

Henri Beyle

By Norman Hapgood

THE fact that none of his work has been translated into English is probably a source of amused satisfaction to many of the lovers of Beyle. Though he exercised a marked influence on Mérimée, was wildly praised by Balzac, was discussed twice by Sainte-Beuve, was pointed to in Maupassant's famous manifesto-preface to *Pierre et Jean*; though he has been twice eulogised by Taine, and once by Bourget; and though he has been carefully analysed by Zola, he is read little in France and scarcely at all elsewhere. While his name, at his death scarcely heard beyond his little circle of men of letters, has become rather prominent, his books are still known to very few. His cool prophecy that a few leading spirits would read him by 1880 was justified, and the solution of his doubt whether he would not by 1930 have sunk again into oblivion seems now at least as likely as it was then to be an affirmative. "To the happy few," he dedicated his latest important novel, and it will be as it has been, for the few, happy in some meanings of that intangible word, that his character and his writings have a serious interest.

In one of the *Edinburgh Review's* essays on Mme. du Deffand is a rather striking passage in which Jeffrey sums up the conditions that made conversation so fascinating in the salons of the
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France of Louis XV. In *Rome, Florence, et Naples*, published shortly afterward by Beyle, under his most familiar pseudonym of Stendhal, is a conversation, with all the marks of a piece of genuine evidence on the English character, between the author and an Englishman; and yet a large part of what is given as the opinion of this acquaintance of Beyle is almost a literal translation of Jeffrey's remarks on the conditions of good conversation. Such a striking phrase as "where all are noble all are free" is taken without change, and the whole is stolen with almost equal thoroughness. This characteristic runs through all of his books. He was not a scholar, so he stole his facts and many of his opinions, with no acknowledgments, and made very pleasing books.

Related, perhaps, to this characteristic, are the inexactness of his facts and the unreliability of his judgments. Berlioz somewhere in his memoirs gives to Stendhal half-a-dozen lines, which run something like this: "There was present also one M. Beyle, a short man with an enormous belly, and an expression which he tries to make benign and succeeds in making malicious. He is the author of a *Life of Rossini*, full of painful stupidities about music." Painful indeed, to a critic with the enthusiasm and the mastery of Berlioz, a lot of emphatic judgments from a man who was ignorant of the technique of music, who took it seriously but lazily, and who could make such a delicious comment at the end of a comparison of skill with inspiration, as, "What would not Beethoven do, if, with his technical knowledge, he had the ideas of Rossini?" Imagine the passionate lover of the noblest in music hearing distinctions drawn between form and idea in music, with condescension for Beethoven, by a man who found in Cimarosa and Rossini his happiness night after night through years. Imagine Beyle talking of grace, sweetness, softness, voluptuousness,

voluptuousness, ease, tune, and Berlioz growing harsh with rage and running away to hide from these effeminate notions in the stern poetry of Beethoven's harmonies. Imagine them crossing over into literature and coming there at the height to the same name, Shakespeare. What different Shakespeares they are. Berlioz, entranced, losing self-control for days, feeling with passion the glowing life of the poet's words, would turn, as from something unclean, from the man whose love for Macbeth showed itself mostly in the citation of passages that give fineness to the feelings which the school of Racine thought unsuited to poetry. "You use it as a thesis," the enthusiast might cry. "The grandeur, the wealth, the terror of it escape you. You see his delicacy, his proportion, a deeper taste than the classic French taste, and it forges you a weapon. But you are not swept on by him, you never get into the torrent of him, you are cool and shallow, and your praise is profanation." Stendhal read Shakespeare with some direct pleasure, no doubt, but he was always on the look-out for quotations to prove some thesis, and he read Scott and Richardson, probably all the books he read in any language, in the same unabandoned restricted way.

In painting it is the same. It is with a narrow and *dilettante* intelligence that he judges pictures. The painter who feeds certain sentiments, he loves and thinks great. Guido Reni is suave; therefore only one or two in the world's history can compare with him. One of them is Correggio, for his true voluptuousness. These are the artists he loves. Others he must praise, as he praised Shakespeare, to support some attack on French canons of art. Therefore is Michelangelo one of the gods. The effort is apparent throughout, and as he recalls the fact that Mme. du Deffand and Voltaire saw in Michelangelo nothing but ugliness, and notes that such is the attitude of all true Frenchmen, the lover
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of Beyle smiles at his effort to get far enough away from his own saturated French nature to love the masculine and august painter he is praising. Before the Moses, Mérimée tells us, Beyle could find nothing to say beyond the observation that ferocity could not be better depicted. This vague, untechnical point of view was no subject of regret to Stendhal. He gloried in it. "Foolish as a scholar," he says somewhere, and in another place, "Vinci is a great artist precisely because he is no scholar."

