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# EXPLORATIONS

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BY

J. M. ROBERTSON,

AUTHOR OF "A SHORT HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT," ETC.

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# PREFATORY NOTE

Of the following papers, only one is now published for the first time—that on "The Causation of the French Revolution." For permission to reprint that on "The Prose of the English Bible" from the (unfortunately defunct) Journal of English Studies I have to tender my thanks to Horace Marshall & Sons; and for permission to reprint four papers from The Reformer my thanks are due to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner. All, in this reprint, have undergone slight modifications, omissions having in some cases been made good and elucidations supplied in others. It is perhaps unnecessary to ask the reader to note the dates of the papers.

# THE CAUSATION OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

THOUGH Sociology is reckoned "the last of the sciences," and has little to show in the way of accepted results, its cultivators can point to a whole library of material, going back to the beginnings of literature. Sociology emerges in Genesis; and ever since, men have been writing it, even as M. Jourdain spoke prose. What its students aspire to, now that it has a name, is a procedure comparable to that of the sciences in general in respect of accuracy in statements testable, rectitude in induction, and consistency in deduction. But these standards are still somewhat too high for the bulk of even the academic writing that properly comes under the sociological heading. It is with a certain hope for reform, and a strong conviction of the need for it in an age in which all men talk of "reconstruction," that I raise the particular issue hereinafter discussed. Reconstruction of society can hardly go on successfully without some approach to rational comprehension of the past. Yet we find ostensible experts formulating the causation of even the historically near past in a fashion that seems to defy almost every principle of scientific induction.

The University Lectures of the late Professor Sidgwick on "The Development of European Polity" (1903) were edited after his death from his repeatedly revised manuscripts by the very competent hands of Mrs. Sidgwick, and were scrutinized in proof by at least five qualified scholars, who subjected them to criticism. Any noticeable proposition of a general historical character which they contain, then, may be supposed to be such as will pass current among scholarly people

as a statement of fact, whether or not there be difference of opinion as to interpretation of a sociological kind. On that head, some diversity of view would be a matter of course; and no agreement in any one of Professor Sidgwick's conclusions is to be inferred in the case of any one of those who assisted the editor. But I suppose they would all be ready to point out a grave historical error. When, then, such an error is found obtrusively put in the lectures, it seems reasonable to infer that it is not special to the author, but that he is putting a view generally current in English academic circles. And when it is put by a writer of such extensive knowledge and ripe judgment as we all ascribe to Professor Sidgwick, it becomes important to debate it.

The "Development of European Polity" is obviously, in respect of its aims and its authorship, an important sociological treatise; and in all its sections it exhibits original judgment, proceeding upon wide study. It is precisely because of the general ability and value of the book that I am concerned to criticize its treatment of one of the most important of its problems, that of the development of French life and political thought in the eighteenth century. Here we are in clear touch with the determining forces of modern history; and wrong thinking and erroneous history here become serious to an extent that they could not if they occurred—I do not say that they often do—in the earlier sections. It is in the important lecture on "Political Thought: the Influence of Rousseau" that the Professor thus generalizes (p. 385) the transmutation which he supposes to have overtaken French life and mind in the generation before the Revolution :—

> Rousseau's work seized hold of the public mind at a time when—according to the almost unanimous agreement of French historical writers—the critical and negative work, of which Voltaire was the leader, was seriously demoralizing the educated world. It co-operated with and aided the tendency of the political conditions, due to

the deliberate policy of the monarchy, to produce a luxurious and frivolous aristocratic society, of which the court was the centre.

A wealthy and polite society from which the monarchy had, as we have seen, withdrawn almost all the steadying and ennobling influence exercised by the responsibilities of political power, the performance of serious and important social services to their fellow men—such a society might yet be partially saved from mere frivolity by strong religious convictions having the support of thoughtful opinion and the prestige of eloquent expositors, as it had in the great days of the seventeenth-century monarchy. But when the hold of Catholic orthodoxy on the minds of most educated persons had been shattered by the unrivalled literary skill of Voltaire; and the talkers at salons and at dinner-parties talked—to use Berkeley's phrase—"as if atheism was established by law, and religion only tolerated"; when philosophy, following the new impulse to learn from England, had abandoned Descartes for Locke, and developed Locke's teaching in the direction of materialism and sensationalism in metaphysics, and naked egoism in morals, then the chief intellectual barrier against luxurious frivolity and artificiality was removed.

"The feudal aristocracy," says Taine, "became a *société de salon*—absorbed in the life of the salon to an unparalleled extent, to the subordination of other interests and duties, to the loss not merely of all deep patriotic concern for public affiairs, but of all real force and vitality in the domestic affections. Intellectual interests, indeed, remain.....; but the interest in serious topics is only on condition that the serious topics become a means of entertainment. So far as they believe in anything, these denizens of the salon believe in progress.....But the sole business of good society is to talk about this progress in the intervals of fêtes, bon mots, and badinage....."

It was such a society as this that Rousseau startled, and to a remarkable extent *passionately moved*, by his preaching of the superiority of the natural life of a man to the artificial product of civilization.

It might have been supposed that the sentence last quoted, with the words italicized, would have suggested to the writer the psychological nullity of his elaborated proposition. A society made thoroughly frivolous by Voltaire, only to be at once "passionately moved" by

Rousseau, is a rather grossly chimerical conception; unless we are meant to understand that it was only thoroughly frivolous people who could be so moved. The term "startled" is perhaps so far justified by the statement of Garat, in his "Mémoire sur M. Suard," that "admiration and a sort of terror were almost universal"; but that notion too is clearly not to be taken literally. As has been repeatedly remarked, the notion of the superiority of the state of nature "was already to be found almost everywhere—for example, in the 'Lettres Persanes,' in the second part of the 'Histoire des Troglodytes,' or in Marivaux's 'Ile des esclaves,' and the 'Ile de la raison.'"[1] But before we discuss the psychology let us attend to the simpler and less debateable business of the chronology. The Professor tells us that "the almost unanimous agreement of French historical writers" bears him out in his account of the movement of things. Before discussing that claim, too, it will be well to examine the dates. As Mr. Birrell reminds us, there are some kinds of assertion that cannot possibly be true even in the House of Commons; and such propositions ought not to be accepted by English professors even from French historical writers.

The Professor specifies as the first work of Rousseau's that "brought him into notice" the essay "which not only won the prize of the Academy of Dijon, but the applause of the metropolis." That essay was published in 1750. The "Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité," which, as Lord Morley notes, "neither gained the prize nor created as lively an agitation as its predecessor had done," was dedicated to the Republic of Geneva in 1754, and was published at Amsterdam in 1755. The "startling" of frivolous France, then, was presumably done in

[1] Lemaître, "Jean Jacques Rousseau," En. tr. 1907, p. 87. The thesis is much older than the eighteenth century. The Benedictine Dom Cajot pointed out in 1766 that it had been developed for Rousseau by Lillo Giraldi in the sixteenth.

or soon after 1750. What, then, had Voltaire by this time achieved in the way of demoralizing the French aristocracy?

His first notable piece of freethinking is the poetic "Épitre à Uranie," which is usually dated 1722, but which in MS. can hardly have had a very disintegrating effect on a society in which its simple deism was already of long standing. The well-known biographical fact, too, that Voltaire withdrew from Paris in his prime, long before 1750, precisely because of the frivolity of upper-class life there, might serve to put in grave doubt the theory that it was he who had demoralized Paris. Did he, then, begin to do so by his writings before or after he withdrew? The first of his books that made any stir by its apparent heterodoxy was the "Lettres Philosophiques," of which, after the letters had circulated in manuscript, five editions appeared in 1734. This book was certainly burned by the common hangman, and a bookseller was imprisoned for it; but I doubt whether any man who has read it, not a Catholic priest, will pretend that it could have done anything to make French society frivolous. It was not fear of such demoralization that led to its seizure; and until any one seriously advances the charge I shall count it beneath discussion. The letter "Sur le Parlement" seems to have been the main cause of agitation in official circles. Apart from the letter "Sur les pensées de M. Pascal," which only discusses what Pascal had discussed in the previous century, even the freethinking of the book is of a very guarded kind, only slightly hinting at the much more pronounced freethinking then common in England, where society, on Professor Sidgwick's view, must then have been far gone in demoralization, though he does not say so.

It is true that Voltaire's propaganda for the Newtonian theory, which began in the "Lettres Philosophiques," may have tended to undermine Catholic orthodoxy; but

I do not understand Professor Sidgwick to argue that people are demoralized by science even when it shakes their religious opinions. That would not now be a popular view, though it once was. If it were accepted, we would apparently be committed to the conclusion that Newton had turned to frivolity the earnestness of the English aristocracy after the Restoration, which seems unplausible. And if any stress be laid on the fact that the Marquise du Châtelet became a strong Newtonian under Voltaire's guidance, besides studying hard in other directions, I would ask whether it is inferred that she thus became more frivolous than she would otherwise have been, or whether her morals were impaired only by that means, or whether they were in any way "startling" for her aristocratic circle.

Looking through Voltaire's early work for anything else likely even to shake, not to say shatter, Catholic orthodoxy, I can find before 1750 nothing save "Zadig" (1748); and it would seem impossible for any society to be collectively deprived of its faith and demoralized by that performance, even with a much longer vogue than one or two years. The simple biographical fact is that Voltaire had done nothing in the way of serious detailed criticism of orthodoxy till after Rousseau had "startled" and "passionately moved" French society by the first of his two "Discours." It is true there are some chronological mystifications about his work. The "Examen Important de milord Bolingbroke" and the "Défense de milord Bolingbroke" have been ante-dated, the former to 1736, the latter to 1731; whereas they appeared only in 1767 and 1751–2 respectively. It is true, too, that Lord Morley, in his brilliant book on Rousseau, speaks of the Creed of the Savoyard Vicar in "Émile" (1762) as something attractive to "souls weary of the fierce mockeries that had so long been flying like fiery shafts against the far Jehovah of the Hebrews and the silent Christ of the later doctors and dignitaries"; and lauds

the "superiority of the sceptical parts of the Savoyard vicar's profession.....over the biting mockeries which Voltaire had made the fashionable method of assault." But we get no reference to these "fierce mockeries" and "biting mockeries." The fact is that Lord Morley is seriously and surprisingly wrong in his chronology, and this, indeed, by his own showing; for in his "Voltaire" he accurately notes that the patriarch began his attacks on "L'Infâme" only after settling at Ferney —that is, after 1758. The poem "La religion naturelle" (1755) and that "Sur la destruction de Lisbonne" (1756) cannot plausibly be described as mockeries of Jehovah. In any case, they come long after 1750.

Coming to the French biographical writers who, on any view, ought to be first consulted on such points, we find Condorcet, who really must have known something of his subject, reporting in his "Vie de Voltaire," concerning that very "Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard," with its direct discussion of Christian beliefs, that "cette hardiesse étonna Voltaire, et excita son émulation."[1] It is true that the "Sermon du Cinquante," described by the Basle editors as his "first frontal attack on Christianity," has been proved by M. Champion to have been written a year or two before; but it had not been published. Voltaire's "mockeries" of Jewish religion (apart from the jests about Adam and Eve in the "Mondain," the attack on Jews in "La religion naturelle," and the pleasantries of "Candide") begin with "Saül" in 1763.

It would thus appear that Professor Sidgwick's explicit proposition as to the influence of Voltaire before 1750 is rather unhappy nonsense, excusable only on the ground of his belief that French historical writers are almost unanimous to the same effect. We have to ask, then, what documentary grounds of that kind he had. It must be premised that the contemporary writers, who clearly

[1] Ed. 1792 (vol. 100 of "Œuvres de Voltaire"), p. 118.

ought first to be consulted, give no shadow of authority for his thesis. The Abbé Gauchat, who began his "Lettres Critiques" in 1751, does indeed attack the "Lettres Philosophiques"; but he also assails Diderot's "Pensées Philosophiques," the anonymous "Discours sur la vie heureuse" (1748), the essay "Les Mœurs" (1748), and Pope's "Essay on Man." In his second volume he fastens on the "Lettres Persanes" of Montesquieu (1721), and other sets of "Lettres" written in imitation of them; and in his third volume he has nothing more obnoxious by Voltaire to discuss than the "Henriade," the "Mahomet," and some fugitive pieces. That is "how it struck a contemporary" very ready to convict Voltaire of anything. And in 1754 the Bishop of Puy, in his treatise "La Dévotion conciliée avec l'esprit," assures his flock: "You live in an age fertile in pretended *esprits forts*, who, too weak nevertheless to attack in front an invincible religion, skirmish lightly around it, and, in default of the reasons they lack, employ raillery."

Certainly there was plenty of unbelief in France before 1750. Grimm at that date retails a *gauloiserie* of Fontenelle about the evidence as to prevailing diseases given by the *affiches* of Paris, every street corner exhibiting two, of which one advertised a "Traité sur l'incredulité." Are we, then, to infer that unbelief had been a merely demotic malady in the previous age, and that, if not Voltaire, some other unbelievers had unhappily transferred it by their literary art to the upper classes? Again, evidence is totally lacking for such a bold hypothesis. There were a few "destructive" treatises current in the forties, not by Voltaire; but Voltaire had lived from his youth among freethinkers whose deism was a derivation from the past. The bulky manuscript of the Curé Meslier can have had few readers; and "La vraie religion," ascribed humorously on the title-page to Bishop Burnet, and seriously to Saint-Evremond and others, was

not printed till 1745. The works of d'Argens, published at Berlin, were certainly not calculated to "shatter" beliefs by literary skill. They are didactic and rather dull. But French deism is far older than that. It might have occurred to Professor Sidgwick that Pascal's argumentation for the faith in the previous century was motived by a good deal of open scepticism among the educated classes; that Fénelon's vindication of the existence of God was not written at deists; and that Huet would hardly have been driven to a defence of the faith on lines of philosophic scepticism save by much scepticism of the practical sort. Had the Professor gone into detail, he would have found a small library of rejoinders to "this multitude of *libertins* and of unbelievers which now terrifies us" as early as 1695, and he might have noted that Le Vassor, who used that language in 1688, complained of how "people talk only of reason, of good taste, of force of mind." As regards the aristocracy, we find the Duchesse d'Orléans declaring in 1698 that "every young man either is or affects to be an atheist." And he might further have discovered that "the first French work openly destructive of Christianity" was the privately printed "Lettre d'Hippocrate à Damagète," 1700, ascribed to that champion of feudalism, the Comte de Boulainvilliers, who further said some unsettling things in his "Vie de Mahomed," published in 1730.

