

tence was 'so vast' that it was 'epic.'

His one resource — it can be explained no more and no less in him than in any other — was his art. And his genius as an artist was so extraordinary that his influence would still have been great had his character and 'subject-matter' lacked their peculiar qualities. He wrote impeccable prose; but his verse, for compactness, for accuracy, for music, cannot be surpassed. He may not be ranked with the world's greatest poets: humanity will scarcely concede that to a man whose principal work was labelled (not without reason) *Flowers of Evil*, and who was successfully prosecuted for obscenity: apart from which, volume of work, and universality of appeal are bound to count in such matters. But there certainly never was a poet who said with more perfection what he had to say,

who had fewer weak lines or otiose words, who was more consistently near his own highest level of achievement. His sense of form was like that of the great masters in marble and bronze, and he worked like a slave in his narrow field, watering it with his sweat 'pour extorquer quelques épis.' Here, at any rate, his influence cannot but have been salutary. If the Symbolists trace to him the origins of their 'correspondences' and their mystical minglings of the senses, the Parnassians were certainly as much in his debt for the example he set of artistic self-discipline. To read him is to contract a disgust with looseness and diffuseness. It is perhaps significant that the memorial ode which the young Swinburne wrote on him was the most clear, vivid, and truly classic of all Swinburne's poems.

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## FRENCH CRITICS AND ENGLISH WOMEN-WRITERS

BY ROWLAND GREY

SURELY, the chivalrous attitude of the French critic toward the English woman-writer is a charming aspect of *entente cordiale*, worthy of a note of admiration, if space lacks for the minute analysis it deserves. It dates, at least, from the day when a bashful girl of twenty disputed with Richardson the honor of having invented the English domestic novel, and it underlines in striking fashion the broad-mindedness of the intellectual outlook of the compatriots of Sainte-Beuve.

In France, there has been no delay. English genius has been at once

crowned, talent fully recognized, often with far more delicate discernment of fine shades than in England. *Evelina* and *Camilla* were acclaimed in Paris, years before Fanny Burney's 'amour d'automne' made her a Frenchwoman by her happy union with General d'Arblay. It is said that she was offered — and declined — a place for her bust, in Panthéon, while she was still a prisoner at the dreary court of George III, with the insufferable Frau Schwellenburg as her jailor. Not until she was free at last, could her French knight-errant court her in the

rose-garden of Juniper Hall, and atone by devotion until his death, for her martyrdom under the German yoke.

As to Maria Edgeworth, only her connection with the saintly Abbé who did — or did not — exclaim 'Fils de Saint-Louis, montez aux cieus' could account for her favor with those of Royalist sympathies. Yet, of general enthusiasm in France she had overwhelming testimony in her triumphant visits to Paris. Not her Protestantism, not the frequently tedious excess of moral with which her heavy father forced her to adorn her tales, not a sprinkling of French characters drawn with a touch of caricature, affected her popularity. Numerous translations, running into countless editions, were hurried out. As late as 1892, that didactic gem *Forester* was carefully edited for the use of French school children. The *Biographie Universelle*, if it calls her 'Mary,' does homage to her 'style clair et harmonieux,' 'Caractères d'homme, tracés avec une vigueur et une vérité extraordinaires,' 'Femmes séduisantes par la douceur, vivacité légère, coquetterie gracieuse qu'elle sait bien allier avec la vertu et la dignité.' It was no wonder Maria Edgeworth found France a 'pays de connaissance.'

Alas! the short and simple annals of Jane Austen fail to show that she was aware that those of her immortal books which had appeared were all translated into French during her lifetime. *Emma* bore the flattering sub-title 'Les caractères anglais du siècle.' The original translation of *Northanger Abbey*, if it made the most sparkling flapper in all fiction drink 'le grog' and dance at her début in the 'petit salon inférieur' instead of the Lower Rooms at Bath, was preceded by a peculiarly sympathetic memoir. The writer was already convinced of

Jane Austen's supremacy. 'Son caractère était aussi poli que son esprit. . . Tout ce que sa plume traçait était parfait.' A version closer to the original was made in 1899 by Monsieur Félix Fénelon. It has for preface these decisive words; 'Depuis elle, le roman de mœurs anglais a paru se compliquer de paysage, de farce et de pathétique. Jane Austen l'aura formulé dans son type le plus pur.' It is quaint to find a direct link between Napoleon and the Austen family in the fact, only lately known, that he continued the pension of the Comtesse de la Feuillade, widowed by the guillotine, after her marriage with Jane's clever brother Henry, sometime a discontented chaplain at Berlin. This brilliant lady was niece to Mrs. Austen, and might have sat for the irresistible, if naughty, Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park*. As Jane often stayed in London with this lively couple, she may be said, without exaggeration, to have eaten bread provided by her hereditary enemy.

