws, royal oaths, popular phrases, comedy, tragedy, laughter, tears, prose and poetry. Woe to the poet whose verse does not speak out! But this form is a form of bronze which encases the thought in its metre beneath which the drama is indestructible, which engraves it more deeply on the actor's mind, warns him of what he omits and of what he adds, prevents him from changing his rôle, from substituting himself for the author, makes each word sacred, and causes what the poet has said to remain vivid a long while in the hearer's memory. The idea, when steeped in verse, suddenly assumes a more incisive, more brilliant quality.

One feels that prose, which is necessarily more timid, obliged to wean the drama from anything like epic or lyric poetry, reduced to dialogue and to matter-of-fact, is a long way from possessing these resources. It has much narrower wings. and then, too, it is much more easy of access; mediocrity is at its ease in prose; and for the sake of a few works of distinction such as have appeared of late, the art would very soon be overloaded with abortions and embryos. Another faction of the reformers incline to drama written in both prose and verse, as Shakespeare composed it. This method has its advantages. There might, however, be some incongruity in the transitions from one form to the other; and when a tissue is homogeneous it is much stouter. However, whether the drama should be written in prose is only a secondary question. The rank of a work is certain to be fixed, not according to its form, but according to its intrinsic value. In questions of this sort, there is only one solution. There is but one weight that can turn the scale in the balance of art--that is genius.

Meanwhile, the first, the indispensable merit of a dramatic writer, whether he write in prose or verse, is correctness. Not a mere superficial correctness, the merit or defect of the descriptive school, which makes Lhomond and Restaut the two wings of its Pegasus; but that intimate, deep-rooted, deliberate correctness, which is permeated with the genius of a language, which has sounded its roots and searched its etymology; always unfettered, because it is sure of its footing, and always more in harmony with the logic of the language. Our Lady Grammar leads the one in leading-strings; the other holds grammar in leash. It can venture anything, can create or invent its style; it has a right to do so. For, whatever certain men may have said who did not think what they were saying, and among whom we must place, notably, him who writes these lines, the French tongue is not fixed and never will be. A language does not become fixed. The human intellect is always on the march, or, if you prefer, in movement, and languages with it. Things are made so. When the body changes, how could the coat not change? The French of the nineteenth century can no more be the French of the eighteenth, than that

is the French of the seventeenth, or than the French of the seventeenth is that of the sixteenth. Montaigne's language is not Rabelais's, Pascal's is not Montaigne's, Montesquieu's is not Pascal's. Each of the four languages, taken by itself, is admirable because it is original. Every age has its own ideas; it must have also words adapted to those ideas. Languages are like the sea, they move to and fro incessantly. At certain times they leave one shore of the world of thought and overflow another. All that their waves thus abandon dries up and vanishes. It is in this wise that ideas vanish, that words disappear. It is the same with human tongues as with everything. Each age adds and takes away something. What can be done? It is the decree of fate. In vain, therefore, should we seek to petrify the mobile physiognomy of our idiom in a fixed form. In vain do our literary Joshuas cry out to the language to stand still; languages and the sun do not stand still. The day when they become *fixed*, they are dead.--That is why the French of a certain contemporary school is a dead language.

Such are, substantially, but without the more elaborate development which would make the evidence in their favour more complete, the *present* ideas of the author of this book concerning the drama. He is far, however, from presuming to put forth his first dramatic essay as an emanation of these ideas, which, on the contrary, are themselves, it may be, simply results of its execution. It would be very convenient for him, no doubt, and very clever, to rest his book on his preface, and to defend each by the other. He prefers less cleverness and more frankness. He proposes, therefore, to be the first to point out the extreme tenuity of the thread connecting this preface with his drama. His first plan, dictated by his laziness, was to give the work to the public entirely unattended: el demonio sin las cuernas, as Yriarte said. It was only after he had duly brought it to a close, that, at the solicitations of a few friends, blinded by their friendship, no doubt, he determined to reckon with himself in a preface--to draw, so to speak, a map of the poetic voyage he had made, to take account of the acquisitions, good or bad, that he had brought home, and of the new aspects in which the domain of art had presented itself to his mind. Someone will take advantage of this admission, doubtless, to repeat the reproach already uttered by a critic in Germany, that he has written "a treatise in defence of his poetry." What does it matter? In the first place he was much more inclined to demolish treatises on poetry than to write them. and then, would it not be better always to write treatises based on a poem, than to write poems based on a treatise? But no, we repeat that he has neither the talent to create nor the presumption to put forth systems. "Systems," cleverly said Voltaire, "are like rats which pass through twenty holes, only to find at last two or three which will not let them through." It would have been, therefore, to undertake a useless task and one much beyond his strength. What he has pleaded, on the contrary, is the freedom of art against the despotism of systems, codes and rules. It is his habit to follow at all risks whatever he takes for his inspiration, and to change moulds as often as he changes metals. Dogmatism in the arts is what he shuns before everything. God forbid that he should aspire to be numbered among those men, be they romanticists or classicists, who compose works *according to their own systems,* who condemn themselves to have but one form in their minds, to be forever *proving* something, to follow other laws than those of their temperaments and their natures. The artificial work of these men, however talented they may be, has no existence so far as art is concerned. It is a theory, not poetry.