After 1700, the first work of "frontal" criticism printed in France was the 1714 translation of Collins's "Discourse of Freethinking." And here we are led to note the fact that a number of French writers used to ascribe the French unbelief of the first half of the eighteenth century to *English* influence. Far from pretending that Voltaire had demoralized the aristocracy between 1734 and 1750, the Abbé Ranchon in his MS. Life of Fleury avowed that "the time of the Regency was a time of dissoluteness and irreligion," but claimed that "precisely" in this period "a multitude of those

offensive and irreligious books were brought over the sea." He could at least point to the translations of Collins and Shaftesbury, and to many other English books which *might* be read by Frenchmen who *could* read English; though it is doubtful whether he would have argued that the English aristocracy, between Newton and the deists, had become notably more frivolous than the French of the same period. On the other hand, we have seen the Abbé Gauchat vigorously impugning the "Lettres Persanes" of Montesquieu, which M. Lanson in our own day pronounces "fundamentally irreligious," and which long preceded everything heterodox by Voltaire. Professor Sidgwick puts none of the blame for the demoralization of the noblesse on Montesquieu; but if the critical reader will ask himself which book was the likelier to promote frivolity of spirit, the "Lettres Persanes" or the "Lettres Philosophiques," he will see fresh ground for scepticism as to the whole thesis upon which Professor Sidgwick declares French historical writers to be nearly unanimous.

Those writers, however, must in turn be sought for. The Professor names only Tocqueville, Taine, and Paul Janet in his general discussion on French political evolution in the period in question. Now, not one of these bears him out. I cannot pretend to have read everything of Janet; but in the standard work to which Professor Sidgwick refers, his "Histoire de la science politique" (1872), Janet pays a tribute to Voltaire as a teacher which is nearly a complete negation of the Professor's charge. As thus:—

"Men have not yet forgotten what they owe him; and whatever effort may have been made to render his name odious, it seems that it has only served to render him more popular." Voltaire too often lent himself, indeed, to an anti-ascetic morality, and his readers went further than he; but "if Voltaire is sensible and prudent, though little elevated in his views on men and life.....we should not hesitate to say that in public morality he is great,

when he invites society to have more regard for human nature, to respect more its dignity and its rights. A society the most polished that had yet been seen, and the most enlightened, lacked humanity and often even justice. Of all the writers of his time Voltaire is the one who devoted himself with most ardour and laboured with most persistence at the noble task of correcting prejudices and abuses."[1]

Professor Sidgwick had this book before him, and specially recommended it to his students. Where, then, did he get his theory of the demoralizing influence of Voltaire?

Tocqueville's able book contains a good deal of hasty deductive generalization and inconsistent theory, but he nowhere suggests the notion of an educated society made frivolous by the removal of its religion at the hands of the school of Voltaire before 1750, and "passionately moved," in consequence, by Rousseau's panegyric of the simple life. He knew the main outlines of the history too well to be capable of such a fantasy. Not only that; his book again and again puts conceptions of causation which are utterly irreconcilable with it. Had Tocqueville met with Professor Sidgwick's thesis, he would have politely assented to the general idea of the importance of religion to morals and family life and seriousness of conduct; and he might have added platitudes of his own on that head; but he would have indicated that the thesis gave no idea of the actual social causation. What he says in that regard is not that orthodoxy was destroyed by Voltaire before 1750, but that in the period between 1750 and the Revolution the literary attack on "religion" became newly abundant and fierce; and he seems to imply that this was part of a rising tension in all things. Far from pretending that early Voltairism demoralized a good and previously well-conducted noblesse, he declares[2] that "the spirit of Voltaire had long been in the world"

[1] Work cited, ii, 557-9.
[2] "L'ancien Régime," 2 ième edit. 1856, p. 251.

[i.e., before Voltaire wrote], "but Voltaire himself could hardly have actually reigned save in the eighteenth century and in France." Far from pretending that unbelief worked out as frivolity, he writes[1]: "If the Frenchmen who made the Revolution were more incredulous than we in the matter of religion, there remained to them at least a belief which is lacking to us: they believed in themselves. They did not doubt of the perfectibility, of the potentiality of man....."

The whole truth, indeed, is not to be reached in Tocqueville's survey. He also was too much of an apriorist, too indocile to induction, to face all the facts; and he chronically falls into the common snare of collective abstraction, regarding a great complex as a simple process, ignoring counter forces, solving an imbroglio with an epigram. The due result is self-contradiction. Once he absurdly writes[2] that the freethinkers "wrought ardently and continually to take away from men's souls the faith which had filled them; and they left them empty"—a proposition negated by all human experience, and flatly contradicted by his own words above cited. A little further on[3] we get the twofold contradiction: "When religion deserted men's minds she did *not* leave them, *as often happens*, empty and debilitated; they found themselves momentarily filled by sentiments which for the time held her place, and did not at once permit them to fall away." A little more of inductive scruple would have saved Tocqueville from these exercises in suicidal verbalism. It almost suggests wilful blindness to find him denying that the Church had provoked attack, and alleging[4] that "she was infinitely [!] more tolerant than she had been hitherto, and than she was in other countries."

Here the cold touch of dates and facts is as fatal to him as to Professor Sidgwick. What gave the tone of

[1] P. 260. [2] P. 251. [3] P. 259. [4] P. 252.

asperity and passion to the Voltairean campaign *after* 1750—*after* 1760—was just the renewal of savage persecution by the Church. The "Infâme" of Voltaire's detestation was the Church that slew the heretic. He expressly tells that under that name he wars against fanaticism, not against "religion," which he cherishes. The cases of Jean Calas and the Sirven family (1762), and of the lad La Barre, slain for alleged frivolous blasphemy—these were the atrocities that drove him to his great campaign of aggression; and he wrought as zealously for the family of the judicially murdered Protestant as for the memory of the scapegrace boy. Of the "frivolous" Voltaire Lord Morley has written that such infamies were as knives to his heart. Tocqueville was fain to exclude them from his view, though they point to the very explanation that his problem called for —an explanation which, indeed, he partly glimpses immediately afterwards when he backs the view of Hume, that intolerance promoted enlightenment, against the opinion of the French freethinkers that it did not. In reality neither view gave the whole truth, though Hume came near it. Cruel intolerance roused a propaganda of anger which went fast and far; whereas in England the relative (though imperfect) tolerance of the political system supplied no such fuel. But what happened in France was rather an accentuation of the spirit of the freethinker than any such wholesale rooting out of "religion" as is so commonly and so absurdly alleged. On this head the traditional view is pure delusion. As Taine obliviously confesses, the vast mass of the French nation was untouched by freethinking. Even among the leading revolutionaries many, like Lafayette, were orthodox. As Aulard has shown, there was only one convinced and avowed atheist among them, the journalist Salaville, who calmly and rationally opposed the semi-official "Cult of Reason." The others were mostly zealous deists, of the school of Rousseau, preaching

a religion of justice against a so-called religion of love that chronically and officially spelt murder.

Add that the Church blindly persisted in the policy of persecution to the last, and Tocqueville's indignant "Why?" is answered, on the political side. In 1757 was pronounced the death penalty against all writers attacking religion; and down to 1780 books were constantly being officially burned. As Tocqueville expressly avows,[1] complete liberty of the press would have been far less injurious to the Church; persecution quintupled the press's power. But there is a further touch of judicial blindness in Tocqueville's thesis[2] that freethought, left alone, dies out. In the next breath he thoughtlessly claims, as if it were a comforting doctrine, that after the Revolution the irreligious noblesse became formally religious from motives of political self-preservation; and yet again he avers, quite falsely and very absurdly, that long before the Revolution the Church, in the face of the indifference of the noblesse, became "silent," with the result that many believers were afraid to avow their faith! Thus to ignore at once the constant activity of the pulpit and the actual output of apologetics is again to flout induction for an à priori theory. None of the theorists will patiently investigate the facts.

It has indeed been the custom, since Alison, to say that the defence of the faith in eighteenth-century France, as compared with England, was "bad"; but this is only one more shibboleth. The apologetics of Pascal, Bossuet, Fénelon, and Huet, to begin with, whatever their logical force, had been more thoroughgoing in point of philosophy than any then produced on the orthodox side in England; and these remained classics. Fénelon, if not a very powerful reasoner, had the charm of a high amenity, as had Crousaz, who replied to Collins and Pope. The polemic of Gauchat, which ran

[1] P. 255.

[2] Pp. 256–7.

to fifteen volumes, in its turn was more systematic than anything done against deism in England, where there were scores of scattered replies, but no collocation of their case down to Paley, though Leland produced a general survey in 1754–6.[1] The Abbé Bergier, who produced at least four works of vigorous polemic between 1765 (beginning with an attack on the deism of Rousseau) and 1773, was quite as competent an apologist as any in England up to that time. And there were many others. If Voltaire was not "answered" in France, neither was he in England: Bishop Watson warmly avowed the vexatious difficulty. A thesis which ignores or denies these facts is condemned in advance.

Throughout Tocqueville gives no shadow of support to the special thesis of Professor Sidgwick. He posits[2] "the universal discredit into which all [!] religious beliefs fell at the *end* of the century," not in its first half; and at the same time, knowing too well the nullity of the notion that upper-class demoralization was the result of deistic literature, he pronounces[3] that the effect of that "was much more in disordering minds than in degrading hearts, or even corrupting morals." Few Frenchmen, indeed, can ever have been capable of the pretence that French upper-class life was "serious" and moral under Louis XIV and the Regency, and became frivolous and dissolute under Louis XV. Taine really makes no such pretence; though it is probably from some of his self-contradictory formulas that Professor Sidgwick has deduced his. In respect of rash generalizations, often mutually destructive, Taine almost outgoes Tocqueville. When, however, he uses the expression quoted from him by the Professor, as to the noblesse becoming a *société de salon*, he is not saying what the Professor's context

[1] In the "Dictionary of National Biography" Sir Leslie Stephen writes of Leland's "View of the Principal Deistic Writers," that "though the argument is commonplace" the book "is a contribution of some value to the history of English thought."

[2] P. 259.

[3] Ib.

makes him say. He is really dealing with the whole monarchic process, completed by Louis XIV, of bringing the nobility from feudal semi-independence to court subordination. In this connection Voltaire is not even named; nor is his period indicated.

Where Taine misleads Professor Sidgwick is in his non-chronological section on "L'esprit et la doctrine," in which he works out a theoretic progression, abounding in untested assumptions, after the manner of his formula of "race, milieu, moment,"[1] in his scheme of literary evolution. It is here that he posits "two stages" or "stadia" in the "expedition" of reason against "religion," the first of which, with Voltaire conducting the philosophic army, "takes from the enemy his exterior defences and his frontier fortresses."[2] Here he couples with Voltaire the Montesquieu of the "Lettres Persanes," describing the attack in terms of that book and of the "Lettres Philosophiques"—the ironical comparison, namely, of different constitutions, religions, moralities, "the diversity, the contradiction, the antagonism of fundamental customs, all equally consecrated by tradition." And, he wildly alleges, "From this moment, the charm is broken.....Scepticism enters by all the breaches. In regard to Christianity, it changes *at once* into pure hostility, into a prolonged and fierce polemic."

To this extravagance a critical reader would give the answer of common sense, that the main facts indicated by Montesquieu and Voltaire (apart from details about England[3]) had been perfectly well known for centuries, and had been both sceptically and orthodoxly discussed, from the days of Boccaccio to the days of Bossuet. But

[1] It is to be remembered that "moment" in this phrase primarily meant "momentum," though Taine vacillated between that sense and that of "the moment."

[2] "Origines de la France contemporaine: L'Ancien Regime," ed. 1878, p. 279.

[3] Even these, which Taine takes to have been highly novel for French readers, must have been largely known. Rapin had long been widely read.

even without this exercise of ratiocination, he would find the thesis cancelled by Taine himself, both before and after propounding it. A few pages earlier[1] (after a theory of the genesis of religion that is more loosely catastrophic than any of the "philosophic" theories of the eighteenth century, and one long ago exploded, as Taine elsewhere recognizes, by Voltaire), he had told us that religion *cannot* be cut out of the human heart: "its germ is too deep." In a later section, where he has returned to his historic method, such as it is, he indicates on the one hand that with the Regency unbelief came into the daylight ("l'incrédulité se produit au grand jour"), and quotes the mother of the Regent as declaring in 1698 that "one hardly sees now a single young man who does not want to be an atheist"; and, in 1722, that she does not believe "there are in Paris a hundred persons, either among the ecclesiastics or among the laity, who have the true faith, or who even believe in our Lord." This exorbitant testimony Taine tables as he does any other, not gainsaying it. Thus the thesis as to the instantaneous breach made by Voltaire and Montesquieu somewhere about 1721–34 is tranquilly abandoned—as it well might, seeing that the "stage" had been illustrated by reference to Voltaire's procedure after 1760.

And, after having, like Tocqueville, ignored the salient *political* facts which really explained the severity of the later critical attack, Taine further cancels his previous demonstration *in vacuo* by noting how the Church had aroused antagonism against itself *and against religion* by obstinately refusing to submit to the taxation of ecclesiastical wealth. "In 1748 a work of Toussaint in favour of natural religion, 'Les Mœurs,' became all at once so celebrated that, says Barbier, 'in a certain class there is no one, man or woman, claiming to have *esprit*, who does not want to see it.'" In 1753 d'Argenson had noted

[1] P. 274.

that "the hatred against the priests goes to the last excess. They can hardly show themselves in the streets without being hooted."[1] Here we have the man in the street playing the anti-clerical, not the educated class alleged to have been disillusioned by Voltaire. Thus, item by item, in sections written at different times and without scientific coherence, we get the theories and the facts which dispose of the theories. Professor Sidgwick, noting some of the theories and none of the facts, has been landed in historical hallucination.

