of paganism in the midst of a Catholic society is very curious; the paganism is perfectly simple and frank.'

These are but notes, jottings in his Journal, and Amiel passed from them to broodings over the infinite, and personality, and totality. Probably the literary criticism which he did so well, and for which he shows a true vocation, gave him nevertheless but little pleasure because he did it thus fragmentarily and by fits and starts. To do it thoroughly, to make his fragments into wholes, to fit them for coming before the public, composition with its toils and limits was necessary. Toils and limits composition indeed has; yet all composition is a kind of creation, creation gives, as I have already said, pleasure, and, when successful and sustained, more than pleasure, joy. Amiel, had he tried the experiment with literary criticism, where lay his true vocation, would have found it so. Sainte-Beuve, whom he so much admires, would have been the most miserable of men if his production had been but a volume or two of
middling poems and a journal. But Sainte-
Beuve’s motto, as Amiel himself notices, was that
of the Emperor Severus: Laboremus. ‘Work,’
Sainte-Beuve confesses to a friend, ‘is my sore
burden, but it is also my great resource. I eat my
heart out when I am not up to the neck in work;
there you have the secret of the life I lead.’ If
M. Scherer’s introduction to the Revue Ger-
manique could but have been used, if Amiel
could but have written the article on Uhland, and
followed it up by plenty of articles more!

I have quoted largely from Amiel’s literary
criticism, because this side of him has, so far as
I have observed, received so little attention, and
yet deserves attention so eminently. But his more
general criticism, too, shows, as I have said, the
same high qualities as his criticism of authors and
books. I must quote one or two of his aphorisms:
L’esprit sert bien à tout, mais ne suffit à rien: ‘Wits
are of use for everything, sufficient for nothing.’
Une société vit de sa foi et se développe par la science:
‘A society lives on its faith and develops itself by
L'État libéral est irréalisable avec une religion antilibérale, et presque irréalisable avec l'absence de religion: 'Liberal communities are impossible with an anti-liberal religion, and almost impossible with the absence of religion.' But epigrammatic sentences of this sort are perhaps not so very difficult to produce, in French at any rate. Let us take Amiel when he has room and verge enough to show what he can really say which is important about society, religion, national life and character. We have seen what an influence his years passed in Germany had upon him: we have seen how severely he judges Victor Hugo's faults: the faults of the French nation at large he judges with a like severity. But what a fine and just perception does the following passage show of the deficiencies of Germany, the advantage which the western nations have in their more finished civilisation:—

'It is in the novel that the average vulgarity of German society, and its inferiority to the societies of France and England are most clearly visible. The
notion of a thing's *jarring on the taste* is wanting to German æsthetics. Their elegance knows nothing of grace; they have no sense of the enormous distance between distinction (gentlemanly, ladylike) and their stiff *Vornehmlichkeit*. Their imagination lacks style, training, education, and knowledge of the world; it is stamped with an ill-bred air even in its Sunday clothes. The race is practical and intelligent, but common and ill-mannered. Ease, amiability, manners, wit, animation, dignity, charm, are qualities which belong to others.

'Will that inner freedom of soul, that profound harmony of all the faculties, which I have so often observed among the best Germans, ever come to the surface? Will the conquerors of to-day ever civilise their forms of life? It is by their future novels that we shall be able to judge. As soon as the German novel can give us quite good society, the Germans will be in the raw stage no longer.'

And this pupil of Berlin, this devourer of German books, this victim, say the French critics, to the contagion of German style, after three hours, one day, of a *Geschichte der Ästhetik in Deutschland*, breaks out:—

'Learning and even thought are not everything. A little *esprit*, point, vivacity, imagination, grace, would do no harm. Do these pedantic books leave
a single image or sentence, a single striking or new fact, in the memory when one lays them down? No, nothing but fatigue and confusion. Oh, for clearness, terseness, brevity! Diderot, Voltaire, or even Galiani! A short article by Sainte-Beuve, Scherer, Renan, Victor Cherbulioz, gives one more pleasure, and makes one ponder and reflect more, than a thousand of these German pages crammed to the margin and showing the work itself rather than its result. The Germans heap the faggots for the pile, the French bring the fire. Spare me your lucubrations, give me facts or ideas. Keep your vats, your must, your dregs, to yourselves; I want wine fully made, wine which will sparkle in the glass, and kindle my spirits instead of oppressing them.'

Amiel may have been led away deteriora sequi: he may have Germanised until he has become capable of the verb dépersonnaliser and the noun réimplication; but after all, his heart is in the right place: videt meliora probatque. He remains at bottom the man who said: Le livre serait mon ambition. He adds, to be sure, that it would be son ambition, 'if ambition were not vanity, and vanity of vanities.'

