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LIFE-STORIES OF FAMOUS MEN

VOLTAIRE

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LIFE-STORIES OF FAMOUS MEN

VOLTAIRE

BY

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INTRODUCTORY

IT is fitting to recall, in the years after the Great War, that Voltaire was the first really warm friend England had among the great writers of France; and that, despite much contrary comment, some of the highest tributes to his memory have been paid by eminent Britons not at all typically of his way of thinking. It was Brougham, become the official exponent of Christian Evidences, who testified that no one could be named since the days of Luther to whom "the spirit of free inquiry—nay, the emancipation of the human mind from spiritual tyranny," owed more than to Voltaire. It was Ruskin who wrote of him that ^Mhis voice is mighty among the ages"; it was Matthew Arnold who, besides dubbing him "the French Luther of the eighteenth century" and a "splendid professor and propagator" of "logic and lucidity," ranked him in a set of six great prose writers of the world; it was the authoritative Jowett who, outgoing Brougham, declared that "civilization owes more to Voltaire than to all the Fathers of the Church put together"; and from such different oracles as Buckle and Browning come verdicts hardly less acclamatory.

No excuse, then, can be needed for a new estimate of him in English, in an age in which the past is being re-surveyed in all its aspects. Those English verdicts just quoted have not yet been made fully current by biographical surveys, though to the friendly sketch of F. H. Standish, issued in 1821, over which Carlyle solemnly shook his head, the Life by Brougham, and

the fair and comprehensive Life by James Parton, there have been added the eloquent and able monograph of Lord Morley, and the tolerant exposition of General Hamley. In France, so late as 1897, despite the vindications of Noel and Pompery, the felt need for a critical defence of the most famous of French men of letters against a multitude of French disparagements elicited the admirable volume of M. Edme Champion (VOLTAIRE : ETUDES CRITIQUES), which is strongly reinforced by the monograph of M. Lanson (in the *Ecrivains Français* series; 1906). For French readers, that defence will probably never be turned; for English-speaking readers, a broad revision of the case with the help of MM. Champion and Lanson is still timely.

If M. Champion could with acceptance say in France, two hundred years after Voltaire's birth, that "Voltaire is ill known," the statement must hold good for this side of the Channel, though here there has been probably less denigration of him than in his native land. In France, the misconceptions have grown not only out of the general Catholic bias against the freethinker, originating in his youth, persisting throughout his career, and taking fixed form in the vituperative Life by Lèpan (1817) and later in the religiously hostile Life by Abbe Maynard (1867), but from the later accumulation of a hundred incidental misjudgments by men of letters not religiously moved. When Sainte-Beuve gave Voltaire "out," few were likely to challenge the umpire; and M. Faguet has summed up in hostile fashion. And since not even in France do many people master the fifty or seventy volumes of Voltaire's writings, only a few are fitted to balance the accounts of current criticism.

In the English-speaking countries, the forces deflecting judgment are different. Carlyle, writing on Voltaire in 1828, made an attempt to be partly fair to a figure

labelled "irreligious," with the result of a ponderous judgment in which good marks and bad marks are alternately allotted without elucidating the critic's own dogma that a personality is always essentially a unity. The trouble was that Carlyle at that stage was concerned to exorcise the spirit of mockery from his own dual mental outfit, and therefore saw fit to specify as a mark of inferiority in Voltaire the very proclivity which more than any other characterizes the great mass of his own later criticism of life. Something, too, may be set down to unconscious rivalry. The mockery of Carlyle differs from the mockery of Voltaire somewhat as does whisky from champagne; but those factors compete. There results the anomalous pronouncement by one mocker that another is "shallow" precisely because of his mockery; and a large and serious public has trustingly assented. Yet the outstanding difference between the two men is that Voltaire never seriously mocked at human aspiration, and Carlyle often did. But then, though Voltaire talked about as much of "God" as did Carlyle, he published his views about the Christian creed, and Carlyle never did.

More surprising is the continued currency of historical confusions over Voltaire's relation to his age. After the reaction against the French Revolution had made it an after-dinner axiom that that convulsion was the outcome of criticism of the Christian religion, historic analyses of the process had to be produced. To eyes guided by the conventional formula and not by any accurate culture-history it seemed that, broadly speaking, French criticism of life after 1750 took the shape of a developing attack upon the political system of the monarchy. For this there is the support of the generalization that the open political conflicts between the Paris Parlement and the Government, which in the first half of the century had

been mainly over ecclesiastical matters, in the second ran mainly to secular politics. But Buckle put the case in the form of the generalization that the French intellect in the first half of the century ran to criticism of religion, and in the second to criticism of the State, which is a comprehensive mistake. The open religious disputes of the first half were *within* the pale of orthodox or Catholic belief; they were battles between Catholic parties and factions, not between Catholics and Freethinkers. When, then, readers were taught to believe that what thus took place was a development of early aggressive freethinking on religion into aggressive freethinking on politics, they were as completely misled as they could well have been on any large matter of modern history. What had really taken place was a transition in Catholic *political* life from a mainly ecclesiastical or sectarian pre-occupation to an active discussion of secular matters.

Practically speaking, Voltaire's systematic polemic against Christian dogma begins long after the time when a France of which the intellectual class was nourished on conversational freethought is represented as having turned to political iconoclasm. In point of fact, he simply dared not have published before 1760 any of his vital attacks upon orthodox belief. In 1736 he had to fly from Cirey to Brussels for the light poem *LE MONDAIN*, containing a jest about Adam and Eve; and in the forties he could not dream of printing his more serious manuscripts on theological topics. At 1750 there was probably not much more active incredulity than there had been in 1730; and if there were, it was due far more to the continued influence of English deistic criticism, which had begun with the translation of Collins's *DISCOURSE OF FREETHINKING* in 1714, than to anything written by Voltaire. His *LETTRES PHILO-*

SOPHIQUES (1734), drafted in England, were at most pointers in that direction, not at all a polemic against the current creed. The fling at priestcraft in (EDIPE (1718) could not have made the impression it did save in a society where freethinking had gone some way ; and Vinet, long before General Hamley and M. Lanson, summed up that the educated French society of the age of Louis XV was "fundamentally irreligious" before Voltaire had begun to minister to its bias. So hostile a clerical biographer as the Abbe Maynard insists that Voltaire was cradled in unbelief by his godfather, an unbelieving Abbé. To the errant thesis of Professor Sidgwick, that Voltaire's polemic had undermined belief as early as 1750—a proposition framed in total disregard of literary history—it might be not unjustly retorted, not only that the young Voltaire imbibed intellectual scepticism from the unbelieving society around him, but that the moral levity of that world had in his youth infected him to the point of exacting from him the brilliant ribaldry of LA PUCELLE when his native bent had been to the liberal enthusiasm of LA HENRIADE (1723). The true, the great Voltaire, began to "find himself" when he withdrew from the frivolous world of Paris in 1734 to lead a life of hard study at Cirey; and his main propagandist achievement belongs to the period after 1753, when he at last anchored in a rural life.

And that is the Voltaire whose voice is "mighty among the ages," the vivid spirit who, after becoming a famous poet and dramatist, then an original and successful historian, and likewise a prominent figure in international affairs, in his later life turned all his formidable powers of mockery and judgment, gaiety and passion, wild wit and patient toil, to the emancipation of mankind from a tyranny of error and cruel fanaticism more noxious to human well-being than the political

tyranny bound up with it; though he was as zealously propagandist for political and social as for intellectual reform. To know him, then, we have to survey broadly both his life and his work, noting his character, his environment, his motives, and his achievement. The life, so full of detail interest and of disputes over detail as latterly handled, can only be outlined in our narrow limits; and the work, so multifarious and so voluminous, is no more easily to be summarized. But a concise presentment of both is a requisite in our crowded day.

II

FIRST PERIOD

MYSTIFICATION about Voltaire begins with his birth. He is recorded to have been born on February 20 and on November 20 or 21, 1694, his certificate of baptism bearing the latter date; and the problem is further complicated by the assignment to him of two birthplaces—Paris and the village of Ch&tenay, seven miles off, where his father had a country house. The solution authorized by Voltaire as to the first puzzle was that he had been a very sickly infant, and that his parents, taking care to have him privately "sprinkled," postponed his christening till he was strong enough to be carried with safety to church. But Voltaire, while he expressly declared for the former, seems to have used both dates; and Catholic charity explains that he found the earlier date convenient in buying annuities, the form in

which he invested most of his funds. The story of the long delayed baptism, imputing non-pious fraud to his father, formerly a highly placed notary, is difficult to believe; and when we note that, while Voltaire had declared himself to have been born at Paris, his friend Condorcet, in 1789, declared that he was born at Chatenay, it is not surprising that the Catholic biographer has raised the question whether he was really the son of Monsieur and Madame Arouet. M. Lanson, who has the historic mind, decides for November 21 as the date, and for Paris as the place.

The father, Francois Arouet, came of old bourgeois stock in Poitou; and the mother, Marie Margaret Daumard, was of a family of the "lesser" or official nobility in the same province. Our future Voltaire, Francois-Marie, was the youngest of the three surviving children of the marriage, the others being his bitter brother Armand and his beloved sister Marie, who became Madame Mignot. Arouet, senior, had years before sold his privileges as 'notary to the Chatelet' of Paris, and acquired an official revenue post that was presumably more remunerative, though he had had clients of distinction, among them the Saint Simons and the Richelieus. When Francois was seven years old the mother died, leaving a reputation for wit and volatility. It was she who described Boileau as "a good book, a silly man." The elder son, Armand, had been educated at a Jansenist school, and became a passionate zealot of that sect; the future Voltaire was sent at the age of ten to the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grand, and thus he not only had a schooling which in that age turned out many men of letters and not a few freethinkers, but became the comrade of many boys of aristocratic families, some of whom were his good friends in later life. At twelve he had begun to write a tragedy; and the Jesuit fathers looked indulgently

on him as one who would do them credit by his already remarkable talents. The stamp of their training, on the side of 'correct' literary taste, never left him.

But correctness on other sides was not cultivated by his godfather, the unbelieving Abbe de Chateauneuf, who is said to have taught him in his early boyhood to repeat the *Moisiade*, a freethinking poem falsely ascribed to J. B. Rousseau (not to be confounded with the later and greater Jean Jacques Rousseau)—a poet who met the schoolboy on a day of prize-giving, and quarrelled with him later. It was Chateauneuf who presented the precocious schoolboy to the illustrious Ninon de l'Enclos, who had been a friend of his mother's and a client of his father's. It must have been about his eleventh year, in which Ninon died. Aged about ninety, she was then "withered as a mummy"; but, amiable to the last, she left to the boy a legacy of 2,000 francs to buy books. It may well have served to fortify a literary ambition already definite, and strongly developed by his Jesuit teachers.

In later life he ridiculed the prevailing system of education, alike as regards the mainly Latin basis of the Jesuit schooling and the method of training law students; but he confessed to have enjoyed intensely the literary leading given him at school by his Jesuit masters. It certainly made him a man of letters. While at school he caused a sensation by throwing off some successful verses for an old soldier who desired to make a poetic petition to the Dauphin on his birthday; and he made his first appearance in print with a devout Ode on Saint Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris, in imitation of a Latin ode by one of his masters. France was then (1708) in sore straits; and the boy had his first lead to the detestation of war which pervades all his serious work.

The practical though irascible father, who had met

Corneille in the days when the old dramatist had outlived popularity and prosperity, and found him a terrible bore, proposed to make his brilliant boy an *avocat* when he left college at seventeen. Francois refused to be anything but a man of letters—a career which, his father pointed out, meant a life useless to society and death by hunger. The parental reminiscences of Corneille and Boileau availed nothing against the youth's vocation. Still, he went through the forms of law study in the intervals of livelier pursuits. His godfather the Abbé had introduced him into a society of freethinking wits, poets, and men and women of the world; and with wits and books not of law he spent the time in which he was not writing verses, till his fiery father bundled him off, at the age of eighteen, to the Hague as page to the Marquis de Chateauneuf (brother of the Abbé), the ambassador of Louis XIV to Holland in 1713. There the youth fell in love with an attractive young French flirt, the daughter of an adventuress who lived by dubious literary production. The girl, Olympe Dunoyer, came near eloping with him in male attire—a consummation which was prevented by his master, who sent him back to Paris, where the scapegrace vehemently sought to enlist in his affair a Jesuit Father and a bishop, on the plea that the damsel was a Huguenot, who might be won to the Church!

The exasperated father threatened to use a *lettre de cachet*—a convenience available in that age to parents for the incarceration of troublesome sons—refusing to see the boy, and offering only the alternative of exile to the West Indies. A compromise was obtained by friends of the family, and the youth was placed in the office of a lawyer much concerned with "stamped paper," where he at least acquired a kind of knowledge very useful to him in his money matters in later life. But soon the

incorrigible made a new scandal. Twice he had competed unsuccessfully for Academy prizes for odes; and when, in the second case, the eminent M. de la Motte had caused the prize to be allotted to another, the indignant youth launched at him a sparkling satire. De la Motte had been on the side of the moderns in the protracted literary debate as to the merits of moderns and ancients, and secured the prize for one of his party. The defeated youth was all for the ancients at this stage, and assailed (1714) de la Motte and his party with much vigour of verse. This meant a new risk of imprisonment; and the precocious satirist, by one account, had to be smuggled into the country by the friendly M. de Caumartin, Marquis de St. Ange, from whom at the chateau of St. Ange he gained not a little literary stimulus and instruction, which bore fruit years afterwards in the poem first entitled *LA LIGUE* and later *LA HENRIADE*. Already he was busy with great literary projects; and his first tragedy, (*EDIPE*), was in draft.

In 1715 Louis XIV died; the crowded prisons gave up hundreds of Jansenist and other prisoners; France exulted in the removal of an incubus; and the young poet, now living in lodgings in Paris, launched anew into the brilliant and debauched world of the Regency. Soon he was in new trouble, being accused, it is told, of the authorship of highly scandalous verses, blackening the dubious characters of the Regent and his daughter the Duchesse de Berri. As he ere long won the Regent's favour by verses of another character, protesting his innocence, the charge may be reckoned of no great weight. Meantime, after being ordered into detention at Tulle, three hundred miles from Paris, he was permitted, on the intercession of his father, to stay at the chateau of the Due de Sully, one of his aristocratic patrons, where he passed a very pleasant time. It was no comfort

to the father when the youth obtained a revocation of his exile.

Ere long he was again in trouble. By his own account he was accused of writing certain verses of invective against the tyranny of Louis XIV, as to which the real author, one Le Brun, made confession, after attempting to fasten them on the young Arouet. But the verses were by this time out of date ; the Regent Orleans was not the champion of Louis's memory ; and if any of the verses gave much offence, it would be those aimed at the Minister of Police, d'Argenson, father of two of young Arouet's school-fellows, who was specially denounced by the versifier. Voltaire could hardly be suspected on that score. On the other hand, there exist official documents setting forth that to a certain spy he had repeatedly avowed having written new libellous verses, in Latin, against the Begent, by way of revenge for his previous prosecution; and that on this ground he was consigned to the Bastille. The spy may have spoken falsely ; but the imprisonment was duly endured, and lasted nearly eleven months. The time was turned to account in the composition of *LA HENRIADE*, the second canto of which, Voltaire declared in his old age, he composed in his sleep. It is certainly not a Homeric epic ; but the only book he had taken with him to prison was a Homer, with a Latin translation. For the rest, his captivity was relieved by the visits of a number of friends, under an indulgence which he sought to stretch beyond plausible bounds. At length, after submissive letters to the Regent, he obtained a series of permits to visit Paris, and finally his release on October 12, 1718. Soon—by one account, immediately—he was permitted to present himself to the Regent, who seems to have accorded him soon afterwards a small pension. The familiar story runs that the Duke undertook to see to his maintenance, and that the

irrepressible begged him not to trouble himself about his lodging.

A month after his release, the sun shone full upon him. For years before his imprisonment he had been using all his powers of persuasion to induce the actors of the Comedie Francaise to play his tragedy of *CEDIPE*, and they had been about to do so when he was arrested. Now, under the influence of some of the poet's powerful friends, they produced the piece, which had an instant and immense success, running for forty-five nights—a thing then unprecedented. It is told that on the opening night the much-tried old father, sitting in a corner of the theatre, covered his comfort with grumbles of "Oh, the rascal; oh, the rascal!" In 1719 the play was printed, with a dedication to the dowager Duchesse d'Orléans; the author had become at a stroke, at the age of twenty-two, the most famous man of letters in France. The Censor who passed the printing was none other than de la Motte, whom the poet had satirized, and whose magnanimity he now acknowledged.

In the dedication of *QEDIPE* the poet for the first time signs himself "Arouet de Voltaire," and thereafter he was "M. de Voltaire" simply. The origin of the famous name is still in dispute; some holding to Condorcet's explanation that it was taken from a small estate once owned by the family of Madame Arouet; others preferring the more satisfying solution, propounded by an antagonist in Voltaire's lifetime, that it is simply an anagram from Arouet with two letters added. It is, in fact, frameable from "Arouet l(e) j(eune)" ("Arouet the younger")—the *u* and *j* being equivalents to *v* and *i*. To this it is replied that in France they did not say "le jeune" for "the younger," but "le cadet." But we have in our own day Daudet's title, *FROMONT JEUNE ET RISLEK AINE*; and at all events the coincidence is notable enough to suggest

that "le jeune Arouet" might really have been the basis. On the other hand, a record of the old Voltaire estate is said to exist. The odd thing is that nobody over testified to having asked Voltaire for the explanation.

As M. de Voltaire he was now launched on a chequered career. At the theatre his great success with (EDIPE was followed by an admitted failure with ABTEMIRE, which he refused to recast and never published; but he held resolutely to his vocation, reading much, and labouring zealously at his epic. With all his juvenile dissipation, he was never idle, and he early revealed a talent for looking after his money. When his father died early in 1722 they had been reconciled, and the old gentleman held some cash for his son. The inheritance was entangled in respect that the main item was the selling value of the official post, which had cost a large sum, and the Jansenist elder brother made all difficulties worse. The father had once remarked that he had for sons two madmen, one in prose and the other in verse. But Voltaire, after being led to fear that he, who had "lived to work," might have to work for a living, got a tolerable income; and to the Regent's pension of 1,200 francs there was added in 1722 one of 2,000 from the young King. Further operations in Government contracts, put in his way by official friends, helped to secure his future; and he stood well with his society, in which his gifts won him high repute. Thus passed his early manhood in an agreeable world of upper-class amenities, in which he carried on his literary work, his versifying, his studies, and his "affairs of the heart"—one of which, with the friendly but otherwise unresponsive Duchesse de Villars, lasted for some years.

Voltaire at this period may be labelled, in modern French slang, an *arriviste*. Conscious of boundless powers, despite his frail physique, he is absolutely

resolved to rise in the world by force of his talent, to make a place for himself as a man of letters in a society where all precedence had hitherto gone by birth, office, and Court favour; where Corneille had died in neglected poverty, and where Racine had collapsed, broken-hearted, upon a royal reprimand of his dreams of social reform. It was primarily as a poet and dramatist, despite these precedents, that Voltaire reckoned to establish his status ; and we are to remember that he had at the very outset found ample proof of his possession of social gifts denied to his great predecessors. No young man of his day and standing had had such a success in high circles, more powerful friends, a readier entry everywhere. His was none the less a mistaken ambition, seen from the height of his later destiny; and the fates supplied the buffets that were requisite to turn him, stage by stage, to his true path. Success in that which he first traced for himself would have meant but a glittering career in *belles lettres*, all the shorter for being passed in Paris, and bounded in breadth by the limitations of his poetic and dramatic gifts. Social misadventures and his fiery temperament were to shoulder him into a greater journey.

Some years after his Bastille experience he discovered the identity of the spy who had betrayed him, and, meeting him at the table of a minister, indicated his opinion of guest and host. The spy, an officer in the army, took his revenge in a cowardly assault by an ambuscade; and Voltaire, after a long and tenacious attempt to have him punished at law, had to realize that ministerial spies were immune. About the same period, his famous *ILPITRE A IIRANIE*, addressed to Madame de Rupelmonde, in which he avowed his unbelief in Christianity, came into manuscript circulation, and began to countervail on one side of society the success he had been winning on another. It proved him a brilliant

poet by the standards of the time, but it definitely marked him as not only an unbeliever but one who was disposed to speak out. Still his luck held. In a terrible epidemic of small-pox, which destroyed multitudes, he was infected, and prepared for death, but was saved by emetics and "two hundred pints of lemonade." His poem *LA LIGUE*, printed (1723) secretly at Rouen—being very imperfectly satisfactory to the clerical authorities—was immensely admired; and the hostile Matthieu Marais concurred with the friendly Villars in pronouncing him the greatest poet of the time. His tragedy *MARIAMNE*, ill received at first, was after a revision produced (1725) with triumphant success. Presented to the young queen of Louis XV, he won her favour by his plays, was patronized by her as 'mon pauvre Voltaire,' and received from her yet another pension of 1,500 francs. The mistress of Orleans stood his friend, and his social success continued.

But one day the Chevalier de Rohan, Marshal and coward, publicly put to him at the theatre an insolent question about his name, and, receiving a stabbing answer, sought revenge. While Voltaire was dining at the house of the Due de Sully, his patron of many years, he was called to the door by a message, and there the brave Rohan set upon him a gang of six ruffians with cudgels. The insulted poet found that his host would not stand by him in seeking amends for the outrage: one of the *noblesse* would not interfere with another in such a case, though Sully had from the point of view of ordinary manhood been insulted in the person of his guest. For monarchic France—with exceptions, notably that of the Marshal Villars, who pronounced Rohan deserving of death—such an episode was a good joke. Voltaire at once determined to force Rohan to a duel, and began to take assiduous lessons in fencing. The

noble coward and his family then appealed to the Minister of Police for protection ; and after Rohan had expressly accepted a challenge from Voltaire, his kinsman the Cardinal obtained a warrant of arrest, and the poet was once more imprisoned in the Bastille (April, 1726). When arrested, he had pistols in his pocket. Unfortunately, he had lacked them at the time of the assault. Soon he obtained his release, upon an undertaking to go at once to England, which he did. Immediately after landing, however, he secretly returned to Paris, hoping still to avenge himself; and only when he found himself in danger of discovery, and his undertaking hopeless, did he return to his place of exile.