But he has hardly even a misunderstood formula, finally, to bear out his account of Voltaire's early influence in driving a previously serious noblesse to frivolity and license. Taine knew that Voltaire, growing up among a frivolous aristocracy, himself turned to hard study, and to writing which could lead no sane man to frivolity. He fully recognizes the scientific importance of the new conception of history established by Voltaire in the "Essai sur les Mœurs" (1740–56), though elsewhere he disparages it because, like the best historians of the century, Voltaire does not duly differentiate the varieties of human nature as between ages and races.[2] He never pretends that Voltaire was the dissolvent of French society, even when he represents him as upsetting religion by describing for France the religious and intellectual life of England. He does speak once of the "disciplined court" of Louis XIV, the court of Madame de Maintenon; but this is not a denial of the previous state of things, or a pretence that outside the court at any time the noblesse were well conducted.

For the rest, as regards the "almost unanimous" opinion ascribed to French historical writers, we may, I think, safely conclude that Professor Sidgwick mistakenly related his particular generalization about Voltaire to another and different generalization—or to two others,

[1] Pp. 376–7.

[2] P. 259.

which were long current commonplaces, and which were equally wrong. The first was that made current by Buckle,[1] to the effect that the activity of the French reformers up to 1750 was directed against religion, and after 1750 against the State. That statement is wrong on both heads. The main battle "against religion" developed after 1760; and many of the freethinking leaders, Voltaire in particular, never "attacked the State." Voltaire was a strong monarchist; a believer, like the great Turgot, in a strong administration, not subject to any representative body; and, mindful of the religious cruelties and tyrannies of the Jansenist Paris Parlement, he rejoiced at its suppression. For the fiscal and other reforms that he desired and urged he looked to an enlightened autocracy, with men like Turgot for its ministers.

One source of Buckle's error is probably the statement made by some French writer—as M. Rocquain has made it since—that the opposition (in the Parlement) to the Government, which had turned mainly on religious grounds before 1750, had become purely political after that date. That is the broad historical fact: the ecclesiastical quarrels between Jansenists and Jesuits, which implicated the Government, and were the main grounds of public debate in the first quarter of the century, became substantially political quarrels, according to Rocquain, as early as 1724–33; indeed, Duruy held that in the work of the Jansenists of Port Royal "the spirit of political opposition concealed itself under the religious." In 1753, further, a new political animus against the clergy arose over the matter of ecclesiastical taxation; and so far the "opposition" in a general way became political. But the Church's own action, now on lines of Jansenist persecution, drove Voltaire and his band about 1760 into a new anti-clerical campaign, which reached its height about 1770, whereafter d'Holbach in particular turned

[1] Routledge's ed., pp. 429, 435, 473.

his energies to criticism of the social system; a criticism, like all his work, as little "frivolous" as any produced in that age, but certainly not very widely influential.[1] That and Diderot's additions to Raynal's "Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes" (1770 and 1780) constituted the main contributions of the *philosophes*, as apart from Rousseau and Morelly, the communist, to the revolutionary agitation proper.

By common consent the social gospel of Rousseau, albeit accompanied by marked indications of his deism, was a (if not *the*) prime factor in the literary generation of revolutionary feeling; and Raynal's doctrine was a close second. But alongside of Rousseau's social idealism there had been going on a concrete critical propaganda that broadly associates with the names of Économistes and Physiocrates, which called for specified reforms on grounds of economic principle, and which was as notable in its day as the critical propaganda of the freethinkers. "L'Ami des Hommes," the voluminous work of the elder Mirabeau (3 vols. 4to; 8 vols. 12mo.), published in 1756, was reprinted with additions in 1759; and the total propaganda of socio-political reform was great. Yet again, Mably, who was "religious to austerity," elaborated a republican doctrine, which in the opinion of Barante had a strong revolutionary influence. Here then we have a second part of the explanation of Buckle's idea that the religious attack "changed" into a political attack after 1750. There were in reality two or more independent movements, which went on side by side after 1750, the freethinkers so called having little share—apart from Diderot's collaboration with Raynal—in the political attack, but greatly developing their own. As against Mably, Boulanger, even in discussing the "Origin of Despotism," expressly argued that republican government was wholly unsuited to human conditions.

[1] The "Politique naturelle" (1773) was not, I think, reprinted till 1795.

Finally, we come to the general myth of the causation of the French Revolution which Professor Sidgwick probably had in his mind as a "unanimous" proposition when he penned his—the myth, namely, that it was the "destructive" work of the freethinkers that made the revolution possible. That formula was promptly caught up by the noblesse, the very class which had been reputedly most Voltairean, and which therefore supplied in itself a refutation, hating the Revolution as it did with its whole heart. A refutation, that is, unless we are to argue that an irreligious noblesse, hating revolution, drives a Catholic populace into it. Of course the legend was adopted, as it had been preluded, by the Church—the Church of the Ligue, of the Wars of Religion, of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day, of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The Church had brought the same kind of charge against every heresy in its history, down to Protestantism and Jansenism. But in this case the charge appealed to all the orthodox everywhere; and the result is a Babel of assertion which at once moves the critical spirit to demand the application of scientific method to sociology (for sociology, good or bad, it all is), and almost to despair of the result. A list of some of the most notable of the internecine propositions in the medley will illustrate the situation.

Few indeed of the contributors tend to justify Professor Sidgwick's thesis as to Voltaire; but even a variant—a wide variant—of that presents itself:—

1. Jansenism, operating through the Paris Parlement, tended all along to undermine the authority of the crown, and so paved the way for the Revolution.—*Jesuit charge; also that of Louis XV.*

2. Jesuitism, which educated Voltaire and Diderot and constantly perturbed the State by its intrigues, paved the way to the Revolution.—*Pro-Jansenist charge.*

3. Jansenism and Jesuitism alike, always fostering the spirit of persecution, stimulated the freethinkers' attack,

which otherwise would have died down as it did in England.—*Liberal charge.*

4. The Revolution was the work of the *Philosophes* in general.—*Catholic charge; endorsed by the noblesse, also by Rivarol, atheist-deist, who had accused Necker of undermining the clergy.*

5. Voltaire was too cynical to move feeling; and so counted for little in preparing the Revolution. Its great fomenter was Rousseau, who had a hundred times more influence than Voltaire in the middle and lower classes. It was "he alone" who established the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people.—*Mallet du Pan's charge.*

6. "Diderot and Condorcet: these are the true chiefs of the revolutionary school." Diderot in particular preached equality, the rights of man, the right of insurrection, and the massacre of priests.—*Also Mallet du Pan's charge* (grossly false as against Diderot).

7. Montesquieu's "Esprit des lois," by its reasonings, tended to "shake the sacred basis of thrones."—*Criticism of Count Cataneo, about 1750.*

8. The teaching of Rousseau's "Émile" tended to make the royal authority odious, and to destroy the principle of obedience.—*Arrêt du Parlement (Paris), 9 juin, 1762.*

9. Marmontel's "Bélisaire," besides being execrable in its theology, taught by implication that "le gouvernement est un bien public qui appartient au peuple seule essentiellement et en pleine propriété."—*Charge by Coger, 1767.*

10. Rousseau's political works "caused no alarm at court." "The priesthood was the first bulwark of absolute power, and Voltaire overthrew it" (i.e., by his later polemic, after 1760). "Without this decisive and indispensable first step nothing would have been done." "In a word, Voltaire made the Revolution, because he wrote for all; Rousseau above all made the Constitution, because he wrote for the thinkers."—*View of Chamfort.*

11. Pascal, by his mordant exposure of the Jesuits, had greatly weakened the spirit of religious obedience.—*View of Barante.*

12. Mably, who detested the *philosophes*, was in politics a destructive force.—*View of Barante.*

13. Voltaire leant unduly to the methods of Louis XIV, who, by destroying the old constitution, prepared a reaction to Revolution.—*Also the view of Barante.*

That may suffice; and it may suffice, as criticism, to point out that everybody shows everybody else to be reasoning from hand to mouth. Not one suggestion will bear confrontation with the whole facts. Barante alone recognizes that the Revolution is the end of the arc begun by Louis XIV; yet he spends on Mably the criticism he should have passed on a vicious fiscal system and irremediably bad finance. As against the dozen delusions above recapitulated, a dozen relevant facts and generalizations of fact may serve to indicate the really political causation of the Revolution, which was much less due to freethinking than the English Rebellion of the seventeenth century was due to religion:—

1. Religious motives had many times led to revolutions, and the Catholic Church had constantly affirmed the removability of kings obnoxious to her. Henri III, Henri IV, and William the Silent had been assassinated, the first by a priest, the others by tools of priests. Damiens, who tried to assassinate Louis XV, carried on his person a copy of the "Imitatio Christi." And Charles V had sacked Papal Rome.

2. A dozen religious wars had outgone the "horrors of the French Revolution."

3. There had occurred in history, time and again, insurrections of peasants—French, English, German—who had never heard of freethought. They rebelled because they suffered; and they at times committed terrible atrocities.

4. The example of English constitutionalism, freedom,

and success counted for more than a dozen Mablys in *preparing* the Revolution.

5. The example of the American Revolution probably counted for more than all Rousseau's teaching.

6. All that has been said of French frivolity and demoralization in the eighteenth century had been said by many English writers concerning English society in the same period.

7. There was as much deism in England as in France: in 1750 a careful German observer endorsed an English estimate that half the educated people in England were deists. And yet the vast majority in both countries were orthodox believers.

8. The Assembly of Notables, which refused to save the king's face and forced on the revolutionary process, was not in the least a freethinking Assembly. The Parlement of Paris, which abetted it, was traditionally orthodox. Equally orthodox were the provincial Parlements, and the provincial clergy who in Dauphiné and elsewhere took the same course.

9. The majority of the Assembly was cordially Catholic; and, later, many priests, and some of the ablest bishops, were of the party of the pious Abbé Grégoire, in favour of the Constitution. Had the Church as a whole accepted it, the end might have been peace.

10. The clergy and the noblesse who resisted every reform, overthrowing Necker and Turgot alike, did more to *precipitate* the Revolution than all the propagandists of all schools put together.

11. Deists figured in the French Revolution as they figured in the politics of the rest of Europe and in the United States. Washington, Paine, and Franklin were deists. Bolingbroke, Walpole, the elder and the younger Pitt, and Charles Fox were deists, as was Aranda in Spain. Catherine of Russia was a deist. Frederick the Great was a deist, inheriting and maintaining and transmitting an absolute autocracy, though there were many

deists in his dominions. Louis XV was a devout believer and the worst king in Europe. It is the weak king whose throne falls, not the worst. And he falls by political forces which master his weakness.

12. The ruinous expenditure of Louis XVI was more dangerous to him than vice and tyranny had been to Louis XV. But his vacillations were still more fatal.[1]

The broad significance of these considerations has long been recognized by French students of the Revolution; and criticism of the old formulas has in France even gone to lengths which have been found excessive. One school has taken up the position that even the progression of revolutionary feeling traced by Rocquain throughout the previous half-century is turned to an illusory conclusion. On his showing, they argue, a revolution *might* have happened at any time: its actual precipitation, then, was a matter of accident—the accident of the acute distress of 1789, which drove crowds of desperate men to Paris. And it is of course a fair inference that this "accident" precipitated the Revolution, and gave it a new impetus to violence. But it does not follow that similar distress in the previous reign would have had the same effect. There *is* a progression in general opinion; and this progression had already affected the Government under Turgot and Necker before Calonne called the Assembly of Notables. The thesis of "accident," the reducing of the determinants to the season's distress, represents the strength of the reaction evoked by the old parade of deductive explanation, which proceeded so largely on traditionary prejudice and claptrap.

Right or wrong, the reaction stands for induction as against deduction; and if we are ever to have a scientific teaching of history, a teaching entitled to the name of sociology, our academics must accept and apply the

[1] This is expressly avowed by Mahon, following Dumont, though the former adds an indictment against the *philosophes* which overturns his own case.

inductive method. Professor Sidgwick claimed at the beginning of his lectures to proceed "from the point of view of Inductive Political Science," as he conceived it, and he undeniably does so to a large extent. But, as we have seen, he lays aside the inductive method at a very important point to employ a mere traditionary theory of the cause of part of the greatest social transmutation in modern history up to 1914; and, discussing the "influence of Rousseau" where he should have been tracking a far more manifold causation, posits a prior "influence of Voltaire" for which there is and can be no such support as he alleged. He was at superfluous pains to correct Maine's misconception of the doctrine of Rousseau—pains which might have been spared by the simple procedure of citing Lanson's summary and synthesis, which show, what Maine had characteristically overlooked, that the "Contrat Social" has travelled a long way from the preliminary "Discours." If it is important to analyse the influence of Rousseau, it is equally important, in a study of the evolution of European polity, to realize that a great political revolution must have had a great political causation. A scheme of "influences" of books, one set making a class grow frivolous and another making other classes revolutionary, belongs to what the scientific schools of France have latterly been wont to dismiss as *de la littérature.* Professor Sidgwick promised and professed "Inductive Science." I plead for the practice of it.

The broad political induction which supersedes the old deductions has now become fairly obvious. It is that the catastrophic and destructive character of the French Revolution resulted directly neither from religious nor from anti-religious ways of thinking, but from the fact that a general push for reform, under a weak government, coinciding with a season of acute distress, produced a crash which went from bad to worse because the nation that sought to govern itself had had no practical prepara-

tion for the task and no adequate police system. Counter-plotting and foreign invasion in the king's interest evoked fury and massacre; and ruffianism, coming to the top, found its brutal instruments among a brutalized mob. The thesis of Mahon, that the miscreants who wrought the massacres were students of the *philosophes* and found in them their inspiration, is beneath discussion. Buckle puts the legend into a comparatively rational form when he writes that by reason of the previous rationalistic movement "men" had been accustomed to daring speculation when they had had no training in political action. But that formula too is misleading in that it points to scientific and philosophic "speculation," which was possible only to the few, instead of to the socio-political, generated alike by English doctrine and practice, American example, and the "doctrinaire" teaching of a hundred writers from Montesquieu onwards. And this kind of speculation also was confined mainly to the readers of books, a minority of the population: the mob of Paris took only the popular formulas, doing its thinking through its passions. Religious rationalism or semi-rationalism had finally nothing to do with the case. Puritans in England wrought revolution because in their day they "speculated" on religious lines, without the slightest lead from rationalism, in the ordinary sense of the term. A theory which explains one revolution by ignoring the other is outside science.