Having attempted, in all that has gone before, to point out what, in our opinion, was the origin of the drama, what its character is, and what its style should be, the time has come to descend from these exalted general considerations upon the art to the particular case which has led us to put them forth. It remains for us to discourse to the reader of our work, of this *Cromwell*; and as it is not a subject in which we take pleasure, we will say very little about it in very few words.

Oliver Cromwell is one of those historical characters who are at once very famous and very little known. Most of his biographers--and among them there are some who are themselves historical--have left that colossal figure incomplete. It would seem that they dared not assemble all the characteristic features of that strange and gigantic prototype of the religious reformation, of the political revolution of England. Almost all of them have confined themselves to reproducing on a larger scale the simple and ominous profile drawn by Bossuet from his Catholic and monarchical standpoint, from his episcopal pulpit supported by the throne of Louis XIV.

Like everybody else, the author of this book went no further than that. The name of Oliver Cromwell suggested to him simply the bare conception of a fanatical regicide and a great captain. Only on prowling among the chronicles of the times, which he did with delight, and on looking through the English memoirs of the seventeenth century, was he surprised to find that a wholly new Cromwell was gradually exposed to his gaze. It was no longer simply Bossuet's Cromwell the soldier, Cromwell the politician: it was a complex, heterogeneous, multiple being, made up of all sorts of contraries--a mixture of much that was evil and much that was good, of genius and pettiness; a sort of Tiberius-Dandin, the tyrant of Europe and the plaything of his family; an old regicide, who delighted to humiliate the ambassadors of all the kings of Europe, and was tormented by his young royalist daughter; austere and gloomy in his manners, yet keeping four court jesters about him; given to the composition of wretched verses; sober, simple, frugal, yet a stickler for etiquette; a rough soldier and a crafty politician; skilled in theological disputation and very fond of it; a dull, diffuse, obscure orator, but clever in speaking the language of anybody whom he wished to influence; a hypocrite and a fanatic; a visionary swayed by phantoms of his childhood, believing in astrologers and banishing them; suspicious to excess, always threatening, rarely sanguinary; a strict observer of Puritan rules, and solemnly wasting several hours a day in buffoonery; abrupt and contemptuous with his intimates, caressing with the secretaries whom he feared, holding his remorse at bay with sophistry, paltering with his conscience, inexhaustible in adroitness, in tricks, in resources; mastering his imagination by his intelligence; grotesque and sublime; in a word, one of those men who are "square at the base," as they were described by Napoleon, himself their chief, in his mathematically exact and poetically figurative language.

He who writes these lines, in presence of this rare and impressive *ensemble*, felt that Bossuet's impassioned sketch was no longer sufficient for him. He began to walk about that lofty figure, and he was seized by a powerful temptation to depict the giant in all his aspects. It was a rich soil. Beside the man of war and the statesman, it remained to draw

the theologian, the pedant, the wretched poet, the seer of visions, the buffoon, the father, the husband, the human Proteus--in a word, the twofold Cromwell, *homo et vir*.