In the earlier days of his stay he was ill and naturally in low spirits, and the death of his beloved sister added much to his depression. " I feel how little I am worth," he writes to the French lady who had sent the news; " my weaknesses cause me pity, and my faults horror"—a strain of contrition not often associated with him. But his inextinguishable love of letters came to his rescue; he soon revived, and within a few months he writes to his friend Thieriot, in English, that if he comes to England he " will see a nation fond of her liberty, learned, witty, despising life and death, a nation of philosophers—not but that there are some fools in England: every country has its madmen. It may be, French folly is pleasanter than English madness, but, by God, English wisdom and English honesty is above yours." He had come to England with good introductions, first and foremost his already formed intimacy with Bolingbroke, who, suspicious of him as of most men, yet brought him into touch with the leading men of letters of the day. Making the best of his exile, he soon mastered English. Pope, he found, spoke no French and understood it very poorly ; it was for the visitor to make himself at home in his

new world by acquiring its language. The result was that he learned not only to read English with ease but to write it with facility and vigour. Many of his preserved letters to his friend Thieriot in France were written in English—partly by way of evading espionage; and his English *ESSAY ON EPICK POETRY*, written after eighteen months' sojourn (1727), is excellent reading to this day, with only here and there a trace of French idiom. At that stage he protests that he cannot pronounce English "at all," and that he "hardly understands" it in conversation; but all his English letters show easy mastery, and it is clear that before his return he became reasonably fluent in talk. Denials of his having written his English essays as they stand turn mainly on the worthless assertion of Madame de Genlis that Wilkes long afterwards assured her of his personal knowledge of Voltaire's inability to read English with any ease. Wilkes was just born in that year, 1727; and his real testimony to the Voltaire of his mature years is highly panegyrical. And there seems no reason to doubt the story of the adventure in which Voltaire, menaced once by a London crowd temporarily rabid against Frenchmen, mounted on a boundary stone and asked "you brave English" whether it was not misfortune enough for him not to have been born in this free country; with the result of his being carried shoulder-high instead of being rolled in the mud.

England undoubtedly impressed Voltaire deeply and permanently, his exile thus making the first great turning-point in his career. There he saw constitutional government; a press almost absolutely free for political criticism, and substantially free for seemly criticism of religion; men of letters holding high administrative and diplomatic posts; and a reign of law under which *lettres de cachet* did not and could not exist. He lived much in

English homes and made friends easily, there as in his native land. Reading, writing, talking, theatre-going, with his insatiable energy, he entered alike into the social and the intellectual life, becoming an ardent devotee of Newton in physics, and of Pope in poetry; eagerly studying Locke, the deists, Milton, Clarke, Swift; endlessly interested in a new literature. Between Newton and Locke he was made once for all a theistic rationalist. For a time he tasted metaphysics, as handled by Clarke; but when one day he declared to an Englishman that he found Clarke a greater metaphysician than Newton, and the Englishman answered, "That may be: it is as much as if you said that one plays football better than the other," Voltaire began to reconsider, and ere long he came to the Englishman's view.

By bringing out in London a revised edition of his *LIGUE* under the title of *LA HENRLADE*, which he dedicated to the Queen, he became quite a personage, obtaining about 350 subscribers of standing, and selling three editions in a few weeks. The money was sorely needed, for his pensions had been stopped. But what he made on that issue he spent afterwards in getting out a new edition in France. The story that his English profits became the foundation of his fortune is a myth. But he may have learned from his English friend, the cultured merchant Falkener (afterwards ambassador to Constantinople), with whom he stayed for long periods at Wandsworth, something of the monetary science with which he invested his little patrimony in French army contracts and other speculations that turned out very well, and made him ultimately the richest literary man of his age. At that stage he bore losses more lightly than he sometimes did when he could better afford to lose. A Jewish financier in London on whom he had

a large letter of credit went bankrupt; and the consideration in which the young poet was held is indicated by the fact that several English friends came to his rescue, and that King George—not a lavish man on others' behalf—is said to have sent him a hundred guineas towards his loss. But perhaps Voltaire scored up the remaining loss against the Jews.

On the whole, Voltaire was very well treated in England, and enjoyed his long sojourn there. English readers must be on their guard against the calumnies concerning him put in circulation in Ruffhead's *Life of Pope*, and too often repeated since. The statement that he was regarded by Pope as "a spy" is grotesquely false; and the story that at their first meeting he drove the poet's old mother out of the room by an indecent account of "his disorder, contracted in Italy," is no less so. Voltaire was never in Italy; and the fact that at their first interview he could not speak English, or Pope French, stamps the tale as a figment. Another version makes Voltaire drive the old lady out of the room by his blasphemies when they met at dinner at the house of Addison. Addison died in 1719; and Voltaire was incapable of either of the outrages ascribed to him. Even hostile criticism avows that, barring an occasional *boutade* about the English drama, he always wrote and spoke of England with the warmest gratitude and praise. Goldsmith's *Life of Voltaire* is the most astonishing tissue of blunder and figment in all biographical literature; and one of its least flagrant figments is its story of a social gathering at which he was present in Paris, where Voltaire, after listening silently to a long attack by Fontenelle on the English, to which Diderot inadequately replied, took up the defence and triumphantly carried it on till three o'clock in the morning, overwhelming all opponents. As Macaulay pointed out,

Voltaire was never within three hundred miles of Paris while Goldsmith was on the Continent; and Masson's heedless suggestion that the episode took place in Switzerland will not hold either. Diderot never visited Voltaire in Switzerland; and Fontenelle was about ninety-eight when "Les Delices" was purchased. But the fiction is true to character as regards Voltaire.¹ He was always the champion of England in serious hours.

In 1729 he was allowed to return to France, and after some little time to settle obscurely in Paris, whereupon he went vigorously to work to establish himself alike financially and as man of letters. He had written in England his HISTOIRE DE CHARLES XII, his tragedy of BRUTUS, and the draft of the LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES, otherwise LETTRES ECRITES SUR LES ANGLAIS or LETTRES ANGLAISES. The books were delayed—the CHARLES XII (in the end surreptitiously printed at Rouen) till 1731, and the LETTRES till 1733 in English and 1731 in French. Over these, as over nearly all of his books, there was trouble; the history was supposed to be unacceptable in parts to Augustus II of Poland, and was suppressed accordingly; and the LETTRES gave a glowing picture of English freedom which was bound to enrage the French authorities. When, accordingly, a surreptitious edition appeared (1731) with the bold letter SUR LES PENSEES DE PASCAL added, the Paris Parliament seized the opportunity to condemn it to be torn and burned by the public hangman, and to imprison the publisher. Had the author been accessible he would have fared similarly. On the stage he had also his

¹ There seems reason to suspect that Goldsmith's *Memoir of Voltaire* was written for him by some imaginative Frenchman, and that the claim to have been present at the gathering described was made by the French penman on his own account. If so, however, the story is no better vouched, for the paper as a whole is a mass of reckless inventions,

troubles. The BRUTUS failed in 1730, as did the tragedy of BRIPHYLE in 1732; and Voltaire's friends began to advise him to abandon the drama; but in the same year he produced the most lasting of his dramatic successes, the tragedy of ZAIRE.

Meantime his finances went very successfully. In 1729 a State Lottery had been so badly planned that, as one of Voltaire's friends pointed out, any one who could buy up all the tickets would make a large profit; and Voltaire obtained from his friends the necessary amount, profiting accordingly, despite the wrath of the authorities. In 1730 the poet further received as his share of his father's estate a sum of 90,000 francs. Another financial operation with State paper in Lorraine tripled his outlay. Henceforth his income, invested in annuities and always being added to, was assured. But the anger of the authorities at his lottery *couji* was such that once more he had to leave Paris for a time, and he was half disposed to return to England. The ecclesiastical refusal of decent burial to the great actress Adrienne Lecouvreur (1730) drew from him one of his most powerful pieces in verse, in which the indignation was doubled by the memory of the freedom he had seen across the Channel. But after rusticating some time with his patron, the Due de Richelieu, he returned to Paris and its gilded chains, and spent a few more years in that feverish environment.

At length, as he tells in his posthumous Memoirs, he renounced that "idle and turbulent life," tired of perpetual interference with his work, of the cabals of envious men of letters and the "basenesses and brigandage" of others. Sooth to say, he had taken fair toll of scalps in return. The lightning wit of the TEMPLE DU Gout, published (1733) piratically while the Censor had it in hand, countervailed all the literary assaults upon him,

though it elicited a new stage lampoon. But he craved larger interests, greater tasks, deeper experience than had yet befallen him. He had reached his fortieth year without any lasting attachment to a woman. A good wife might have done much for him, though she would have had to attend very closely to her business; but that was not to be his fortune. At last, however, in 1733, he found a fit mate in the brilliant Emilie Marquise du Chatelet, devoted at once to him and to science, and left free, in the fashion of the times, by a tolerant husband whoso happiness lay in other directions, but who for a time shared in the *menage*. In 1734, when Voltaire had to fly to hiding from the pursuit over the LETTRES, the Marquise and other friends did their best for him with the authorities; but the grudgingly granted pardon did not incline him to settle permanently in Paris. The Chatelet mansion at Cirey was in disrepair, and Voltaire's money met the needs of the situation. There, accordingly, part master of the household if not of himself, he began a new and fruitful period of study and work, with perhaps as much of domestic happiness as was in store for him.

III

SECOND PERIOD

THE appearance in 1734 of the "English Letters" at once gave Voltaire a new literary status, all the more distinguished because of the prompt denunciation of the book by the official Parlement of Paris, and the attempt

of the authorities to seize the author. The brilliant poet and dramatist became a no less brilliant publicist, putting forth serious and arresting views of the life of the neighbour nation of which Frenchmen knew least, and from which they had most to learn. Still more arresting was the included Letter on Pascal, which roused anew the religious resentments set up by the poem To URANIE. There were five French editions of the book within the year; and an English version had already appeared in 1733. Henceforth Voltaire figures as a *thinker* in French life and letters.

At Cirey he carried still further his serious studies, busily alternating them with poetry and drama, as of old. To the earlier years of his stay belong the tragedies LA MORT DE CESAR (1736) and ALZIRE (1736), the comedy L'ENFANT PRODIGE (1738), and the poems entitled DISCOURS EN VERS SUR L'HOMME (1738), written on the inspiration of Pope. But while he was thus tirelessly fulfilling his first ambition he was planning, primarily for Madame du Chatelet, what was to appear long afterwards as the ESSAI SUR LES MÉTHODES. Madame, like many women and men in that age, found history as theretofore commonly written little better than "an old almanac"; and Voltaire, agreeing, aspired to produce something more nutritive, though Madame did her best to prevent him from so occupying himself. In the midst of all these labours, too, he set himself the task of conveying to French readers a clear knowledge of the Newtonian system, which had partly won his acceptance in England, and to which he was fully converted in 1732 by Maupertuis, who was later one of the scientific visitors of Madame. He drew mainly on other expositions, English and French; but it was he who, under revision from Maupertuis, first won a general hearing for the Newtonian system in France. With his

instinct for exposition, he was the first to give to the world the story of the falling apple, which he had from Newton's niece, Mrs. Conduitt. Even this enterprise of popularizing Newton, already carried out by Algarotti in Italian, was frowned upon by the French censorship, and the book had to wait years before it was printed, without authority, in Holland (1738).

The marvel is that this perpetual and intolerable tyranny over every literary action of his, outside *belles lettres*, did not make him at once the literary rebel he afterwards became. The influence of Emilie doubtless helped to restrain him. That remarkable woman, mathematician and musician, student and coquette, gambler, actress, and thinker, as gifted and exceptional in her degree as he, had a much keener regard for public than for private propriety, and did much to keep him out of scrapes. Under her influence he spent much time and thought in scientific experiment, to little purpose beyond the training of his judgment. But he planned for her (a deist, like himself) his one essay in high philosophy, *LB PHILOSOPHE IGNORANT* (published only in 1762), certainly a much deeper performance than her essay on the Existence of God ; also his less noteworthy *TRAITE DE LA METAPHYSIQUE* ; as well as the historic studies which were to add so much to his later fame.

They were both great workers, studying from morning till night even with guests in the house, reading, writing, experimenting; and she stood at least as high as he in an Academy competition for a treatise on the nature of fire, the prize for which was won by neither, though Condorcet and later authorities have pronounced that Voltaire's work deserved it. That Madame wrote her essay in eight nights, keeping herself awake by various devices, in order to make her competition a secret, is perhaps a better testimony to her force of mind than to

her appreciation of the requirements of science. She was, in fact, too tempestuous for any great success in that arduous field, and too vehemently versatile for eminence in any. But on all sides she was intensely interesting, and she counted for much in Voltaire's intellectual career, indirectly as well as directly. In one of her wild runs of gambling at court, in which she exhausted all her own available money and his, and all she could borrow on a mortgaged property, losing in all some 80,000 francs, he could stop her only by murmuring in her ear, over the card-table, that she was among rooks. At once she realized that his dangerous words had been heard, and the pair left the scene and the place, travelling by night, penniless, with the common result of a breakdown of the carriage, and the less common sequel of finding financial succour from a passing carriage which chanced to be occupied by friends. The outcome of this adventure was that Voltaire had to conceal himself for two months in the house of the friendly Duchesse du Maine, working by night and sleeping by day. The work consisted mainly in producing, for the entertainment of his hostess, a number of the fantastic prose tales, sparkling with wit and wisdom, which have proved to be among the most unduringly popular of his writings, and form part of his title to be called a man of genius. In due time Emilie balanced her finances and secured the official condonation of Voltaire's indiscretion, and they returned to their multifarious life of society and study.

It would have been well for him if he could have become absorbed enough in his various studies to disregard the echoes of his old life of conflict in Paris ; but if we can trust the letters of Madame de Grafigny (who stayed at Cirey for some three months, despite an awful scene in which she was accused by her hosts of passing

on a copy of a canto of the scandalous *LA PUCELLE*), he was chronically exasperated by the attacks of some of his literary calumniators. In his hours of gaiety the most delightful of all companions, he could too readily be "put out"—by the Marquise among others. That he should have been stung to a prolonged warfare with such a creature as the journalist *Abbe Desfontaines*, whom he had saved from shame, was the measure of his weakness on that side ; and we can but note that his passion of chagrin when his old friend *Thieriot* flinched from defending him as he could have done against a gutter journalist is balanced by the entire forgiveness he accorded when the storm was over. Great and little were ever jostling in that tumultuous temperament. Indeed, the hoat of resentment which drove him to conflict on his own behalf was but an aspect of the indignation which moved him to far greater effort on behalf of others. He was above all things a hater of iniquity.

And we are never to suppose him cast down by public hostility. When his tragedy of *MAHOMET* (1742) had to be withdrawn under ecclesiastical and official pressure, he wrote tranquilly enough to *Frederick of Prussia*, who had besought a copy, observing that, whatever might be the folly of most Frenchmen, the thinking minority were so good as to earn pardon for the rest. And he quickly countered the reverse over *MAHOMET* by a new triumph with *MEROPE* (1743), which won for him the greatest of all his successes at the theatre. It seemed as if all the stored reserve of admiration for him among the Parisians had been fired by the memory of the hostilities he had latterly endured, culminating in the suppression of *MAHOMET*. For the first time in French stage-history, it is told, the pit shouted persistently that the author should come upon the stage ; and when he on the contrary calmly withdrew from the box of the *Duchesse de Luxem-*



EMILIE, MARQUISE DU CHATELET

bourg after kissing her hand, his friends followed and found him and drew him into the box of the Duchosso do Villars; whereupon the audience shouted a demand that the Duchesse should kiss him, which she finally had to do, her mother-in-law commanding. The poet had once again drunk to the full the cup of success, and his enemies that of defeat. Yet there was soon added to his cup, as usual, tho "something bitter," in the shape of the denial of a chair in the Academy, vacated by the death of a Cardinal. He could not have *that* vacancy, though he did not scruple to call himself "a true Catholic" for the nonce ; and, the hostile combination remaining firm, three more vacant chairs in the same year wore alike denied him.

While France thus alternately caressed and rebuffed him, however, there was opening up to him a dazzling prospect of new honours elsewhere. One of the most ardent of his continental admirers was Frederick "called the Great," who as a bullied and unhappy Crown Prince had found in Voltaire's writings of every order his chief intellectual pleasure. As early as 1736 he wrote to pay his homage; and there ensued a copious correspondence. In the latter part of 1736, when Voltaire had to fly to Brussels and Holland to avoid imprisonment for the light and bright satire of the *MONDAIN*, with its one jest on the garden of Eden, the new and monstrous attack on his liberty put him in a mood to go to Prussia or anywhere else for freedom from "the furies of superstition and envy." But the strong attraction at Cirey drew him back to France, though by the account of his niece, Madame Denis, he lived there in bondage; and another lady, Madame de Grafigny, testified that Emilie made his life rather difficult for him.

In 1739 he was with her in Brussels, where she was carrying on an endless family lawsuit; then, after a stay

at Enghien with the Duke d'Aremberg, for a month's spell at Paris, where he planned for the production of two new tragedies. Then came the death of the old King of Prussia, and the accession of the young Frederick, who was already producing a splendid edition of *LA HENRIADE*. Voltajre wished to insert new passages of a provocative kind, which Frederick sagely counselled him to withhold, remarking that "there is nothing more cruel than to be suspected of irreligion." The advice might have warned him that there was not to be much more freedom in Prussia than in France. At that stage Frederick was professedly zealous not only for propriety but for political morality, and produced his memorable treatise "Anti-Machiavelli," unctuously denouncing the ethic of Machiavelli's *PRINCE*. Within a year, having succeeded to the throne, he was hastily arresting the printing of his treatise, and beginning his plans for a war of wanton aggression, which Machiavelli would have reckoned the act of a brutal barbarian.

The act should have given warning to Voltaire, of all men, as to the kind of man with whom he had to deal. It did indeed give him pause. When the two first met, at Cleves in the autumn of 1740, Frederick, then suffering from ague, was still "anti-Machiavelli." A month later the Emperor Charles VI died, leaving a daughter, Maria Theresa, to fill his throne; and at once Frederick wrote to Voltaire that "this death upsets all my pacific ideas," hinting at an early war. Still Voltaire was willing, on the official encouragement of the Chief Minister of France, Cardinal Fleury, to go to Berlin, the Cardinal being anxious to gather Frederick's intentions, thus far deducible only from a large increase in his military forces. They were not disclosed to Voltaire, who returned after a two months' absence to the now resentful Emilie. But even when the aggression of Frederick upon Silesia had

begun—re-starting, as it has turned out, the modern evolution of European militarism that has culminated in the World War—Voltaire, though shocked at the new output of evil, contented himself with restrained reproaches. To these Frederick made a reply of which the insolence might again have warned his mentor to keep well aloof. As Voltaire wrote to Falkener in 1742—in an English which shows how well he had mastered the tongue fifteen years before—"You must know my Prussian King, when he was but a man, loved passionately your English government. But the King has killed the man, and now he relishes despotic power as much as a Mustapha, a Selim, or a Soliman."

In 1743, after losing the battle of Dettingen, France was desirous of having Prussia as an ally against Austria and England; and again Voltaire was sent to Berlin as virtual French envoy; Cardinal Fleury being willing to let all bygones be bygones where his Government might make use of the poet whom it had planned to arrest two years before for a jest at Genesis. Voltaire did his duty faithfully, reporting at once to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs an interview in which, when he put plainly to Frederick the Dutch report that he had offered to Maria Theresa to join with her against France, the King, "lowering his eyes," swore that "nothing is more false. What could I gain by it?" For the rest, Frederick was disposed to "humiliate a little the King of England, who wished to give law to Germany." Later he declared: "Let France declare war against England and I march!" It all came to nothing, Frederick being incapable of loyalty to any alliance. And Emilie, who had resented as usual her lover's four months' absence—it was indeed unduly prolonged—was soon busy plotting for the dismissal of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, whom she disliked.

It was the end of Voltaire's official episode; though in 1744 he was back at the French court, regaining the favour of Louis, who had in that year become "the Well-Beloved" of France in respect of having nearly died of a fever during a campaign. Now was produced at court Voltaire's *PRINCESSE DE NAVARRE*, and the poet was appointed historiographer of France. It meant the composition of a number of State papers, a heroic poem on the victory of Fontenoy in 1745, of which five editions were issued in ten days—eliciting two burlesques of it a month later.

Continuing on the path of prosperity, he contrived (1745) to make friends with the genial Pope Benedict XIV, receiving from him, through the offices of a friendly Abbé in the papal household, two portrait medals of His Holiness, and sending to him the drama *MAHOMET*, which had been suppressed by ecclesiastical influence at Paris a few years before. A Latin distich for the Pope's portrait accompanied the tribute; and his Holiness, in a cordial reply, told how he had successfully defended the poet's lines against a French man of letters who had charged upon them a false quantity. Voltaire capped his two Virgilian quotations with a third—skillfully turned to complimentary use; and there appeared an edition of *MAHOMET* headed by the correspondence, in French and Italian. Then, in 1746, came Voltaire's election to the French Academy, signalized by a brilliant *discours de reception*. Between royal and papal favour, the much-persecuted poet seemed to have reached peace with honour. But it was not to last long. The envious ones showered new libels and lampoons; and the poet was romantic enough to go to law about the former. Equally ill-advised was his open homage at the shrine of the King's latest mistress, Madame de Pompadour—an affront to the Queen, who had once been his benefac-

tress, and whose influence behind the scenes went strongly against him. Thus his favour declined ; and the before-mentioned episode of the card-playing in which Madame du Chatelet lost so heavily came to cause another eclipse.