# THE PROSE OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

## I

(1913)

DOGMATIC deliverances on questions of style are not to be blamed on principle, inasmuch as free intercourse involves them. But when put by way of historical propositions, in an academic discourse, they should at least be capable of a semblance of proof on the historical side. And this modest requirement does not seem to have been observed by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in one of his recent lectures at Cambridge on the writing of English. I give the peccant passage in full from the report in a "special" communication to the "Westminster Gazette," relying on its substantial accuracy. Errors of reporting are indeed far more common than most newspaper readers realize; but in this case the reporter seems to be competent, and the whole tenor of the passage appears to be consistent:—

> The education of English prose was more difficult than that of English verse, and went through more violent convulsions. He supposed that most of them, if after reading a quantity of Elizabethan prose they had the courage to tell the plain truth undaunted by the name of a great epoch, would confess to finding it in the main detestable. He, at any rate, did not mind owning that the most of Elizabethan prose offended him. Only a pedant would ask them to study it. Its one merit consisted in that it was struggling, fumbling, to say something that was to make something. It was not like modern jargon trying to dodge something. Yet all the Elizabethan writers were alive, and, unconsciously for the most part, were striving to philosophize the vocabulary of English prose and find a rhythm for its periods. And then, as already had happened to our verse through Shakespeare, to our prose there suddenly befel a miracle.

What was the miracle? He meant the authorized version of the Bible. It was a greater miracle, too. Individual genius such as Shakespeare's we may allow to come in the course of nature. But how forty-seven men, not one known outside of this performance for any superlative talent, could have brought that marvel to birth, and after no very long gestation—well, he had a somewhat sceptical mind, but admitted that before such a wonder as that the most sceptical mind must stand humble and aghast.

The account of the "miracle" here is evidently considerate. It does not consist in the single use of the term; the Authorized Version is deliberately described as a new thing in English prose, a wondrous new birth, unprecedented and almost inexplicable; the unheralded feat of the glorious company of King James's translators. And Sir Arthur, after thus aggressively proclaiming the literary faith that is in him, proceeded to reflect upon the prevailing ignorance in these matters:—

> Did it, or did it not, strike them as queer that the people who set them "courses of study" in English literature never included the English version, which not only intrinsically but historically was out and away the greatest book of English prose? Perhaps they paid the student the silent compliment of supposing that he was perfectly acquainted with it? He wondered.

Sir Arthur must permit us to turn his test upon himself. It is difficult to believe that he is even superficially acquainted with the main facts as to the evolution of the Authorized Version. It is even hard to be sure that he has read its preface. His thesis is that Elizabethan prose is "in the main detestable," at best a striving after good diction and periodic rhythm; and that in 1611, after no very long gestation, the forty-seven translators brought to birth a marvel before which "the most sceptical mind must stand humble and aghast." It may be that Sir Arthur had been led to this impressive pronouncement by a perusal of Professor Saintsbury's pages on the Authorized Version in his "Elizabethan

Literature." That authority, too, writes of "the company of scholarly divines who *produced* what is probably the greatest prose work in any language"; he, too, finds it "curious that such an unmatched result should have been the result of labours thus combined, and not, as far as is known, controlled by any one guiding spirit"; and all he has to say of the previous versions which the king's translators did but revise is that "they had in the earlier English versions excellent *quarries* of suitable English *terms, if not very accomplished models of style.*"[1] Professor Saintsbury, it is clear, had not at that stage studied either the Bishops' or the Genevan Bible. Whatever be his sins as a historian, a rhythmist, and a writer, he has a literary palate; and the words above italicized could have been written by him to that purpose only in ignorance. But when a professed historian of Elizabethan literature can thus write of one of its processes of evolution, it becomes intelligible that a distinguished amateur should err to the same effect.[2]

Or it may be that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch prepared himself by a glimpse of the chapter by Professor A. S. Cook on "The Authorized Version and its Influence," in the "Cambridge History of English Literature." That chapter begins:—

If the Authorized Version of the Bible be the first

[1] "Elizabethan Literature," ed. 1910, pp. 215–6.

[2] [I had forgotten, when I wrote this criticism, that Macaulay had given Sir A. Quiller-Couch a lead in a passage of the juvenile essay on Dryden: "At the time when that odious style which deforms the writings of *Hall and of Lord Bacon* was *almost universal* had appeared that stupendous work, the English Bible" ("Miscel. Writings," ed. 1868, p. 94). As this is one of the early essays (1828) in the "Edinburgh Review" which Macaulay himself did not reprint, it is reasonable to suppose that he had in his maturity recognized some of its sins; and it would have been well if his editor had done as much. The astonishing collocation of Hall and Bacon, and the allegation of an "almost universal" prevalence of an "odious" prose style before 1611, betray a comprehensive ignorance of the subject. And Macaulay's praise of the king's translators for refraining, out of respect for the original, from "adding any of the hideous decorations then in fashion," reveals a happy inacquaintance with the history of Bible translation. But even the young critic knew enough to add that "the groundwork of the version, indeed, was of an earlier age."]

> English classic, as seems by all competent authorities to be allowed, two inquiries suggest themselves: first, what is meant when it is called a classic; and, secondly, what are the qualities that entitle it to be ranked as the first classic in English.

For the reader the initial question really was: What is meant by "first"? Professor Cook, it appears, does not by his ill-chosen phrase mean "first in time"; and, though his chapter largely consists of rhetorical panegyric irrelevant to the literary problem proper, he at least avows that the Authorized Version is but a revision and adaptation of the Tudor versions; and that these in turn drew from Wiclif, and of course upon the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Of all this we get no hint in the Cambridge lecture. No listener could gather from Sir Arthur's exclamation that there had been any tolerable English version of the Bible before the Authorized; and no one could be moved by him to guess that the framers of that owed anything to their predecessors. Yet the facts are sufficiently notorious. In the words of Dr. Edgar:—

> The Bishops' Bible [of 1568–72], of which the Authorized Version is avowedly a revision, supplied verbatim four-fifths, if not nine-tenths, of the whole text in the King's translation; and the Great Bible[1] [of 1540], of which the Bishops' Bible is a revision, supplied verbatim four-fifths, if not nine-tenths, of all the bishops' text.[2]

To say this is not to disparage the Authorized Version, either as to its scholarship or as to its literary merit. All that can be claimed for it on both heads is fully claimed by Dr. Edgar as by other historians. But when we are

[1] Often called Cranmer's. Really Coverdale's revision of his own, with general resort to Tyndale and Rogers.

[2] "The Bibles of England," 1889, p. 317. [It should be added that these Bibles in turn owed much to Tyndale's New Testament. By the avowal of the Revisers of 1881, "His translation of the New Testament was the true primary version. The versions that followed were either substantially reproductions of Tyndale's translation in its final shape or revisions of versions that had been themselves almost entirely based on it." And Tyndale in turn owed a good deal to Luther. See J. R. Dore, "Old English Bibles," 2nd ed. 1888, p. 20.]

dealing with an alleged "miracle," a "greatest birth of Time" in the way of English prose, a marvellous innovation on the style of the sixteenth century, it behoves us to come to the facts. The King's translators were expressly instructed to have regard, in their revision, to the Bishops' text, and after that to Tyndale's New Testament (1526; revised later), Coverdale's Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (i.e., Rogers's, of 1537), the Great Bible, and the Genevan Bible (1560, first printed in England 1575 [1]); and this regard they demonstrably gave. But as regards diction and rhythm their model was substantially set for them by the Bishops' Bible and the Genevan; and while they did undoubtedly make many detail improvements in both diction and rhythm, they not only made no revolutionary change, they at times fell below the effects of their predecessors. This might well happen through a concern for accuracy, as it is said to have happened in the Revised Version of our own day. But even if we put aside all such æsthetically dubious variations, and note only the improvements, the fact remains that the prose ideals, the taste in diction, the conception of rhythm in the Authorized Version, are essentially those of the previous standard versions, and thus represent, in the main, the serious prose standard of the Elizabethan age.

A few comparisons may serve to make this clear. They are culled from the old collation by Charles Rogers, the spelling being in all cases modernised so as to give each version an equal chance. Let us take first a simple narrative sentence:—

EXODUS ii, 3.

And when she could no longer hide him, she took a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch, and laid the child therein, and put it in the flags by

[1] This, often called the "Breeches Bible" because of its rendering of Gen. iii, 7 (wherein it follows Wiclif), introduced the practice of division into numbered verses.

the river's brink.—Bishops' Bible (1568–72), edd. 1572 and 1575.

But when she could no longer hide him she took for him an ark made of reed, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and laid the child therein, and put it among the bulrushes by the river's brink.—Genevan Bible (1560), Edinburgh ed. 1579.

And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.—Authorized Version.

Here there are none save minute variations. The first version—which, in turn, follows predecessors—alternates "bulrushes" and "flags"; the second has "reed" and "bulrushes"; the third reverts to "bulrushes" and "flags." All the essentials of diction and rhythm are unchanged. Seeking for more specifically literary effects, we turn to Job viii, 16–19:—

It is a green tree before the sun, and shooteth forth the branches over his garden. The roots thereof are wrapped about the fountain, and are folden about the house of stones. If any pluck it from its place, and it deny, saying, I have not seen thee! Behold, it will rejoice by this means, if it may grow in another mould.—Bishops' Bible.

The tree is green before the sun, and the branches spread over the garden thereof. [The rest as in the Bishops' Bible.]—Genevan Bible.

He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap, and *seeth*[1] the place of stones. *If he destroy him*[2] from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow.—Authorized Version.

Here, in an obscure passage, whatever rectification may have been made in point of faithful rendering, there is assuredly little advance either in lucidity or in harmony;

[1] Revised Version.—He beholdeth. For "the place of stones" the margin suggests "Or, *beside* the spring"—a partial return to the Bishops' interpretation.

[2] Revised Version.—If he be destroyed.

and the simple binary construction is the same in all the versions alike. It may be broadly true that, "wherever the King's translators found in the Genevan Version a happier word or phrase than they found at the same place in the Bishops' Bible, they appropriated that word or phrase, to adorn and enrich their own version";[1] but the process is certainly not always fortunate. Where the Bishops' Bible, following the Vulgate, has (Job ix, 25): "My days are more swift than a runner," the Genevan Version had: "My days have been more swift than a *post*"; which the Authorized Version merely alters to: "Now my days are swifter than a post." In Job xxxviii, 31–2, the three versions broadly coincide:—

> Wilt thou hinder the sweet influences of the seven stars, or loose the bands of Orion? Can'st thou bring forth Mazzaroth in their time; can'st thou also guide Arcturus with his sons?—Bishops' Bible.

The Genevan Version had run:—

> Can'st thou restrain the sweet influences of the Pleiades?

The Authorized goes back to "bind," and puts "in his season" for "in their time"; the cadences are the same, save for the dropping of "the" before Pleiades. But where, in verse 37, the Genevan Version runs:—

> Who can cause to cease the bottles of heaven?

the Bishops had read:—

> Who stilleth the vehement waters of the heaven?

and the Authorized, faithfully but infelicitously, returns to the Genevan:—

> Who can stay the bottles of heaven?

A good sample of its æsthetic improvements occurs in Job xxxix, 19:—

> Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?

where the Bishops had: "or learned him to neigh

[1] Edgar as cited, p. 307.

courageously," and the Genevan Version, following the Vulgate: "or covered his neck with neighing"; but only the intractability of the original metaphor could have given courage for the summary transformation. Broadly speaking, the diction in Job is little changed, and the changes are not always notably for the better, though they are at times so. A few instances may be interesting:—

JOB xl, 18.

His bones are like staves of brass, and his small bones [Vulg. *cartilago*] like staves of iron.—Genevan Bible.

His bones are like pipes [Vulg. 13, *fistulæ*] of brass; yea, his bones are like staves of iron.—Bishops' Bible.

His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars [Vulg. *laminæ*] of iron.—Authorized Version.

Job xli, 15, 18, 19, 22, 24. (The old versions make a different division of chapters xl and xli.)

The majesty of his scales is like strong shields, and are sure sealed.

His neesings make the light to shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.

Out of his mouth go lamps, and sparks of fire leap out.

In his neck remaineth strength, and labour is rejected before his face.

His heart is strong as a stone, and as hard as the nether millstone.—Genevan Bible.

His scales are as if they were strong shields, so fastened together as if they were sealed.

His neesings make a glistering like fire, and his eyes like the morning shine.

Out of his mouth go torches, and sparks of fire leap out.

In his neck there remaineth strength, and nothing is too laborious for him.

His heart is as hard as a stone, and as fast as the stithy that the smith smiteth upon.—Bishops' Bible.

His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal.

By his neesings a light doth shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.

Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out.

> In his neck remaineth strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him.
>
> His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone.—Authorized Version.

It may well be doubted whether "burning lamps" is better than "torches," or whether "a piece of" improves "the nether millstone." The Revised Version compromises on "burning torches," and drops the "piece of," putting "firm" in both clauses. But "the eyelids of the morning," the contribution of the Genevan Version, is duly retained. And whatever may be thought as to the precise merits of any one phrase-rendering, it will surely not be denied by any scrupulous reader that in all we are dealing with the same prose style, the same kinds of movement, the same general command of expression, the same taste in serious speech. The Bishops were clearly in the dark when they rendered xli, 7:—

> Can'st thou fill the basket with his skin, or the fish panier with his head?

in which "howler" they followed the Genevan Version, which followed the Vulgate (xl, 26); but the more correct rendering of the King's translators:—

> Can'st thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish-spears?

does not seriously alter the rhythm. And at times they rather disregard rhythm, as in the Song of Solomon, i, 9:—

> I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.

The Genevan Version had:—

> I have compared thee, O my love, to the troop of horses in the chariots of Pharaoh.

And the Bishops', more Latinically, but too "verse-like":—

> Unto the host of Pharaoh's chariots have I compared thee, O my love.

It may be that the King's translators here sought to avoid a quasi-verse rhythm; but elsewhere they have

reversed the process. And yet again we find them at times choosing the wrong words. In the Song, iii, 6, they give us:—

> Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all *powders* of the merchant?

where the Genevan Version had run:—

> Who is she that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense, and with all the *spices* of the merchant?

