

### III MY VISIT TO LONDON

(November, 1893)

On the 19th of November last, at nine in the evening, I took the train at the Gare Saint-Lazare for Dieppe-Newhaven. On reaching Dieppe, I found the buffet crammed with travellers, who had been kept by the bad weather from taking the preceding boats. The boat corresponding with my train was equally unable to put out to sea, on account of a storm which had already lasted twenty-four hours, and was to last, with redoubled violence, till the next evening. So there was nothing for it but, in company with a good hundred people, to spend part of the night on a bench, till the worthy host (to whom thanks, and thanks again!) made me the offer, not indeed of a room, but of a sofa in the dining-room of his hotel opposite the station, and I was thus enabled, if not to sleep with much comfort, at all events to take a little rest, to the accompaniment of the boom of the sea, which reminded me of the too Parisian uproar and the cannonade of September, 1870, to January, 1871. All the next day a diluvian rain fell, and I consumed the time in déjeuners, lunches, and dinners, apéritifs, coffees, and cigars, at the said buffet. Of Dieppe I saw no more than the whitish cliffs against an iron-gray sky, across the lances as of a mass of armed men—

“les lances de l'averse”—

the terrible downpour, under which the sea, gradually calming, growled like a gorged beast, still terribly, with a ravenous delight, one might have said, for many fishing-boats, alas! had gone down, and were still going down, with all hands on board, in the harbour and out at sea.

At last, on the 20th of November, at nine in the evening, there was some talk of setting out, and, hobbling along as fast as I could, I managed to secure half a berth in the second-class cabin. When the bell had sounded for the last time, and the great white chimney, like a vast phantom in the opaque night, had uttered its lugubrious shriek, I felt, after some minutes of uneasy motion in port, a prodigious pitching of the vessel, then a quite sufficient rolling, stupefying at first by their continuity and their almost rhythmical regularity, and becoming a literal rocking to sleep, at least as far as I was

concerned, fatigued as I already was by a sleepless night, or all but, and a day of interminable boredom. And there was something, too, in the immensity of the "caress," not unpleasing to a poet, and I made a little poem about it not long afterwards, which is to appear some day in an English paper.<sup>1</sup> Anyway, I slept the sleep of the just during the whole passage, and never opened my eyes till within sight of Newhaven, when, the sea being now quite calm, the boat glided along without needing to turn on steam, and the very lull and comparative silence awoke me as pleasantly as possible. When I reached London at two in the morning, and had a quarter of an hour's drive to the Temple, in the fine moonlight, the wind quite bracing, I felt already the good effect of what was really one of the best crossings I had ever had. London, so impressive as one passes its superb buildings from the formidable Thames towards Westminster, the rich, elegant London between Victoria Station and the Strand, seemed to me that night exquisite, delicate, almost dainty—luminous.

At the Temple awaited me the poet Arthur Symons, who (as, afterwards, Herbert Horne, poet himself, and architect) was to give me a charming hospitality. He had been to look for me three or four times in vain at Victoria Station, and, imagining after these fruitless errands that I should not come till night, he had waited up for me, and came to welcome me at the very door of the house which he inhabits in that vast caravanserai of the Law—and of Silence. (For how exquisite a corner of London, in which there are so many exquisite and infamous corners, so few common or vulgar!) My host led me up into his charming little flat, from which, next day, I was to have one of the most ravishing and peaceful views, in the exceptionally fine weather, as if made on purpose for the traveller, which bathed the London sky and the whole aspect of the immense city of pale rose and pearl gray. Blithe birds, blackbirds even, on the infinitely twisted branches of those beautiful, immense English trees; to the left, in a paved and grassy angle, regular to the point of being beautiful, in its way, the fountain, which gives its name to the spot (Fountain Court), with its babbling jet of water. But for the moment I was hungry, fagged out by those hours of vehement sea; and Symons, following my example, ate—while we talked, for two good hours, about everything under the sun, Paris, poetry, money too (poets think of nothing else . . . and with reason!), my future lectures—an entire box, one of those long, tall, tin boxes, of tea-biscuits, "muffins" in English,<sup>2</sup> washed down with plenty of "gin and

<sup>1</sup> It appeared in the "New Review."—ED. "Savoy."

<sup>2</sup> They were Osborne biscuits.—ED. "Savoy."

soda,"<sup>1</sup> and perfumed with vague cigarettes. And it was, I assure you, one of the best and gayest meals I ever had in my life!

But I had not come to London merely as a tourist. The very date of my arrival is sufficient evidence to the contrary. I had to give two *conférences*, or rather two *lectures*, as they say, more justly, more simply, and more modestly, in English: one at London, the other, on the following day, at Oxford. The London one was to take place next day (or rather the very day of my archi-matutinal arrival) at 8.30 P.M., at a hall in Holborn, of which I shall have something to say in a few moments.