So went on his life until the domestic tie was tragically ended. Voltaire, always fragile and now conscious of approaching age, lost his ardour as a lover; and Emilie, who had certainly loved him well in her tyrannous way, at length turned to a younger admirer—the Saint-Lambert who lived to write rather well on morals in the period of the Revolution. She had met and fallen vehemently in love with him at Lunéville, the little court of ex-King Stanislas of Poland, father of Queen Marie, who reigned on a modest scale as Duke of Lorraine. The story, very fully related by Carlyle, need not be told again in detail; some of it, indeed, as regards the benevolent attitude of M. du Chatelet, being difficult to believe, though Voltaire's acquiescence, after a first angry recoil, is certain enough. Madame toiled devotedly at her great work on Newton while the time of her confinement was approaching; and Voltaire in the same anxious period wrote in eight days and nights his tragedy of *ROME SAUVÉE*, and on the heels of that his *ELECTRE*—two dramas planned to eclipse *Crebillon*. Madame put all her papers and affairs in order before the time of danger: she was now forty-three years old. The confinement, however, took place successfully, at Lunéville—while Madame was at her desk; and she would have recovered but for her insane insistence, four days later, on taking an iced drink, from the violent effects of which she died after two more days. The vehement will had slain itself; though the desolated Voltaire, by the death-bed, put the tragedy to the account of Saint-Lambert. He mourned her not the less deeply because his portrait, in her ring, had been superseded by Saint-Lambert's, as

his in 1734 had superseded that of the Due de Richelieu. "I have lost the half of myself," he wrote; and he and the husband, whom he had greatly assisted financially, joined in a sincere sorrow, remaining friends to the last, as did Voltaire with Saint-Lambert. To some extent, perhaps, Voltaire's recovery from his grief was assisted by the discovery that before the Saint-Lambert episode Emilie had written concerning him in terms not at all loverlike. She had even left to be burned, with all their letters, some of his most important manuscripts of which she did not approve. But he never spoke of her save with admiring respect to the end of his life.

At first he settled in Paris, in a large house leased from Du Chatelet, with his widowed niece, Madame Denis, to superintend it; busying himself with the production in his own house of *ROME SAUVÉE* (he playing Cicero) and others of his tragedies, the young Lekain being one of his performers. There had been much friction between him and the company of the Theatre Francois a year or two before, and the actors, hearing much talk of *ROME SAUVÉE* (otherwise *CATILINA*) as a new success, sought a reconciliation, to which he readily assented. He gave them, however, not the privately successful *ROME SAUVÉE*, but a new *ELECTÉE*; and when this was produced the hostile faction, who swore by Cr6billon, did their best to make it fail. Yet in the same year he published still another tragedy, *LE DUC D'ALENCJON*, and a small tract on government, *LA VOIX DU SAGE ET DU PEUPLE*, which elicited some fifteen replies and imitations. It advocated, among other things, taxation of Church property.

At this stage Voltaire saw fit to yield to the often-repeated solicitations of Frederick to pay a long visit to the Prussian court. Out of favour at Versailles, he there obtained a cold permission to travel, and he set

out on what he meant to be a stay of three or four months, to be followed by a tour in Italy. Frederick accorded him an annual allowance of 20,000 francs, and offered 4,000 more to Madame Denis for life if she would, keep house for her uncle in Berlin. Wiser than he in some things, she declined. There must have been some strong elements of attraction in the life at Potsdam to induce Voltaire to stay there for over two years; and Voltaire's own account in his memoirs, written long afterwards, confesses to a great enjoyment of the suppers, at which the talk was free to an extent not to be equalled in a similar circle in France. Frederick had gathered around him a very various group—La Mettrie, d'Argens, Maupertuis, Algarotti, and others less known to fame, though in person perhaps better worth knowing.

But what mainly moved Voltaire to stay so long was probably the fact that he had now much leisure for his studies, and that in Prussia he was able without interference to publish one of his masterpieces, *THE AGE OF Louis XIV* (1752). To him Frederick must have been on the whole a more pleasant master than he was to some of the others. In grain a churl, the son of a churl, though supremely qualified to play the autocrat over a submissive people, he had in him no element of gentleman, as distinguished from condescending prince, and nothing of the goodness of heart which morally ballasted Voltaire. Still, an illustrious poet who daily supervised the royal verses could not well be made a subject of such slights and insolences as were bestowed by the king upon some of the others, too dependent on the royal bounty to be able to break away. But the relation was fundamentally false. Frederick's versifying was the inexplicable folly of a man of action, and Voltaire had to commend it though knowing better than anybody its worthlessness, while the king in turn

chronically spoke with disrespect of the poet behind his back. Each admired the strong side and was alive to the weak side of the other. Voltaire could not at heart respect the egoist king whom he flattered, and the churl king as little respected the temperament of the writer whom he extolled. The relation could not endure.

When Voltaire learned from the heedlessly genial La Mettrie—of whom he writes with little sympathy, perhaps because La Mettrie's atheism baffled him—that the king spoke of him as an orange which he could throw away when he had squeezed it, he shrewdly decided to do some preliminary squeezing on his own account. He had 300,000 francs to invest, and he was careful to do so in the territory of the Duke of Württemberg, outside Frederick's ambit. Less judicious was his device of buying up a large amount of the depreciated note issue of Saxony, which under treaty had to be redeemed at par by the Elector. Speculations of the kind had continued after Frederick had prohibited them, but Voltaire lightly entered upon one with Hirsch & Son, a Berlin firm of Jews with which he had had some licit dealings. Repenting of it, he sought to extricate himself but they in turn sought to plunder him, and the outcome was a furious quarrel, ending in a scabrous litigation, in which Voltaire won, at the cost of a sorry scandal. Frederick now had him at a disadvantage, and he had to make a humiliating apology, to which the king, whose own practice was to Voltaire's as that of an armed robber of territory to that of an *agioteur*, and who had played false with every ally, replied with fustian about "the rough good sense of a German, who says what he thinks." It was a fit punishment for the hater of war who had succumbed to the flattery of the king who had seized Silesia. But the king required the poet to revise his poem on "The Art of War," and the quarrel was dropped.

It is fair to say that the king in his turn was able to pass some troublesome criticism on the matter as apart from the manner of Voltaire's poem, *LA LOI NATURELLE*, which was one of his occupations at Potsdam, with the first draft of the *DICTIONNAIRE PHILOSOPHIQUE*. But the final rupture arose outside of their direct relations. Maupertuis, the French president of the Berlin Academy, had a quarrel with a member of his own appointing, an old friend of his and of Voltaire's—Koenig, an enthusiastic Leibnitzian. It arose rather appropriately out of a talk on the Newton-Leibnitz dispute as to the "infinitely little"; the amiable Koenig in the first instance behaving a little incorrectly in talk, but apologizing. Later, he credited Leibnitz with anticipating Maupertuis on a point on which the latter plumed himself, "the principle of the least action." But Koenig's case turned upon a lost letter which he himself had never seen; and when this could not be produced, Maupertuis had Koenig expelled from the Berlin Academy as a "forger"; the servile Academicians finding him guilty of a charge which was absurd on the face of it, since it was declared that no document existed, and from which Koenig effectually vindicated himself on the implications. At this stage Voltaire, mocking at the mathematical issues, stepped into the fray on Koenig's side with an anonymous pamphlet assailing Maupertuis, justly enough, for his tyrannical action, and incidentally deriding some of his many scientific absurdities. The president was indeed an arrogant and overbearing person, and Voltaire had in the past forbearingly remonstrated with him on his bearing towards his colleagues. Now he struck, as was his wont, on behalf of the man oppressed.

But Frederick, in whose eyes the barrack-room procedure of Maupertuis was quite correct, regarded Voltaire on the same principle as intolerably insubordinate; and

he in turn took the grossly incorrect course of issuing an anonymous pamphlet of his own, consisting of dull and pointless bluster in defence of Maupertuis and against his assailant, with no attempt to face the merits of the case. Voltaire, on learning the authorship, was staggered, but not silenced. Maupertuis, an exceedingly ill-balanced mind, gave him his chance by publishing a series of letters in which he added to his previous extravagances a number of propositions of which some startled and shocked the public of the day—such as a proposal for the dissection of the brains of criminals—and others which suggested doubts as to his sanity. To a scheme for an expedition to Patagonia to examine the brains of natives "ten or twelve feet high" he added notions about discerning the future by exciting the soul with opium and seeking for means of indefinitely prolonging life; with a further suggestion that doctors should not be paid unless they cured their patients. Upon this Voltaire proceeded to pen one of the most wildly witty of his thousand squibs, the *DIATRIBE DU DR. AKAKIA, MEDECIN DU PAPE*, in which Maupertuis was ridiculed as never man had been before. Frederick, who could not but see the folly of his President, sought to soothe him into silence, but could not forbear to laugh; though he had to proceed to hector Voltaire for his defiance of authority. The very printing of the *DIATRIBE* was a Voltairean stratagem, the poet having for his purpose made use of a permission by the King to print at his own convenience the articles he was contributing to the new *ENCYCLOPEDIE* in France.

There was nothing left for the outwitted King but to explode against his incorrigible servitor, which he did in his crudest drill-sergeant manner. But he was now at a bad disadvantage, all the points in the skirmish having been scored by Voltaire. Frederick had played the fool in publishing anonymously an angry and witless pamphlet,

and then republishing it with the royal arms on the cover. Intelligent sympathy was with Koenig; and Mauportuis was the target of inextinguishable laughter. The King had descended from his coign of anonymity to dislodge Voltaire from his; and the poet's professed submission was but a mockery the more. He had now determined to escape, while the King had no wish that he should. To be loft with Mauportuis and to lose Voltaire was the last thing he would have sought. So the two met again and spent a week in guarded intercourse, without the King's succeeding in moving his guest to stay. The mocker persisted in a sad civility of submissive appeal for dismissal, having at length succeeded in investing his 300,000 francs in the Duke of Wiirtemberg's territory in France; and Frederick, angrily aware of the fact, could but let him go.

These miniature tempests in Voltaire's life have to be kept in view because from time to time they determined his career. He had seen that for him, at Frederick's court, there was ultimately no more freedom of action than in France, save for the publication of certain of his books ; and his next big book was not nearly ready. Go, therefore, he must; and either by inadvertence or in mischief he carried with him a volume of the King's " poesies " which the latter had requested him to return, as well as some paraphernalia of his resigned post of chamberlain. Once beyond Prussian territory he travelled leisurely, desiring to see about him and meet *literati* in various towns,^nd finding flattering receptions from the Duke and Duchess of Gotha and the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel. Thus it came about that when he reached Frankfort, where Madame Denis had come to meet him, time enough had elapsed for Frederick—who had no juridical rights in the city—to hold him in high-handed detention by means of the Prussian resident, who

demanded the return of the "*potshies*" of the king, his master, and of his ex-chamberlain's official appurtenances. The book (a gift from the king) and the other contraband matter were behind, with the poet's main baggage, at Hamburg; and pending its arrival and the final satisfaction of the Prussian official, Voltaire and his niece were made to suffer all manner of indignities for a period of weeks, he impotently fuming. On his and Frederick's latter procedure we can but echo his own humorous sigh to his niece: "Ah, we are not philosophers, neither the one nor the other."

As usual, nevertheless, he collected himself and cheerfully though feebly went on his way, questing for a safe resting-place, and aware that Paris was not such. At Mannheim the Elector Palatine feted him handsomely; and, after a stay at Strasburg he schemed to settle in an old chateau of the Duke of Wurtemberg at Horburg, near Colmar, where his ANNALS OF THE EMPIRE were in process of publication. The Jesuit Superior of Colmar, brother to the Confessor of the Dauphiness, contrived to prevent that settlement, though the fugitive spent there in all over a year; and after three months' stay at Lyons he was constrained to continue his pilgrimage. He had had dreams of going to Quaker Philadelphia, but wisely gave up that romantic motion. At length, desirous to consult the eminent Swiss physician Tronchin, he made his way to Geneva, buying the house named by him "*Les Delices*" (its former name had been *Saint-Jean* /) near by, and another for winter residence near Lausanne. At "*Les Delices*" or the other house, carrying on a perpetual activity of literary and propagandist work, he lived for some four years; and in that time, when he seems to have reckoned his life's work as nearly over, may be said to have begun the most important period of his dazzling career.

IV

THIRD PERIOD

IT was as a famous rather than as an illustrious personage that Voltaire, after leaving Germany, figured for some years in the eyes of France and Europe. Ostensibly humiliated in his relations with Frederick, denied recognition at the French court, he held at first in his Swiss refuge an equivocal status. His highly successful book on the Age of Louis XIV had indeed given a new element of solidity to his reputation; but the great *ESSAI SUE-LES McEURS* (1756) was yet to come, only pirated fragments having thus far appeared. These were falsified, and he disavowed them; but they served to keep Paris closed to him. It was after he had settled down to the comparatively secure and independent life of his new home that he built up his enduring fame as one of the foremost mental forces of his century, conquering a new esteem by a new activity.

It was not the result of any clear plan. On one side homesick for Paris, whither he was not permitted to go; on the other ready to resume intermediary functions when Frederick's sister besought him to try to promote peace for her brother, in sore straits early in the Seven Years' War, Voltaire long regarded himself as still a part of the old Regime, alternately taking satisfaction in the thought of a Franco-Austrian triumph over Prussia and England, and in the purpose of doing a kindness to the once esteemed churl king who had treated him so ill. The aggression of Frederick on Saxony in 1756, as infamous as his former seizure of Silesia, might well

have moved him to sheer disgust. Frederick was devoid of real goodwill to him even when vapouring of suicide for his own part, and spoke with coarse contempt of the man who was forgivingly counselling him and seeking to serve him, and whom he was ready to employ in bargaining for peace, or in bribing Madame de Pompadour. But Voltaire, half of him a consummate man of the world, could least of all men miss seeing how kings and courts, home and foreign, were ready to use him when it suited them. Versailles could always tolerate him when he could be a useful instrument. Maria Theresa, who had returned no answer to his advances on his departure from Frankfort, was quite ready to receive him at Vienna when the new war made him look like a serviceable literary ally. As such, he could be temporarily forgiven his freethinking. But the course of events barred such a development. The slackness of the victorious French gave the defeated Frederick his chance. Rosbach restored his prestige; and the Seven Years' War dragged its destructive course to its nugatory finish. By that time Voltaire had insensibly advanced a good way on his own great unforeseen campaign, which was to make him a power in Europe in his own right.

The new period may be held to begin with the earthquake of Lisbon, towards the end of 1755. To the vivacious theist, for whom the miseries of men had passed as largely of their own making, that frightful outbreak of destructive Nature seems to have brought a new challenge. Till then he might be reckoned as optimistic as the general run of deists, hostile as he was to the implicit pessimism of Pascal, and laudatory of the doctrine of Pope. To compare the previous poem on Natural Religion, addressed to Frederick, with that on the Earthquake, is to see a wilful theist suddenly shaken **in his complacency**. True, the process goes little further.

Always he had avowed in passing that, though he believed, he could not comprehend. Now he stressed the mystery, with little stress on the belief. His theism had before been explicitly grounded on the fact of the innate moral sense—the position which latter-day theists claim as the one truly philosophic form of their creed. But the flagrant antithesis of a brute Nature which reveals no controlling moral sense had given check to the temperamental comfort in the old evasion; and the new poem sounds a deeper note.

As mere verse, it was markedly the finer work; the bulk of its two hundred lines is among his best serious poetry. An opponent who replied in verse, to the effect that the clay must not impeach the potter, admitted the power of the poem, with the passing reflection:—

Jo ne veux point savoir si ton dernier systeme
Fut jadis, dans Pascal, combattu par toi-meme.

More fervently religious spirits (cruelly provoked by a wickedly Voltairean footnote on the need for revelation) execrated the work as a masterpiece of Satan. The total outcome was a general recognition of a fund of gravity not before ascribed to the poet. Very characteristically, he readjusted his balance a few years later in *CANDIDE* (1759), where the optimistic view of things is riddled in a very different fashion. The poem ends with an *Oremus*—Let us pray; the romance with a *Laboremus*—Let us work. But the theist in Voltaire, fragile yet inextinguishable, like the integument, remained unintended; and in the long campaign which he was yet to make against a persecuting orthodoxy he retained the great tactical advantage that always accrues to him who attacks current religion in the name of God. A thoroughly philosophical Voltaire could never have penetrated the hide of religious Europe.

When to his various renown was added that of the

Essay on General History and the Manners and Morals (*Mccurs*) of Nations, Voltaire began to rank as one of the weightiest as well as one of the most brilliant writers of his time, touching shoulders with Montesquieu, while coming not far short of Corneille and Racine. The *ESSAI* was a work of breadth and length, proceeding on a wide and long study of all history, conducted with a critical acumen not often hitherto applied to either its large or its small problems. Begun for Madame du Chatelet, it was completed for mankind.

At the time, perhaps, Voltaire would still have pronounced that his greatest literary work lay in his tragedies. He was barred from producing these at theatreless Geneva, but continued to have them played in his house at Lausanne, even after the earthquake at Lisbon had terrified Calvinistic Switzerland into a new prostration before the supernatural. It was at those performances that the young Gibbon, sent to Lausanne to cure him of his juvenile attack of Catholicism, heard the poet declaim his own verses. As regards Geneva there was new trouble ahead. D'Alembert visited Voltaire in 1757, and on his return to Paris published in the *Encyclopedic* an article on Geneva, which respectfully deprecated the attitude of the clergy (some of whom he truly declared to be Unitarians) towards the drama. This brought out Jean Jacques Rousseau, who eloquently vindicated the pristine simplicity of the life of his native town, and laid the beginning of the well-founded distrust of Voltaire in his regard. Voltaire, who later published a dignified defence of drama against Rousseau, was himself compromised with the Genevans by the publication of one of his private letters in which he commented severely on Calvin.

The end of the Swiss troubles was that in 1758 he saw his way to purchase, just across the border in Burgundy,

the "free barony" of Ferney, with its old chateau, which he rebuilt. By this time he was again in favour at court. In the panic over the attempted assassination of Louis XV by Damiens in 1757, Madame de Pompadour was nearly expelled by the then Ministers, but recovered her position; and in 1758 her friend and Voltaire's, the Due de Choiseul, became chief Minister. Voltaire was now free to dwell in a corner of his native land, while corresponding from time to time with Frederick, Choiseul knowing and permitting. And still there came from the old poet a stream of works of *belles lettres*—a tragedy on SOCRATES, a version of the Song of Songs (the outcome of a suggestion by the Due de la Valliere that he should produce a version of the Psalms under the auspices of Madame de Pompadour!), and two comedies in the same year with CANDIDE; two more comedies in 1760; and two tragedies, TANCREDE and ZULIME, and yet another comedy, in 1761; while a History of Russia under Peter the Great was taking shape (1759-63). The motives and materials for this last had been supplied by the Czarina Elizabeth, whence naturally resulted an inadequate history; but it was the best then producible, and it sufficed to make clear that in thirty years' time the author had greatly enlarged the outlook on social history from which he had written of Charles XII.

By 1760 Voltaire was the recognized chief of the new skirmishing corps of "philosophers" who controlled so far as might be the great *Encyclopédie* which had begun to appear in 1751, and, with chronic suppressions and interferences, was to go on to completion. Their work, he told them, was to *^eraser l'Infame*, to crush the Infamous, the power of superstitious religion to slay and persecute. As chief he effected one notable "act of justice." In 1760 there was admitted to the French

D

Academy the Marquis Le Franc de Pompignan, once something of a *bel esprit*, but now concerned to obtain the post of tutor to the children of the Dauphin; and he thought fit to signalize himself for it by making his reception discourse an insolent attack on the *philosophes* as such, which edified the orthodox, but offended everybody else. It was an unlucky stroke. Voltaire, reading the discourse at Ferney, dashed off a series of sentences beginning ' *When* * one is or has done so-and-so, every one a barbed arrow for the aggressor. The ' *When's* ' making a hit, there followed, from others, ' *If's* ' and ' *Wherefore's* ' ; and Voltaire, renewing the warfare from time to time, followed up with verses on the same model—' *To's* , ' *That's* , ' *Who's* , ' *Why's* , ' *Ah's* , ' *For's* , ' and so on, which, filling Paris with laughter, goaded Pompignan to angry ineptitudes. The end of it all was his withdrawal from public life, expelled by the merciless hail of ridicule begun and mainly sustained by Voltaire. At times the weapons of satire were turned with a measure of popular success against the new school, as in Palissot's comedy, *LES PHILOSOPHES* (1760), which was acclaimed by those who disliked the men assailed. The Abbe Morellet, replying in a rather savage lampoon, was ungallant enough to turn part of the savagery against a great lady, then near her death, who was among Palissot's patrons ; and for this offence the Abbe spent two months in the Bastille. With Voltaire, whom as a poet he greatly admired, Palissot had a long and courteous correspondence, Voltaire worthily declining to accept compliments at the-expense of his friends, whom he warmly declared to be greatly his superiors in all essential things. With other assailants his relation was different. Freron, who attacked the brethren in print and on the stage, was pilloried in Voltaire's comedy, *L'ACOSSAISE*, which had a long life in Paris and elsewhere. As he wrote concern-

ing his chronic campaign against Pompignan, he did not love war, but when he had to make it he did not do it slackly.

In 1762 began a new departure. In October of the previous year Jean Calas, a Protestant shopkeeper of Toulouse, had been there arrested with his wife, a guest, a servant, and one of his surviving sons, on a charge of having strangled the eldest son, who was supposed to have been on the point of turning Catholic. While they were still in prison there were executed, on February 19, a young Protestant pastor, Francois Rochette, charged with contravening the law as laid down in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and three "gentlemen" co-religionists who had sought to rescue him from his captors. He was hanged, they beheaded. Soon afterwards began the trial of Calas, who may be said to have been doomed in advance. The youngest son, Donat, had been advised to fly to Geneva, and did so; whereupon the Catholics alleged that he also had been murdered. Catholic Toulouse was ready to believe anything, and to do anything.

Two hundred years before, the priest-led Catholic mob of the same city had massacred upwards of three thousand Protestants—unarmed men, women, and children; the Toulouse Parlement instituted an annual festival to commemorate the deed; and the Pope blessed it. The festival was still regularly celebrated, with great magnificence, at 1762. Against Jean Calas there was no real evidence whatever. He was a good and remarkably tolerant man; and for twenty-three years the family had been served by a zealous Catholic maid-servant, who had already converted to Catholicism his third son, Louis. And Louis, though the least worthy of the family, had still been treated with perfect kindness. The eldest son, Marc Antoine, who was hostile to Louis,

had been trained for the bar, but could not be admitted unless he obtained a voucher that he had confessed to a Catholic priest, and the local cur6 refused to grant the certificate usually given by good-natured men of his cloth in such cases. This bar to his career, coupled with losses at play, made the youth moody and melancholy ; and one evening, while his family were entertaining a guest, he hanged himself.