—a rendering substantially followed by that of the Bishops, though altered at one point for the worse:—

> Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like vapours of smoke, as it were a smell of myrrh, frankincense, and all manner of *spices* of the apothecary?

And is "stay me with flagons" (ii, 5), the Genevan rendering adopted by the King's translators, an improvement upon the Bishops' "Set about me cups of wine"? Sad to say, the revisers are driven to read: "Stay me with raisins" (marg. "cakes of raisins"); but if we talk of diction, there is small "miracle" in the formula which the King's translators helplessly copied from the Genevan Version. They are seen at their æsthetic best in their revision of their predecessors in Isaiah xl, 12:—

> Who hath measured the waters in his fist [Vulg. *pugillo*]; and counted heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure; and weighed the mountains in a weight [Vulg.], and the hills in a balance?—Genevan Bible.
>
> Who hath measured the waters in his fist? Who hath measured heaven with his span, and hath comprehended all the earth of the world in three measures [Vulg. *tribus digitis*]? Who hath weighed the mountains and hills in a balance?—Bishops' Bible.
>
> Who hath measured the waters in *the hollow of his hand*, and *meted* out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?—Authorized Version.

No less felicitous is their substitution of "Son of the

morning" for the Bishops' "thou fair morning child" in the apostrophe to Lucifer (xiv, 12). But their "taketh up the isles as a very little thing," in xl, 15, is just the Bishops' "Yea, and the isles he taketh up as a very little thing," which is not very much better than the Genevan "he taketh away the isles as a little dust"—a partial adherence to the Vulgate's *ecce insulæ quasi pulvis exiguus*. And through all the variants the broad fact remains clear that the King's translators are simply revising the Bishops' Version, with an eye to the Genevan, and a not infrequent resort to the Rheims-Douay rendering. That a company of forty-seven scholarly men, all independently comparing previous versions and systematically collating their results, should have reached, on the whole, a higher level of harmony and smoothness as well as of accuracy, is a "miracle" only for that kind of "sceptical" mind which does its doubting without any study of the relevant facts. If they had failed to do as much, their work might reasonably have been pronounced a miracle of incompetence. They had an immense twofold advantage over all previous translators in their mere number and in their fullness of collaboration. The Great Bible of 1540 stands for the work of Coverdale, proceeding anew upon Tyndale and Rogers. Coverdale is only too diffident; more than once, for lack of counsel, he gave way upon sound readings of his own, which have been restored by the modern revisers. The Genevan translators, at most seven, latterly three in number, had small scope for counsel. The bishops and their collaborators, under Archbishop Parker, were a disunited and recalcitrant body, chosen partly *ex officio* and not for scholarly merit or literary zest or bias. King James's seven-and-forty translators, scholars living among English scholars, could subdivide their work as no previous company ever did, and could aid and check each other in a way unattainable by Parker's prelates. If they had actually produced the most carefully phrased book in the

language, it would have been no marvel, for no single writer could ever have for his work such vigilance of supervision as that large company were free to give to theirs. On rational reflection, the wonder is not that they heightened so many epithets and refined so many rhythms, but that, scholarship apart, they left so much opening to men of their own day for challenge.

Among the literary myths which still do duty for history is the assertion that, "whereas previously one Bible had been read in church and another at home, now all parties and classes turned with one accord to the new version and adopted it as their very own."[1] It was not so.[2] Of systematic and competent criticism, of course, there was none on the literary side. But that the King's translators had finally achieved a new marvel of English style was certainly not the general view of either their own or the next age. It is of course no argument against their work on any side that "In the homes of the people the Geneva Version held its ground long after 1611; it is said that no fewer than thirteen editions of the Geneva Version were issued from the press between 1611 and 1617."[3] But while the religious public thus indicated its natural satisfaction with the previously current standard version, the experts, in turn, found no great literary gain. Selden's verdict was that the English "is the best translation in the world, and renders the sense of the original best, taking in for the English translation the Bishops' Bible as well as King James's.....But the

[1] Professor A. S. Cook, in "Camb. Hist. Eng. Lit.," vol. iv, ch. ii, p. 42.

[2] The whole tradition as to the reception of the English Bible is ill founded. "The 'intense desire' for a vernacular Bible we read about in the works of nearly all writers on the subject had no existence, and it was only by penal enactments that the Bible could be forced into circulation" (J. R. Dore, "Old Bibles," 2nd ed. 1888, pp. 225–6). This was especially the case in Scotland about 1576.

[3] Edgar, p. 295. Many editions came afterwards from Holland, down to the folio of 1644; and "150,000 copies were imported from Holland after this version had ceased to be printed in England." On the score of printers' errors Laud at length prohibited them, to the indignation of the Puritans, who made it one of their main charges against him. Dore, p. 204.

Bible is rather translated into English words than into English phrase. The Hebraisms are kept, and the phrase of that language is kept.....which is well enough so long as scholars have to do with it; but when it comes among the common people, Lord, what gear do they make of it."[1]

It was with this authority behind him that Hallam[2] pronounced the Jacobean version to be "not the language of the reign of James I"—a judgment for which he has been recklessly denounced by the intuitive school. In that matter, and by that school, as he observed, "no one is permitted to qualify or even explain the grounds of his approbation." Hallam was of course substantially right, as he was in regard to the presence of "obsolete phraseology." But, in giving merely the explanation that "the principle of adherence to the original versions had been kept up ever since the time of Henry VIII," he omitted to note the fact brought out by Selden—that the English of the translators is often not the natural English of any period whatever. Much of what passes as old English idiom because it is found in the Bible of 1611 is really foreign idiom imposed on English by that and previous versions. And to this fact the conventional panegyrists appear to remain blind.

It might fairly be answered to Selden that the translators had no choice. They were dealing with matter in the rendering of which all avowed deviation from the original was like to be made ground for furious impeachment; and they simply had to put many Hebrew idioms in non-English phrase if they would escape simple paraphrase. Such a phrase as "smote them hip and thigh" was not natural English; but English Puritans were quite determined to abide by it. The odd thing is that to-day this aspect of the case is wholly ignored by critics who avowedly find in most Elizabethan prose a

[1] "Table Talk," s. v. Bible.
[2] "Literature of Europe," pt. iii, ch. ii, end.

"struggling, fumbling, to say something that was to make something." That description might naturally hold good of most of the prose of the ages in which began for the different races the practice of reflective discussion. It would naturally hold good of most Hebrew literature; though, as regards that, there supervenes the constant problem of interpretation. But if that be granted, it obviously follows that the same tentative quality of expression must attach to much of the translation, produced in an age in which there was little habit of reflective discussion save in theology, where critical reflection was so straitly channelled.

Selden's meaning may perhaps be illustrated by taking the first verse of the Book of Psalms:—

> Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly [R. V., *wicked*], nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

It is clearly not a natural English way of speech thus to formulate "walk in the counsel of," "stand in the way of," "sit in the seat of"; though as regards the last phrase a secondary or artificial idiom has arisen through the very habit of reading the Bible. If that sentence had *not* been in the Bible, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch had met it in an Elizabethan book for the first time, he would be about as well entitled to speak of it as "fumbling" as he is in regard to the prose, say, of Thomas Wilson, concerning whom his recent editor, Mr. G. H. Mair, has said things that might seem to have suggested the general verdict of Sir Arthur. Mr. Mair's pronouncement is worth considering in this connection:—

> The student of style.....will find him [Wilson] an instructive example of a certain stage in the development of English prose. The intention is plain enough: he desired to write as men spoke; to use no words and no constructions not already familiar to all his readers. Yet he utterly failed to carry this out in practice. There is a clumsiness and ineffectiveness of syntax which makes the expression of any abstract idea impossible or at best halting;

it shows itself most prominently in his constant use of participial nouns, particularly in his definitions. Insinuation is "a privie twining or close creeping in"; a conclusion is "the handsomely lapping up together, and brief heaping of all that was said before, stirring the hearers by large utterance, and plentiful gathering of good matter, either the one way or the other." It is easy enough to see that prose as an instrument of instruction or a means of expressing ideas is in its infancy here.[1]

Not in its mere infancy, surely; at worst in its hobbledehoyhood. But if Wilson's way of feeling for abstract ideas be classed as primitive work in prose, those Hebrew metaphors about "standing in the way of," and so on, must in fairness be put in a similar category; and how then can the simple translation of them be said to transcend the same literary plane? If it be said that the Hebrew metaphors as such give a certain pleasure, one can but answer that pleasure is not quite exiled from Wilson's performance; and that if his more cumbrous clause-construction sets up a sense of immaturity and infirmity, it is because he is doing more complex work and striving at a more difficult literary effect than a simple sequence of short unconnected or unwoven clauses, which is the literary form of all early Hebrew literature. To see and say that much would be the first duty of any student dealing with the English Bible as a purely literary performance; and in the fact that such criticism would be felt inexpedient by academical instructors may be found the answer to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's unsophisticated query as to why the Authorized Version is not a matter of study in "literary" courses.

How difficult it would be to secure or safeguard a truly scholarlike handling of the question may be divined from a perusal of Professor Cook's dithyramb in the "Cambridge History of English Literature." Copying the critical methods of Matthew Arnold at that point at

[1] Introd. to rep. of Wilson's "Art of Rhetorique," 1560, in "Tudor and Stuart Library." Mr. Mair's introduction has great value.

which they are best honoured in the breach, the American critic on the one hand establishes the literary merits of the Hebrew original by comparing a "faked" speech from Thucydides (iv, 126) with the address of Gideon to his soldiers in Judges (vii, 17–8), and on the other hand vindicates the Hebrew style in general by showing that in the prose of Shakespeare there is "repetition" and "somewhat hysterical exaggeration." The Professor is careful to quote from one of the most factitious of all the Thucydidean sham-speeches, and to use not the version of Hobbes but a modern "crib." In the case of Shakespeare he selects Hamlet's speech, "This goodly frame, the earth," and actually pens this criticism :—

> This, indeed, is fine rhetoric, but *how apostrophic it is, and how repetitious !* "Canopy"—"firmament"—"roof"—thus it is *amplified*. Again, even if we can distinguish between "noble in reason," "infinite in faculty," and "in apprehension.....like a god," how shall we make clear to ourselves the difference between "moving" and "action"? And what an anti-climax—"the paragon of animals"!

Now, some of us are fain to maintain that Shakespeare's prose, even at its finest in point of phrase and purport, is not exemplary *as* great prose—as nobly cadenced and balanced speech. But Professor Cook here is not considering prose structure at all; he is analysing vocabulary; and he is expressly disparaging in Shakespeare what he must have known to be *the* outstanding characteristics of elevated Hebrew prose as rendered in the Authorized Version.[1] In the very sample (Ps. viii, 3–8) with which he contrasts his quotation from Shakespeare we have it signally illustrated :—

> When I consider the heavens, *the work of thy fingers*, the moon and the stars *which thou hast ordained*, what is *man*, that thou art *mindful of him*, and the *son of man*, that thou *visitest him ?* For thou.....hast crowned him with *glory and honour*.....All *sheep and oxen*, yea, and

[1] Compare, for instance, Isaiah xl, 12, above cited.

> *the beasts of the field*.....The *fish of the sea*, and *whatsoever passeth through the path of the seas.*

What, one wonders, would Professor Cook have said of the Psalm if he had found it in Shakespeare, and what of Hamlet's speech if he had found it in the Psalms? Would he have discovered an anti-climax in the downward progression from angels to fish? Would he still have been clear as to the demerits of apostrophe? Would he have distinguished successfully between "glory" and "honour," "man" and "the Son of man"? And in which instance would he have discovered the inexpediency of repetition? His conduct of the case is really beneath discussion; the rest of the passage is, if possible, worse than what is above cited. Before such an astonishing display of judicial blindness one can but repeat the surmise that there is not likely to be any gain to sound culture from an introduction of the Bible into "courses" of English literature which involve any process of critical reflection.

If a sample expressly chosen as a foil to the alleged imperfection of Shakespeare's diction is found to obtrude all the characteristics there censured, what would be the result of examination at large? If "infinite in faculty" is blamable hyperbole, as Professor Cook protests, and if "in action how like an angel" be "somewhat hysterical exaggeration" in contrast with "a little lower than the angels," what would be the outcome of a critical comparison of the prophets and of Deuteronomy? A question not to be asked! Those who desire that Professor Cook's fashion of criticism should continue to pass muster either in histories of literature or anywhere else will do well to decline the invitation of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch; and those who wish well to rational study will do well to recognize that the Authorized Version is but the outcome of a process of revision by men not really more gifted than Shakespeare.

The plain literary fact is that where it is not a direct

translation of Hebrew idiom and image the English translation of the Bible is in the ordinary style of Tudor narrative prose, howbeit hampered by the perplexities and peculiarities of the Hebrew text. There is really no literary merit in such a phrase as: "So they established a decree to make proclamation" (2 Chron. xxx, 5); and such an expression would not have been framed save by way of scrupulous rendering of a difficult original. The Vulgate is rather better: "Et decreverunt ut mitterent nuntios in universum Israel"; though the Vulgate is not in general tolerable Latin prose for readers of the classics. It is only in the portions of the Bible where higher literary values and effects are involved in the nature of the matter that any question of great prose can arise; and in perhaps two-thirds of that matter the effect is at least as much ascribable to the striking images of the original as to the literary art of the rendering. When we read such verses as:—

> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?.....Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding.

we receive a literary sensation common to all readers of all versions, including the Vulgate. And when we read:—

> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.

the true verdict must be the same. Take it in the Vulgate:—

> Quam pulchri super montes pedes annuntiantis et prædicantis pacem.

To the English translators may be given the credit of their rhythm, though they have so exactly followed the Vulgate in the first clause that their skill is clearly not recondite. But if the amateur will persist in talking of "miracle" in such a matter, let him turn to the versions upon which King James's translators proceeded, and he will find that all the marvels of his allegiance are there,

a generation before. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is essentially the same English, as to style and term and cadence, in the Genevan as in the Authorized Version. Where the King's translators put "declare his generation" for "declare his age," they do but adopt the wording of the Bishops. When they write "put him to grief" and "the pleasure of the Lord," they do not improve upon "make him subject to infirmities" and "the will of the Lord," though they seek for new sonority in putting "numbered" for "counted," and "made intercession for the transgressors" in place of "prayed for the trespassers." In such revision there is nothing marvellous.