Add to these qualities of lack of truthfulness, lack of thoroughness, and lack of imagination, a total disregard for any moral view of life, in the sense of a believing, strenuous view, and you have, from the negative side, the general aspects of Stendhal's character. He was not vicious—far from it—though he admires many things that are vicious. He is not indecent, for "the greatest enemy of voluptuousness is indecency," and voluptuousness tests all things. The keen Duclos has said that the French are the only people among whom it is possible for the morals to be depraved without either the heart being depraved or the courage being weakened. It would be almost unfair to speak of Beyle's morals as depraved, as even in his earliest childhood he seems to have been without a touch of any moral quality. "Who knows that the world will last a week?" he asks, and the question expresses well the instinct in him that made him deny any appeal but that of his own ends. Both morals and religion really repel him. It is impossible to love a supreme being, he says, though we may perhaps respect him. Indeed, he believes that love and respect never go together, that grace, which he loves, excludes force, which he respects; and thus he loves Reni and respects Michelangelo. Grace and force are the opposite sides of a sphere, and the human eye cannot see both. As for him, he fearlessly takes sympathy and grace and abandons nobility. In the same manner that he excludes
strenuous

strenuous feelings of right altogether, he makes painting, which he thinks the nobler art, secondary to music, which is the more comfortable. For a very sensitive man, he goes on, with real coherence to the mind of a Beylian, painting is only a friend, while music is a mistress. Happy indeed he who has both friend and mistress. In some of his moods, the more austere, the nobler and less personal tastes and virtues, interest him, for he is to some extent interested in everything; but except where he is supporting one of his few fundamental theses he does not deceive himself into thinking he likes them, and he never takes with real seriousness anything he does not like. Elevation and ferocity are the two words he uses over and over again in explaining that Michelangelo alone could paint the Bible, and the very poverty of his vocabulary, so discriminating when he is on more congenial subjects, suggests how external was the acquaintance of Beyle with elevation or ferocity, with Michelangelo or the Bible. He has written entertainingly on such subjects, but it all has the sound of guess-work. These two qualities, with which he sums up the sterner aspects of life, are perhaps not altogether separable from a third, dignity, and his view of this last may throw some light on the nature of his relations with the elevation and ferocity he praises. Here is a passage from *Le Rouge et le Noir*: "Mathilde thought she saw happiness. This sight, all-powerful with people who combine courageous souls with superior minds, had to fight long against dignity and all vulgar sentiments of duty." Equally lofty is his tone towards other qualities that are in reality part of the same attitude; a tone less of reproach than of simple contempt. The heroine of *Le Rouge et le Noir* is made to argue that "it is necessary to return in good faith to the vulgar ideas of purity and honour." Two more of the social virtues are disposed of by him in one extract, which, by the way, illustrates also the truly logical
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and the apparently illogical nature of Stendhal's thought. It will take a little reflection to see how he gets so suddenly from industry to patriotism in the following judgment, but the coherence of the thought will be complete to the Beylian: "It is rare that a young Neapolitan of fourteen is forced to do anything disagreeable. All his life he prefers the pain of want to the pain of work. The fools from the North treat as barbarians the citizens of this country, because they are not unhappy at wearing a shabby coat. Nothing would seem more laughable to an inhabitant of Crotona than to suggest his fighting to get a red ribbon in his button-hole, or to have a sovereign named Ferdinand or William. The sentiment of loyalty, or devotion to dynasty, which shines in the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and which should have made him a peer, is as unknown here as snow in May. To tell the truth, I don't see that this proves these people fools. (I admit that this idea is in very bad taste.)" For himself, he hated his country, as he curtly puts it, and loved none of his relatives. Patriotism, for which his contempt is perhaps mixed with real hatred, is in his mind allied to the most of all stupid tyrants, propriety, or, as he more often calls it, opinion, his most violent aversion. Napoleon, he thinks, in destroying the custom of *cavaliere serviente* simply added to the world's mass of *ennui* by ushering into Italy the flat religion of propriety. He is full of such lucid observations as that the trouble with opinion is that it takes a hand in private matters, whence comes the sadness of England and America. To this sadness of the moral countries and the moral people he never tires of referring. His thesis carries him so far that he bunches together Veronese and Tintoretto under the phrase, "painters without ideal," in whom there is something dry, narrow, reasonable, bound by propriety; in a word, incapable of rapture. This referring to some general standard, this lack of directness, of fervour, of abandonment, is illustrated

illustrated by the Englishman's praise of his mistress, that there was nothing vulgar in her. It would take, Beyle says, eight days to explain that to a Milanese, and then he would have a fit of laughter.