There is one period of his life, especially, in which this strange personality exhibits itself in all its forms. It is not as one might think at first blush, the period of the trial of Charles I, instinct as that is with depressing and terrible interest; but it is the moment when the ambitious mortal boldly attempted to pluck the fruit of that monarch's death; it is the moment when Cromwell, having attained what would have been to any other man the zenith of fortune--master of England, whose innumerable factions knelt silently at his feet; master of Scotland, of which he had made a satrapy, and of Ireland, which he had turned into a prison; master of Europe through his diplomacy and his fleets--seeks to fulfil the dream of his earliest childhood, the last ambition of his life; to make himself king. History never had a more impressive lesson in a more impressive drama. First of all, the Protector arranges to be urged to assume the crown: the august farce begins by addresses from municipalities, from counties; then there comes an act of Parliament. Cromwell, the anonymous author of the play, pretends to be displeased; we see him put out a hand toward the sceptre, then draw it back; by a devious path he draws near the throne from which he has swept the legitimate dynasty. At last he makes up his mind, suddenly; by his command Westminster is decked with flags, the daïs is built, the crown is ordered from the jewelers, the day is appointed for the ceremony.--Strange dénouement! On that very day, in presence of the populace, the troops, the House of Commons, in the great hall of Westminster, on that dais from which he expected to descend as king, suddenly, as if aroused by a shock, he seems to awaken at the sight of the crown, asks if he is dreaming, and what the meaning is of all this regal pomp, and in a speech that lasts three hours declines the kingly title.

Was it because his spies had warned him of two conspiracies formed by Cavaliers and Puritans in concert, which were intended, taking advantage of this misstep, to break out on the same day? Was it an inward revolution caused by the silence or the murmurs of the populace, discomposed to see their regicide ascend the throne? Or was it simply the sagacity of genius, the instinct of a far-seeing, albeit unbridled ambition, which realizes how one step forward changes a man's position and attitude, and which dares not expose its plebeian structure to the wind of unpopularity? Was it all these at once? This is a question which no contemporaneous document answers satisfactorily. So much the better: the poet's liberty is the more complete, and the drama is the gainer by the latitude which history affords it. It will be seen that here the latitude is ample and unique; this is, in truth, the decisive hour, the turning-point in Cromwell's life. It is the moment when his chimera escapes from him, when the present kills the future, when, to use an expressive colloquialism, his destiny *misses fire*. All of Cromwell is at stake in the comedy being played between England and himself.

Such then is the man and such the period of which we have tried to give an idea in this book.

The author has allowed himself to be seduced by the childlike diversion of touching the keys of that great harpsichord. Unquestionably, more skillful hands might have evoked a

thrilling and profound melody--not of those which simply caress the ear--but of those intimate harmonies which stir the whole man to the depths of his being, as if each key of the key-board were connected with a fibre of the heart. He has surrendered to the desire to depict all those fanaticisms, all those superstitions--maladies to which religion is subject at certain epochs; to the longing to "make playthings of all these men," as Hamlet says. to set in array about and below Cromwell, himself the centre and pivot of that court, of that people, of that little world, which attracts all to his cause and inspires all with his vigour, that twofold conspiracy devised by two factions which detest each other, but join hands to overthrow the man who blocks their path, but which unite simply without blending; and that Puritan faction, of divers minds, fanatical, gloomy, unselfish, choosing for leader the most insignificant of men for such a great part, the egotistical and cowardly Lambert; and the faction of the Cavaliers, featherheaded, merry, unscrupulous, reckless, devoted, led by the man who, aside from his devotion to the cause, was least fitted to represent it, the stern and upright Ormond; and those ambassadors, so humble and fawning before the soldier of fortune; and the court itself, an extraordinary mixture of upstarts and great nobles vying with one another in baseness; and the four jesters whom the contemptuous neglect of history permitted me to invent; and Cromwell's family, each member of which is as a thorn in his flesh; and Thurloe, the Protector's Achates; and the Jewish rabbi, Israel Ben-Manasseh, spy, usurer, and astrologer, vile on two sides, sublime on the third; and Rochester, the unique Rochester, absurd and clever, refined and crapulous, always cursing, always in love, and always tipsy, as he himself boasted to Bishop Burnet--wretched poet and gallant gentleman, vicious and ingenuous, staking his head and indifferent whether he wins the game provided it amuses him--in a word, capable of everything, of ruse and recklessness, calculation and folly, villainy and generosity; and the morose Carr, of whom history describes but one trait, albeit a most characteristic and suggestive one; and those other fanatics, of all ranks and varieties: Harrison, the thieving fanatic; Barebones the shopkeeping fanatic; Syndercomb, the bravo; Garland the tearful and pious assassin; gallant Colonel Overton, intelligent but a little declamatory; the austere and unbending Ludlow, who left his ashes and his epitaph at Lausanne; and lastly, "Milton and a few other men of mind," as we read in a pamphlet of 1675 (*Cromwell the Politician*), which reminds one of "a certain Dante" of the Italian chronicle.