Any one faithfully seeking for purely literary merit in the English Bible would do well to turn to the little-read Apocrypha. There we have a quantity of original work of a consciously literary kind, relatively late in time and standing for the results of a prolonged literary evolution. As we learn from Selden, the translation of the Apocrypha was mainly given to Andrew Downs,[1] Greek Professor at St. John's, Cambridge. Working with a comparatively free hand, on matter which specially lent itself to normal English phrase and construction, Downs has produced some of what is perhaps the most really readable prose in the Authorized Version;[2] but here again there is no great innovation, no notable advance upon the forms of Tudor prose, save in so far as the fortunate inhibition laid by the Vulgate and by the original English on native prolixity yields a terseness of which most writers before Bacon had failed to see the value.

[1] The record is that twenty-five persons were assigned to the Old Testament, fifteen to the New, and seven to the Apocrypha. Downs seems to have been allowed to do the drafting.

[2] The Rev. Dr. C. B. McAfee, an American scholar, writes of the group of translators who did the Apocrypha that "Their work was rather hastily and certainly poorly done, *and* has been dropped out of most editions" ("The Greatest English Classic," 1912, p. 57). This illustrates the process of conventional bias. The Apocrypha were later excluded from most editions for *theological* reasons, certainly not for poverty in the translation.

The sum of the matter seems to be that what readers like Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch extol as a triumph of post-Elizabethan English style is not only, to begin with, in the main early Elizabethan work produced by men who had their schooling under Henry VIII, but is indebted for its later impressiveness largely to the fact that modern readers find in its non-idiomatic phrase only the same degree of remoteness and old-world charm as they do in its idiomatic phrase, whereas for readers of that age the former element could have a measure of incongruity. In other words, the modern reader tends to overrate its pure literary merit relatively to its time, especially inasmuch as he tends to accord to all literary effects in the Bible a more exalted admiration than he bestows on any others. This bias is so strong that a really critical handling of the literary problem is hardly ever attempted. Even scholarly writers habitually claim for the English version, as such, a beauty which must often inhere in the original thought; and no less habitually rate as pure beauty an effect of phrase which comes of prior sacrosanctity. The fact that all Sacred Books alike are similarly extolled by their believing readers—the Koran no less than the Bible—should warn the student that in these cases the æsthetic and the critical faculties do not work in their normal way.

Even if, however, this aspect of the problem be wholly waived, the "miracle" theory of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch is done with. What he has so lightly certificated as a sudden prodigy was simply a final stage in an evolution to which he had paid no previous heed. The English Bible is essentially a production of the Tudor period; and as regards its literary refinements it is mainly Elizabethan. Mr. Lang,[1] describing it in one page as retaining a substratum of simple English from Wiclif and from Tyndale, in another says that it owes much to

[1] "History of English Literature," pp. 174, 282.

Coverdale. That would be hard to prove. Tyndale is the more traceable force, and the same may be said of Rogers. But the Bishops' and the Genevan Bibles, both Elizabethan,[1] determine, as Dr. Edgar has put it, four-fifths of the language of the version of 1611; and in so far as that version improves on those the result is rationally to be ascribed, not barely to the collaboration of a company of scholars trained in the Elizabethan half-century, but to the betterment actually made in English style in the last dozen years of Elizabeth's life. In short, the thesis of a "miracle" of beauty suddenly supervening in a process of style-evolution "in the main detestable" is no less irrational than inaccurate. If the Bible of 1611 is better literature than the Bibles of 1560 and 1568, it is partly because so much fine English had been written in the intervening years. It was certainly those years that saw the issue of most of the Tudor prose that could be safely pressed on the attention of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch; and the years 1570 to 1603 are by far the richest of all. But still we had better not talk of miracles. What was attained in the last Elizabethan decade was, broadly speaking, the craft of sentence structure and orderly complication of clause; and even that craft is advanced by such prose as that of Lilly's "Euphues," by some of the better theological writing, and by some of the better translations in secular literature. It will really not do to say that English prose had a more difficult and convulsive evolution than English verse. Tudor verse down to Spenser is in the mass certainly no better in its kind than the prose; it has in general hardly more charm,[2] despite its æsthetic aim; and it is on the whole more conventional, less spontaneous, as well as less edifying. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch would seem to distribute his favour with a bias. Would he, one wonders, bestow

[1] The Genevan was really done in the reign of Mary.
[2] Surrey is the chief exception, after the "Nut-Brown Maid."

his detestation upon the simple and straightforward prose of Richard Eden, who was writing and translating books about America in the days of Mary? There, at least, he may find the kind of prose which forms the bulk of the work of the translators of the Bible. Let us take a passage of the "Treatyse of the Newe India," dated 1553, from the chapter "How the Portugals sought new Islands in the East parts, and how they came to Calicut":—

> And thus being brought into the East they saw certain Indians gathering shell fishes by the sea banks: being men of very high stature, clothed with beasts' skins. To whom, whereas certain of the Spaniards went a-land, and shewed them bells and painted papers, they began to dance and leap about the Spaniards with a rude and murmuring song. At the length there came three others, as though they were ambassadors, which by certain signs desired the Spaniards to go further with them into the land, making a countenance as though they would entertain them well, whereupon the captain Magellanus sent with them seven men well instructed to the intent to search the region and manners of the people. And thus they went with them into the deserts, where they came to a low cottage covered with wild beasts' skins, having in it two mansions, in one of which were women and children, and in the other only men. They entertained their guests after a barbarous and beast-like manner, which nevertheless seemed to them princelike, for they killed a beast, not much unlike a wild ass, whose flesh, but half-roasted, they set before our men, without any other kind of meat or drink.[1]

It needed no miracle to turn such narrative prose to the service of the Bishops' and the Genevan Bibles. And in that "rude and murmuring song" is a promise of all the flowering of English speech in the age of Shakespeare and Bacon.

## II

It may be well, in a brief sketch of the progress of English prose in the sixteenth century, to set out from

[1] Arber's reprint, pp. 32–3.

Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, published in 1526, inasmuch as that book must have widely influenced prose form. A fair sample of the power of Tudor English at that date to render serious matter with precision and dignity is supplied by the version of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, of which, in modernized spelling, the first two paragraphs run:—

> Though I spake with the tongues of men and angels, and yet had no love, I were even as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal; and though I could prophesy, and understood all secrets and all knowledge, yea, if I had all faith so that I could move mountains out of their places, and yet had no love, I were nothing. And though I bestowed all my goods to feed the poor, and though I gave my body even that I burned, and yet have no love, it profiteth me nothing.
>
> Love suffereth long and is courteous; love envieth not. Love doth not frowardly; swelleth not; dealeth not dishonestly; seeketh not her own; is not provoked to anger, thinketh not evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth, suffereth all thing(s), believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth in all things. Though that prophesying fail, other tongues shall cease, or knowledge vanish away, yet love falleth never away.

The Genevan translators rightly retained Tyndale's "love"; whereas the Bishops, ceding to Sir Thomas More and the Vulgate, substituted "charity"; and to this the Authorized Version adhered. The Revisers have gone back to Tyndale.[1] They have altered his "thoughs"

[1] [Professor Saintsbury ("Hist. of Eng. Prose Rhythm," p. 152 *sq.*) has made a characteristic assault on the Revisers for reverting to "love," erroneously ascribing the first use of "charity" to the A. V. He roundly alleges, not only that "love" is unjustifiable, since it carries two forces (as if "charity" did not), but that "they have at one blow cut the whole rhythm of the passage to pieces, and substituted ugly jolting thuds for undulating spring-work." So "lo*ve*" is a thu*d*! The value of this dogmatism may be better appraised when it is noted that the Professor "scans" (his notion of evaluating prose cadence is to "scan" it with quantitative marks and pseudo-metrical cæsuras) Sir Walter Raleigh's "O eloquent, just, and mighty death" thus:—

Ŏ ēlŏqŭent, | jūst, | ănd mīghtў | Dēath!

making the great exordium *skip* at its outset to the tune of "Penelope went to comb her hair." The rhythmist who makes that "O" short is

to "ifs," taken later terms instead of some of his, and generally quadrated the tenses; but the passage to this day is but a revision of his version, following his cadences, as indeed was inevitable. Sentence form and cadence were given in the original and in the Vulgate; and he passed them on, with his own word values. To speak of the Jacobean version as working a new miracle here is worse than idle: it adhered to Tyndale wherever it well could.

Translation from dead languages might not have been the best discipline in style for that day any more than for this; but it was the natural one for Tyndale; and in the translation (1533) of the "Enchiridion Militis Christiani" of Erasmus, which would appear to be his work, though there his form is more lax, he generally shows a similar competence, as here:—

> Knowledge helpeth more unto piety than beauty or strength of body or riches; and though all learning may be applied to Christ, yet some helpeth more compendiously than some. Of this end and purpose, see thou measure the profitableness or unprofitableness of all mean things. .....If thou have confidence in thyself and trust to have advantage in Christ, go forth boldly as an adventurous merchant, to walk as a stranger somewhat further, yea in the learning of Gentiles, and apply the riches or treasure of the Egyptians unto the honesting of the temple of God. But if thou fearest greater loss than thou hopest of advantage, then return again to our first rule: know thyself and pass not thy bounds, keep thee within thy lists. It is better to have less knowledge and more of love than to have more of knowledge and not to love. Knowledge therefore hath the mastery or chief room amongst mean things. After that is health, the gifts of nature, eloquence, beauty, strength, dignity, favour, authority, prosperity, good reputation, kin, friends, stuff of household. (Rep. 1906, pp. 131–2.)

Here the task of translation has really been effected:

really not capacitated to lay down the law in these matters. After that, one can understand how *he* prefers the skipping dactyls: "charity | suffereth | long and is |" to the grave tread of "love suffereth long." But whom will his vociferation persuade?]

the Latin is turned into idiomatic English. As much can hardly be said of the contemporary rendering into English by Lord Berners of the French version of the Spanish Guevara's "Golden Boke of Marcus Aurelius" (1534). The opening sentences run:—

> In the year of the foundation of Rome .vi.C.xcv. in the Olympiad .C.lxiii., Anthony the meek being dead, *then consuls Fulvie Caton & Enee Patrocle*, in the high capitol the iiii. day of October, at the demande of all the people Romayne, and consent of the Sacred Senate, was declared for Emperor universal of all the monarchy of Rome, Mark Aurely Anthony. This excellent baron was naturally of Rome born in the mount Celie.

Despite the resort to Latin constructions, the very names are transliterated from the French, in the manner of the later writer who told of "Mark Antony Pie." And Berners' English all along is still substantially foreign, though in some respects on a par with that of fifty years later. Thus he begins the Prologue:—

> As the time is an inventor of novelties and a register certain of things ancient, and at the end time giveth end to that suffereth end, the truth all only among all things is privileged in such wise that when the time seemeth to have broken her wings, then as immortal she taketh her force. There is nothing so entire but it diminisheth; nor nothing so whole but that is weary; nor nothing so strong but that it breaketh, nor nothing so well kept but that it corrupteth. So all these things time achieveth and burieth, but only truth, the which (of the time, and of all thing that is in the time) triumpheth. Neither to be favoured of the good nor to be persecuted of the ill, maybe but that sometime truth may be stopped and hid, but when it is displeased and will displease, then at the last she cometh to a good port, and taketh land.

Here we are steeped in French, from "the time" onwards, though the last sentence suggests that even the French is ill understood. Writing for a courtly audience, the translator has not compassed the idiomatic lucidity of Tyndale's rendering of Erasmus. There we have, so to say, a greater wave length, a freer line, a more organic

construction than is often possible in the rendering of New Testament Greek: the instrument is equal to the freer task. Theological doctrine and controversy, unfortunately, do not make interesting reading for posterity; and the many volumes of the Parker Society's reprints thus find few readers with æsthetic tastes; but those who study them are aware that the abundant controversial writing of the early Reformers played an important part in developing and suppling the language. Tyndale had less variety of literary gift than More, but in his controversy with that formidable antagonist he writes as forcibly, tersely, and idiomatically as the other. It was a duel of stout and stern foemen, who cut and thrust with a swift vigour and directness not to be looked for in the tranquil narrative of the chronicler.

But even the chronicler, as early as Hall (1548), had learned to manage English with dignity and sonority, and even with something of stately grace. Hall, whose discipline had evidently been in Latin and French, begins his dedication on the high horse:—

> Oblivion, the cankered enemy to fame and renown, the sucking serpent of ancient memory, the deadly dart to the glory of princes, and the defacer of all conquests and notable acts, so much bare rule in the first and second age of the world, that nothing was set out to men's knowledge, either how the world was made, either how man and beasts were created, or how the world was destroyed by water, till father Moses had by divine inspiration in the third age invented letters, the treasure of memory, and set forth five notable books, to the great comfort of all people living at this day.....So that evidently it appeareth that fame is the triumph of glory, and memory by literature is the very dilator and setter forth of Fame.

The introduction begins in the same key and *tempo*. But already we have accurate grammar, balance of clauses, fullness of vocabulary, and English construction. Hall's faults are the mechanical reduplication of clause and rhetorical over-elaboration so sharply animadverted upon

by Ascham,[1] who girded at his "indenture English..... strange and inkhorn terms.....words vainly heaped one upon another.....many sentences of one meaning..... clouted up together." But Hall had an eye and ear for prose values of which Ascham, albeit he sought them in his Latin letters, took small care when writing his mother-tongue, save when, as it happened, he committed the very sins of reduplication which he charges upon Hall. Something is done for the dignity of prose as well as of history in such a passage as the chronicler's description of Richmond at the battle of Bosworth:—

> He was a man of no great stature, but so formed and decorated with all gifts and lineaments of nature that he seemed more an angelical creature than a terrestrial personage; his countenance and aspect was cheerful and courageous, his hair yellow like the burnished gold, his eyes grey, shining, and quick, prompt and ready in answering, but of such sobriety that it could never be judged whether he were more dull than quick in speaking, such was his temperance. And when he had overlooked his army over every side, he paused awhile, and after, with a loud voice and bold spirit, spake to his companions these or like words following.