These few references illustrate fairly the instincts and beliefs that are the basis of Stendhal's whole thought and life. The absolute degree of moral scepticism that is needed to make a sympathetic reader of him is—especially among people refined and cultivated enough to care for his subjects—everywhere rare. I call it a moral rather than an intellectual scepticism, because, while he would doubtless deny the possibility of knowing the best good of the greatest number, a more ultimate truth is that he is perfectly indifferent to the good of the greatest number. It is unabashed egotism. The assertion of his individual will, absolute loyalty to his private tastes, is his principle of thought and action, and his will and his tastes do not include the rest of the world, and its desires. "What is the ME? I know nothing about it. One day I awoke upon this earth, I found myself united to a certain body, a certain fortune. Shall I go into the vain amusement of wishing to change them, and in the meantime forget to live? That is to be a dupe; I submit to their failings. I submit to my aristocratic bent, after having declaimed for ten years, in good faith, against all aristocracy. I adore Roman noses, and yet, if I am a Frenchman, I resign myself to having received from heaven only a Champagne nose: what can I do about it? The Romans were a great evil for humanity, a deadly disease which retarded the civilisation of the world . . . In spite of so many wrongs, my heart is for the Romans." Thus, in all the details of his extended comparison, Beyle tries to state with fairness the two sides, the general good and the personal, the need of obedience to its rules if some general ends of society are to be

attained, and the individual's loss from obedience. He states with fairness, but his own choice is never in doubt. He goes to what directly pleases him. "Shall I dare to talk of the bases of morals? From the accounts of my comrades I believe that there are as many deceived husbands at Paris as at Boulogne, at Berlin as at Rome. The whole difference is that at Paris the sin is caused by vanity, and at Rome by climate. The only exception I find is in the middle classes in England, and all classes at Geneva. But, upon my honour, the drawback in *ennui* is too great. I prefer Paris. It is gay." His tastes, his sympathies, are unhesitatingly with the Roman in the following judgment: "A Roman to whom you should propose to love always the same woman, were she an angel, would exclaim that you were taking from him three-quarters of what makes life worth while. Thus, at Edinburgh, the family is first, and at Rome it is a detail. If the system of the Northern people sometimes begets the monotony and the *ennui* that we read on their faces, it often causes a calm and continuous happiness." This steady contrast is noted by his mind merely, his logical fairness. His mind is judicial in a sort of negative, formal sense; judicial without weight, we might almost say. He does not feel, or see imaginatively, sympathetically, the advantages of habitual constancy. He feels only the truths of the other side, or the side of truth which he expresses when he says that all true passion is selfish: and passion and its truth are the final test for him. This selfishness, which is even more self-reliance than it is self-seeking, which has his instinctive approval in all moods, is directly celebrated by him in most. The more natural genius and originality one has, he says, the more one feels the profound truth of the remark of the Duchesse de Ferté, that she found no one but herself who was always right. And not only does natural genius, which we
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might sum up as honesty to one's instincts, or originality, make us contemptuous of all judgments but our own; it leads us (so far does Beyle go) to esteem only ourselves. Reason, he argues, or rather states, makes us see, and prevents our acting, since nothing is worth the effort it costs. Laziness forces us to prefer ourselves, and in others it is only ourselves that we esteem.

With this principle as his broadest generalisation it is not unnatural that his profoundest admiration was for Napoleon. I am a man, he says in substance, who has loved a few painters, a few people, and respected one man—Napoleon. He respected a man who knew what he wanted, wanted it constantly, and pursued it fearlessly, without scruples and with intelligence, with constant calculation, with lies, with hypocrisy, with cruelty. Beyle used to lie with remarkable ease even in his youth. He makes his almost autobiographical hero, Julien Sorel, a liar throughout and a hypocrite on the very day of his execution. Beyle lays down the judgments about Napoleon, that he liked argument, because he was strong in it, and that he kept his peace, like a savage, whenever there was any possibility of his being seen to be inferior to any one else in grasp of the topic under discussion. It is in his *Life of Napoleon* that Beyle dwells as persistently as anywhere on his never-ceasing principle: examine yourself; get at your most spontaneous, indubitable tastes, desires, ambitions; follow them; act from them unceasingly; be turned aside by nothing.

It is possible, in going through Beyle's works for that purpose, to find a remark here and there that might possibly indicate a basis of faith under this insistence, a belief that in the end a thorough independence of aim in each individual would be for the good of all; but these passing words really do not go against the truth of the statement that Beyle was absolutely without the moral attitude; that the pleasing to himself immediately was all he gave interest