All the evidence went to prove suicide ; but Catholic malice, forestalling the comment that the tyrannous law of the Church had driven the youth to his death, at once leapt to the idea that he had designed to turn Catholic, like Louis, and that his father had on that score murdered him. For this fanatical surmise the sole support found later lay in two compromising details. (1) The agonised father, when sending for a surgeon, had besought his son Pierre and his young guest to conceal the fact that the case was one of suicide. (2) The guest, who had not been present at the finding of the suspended body, made a mistake as to where exactly it had hung. But the poor father's device—so natural in an age and country in which the corpse of a suicide was formally tried for its crime, and, on conviction, dragged naked, face downwards, through the mud to a gibbet and hanged—was really a sign of innocence, seeing that to have told of the suicide would have been for Calas by far the safer course. To rational judges neither blunder would have suggested guilt. Almost any Catholic in Toulouse would in Calas's place have acted as he did. A suicide brought black disgrace on any family.

But before any trial could take place the Catholic brotherhoods, deciding that the dead youth had meant to turn Catholic, gave him a Catholic funeral, with honours; and thenceforward it was plainly necessary to convict the father of murder. To that end the prosecu-

tion was ruthlessly conducted by a malignantly fanatical magistrate. Exculpatory evidence was refused a hearing; the Catholic maid-servant was kept in custody and not allowed to testify; Calas was denied access to his advocate; the most inane hearsay evidence was accepted against him; and the worst methods of medieval "justice," zealously conserved at Toulouse, were employed to convict him. The first court, however (composed of *capitouls* or magistrates), pronounced in November only a sentence of rigorous torture against Calas, his wife, and their son Pierre; the guest and the maid-servant to be present and see them tortured. The five accused then appealed to the "Parlement" of Toulouse, a "high" court of justice; but at the same time the King's procurator appealed on the score of undue leniency in the sentence; their prison was changed, they were put in irons, and were all subjected to "lesser" torture. Before the Parlement the procedure seems to have been even worse than before the magistrates.

There was not to be found a shadow of evidence that Marc Antoine had thought of turning Catholic. In his pockets had been found only some "obscene songs and verses"; there was strong evidence that he had contemplated going to Geneva to become a Protestant minister; and every story of his having "confessed" collapsed on the first inquiry. But he had been publicly buried as a Catholic, with special honours, and the father *must* be convicted of murdering him. At length there was produced evidence of Catholic conduct in public on the part of the deceased—evidence which either was deliberately false or stood for a confusion of identity between Marc Antoine and Louis. But in Catholic France after 1685 all persons had perforce to kneel before a procession of the "host," and all the Calas children had perforce been baptized. The whole scheme

of proof was worthless. As Voltaire wrote afterwards (1763) to Darnilaville: "These Visigoths hold for a maxim that four fourths of proof and eight eighths make two complete proofs, and they give to hearsays the name of fourths and eighths of proof. What think you of this fashion of reasoning and judging? Is it possible that the lives of men should depend on people so absurd? The heads of Ilurons and Topinambous are better made."

At length, seven of the thirteen judges voted for death, three for provisional torture, one for acquittal, and two for an inquiry as to the possibility of suicide in the manner alleged. But seven was not a sufficient majority; the chief judge was persuaded to transfer his vote to them; and Calas was duly sentenced to be first put to the torture, "ordinary and extraordinary," then taken in his shirt to the door of the cathedral in the pose of a penitent, and then to the scaffold to be "broken alive." It was all duly done on March 10, 1762. Interrogated at great length on the "doubled" rack, after being sworn before the crucified figure of "Our Lord Jesus Christ" to speak the truth, he persisted patiently in declaring his innocence and his ignorance as to any one else being concerned in his son's death. Then he was taken to the scaffold, at the foot of which a priest urged him anew to confess. "What, my father," he replied, "do you also believe that a father can kill his son?" To convince him that he could, he was "broken alive" with eleven murderous blows of an iron bar—legs, arms, and thighs in succession—only the first blow drawing from him a cry. Then he was laid on the wheel "with his face to heaven," to continue for two hours in his mortal agony. In that state he prayed to God not to impute his death to his judges, who had "doubtless been misled by false witnesses." To the priest who at the end pressed once

more for a confession he made anew his humble protestations of innocence and of faith in an eternal happiness to come, dwelling lastly on his deep sorrow that his innocent guest should have been by chance implicated in the trouble of the family. Lastly the demoniac magistrate leapt to the victim, pointed to the fire which was to burn his corpse, and once more adjured him to confess. The dying man turned away his head ; whereupon the broken wreck was strangled, and thereafter consumed in the fire. Such was one of the ways of work of " the Infamous " which Voltaire had set out to crush—the faith which fiendishly slays for difference of faith.

And still the pursuit went on. The son Pierre and the young guest, terrified in prison by menaces of the father's horrible death if they did not abjure, turned Catholic ; and it was sought by the news of the abjuration to entrap Madame Calas into a fanatical outbreak. She kept silence. The procurator-general had previously demanded that she, Pierre, and the guest should be hanged, the Catholic maid-servant to be present at the execution and afterwards interned for life. This course was swerved from. Another proposal had been made that Pierre should be sent to the galleys, many having doubted whether the old man could have murdered his son alone. Finally he was sentenced by a majority of the judges to be banished for life—a plain confession of the breakdown of the whole official case. The widow and the guest were disposed of in the same way ; only the Catholic maid-servant was acquitted. Pierre was entrapped into a convent and kept there four months in a cell, finally escaping—half-blind from nine months of darkness. The two daughters of the family, who had been away from home at the time of the tragedy, were also put in a convent, where, however, they met good

treatment from a kind-hearted Sister who held Calas innocent. But family after family of the Protestants of Toulouse escaped when they could to Switzerland, feeling that in the bigot city no Protestant life was safe.

When the hideous tale was made known to the world, the broken-spirited remnant of the Protestants of France found themselves categorically accused by the Catholic Church of teaching that Protestant parents ought to kill their children if they found them inclined to join it. An outspoken anonymous defence, which was publicly burned by the Parlement of Toulouse, so terrified them by its bold counter-charges that they disavowed it, some Protestants professing belief in Calas's guilt. It was left to the heretic to fight the battle of the trembling believers and of their martyr.

When Voltaire first heard the story he took for granted that Calas was guilty, and regarded the case as one of fanatical crime, fanatically avenged. When assured by a travelling merchant from Toulouse that Calas was innocent, he began to investigate, seeking in every direction for the facts, checking testimonies with the vigilance of a man of science and the zeal of a detective, and spending heavily in securing documents. Finding the youngest Calas boy at Geneva, he took him to his house, Les D6lices, and carefully studied him. When Pierre, escaping from the Toulouse convent, reached Geneva, Voltaire placed him under careful espionage for months, guarding against every chance of deception. Satisfied at length of the truth, he with much difficulty persuaded the destitute and heart-broken mother (w^{tho} had retired to Montauban with the faithful Catholic maid) to go secretly to Paris to make possible a methodical procedure for her husband's vindication, providing for her comfort and her concealment; he himself supervising from Geneva every legal step taken, and guarding by

his unmatched shrewdness against the many mistaken counsels of injudicious sympathizers. Meanwhile he used all his multifarious influence with people of importance to move the wheels of the official machinery ; and above all put the case before the world in the HISTOIRE DE M^{lle} ELIZABETH CANNING ET DE JEAN CALAS and the PIÈCES ORIGINALES CONCERNANT LA MORT DES SEIGNEURS CALAS ; with other weighty documents by able advocates.

At length, a year after the death of Calas, the matter was brought before the Council of State at Versailles, which, after a hearing, ordered a review of the case ; and a " Conseil du Roi " proceeded to do it. After another year and three months it quashed the judgment and ordered a new trial. The Toulouse lawyers furiously protested that, theirs being a " Supreme " Court of Justice, their judgment could not be reversed ; and the Archbishop consoled the members with the indulgence of having mass said in their own homes on Sundays. But after yet another nine months of procedure the new trial duly took place before a kind of " Palace Court," consisting of forty high official personages, who at last heard all the evidence, incriminatory and exculpatory alike ; and on March 9, 1765, the anniversary of the sentence of Calas, the victim was declared innocent by the unanimous voice of the forty judges. Madame Calas received a sum of public money in compensation, but that and a great deal more was swallowed up in the enormous costs of the procedure of rehabilitation. Voltaire had spent much ; a European subscription was collected in which appeared the names of the Empress of Russia, the Queen of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and many English peers and bishops ; but not even that availed to meet all the legal creditors ; and not till the Revolution were they all paid off by the National Convention (1792).

The solemn reversal of the abominable sentence, nevertheless, was a great achievement—a new thing in Christian history. No man but Voltaire could have brought it about; and for him it was possible only because there had at length grown up in France, among the educated class, a measure of free public opinion that would not shape itself at the order of the Church. That new force only the infinite energy of Voltaire could have successfully swayed. Throughout the whole proceedings the Secretary of State wrought actively behind the scenes on behalf of the Catholic interest, delaying and baffling justice to the verge of possibility. The pen and brain of the heretic had fought to a stand the whole organization of Catholicism in Church and State by arraying against it the active reason of the minority. And the Church hated him accordingly, with a new intensity; for now even the populace began to divine the actuality of "the Infamous" which Voltaire in his letters from 1759 onwards exhorted his friends to crush. The demoniac magistrate at Toulouse was at length repudiated by his dastardly accomplices. Driven from his official post in 1765, he became insane, seeing everywhere visions of gibbets and executioners; and after one unsuccessful attempt at suicide killed himself by leaping a second time from a window. The record runs that at his death he uttered the name of Calas. It may perhaps be true. His case is one of the dramatic proofs that men not devoid of a sense of justice can be made murderously iniquitous by a religious creed which substitutes for the tests of right and wrong that of obedience to dogma and church. The thousand massacres of Catholic history had proved it in the past for all who could read and think; and Montaigne had long ago put the summary in a sentence; but the passing of that demoniac judge, like a fury-driven

figure in a Greek tragedy, brought the lesson home even to some of the illiterates of Toulouse.

While the Calas case was in its first stage, however, the inveterate bigotry of Languedoc barely missed committing a second judicial murder to match that of Calas. Paul Sirven, a Protestant land-surveyor in the district of Castres, had a weak-minded daughter, who, being said to have turned Catholic, was taken by a Catholic lady to a convent. Thoro sho was repeatedly whipped, and, having become quite insane, was heartlessly sent home. There she was kindly treated, as she had always been, but, wandering by night, she drowned herself in a well; and at once Catholic fanaticism charged the father and mother and two sisters with her murder, exactly as had been done in the Calas case. The local magistrate, pronounced by Voltaire an imbecile, took medical evidence that the girl must have been murdered and thrown into the well, because the body was not full of water; and the Sirven family were declared guilty, as the Calas had been. They fled on foot to Switzerland over the snow-covered mountains, and one of the daughters, married a year, died on the way in childbirth; the child dying also. In this case the local procedure did not admit of the methodical rectification attainable in the Calas case; it dragged on for years, and only in 1764 were the Sirvens formally sentenced—the parents to be hanged and the daughters to be banished. Voltaire and his coadjutors could only appeal to public opinion; and not till 1772 did the chastened Parlement of Toulouse reverse the sentence and condemn the local court to pay all the costs of the original prosecution. The Catholic account of the matter is that Voltaire had deliberately delayed action because he feared the Sirven case, in which the falsely accused family had escaped, would weaken his agitation for the Calas.

Meantime yet another atrocity had been wrought in the Catholic interest. One morning in August, 1765, a wooden crucifix on the bridge at Abbeville was found to have been damaged in the night; and the Bishop of Amiens and Abbeville saw fit to arrange a solemn procession in testimony against what was assumed to be a deliberate outrage. An elderly legal official named Belleval carried the matter further. He had a vendetta against an abbess who had repelled his persistent advances; and the lady often entertained in her convent a young nephew, the Chevalier la Barre, who took his aunt's view of Belleval, and showed as much. Belleval knew that La Barre and one of his young friends, named d'Etallonde, had in the previous month let a procession carrying the Sacred Host pass them without raising their hats; and he procured testimonies to the fact that La Barre had once made an impious remark about a God of dough, and had sung indecent songs, in use among soldiers, about the Virgin Mary. It was found that Belleval's own son was implicated in these sins; but that youth was got out of the way; while d'Etallonde, La Barre, and others, were arrested and prosecuted, all being charged not only with the offences in question, but with mutilating the crucifix, as to which there was no evidence whatever. D'Etallonde escaped before trial, and became an officer in the army of Frederick of Prussia (never being able, even with Voltaire's help, to obtain restoration to his rights in France); but La Barre was tried and sentenced to be beheaded. He confessed only to having sung some improper songs, often sung by soldiers, and to having recited some verses from Voltaire's *PUCELLE* and *BPITRE A URANIE*. Belleval made much use, further, of the fact that the youth possessed a copy of Voltaire's *DICTIONNAIRE PHILOSOPHIQUE*. La Barre was tortured to extract from him a confession about

the crucifix, but to the last he firmly denied complicity in that matter. The sentence of the local tribunal was appealed against before the Paris Parlement, but was there confirmed; and on July 1, 1766, the lad, aged nineteen, was beheaded on the scaffold, bearing himself with perfect fortitude. The king had refused to use his prerogative of mercy, though the actual law did not sanction the death penalty in such a case.

Voltaire now saw himself menaced by a new danger. His new DICTIONNAIRE had been officially burned with the corpse of La Barre ; and personal hatred was as likely to aim at him as at any one. He had latterly added to his specific offences against the Church the mordant SERMON OF THE FIFTY, the SERMON OF THE RABBI AKIB (1760), the TREATISE ON TOLERATION, the burlesque SAUL, and the CATECHISM OF AN HONEST MAN (1763); as well as the QUESTIONS CONCERNANT LES MIRACLES (1765). The Jansenists, now dominant in ecclesiastical politics since the fall of the Jesuits in 1764, had shown themselves more savage persecutors than the Jesuits had been; and Voltaire, seeing for the moment no hope of better life in his native land, actually planned a new exodus to the kingdom of Frederick, who, under careful stipulation for the maintenance of literary propriety, was willing to establish him and other *philosophes* at Cleves. Happily, none of his French friends were willing to accompany him; and he and the world were spared the repetition of former experiences to which another sojourn in Frederick's country would inevitably have led. There was nothing for it but to face the risks in France and to go on with the battle against "the Infamous" which, to Voltaire's mind, alone could make life worth living for lovers of mental freedom.

, his Information

to the Public on those of the Calas and the Sirvens ; an Essay on Proscriptions, and other tractates, with a Commentary on Beccaria's CBIMES AND PUNISHMENTS, and the long-delayed PHILOSOPHE IGNORANT. The next year saw the production of a dozen more things, including a new tragedy and a new comedy; the EXAMEN IMPORTANT DE MILORD BOLINGBROKE, one of his chief criticisms of the reigning religion; the irresistible DEFENSE DE MON ONCLE, retaliating on the critics of the GENERAL HISTORY ; tho searching QUESTIONS OF ZAPATA ; the new romance L'INGENU ; a defence of deistical writers ; and a satire on their enemies. And this astonishing rate of output is kept up and even exceeded for two years more, 1768 yielding fifteen separate entries, and 1769 thirteen. These include the elaborate AGE OF Louis XV and a long supplement thereto; a new work on history ; various vigorous deistic treatises; another romance, JENNI ; the History of the Parlement of Paris ; and the strenuous DIEU ET LES HOMMES.

Nor is it possible to say that the force of Voltaire ever flagged while he lived, though his yearly output lessened in number of items. Always frail, he seemed no frailer at eighty than at forty ; and the four treatises he published in 1777, at eighty-three—the History of the Establishment of Christianity (135 pp.), the Commentary on Montesquieu's ESPRIT DES LOIS (108 pp.), the Dialogues of Evhemerus (120 pp.), and the Prize of Justice and Humanity (102 pp.)—seem to tell of a wholly unabated force. More and more, in his closing years, Voltaire concerned himself with the reform of the brutal and stupid criminal code under which had perished Calas, La Barre, and later (1770) Montbailli of St. Omer, who after torture was broken alive on a false charge of murdering his own mother. Voltaire was able to save the wife, who lay in prison on the same false

charge, thereby proving the innocence of the slain man. More than any other man, next to Beccaria, he wrought for the civilizing of the Christian criminal code which made possible the string of atrocities above reviewed.

And the passion of humanity which had grown with his years was no less manifested in the home life at Ferney. That life had its own side of comedy—and of farce. The building of a church, with the inscription *Deo erexit Voltaire*, belonged to neither of these sides, he being a perfectly sincere deist, if he did beg and obtain from the Pope a relic of Saint Francis for the structure. It was otherwise with his deliberate masquerade (1768) of taking the sacrament in order to have the opportunity of sermonizing the parishioners about the too common practice of theft. But even his going to mass was a sequel to his strategy on behalf of Mademoiselle Corneille, a poorly born descendant of the poet, whom he adopted and was determined to place well in marriage. The further device of receiving the sacrament in an ostensibly dying state (1769) was certainly not edifying; but the Church which had persecuted him was hardly in a position to complain of being played with.

As against these escapades, there stand to his credit not only his long campaigns on behalf of the wronged, but a thousand acts of beneficence. He even took much trouble to appease the strifes of factions among his neighbours, the Genevans; and when that attempt failed he made (1767) a refuge at Ferney for about a hundred workmen—watchmakers, stocking-weavers, and others—who found themselves unbearably oppressed in the very undemocratic Genevan republic of that period. The colony grew and flourished, Voltaire finding purchasers for its products among his crowned and other admirers throughout Europe. In 1775 its population

had risen to 1,200, and in 1776 its production reached in value 600,000 francs. Voltaire was able to claim that his colonists, Catholic and Protestant, lived in perfect amity, Protestants making articles for Catholic processions, and each sect succouring those of the other in sickness. It was a kind of model Republic before the Revolution, a priceless example to Switzerland. And Voltaire, the mocker, gaily declared that he had managed it all out of "pure vanity," imitating the God of the orthodox, who did all things for his own glory.

It was thus upon a tolerably well-spent life that the curtain was to fall in 1778. In his last years the old man had some new and precious domestic happiness in the devotion of the young Mile, de Varicourt, whom he and Madame Denis adopted, and who cherished for him no less affection than that which made him name her his "Belle et Bonne." Madame Denis had often been a trying housemate, and a long absence from home on her part was not an unmixed loss; but she too seems to have mellowed somewhat towards the close of her uncle's life. And he, who had always had "troops of friends," had now armies of admirers in all civilized countries. Fixed at Ferney, he might talk as he would of being retired from the world, a worn-out old man : he remained the most notable figure in the whole intellectual world, increasingly remarkable to the very end. The mere entertainment of visitors at Ferney was a tax on time insupportable by any other writer, and financially bearable only by the richest of the tribe, with an ever-increasing income from many sources, which in the last year of his life exceeded 200,000 francs. Even in the 'sixties, his daily bill for the postage of letters delivered was often over a hundred francs, and he had to announce in a Paris gazette that he was simply compelled to decline the packets of those whom he had not the honour



VOLTAIRE
(From the Statue by Houdon)

to know. During a period of peace and quietness, Madame Denis being in Paris, ha remarks to a correspondent that in the past he had been " hotel -keeper to Europe," and, it must regretfully be added, that of the three or four hundred Englishmen who had visited him all had been too patriotic to remember him afterwards. But that difficulty about postage may very well have been the explanation.

Of the vivacity of the intercourse he maintained with a thousand contemporaries his immense mass of correspondence is the witness. No man in his age, and only Napoleon in the next, was more discussed. Fourteen printed treatises had been devoted to him in 1719 on his debut, fifty in the decade 1734-44, sixty in the next, fifty in each of the next two, and thirty-four in the six years to 1779—twenty-two in the years 1778-79 alone. It was thus a foregone conclusion that when the withered old monarch of the world of letters should revisit Paris, the scene of his triumphs in youth, no surviving hostility on the part of the wasps of current literature could prevent a tremendous acclamation.

When, in 1770, a group of his Parisian admirers started a subscription for a statue of him, the richer everywhere had to be told that their donations must be small, in order that the majority might play their part. Frederick, invited by D'Alembert to give his name with the other monarchs of Europe, returned an ardent eulogium and begged to be told how much he should give. "A crown piece, sire, and your name," was the reply. Voltaire, invited by Madame Necker to sit for the statue, declared that he had no face left, that his eyes were sunk three inches, that his cheeks were of old parchment badly stuck on loose bones, and that he had no teeth left. Nevertheless, the statue was made, and the subject wrote to congratulate Frederick on having added

to his cultivation of the other arts and sciences an encouragement of anatomy by subscribing for a skeleton. The mere making of the statue, according to Grimm, was a Voltairean comedy, better than some of those he wrote. He could not sit still while Bigalle modelled him, but went on talking, dictating letters to his secretary, gesticulating with his inexhaustible vivacity, and driving the sculptor to despair. At length, one day, the talk chanced to turn upon the story of Aaron's golden calf, an anecdote of which Voltaire had sufficiently demonstrated the non-historicity. The sculptor, speaking on the lines of his specialty, gave the opinion that the casting of such a statue would require at least six months, and the delighted old controversialist, charmed to receptivity, became docile as clay to the artist who had learned thus to mould him.

It was meet that Paris, even at a later stage, should see in the flesh what was left of France's most wonderful product of a century. The reunion came about in 1778, when, on repeated assurances that the court would be delighted at his advent, and that his newest tragedy—for he went on penning them to the end—could not be properly rehearsed without him, he was persuaded to convey his "anatomy" to the scene of his youth. It was to have been only for a stay of six weeks; but when he set out the whole population of Ferney was in tears. He had thought to travel incognito—he, the most discussed man in France—and everywhere the transit was a kind of triumphal procession. "You are carrying M. de Voltaire," said the landlords to their postillions, urging speed. Madame Denis and "Belle et Bonne" and her husband had gone on before; the patriarch travelled with his secretary and his cook, whom he kept laughing when he was not reading or sleeping. At the gates of Paris came the usual official challenge as to

whether they were carrying contraband, and "Only me" was the answer. At once, on alighting, came a shock in the tragic news that Lekain, the actor, who was to have played in the tragedy, had just died. The old friend D'Argental, however, was still there, and "I have left off dying to come and see you," declared Voltaire. That night, theatre maniacs both, they sat up till the small hours discussing the new points that Voltaire had introduced into IRENE.