It is not, I think, accurate to say that his style changes when he comes to his own time and narrates events which he had witnessed. With more details to give, he is more everyday in his diction; but his manner remains formal, dignified, periphrastic; and his sentence-formation is not changed. Of such a style we cannot rightly say, any more than of that of Tyndale, that it is fumbling or infantine; it is at worst prolix and operose, the style of a narrator following foreign models, and concerned for embellishment as a matter of course, having no quickening sense of a message to deliver such as moved Tyndale and later propagandists. If a later writer, dealing with the mere dry bones of scholastic method, exhibits the lack of a technical vocabulary wherewith to analyse logical

[1] "The Schoolmaster" (1570), Arber's rep., pp. 111–2.

and expository processes, none the less men had before his time been able to debate in English with point and edge. Tyndale pronounces that

> Master More declareth the meaning of no sentence; he describeth the proper signification of no word, nor the difference of the significations of any term; but runneth forth confusedly, in unknown words and general terms. And where one word hath many significations, he maketh a man some time believe that many things are but one thing, and some time he leadeth from one signification unto another, and mocketh a man's wits; as he juggleth with his term "church"; making us in the beginning understand all that believe, and in the conclusion the priests only.[1]

And he could analyse a logical process featly enough:—

> Ye must understand that we sometime dispute forward, from the cause to the effect; and sometime backward from the effect to the cause, and must beware that we be not therewith beguiled. We say, summer is come, and therefore all is green: and dispute forward; for summer is the cause of greenness. We say, the trees be green, and therefore summer is come; and dispute backward from the effect to the cause; for the green trees make not summer, but make summer known.[2]

A modern writer could put this more shortly by means of technical formulas; and would rightly say "argue" or "reason" instead of "dispute." But who can say that the prose, written in the early days of the revival of learning, is not adult and energetic? Jewel, conducting his vast debate with Harding forty years later, can spar with his voluble antagonist over "an argument negative from special to general"; but both writers are diffuse and tedious in comparison with Tyndale and More. What may be claimed for Tyndale, however, holds good for a series of later divines and controversialists, notably Hooker, Hutchinson, and Whitgift. The two former, keen sectarians both, writing their treatises with a constant eye to controversy, exhibit the literary value of that

[1] "Answer to More," Parker Soc. rep., pp. 194–5. [2] *Id. ib.*, pp. 198–9.

preparation. Their sentences are clean-cut, balanced, and cleanly fitted, maintaining an easy movement and a grateful cadence. They give us neither the cumbrous periods of the average divine of the seventeenth century nor the harsh transitions of the average writer of all times. Of course, they had a faculty for style. Bale, fiercest of all controversialists, is far too much concerned about invective to care for finish or cadence of phrase. Coverdale, writing devotionally and not in controversy, aims in his "Spiritual and Most Precious Pearl" (1550) at a long-drawn suavity and linked sweetness incompatible with disputation; but he attains it at the expense of pregnancy, securing his *cantabile* effect by much bland tautology. As prose, the result is agreeable enough, anticipating some of the periodic effects of Newman and the elder Arnold. What is lacking is weight of thought; the message is unduly diluted for weak intelligences. Between such defect of stamina and defect of literary sense, plenty of the prose of Elizabeth's day, early and late, is certainly dull and repellent—like most of the serious prose of all periods. Controversy could not make Jewel concise. His ungirt style is freely displayed in his Latin "Apologia," whereof the fifth paragraph, in Lady Anne Bacon's translation, is one monstrous sentence of some four hundred words. She has faithfully followed her original. The mere extent of his immense and formless debate with Harding repels all hope of style; it is a wilderness of minute wrangling, conducted after the main battle was over. But a controversy which, like that of Tyndale and More, had living forces behind it, was once again, yet a generation later, to be the occasion of some of the finest prose of that century.

That the old theologians should as such be unknown to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch is not surprising, when professed historians of Elizabethan literature pass them by as of no literary account. But what is puzzling in his indictment of pre-Jacobean prose is its comprehensive-

ness. Any essayist on the subject, one would suppose, would note at least the well-known sermons of Latimer, whether or not he glanced at such good narrative prose as Eden's "Treatyse of the Newe India." The "Sermon of the Plough" is very commonly cited with praise as a sample of fine vernacular English, telling a plain tale with a strong simplicity of phrase, not to be surpassed for purposes of popular homily. Yet Sir Arthur does not think fit to exempt it in his account of sixteenth-century prose in general as unreadable save for pedants. One can but remind the reader of Latimer's existence, and, noting further that Ralph Robinson's modest translation of More's "Utopia" has given some literary satisfaction to many, proceed to note the higher developments of prose in Elizabeth's day.

For the production of fine prose there is first needed, clearly, vital purport. For sincere readers of that century this had been given in the religious content of the earlier Protestant controversy and theology in only a less degree than by the Bible; and the ends of the former permitted and invited a range of expression and construction which the Biblical originals shut out, even in their finest passages. Their prose runs to short phrases and short sentences; a kind of composition certainly tractable to fine effects, but surely not the highest stage of prose form. That it lay within the compass of others than translators, whether Elizabethan or Jacobean, may be gathered from a fragment of the "revelations" transcribed by John Dee, as made to him by the angel Gabriel at Cracow in 1584:—

Happy is he that hath his skirts tied up and is prepared for a journey, for the way shall be open unto him, and in his joints shall there dwell no weariness. His meat shall be as the tender dew, as the sweetness of the bullock's cud. For unto them that have shall be given, and from them that have not shall be taken away. For why? The burr cleaveth to the willow stem, but on the sands it is tossed as a feather without dwelling. Happy are they

> that cleave unto the Lord, for they shall be brought unto the storehouse, and be accounted and accepted as the ornaments of his beauty.[1]

Of this grave music the secret is surely not very recondite. It is a matter of simple metaphors, simple propositions, simple sentences, in a binary construction, with a regular, calmly falling cadence. If the prose writers of that age had chosen to restrict themselves to such a style, few could have had any difficulty in producing it in abundance. Presumably they saw more or less wittingly—what only the spell of custom and sanctity can prevent readers now from seeing—that the highest forms of prose, considered as mere artistic composition, involve some complexity of clause and prolongation of cadence. Not otherwise do we obtain those effects of sustained movement, of space and amplitude, which in literature are broadly analogous to the impressions made by arch and dome and sinuous scroll in architecture. Such effects, indeed, were not easily to be reached on the inspiration of early romance, criticism, history, or even homily, though they were partly attainable in earnest controversy on momentous religious themes. Early romance is too fantastic, early criticism alternately too academic and too superficial, and early history too naïve or too pedantic, for great effects of style. These come of depth of feeling and reverie, fullness of experience, and discipline in considerate writing—with some touch of genius as a pre-requisite. Painter's "Palace of Pleasure," with its mass of more or less vivaciously and well written tales, freely translated, is readable enough; but the translator is not greatly preoccupied about diction. Such a book as Foxe's "Acts and Monuments" had the due material; but Foxe's work, growing into a huge history of Christendom in its ecclesiastical relations, plus a general chronicle of England, became

[1] "John Dee," by Charlotte F. Smith, 1909, p. 299.

too copious for aught save a business-like narrative style, whatever were Foxe's literary capacities. By his own avowal he would rather have written in Latin; and for him, as for Ascham, English prose was simply the language of everyday life, a means of conveying knowledge and counsel, not an instrument to be used in rivalry with the great prose of antiquity. Good, earnest, readable English his always is, and his unadorned recitals of the martyrdoms of his own age have outlived, in human interest, many more ambitious performances. Simplicity has this saving grace. Simplicity alone, however, will not serve to make a great book. Ascham, writing his "Toxophilus" under Henry VIII, proposed to follow the maxim of Aristotle, "to speak as the common people do, to think as wise men do." But the scholar who, when "of good years," zealously planned a book on cockfighting, was wise only in respect of his good heart, and could compass no depth either of thought or feeling, save in the way of hearty moral sympathies. His style is indeed free of pedantry, even when he writes in his quality of pedant; and he has his reward in a friendly audience even to this day, though Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has apparently no good to say of him. But of what makes either great prose or great literature his wide classical reading had left him complacently unaware; and he remains to the last a cordial commonplacer, bent on good cockfighting, good archery, and good schoolmastership. Nor will his unstudied prose serve us, any more than that of Foxe, to prove against Sir Arthur that there was great diction in England before 1611; for he misconceived Aristotle to the extent of confounding common vocabulary with common phrase. Those who ascribed to him *eximiam scribendi facultatem*, and saw in his English works *suavem scribendi elegantiam*,[1] were but carrying the law

[1] E. Grant, "De Vita et Obitu Rogeri Aschami," in the 1753 ed. of the "Epistolae," p. 31. The praise might hold of his Latin letters, which are fluent and graceful.

of the funeral oration into criticism. He approaches elegance only in passages where he adopts the antithetic manner, soon to be so intolerably abused by Lilly. For the higher prose, in that age as in every other, we must, as a rule, turn to the men with literary faculty and literary purpose, also working sincerely upon high matters which they had deeply at heart.

We see the virtues of gift and of message when we turn from the early literary criticism of Puttenham and Webbe to that of Sidney. The first frames a naïve pedantic handbook for verse-makers; the second combines with an ill-informed and scanty survey of ancient and modern poetry some very unequal criticism and some very incompetent verse-analysis; Sidney pierces at once to essentials, and treats of them with a literary faculty which was early mature. The "Apologie for Poetrie," it is agreed, was written about 1581–2, in Sidney's twenty-eighth year. Already he had written the sonnets to Stella, the slight masque "The Lady of the May," and part if not all of the "Arcadia." The last had been penned with a fatal fluency, its unreality of theme entailing an infinite superfœtation of phrase, so that the style is hardly more satisfying than the fantastic narrative; though at times it is fortunate. There is nothing to show that its author had ever recognized the possibility of method or balance in the formation and filiation of clauses and sentences; all is breathless, measureless, rhythmless. And yet within a year or two, upon the provocation of a tactless diatribe against poetry, he frames the most thoughtful and intimate critical treatise yet written in English, entirely adequate in point of inspiration, however deficient in point of psychic science or impermanent in doctrine; and written with a calm maturity of phrase and form never hitherto attained in any purely literary production. Beginning and ending on a new note of humour, he plans his course and shapes and correlates his sentences, save for a few lapses, with

an easy skill which at once reveals him as a truer master of prose than of verse. Above all, he had taken his own poetic counsel: "Look in thy heart and write." The result is one of the lasting things in English literature, a sudden brief masterpiece of musical, pregnant, rhythmic prose. Criticism can easily go deeper; but for unaffected distinction of feeling and grave grace of exposition the "Apologie" is not to be surpassed in its kind.

It is the implicit dismissal of such work as this to the general limbo of failure that specially astonishes one in the pronouncement of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. He himself writes good prose: does he think this was bad; or that his own faculty, in that age, could conceivably have done better? To take the most familiar sample, is he blind to the beauty of this?—

> Now therein of all sciences (I speak still of human and according to the human conceits) is our Poet the monarch. .....He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you; with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner.

To think only of the bad prose and to say nothing of this is an unscholarly way of dealing with a scholarly question. Bad prose there certainly was, in abundance. Sidney's lead, be it remembered, was given in print only in 1595. Meantime "Euphues," and Fenton's and Hellowes' versions of Guevara's "Epistles," and Greene's tales, had their vogue in a world certainly not trained to distinguish between good prose and bad. Condemnation of all these is very justifiable. The Guevara manner, which is one of the ancestors of the Lilly manner, had been Englished as we saw in 1534, by Lord Berners' translation of the French version of Guevara's "Golden Book"; and the snap of antithesis and the crackle of

strained cleverness there purveyed were so popular (the book had thirty editions) that yet another version by North, "The Dial of Princes" (1557), made from the expanded original, ran in rivalry with the first. The style is to good natural prose, and the matter is to good literature, what Queen Elizabeth's costumes were to those of Aspasia. All the higher possibilities of prose ratiocination are, in the hands of Guevara and his translators, exploded into glittering fragments: the effect is as of tinsel in a pantomime. And Lilly, who copied the matter and revived and renovated the style, adding the fearful charms of a bogus world of natural history to the trick of antithesis, is for us grown even more intolerable in point of mannerism than his spiritual forbears. The main excuse for him is that the Elizabethan prose current before 1580 was still in too large part ungirt, uncombed, and uncouth. For cumbrousness and slovenliness he suddenly substituted foppery of form and thought, to the delight of the ladies and the bewilderment of the wise. Yet his pursuit of point and concision, neatness and syntax, really furthered the evolution of English literature, creating as it did a standard of finish and a demand for deftness of movement. The fit fruit is to be gathered not in the voluble and worthless romances of Greene, who did but imitate the mannerisms of Lilly without heed to his comparative terseness, but in the prose of Bacon, where terseness and sanity go hand in hand, and withal in a style which is by turns gnomic and noble, crisp and sonorous.

It is in the face of *that* that the drawing of the line of a new literary era at 1611 assumes its most outrageous aspect. As we have seen, there were no secrets of simple cadence and majesty left by the Elizabethan translators of the Bible for the Jacobean men—all trained under Elizabeth—to discover. All they had to do on that side was to refine vocabulary and to perfect the balance of clauses; and even that they did not always compass.

But if we took the Authorized Version for a new work, it would still be uncritical extravagance to claim that, purport apart, it is a miracle of language, a new marvel in prose. Bacon's "Advancement of Learning" tells of a command of organic composition which, in the nature of the case, no close translation of the Old and New Testaments could exhibit: the method belongs to a later world, an evolved faculty of connected reasoning and psychic introspection which perforce evolved a wider range of utterance and a more complex æsthetic art. It is a poor service to literature to represent this as a small thing in comparison with the reverent archaistic reproduction of the solemnities and the oracles of ancient religion—in disregard, too, of the fact that these are but the high lights of a mass of matter which in the narrative portions does not differ, save in its compulsory brevity, from the serious narrative style of previous generations.