interest to, and that of the intellectual qualities those that had beauty for him were the crueller ones — force, concentration, sagacity, in the service of egotism. But here are a few of the possible exceptions. “Molière,” he says, in a dispute about that writer’s morality, “painted with more depth than the other poets. Therefore, he is more moral. Nothing could be more simple.” With this epigram he leaves the subject ; but it is tolerably clear that he means to deny any other moral than truth, not to say that the truth is an inevitable servant of good. If it did mean the latter, it was thrown off at the moment as an easy argument, for his belief is pronounced through his works, that his loves are the world’s banes, and that any interest in the world’s good, in the moral law, is bourgeois and dull. Here is another phrase that perhaps might suggest that the generalisation was unsafe : “He is the greatest man in Europe because he is the only honest man.” This, like the other, is clear enough to a reader of him ; and it is really impossible to find in him any identification of the interesting, the worthy, with the permanently and generally serviceable. Where the social point of view is taken for a moment it is by grace of logic purely, for a formal fairness. A more unmitigated moral rebel, a more absolute sceptic, a more thoroughly isolated individual than the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir* could not exist. Nor could a more unhesitating dogmatist exist, despite his sneering apologies, for dogmatism is as natural an expression of absolute scepticism as it is of absolute faith. When a man refuses to say anything further than, “This is true for me, at this moment,” or perhaps, “This is true of a man exactly such as I describe, in exactly these circumstances,” he is likely to make these statements with unshakable firmness. This distinctness and coherence of the mind, which is entirely devoted to relativity, is one of the charms of Stendhal for his lovers. It makes possible the completeness and
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Zola draws an illustration from a strong scene in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, and shows how different the setting would have been in his own hands. Beyle is a logician, abstract; Zola thinks himself concrete, and concrete he is—often by main force. This is a sad failure to apply the doctrine of relativity to oneself. Beyle errs sometimes in the same way, and some of his attempts at local colour are very tiresome, but on the whole he remains frankly the analyser, the introspective psychologist, the man of distinct but disembodied ideas. He recognised the environment as he recognised other things in his fertile reflections, but he was as a rule too faithful to his own principles to spend much time in trying to reproduce it in details which did not directly interest him. It was therefore natural that his celebration by the extremists should be short-lived. Most of them do him what justice they can with effort, like Zola, or pass him over with some such word as the “dry” of Goncourt. His fads were his own. None of them have yet become the fads of a school, though some principles that were restrained with him have become battle-cries in later times. His real fads are hardly fitted to be banners, for they are too specific. In very general theories he generally kept rather sane. His real difference from the school that claimed him for a father half a century after his death, is well suggested in the awkward word that Zola is fond of throwing at him, “ideologist.” The idea, the abstract truth and the intellectual form of it, its clearness, its stateableness, its cogency and consistency, is the final interest with him. The outer world is only the material for the expression of ideas, only the illustrations of them, and the ideas are therefore not pictorial or dramatic, but logical. The arts are ultimately the expression of thought and feeling, and colour and plastic form are means only. You never find him complaining, as his friend Mérimée did, that the meaning of the plastic arts
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cannot be given in words because for a slight difference in shade or in curve there is no expression in language. All that Beyle got out of art he could put into words. He made no attempt to compete with the painter like the leading realists of the past half-century. Other arts interested him only as far as they formed, without straining, illustrations for expression in language of the feelings they appeal to. It was with him in music as it was in painting, and often his musical criticism is as charming to the unattached *dilettante* as it is annoying to the technical critic who judges it in its own forms. Beyle names the sensation with precision always. His vocabulary has fine shades without weakening fluency. In choosing single words to name single sensations is his greatest power, and it is a power which naturally belongs to a man whose eye is inward, a power which the word-painters of the environment lack. Everything is expression for Beyle, and within the limits of the verbally-expressible he steadfastly remains. His truth is truth to the forms of thought as they exist in the reason—the clear eighteenth-century reason—disembodied truth. “It is necessary to have bones and blood in the human machine to make it walk. But we give slight attention to these necessary conditions of life, to fly to its great end, its final result—to think and to feel.

“That is the history of drawing, of colour, of light and shade, of all the various parts of painting, compared to expression.

“Expression is the whole of art.”

This reminds one again of Mérimée’s statement, that Beyle could see in the Moses nothing but the expression of ferocity; and an equally conclusive assertion (for it is in him no confession) is made by Beyle in reference to music, which he says is excellent if it gives him elevated thoughts on the subjects that are occupying him, and if it makes him think of the music itself it is mediocre.

Thus

Thus Beyle is as far from being an artist as possible. He cares for the forms of the outer world, he spends his life in looking at beauty and listening to it, but only because he knows that that is the way to call up in himself the ideas, the sensations, the emotions that he loves almost with voluptuousness. The basis of genius, he says, in speaking of Michelangelo, is logic, and if this is true—as in the sense in which he used it, it probably is—Beyle's genius was mostly basis.

Mérimée says that though Beyle was constantly appealing to logic, he reached his conclusions not by his reason but by his imagination. This is certainly making a false distinction. Beyle was not a logician in the sense that he got at conclusions indirectly by syllogisms. He did not forget his premisses in the interest of the inductive process. What he calls logic is an attitude or quality of the mind, and means really abstract coherence. Of what he himself calls ideology, with as much contempt as Zola could put into the word, he says that it is a science not only tiresome but impertinent. He means any constructive, deductive system of thought. He studied Kant and other German metaphysicians, and thought them shallow—superior men ingeniously building houses of cards. His feet seldom if ever got off the solid ground of observations into the region of formal, logical deduction. "Facts! facts!" he cried, and his love of facts at first hand, keeps him from some of the defects of the abstract mind. Every statement is independent of the preceding and the succeeding ones, each is examined by itself, each illustrated by anecdote, inexact enough, to be sure, but clear. There is no haze in his thought. When Mérimée says that it is Beyle's imagination and not his logic that decides, he is right, in the sense that Beyle has no middle terms, that his vision is direct, that the *a priori* process is secondary and merely suggestive with him. "What should we
logically

logically expect to find the case here ? ” he will ask before a new set of facts, but if his expectation and his observation differ, he readjusts his principles. It is no paradox to call a mind both abstract and empirical, introspective and scientific ; and Beyle’s was both.