Scottish Susan Ferrier—that unique author who stopped 'because she had nothing more to say'—had her modest recognition, for she, too, was read and praised. Of *Marriage* it was justly said: 'Cet ouvrage offre une peinture du grand monde qui, quoiqu'un peu exagérée et sévère, ne laisse pas d'être piquante et vraie.'

It is, however, regarding the Brontës that French writers have best shown the rare intuition which is the soul of true criticism. That there is now an increasing Brontë literature in France is less to French credit than the amazing contrast of the contemporary treatment of the masterpieces of Charlotte in the two countries. Lady Eastlake won an everlasting contempt by her inept bludgeoning of *Jane Eyre*. G. H. Lewes, after mangling *Villette*, wrung from his quivering vic-

tim the poignant remonstrance: 'I can be on my guard against my enemies. The Lord deliver me from my friends.' Balm in Gilead was applied by Eugène Forcade who, in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, may well have sneered at 'les écrivains qui font sentinelle auprès de la vieille société anglaise.' He, at least, is certain of the sex of Currer Bell, 'femme indocile et brave qui s'est battue avec la vie. George Sand, anglais.' Forcade grasped the truth that *Shirley* was as passionate, and a far more logical, appeal for women's rights than *Indiana*.

Après avoir lu *Shirley*, on jurerait qu'on a vécu avec tout ce monde-là — le naturel, le feu, le caprice du dialogue, enfin une certaine grâce générale. C'est un style qui ragaillardit l'esprit comme quelque chose de frais, d'alerte, et de sain.

What Forcade's praise meant to the bereaved and lonely genius, her pathetic letters show. To-day, the Abbé Dimnet, in his careful study *Les sœurs Brontë* where a mistake regarding the date of the birth of Charlotte should be rectified, deals with these daughters of Puritanism with noteworthy detachment from prejudice. He renders ample justice to the 'strength and beauty met together' of *Villette*, for all the violence of its attacks upon his own Church. The radiant magic of the Brontës made its appeal to the keen French brain, quick to recognize in their work the color that is unfading.

The recent centenary of George Eliot has naturally focused searchlights upon her, causing her compatriots to hesitate over the bestowal of the word 'genius' upon an achievement of widely varying merit. The *schwärmerei* of German Mathilde Blind, promising 'ever-growing fame,' is as a voice crying in the wilderness. We were not at war with France when George Eliot was at her zenith, in-

deed not a few of the wisest thought we should have been fighting beside her. Yet there is cogent reason for astonishment at her handsome reception in France, where her reputation still stands high. For she was ever a fervent disciple of the 'kultur' malignly rewarding her devotion by ruining her style. The arid labors of translating the *Das Leben Jesu* of Strauss not merely undermined her religious faith, but set its vindictive seal upon her art. 'A little more Paris, a little less Berlin.' Mr. Gosse was indeed right.

Who knows, if George Eliot's profound admiration and knowledge of French literature had vanquished her obsession for that 'old, wise Germany' she viewed through the misleading rose-colored spectacles of Madame de Staël, whether the charm of her cow-slip-scented early books might not have endured to the end? Molière was her favorite playwright, *Le Misanthrope* her favorite play. Had she let Molière exert his sunny influence, we might never have had to mourn what Mr. G. K. Chesterton calls 'the spectacle of a fine mind slowly drying up.' When she reached Paris, she knew the French language thoroughly and spoke it with an atrocious accent. She was plain, provincial, and badly dressed, her queer habit of affecting Paris hats in the extreme of fashion only making the general effect more deplorable. Her idea of conversation as a series of Hamlet-like soliloquies was antipathetic to the tradition of the French hostess. Her personality was unattractive and a target for ridicule for a malicious pen. Praise of Germany was ever upon her lips.

Yet these drawbacks never affected one as did the chorus of welcome that was readily accorded to her books. Edmond Schérer wrote long articles eulogizing her work as 'parfumé de

sagesse.' He insisted that 'la joyeuse Mrs. Poyser' was the equal of Sancho Panza, though 'joyeuse' is hardly the 'mot juste.' She was even hailed 'le premier romancier de l'Angleterre.' He did more than this, for at a time when neither George Eliot nor her publisher could convince the British public that she and not the Rev. Mr. Liggins was indeed the author of *Adam Bede*, Montégut has no doubt as to the sex of the book he analyzes with such fine skill. Taine, it is true, dismisses 'Mistress Lewes' rather curtly, merely ranking her amid a bevy of worthy descendants of Scott, 'L'Homère de la Bourgeoisie.' Malfroy, in editing 'son œuvre le plus parfait, *Silas Marner*,' reasonably questions her success as an essayist.