He had not been in Paris for twenty-eight years, and even now he learned that there had been question at court whether the order excluding him had been properly annulled. On the first day he received three hundred visitors, and day after day the reception went on. "Everybody that was anybody" called, and the entire company of the Theatre Francais arrived in a body. Then came the rehearsals, in which, as ever, the Master ruled the players with a rod of iron, implacable as to the proper enunciation of his verses and the due rendering of his characters' emotions as he himself declaimed them. After a week, old friends, like Madame du Deffand, began to fear the consequences of the long strain, and their fears were soon justified. On the fifteenth day came haemorrhage of the lungs, treated by the famous Tronchin with copious surgical bleeding. Even from this he partly recovered; but he began to take precautions against being denied decent burial, and to a troublesome priest he gave the written declaration: "I die, adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition. February 28, 1778.—VOLTAIRE." But the priest was not the parish priest, and the latter avowedly felt injured; wherefore Voltaire, still humorously alive, sought vainly to propitiate him by letter. When IRENE was produced, in a packed theatre, all the court being present save the King, the poet was too prostrate to be present.

Yet again he recovered strength; again he received visitors, and again he bethought him of his tragedy. When he learned that his niece, his friend D'Argental, and others had inserted new verses while he lay helpless, there was a terrible scene, followed by new haemorrhage, recovery, and contrite apologies to D'Argental for things said in anger. Some one might have commented :

'Tis better playing with a lion's whelp
Than with an old one dying,

had quotation of Shakespeare been permissible in that neighbourhood. At the end of March, still wisely proposing to return to Ferney, he less wisely proceeded to pay calls, meeting old friends, old loves, all the ghosts of the far past, and consented to show himself at the theatre, after attending a sitting of the Academy. His carriage could hardly pass through the applauding crowds. The Academy—represented by half of the Forty—received him in their outer hall, a thing they had never before done for any member, and the discourse was an embroidery of compliment. At the theatre the scene was overwhelming, ladies snatching fibres from the fur of his cloak as he passed through lanes of them, the audience shouting its rapture during twenty delirious minutes, in which time he was crowned with laurel. After the tragedy came a new scene of acclamation, the players laurelling the poet's bust amid new thunders of applause, and finally his comedy of NANINE was played to the same transported audience. He could with difficulty get to his carriage, and that had much ado to start. The old man had shed tears freely, not overvaluing the demonstration, but too human not to value it. After such a life of conflict, such a blaze of victory!

But when the crowds in the streets continued day after day to run after his carriage his good sense took

offence. He was in fact minded to go on actively living, staying in Paris against the advice of Tronchin. At length, on the doctor's urgent pressuro, ho decided to go, Madame Denis opposing as usual, and he compromising by buying a house in which she might stay in Paris, while he spent the summer at Ferney. It is not clear why he consented thereafter still to stay in town, but he did, sending back his desolated and devoted secretary, Wagniere. Voltaire proceeded to begin his throe months' term of service as president of the Academy, and roused his colleagues to enthusiasm with a project for a new and scientific Academy Dictionary—destined to be fulfilled only after fifty-seven years. When the scheme, driven by his marvellous energy, was decided on, he thanked the Academicians " in the name of the alphabet," and they him " in the name of letters."

It was his last effective day's work. To flog his faculties for the share he had undertaken in the Dictionary he took overdoses of coffee, and to counter-vail the effects he took doses of opium, ignoring and disobeying Tronchin, who was called in too late to do anything but reproach him. Gradually that wonderful vitality ebbed away. The news of the royal reversal of the attainder of Lally roused him to dictate a brief note to Daily's son, saying that he would now die content. The end came on May 30, 1778; the last words were to his valet: " Adieu, my dear Morand, I am dying."

The precautions to " square " the church in the matter of a funeral had failed, as aforesaid. Near the end the offended parish priest had presented himself; and when the dying man murmured, " Let me die in peace," with a gesture of dismissal, had gone away to report him *non compos mentis*. At once episcopal orders were sent in all directions to prevent burial in any churchyard—

the only kind of cemetery then in existence. This the friends of Voltaire circumvented by the stratagem of sending the body by night uncoffined, held in a sitting position by a servant, to the Abbey of Scellieres, of which the Abbé Mignot, Voltaire's nephew, was "lay abbot." He had gone on in advance, and on his request the body was duly buried. Within an hour or two came the bishop's order, sternly forbidding the burial; and when the prior officially justified his action there were pious cries for exhumation. Finally, the body was left in peace in its tomb in the church vault, with the simple inscription: "HEKE LIES VOLTAIKE." Frederick and others said what they thought of the procedure of the bishops; and in Paris the Academy made formal amends for the manners of the Church, which, it may be, had brought the French Revolution so much the nearer.

Only thirteen years were to pass before the king had to sign the decree of the National Assembly, ordering that the ashes of Voltaire should be removed from their resting-place to the Paris church of Ste. Genevieve, thenceforth named the Pantheon. It was a tremendous occasion, of which the unanimity was broken by the cry of one priest: "God, thou shalt be avenged"; but some of the freethinkers must have mused as to what Voltaire would have thought of the Revolution which thus apotheosized him, and was soon to go a great deal further. Napoleon left the Pantheon untouched. As soon, however, as he was sent to Elba, pious hands opened by night the tombs of Voltaire and Rousseau, bundled their bones into a sack, and buried them, with quicklime, in a piece of waste ground near Bercy. The secret was substantially kept, and not till 1864 was the fact of the exhumation revealed by the opening of the tombs. It is not on record whether the Church collec-

tively or any Christians in particular ever derived any deep comfort from the devout exploit, which raises (among others) the question, Who are the Materialists? Those of the other way of thinking had their comfort in what Parton has fitly termed "the Life of Voltaire after Death."

Madame Denis made short work of Ferney, selling it, marrying in her mature age, and disappearing into merited obscurity with the bulk of her uncle's fortune; though Abbe Mignot and a grand-nephew got a hundred thousand francs each. The beneficent constructive work of the Master on his own little territory thus practically disappeared. But in the world of the mind he had left a composite memorial—his work, his works, and his personality—which remains in full view, after 144 years, and is still well worth examination.

V

THE MAN

VOLTAIRE will never be understood save in the light of his physique and temperament; and the French and other criticism which still discusses him without reference to that determinant is untrue to its own function, insofar, that is, as it undertakes to judge the man and not merely his work. Carlyle, for once sympathetic in terms of his own idiosyncrasy, was the first to point out how much sheer malady counted for in the long epic of Voltaire's career. All through it he had frail health; and his

countless illnesses kept the nervous machine constantly vibrant. But it was a supersensitive machine at its best, and it conditioned alike his faults and his virtues. As we cannot comprehend Rousseau without recognizing his chronic approaches to insanity, so we cannot know Voltaire without realizing him from his childhood as a lean bundle of taut-strung nerves, reacting instantly, often violently, to every kind of stimulus. Alike in admiration and repulsion, love and enmity, delight and derision, whether well or ill, he is electrically spontaneous and "all in." Anger in him was apt to be an explosion, as when a spark falls on loose powder; a sudden provocation could put him beside himself, storming like a leaping rocket; and a score of stories reveal him as flashing fire where another would have smiled; "sudden and quick in quarrel" where others would smoulder and refrain, to meditate vengeance. And he was not unconscious of his infirmity. The very play of fun which makes so many respectable people dismiss him as incurably frivolous was his main recourse against the impact of indignation. All through *CANDIDE* he wears that fine coat of mail. In the first shock of the story of the abominable execution of La Barre he protested that he wished to escape *Mcmeur* and to remain facetious. But when his friend d'Alembert, desolated by the new Jansenist savagery which was out-going that of the soon-to-be-expelled Jesuits, professed the same cynic disposition, the old champion leapt to his feet with the cry that this was no time for sardonic laughter, and dealt out on all hands his burning impeachment. To call such a man frivolous is merely to be blind to his deeds and to his psychology. He was a soul quick to anger, who often instinctively sought to mute his anger into irony in face of the world. But the proclivity remained.

Such lack of balance involves humiliations, and Voltaire underwent several; the compensation being that he was in general as quickly pacified as provoked, and that he never bore malice long. "When I am attacked," he truly said of himself, "I fight like a devil; I cede to no one; but at bottom I am a good devil, and I end by laughing." There seems to have been but one exception. He had it all by heredity—irascibility and practical shrewdness on the father's side, wit and levity on the mother's; and the temperamental blend was unalterable, pervading all his faculties. The singular specialty in his case was the combination of temperament with intellect and wit, turning his enmities to a play of dazzling mockery, sheer intelligence transmuting anger into fun, fire into light. If the light often dances, he is nevertheless the most illuminant of men.

It is easy to understand how such a temperament made at once enemies and devotees. We can see him in his youth as one has described him, "with his great, black, luminous, ardent eyes," with his high, broad forehead, figuring for some great ladies as a "wicked mummy," for others as the most fascinating of all talkers and flirts; an electric battery of repartee, laughter, rapture, wit, flattery, or scorn. Spontaneously gracious, complimentary, caressing, courtly, he had withal from his boyhood an inexhaustible fund of impertinence for acid opponents. When the cool old Fontenelle met the young dramatist after his first success, the ripe censor, somewhat antipathetic to the *verve* of the new-comer, observed to him, with two-edged complaisance, that his style was really too brilliant for tragedy. At once the blades crossed and disengaged: "I must re-read your pastorals," came the smiling rejoinder, and Fontenelle was *touché*. Long afterwards the old sage figured in Voltaire's MICROMEGAS as the "dwarf from Saturn"; for the

bundle of nerves could also be at times antipathetic. But he elsewhere spoke of Fontenelle with proper respect.

And, despite all that has been said of his feuds, in which, be it remembered, he was almost never the aggressor, he was incapable of personal as of racial hatred. In the case of one senseless personal quarrel with the President de Brosses, whom he suspected of over-reaching him, and who was skilfully provocative from the start, he seems to have entirely lost temper and judgment. But that case stands alone. Never was he guilty of hating a man for his opinions, as so many pietists have hated him. The one thing he always hated was cruelty; and it was always the cruelty, never the worker of it, that he kept fixedly in mind. Frederick used him ill enough, being indeed incapable of good human relations with any one; but each man was at bottom too great to fail of respect in the end for what was great in the other. It was with entire truth that Voltaire, at the close of life, declared that he should die in charity with all men. The records of his generous forgivenesses are many. When the Abbé Trublet, who had assailed him and been retorted on, made a courteous demonstration, the response was instant and humorously cordial. Be it added that the notion, set up by German writers, that Voltaire behaved rudely to Lessing, is quite erroneous. Lessing, who had unwarrantably taken away to the country a manuscript unwarrantably lent him by Voltaire's secretary, had no good ground for taking offence at Voltaire's alarm; and Voltaire had written to him with marked courtesy.

A distinguished French critic, M. Faguet, has framed a formula in which Voltaire figures as *the* French bourgeois—the *grand bourgeois*; Diderot as the *petit bourgeois*; Eousseau as the plebeian, and so on; and

Voltaire is on this score credited with all "the" bourgeois faults, including snobbery. He forgave wrongs, says the critic, only when they were dealt him by great personages. But these classifications raise the query whether the critic in turn has not as such the faults of "the" French *litterateur*, or Bohemian, or artist, or of all three; and they arouse a wish that he should go to work in the spirit of French science, which is perforce that of all other science. Voltaire's faults were those of a temperament, not of a class, being distributed in all classes. It was hardly a *bourgeois* trait to let, as he did, all the profits of his many later books go to the publishers, or to bestow help on all who asked it.

He forgave Thieriot for plundering him, and Thieriot was merely an old comrade, not a distinguished personage. He forgave even the miserable Abbe Desfontaines, who, after being saved by him from imprisonment on a shameful charge, sponged on him and then calumniated him for money, pleading in excuse that "one must live," so earning, if he did not elicit, the classic retort. As against the charge of M. Faguet we have that of La Harpe, who, on becoming pious, alleged that after the death of Frederick Voltaire lampooned him with virulence. The facts are that Frederick survived Voltaire by eight years, and that La Harpe had actually appropriated a copy of the MS. Memoirs which Voltaire had sought to destroy long before he pre-deceased Frederick.

It is impossible, on retrospect, not to think of Voltaire as a faulty man, whose high-strung temperament, placed in a world of envious rivals, libellers, persecuting priests and zealots, made him as apt to fence and dissemble at times for safety's sake as to strike out indignantly and defiantly at other times against public infamies and personal wrongs. But moral criticism is worthless if it is not comparative; and when we weigh Voltaire as a

moral force against the supporters of the creed and the dominant system which he assailed, we find him essentially and habitually a fighter for freedom, reason, and humanity against a tribe which upheld tyranny, detested reason, and wrought infinite cruelty. These decisive facts one would hardly gather from M. Faguet's survey.

It is skilfully conceded to M. Faguet by M. Champion that Voltaire, like Kabelais and Montaigne and Moliere, was guilty of being "too French." That cannot well be the worst of faults in most French eyes, or even, nowadays, in English. Mr. Churton Collins, like M. Faguet, rather disliked him, and, blinded by dislike, laid against him charges of personally dishonourable conduct in England which will not bear a moment's examination. And this misdeed has none of the palliating charms of wit and humour which to some eyes soften the occasional injustices of Voltaire. Perhaps we shall conceive him not unscientifically if we regard the over-excitability as the price of the wit and humour, seeing how often those gifts go with that flaw. But the flaw is not merely repellent. Voltaire in the theatre, transported by what he saw and heard to the plane of the persons of the drama, has a psychological interest. That was how his sympathies operated. When his plays were being performed on his own private stage at Ferney he would edge his chair foot by foot from the wings till he was among the performers, applauding or admonishing. We might say that such a temperament was purely French if we did not remember how Charles Fox behaved at a horse-race or a boat-race. And when we read the hilarious tale of the aged Voltaire's voluble wrath at the maidservant who said it was as well that his adored pet eaglet died, because it had been "so thin," he taking the thesis as applicable to his own skeleton aspect, and ordering the maid's dismissal, we might again call the

episode "so French" if we did not remember old Capulet, who is drawn from an English model. But Madame Denis did not dismiss the servant, knowing she could have her re-called from the kitchen after a while on the plea that the girl could not find another place. And Voltaire would never have dreamt of forcing a girl into a loveless marriage. To young people he was exquisitely good. Florian and Mile, de Varicourt and Marmoncel have left their testimonies.

When in old age, peevish with pain, he would at times scold his servants as his father had done before him, he would soon afterwards say in their hearing that they must forgive him because of his sufferings. The cook, "Baba," confabulated with him every morning over his five o'clock coffee, and when he once made the experiment of dropping some essence of rose in the cup, and afterwards suffered accordingly, she informed him that with all his *esprit* he was sillier than his turkeys. In serious matters he was singularly compassionate. Poor people led to theft he saved from prison and assisted to begin an honest life; and when one couple who had robbed him went on their knees to beg his forgiveness, he knelt to raise them, giving free pardon with tears, and tolling them to kneel only for God's. The "divine Emilie" pronounced that, whatever might be his tantrums, his heart was fundamentally tender. And she had cause to know, having a temper of her own.

Let us say, on the other hand, if you will, that there was something splendidly French in the great campaign of three years which he fought for the martyred Calas family. He battled for them as Zola and his comrades battled in our time for Dreyfus. Had he been an Englishman, he would conceivably have fought so for Admiral Byng, whom, as it was, he did his chivalrous best to save from an unjust doom at English hands,

even as he battled for the memory of Lally, the French Byng. What is established by his whole battling life is that he was a man of very strong will. In his childhood he was dubbed *le Volontaire*, the self-willed one (some think he took his chosen name from that, contracted as it might be in pronunciation); and an unsubduable will, if it be a merit, is as much so in his case as it can have been in those of Cromwell and Frederick, whom we have been taught to admire on the score of that characteristic. The will to conquer iniquitous bigotry is certainly as meritorious as the will to conquer in war and faction. It was left to Joseph de Maistre, the Catholic champion, while professing disbelief in Calas's innocence, to make light of the slaying of Calas as part of his case against Voltaire. If we were to say of Joseph de Maistre that he had a bad head and a bad heart, we should perhaps be on stronger ground than is occupied by the anti-Voltairean succession. To be very *volontaire* is to be sometimes badly wrong, but the Catholic in that direction easily outgoes the Freethinker.

One of the miscarriages of Voltaire's obstinacy was his refusal to believe that the marine fossils found in his day in the Alps testified to an ancient state of things in which those mountains were below the sea-level. The phenomenon was eagerly declared by the devout of his day to testify to the truth of the Deluge story, which Voltaire refused to believe, both because it was absurd and because it was a negation of the goodness of God. He knew well enough that there had been great changes in the site of sea-beds, but he was not prepared to think that there could be marine deposits in the Alps. Geology in his time had not got beyond the initial stage of the thesis of De Maillet's *TELLIAMED* (1748), and he was not open to enlightenment on that point. But those who to-day exclaim over that display of wrong-headed-

ness might usefully reflect that at that time the whole body of the European orthodoxy of all Churches held devoutly not only by the flood but by every absurdity and atrocity in the Sacred Books, and that Buffon was put by the Sorbonne (1751) to the public ignominy of a retraction for having indicated large views as to the antiquity of the earth. Voltaire never added to his errors the sin of seeking to suppress discussion or penalize opinion. It is true that he defiantly professed to believe in a rewarding and punishing deity, while avowing that he could not see how the rewards and punishments were conferred ; but until we find a theistic philosopher of the past who has not as seriously confuted himself, that inconsistency can hardly put him out of the class of serious thinkers. In respect of the inconsistencies born of varying mood, he is in similarly good company with the Carlyles, the Buskins, the Emersons, the Mills, the Pascals, and the Tennysons. His warmest admirers admit that he often exceeded in compliment and panegyric ; but if that sin be stressed we must remember that he had in it a large fellowship, including the translators of the English Bible of 1611.' If, in the social manner of the period of his youth, he was too often adulatory, he was the most effective corrector of blind reverence in his time. Those who represent him as doing unworthy homage to Louis XIV have strangely misconceived the effect of his work. It was censured even by liberal men in his own day as unwarrantably irreverent, and he could claim to have been the first to point to the real measure of the Grand Monarque, who in his pages is no admirable figure. Compared with Mommsen's idolatry of Caesar, or Carlyle's of Cromwell, the book is a scientific study. And Louis XV evidently felt that there was no real deference behind Voltaire's courtly flattery: witness his anger at being styled "Trajan."

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That particular hyperbole was a freak of the moment, a levity. But, broadly speaking, in Voltaire the turn for hyperbolical compliment was really an aspect of his large intellectual passion for humanity. No man took more joy in doing good, whether on intellectual or on temperamental motives. And that a man whose life was so largely filled with deeds of active and energetic kindness, a fighter who so loved his friends, a satirist with such a passion for justice and mercy, should still have to be defended, with other freethinkers even more benevolent than he, as Diderot, d'Holbach, and Helvetius, against the animus of creed, is a sad commentary on the influence of faith.

VI

POETRY, DRAMA, AND PROSE

IN his own age, Voltaire was for educated Europe as well as for France a great poet and a great dramatist, no less than an admirable writer of both serious and amusing prose, and an unmatched master of light verse. To-day, neither in France nor elsewhere does he hold the higher poetic kinds of status, though the others stand secure. For in France as in England the "Augustan" tradition was supplanted in the last century by a new growth. Corneille and Racine, indeed, remain classics; and Anatole France the other day saw fit to put the latter high above Shakespeare as a painter of women; but, whatever may be the French fortune of that thesis, Voltaire has lost his old rank in tragedy about as completely as in "epic"

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(From a Sketch)

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poetry. The truth is that for him drama and serious poetry alike were the brilliant exercises of an immensely versatile intelligence and a high literary gift, doing experimentally what the born poet and the born dramatist do because they must so express themselves. For every kind of artistic literature he had a fine talent: what in him is distinctive and unique, to the height of genius, is the spirit of direct criticism of life which pervades all his prose, and of which prose and not verse is the fit vehicle, Arnold notwithstanding. Neither poetry nor drama, as such, is primarily ratiocinative; and Voltaire, with all his passion, is ratiocinative to the tips of his fingers. He reasons even when he is in a rage. And his master bias is one which fails to qualify for great play-making and for great poetry as the nineteenth century and ours have come to conceive it.

It would be unwarrantable to say this in a sketch where there is no scope for the proof, were it not that the consensus of criticism has said it long ago. Even at the end of the eighteenth century—nay, even in his own day—there were French critics who denied him genius as a dramatist; and even the lack of competing French epics did not bar similar judgments on the *HENRIADE*. Nor can they be gainsaid. To make an epic "by the rules" out of the wars of religion and the triumph of Henri IV and toleration was to imitate an imitation of an imitation, so to speak—to resort to the machinery of Ariosto and Tasso, with an eye to Virgil, who had his eye on Homer; and to do it all not because of any impulse to sing an action or present living figures, but because of a gifted young man's love and facility for writing verse, and the conviction that there was an opening for a kind of heroic poem which should convey moral lessons suited to the needs of his time and country.

In face of the young Voltaire's passion for writing

verse, and his unquestioned mastery in all sorts of *vers d'occasion*, it may seem hard to deny that he proceeded on true poetic impulse when he wrote with eager zest a poem that strongly appealed to thousands of sensitive readers in his own age. The phenomenon is really one which forces on criticism the avowal of the relativity of taste. Time counts in aesthetics as well as in the thesis of Einstein. De Quincey says somewhere that fiction is everywhere and at all times "hastening to decay"; and what is true in that statement holds equally of poetry. In Voltaire's time people thrilled to tears of rapture over art forms which strike us as hopelessly artificial and unlikeliest; and to be able to move the instructed to rapture is really the ultimate proof of achievement in the arts. But fashions of rapture change; and for latter-day French criticism the bulk of French work of the eighteenth century is *podsie sans podsie*, unpoetic poetry, even as so much of English verse of that age is for us. Of course, the phrase will not hold literally. Poetry is not a definite something monopolized by great poets and wholly denied to the mass of versifiers. It is a question of degree of inspiration, of power of upward flight; and Voltaire certainly had some, though there is not much in the *HENRIADE*. The trouble is that most of what passed then for elevation of feeling is found later to be but facile rhetoric, lacking the intension which flames into great song. And that fate of devitalization overtakes scores of poets in all ages and all countries.-

The fact that, while so much art becomes rapidly ineffective for posterity, some continues to thrill and charm after thousands of years, seems to many to prove that there is an aesthetic absolute, a kind of expression always valid, secure from mutation of taste, because in all ages it has the ring of life and feeling as we all know it; and we may agree that that is as near an absolute as

we shall get. As a matter of fact, it disallows a great deal in Homer and Virgil, and leaves wholly valid only selected things—such as a certain amount of Greek sculpture, mostly mutilated; some songs of Sappho, in the same case; more or less large extracts from Greek drama; passages of Virgil; a handful of the poems of Catullus; and so on, through the ages. By that kind of test, a great deal more than Voltaire will go to dust on even the select shelves of eighteenth-century literature; but it is at any rate clear that *LA HENRIADE* is long ago declassified. After Lamartine and Victor Hugo had struck new music from new lyres, that of Voltaire's epic grew slowly charmless, even for French ears that always responded readily to sheer rhyme. The percentage of vital feeling as discriminable from verbal and episodic artifice and modish rhetoric was felt to be too small. Much of the supernatural and allegorical machinery, too, conies clearly within the scope of his own animadversions on Milton; while much of the verse is but rhymed prose. The subject, in fine, was poetically felicitous only for an age; we who to-day are attracted by it find the prose history of events much the more interesting.