This quality of logic without constructiveness shows, of course, in his style. There is lucidity of transition, of connection, of relation, among the details, but the parts are not put together to form an artistic whole. They fall on to the paper from his mind direct, and the completed book has no other unity than has the mind of the author. As he was a strong admirer of Bacon and his methods, it is safe enough to say that he would have accepted entirely this statement about composition as his own creed : “ Thirdly, whereas I could have digested these rules into a certain method or order, which, I know, would have been more admired, as that which would have made every particular rule, through its coherence and relation unto other rules, seem more cunning and more deep ; yet I have avoided so to do, because this delivering of knowledge in distinct and disjointed aphorisms doth leave the wit of man more free to turn and toss, and to make use of that which is so delivered to more several purposes and applications.” He is the typical suggestive critic, formless, uncreative, general and specific, precise and abstract : chaotic to the artist, satisfactory to the psychologist. It makes no difference where the story begins, whether this sentence follows that, or where the chapter ends. There are no rules of time and place. His style is a series of epigrams, and the order of their presentation is almost accidental. “ To draw out a plot freezes me,” he says, and one could guess it from his stories, which are in all essentials like his essays. To this analytic, unplastic mind the plot, the characters, are but illustrations of the general truths. The characters he draws have
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separate individual life only so far as they are copies. There is no invention, no construction, no creation. Moreover, there is no style, or no other quality of style than lucidity. He not only lacks other qualities, he despises them. The "neatly turned" style and the rhetorical alike have his contempt. Most rhetoricians are "emphatic, eloquent, and declamatory." He almost had a duel about Chateaubriand's "cime indéterminée des forêts." Rousseau is particularly irritating to him. "Only a great soul knows how to write simply, and that is why Rousseau has put so much rhetoric into the *New Eloïse*, which makes it unreadable after thirty years." In another place he says he detests, in the arrangement of words, tragic combinations, which are intended to give majesty to the style. He sees only absurdity in them. His style fits his thought, and his failure to comprehend colour in style is not surprising in a man whose thought has no setting, in a man who remarks with scorn that it is easier to describe clothing than it is to describe movements of the soul. He cares only for movements of the soul. The sense of form might have given his work a larger life, but it is part of his rare value for a few that he talks in bald statements, single-word suggestions, disconnected flashes. This intellectual impressionism, as it were, is more stimulating to them than any work of art. These are not poetic souls, it is needless to say, however much they may love poetry. Beyle is the essence of prose and it is his strength. He loved poetry, but he got from it only the prose, so much of the idea as is independent of the form, Mérimée tells us that Beyle murdered verse in reading aloud, and in his treatise *De l'Amour* he informs us that verse was invented to help the memory and to retain it in dramatic art is a remnant of barbarity. The elevation, the *abandon*, the passion of poetry—all but the psychology—were foreign to this mind, whose unimaginative prose is its distinction.

Perhaps

Perhaps this limitation is kin to another : that as novelist Beyle painted with success only himself. Much the solidest of his characters is Julien Sorel, a copy trait for trait of the author, reduced, so to speak, to his essential elements. Both Julien and Beyle were men of restless ambition, clear, colourless minds, and constant activity. Julien turned this activity to one thing, the study of the art of dominating women, and Beyle to three, of which this was the principal, and the other two were the comprehension of art principles and the expression of them. In his earlier days he had followed the army of Napoleon, until he became disgusted with the grossness of the life he saw. What renown he won in the army was for making his toilet with complete care on the eve of battle. From the Moscow army he wrote to one of his friends that everything was lacking which he needed, "friendship, love (or the semblance of it), and the arts." For simplicity, friendship may be left out in summing up Beyle's interests, for while his friendships were genuine they did not interest him much, except as an opportunity to work up his ideas. Of the two interests that remain, the one expressed in Julien, the psychology of love, illustrated by practice, is much the more essential. Julien too had Napoleon for an ideal, and when he found he could not imitate him in the letter he resigned himself to making in his spirit the conquests that were open to him. The genius that Napoleon put into political relations he would put into social ones. All the principles of war should live again in his intrigues with women.