We omit many less important characters, of each of whom, however, the actual life is known, and each of whom has his marked individuality, and all of whom contributed to the fascination which this vast historical scene exerted upon the author's imagination. From that scene he constructed this drama. He moulded it in verse, because he preferred to do so. One will discover on reading it how little thought he gave to his work while writing this preface--with what disinterestedness, for instance, he contended against the dogma of the unities. His drama does not leave London; it begins on June 25, 1657, at three in the morning, and ends on the 26th at noon. Observe that he has almost followed the classic formula, as the professors of poetry lay it down to-day. They need not, however, thank him for it. With the permission of history, not of Aristotle, the author constructed his drama thus; and because, when the interest is the same, he prefers a compact subject to a widely diffused one.

It is evident that, in its present proportions, this drama could not be given at one of our theatrical performances. It is too long. The reader will perhaps comprehend, none the less, that every part of it was written for the stage. It was on approaching his subject to study it that the author recognized, or thought that he recognized, the impossibility of procuring the performance of a faithful reproduction of it on our stage, in the exceptional position it now occupies, between the academic Charybdis and the administrative Scylla, between the literary juries and the political censorship. He was required to choose: either the wheedling, tricky, false tragedy, which may be acted, or the audaciously true drama, which is prohibited. The first was not worth the trouble of writing, so he preferred to attempt the second. That is why, hopeless of ever being put on the stage, he abandoned himself, freely and submissively, to the whims of composition, to the pleasure of painting with a freer hand, to the developments which his subject demanded, and which, even if they keep his drama off the stage, have at all events the advantage of making it almost complete from the historical standpoint. However, the reading committees are an obstacle of the second class only. If it should happen that the dramatic censorship, realizing how far this harmless, conscientious and accurate picture of Cromwell and his time is removed from our own age, should sanction its production on the stage, in that case, but only in that case, the author might perhaps extract from this drama a play which would venture to show itself on the boards, and would be hissed.

Until then he will continue to hold aloof from the theatre. and even then he will leave his cherished and tranquil retirement soon enough, for the agitation and excitement of this new world. God grant that he may never repent of having exposed the unspotted obscurity of his name and his person to the shoals, the squalls and tempests of the pit, and above all (for what does a mere failure matter?) to the wretched bickerings of the wings; of having entered that shifting, foggy, stormy atmosphere, where ignorance dogmatises, where envy hisses, where cabals cringe and crawl, where the probity of talent has so often been misrepresented, where the noble innocence of genius is sometimes so out of place, where mediocrity triumphs in lowering to its level the superiority which obscures it, where one finds so many small men for a single great one, so many nobodies for one Talma, so many myrmidons for one Achilles! This sketch will seem ill-tempered perhaps, and far from flattering; but does it not fully mark out the distance that separates our stage, the abode of intrigues and uproar, from the solemn serenity of the ancient stage?

Whatever may happen, he feels bound to warn in advance that small number of persons whom such a production might attract, that a play made up of excerpts from *Cromwell* would occupy no less time then is ordinarily occupied by a theatrical performance. It is difficult for a *romantic* theatre to maintain itself otherwise. Surely, if people desire something different from the tragedies in which one or two characters, abstract types of a purely metaphysical idea, stalk solemnly about on a narrow stage occupied only by a few confidents, colourless reflections of the heroes, employed to fill the gaps in a simple, unified, single-stringed plot; if that sort of thing has grown tiresome, a whole evening is not too much time to devote to delineating with some fullness a man among men, a whole critical period: the one, with his peculiar temperament, his genius which adapts itself thereto, his beliefs which dominate them

both, his passions which throw out of gear his temperament, his genius and his beliefs, his tastes which give colour to his passions, his habits which regulate his tastes and muzzle his passions, and with the innumerable procession of men of every sort whom these various elements keep in constant commotion about him; the other, with its manners, its laws, its fashions, its wit, its attainments, its superstitions, its events, and its people, whom all these first causes in turn mould like soft wax. It is needless to say that such a picture will be of huge proportions. Instead of one personality, like that with which the abstract drama of the old school is content, there will be twenty, forty, fifty,--who knows how many?--of every size and of every degree of importance. There will be a crowd of characters in the drama. Would it not be niggardly to assign it two hours only, and give up the rest of the performance to opera-comique or farce? to cut Shakespeare for Bobèche?--and do not imagine that, if the plot is well adjusted, the multitude of characters set in motion will cause fatigue to the spectator or confusion in the drama. Shakespeare, abounding in petty details, is at the same time, and for that very reason, imposing by the grandeur of the *ensemble*. It is the oak which casts a most extensive shadow with its myriads of slender leaves.