What remains true is that even in his epic Voltaire was original in so far as he handled his matter freshly and brilliantly within his modal limits; and the same praise is earned by much in his tragedies. The peculiar stiffness of French classic tragedy—the aspect which tempts us to compare it with Shakespeare somewhat as we compare Egyptian hieratic statuary with Greek—is a result of the twofold influence of classic model and court etiquette. French tragedy, unlike English, was framed expressly for the taste of the court and the upper classes. The French verse prosody, to begin with, retains a pronunciation which has long ago disappeared from every-day speech; and the verse gives a lead to classic

convention all round. Action is so minimized, and speech so rigorously confined to the always rhymed rhetoric of correct courtly personages, that we are apt, as we vulgarly say, to be "bored stiff" by the totality even when we are anxiously ready to echo at every page the "il y a un beau vers" of the spectators in *LE MONDE OU L'ON S'ENNUIE*. Distinguished persons discoursing alternately with their confidants and with each other, always in rhyme, are too wide of illusion for eyes and ears not docile to convention. In *BERENICE*, Racine is held to have triumphed by making a tragedy without a death, out of the sheer sorrows of the frustrate lovers; and, given the imposed form, atmosphere, and medium, it is wonderfully well done, though we may feel spasms of cramp over such diction as Berenice's

No vous offensez pas si mon zèle indiscret
De votre solitude interrompt le secret.

What we ask in regard to the whole is—what in effect Voltaire himself asked—Why not give some pulse of larger life to the scene by bringing in some of the Romans whose resistance forces Titus to send away Berenice, instead of merely telling us vaguely about their attitude? Why limit drama so closely to recitation? That is to say, we domur to the form and the atmosphere even if we let pass the medium. Voltaire, holding zealously to the prescribed French form and medium in general, seeing no nearer approach to verisimilitude in the blank verse convention than in that of rhyme, and repugning the pell-mell of classes and types in Shakespeare, was yet so far influenced by the English variety of scene and action as to bring them to some extent on his stage. Following Saint-Evremond, he declared that the bane of French tragedy was its lack of action, and he sought to some extent to introduce it. He was alarmed by the young Marmontel's introduction of a trial scene, with the

accused in fetters ; but applauded warmly when the scene was acted. Yet Marmontel's *coup de théâtre* meant no enduring dramatic success. Voltaire partly succeeded; partly he failed against the intense conservatism of Parisian taste, which resented as much the appearance of a personage with his arm in a sling, in ADELAIDE DU GUESCLIN, as it did the theatrical cannon shot which in the same play announces an execution. Perhaps the audience was right on both counts ; it was by intellectual rather than by mechanical departures from usage that he best realized his own ideal.

And for his age he did in a measure realize it. People who oppugned him confessed with vexation that his tragedies brought tears to their eyes. In the decades of his supremacy it was quite an accepted view that he was the compeer or rival of Corneille and Racine, only the purists dissenting; and after him we find the acrid Joseph de Maistre, who hated him, and who as a child had been lulled to sleep a hundred times by his mother with the verse of Racine, avowing that in one field Voltaire could be "sublime"—to wit, in tragedy. The critic goes on to protest that it is by way of "hypocrisy," by aping the great poets ; but there the tribute stands. And if in the next age Victor Hugo found Voltairean tragedy the most "formless" thing in literature, we are to remember what Arnold thought of the tragedy of Hugo. In Georgian England, Gray, disliking all freethinking as he did, placed Voltaire's tragedies next to Shakespeare's ; and Bulwer Lytton a century later reckoned him the greatest of French dramatists. BRUTUS and the DEATH OF CAESAR, ZAIRE and TANCREDE (which made Marie Antoinette weep), had a long run of vogue ; ZAIRE is still played ; and MEROPE is still praised by critics otherwise hostile. They are assuredly no weakling's work, though the confessed failures were deservedly dismissed.

But all this does not make him finally a great or durable dramatist. At best, he is the gifted and resourceful dilettant of the stage, keen about striking effects, fluent in rhetorical verse, but often, in his haste, slipshod in his diction, sinning as badly as Corneille ever did in the very modes of bad style for which he so vehemently reproached Corneille, and against which he so explicitly warned Helvetius. Legouv⁶, Deschanel, and others, have freely sampled his lapses—chiefly from ADELAÏDE DU GUESCLIN. When they speak of his bad versification they do not refer to what we mean by that term; Voltaire's verse is correct enough; they condemn the turgid and distorted diction to which he at times resorts to fill his lines—a kind of misdeed absolutely impossible to him in prose, where he is the consummate master of his medium. And his stumbling-block was not merely the difficult verse and rhetorical convention of the French stage, but his fundamental lack of high vocation for the poetico-dramatic presentment of life. It is true that absurd and distorted phraseology abounds in both the narrative and the lyric verse of our own Shelley, who was so essentially a poet that Swinburne could call him alone "the true singing God"; but in Shelley the frequent collapse of diction came of the recurrent doctrinal and didactic preoccupation which so often led him to defy the discipline that alone makes verse justifiable; in Voltaire, for whom strict art in verse was confessedly the supreme law, the failure came of heedless hurry to achieve a stage mosaic."

He had not here meditated enough, because he had not felt enough. French critics have said that he had not sufficient genius to give effect to his dramatic ideas: perhaps it would be more accurate to say that his ideas had not enough of genius in them to inspire a great execution. The best proof of Voltaire's lack of the

highest dramatic gifts is his almost complete failure in comedy. This, on the part of the greatest wit and humorist of his age and country, has naturally been the theme of much puzzled comment. Like the dramatic failure of Lamb, it tells of a personality which, though greatly gifted to give out its own view of life and of other personalities, is not capacitated to enter into them and set them in their proper action. Faculty for greatness in drama is evidently quite distinct from literary genius of either the analytic or contemplative, the narrative or the descriptive order ; it was denied to Tourguenief and to Flaubert no less than to Lamb. Voltaire's measure of dramatic success is but that of an extremely alert intelligence, employing a quick talent.

Even in the field where he is admittedly without rival, the humorous didactic romance, of which *CANDIDE* is the masterpiece, we are in presence of a non-dramatic faculty, though the facility and felicity of the character-sketching as of the play of incident might suggest that if he had only held to his true instrument, prose, he might have produced true plays. The paradox of Linguet, that verse-writing is " only a habit," inessential to either poetry or serious drama, is indeed better worth discussion than it is has been held to be. But there is no reason to think that Voltaire could have written what we call a great novel any more than a great play. He had not the impersonal insight into and interest in other personalities as such which, differently qualified, makes the novelist or the dramatist; the content in sheer portrayal of characters as in themselves the stuff of life. He is rather their critic, their satirist, their teacher, their admonisher.

And, having thus recognized all the orders of genius that he had not, let us be thankful for that which he had—a genius for the criticism of life in a fashion which

stirs and charms, illuminating and disentangling the imbroglio of human things in its own matchless way. This gift, irradiated by wit and humour, pervades all his prose, the most pellucid of all vehicles of thought and statement. There we find no laming convention, no cheap artifice ; he is so apparently effortless in his prose diction that many critics have been quick to deny to him greatness there, arguing that for that there is needed more than vigour and lucidity. And it is conceivable that if, anticipating Linguet, he had sought to secure in prose some of the kinds of effect which he pursued in verse, he might have given us much that would have barred such criticism. But the criticism is false as it is. Those who vend it cannot have weighed the prose of the PHILOSOPHE IGNORANT, which has so often the echoing depth of great prose style; or even the prose of the graver articles in the DICTIONNAIRE, which so strongly testify to the strength and seriousness of his religious bias. The truth is that in prose Voltaire had unlimited faculty, and that if he does not often there set up the impression of the conscious literary artist, as we get it in Bossuet, it was because his artistic ambitions fastened on what he regarded as the special literary fields of art, poetry, and poetic drama. In prose his ruling concern was to be clear, concise, coherent, interesting, and magnetic, for the express purpose of exposition ; not to dazzle by diction or to move by rhetoric, but to win conviction, not applause. In a word, he is there sincere in every application of the term.

And in the unique prose romances—ZADIG, BABOU, MEMNON, MICROMEGAS, CANDIDE, L'INGENU—we have at once the genius for style applied to the lightest form of narrative and the genius for wit etherealizing wisdom. Here the inveterately hostile can but mumble of "frivolity," trying to evade the fact that these dancing

recitals all face with clear vision the great problems of life and character and conduct. This is Voltaire without alloy. If it be fit praise for Emerson that he "kept hold of happiness and hope," what praise is to be denied to him who in *CANDIDE*, victoriously confuting the optimism that makes our scene the best of possible worlds, steeped in gaiety the very pessimism of the confutation, unfolding

the riddle of the painful earth "with the keenest sense of its agony of blood and tears, and yet never revolting us by the record. The French artist in him, which recoiled from horror on the stage, so rules him that he unrolls strings of atrocities without making us shudder, somehow keeping throughout the key of the supper of the six exiled kings who had all gone to Venice for the Carnival—the scene which shook Europe into a new sense of the comedy of human things.

And this unfailing grace of presentment, when all is said, leans to the side of poetry, being thoroughly akin to the spirit and the execution of the wonderful mass of Voltaire's "occasional verse," which is without rival in any literature. Carlyle, scrutinizing it and its author from his point of view as champion of Frederick and of earnest purpose, applauds here without reserve. And the world continues to do so likewise.

VII

HISTOEY

WHEN Voltaire began to write and study history there had been creditably done a certain amount of modern historical work and a certain amount of able scholarly and critical research in ancient history. The younger Scaliger had founded chronology (1583), and Tillemont had laboured powerfully to clear up the records of imperial Rome (1691-1738). Freret, one of the greatest scholars of his age, had carried far and widely the same critical impulse in his manifold and strenuous researches. But in regard to all early ancient history, pagan and "sacred" alike, the prevailing attitude of scholars was still in great part credulous and uncritical. Freret was actually sent to the Bastille for a critical inquiry into the historic origins of France. Beginning by writing his HISTORY OF CHARLES XII (1731), a model of concise and lucid narrative, Voltaire gained at once a direct view of the difficulty of reaching accuracy and certainty even in matters classed as within living knowledge; in carrying out his survey of the Age of Louis XIV, over which he took endless pains to secure first-hand documentary and other information, he learned much more fully the same lesson; and when he began to set down what seemed to him valid and valuable in the history of civilization he brought a keen and in part trained critical sense to the study of legendary matter. The result was a great and fruitful impetus to all historical study in Europe.

Alike as to matter and method, indeed, a new spirit was now in the air. In England Voltaire found men like Bolingbroke already exclaiming against a historiography which recalled "old almanacs," and which retailed dusty events without explaining social movement. The concern about causation was taking new lines. Even Bossuot (whom Voltaire praised highly for the style of his *Discours* on Universal History, though he censured its narrowness of scope and thought) had announced that while the revolutions of empires were ruled by God for the humiliation of princes, nevertheless, apart from "certain extraordinary *coups* in which God willed that his hand alone should be seen," there were no great changes which had not their causes in preceding ages. The "true science of history," he affirmed, was to trace tendency. Machiavelli, indeed, had taught the lesson more penetratingly long before ; and Montesquieu powerfully applied it not only in his *ESPRIT DES LOIS*, but in his masterly essay on the Greatness and Decadence of the Romans. But Voltaire was the first to handle largely the history of civilization and of an important modern period in the light of the new outlook. Hume, who began to produce his *History of England* in 1752, does not present social history as does Voltaire in the *AGE OF LOUIS XIV*, though in his *NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION* and his political and economic essays he had given a decisive lead to the new way of studying the past. Gibbon, still more gifted in other ways to clarify historic science, treads on Voltaire's heels.

As Buckle pointed out, the only general principles which hold good in Niebuhr's criticism of early Roman history were laid down by Voltaire—who, however, had a strong lead from Beaufort, whom Niebuhr later disparaged. This prompt perception of the unveridical character of early historic legend he had in virtue of his

perfect freedom from past-worship. The temper of free individual judgment, hampered only by the prejudices of his literary education, made him as instantly critical of historic tradition as of old or alien literary standards. It gave him, in fact, that activity of scrutinizing reason which is the root and the life of all science; and this at a time when doubts on Roman history were in all seriousness thought in France to be nearly as wicked as doubt on Genesis, which was blasphemy. Looking rationally at all orders of history, he swiftly sifted and weighed the legendary matter which everywhere stood for an account of the beginnings of societies, and, finding it all mere myth and raw poetry, he sought at once to frame sane hypotheses on grounds of what we in England now term anthropology. Applying the same method to written history in general, he insisted on testing it by canons of probability—a tentative which could not in one age be carried everywhere to sound results, but which as begun by him stirred a thousand minds to new examination and reflection. Thus he earned the title of founder of modern historic science—a status accorded to him by many before Buckle, and in our day endorsed by leading masters of history in France.

One of Voltaire's strongest literary proclivities has stood in the way of his professional reputation as a historian. Above all things he valued brevity, and he never troubled his head about proving his knowledge by references or weighting his argument by elaborate excursus. Big books he honestly regarded as great evils. "Time is so precious and history so immense," he wrote, "that readers should be spared idle fables and idle moralizings." For his own study he ruthlessly cut away great portions of many standard works, binding up only what he held to be useful; so that his library of 6,000 volumes was from the book collector's point of

view nearly valueless. Padding he could not endure. Some men can be prolix in one small volume; Voltaire is terse through a hundred. For him history had to be compendious if it was to be readable; and masses of narrative which told of mere intrigues and feuds without conveying any idea of total social or political movement were fit only for reduction to summary. Hence, for many, an appearance of suspicious lightness, setting up the usual charge of superficiality. What is true is that no man can survey the whole of human history in its most important aspects, offering estimates at every step, without being frequently inadequate; and Voltaire had no illusions about the finality of his work. But the fact remains that the *ESSAI SUR LES MŒURS* was a great and brilliant boon to his age—winning in England the delighted welcome of such different types as Gray and Horace Walpole; and that after a century Buckle could pronounce it the best book of its kind yet produced. Gray, it will be remembered, had planned a didactic poem on the process of civilization, and had put it aside when he found that Montesquieu had anticipated some of his best ideas. Voltaire's *ESSAI* gave him more of what he wanted.

What is beyond dispute is that the *ESSAI*, with the *ESPRIT DES LOIS* and the *Essays* of Hume, created or inspired within a generation a whole new school of sociological thinkers. In Scotland there was a notable group. Principal Robertson, the "Moderate*" clerical, was Voltaire's disciple in history; and we can trace his influence in Dr. Ferguson's *ESSAY ON CIVIL SOCIETY* (praised by Comte); in Adam Smith; in Dunbar of Aberdeen—a thinker undeserving of the disregard into which his work was allowed to pass; and in Millar, disdained of Hallam, but longer-sighted than Hallam in some directions. The lead of large and penetrating

general views in the *ESSAI*, and the deft and exact execution of the *SIECLE DE LOUIS XIV*, gave a new life to all historiography. In the reaction which followed the French Revolution all of Voltaire's work of course came under censure; and Hallam protested against Robertson's praise of his grasp of medieval history, while admitting that "the latter history of his country he possessed very well." But Hallam's and other disparagements on detail do not really affect the issue as to Voltaire's service. He had read hard and far, little as he sought to prove his erudition. That was the thing he was least concerned about. Learning like that of Larcher, who could annotate everything in Herodotus without elucidating anything and without power to reason justly on any large issue, drew his derision when it chose to raise just such issues. Proceeding on common sense, Voltaire denied that what Herodotus said of a universal usage of religious prostitution in Babylon could be true. Larcher, swearing by Herodotus, maintained that the fact was proved by a text in Baruch, which he misquoted. Modern scholarship, proceeding on much accumulated knowledge, inevitably decides that Voltaire was right. The Catholic scholar could believe anything that blackened paganism, Babylonian or Roman, and counted a rational argument as nothing against a classic text. Voltaire, tossing aside the apparatus which established the irrational, raised the plane of history once for all. Certainly he made wide shots himself, and he was taken-in concerning the "Ezour-Veda." But his slips were venial beside the solemn folly of the pedant on larger problems; and after reading the *DEFENSE DE MON ONCLE* it is quite impossible to be serious about them; those of the professional scholar are so much more absurd, especially when he sees fit to be facetious about Sarah and Ninon de l'Enclos. Larcher

stultifies his very scholarship when he argues that the antiquity accorded to Chinese civilization is assumed in order to discredit Christianity. It was Christian missionaries who first amassed the proofs; and Voltaire had backed them by sound and original sociological reasoning. "He reasoned; he did not compile," as he makes the nephew of *mon Oncle* remark in that festive DEFENSE.

The criticism which detects in him errors about the Pepins is naturally blind to the larger importance of a vision which rolled back the Catholic curtains and revealed the vista of human beginnings to a world taught to accept the neat finality of Bossuet and Ussher. Hallam, whatever his private views, shows no vision on these problems at all. For him the fall of Napoleon was one of the special *coups* of deity so dear to Bossuet. Such criticism as his makes out merely that Voltaire had nob written a final history of the Middle Ages. Voltaire never supposed he had. But when to Hallam's is added the criticism which denounces Voltaire as unable through prejudice to see the good wrought by Christianity, we are dealing not merely with a contrary prejudice which falsely supposes itself to be scientific, but with a prejudice which will not even read Voltaire. And even unprejudiced critics at times do him injustice : M. Lanson, for instance, affirms and denies on the same page that Voltaire gave the Church credit for real services. In point of fact, he often backs a Pope against an Emperor; he always notes a concrete service to civilization; and he says warmly appreciative things about monasticism just as he does about his inferred Jesus, while also pointing out, as many Catholics have done, the deep dis-service that monasticism involved. The full measure of reactionary obscurantism was reached when his denunciation of the Crusades was met by an infatuated claim that they had

greatly furthered civilization. The vory furtherance claimed had to be stated in terms of the paralysis wrought in Europe by the dominion of the faith, which the Crusades are alleged to have cured ; and no account is taken of the enormous demoralization and misery wrought in the process, which Voltaire brought into clear relief. The reader who has been taught to think of Voltaire as blinded by freefchinking prejudice has but to turn to the ecclesiastical history of Cardinal Eleury, his contemporary, for an estimate that substantially squares with his, or to the little book on the Crusades by Sir George Cox, an English clergyman, where will be found a record of the whole business more damning than Voltaire's.

The obscurantism which glorifies the Crusades yields only one elementary truth—the ancient truth that great evils may be accompanied by some small benefits. The same claim may be made for the World War; but not even the militarists have latterly ventured to claim that the grains of good balance the vast harvest of horror and crime. On the principle which acclaims the Crusades nothing in history can consistently be deplored. Voltaire was the apostle of peace on earth. Once he was so far deflected from his principles as to acclaim a Russian war against Turkey in the hope that it would free his adored Greece, giving his favour whole-heartedly to the Christian people as against that which could "neither read nor write, nor dance nor sing." But he was incapable of the Tennysonian folly of proclaiming that "a peace that is full of wrongs and shames" is to be rectified by a war that is full of agony and hate. And with regard to the broad question of the influence of a given organized religion on civilization he simply applied the tests of honest morals and true historiography. The answer which fifty years ago and earlier passed with some as.

scientific is but the resistance of a prejudice which has not taken one scientific step. It blurs the details of history into a foregone and false generalization, and does not even begin to weigh the conflicting facts, insisting on the verdict *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* for every step of progress. By that test, polytheism wrought Greek civilization, savagery wrought polytheism, paganism evolved Christianity, Catholicism is the generator of Protestantism, and persecution gets the credit of inspiring Voltaire.

VIII

CRITICISM

LARGELY construed, the term "criticism" would cover the bulk of Voltaire's most important work, since he is a critic in historiography, morals, politics, and religion, as well as in artistic literature. But by handling the former topics separately we limit our heading—save for an estimate of his general critical faculty—to the latter; in which field, indeed, Voltaire is a notable practitioner. Unfortunately, he went far to spoil his market in England by his celebrated attack on Shakespeare as a *sauvage ivre*, a tipsy savage, a kind of Caliban of genius, capable at once of prodigies of power and of prodigies of grossness and bad taste. It is necessary, then, to look into that matter before we seek to come to a judgment on Voltaire the critic. Professor Lounsbury has done so, at some length, with his usual methodical thoroughness. But perhaps Professor Lounsbury's trench-warfare mood and

manner may yield a verdict which is not so impeccably true as it looks ; and when one finds him on p. 22 suggesting that Voltaire sometimes deliberately wrought to deceive, on matters of fact, people worse-informed than himself, and then on p. 25 deciding in regard to his account of the life of Cromwell that "the worst thing to be said about this essay is that he undoubtedly believed himself what he put in it," we are moved to misgiving even about the ethico-critical method. It is possible, perhaps, to be fairer than Professor Lounsbury on the Voltaire-Shakespeare question without fundamentally differing from him—at least in words.