This spirit is well enough known in its outlines. Perhaps the most perfect sketch of it in its unmixed form is in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, a book which Beyle knew and must have loved. He must have admired and envied the Comte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil. There is here none of the grossness of the
Restoration

Restoration comedy in England. It is the art of satisfying vanity in a particular way, in its most delicate form. It is an occupation and an art as imperative, one might almost say as impersonal, were not the paradox so violent, as any other. What makes Stendhal's account of this art differ from that of Delaclos and the other masters is the fact that, deeply as he is in it, he is half outside of it: he is the psychologist every moment, seeing his own attitude as coldly as he sees the facts on which he is forming his campaign. Read the scene, for instance, where Julien first takes the hand of the object of his designs, absolutely as a matter of duty, a disagreeable move necessary to the success of the game. The cold, forced spirit of so much of intrigue is clearly seen by Beyle and accepted by him as a necessity. He used to tell young men that if they were alone in a room five minutes with a beautiful woman without declaring they loved her, it proved them poltroons. Two sides of him, however, are always present; for this is the same man who repeats for ever in his book the cry that there is no love in France. He means that this science, better than no love at all, is inferior to the *abandon* of the Italians. The love of 1770, for which he often longs, with its gaiety, its tact, its discretion, "with the thousand qualities of *savoir-vivre*," is after all only second. *Amour-gout*, to point out the distinction in two famous phrases of his own, is for ever inferior to *amour-passion*. Stendhal, admiring the latter, must have been confined to the former, though not in its baldest form, for to some of the skill and irony of Valmont he added the softness, the sensibility, of a later generation, and he added also the will to feel, so that his study of feeling and his practice of it grew more successful together. Psychology and sensibility are mutual aids in him, as they not infrequently are in "observers of the human heart," to quote his description of his profession. "What consideration

consideration can take precedence, in a sombre heart, of the never-flagging charm of being loved by a woman who is happy and gay?" The voluptuary almost succeeds in looking as genuine as the psychologist. "This nervous fluid, so to speak, has each day but a certain amount of sensitiveness to expend. If you put it into the enjoyment of thirty beautiful pictures you shall not use it to mourn the death of an adored mistress." You cannot disentangle them. Love, voluptuousness, art, psychology, sincerity, effort, all are mixed up together, whatever the ostensible subject. It is a truly French compound, perhaps made none the less essentially French by the author's constant berating of his country for its consciousness and vanity: a man who would be uneasy if he were not exercising his fascinating powers on some woman, and a man whose tears were ready; a man who could not live without action, soaking in the *dolce far niente*; a man all intelligence, and by very force of intelligence a man of emotion. He would be miserable if he gave himself up to either side. "In the things of sentiment perhaps the most delicate judges are found at Paris—but there is always a little chill." He goes to Italy, and as he voluptuously feels the warm air and sees the warm blood and the free movements, the simplicity of heedlessness and passion, his mind goes back longingly to the other things. "All is decadence here, all in memory. Active life is in London and in Paris. The days when I am all sympathy I prefer Rome: but staying here tends to weaken the mind, to plunge it into stupor. There is no effort, no energy, nothing moves fast. Upon my word, I prefer the active life of the North and the bad taste of our barracks." But among these conflicting ideals it is possible perhaps to pick the strongest, and I think it is painted in this picture: "A delicious salon, within ten steps of the sea, from which we are separated by a grove of orange-trees. The sea
breaks

breaks gently, Ischia is in sight. The ices are excellent." The last touch seems to me deliciously characteristic. What is more subtle to a man whose whole life is an experiment in taste, what more suggestive, what more typical, than an ice? There is a pervading delight in it, in the unsubstantiality, the provokingness, the refinement of it. "In the boxes, toward the middle of the evening, the *cavaliere servante* of the lady usually orders some ices. There is always some wager, and the ordinary bets are sherbets, which are divine. There are three kinds, *gelati*, *crepè* and *pezzidiere*. It is an excellent thing to become familiar with. I have not yet determined the best kind, and I experiment every evening." Do not mistake this for playfulness. The man who cannot take an ice seriously cannot take Stendhal sympathetically.

Such, in the rough, is the point of view of this critic of character and of art. Of course the value of judgments from such a man in such an attitude is dependent entirely on what one seeks from criticism. Here is what Stendhal hopes to give: "My end is to make each observer question his own soul, disentangle his own manner of feeling, and thus succeed in forming a judgment for himself, a way of seeing formed in accord with his own character, his tastes, his ruling passions, if indeed he have passions, for unhappily they are necessary to judge the arts." The word "passion," here as elsewhere, is not to be given too violent a meaning. "Emotion" would do as well—sincere personal feeling. That there is no end of art except to bring out this sincere individual feeling is his ultimate belief. He is fond of the story of the young girl who asked Voltaire to hear her recite, so as to judge of her fitness for the stage. Astonished at her coldness, Voltaire said: "But, mademoiselle, if you yourself had a lover who abandoned you, what would you do?" "I would take another," she answered. That, Stendhal adds, is the correct point
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of view for nineteen-twentieths of life, but not for art. "I care only for genius, for young painters with fire in the soul and open intelligence." For disinterested, cool taste, for objective justness and precision, he has only contempt. Indeed, he accepts Goethe's definition of taste as the art of properly tying one's cravats in things of the mind. Everything that is not special to the speaker, personal, he identifies with thinness, insincerity, pose. "The best thing one can bring before works of art, is a natural mind. One must dare to feel what he does feel." To be one's self, the first of rules, means to follow one's primitive sentiments. "Instead of wishing to judge according to literary principles, and defend correct doctrines, why do not our youths content themselves with the fairest privilege of their age, to have sentiments?" There is no division into impersonal judgment and private sentiment. The only criticism that has value is private, personal, intimate.