Our conversation, much against our will, finally came to an end, in spite of its twofold interest, intellectual and gastronomic, for "the Sandman," as Hoffmann says, "*Madame la Poussière*," as they say in my mother's country, Arras, to represent sleep, had passed, and a well-deserved repose parted us until eleven, when the very sympathetic journalist, Mr. Edmund Gosse, came to take us out to lunch in a sumptuous restaurant near by, where my forces were sufficiently recuperated to enable me to put the finishing touches to my *causerie* for the evening. I say nothing of many other visits, among which I remember those of William Heinemann, the great publisher, Horne, Rothenstein, whom I had met the summer before, and who had sketched, in the Hôpital Broussais, a portrait of me which has since appeared in the "Pall Mall Budget," Lane, the publisher of "*les Jeunes*," and others whose names I forget.

The evening came, and our little band, after a dinner *à la française*, not less copious than the morning's lunch, set out, in a confusion of vehicles, towards the spot where I was to speak of "Contemporary French Poets." It was, as I have said, in Holborn, the long, immemorial street of the venerable capital. I knew London long since, and I remembered to have seen, in Holborn, almost at the intersection formed by the Viaduct, a row of some dozen houses, as picturesque as could be, and extremely old, dating from at least the time of Elizabeth. I was not so very much surprised, guided as I was by artists and poets, to find myself, after passing through indefinite corridors, in an extraordinary hall, very ancient, of a sort of rustic Gothic—there is a little too much Gothic among our neighbours (and yet even their modern Gothic is so charming!) as, among us, there is an outrageous deal too much Roman, and what not! in architecture—but the Gothic of Barnard's Inn is sincere, *natural*, and marvellous in its simplicity. There is some talk of pulling down this intimate remnant of the end of the Middle Ages. (Barnard's

<sup>1</sup> There was no soda.—ED. "Savoy."

Inn formerly served for corporative meetings and ceremonies.) In our days the hall is used for private exhibitions, and the artists protest vigorously against this act of vandalism. If the voice of a humble stranger can be heard in this most reasonable hue and cry, here is mine, and loudly.

In front of me was a platform, where, behind a bare table of oak, lit by an old bronze lamp, rose an armchair of oak, also bare, and of colossal proportions, in which there was room enough for even the ventripotent syndics of old "merry England."

I, "chétif trouvère de Paris," intimidated by the imposing place, and the rude, majestic furniture, but encouraged by the numerous and very select audience, installed myself as best I could in the immense chair, at the immense table, and unfolding a roll of notes, expressed myself much as follows :

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I should be unworthy of the title of poet—of the glorious, and sorrowful, and thereby the more glorious, name of poet—if I were to forget that I speak here in the country which is *par excellence* that of poetry. Some acquaintance (alas! but imperfect), with your language, and necessarily incomplete readings in that language, have taught me modesty, Frenchman as I am—and modesty is not specially the portion of us Frenchmen—in regard to this as to many other truths. Thus it is not without timidity that I ask for the indulgence of this picked audience.

"Nevertheless I shall venture, since I have been so graciously invited, to attempt here the most difficult of all endeavours, and, asking forgiveness for not doing it in English, the English which a great writer of ours, Barbey d'Aurévilly, declared was evidently the idiom spoken at the beginning of the world by our grandmother Eve, I begin.

"I am not wanting in experience of lectures. Last year I went to Holland and to Belgium, where I met with some success. Quite lately I visited Nancy and Lunéville, and I was touched at receiving so warm a welcome from my compatriots, for I belong to that part of the country, I was born at Metz, and it was here in London, in 1872, that I declared for the French nationality.

"But under the present circumstances, I cannot repeat too often, I experience a quite special kind of emotion, and I would specially ask your kind attention.

"May I merit it!

"I shall speak, too, during these few moments, so flattering and so formidable for me, of things of which I have some knowledge, for I have

taken part in them to the best of my ability. I allude to contemporary French poetry.

"I do not intend, be assured, to recapitulate the whole history of the poetic evolution of the present time: Romanticism, the *Parnasse contemporain*, itself an output of Romanticism, an advanced Romanticism in which thundered the formidable verse of Leconte de Lisle, flickered and tinkled that of Théodore de Banville, while that of Baudelaire sighed and shone like a corpse-candle—revered and venerated trinity, from whom, undoubtedly, proceeded the first works of a generation already ripe, very ripe, too ripe, think and say some impatient ones among us; a generation to which I belong, to which Stéphane Mallarmé belongs, and others also, whose talent has retained the impress of the past, not without some necessary modifications (doubtless for the better) which time brings with it in its passing.