We may all agree, to begin with, that Voltaire *could not* in his day appreciate the unique greatness of Shakespeare as an artist. Hardly any Englishman adequately did, though Shakespeare had always been warmly praised. Coleridge is responsible for the figment that Shakespeare's greatness had not been seen before Lessing. Thirty-two years after his visit, Voltaire speaks of *les Anglais* as putting Shakespeare on a level with Sophocles ; and it was largely due to an indiscriminate English idolatry, then common, of everything published under Shakespeare's name, that Voltaire became an assailant of the idol, for he confessed that the action of the old plays had greatly interested him in the theatre. But to appreciate Shakespeare's blank verse was another matter. It is doubtful whether Voltaire can have savoured the mastery of the verse of Milton, of whose *PARADISE LOST* he writes with so much admiration, while justly denying the fitness of many of the episodes. What he has in view is always fitness of invention and of image; there is no dwelling on the large and various harmony of the verse, which for us veils in music the ill-conceived allegories and episodes that repelled Voltaire. And,

indeed, it is doubtful whether in 1728 either Theobald or Pope could have conveyed to him any adequate sense of the rhythmic magic of the versification in the work that is really Shakespeare's. Many Englishmen are deaf to it to-day ; and Voltaire's rapid assimilation of English idiom could not help him to taste the quality of the greatest Elizabethan verse in an age in which the Pope couplet was the sovereign verse form. That technique was as kindred to the French as Shakespeare's was alien from it. And, over and above all that, the dramatic taste in which Voltaire was brought up was in the main quite irreconcilable with the Elizabethan fashion of mingling tragedy with farce, poetry with buffoonery, and the vernacular and demotic with the stateliest conventions of blank verse. It needed the more catholic spirit of Diderot to value all aright. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that Voltaire was one of the first to tell Frenchmen of Shakespeare's power; and this service, which Professor Lounsbury notes only to convict him of sinning against light, really counts for something the other way. In point of fact, he denied to Shakespeare in his very first account of him "the least spark of good taste or the least knowledge of the rules," while granting him "a genius full of force and fecundity."

But while Voltaire was the first to introduce Shakespeare to his countrymen with any commendation, indicating what he thought the good and the bad, the later-ensuing French admiration, which he thought indiscriminate, caused him chagrin ; and he then (1760 and later) stressed rather fiercely, at times quite unworthily, what he held to be faults. Professor Lounsbury's account is that he picked out the "garbage" from *OTHELLO* and maliciously paraded it. But if we are to play Aristarchus as the Professor seeks to do, we must

blame as such what we confess to be literary garbage no less than we blame the malicious exhibition of it. And this the Professor is careful not to do in words. For him, Voltaire is the sole sinner in the matter. But Voltaire not merely translated exactly the obscenities (left out in a French version) which he denounced in *OTHELLO* : besides arguing against what he thought the tasteless incongruities of the tragedies, he condemned the psychic disunity of *HAMLET*, the clown's prattle to Cleopatra, and the trivial Katherine scenes in *HENRY V*. Now, *HAMLET* as a whole, with all its marvellous power in detail, is psychically incoherent, for reasons into which we cannot here enter. The Katherine scenes in *HENRY V* are worthless. They are not the work of a man of genius at all. They are, in short, not written by Shakespeare. But Voltaire could not possibly know that, when no contemporary Englishman had glimpsed it; and he was within his clear critical rights when he condemned what he found to be by some uncritically praised. Dr. Johnson actually followed him in this condemnation. For the rest, as Professor Lounsbury very fairly shows, many Englishmen eminent in that age for critical taste, Bolingbroke and Shaftesbury included, denied that there existed in English one entirely good tragedy. Voltaire was saying what distinguished Englishmen had said in his hearing, alike as to *HENRY V*, *HAMLET*, *OTHELLO*, and *JULIUS (CESAR)*.

Still there remains an unanswerable indictment against him. It is quite true that there are strange grossnesses in *OTHELLO*. Shakespeare, indeed, like Marlowe, is free from essential grossness: that entered into the Elizabethan drama mainly with Jonson, and developed, through Fletcher and Massinger, to Dryden and the men of the [Restoration. But in *OTHELLO* there are things that exclude the unexpurgated play from school editions, and

the critics have never even asked themselves whether they are of Shakespeare's origination. None the less, Voltaire's course in dwelling on these by way of criticizing the play as a whole is a sin against criticism, as was his device of citing from *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA* only the scene in which the clown prattles to Cleopatra of the dangerousness of the worm; with nothing said of the amazing power of the tragedy as a whole. What has to be kept in mind in passing judgment is that the critical sin in question is one still committed every day. There are in England at this moment professional critics, regarded by themselves as in the forefront of their craft, who, without scruple, apply that very method to the works of authors whom they dislike. After all repetitions of the lesson against sampling the wheat from the chaff, the thing is frequently done. And it is as puerile as it is perverse ; puerile in the way of the person who condemns a house or a cathedral for a broken window or a stained stone.

In no worthy meaning of the word is it criticism at all. It has none of the balance and sanity of the *ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY*. Criticism and malice are "of two houses." Polemic is another matter. That will go on with due asperity so long as the average ethics of the intellectual life are, as is still the case, lower than those of the commercial. But he who professes criticism professes both science and justice ; and when he turns his back on both he is but working intellectual iniquity. The odd thing is that people who profess to deplore the natural asperities of polemic are so often ready to practise or to endorse iniquity in literary criticism. Macaulay and Carlyle did it, time and again, presenting what was worst in a given performance as constituting its substance, and receiving common assent in so doing; and in due course the method was turned against

Macaulay himself by Arnold, even more iniquitously. Quite spontaneously, Arnold often assumed to class writers by comparing the best of A with the worst of B.

The explanation of these things, as of Voltaire's handling of *OTHELLO*, is in terms of Flaubert's unanswerable challenge to Sainte-Beuve over his carping critique of *SALAMMBO*: "Are you sure that you have not let your criticism cede to your nervous impression?" Nervous impression counts for so much in the very process of judgment, and literary men are so little given to self-analysis, that criticism which is at all vivacious is apt to be unjust. And Voltaire, with all his love of truth and justice, was about the last man to bridle himself with scientific checks on his nervous reactions when he was excited. Of all reasoning men he is the most vivacious; the most prone to the nervous impression. In every aspect, temperament is with him cogent. It determines alike his evasions and his heroisms, his follies and his sagacities, his wit and his prejudice. His quickness was one of his snares. Once, ridiculing a scholar who discussed a certain charge against Socrates under a misleading title, he misunderstood him as whitewashing where he was denying; and at once the arrow left the bow, the scholar being assailed as the master mocker would assail Maupertuis or Pompignan. A French scholar of our own day is bitterly severe on the blunder, and not unjustifiably so. Haste is no more an excuse for injustice than is prejudice. But we shall do well to remember that for one such hasty and humorous sin of Voltaire against others a hundred coldly malignant injustices were and are committed against him; and if we further realize him as something of a *gamin* given to hurling squibs in a world full of his enemies, we shall get a truer notion of his personality than is to be reached by the process of putting him in the pillory for his critical

misdeeds while his generation is left unjudged and his normal rectitude and shining good deeds are left out of the account. And we are to remember, too, that the worst of Voltaire's polemic against Shakespeare, put in his letter to the French Academy in 1770, is part of what had then become a hot controversy, in which Voltaire, once denounced for his "Anglomaniac," was hotly assailed by a new generation of Anglomaniacs who found him old-fashioned. It was a situation to upset a better balanced temperament than his.

Broadly speaking, his general literary criticism has in large part the merits of his criticism of history and of religion; the drawback in this case being that he was dealing with art and aesthesis in a day of established conventions for many of which he was a partisan, while there he fought by the lights of good sense, judgment, and humanity. Once more, his range is too wide, his spirit too quick, to admit of his going scientifically into the problems of the great literary arts; even as his immense vivacity of production barred him in the main from the creative brooding which yields the greatest form of utterance. Wistfully accepting the expert verdict of his friend Clairault, that he lacked the due qualifications for original work in physical science, he missed the correlative question whether he lacked the slow patience that scientifically probes aesthetic problems, which also call for scientific handling.

Voltaire, so to say, is the genius of common sense, doubled with wit and humour, and these gifts neither constitute a poet nor capacitate for the perception of poetic power under strange or antique vestures. He could no more fully adjust his mind to Dante or to Kabelais than to Shakespeare; they are alike in large part outside his aesthetic orbit, given him by his clever Jesuit teachers; and to all of them he says, in effect,

Why did you not write as we do? Even in Montaigne he is put out by the distance of the idiom and the diction from his own. Not that Voltaire was blind to the power of Shakespeare or of Dante. Even when fuming at what he found unendurable changes of key in the Tudor drama he emphatically avows the astonishing force of certain Shakespearean utterances, which thrill him to rapture. Nay, he always affirms that Shakespeare is a genius, and in a midway mood genially decides that the great barbarian would probably have been a perfect artist if he had lived in the age of Addison, the deadness of whose decorum Voltaire perhaps knew as well as anybody, though as decorum he acclaimed it. But he never took the necessary trouble to know Shakespeare: it was impossible that he should. The probability is that, irritated on the one hand by puerilities which are not Shakespeare's work, and by the flaws of structure that make *HAMLET* a standing perplexity, as well as by peculiarities of technique which offended his exclusively Parisian code, he never patiently mastered the mass even of Shakespeare's greatest plays. And when he speaks of Falstaff as a *general* whom Prince Henry slangs in an unbecoming manner, we speechlessly realize how misconception can make the master of wits at a pinch play the simpleton.

But the other things are to be kept in view in a general estimate of Voltaire as a literary critic. When he protests as he does against what he reckons incongruities of key, he is really arguing for an absolute and unchangeable standard of taste, trying Shakespeare and Dante too often by the French tests of the eighteenth century for its own French products. Now, it is quite true that Shakespeare *redivivus* would not in the eighteenth century have mixed the comic with the tragic exactly as he did in his own day, though Otway, following the tradition,

did. The method really does not now recommend itself, either in drama or in fiction; and it was certainly not adopted by Shakespeare as a matter of high aesthetic principle. It was the spontaneous device of matter-of-fact actor-playwrights and others before him, seeking to please mixed audiences. Marlowe seems to have disliked it, and it is not to be supposed that Shakespeare greatly delighted in it. There the fundamental aesthetic problem has been missed by Voltaire's antagonists no less than by Voltaire. It is one thing to appreciate the primal power of the old method, or to enjoy the incomparable Falstaff scenes as interludes in a historical play; it is quite another thing to maintain that the grave-diggers in HAMLET or the clown in ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA belong to the finest tragic method.

On the other hand, it is to be remembered that Voltaire was very ready to confess to bad quarters-of-an-hour in Corneille. He gave much offence in Franco by so doing; even as he gave offence by his early praise of Shakespeare. Some severe English criticisms of Corneille's CLEOPATRE he at once declared to be perfectly just, only claiming that the same judgments had been put by Frenchmen earlier. He really had a very active palate, a critical sense always responsive to what struck him as bad in taste or feeble in execution; and, as he declared, he must "follow his heart." Where he found Corneille insupportable he resolutely said so, defying the storm which followed. Even in his adored Kacine he saw blemishes. If habitual discrimination makes a critic, Voltaire fills the part. The trouble was, on the Shakespeare issue, that he did not realize the relativity of taste to culture, or dream of the secrets of rhythm which make great blank verse greater than rhymed. Hence we have from him the lamentable dictum that the only difference between blank verse and

rhymed is that the former weakly escapes the difficulty of rhyme. As if dozens of English playwrights, from Greene to Dryden, did not write rhymed drama with consummate facility without often reaching even the merit of second-rate blank verse. But the essential intractability of the French tongue to blank verse barred for Voltaire the perception of the aesthetic facts, even as we mostly tend to dislike the French alexandrine, and dislike the sudden changes of beat by which it escapes its normal monotony.

When all is said, Voltaire is not one of the greatest critics: by his temperament he hardly could be, vivid as were his perceptions and sensitive as was his taste. A good critic he often shows himself, in an age when criticism was still largely pedantic. His driving power in that field was, as aforesaid, his nervous impression, which could yield him, alike in reading Shakespeare and in reading Corneille, raptures of admiration and storms of recoil. In general the recoil is that of common sense against what to it is an extravagance of construction or of phrase or thought; but the Voltaire who so often explodes against an exorbitant metaphor is at times in the mood to acclaim another no less so. Thus Palissot, who greatly admired and judiciously criticized him, could justly impugn his "anti-poetic system" of verbal criticism as being at times quashed by himself. The fact was that Voltaire, not a great poet (Palissot notwithstanding), normally regarded poetic diction in the mood in which he framed his own, but was at times carried beyond himself by a magnificent salience of image in a poet who had the gift for it. Hence an instability in detail in his estimates.

But it remains true that, as Sainte-Beuve avows, his judgments no less than his example made in the mass for naturalness in style and for sanity in conception ;

while his unquenchable enthusiasm for good writing of all orders was an immense stimulus to literature wherever he was read. Many a time, from his forties to his eighties, did his unstrung nerves declare themselves in pessimistic outcry against an evolving literature from which ratiocination and neologism were by the nerves' testimony banishing alike gaiety and beauty; though, with one foot in the grave and the other entering it, he was on fire with the project of a new Academy Dictionary in which much of the lost vigour of idiom and term in the old writers (recognized and acclaimed by him in his youth) should be rescued and preserved. Macaulay, be it remembered, was perfectly confident in his latter years that English literature was "miserably enervated"; and Lowell could find nothing after Hawthorne to extract from him a superlative. In fairness, such attitudes may be set down to the touch of age upon the literary temperament; but the born critic would resist it. The critic who does not is otherwise preoccupied; perhaps happily; but he is to be classified accordingly; albeit he may retain a considerable status.

When, however, granting the limitations of his literary training in fine letters, we turn to estimate Voltaire as a judge in the less technical disputes of literature, we are bound, if we will be just, to see in him a rare faculty for justice, not always obvious in the pronouncements of critics who have passed judgment upon him. To Bossuet, on the score of the DISCOUBS and the funeral orations, he pays the highest homage. He is accused by Sainte-Beuve, indeed, of being biased in favour of the Jesuits, through his Jesuit schooling, to the length of being ready to earn Jesuit favour by assailing Pascal. Ernest Havet is guilty of the same aspersion. Now Voltaire always maintained, with broad justice, that in the LETTRES PROVINCIALES, which as literature he

extolled to the uttermost, Pascal not only unjustly ascribes to the whole Jesuit body the extreme teachings of a few, but in effect exhibits the general Jesuit teaching as corrupting mankind—this even while adding a "don't nail his ears to the pump." Pascal, as a matter of fact, set up in the France of Louis XIV, towards the whole Jesuit influence, a temper of mordant contempt closely akin to that which Voltaire later aroused against traditionalism in general, and thus played a great destructive part in preparing the "century of freethought," though the partisans of Pascal who assail Voltaire never seem to realize the fact, even after De Tocqueville has stressed it.

Towards Pascal's anti-Jesuitism Voltaire stood as one who knew, on the one hand, that the Jesuits were in general good schoolmasters and often amiable men, and on the other that not only did Pascal maintain dogmas (e.g., salvation by grace) as immoral as any of those of the Jesuits, but the Jansenists of Pascal's affinity were in the mass capable of an insane and murderous fanaticism. The Jansenist *convulsionnaires* were temperamentally the near kin of the Leaguers of St. Bartholomew's Day. For the rest, Pascal's personal counsel to hesitating believers to "stupefy" themselves by ritual—a counsel which seems to have appealed to Professor James—was as destructive of intellectual rectitude as the Jesuit sophistries which Pascal exposed. Nay, Pascal is admitted even by his admirers to have flatly prevaricated in denying that Jansen taught what was ascribed to him. And if we reckon up the several sins of Jansenists and Jesuits in the matter of persecution, it is hard to say which comes out the blacker.

When, then, the Jesuits were being politically discredited in France, and d'Alembert was willing to let the "Jansenist gang" relieve France of the "Jesuit gang,"

Voltaire with truly critical shrewdness warned his friends that they might be getting out of the frying-pan into the fire. "A plague of both your houses!" was his feeling as to the two groat persecuting Catholic factions whose virulent strife was the outstanding religious phenomenon of French life for three generations; but he disliked even persecution of Jesuits; and to the men of the two factions, as men and as writers, he is signally just. No one has ever outgone his encomium of Pascal as a writer; and Havet and Sainte-Beuve confess to his sympathetic appreciation of the best side of Port Royal. In short, Voltaire as critic could be fraternal towards men whose opinions were antipathetic to him, and who, had they sat in judgment upon him, would probably have been withheld by their antipathy from giving him one good word.

IX

MILITANT FREETHOUGHT

THE conventional estimate of Voltaire's work as a Free-thinker has gone through a number of stages. In his own day he was fervidly denounced by Catholic orthodoxy as wickedly impious; and, of course, that verdict still holds for the faithful. After the Revolution he was bracketed with Rousseau and the French *philosophes* in general as having practically caused the French Revolution by breaking down respect for tradition; and to have caused the Revolution meant, for respectable people, **to be guilty of its bloodshed. Then in England came the**

comparatively rational but "hedging" attempt of Carlyle, notable in its day, to deal with the Voltairean propaganda from the point of view of the more instructed, who knew that a great deal of Voltaire's criticism of current religion was true. Carlyle, himself a non-believer in the Sacred Books, professed to sum up the case by saying that if you conceded to Voltaire the untenableness of the dogma of plenary inspiration his attack was turned, and "his ram swings freely to and fro through space." Only the memory of the social danger incurred at that time by going even so far as to give up plenary inspiration can withhold us from pronouncing the criticism highly disingenuous. For the dogma of plenary inspiration was the ruling faith of Christendom; and it was more largely owing to Voltaire than to any other that a growing minority of educated men had given it up. To make light, then, of the very polemic which had so largely wrought the emancipation was to play fast and loose with critical equity. To give up the dogma was to raise the question, What, then, is to be believed? But that issue Carlyle never faced. He did but hint that believers need not raise it.

It is of course true that both in England and France deists had assailed and for many thinking men discredited the dogma of inspiration before Voltaire took up the attack; and that current of thought had never ceased to flow. But Voltaire, passing in his youth from the select society of unstudious Parisian unbelievers to an England where multitudes had read Locke and Collins, and were reading Woolston on the Miracles, recognized instantly that he was in a healthier moral and intellectual atmosphere, and yearned for a similar freedom of publication and debate in his fatherland. Woolston, it is true, was fined and put in local detention, but his books sold openly by the thousand. In France they were

unprintable; and a far less advanced challenge to faith would have to face serious penalties. We have seen the official reception of the LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES and the SIECLE DE LOUIS XIV. When, after middle life, Voltaire found himself so placed as to be able to launch his "ten thousand tracts"—always under pseudonyms—he was aiming at doing for France and French-reading Europe what the Deists had done for England.

And he had a powerful motive. To a man of Voltaire's temper, who saw the relative freedom of discussion in England, there was something intolerable in the reign of bigotry in France, where the suppression and persecution of new ideas had never slackened, and where such men as Buffon and Helvetius had to undergo the humiliation of formally abject retractations when they ventured to depart from authorized tradition. That men of good minds should be thus under the feet of men of no mind was perhaps the worst of the gravamen. The "ass's heel" was as trying to Voltaire as to Burns. Books which, like the LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES, made no attack on scriptural doctrine, were nevertheless condemned to be burned. Deslandes's PYGMALION (1741), La Mettrie's HISTOIRE NATURELLE DE L'AME (1745), Diderot's PENSEES PHILOSOPHIQUES (1746), the younger Beausobre's PYRRHONISME DU SAGE (1754), met the same doom as was passed on De la Serre's LA VRAIE EELIGION; and where authors could be caught they were imprisoned. Diderot was in jail for six months for his LETTRE SUR LES AVEUGLES. In 1757, after a year in which apparently no innovating book succeeded in appearing, there was framed an edict pronouncing the death penalty against all authors "attacking religion"—a formula to be interpreted to ecclesiastical taste. A general suspension of serious literature naturally followed.

On these matters there has been persistent mystification. Orthodox critics like Linguet, admiring Voltaire on the literary side, professed after his death to rebut his demand for tolerance by arguing that no one is entitled to "insult" the religious opinions of his neighbours—the kind of argument which justifies police measures in India to prevent religious riots, and is never sought to be turned against those who "insult" Atheists in Europe. But, as Linguet very well knew, every species of innovating thought bearing in any way on religion, however devoid of disrespect to religious practice, was in Voltaire's as in earlier ages seized upon and strangled by French authority. There is a peculiar piquancy in the protest against Voltaire's propaganda, as coming from Linguet, whose *HISTOIRE IMPARTIALE DES JESUITES* (Madrid, 1768) had been condemned to be burned; who had been dismissed from the Bar in 1775 for his attacks on other advocates; and who in 1780 was sent to the Bastille for two years for an attack on the Due de Duras, an academician and marshal of France. In his youth he had been himself a *philosophe*; but he quarrelled with the courteous D'Alembert in 1762, and in 1764 published an attack on the group under the title of *THE FANATICISM OF THE PHILOSOPHERS*—this when Voltaire's frontal attack had been little more than begun. Linguet, a victim of temperament and ultimately a victim of the guillotine, is to be remembered with compassion; but in view of his argument against toleration of any departure from the ecclesiastical code of dogma he had less grievance than some of his fellow-martyrs. Voltaire, who hated all persecution and objected even to capital punishment, began to attack current doctrines and the Sacred Books only after dozens of reasonable books had been burned; when dozens of men had been imprisoned for a moderate rationalism which left the Sacred Books unassailed; **and**

when the death punishment had been decreed against any new work of the kind. If the edict was never put in force, it was mainly because the new resistance began to open clerical eyes to the danger of violent provocation, though books continued to be officially burned till 1788, as they were after the Restoration.

Condorcet has misled literary historians by affirming that Voltaire's first frontal attack on the Sacred Books, the *SERMON OF THE FIFTY*, was written in 1762, and was motived by emulation of Rousseau, whose *EMILE* (1762) had been publicly burned at Geneva and Paris on account of its *PROFESSION OF FAITH OF A SAVOYARD VICAR*. But M. Champion has pointed out that the *SERMON* is actually mentioned in Barbier's *JOURNAL* as current in Paris in MS. in 1760 ; and it may be older than that, though the date of 1749 placed upon it in miscellanies of 1764 and 1765 is certainly not to be relied on. The "attacks" on superstition and fanaticism in such works as (*EDIPE* and *MAHOMET* and *ZADIG* (1747) are incidental and generalized ; the *SERMON* is a direct impeachment of the creed and its books. It was thus ten years after the date at which Voltaire is represented by Professor Sidgwick as having demoralized the French upper classes by his scepticism that he really began to assail Christianity. And it was also after he had ripened his judgment and approved his strength in "criticism of life" by the *ESSAI SUR LES MŒURS* and the *SIECLE DE LOUIS QUATORZE*.