But if men cannot, or will not, discriminate between the artistic and the religious values of the prose of Bacon's age, let them test the conventional judgment by confronting it with religious prose written in Elizabeth's lifetime. Alleged miracles are to be measured not against modish performances or the admitted fumblings of the average amateur: they are to be certificated, if at all, in comparison with the work of recognized masters. In this case we naturally turn for such a test to Hooker. Reading him, we realize anew the importance of an earnest purpose to good writing. He develops his powers in a new controversy, and does it the better inasmuch as he is constrained to be more calmly ratiocinative than were the old Reformers. In his Sermons, indeed, reverting to the quarrel with Rome, he can be as fierce as they; but in his effort to rationalize the bitter debate arising between the Nonconformists and the Church he is moved to a saner order of persuasion. Even that controversy is grown remote and foreign for these days; but that any man who has read Hooker with attention could speak

of his style as "struggling, fumbling to say something that was to make something," I cannot believe, though I can conceive of such a censure being passed upon the very phrase that propounds it. And if the reader be unable to derive from the gravely powerful argumentation of the "Ecclesiastical Polity" the kind of satisfaction he gets from the diction of the Authorized Version, let him read the section on "The Law which Angels do work by" (I, iv, § 1),[1] or consider the following passage from the First Sermon, "Of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect":—

> Then we think, looking upon others and comparing them with ourselves, their tables are furnished day by day; earth and ashes are our bread; they sing to the lute, and they see their children dance before them; our hearts are heavy in our bodies as lead, our sighs beat as thick as a swift pulse, our tears do wash the beds wherein we lie; the sun shineth fair upon their foreheads; we are hanged up like bottles in the smoke, cast into corners like the sherds of a broken pot: tell us not of the promises of God's favour, tell such as do reap the fruit of them; they belong not to us, they are made to others. The Lord be merciful to our weakness, but thus it is.

And if this be appreciated for its unction, perhaps that which follows may be recognized to show even such a faculty of harmonious diction as has been reckoned miraculous in the churchmen of the next decade:—

> Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world whereof all things in this lower world are made should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wanted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way which it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now

[1] This and other valid samples of the higher Elizabethan prose—including Raleigh's "Sea Fight," discussed below—may be found by teachers in the third volume of Miss C. L. Thomson's "First Book of English Literature" (Marshall).

as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief: what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world? (I, iii, § 2.)

But if that be good prose, no less so is the passage in which Hooker anticipates a deliverance of Hume's, as elsewhere he does dicta of Hobbes and Locke:—

> Of this point, therefore, we are to note that sith men naturally have no full and perfect power to command whole politic multitudes of men, therefore, utterly without our consent, we could in such sort be at no man's commandment living. And to be commanded we do consent, when that society whereof we are part hath at any time before consented, without revoking the same after by the like universal agreement. Wherefore, as any man's deed past is good as long as himself continueth, so the act of a public society of men done five hundred years sithence standeth as theirs who presently are of the same societies, because corporations are immortal; we were then alive in our predecessors, and they in their successors do live still. (I, x, § 8).

Enough, perhaps, of didactic matter. But the case would be inadequately stated if we had not regard to the mass of sound and readable prose put forth by the diligent tribe of translators, from North's Plutarch and the rendering of the first two books of Herodotus by B. R. (1584), to Florio's Montaigne and Philemon Holland's mighty versions of Livy, of Plutarch's "Moralia," and of Pliny's Natural History—all in the mass of Elizabethan prose which Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch finds mainly "offensive" and "detestable." His verdict is sufficiently flouted by the public which goes on absorbing editions

of Florio in our own time; and would probably be flouted anew if any publisher should venture on a complete reprint of Holland's Plutarch, albeit the large output of the inventor of the essay is somewhat less succulent than that of the greatest of his followers. Holland, partly by bent and partly in loyalty to his "poor pagan and ethnic" original, is loquacious; but his is a delightful loquacity, the free-handed play of a liberal master of the Elizabethan speech, glorying in its fullness. To read Plutarch on Garrulity in Philemon's expansive rendering—available in Messrs. Dent's reprint of twenty of the essays—is an entertainment from which no wise man will be deterred by the ban of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Florio's Montaigne needs no vindication, even against that ban; but it may be needful to commemorate the body of generally clear, firm prose narrative of travel and adventure collected by Hakluyt; and, above all, it were a grievous wrong to fail to bear witness of the unmatched strength and noble simplicity of Raleigh's tale of "The Sea Fight about the Isles of the Azores" (1591), which moved Tennyson to frame his ballad of "The Revenge." The tense calm of Raleigh's effortless prose is for some of us a finer thing than the ringing song of the great laureate. Perhaps the finest stroke of all is the classic restraint of the conclusion, a thing possible only to one himself heroic:—

> What became of his [Grenville's] body, whether it was buried in the sea or on the land, we know not; the comfort that remaineth to his friends is that he hath ended his life honourably in respect of the reputation won to his nation and country, and of the same to his posterity, and that, being dead, he hath not outlived his own honour.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, assuredly, cannot have had *that* in mind when he heaped disdain on the mass of Elizabethan prose. But could he any more have had in recollection the three collected volumes of the work of Thomas Nashe, from the "Anatomy of Absurdity" to "The Unfortunate Traveller"? That any man of letters

could miss sight of the genius for prose in either the "Lenten Stuff" or "Christ's Tears over Jerusalem," the first written for fun and cash, the second for cash and edification, is to me inconceivable. Greene wrote equally for cash, but he had neither moral message nor rhythmic gift, and never pens an arresting sentence. The native gift of Nashe, on the other hand, is the more evident seeing that it reveals itself most fully where he has no very earnest purpose to inspire him—for even in "Christ's Tears," with its fine and finished harmonies, he is rather making copy for the printers than bent on influencing life. The strongest kind of moral motive that ever moved him is that which animates his wrangles with Gabriel Harvey, where his sheer facility and fertility defy even the tedium of strife. But the no less expansive flow of the "Lenten Stuff" marks him of the tribe of Charles Lamb, the men who write vividly and well for the sheer joy of putting forth their faculty of phrase and rhythm. If we should seek in that age for the born writer of prose, the man who writes because he must talk, with none of the austere purpose that moves the Hookers and the Bacons, and with no moving tale to tell, yet with a spontaneous felicity and wild wealth of language excelling theirs, perhaps the Bohemian should receive the palm. They who cannot recognize his gift put us in doubt of their own.

If finally, upon challenge, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and those who concur with him should fall back on the plea that he did but ban Elizabethan prose "in the main," thereby letting some pass, we can but ask them in what period of thirteen years they profess to find a greater quantity of fine prose than that above specified as coming from Sidney, Raleigh, Hooker, Bacon, Nashe, Florio, and Holland, to name no others? To put the years 1590–1603 out of account and challenge the work of the previous thirty years were an idle device, for Sir Arthur expressly likened the portent of 1611 to that of

Shakespeare's advent in poetry. He had seen no such lifting of prose in Shakespeare's earlier day—the day of all of the writers named. Even for the period 1560–80, such prose as Foxe's and Painter's is not rationally to be dismissed as "offensive" or "detestable"; but we have seen that characterization cast at the whole mass of the prose of Elizabeth's reign. One can but repeat that the judgment is preposterous, and, if persisted in, incompetent. It proceeded upon ignorance of the antecedents even of the Authorized Version, which is but a revision of prior versions marked by the same technique and the same sense of prose effect.

As for the judgment which sets that *kind* of prose, *as* prose and independently of content, above every other—the kind of judgment which puts the clear praise of the dead Launcelot in the "Morte d'Arthur" among the very highest forms of prose style—one can but hope that critical reflection upon the whole problem may lead to the perception that in this art as in others, while we may credit elemental greatness to primary forms, we are but flouting progress when we refuse to acknowledge how faculty grows with the generations wherever it has free course and fostering soil.[1]

[1] [A recent critic has courageously challenged the indiscriminate acclamation of the prose of the Authorized Version. "When we consider style in the larger sense," writes Mr. J. Middleton Murry ("The Problem of Style," 1922, p. 135), "it seems to me scarcely an exaggeration to say that the style of one half of the English Bible is atrocious. A great part of the historical books of the Old Testament, the gospels in the New, are examples of all that writing should not be; and nothing the translators might have done would have altered this. On the other hand, though the translation of Job that we have is a superb piece of poetry, I am convinced that it is finer in the Hebrew original. All this may, I fear, be thought heresy, perhaps even a painful heresy; but I should not have gone out of my way to utter it if I did not feel that the superstitious reverence for the style of the Authorized Version really stands in the way of a frank approach to the problem of style. I shall put my conviction most clearly if I say that the following proposition must be accepted in any consideration of style: '"The Life of Jesus" by Ernest Renan is, as a whole, infinitely superior in point of style to the narrative of the Authorized Version of the Gospels.' The proposition is really axiomatic."]

# TOLSTOY

(1902)

## I.—The Moralist

### § 1

To any one who reflects much on the insaner aspects of civilization there is nothing at all surprising in the fact that for many people the way to a solution of life's problems is the old one of learning from a prophet. By a prophet is to be understood a personality aiming at moral authority, not necessarily by vaticination, but always on à priori grounds, and by exhortation rather than persuasion. The cowl does not make the monk; but the spirit of authority, the claim to expound a divinely righteous law, makes the prophet. Necessarily he takes to some extent the colour of his times: Carlyle and Ruskin and Comte vary much from the Semitic norm; and the prophet of to-day, unless he be a mere cracked Messiah, must make some concessions to the evolved spirit of reason. So it is with Tolstoy, the outstanding prophet of our time; he so far conforms to the conditions of modern appeal as to seem to many even persuasive; and in virtue of being powerfully opposed to the worst collective evils of the modern as of the ancient world, he is a prophet for not a few scrupulous spirits. Thence a species of cultus, not exactly like that of Comte, but recalling that, in respect of the element of arbitrariness on the teacher's side, and of reverence on the side of the disciples. For those of us, then, who hold with many of the disciples that the world is on the whole in as parlous a state as ever, that some of their prophet's instincts are fundamentally right, and that from any point of view he

is a man of genius and a notable personality, the phenomenon is worth considering.

Critically studied, it conveniently divides into three aspects, in terms of the prophet's three main lines of activity—as a moral philosopher, as a critic of art in general, and as a writer of prose fiction. I propose to take the aspects in that order, noting that the first, which is as it were central, stands for Tolstoy's later evolution, and that he himself passes a hostile criticism on his own earlier imaginative work. The total problem is thus somewhat complex; but a close study of the central section may help us to unify it.

## § 2

On a critical reader of Tolstoy's novels, one of the first impressions he will make, probably, is that of a signal censoriousness. Alike in early work like "Sebastopol," middle-period work like "Ivan Ilyitch" and "Anna Karénina," and latter-day work like "Resurrection," there is struck the same major key of disparagement, involving the majority of the characters; evidently it is the key-note of the author's temperament. In "Sebastopol" hardly a personage is presented without some heavy shading; and the total effect is that of a powerfully original judgment on men in general, a keen insight into average human weakness and folly, and a masterful refusal to say smooth things or accept popular platitudes about men even when they are figuring as fighters, and in the way of being specially extolled by their whole nation. Putting aside for the present the artistic problem, we turn to the moralist as he is latterly evolved, and note that alike in his fiction and his argumentative propaganda he is in the same judicial relation to the mass of his fellow creatures. And here, taking his didactic propositions on their merits, we are instantly struck by their want of measure. On the first page of

Mr. Aylmer Maude's preface to "Resurrection" we read:—

> It is interesting to note how, Tolstoy's keen observation of life having helped him to generalisations, his generalisations are afterwards illustrated in his descriptions of life. Take, for instance, drinking and smoking. In "Why Do People Stupefy Themselves?" Tolstoy decides that a main cause of the craving for stimulants and narcotics lies in the terrible consciousness people have of the fact that their lives and actions are at discord with the principles they profess. They want something which.....will lull or excite them so that they shall no longer be conscious of this discord.....Another effect is that it becomes easier for them to commit stupid or wicked actions without remorse. Any one reading "Resurrection" with this in mind may see that even the casual references to drinking and smoking, besides being true to life, are (with just a few exceptions to prove the rule) true also to this explanation.

Now, Mr. Aylmer Maude is to be known, from many of his papers, as a moralist of uncommon rectitude, with a real gift for justice; and at the same time we all know this "generalisation" to be ridiculously false. How, one asks, can a scrupulous man thus cite and endorse it?

If Mr. Maude or any one else will sit down in a judicial spirit to reckon up the normal motives to smoking and drinking, he will find that in the mass of cases they come under the heads of (1) the simple pleasantness of the indulgence, apart from any desire for narcotization or stimulation; (2) nervous or muscular fatigue, which makes the indulgence specially grateful; (3) the simple *habit*, once formed. By Tolstoy's account, smokers and topers must have much more sensitive consciences than the abstainers; for there are certainly thousands of the latter who live exactly the same civic lives as the others. In terms of the generalization before us, the abstainers are not disturbed by any consciousness of discord between their principles and their practice, while the smokers and drinkers are. At the same time, the disturbed smokers and drinkers are in the terms of the proposition *not* disturbed, since their indulgence makes it "easier for

them to commit stupid or wicked actions without remorse." If the meaning be that they complacently commit these sins *while* narcotized or stimulated, the original assertion has been completely nullified; if it be meant that they do their misdeeds after the effects of the drug are over, the original assertion has been equally nullified. In fact, the proposition is a piece of scandalous nonsense in its own terms, and the alleged facts on which it proceeds are reckless figments.

As against Tolstoy, we may truly say that some of the most deeply self-dissatisfied people are indeed the drinkers, who are often remorseful because simply of their past drinking, and who yet tend to drink again in order to drown the sensation of remorse *for* having drunk, not for any other divergence from their ideas of their duty. As regards the smokers, he who cannot see that to the mass of toiling men tobacco is a simple physical solace, whether bad or good; that many men smoke to excess in virtue of mere stress of habit; and that many more men who *ought* to realize a continual discord between their professions and their practice (Christian preachers, for instance) neither smoke nor drink at all—he who cannot see these things, whatever be his gifts, is on that side a very false observer. The majority of working men are smokers; non-smokers are to be found rather more frequently (for hygienic reasons) among the middle and upper classes. On Tolstoy's own view of things, moral unrest belongs properly to the upper orders who live without working, and is most commonly escaped among those who live by their work. Yet the latter are most given to using the "narcotic." The theory goes to pieces at a touch.

Now, this may serve as a critical test case. Tolstoy's teaching is summed up by himself and his disciples in five precepts:—

(1) Do not be angry;

(2) Do not lust;