"I give here only the name of Mallarmé, who, along with myself, was most in sympathy with those younger men about whom I intend to speak. It was about the year 1881 that the various tendencies of the new 'batch' of poets began to make themselves felt, tendencies confirmed by a most often happy audacity, and a true love of letters. I do not always agree with them; I should raise many objections to the *vers libre*, for example, and the *rime libre*, preached and practised by these latest friends of mine. But what merits, already, and rightly, noised abroad, are there not in Jean Moréas in particular, at once the courageous, the indefatigable critic, and the protagonist of his work, still constantly under discussion, so to speak. It was at first pure Romanticism, without a shadow of resemblance to the *Parnasse contemporain*, then it adopted Symbolism, in whose definition of itself he was not slow to recognize the insufficiency, and which he replaced by the *École Romane*, gathering about him, with a well-merited pride, men of such fine talents, original within even the limits of the accepted poetic discipline, as Ernest Raynaud, Maurice du Plessys, and, more recently, Raymond de la Tailhède.

"In addition to the 'Romans,' for, in spite of all, the name has had to be recognized, there is an independent *pléiade* of poets, powerful or charming, each seeking a way of his own, and the most having found it; some fervent adepts, others sceptical partisans, it would seem, of that *vers libre* which, once and for all, I am by no means too fond of. Others, again, hold by verse pure and simple, verse as I have known and used it, with yet others who are legion.

"Undoubtedly the most remarkable among these is Laurent Tailhade, at once subtle and mystical, and so terribly and so stingingly *méchant*. It is

certainly well to be among his friends ; as for his literary enemies, they can be but the foolish or the ignorant. I am infinitely fond of his books of pure beauty, but I confess I have a weakness for *Au Pays du Mufle*, which might be rendered in English, imperfectly enough, by *In the Country of the Snob* : that formidable farrago of violence and of irony, in which the ferocity of the subject-matter corresponds, in some sort, with a certain ferocity of the form, a form at once learned and amusing, furiously yet quite intelligibly archaic. Next follow Paul Vérola ; Henri de Régnier ; Vielé-Griffin, Stuart Merrill, both of Anglo-Saxon origin, but brought up mainly in France ; Adolphe Retté ; Edouard Dubus ; George Suzanne ; Dauphin Meunier ; all remarkable in their different degrees, and of an assured future. I am not mentioning names at random, be sure, for, if I desired to be interminable, I easily could be, so many young poets are there in these days of surrounding materialism and rationalism, whose extent, however, is perhaps somewhat exaggerated. Many of these will renounce the fray, and honourably re-enter the ordinary intellectual life. As for those I have named, never ! and so much the better for all of us.

"These poets, I repeat, are independent of one another. The 'Romans,' of whom I have just spoken, form, on the contrary, a group to themselves, and, whatever may be the very real originality, on which I have but now insisted, of one and another among them, taken separately, they follow a common principle, which is, to go straight back to the origin of the French language, which, it is well known, comes of Gallo-Roman stock. But is 'Roman' really the word ? I doubt it ; indeed, I deny it. The Roman is still Latin, liturgical Latin, in my opinion, of the time of the Roman basilicas ; and I do not quite understand, on the part of the poets in question, the leap from this time to that of Ronsard, whose idiom, whose rhythm, whose very tricks, are a good deal too much borrowed by these amiable, and, at their moments, admirable poets. They have science (a little at random, for they are young) ; they have music, or at least almost all the four who form the group ; they have faith, and, above all, good faith. They have all that, I admit willingly, gladly, indeed, on behalf of my art which they honour, my country which they adorn ; but, but, though that is enough to be or to become a perfect artist, is it enough to become an incontestable poet ? Perhaps not ; unkind as it may seem to suggest the doubt.

"But life is hard, as it is essentially uncertain, obscure, indecisive, complex ; and again charming, smiling, friendly, simple, when it wills. And in order to be a poet, it seems to me, one must live much, and remember much. Alfred

de Musset has said that infinitely better than I could possibly say it, and he has left a living work, the typical living work, though, indeed, he has not put all of himself into it. He had his reasons, which were, in the main, that he chose to do as he did; but he might, perhaps he should, have done more. In spite of all, he remains a great poet. An artist? yes, a hundred times, yes. A perfect artist? No; for life, felt and rendered, even well, even admirably felt and rendered, is not all which that task requires. You must work, you must work like a labourer; and that these 'Roman' poets undoubtedly do.

"So, it seems to me, the poet should be absolutely sincere, but absolutely conscientious as a writer; hiding nothing of himself, but employing, in the expression of this frankness, all needful dignity, and a care of that dignity which should manifest itself in, if not the perfection of form, at all events an invisible, insensible, but effective endeavour after this lofty and severe quality; I was about to say, this virtue.