Less special to Stendhal now, though rare at the time in which he lived, is the appeal to life as the basis of art. "To find the Greeks, look in the forests of America." Go to the swimming-school or the ballet to realise the correctness and the energy of Michelangelo. Familiarity is everything. "The work of genius is the sense of conversation," and as "the man who takes the word of another is a cruel bore in a salon," so is he as a critic. "What is the antique bas-relief to me? Let us try to make good modern painting. The Greeks loved the nude. We never see it, and moreover it repels us." This conclusion shows the weakness, or the limitation, of this kind of criticism, which as Stendhal applies it would keep us from all we have learned from the revived study of the nude, because the first impression to one unused to seeing it is not an artistic one. But the limitations of Stendhal and his world are obvious enough. It is his eloquence and usefulness within his limits that are worth examination.

"Beauty,"

"Beauty," to Stendhal, "is simply a promise of happiness," and the phrase sums up his attitude. Here is his ideal way of taking music. He asked a question of a young woman about somebody in the audience. The young woman usually says nothing during the evening. To his question she answered, "Music pleases when it puts your soul in the evening in the same position that love put it in during the day."

Beyle adds: "Such is the simplicity of language and of action. I did not answer, and I left her. When one feels music in such a way, what friend is not importunate?" When he leaves this field for technical judgments he is laughable to any one who does not care for the texture of his mind, whatever his expression; for music to him is really only a background for his sensibility. "How can I talk of music without giving the history of my sensations?" This is, doubtless, maudlin to the sturdy masculine mind, this religion of sensibility, this fondling of one's sentimental susceptibilities, and it certainly has no grandeur and no morality. "Sensibility," Coleridge says, "that is, a constitutional quickness of sympathy with pain and pleasure, and a keen sense of the gratifications that accompany social intercourse, mutual endearments, and reciprocal preferences . . . sensibility is not even a sure pledge of a good heart, though among the most common meanings of that many-meaning and too commonly misapplied expression." It leads, he goes on, to effeminate sensitiveness by making us alive to trifling misfortunes. This is just, with all its severity, and the lover of Stendhal has only to smile, and quote Rousseau, with Beyle himself: "I must admit that I am a great booby; for I get all my pleasure in being sad."

Naturally enough, ennui plays a great part in such a nature, thin, intelligent, sensitive, immoral, self-indulgent. It lies behind his art of love and his love of art. "Ennui, this great motive
power

power of intelligent people," he says ; and again : " I was much surprised when, studying painting out of pure ennui, I found it a balm for cruel sorrows." He really loves it. " Ennui ! the god whom I implore, the powerful god who reigns in the hall of the *Français*, the only power in the world that can cause the Laharpes to be thrown into the fire." Hence his love for Madame du Deffand, the great expert in ennui, and for the whole century of ennui, wit, and immorality. Certainly the lack of all fire and enthusiasm, the lack of faith, of hope, of charity, does go often with a clear, sharp, negative freshness of judgment, which is often seen in the colder, finer, smaller workmen in the psychology of social relations. It is a great exposé of pretence. It enables Stendhal to see that most honest Northerners say in their hearts before the statues of Michelangelo, " Is that all ? " as they say before their accomplished ideal, " Good Lord ! to be happy, to be loved, is it only this ? "

But just as Stendhal keeps in the borderland between vice and virtue, shrinking from grossness, and laughing at morality, so he cannot really cross into the deepest unhappiness any more than he could into passionate happiness. Tragedy repelled him. " The fine arts ought never to try to paint the inevitable ills of humanity. They only increase them, which is a sad success Noble and almost consoled grief is the only kind that art should seek to produce." To these half-tones his range is limited through the whole of his being. Of his taste in architecture, of which he was technically as ignorant as he was of music, Mérimée tells us that he disliked Gothic, thinking it ugly and sad, and liked the architecture of the Renaissance for its elegance and coquetry ; that it was always graceful details, moreover, and not the general plan that attracted him ; which is a limitation that naturally goes with the other.

Of course the charm and the limitations that are everywhere in Beyle's art criticism are the same in his judgments of national traits, which form a large part of his work. Antipathy to the French is one of his fixed ideas, thorough Frenchman that he was; for his own vanity and distrust did not make him hate the less genuinely those weaknesses. Vanity is bourgeois, he thinks, and there is for him no more terrible word. It spoils the best things, too—conversation among others; for the French conversation is work. "The most tiresome defect in our present civilisation is the desire to produce effect." So with their bravery, their love, all is calculated, there is no abandonment. This annoys him particularly in the women, who are always the most important element to him. He gives them their due, but coldly: "France, however, is always the country where there are always the most passable women. They seduce by delicate pleasures made possible by their mode of dress, and these pleasures can be appreciated by the most passionless natures. Dry natures are afraid of Italian beauty." Of course this continual flinging at the French is only partly vanity, self-glorification in being able, almost alone of foreigners, to appreciate the Italians. It is partly contempt for his leading power, for mere intelligence. In his youth he spoke with half-regret of his being so reasonable that he would go to bed to save his health even when his head was crowded with ideas that he wanted to write. It was his desperate desire to be as Italian as he could, rather than any serene belief that he had thrown off much of his French nature, that made him leave orders to have inscribed on his tombstone:

Qui Giace

Arrigo Beyle Milanese

Visse, scrisse, amò.