What, then, is the nature of Voltaire's critical campaign against orthodoxy and superstition ? It is vital to realize that these were his objectives. "Eeligion" he constantly distinguished from superstition, for he had his own religion, an ill-established but very persistent theism. In our own day an English bishop and an American professor have been found to repeat the old assertion that

Voltaire was "atheistical" ; and it is said that that view is still common in France. Voltaire was really a theist of the essentially "religious" type, clinging to his faith even after he had been driven from the optimistic form of it by his reflections on the earthquake of Lisbon. That it should have needed such an experience to shako him out of the ordinary Popean theism is part of the proof that his God-idea was emotional and not philosophical. But still he held to it, and, after routing in *CANDIDE* the theistic optimism of Leibnitz, he continued to combat every form of atheism, which to the last he pronounced a "ridiculous" opinion. He could not or would not recognize that philosophic atheism was but a rejection of *his* deity on the logical lines of his own rejection of the innumerable deities of others, and that it posited *no* theory of the infinite universe, such a theory being, in the terms of his own argument, impossible to the finite mind. In his *PHILOSOPHE IGNORANT*, after reaching a distinctly pantheistic position, he recoils from the pantheism of Spinoza simply because he sees that that comes to the same thing as atheism. He clings emotionally to a "Providence" which is the negation of his own doctrine of natural law. Thus it came about that for the harder and more consistent thinkers who refused all the untenable propositions of theism he himself came to figure as a kind of genial bigot, an "adorable child," who beyond a certain point would not reason. His theism was a faith.

It was in this temper that he assailed the traditional religion which, for him, dishonoured the God-idea. Like Thomas Paine in the next generation, he attacked the current creed and Sacred Books because in his opinion they *made for atheism*. The *SERMON OF THE FIFTY* is penned on that motive; and if any orthodox person supposes that it must be refutable, let him try to refute

it. Neither in France nor in England was Voltaire's polemic ever met save by vituperation or evasion of the main issues. After generations of polemic in which serious English deism had been answered as often by snarls and sneers as by serious argument, Paley complained feelingly of Voltaire's attack that it is impossible to refute a sneer. But the "sneer" is only the light artillery of Voltaire's battle; the moral and logical attack is intensely in earnest, and his mockery is *his* way of dealing with what he felt to be the stupidity of resistance, where the orthodox expedient, as against persistent attack, was virulent objugation.

M. Lanson, justly pointing out the scientific importance of Voltaire's criticism of religious tradition, placates religious feeling by conceding that the attack was angry (*haineux*), *bouffon*, and *ordurier*. But it should be noted that a main part of Voltaire's indictment was that the Old Testament itself is full of hate, and that *it* was *ordurier* in its accounts of non-Jewish peoples. It was because all the savagery of the old records was imposed on mankind as divine truth, divine morals, and divine administration that he revolted against it. As a body of ancient folk-lore he found the Old Testament extremely interesting, and said so. But when its "oriental fables" were forced down all men's throats as the highest truth accessible to mankind, and every demur was met by fire and fetters, he might fairly claim that he did well to be angry, though his anger, compared to the opposing hate, was as protestation contrasted with brutality. It ought now to be possible even for traditionists to see that the record of their predecessors is a cause for shame; and all men capable of seeing that much of the Old Testament ethic is a product of early barbarism should have the candour to avow that Voltaire was within his rights in saying so. He was determined to arouse the general

reason against the unbearable tyranny that was paralysing it; and he succeeded. The most propitiatory criticism would have been suppressed just as zealously as the most severe, and would have had the fatal handicap of passing unnoticed. A pamphlet known to be pungent and powerful would be eagerly sought for, and would secretly circulate in defiance of prohibition, where a decorous tentative would be put down and done with. Pious like political tyranny has to thank itself that the revolt against its methods is fiery, and that the fire spreads.

It is a mistake, indeed, to suppose that Voltaire's was the severest attack made in his age upon the Christian religion. The TESTAMENT of the cure Jean Meslier (d. 1733 ?), obtainable throughout the century in MS. in Paris at a high price, is a far grimmer and more systematic impeachment of the whole faith and its documents than Voltaire ever compassed. It ruthlessly bombards alike theism and evangelicalism ; denounces the gospels alike for their figments and for the false promises put in the Founder's mouth; and sternly maintains that the whole system has been made a machine of tyranny and cruelty. This indictment, left behind him by an old village priest of the strictest rectitude and humanity of life, was written, copied, and re-copied by its author at least as early as 1733. It is the patient achievement of a perfectly convinced and earnest atheist, and its indignant denunciation of the injustice and inhumanity of the Christian social system may be said to "prepare and summon" the French Revolution in a sense that cannot hold of the work of Voltaire or any other leading freethinker, though they all read and mused over him. Voltaire in 1762 published an extract, from which he was careful to leave out the atheism; and d'Holbach and Diderot—mainly the latter—concocted from the

TESTAMENT in 1772 a booklet entitled "The Good Sense of the cure Meslier," which Voltaire found "terrible." It was Meslier who first put in writing the phrase about "strangling kings in the bowels of priests," and tells that he had it from the mouth of an uneducated peasant who had roached that pleasing sentiment for himself. The old priest had always fulfilled his public functions and dealt faithfully by his parishioners, though he avows that he had been a hundred times tempted to repudiate the rites of his office.

For Voltaire, in whom anger always tended to dissolve in wit and humour, the task of assailing "the Infamous" was on the whole somewhat more cheerful, though the chronic cruelties inspired by the creed lacerated his heart, and it was to make them impossible that he fought. Gladstone believed and said that Voltaire's watchword, *Ecrasez VInfame*, "Crush the Infamous," was pointed at "the Christian religion" as a whole, but he cannot have studied the case. "The Infamous" was for Voltaire the spirit of persecution, which rooted and flourished in blind faith and anti-rational dogma. Had the Church not been an obstinate persecutor he would never have gone out of his way to fight it; and had it not shed blood his watchword would never have been shaped. Where Meslier impeached the gospel Jesus as a retailer of false promises, Voltaire acclaimed the Founder, as a man, in tributes which M. Champion challenges Christians to match for their charm. In his last years, when the Church had begun to falter in the work of persecution, largely because he had made it more and more unpopular, he looked forward to a time of tranquil truce, in which all men would be good theists and all dogmas quietly decay in the sunshine of a religion of reciprocal beneficence. Kenan's Life of Jesus would have been quite to his mind.

As it was, he produced a long series of compact treatises and *jeux d'esprit*—a professed translation from Bolingbroke (1762) purporting to have been written in 1736, attacking the Pentateuch, the prophets, the Jews, the Gospels, the early Christians, the Fathers, and the Church; a treatise on Tolerance (1763); the burlesque SAUL (1763), substituting humorous drama for a serious English impeachment of David; QUESTIONS ON MIRACLES (1763); LETTERS ON MIRACLES (1767); homilies on atheism; an essay on GOD AND MANKIND (1769), in which, after a long comparison of other ancient religions with the Jewish to its disadvantage, there is a notable vindication of an historic Jesus held to be discernible behind the Gospels; that quiverful of arrows and arguments, the PHILOSOPHICAL DICTIONARY (first ed. 1765), to which he went on adding wit and wisdom year after year, glancing at every form of unreason and injustice; a BIBLE AT LAST EXPLAINED (1776), duly ascribed to "Some Almoners of S. M. L. R. D. P."—that is to say, of His Majesty the King of Prussia, who had no almoners—an extremely business-like examination of most of the Old Testament and Apocryphal books; a critical survey of the Apocryphal Gospels; a History of the Establishment of Christianity; and, beyond all this, over the whole period of twenty years, dozens of dialogues, scores of open letters, catechisms, diatribes, squibs, sermons, sets of verses, tales, fables, commentaries, discourses, published in various countries under more than a hundred pseudonyms, satirizing priests and persecutors, flouting dogmas, and glorifying God. It is the most astonishing pell-mell of propaganda ever put out by one man who was at the same time producing a mass of general literature; and by the habitual declaration of the Catholic priesthood it "overthrew religion" in France.

That is of course no more true than the self-stultifying corollary that the alleged cataclysm was accomplished by sheer frivolity and superficiality. It was no doubt aggravating that the unwearying old polemist contrived to put so much sparkle in this mass of work over which he toiled so hard and so long ; but the fact is that any one who read all that Voltaire wrote on religion learned a great deal more about it historically than most priests ever did. Yet, when all is said, the propaganda reached only a minority in France and elsewhere. Frederick was probably not far wrong when he put the French public of his *philosophe* friends at 200,000. If these included the bulk of the most intelligent of the educated class, the result is a severe reflection on the appeal made to such minds by the current religion and its apologists.

It has been common to say in England that the answer of orthodoxy to freethought in France before the Revolution was "bad" as compared with that made to deism in England. This is a curious misconception. No vindication of orthodoxy in England was ever shown to be largely successful in re-converting deists to the faith; and Paley's skilful arrangement of the more plausible arguments was rather a prophylactic to be administered to orthodox youth than a cure for unbelief. Butler's ANALOGY perhaps checked some from following the deist gambit with zeal; but, like the PENSEES of Pascal, it must have made more doubters than believers. In France the orthodox defence was quite as energetic, as prompt, and as competent as in England. Bergier, who replied to the EXAMEN CRITIQUE DES APOLOGISTES DE LA RELIGION CHRETIENNE (ascribed to Freret; probably by Burigny), did not make the mistake of disparaging the powers of the author—a common weakness in English apologetics. But the defence failed because its case was weak. Bergier entitled his

reply L A CERTITUDE DES PREUVES DU CHRISTIANISME ; and Anacharsis Clootz replied by a CERTITUDE DES PREUVES DU MAHOMETISME, which has been V8ry unintelligently described as foolish. It proved that there can be no proof of any alleged revelation as against another.

Voltaire wrote nothing so massively learned as the EXAMEN last mentioned, which he greatly admired. His aim was to stir the critical faculty of the mass of thinking men, and he succeeded as no other man could have done. His ever activo critical sense, independently developed in his scrutiny of ancient history, was awake to all the thousand-and-one incredibilities in which the unawakoned judgment of the ordinary believer sees merely marvellous revelation; and in particular he disintegrated not only the pseudo-history set forth in the Pentateuch but the assumption of the "Mosaic" authorship. On this point ho was far in advance of his time. In England, indeed, Samuel Parrish, the Guildford bookseller, detected (1739) the lateness of Deuteronomy ; and in France the physician Astruc (1753) laid his finger on the double tradition, Elohist and Jehovist, through the whole structure. But Astruc held fast to "Moses" as the compiler of the whole ; and Voltaire, convinced of the nullity of that assumption, paid no heed to the valid analysis of the material, though, had he reflected more, he might have seen that Astruc's thesis fatally undermined the "Moses" tradition. Scholarly Germany, slow enough to appreciate Astruc, seems to have paid no heed to Voltaire's plain exposure of the impossibility of the tabernacular life in the wilderness; and Kuenen has to record that this discovery, which for men of critical intelligence might be supposed to have been superfluous, remained unseen by the Continental specialists until it was repeated by Colenso, enlightened by a Zulu. Thus

the experts of linguistic scholarship, searching by that light alone, remained blind for a century to a truth perceptible by critical common sense at any period, and known to thousands of unscholarly freethinkers.

Concerning Voltaire's general criticism of Biblical history and morals, we are to remember that he was expressly combating the ingrained belief that the records were an unequalled guide-book for conduct—a delusion cherished in our own age by so liberal a spirit as Matthew Arnold. On this side "Voltaire was not writing simple history, or simply estimating relative racial merits: he was assailing a false estimate. And this is the answer to the criticism that he shows animus. Disparagement is the retort to extravagant over-estimate, backed by persecution: the source of animus against Judaism was in the endorsed pretensions of Judaism—a fact hard of assimilation by Judaic minds. Led by that revolt, Voltaire at times unjustly extended his indictment of Biblical morals to the Jewish race; and when fitly challenged he confessed his misdeed and openly retracted. A Portuguese Jew, Pinto, one of his literary admirers, who had met him in Holland in his youth, put the challenge, and at once received (1762) the avowal: "The lines of which you complain, Monsieur, are violent and unjust. There are among you men highly instructed and very worthy of respect: your letter sufficiently proves it to me. I shall take care to insert a cancel-slip in the new edition. When one has done a wrong one should repair it, and I did wrongly to ascribe to a whole nation the vices of individuals." There followed an appeal to the protesting Jew to avow that superstition and persecution were blots on all religions. Voltaire had his thanks. M. Pinto—or some other propagandist writing later on the same side—replied by complaining that the slip should have been inserted in the *old* edition

(which had been entirely distributed!), and that the new (already printed !) should be *altered* (as if a correcting slip were not the most open and prominent way of making a retraction), and by proclaiming that the Jewish people had never done any wrong to mankind. "I except," he added, "the nations which the divine Oracle had proscribed." That is to say, it was wrong to speak ill of the Hebrew people in general, but right for them to vilify in the mass and to massacre all the peoples "proscribed" in the Pentateuch. Voltaire could learn; the Judaist could not. To Voltaire's argument that the savageries of the Pentateuch could not be divine oracles he could not even see that any answer was required. The upshot was that, the perverse reply being printed with his apology, Voltaire left his text unaltered.

In regard to both the Old and the New Testaments, Voltaire anticipated the principle of nineteenth-century study, that 'the true criticism of dogma is its history.' It is he who first attempts a rational as distinct from a traditional account of the rise of Christianity; and he may justly be said to have given Gibbon the lead for his fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. As to Voltaire, in turn, it is claimed that he received both stimulus and ideas from Bolingbroke, and this may well be true, though it is to be remembered that the *EXAMEN IMPORTANT* which he professes to translate from Bolingbroke is not a translation at all. Bolingbroke is unduly disparaged as superficial and inexact in his critico-historical speculation, in an age in which hardly any rational inquiry had been made into Jewish and Christian religious history save on orthodox lines, and his talk may have been instructive. Both he and Voltaire, indeed, might have profited by the great treatise of John Spencer, *DE LEGIBUS HEBRÆORUM, RITUALIBUS ET EARUM RATIONIBUS* (1685); but their lay scrutiny of super-

naturalist and other history had its own value. Voltaire in particular forced on all branches of history alike an attitude towards authorities and documents which was effectively innovating, and the method of his inquiry into other ancient records underlies his assault upon the Sacred Books.

That such an assault should then provide a substantive scientific account of religious history was impossible. That is even now only being adumbrated, having fallen largely into the hands of men primarily concerned to show that religion must always have been somehow beneficent. Nor was Voltaire's anthropology notably scientific even for his own day, as we have seen. He was too much under the influence of the sentiment that a good God could not fail to implant in his creatures an idea of Himself, to be free to seek quite inductively for the traces of the actual growth. But it is not on that account just to blame him, with some, as imputing to the early Christians an idea of God which they did not possess, and condemning them for not rising to his. This is the old irrelevance of treating him as attacking early Jewish and Christian religionists for not being civilized, when it was his compelled task to refute those who maintained, with virulent animosity towards all who denied it, that the early Jews and the early Christians had received definitive divine revelations of the highest truth, upon which posterity could never improve. While ancient error was imposed by fire and iron as the highest truth, how else should he expose the error?

Lord Morley, who sees and says these things so clearly and so well, puts also, perhaps on a Comtist view, the countervailing charges, pronouncing that Voltaire perversely identified his own God-idea with that of the early Christians. But the early Christians *did*, like later Christians, profess to believe in and to proclaim

an absolutely beneficent God. Voltaire was showing that they stultified themselves by their account of his rule, and that present-day Christians were doing the same thing. More perplexing is the antinomy of Lord Morley's alternate statements, (a) that Voltaire could not see "how futile and inappropriate it is in the long run to examine a religion otherwise than in its most fundamental and comprehensive general ideas " ; and (b) that " there Was no audience in those times for the discussion of the higher facts/" If the " higher facts " are not something quite different from the "fundamental and comprehensive general ideas," what would have been the use of his discussing them in the declared vacancy ? Was he to write only for a remote posterity? On the other hand, supposing the " general ideas " to be something else than the " higher facts," what point is there in reproaching Voltaire, himself a thoist, for not attacking theism ?

" He never understood nor perceived," says Lord Morley, " the fact that a religion rests for its final base on a certain small number of ideas, or that it is only by touching these, by loosening the firmness of their hold, by revealing their want of coherency and consistency with others accepted, that we can expect to shake the superstructure." But Voltaire *did* shake the superstructure, by the joint avowal of Lord Morley and the old Catholic priesthood of Franco. And what are the "small number of ideas " in question if they be not (a) the God-idea, (b) the idea of the efficacy of prayer, and (c) the idea of future salvation through a divine sacrifice? The first idea, as aforesaid, Voltaire vehemently proclaimed, thereby gaining the ear of his age as he could not possibly have done otherwise ; the others he assuredly did undermine. But had he sought to unseat the first, as did d'Holbach in the *SYSTEM OF NATURE*, what would have been the extent of his influence ?

Had any one told Voltaire in his own day that he ought, with Hume (who did not invent *his* argument), to attack not stories of particular miracles but the idea of miracles in general, the great propagandist would have explained that that was precisely *not* the way to go to work. He really knew a good deal about his great business. It is only when men have been led to doubt a number of particular miracles that they can begin to appreciate the negative thesis. Middleton in England had assailed only post-apostolic miracles, knowing that Protestants would be quick to give up these, and doubtless realizing, as Macaulay insists, that the critical pressure would ere long reach the gospels. For it is roally a fallacy to suppose (unless " final base " is a merely verbal expression) that religions rest, for their hold on men, upon " ideas " in the sense indicated. For mo3t, their hold is one of habit, tradition, inculcation, prestige, ritual, association ; and the process of disillusionment is for the majority one of concrete detachment beginning at particular points, and going on till the prestige has faded away. Only the few reach disbelief by a purely generalized process of thought. When Carlyle horrified his mother by asking, " Did God Almighty come down to the earth to make wheelbarrows ? ", he had already been tempered by knowledge of concrete stumbling-blocks to faith. Lord Morley himself tells us, once more, that the official exponents of religion were " firmly bent on making the feeblest of all their ramparts [to wit, the records ?] into their very citadel." That is to say, if anything, that they held by inspiration and miracles and all the rest of it for their power, and that Voltaire had to shake their power by attacking them in their actual positions. What other citadel could they hold, as against simple humanitarian theism ?

One more of Lord Morley's concessions to Victorian

sentiment calls for a word of notice. Voltaire, he writes, "has said no word, nor even shown an indirect appreciation of any word said by another, which stirs or expands the emotional susceptibility, indefinite exaltation, and far-swellling inner harmony, which De Maistre [!] and others have known as the love of God, and for which a better name, as covering most varieties of form and manifestation, is holiness, deepest of all words that defy definition." The answer is again indicated by the distinguished writer himself when he comments on "the incompatibility between many acts and motives expressly approved by the holiest persons and the justice and mercy which are supposed to sit enthroned on high in their bosoms." If those who talk *about* holiness are meant to be distinguished from "the holiest persons," one can but say in regard to both genera that a conceptual holiness which reacts in hate and delights in the shedding of blood for quarrels of belief is constantly impugned by Voltaire, and that the enthusiasm of Cotter Morison and his fellow Gontists for the slaughterous career of St. Bernard as compared with that of Abailard has more affinities with the Dark Ages than with the age of Comte. If there be any adepts of holiness who wholly eschew ill-will, they were not enemies for Voltaire. It is indeed doubtful whether the illustrious humanist whose sayings we have been considering would now adhere to the adjustment of pros and cons which he put forward in his pioneering youth, when so much a priori thinking reckoned itself inductive.. Assuredly we must all agree with him that to approve of the general movement of eighteenth-century emancipation is not to approve of every detail in the movement. The critical caveat in question is just as applicable to the nineteenth century, and will remain applicable in and after the twentieth.

The true question for us, surely, is whether Voltaire,

after so many forms of reaction have had their say, is still entitled to the praises passed on him by the men cited at the outset of our survey. Those eulogies fronted or folio wed-on an abundance of detraction, French and English. Down to the middle of the last century, it might be said that "serious" French opinion since the Eestoration had mainly banned Voltaire; but the difficulty would be to find in the chorus a censor who either achieved a semblance of sociological breadth in his criticism or carried any permanent weight as a thinker on life. All the impressionists who thought themselves thinkers were ready with *ex cathedra* condemnations, the voluble Madame de Stael vieing with the eloquent Chateaubriand in facile disparagement. Comtism in its turn stood aloof, bound by the dogma of its Master as to the impermanence of "destructive" work. Kenan, with his commitments, would not give Voltaire the praise which Voltaire would freely have given to Eenan. But the death-centenary and the birth-centenary revealed the fact that the achievement of Voltaire had outlived the religious sentimentalism of the men and women who in the reactionary periods had scolded him. The adequate eulogist was found in the aged Victor Hugo; no bad arbitrator on the total work of Voltaire. The "destruction" he had achieved was now finally visible as the kind of destruction wrought by Copernicus and Newton and Darwin, to say nothing of Luther, whose surviving devotees are somewhat reticent as to the destruction achieved by him.

The old obloquies pass away as dust, removed by a breath of sane sympathy. For sanity must in the end be on the side of the man who raised sanity to a higher power by electrifying it with wit. On the very theme on which Voltaire fell out with the firmer thinkers of his great fighting group, the God-idea, he left finally a word

of warning to those who on that head held with him, even in protesting vehemently against the negators. To Frederick's nephew and heir, Prince Frederick William, who asked him for his views on immortality, he wrote with his customary splendour of compliment, but denied grounds for any opinion either way, deducing only the wisdom of living by conscience. "Men need laws, not theology," was his final summing-up; and on the total religious problem he pronounced:—

It is only charlatans who are certain. We know nothing of first principles. It is truly extravagant to define God, angels, minds, and to know precisely why God formed the world, when we do not know why we move our arms at will. Doubt is not a very agreeable state, but certainty (*Vassurance*) is a ridiculous one.

Certainty, that is, as to the infinitude in which the finite is but a pulsation. But about right action, and the principles of judgment on the problems of the finite life, there has not spoken in the modern world a more alertly penetrating mind. The censors, in comparison, have mostly gone lifeless. If we could call up spirits from the vasty deep as our spiritists so pathetically profess to do, it would be hard to name, for purposes of consultation on the present posture of human affairs, a personality of the intervening period better worth evoking than his. The fact that he does not seem to be in demand at stances is suggestive of a certain prudence even in those regions. To summon him would be to set him talking; and the conjurers may well hesitate about claiming to speak with that vibrating voice, to think with his sagacity, to phrase with his verve, and to reason with his wit. If only they could, what talk it would be!