Yet this disenchanted brooder, 'full of a tran-
quil disgust at the futility of our ambitions, the void of our existence,' bedazzled with the infinite, can observe the world and society with consummate keenness and shrewdness, and at the same time with a delicacy which to the man of the world is in general wanting. Is it possible to analyse _le grand monde_, high society, as the Old World knows it and America knows it not, more acutely than Amiel does in what follows?—

‘In society people are expected to behave as if they lived on ambrosia and concerned themselves with no interests but such as are noble. Care, need, passion, do not exist. All realism is suppressed as brutal. In a word, what is called _le grand monde_ gives itself for the moment the flattering illusion that it is moving in an ethereal atmosphere and breathing the air of the gods. For this reason all vehemence, any cry of nature, all real suffering, all heedless familiarity, any genuine sign of passion, are startling and. distasteful in this delicate _milieu_, and at once destroy the collective work, the cloud-palace, the imposing architectural creation raised by common consent. It is like the shrill cock-crow which breaks the spell of all enchantments, and puts the fairies to flight. These select gatherings produce without intending it a sort of concert for eye and ear, an improvised work
of art. By the instinctive collaboration of everybody concerned, wit and taste hold festival, and the associations of reality are exchanged for the associations of imagination. So understood, society is a form of poetry; the cultivated classes deliberately recompose the idyll of the past, and the buried world of Astraea. Paradox or not, I believe that these fugitive attempts to reconstruct a dream, whose only end is beauty, represent confused reminiscences of an age of gold haunting the human heart; or rather, aspirations towards a harmony of things which every-day reality denies to us, and of which art alone gives us a glimpse.'

I remember reading in an American newspaper a solemn letter by an excellent republican, asking what were a shopman's or a labourer's feelings when he walked through Eaton or Chatsworth. Amiel will tell him: they are 'reminiscences of an age of gold haunting the human heart, aspirations towards a harmony of things which every-day reality denies to us.' I appeal to my friend the author of Triumphant Democracy himself, to say whether these are to be had in walking through Pittsburg.

Indeed it is by contrast with American life that Nirvana appears to Amiel so desirable:—
'For the Americans, life means devouring, incessant activity. They must win gold, preponderance, power; they must crush rivals, subdue nature. They have their heart set on the means, and never for an instant think of the end. They confound being with individual being, and the expansion of self with happiness. This means that they do not live by the soul, that they ignore the immutable and eternal, bustle at the circumference of their existence because they cannot penetrate to its centre. They are restless, eager, positive, because they are superficial. To what end all this stir, noise, greed, struggle? It is all a mere being stunned and deafened!'

Space is failing me, but I must yet find room for a less indirect criticism of democracy than the foregoing remarks on American life:—

'Each function to the most worthy: this maxim is the professed rule of all constitutions, and serves to test them. Democracy is not forbidden to apply it, but Democracy rarely does apply it, because she holds, for example, that the most worthy man is the man who pleases her, whereas he who pleases her is not always the most worthy; and because she supposes that reason guides the masses, whereas in reality they are most commonly led by passion. And in the end every falsehood has to be expiated, for truth always takes its revenge.'
What publicists and politicians have to learn is, that 'the ultimate ground upon which every civilisation rests is the average morality of the masses and a sufficient amount of practical righteousness.' But where does duty find its inspiration and sanctions? In religion. And what does Amiel think of the traditional religion of Christendom, the Christianity of the Churches? He tells us repeatedly; but a month or two before his death, with death in full view, he tells us with peculiar impressiveness:—

'The whole Semitic dramaturgy has come to seem to me a work of the imagination. The apostolic documents have changed in value and meaning to my eyes. The distinction between belief and truth has grown clearer and clearer to me. Religious psychology has become a simple phenomenon, and has lost its fixed and absolute value. The apologetics of Pascal, Leibnitz, Secrétan, appear to me no more convincing than those of the Middle Age, for they assume that which is in question—a revealed doctrine, a definite and unchangeable Christianity.'

Is it possible, he asks, to receive at this day the common doctrine of a Divine Providence direct-
ing all the circumstances of our life, and consequently inflicting upon us our miseries as means of education?

'Is this heroic faith compatible with our actual knowledge of the laws of nature? Hardly. But what this faith makes objective we may take subjectively. The moral being may moralise his suffering in turning the natural fact to account for the education of his inner man. What he cannot change he calls the will of God, and to will what God wills brings him peace.'

But can a religion, Amiel asks again, without miracles, without unverifiable mystery, be efficacious, have influence with the many? And again he answers:—

'Pious fiction is still fiction. Truth has superior rights. The world must adapt itself to truth, not truth to the world. Copernicus upset the astronomy of the Middle Age; so much the worse for the astronomy. The Everlasting Gospel is revolutionising the Churches; what does it matter?'

This is water to our mill, as the Germans say, indeed. But I have come even thus late in the day to speak of Amiel, not because I found him supplying water for any particular mill, either
mine or any other, but because it seemed to me that by a whole important side he was eminently worth knowing, and that to this side of him the public, here in England at any rate, had not had its attention sufficiently drawn. If in the seventeen thousand pages of the Journal there are many pages still unpublished in which Amiel exercises his true vocation of critic, of literary critic more especially, let his friends give them to us, let M. Scherer introduce them to us, let Mrs. Humphry Ward translate them for us. But sat patriæ Priamoque datum: Maïa has had her full share of space already: I will not ask for a word more about the infinite illusion, or the double zero, or the Great Wheel.

THE END

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