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It comes dangerously near to a pose, perhaps, and yet there is genuineness enough in it to make it pathetic. He praises the Italians because they do not judge their happiness. He never ceased to judge his. Nowhere outside of Italy, he thinks, can one hear with a certain accent, "O Dio! com' e bello!" But the implication is quite unfair. I have heard a common Frenchwoman exclaim, under her breath, before an ugly peacock, "Dieu! comme c'est beau," with an intensity that was not less because it was restrained. But restraint was Beyle's bugbear. From his own economical, calculating nature he flew almost with worship to its opposite. He is speaking of Julien, and therefore of himself, when he says, in *Le Rouge et le Noir*: "Intellectual love has doubtless more cleverness than true love, but it has only moments of enthusiasm. It knows itself too well. It judges itself unceasingly. Far from driving away thought, it exists only by force of thought." He calls Julien mediocre, and he says of him: "This dry soul felt all of passion that is possible in a person raised in the midst of this excessive civilisation which Paris admires." Beyle saves Julien from contempt at the end (and doubtless he consoled himself with something similar) by causing him, while remaining a conscious hypocrite, to lose his life unhesitatingly, absurdly, perversely, for the sake of love. Once he has shown himself capable of the divine unreason, of exaltation, he is respectable. Where the enthusiasm is he is blinded; he cannot see the crudity and stupidity of passion. Before this mad enthusiasm the French fineness and proportion is insignificant. He loses his memory of the charm he has told so well. "Elsewhere there is no conception of this art of giving birth to the laugh of the mind, and of giving delicious joys by unexpected words."

As might be expected, Beyle is even more unfair to the
Germans

Germans than he is to his countrymen ; for the sentiment, of which he is the epicure and the apologist has nothing in common with the reverent and poetic sentiment in which the Germans are so rich. This last Beyle hates as he hates Rousseau and Madame de Staël. It is phrase, moonshine, and the fact that it is bound up in a stable and orderly character but makes it the more irritating. They are sentimental, innocent, and unintelligent, he says, and he quotes with a sneer, as true of the race : " A soul honest, sweet, and peaceful, free of pride and remorse, full of benevolence and humanity, above the nerves and the passions." In short, quite anti-Beylian, quite submissive, sweet, and moral. For England he has much more respect and even a slight affection. He likes their anti-classicism, and he likes especially the beauty of their women, which he thinks second only to that of the Italians. The rich complexions, the free, open countenances, the strong forms rouse him sometimes almost to enthusiasm ; but of course it is all secondary in the inevitable comparison. " English beauty seems paltry, without soul, without life, before the divine eyes which heaven has given to Italy." The somewhat in the submissive faces of the Englishwomen that threatens future ennui, Stendhal thinks has been ingrained there by the workings of the terrible law of propriety which rules as a despot over the unfortunate island. It is the vision of caprice in the face of the Italian woman that makes him certain of never being bored.

It is not surprising that women should be the objects through which Beyle sees everything. A man who sees in relativity, arbitrariness, caprice, the final law of nature, and who feels a sympathy with this law, not unnaturally finds in the absolute, personal, perverse nature of women his most congenial companionship. He finds in women something more elemental than reasonableness. He finds the basal instincts. They best illustrate his psychology
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of final, absolute choice. Of course there is the other side too, the epicure's point of view, from which their charm is the centre of the paradise of leisure, music, and ices. His hyperbole in praising art is "equal to the first handshake of the woman one loves." In politics he sees largely the relations of sex; and in national character it is almost always of the women he is talking. Their influence marks the advance of civilisation. "Tenderness has made progress among us because society has become more perfect," and tenderness here is this soft or, if you choose, effeminate, sensibility. "The admission of women to perfect equality would be the surest sign of civilisation. It would double the intellectual forces of the human race and its probabilities of happiness. . . . To attain equality, the source of happiness for both sexes, the duel would have to be open to women; the pistol demands only address. Any woman, by subjecting herself to imprisonment for two years would be able, at the expiration of the term, to get a divorce. Towards the year Two Thousand these ideas will be no longer ridiculous."

In this passage is the whole man, intelligent and fantastic, sincere and suspicious, fresh, convincing, absurd. He is rapidly settling back into obscurity, to which he is condemned as much by the substance of his thought as by the formlessness of its expression. Entirely a rebel, and only slightly a revolutionist, he is treated by the world as he treated it. A lover of many interesting things inextricably wound up together, his earnest talk about them will perhaps for some time longer be an important influence on the lives of a few whose minds shall be of the kind to which a sharp, industrious, capricious, and rebellious individual is the best stimulant to their own thought.