Let us hope that people in France will ere long become accustomed to devote a whole evening to a single play. In England and Germany there are plays that last six hours. The Greeks, about whom we hear so much, the Greeks--and after the fashion of Scudéri we will cite at this point the classicist Dacier, in the seventh chapter of his Poetics--the Greeks sometimes went so far as to have twelve or sixteen plays acted in a single day. Among a people who are fond of spectacles the attention is more lively than is commonly believed. The Mariage de Figaro, the connecting link of Beaumarchais's great trilogy, occupies the whole evening, and who was ever bored or fatigued by it. Beaumarchais was worthy to venture on the first step toward that goal of modern art at which it will be impossible to arrive in two hours, that profound, insatiable interest which results from a vast, lifelike and multiform plot. "But," someone will say, "this performance, consisting of a single play, would be monotonous, would seem terribly long."--Not so. On the contrary it would lose its present monotony and tediousness. For what is done now? The spectator's entertainment is divided into two or three sharply defined parts. At first he is given two hours of serious enjoyment, then one hour of hilarious enjoyment; these, with the hour of entr' actes, which we do not include in the enjoyment, make four hours. What would the romantic drama do? It would mingle and blend artistically these two kinds of enjoyment. It would lead the audience constantly from sobriety to laughter, from mirthful excitement to heart-breaking emotion, "from grave to gay, from pleasant to severe." For, as we have already proved, the drama is the grotesque in conjunction with the sublime, the soul within the body; it is tragedy beneath comedy. Do you not see that, by affording you repose from one impression by means of another, by sharpening the tragic upon the comic, the merry upon the terrible, and at need calling in the charms of the opera, these performances, while presenting but one play, would be worth a multitude of others? The romantic stage would make a piquant, savoury, diversified dish of that which, on the classic stage, is a drug divided into two pills.

The author has soon come to the end of what he had to say to the reader. He has no idea how the critics will greet this drama and these thoughts, summarily set forth, stripped of their corollaries and ramifications, put together *currente calamo*, and in haste to have done with them. Doubtless they will appear to "the disciples of La Harpe" most impudent and strange. But if perchance, naked and undeveloped as they are, they should have the power to start upon the road of truth this public whose education is so far advanced, and whose minds so many notable writings, of criticism or of original thought, books or newspapers, have already matured for art, let the public follow that impulsion, caring naught whether it comes from a man unknown, from a voice with no authority, from a work of little merit. It is a copper bell which summons the people to the true temple and the true God.

There is to-day the old literary régime as well as the old political régime. The last century still weighs upon the present one at almost every point. It is notably oppressive in the matter of criticism. For instance, you find living men who repeat to you this definition of taste let fall by Voltaire: "Taste in poetry is no different from what it is in women's clothes." Taste, then, is coquetry. Remarkable words, which depict marvellously the painted, *moucheté,* powdered poetry of the eighteenth century--that literature in paniers, pompons and falbalas. They give an admirable résumé of an age with which the loftiest geniuses could not come in contact without becoming petty, in one respect or another; of an age when Montesquieu was able and apt to produce *Le Temple de Gnide*, Voltaire *Le Temple du Goût*, Jean-Jacques *Le Devin du Village*. 130 Taste is the common sense of genius. This is what will soon be demonstrated by another school of criticism, powerful, outspoken, well-informed,--a school of the century which is beginning to put forth vigorous shoots under the dead and withered branches of the old school. This youthful criticism, as serious as the other is frivolous, as learned as the other is ignorant, has already established organs that are listened to, and one is sometimes surprised to find, even in the least important sheets, excellent articles emanating from it. Joining hands with all that is fearless and superior in letters, it will deliver us from two scourges: tottering classicism, and false *romanticism*, which has the presumption to show itself at the feet of the true. For modern genius already has its shadow, its copy, its parasite, its classic, which forms itself upon it, smears itself with its colours, assumes its livery, picks up its crumbs, and, like *the sorcerer's pupil*, puts in play, with words retained by the memory, elements of theatrical action of which it has not the secret. Thus it does idiotic things which its master many a time has much difficulty in making good. But the thing that must be destroyed first of all is the old false taste. Present-day literature must be cleansed of its rust. In vain does the rust eat into it and tarnish it. It is addressing a young, stern, vigorous generation, which does not understand it. The train of the eighteenth century is still dragging in the nineteenth; but we, we young men who have seen Bonaparte, are not the ones who will carry it.