She made no addition to the fine gallery of French portraits from English pens. She created no such exquisite great lady as Thackeray's Léonore de Florac, far less such a fascinating *viveur* as her son, the Prince de Montcontour. She told no *Tale of Two Cities*, with such noble shadows as Doctor Manette, nor gave us a rival to the bewitching Renée de Croisnel of Meredith. Yet, the general consensus of opinion seems to have been enthusiasm which, if tempered, endures.

Able translations abound, combating the difficulties of dialect with creditable success. Memoirs, notes to English editions for the use of students — all tend to place her upon the pedestal she honestly believed herself to occupy. Comparisons with George Sand were intended as the highest

compliment, though Professor Saintsbury shows the resemblance to be superficial and largely unliterary.

There is satisfactory evidence in her letters to Madame Bodichon that she appreciated the quality of the French criticism abundantly bestowed upon her, and she has left one pleasant token of recognition in an article upon 'French Women and Madame de Sablé' — curiously misprinted 'Tablé' in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. This is, possibly, the best essay she ever wrote, yet German-minded G. H. Lewes excluded it from the volume of reprints from *The Westminster Review*. She speaks of:

Those delightful women of France . . . always refined and graceful, often witty, sometimes judicious, they wrote of what they saw, thought, and felt in their habitual language without proposing any model to themselves, without any intention to prove that women could write — as well as men — without affecting manly views, or suppressing feminine ones. . . . These writings were but a charming accident in their more charming lives, like the petals the wind shakes from the roses. In France, alone, woman has had a vital influence in the development of literature; in France, alone, the mind of woman has passed like an electric current through the language, making crisp and definite what is elsewhere heavy and blurred.

The pity of it is that George Eliot did not allow the lucidity she commended with such fervor to inspire her to imitation.

It is tempting to linger over this phase of chivalrous criticism — it is delightful to meet critics fearless to praise, when it is easier to blame. The English woman-writer has her own garland of French laurels — and these laurels are unfading.

## WOMEN IN PRESENT-DAY BRITISH POLITICS

BY CICELY HAMILTON

WOMAN, as a citizen, has so far made little definite impression upon public affairs; the nation's politics, to all appearance, is still a masculine preserve. The woman elector who records her vote at the next general election will record it for a man-devised programme, for a party run on masculine traditions — traditions as yet scarcely influenced by the new element in citizenship.

Quite apart from inexperience, there are valid excuses for her apathy and lack of initiative. Democracy, all the world over, has lost faith in itself and its methods. Further, the official entry of women into politics took place at an unfortunate moment; at a moment, that is to say, when the much-demanded vote had declined in value — since representative institutions and all that they stand for had practically ceased to exist. While the war lasted, representative institutions lapsed — in fact, if not in law; their methods of criticism, discussion, and compromise being incompatible with the rapidity and secrecy demanded by the national danger, they were — (as always) — set aside till the national danger had passed. Set aside firmly and inevitably, in accordance with the unwritten provisions of the real 'Social Contract.'

The real 'Social Contract,' by virtue of which governments exist, and human beings submit to their ordinances, is, in all its provisions, a compromise between the will to self-direction and the need for personal security. That we may be reasonably certain of life,

health, and property, that we may sleep sound o' nights without fear of sudden violence, we resign the desirable privilege of doing in all things as we please, of spending all our gains as we will; paying for the security afforded by police protection, decent drains, and the like, by parting with a measure of our pleasant right of self-direction. Rates and taxes are merely another name for forced labor, forced abstinence, loss of freedom; such forced labor and abstinence being the price exacted for security provided by the State. The fundamental justification of all forms of government lies neither in the Divine Right of Peoples, nor of Kings, but in the power of Peoples, or Kings, to furnish good value in security for the measure of freedom surrendered. And a stable condition of government is the result, not only of reasonable security, but of general conviction on the part of the community that it is not being asked to pay too high a price in loss of self-direction — forced labor and abstinence — for the measure of security provided.

Security — like butter — has a higher value in seasons when it is not plentiful; in times of real danger (as during the war) the price exacted for it in loss of self-direction would be refused in days of peace. Free institutions — that is to say, our system of Parliamentary representation and criticism — were bartered for security in 1914, and bartered without protest or resentment. The power of the purse for which Hampden died, the right of