We are approaching, then, the moment when we shall see the new criticism prevail, firmly established upon a broad and deep foundation. People generally will soon understand that writers should be judged, not according to rules and species, which are contrary to nature and art, but according to the immutable principles of the art of composition, and the special laws of their individual temperaments. The sound judgment

of all men will be ashamed of the criticism which broke Pierre Corneille on the wheel, gagged Jean Racine, and which ridiculously rehabilitated John Milton only by virtue of the epic code of Père le Bossu. People will consent to place themselves at the author's standpoint, to view the subject with his eyes, in order to judge a work intelligently. They will lay aside--and it is M. de Chateaubriand who speaks--"the paltry criticism of defects for the noble and fruitful criticism of beauties." It is time that all acute minds should grasp the thread that frequently connects what we, following our special whim, call "defects" with what we call "beauty." Defects--at all events those which we call by that name--are often the inborn, necessary, inevitable conditions of good qualities.

Scit genius, natale comes qui temperat astrum.

Who ever saw a medal without its reverse? a talent that had not some shadow with its brilliancy, some smoke with its flame? Such a blemish can be only the inseparable consequence of such beauty. This rough stroke of the brush, which offends my eye at close range, completes the effect and gives relief to the whole picture. Efface one and you efface the other. Originality is made up of such things. Genius is necessarily uneven. There are no high mountains without deep ravines. Fill up the valley with the mountain and you will have nothing but a steppe, a plateau, the plain of Les Sablons instead of the Alps, swallows and not eagles.

We must also take into account the weather, the climate, the local influences. The Bible, Homer, hurt us sometimes by their very sublimities. Who would want to part with a word of either of them? Our infirmity often takes fright at the inspired bold flights of genius, for lack of power to swoop down upon objects with such vast intelligence. and then, once again, there are defects which take root only in masterpieces; it is given only to certain geniuses to have certain defects. Shakespeare is blamed for his abuse of metaphysics, of wit, of redundant scenes, of obscenities, for his employment of the mythological nonsense in vogue in his time, for exaggeration, obscurity, bad taste, bombast, asperities of style. The oak, that giant tree which we were comparing to Shakespeare just now, and which has more than one point of resemblance to him, the oak has an unusual shape, gnarled branches, dark leaves, and hard, rough bark; but it is the oak.

And it is because of these qualities that it is the oak. If you would have a smooth trunk, straight branches, satiny leaves, apply to the pale birch, the hollow elder, the weeping willow; but leave the mighty oak in peace. Do not stone that which gives you shade.

The author of this book knows as well as any one the numerous and gross faults of his works. If it happens too seldom that he corrects them, it is because it is repugnant to him to return to a work that has grown cold. Moreover, what has he ever done that is worth that trouble? The labor that he would throw away in correcting the imperfections of his books, he prefers to use in purging his intellect of its defects. It is his method to correct one work only in another work.

However, no matter what treatment may be accorded his book, he binds himself not to defend it, in whole or in part. If his drama is worthless, what is the use of upholding it? If it is good, why defend it? Time will do the book justice or will wreak justice upon it. Its success for the moment is the affair of the publisher alone. If then the wrath of the critics is aroused by the publication of this essay, he will let them do their worst. What reply should he make to them? He is not one of those who speak, as the Castilian poet says, "through the mouths of their wounds."

Por la boca de su herida.

One last word. It may have been noticed that in this somewhat long journey through so many different subjects, the author has generally refrained from resting his personal views upon texts or citations of authorities. It is not, however, because he did not have them at his hand.

"If the poet establishes things that are impossible according to the rules of his art, he makes a mistake unquestionably; but it ceases to be a mistake when by this means he has reached the end that he aimed at; for he has found what he sought."--"They take for nonsense whatever the weakness of their intellects does not allow them to understand. They are especially prone to call absurd those wonderful passages in which the poet, in order the better to enforce his argument, departs, if we may so express it, from his argument. In fact, the precept which makes it a rule sometimes to disregard rules, is a mystery of the art which it is not easy to make men understand who are absolutely without taste and whom a sort of abnormality of mind renders insensible to those things which ordinarily impress men."

Who said the first? Aristotle. Who said the last? Boileau. By these two specimens you will see that the author of this drama might, as well as another, have shielded himself with proper names and taken refuge behind others' reputations. But he preferred to leave that style of argument to those who deem it unanswerable, universal and all-powerful. As for himself, he prefers reasons to authorities; he has always cared more for arms than for coats-of-arms.

October, 1827.