"A poet (alas! only myself) has essayed this undertaking; very probably he has failed, but certainly he has done his best to acquit himself honourably.

"I began, in 1867, with 'Poèmes Saturniens,' a youthful affair, marked by imitations to right and left: Hugo, Gautier, Baudelaire, Banville. In addition, thanks to a mistaken taste for Leconte de Lisle, I was an *impassible*, 'im-pas-si-ble,' as the word was pronounced then in the Passage Choiseul and on the Boulevard des Batignolles.

"Pauvre gens! l'Art n'est pas d'éparpiller son âme :  
Est-elle en marbre ou non, la Vénus de Milo?"

I exclaimed, in an epilogue that I considered for some time as the cream of æsthetics; and I added, in a sonnet which was excluded from this first collection through lack of space rather than lack of taste, that the only just and great man is he who

'S'éternise dans un égoïsme de marbre.'

This verse, I may remark in parentheses, is one of my first, if not the very first, in this form. I was to go to much greater lengths in these audacities. Others outstep me: why should I cry halt to them? I shall never cease to say, and to say again and again: I applaud, but for my part I hold back, and I applaud, even, with reservation. Sometimes I am inclined to reproach myself with having let loose the storm, but it is too late for me to oppose it now. A *Quos ego* on my part would seem ridiculous, and I am now but the old seaman, a little weary, but never tired of heroism ('Comme un buffle se câbre, aspirant la tempête,' Stéphane Mallarmé, my old comrade in dangers, has

written superbly), who assists, just a little sceptical, but imperceptibly, imperturbably, at the efforts of younger 'Jack Tars,' to whom I wish good luck and the happiness of seeing them return victorious from the fray.

"*Paulo minora canamus.* I return to myself and my *débuts*. At present the verses quoted above, and the theories attached to them, seem to me puerile ; decent enough as verse, and thereby the more puerile.

"However, the man who lived beneath the very young, the somewhat pedantical young man, whom I then was, sometimes, indeed often, lifted the mask, and expressed himself in various little poems, not without tenderness, such as :

'MON RÊVE FAMILIER

' Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant  
D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime,  
Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même  
Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend.

' Car elle me comprend, et mon cœur, transparent  
Pour elle seule, hélas ! cesse d'être un problème  
Pour elle seule, et les moiteurs de mon front blême  
Elle seule les sait rafraîchir, en pleurant.

' Est-elle brune, blonde ou rousse ?—Je l'ignore.  
Son nom ? Je me souviens qu'il est doux et sonore  
Comme ceux des aimés que la Vie exila.

' Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,  
Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a  
L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues.'

'CHANSON D'AUTOMNE

' Les sanglots longs  
Des violons  
De l'automne  
Blessent mon cœur  
D'une langueur  
Monotone.

' Tout suffocant  
Et blême quand  
Sonne l'heure,  
Je me souviens  
Des jours anciens  
Et je pleure ;

'Et je m'en vais  
 Au vent mauvais  
 Qui m'emporte  
 De ça, de là,  
 Pareil à la  
 Feuille morte.'

"These verses, among many others, gave evidence of a certain inclination towards a half-sensual, half-dreamy melancholy, confirmed, a year later, more agreeably, perhaps, in any case with more mastery and more deliberate intention, by the verses (costumed after the personages of the Italian comedy and the fancy pieces of Watteau) contained in the little volume, not badly received from the first, the 'Fêtes Galantes.' It is not difficult to find among these some piquant notes of velvety sharpness and of sly malice.

'CRÉPUSCULE DU SOIR

'Les hauts talons luttaient avec les longues jupes,  
 En sorte que, selon le terrain et le vent,  
 Parfois luisaient des bas de jambe, trop souvent  
 Interceptés !—et nous aimions ce jeu de dupes.

'Parfois aussi le dard d'un insecte jaloux  
 Inquiétait le col des belles sous les branches,  
 Et c'étaient des éclairs soudains de nuques blanches  
 Et ce régal comblait nos jeunes yeux de fous.

'Le soir tombait, un soir équivoque d'automne :  
 Les belles, se pendant rêveuses à nos bras  
 Dirent alors des mots si spécieux, tout bas,  
 Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne."

'LE FAUNE

'Un vieux faune de terre cuite  
 Rit au centre des boulingrins,  
 Présageant sans doute une fuite  
 Mauvaise à ces instants sereins

'Qui m'ont conduit et t'ont conduite,  
 Mélancholiques pèlerins,  
 Jusqu'à cette heure dont la fuite  
 Tournoie au son des tambourins.'

"A quite other music is heard in 'La Bonne Chanson,' really a wedding-present, literally speaking, for the tiny volume appeared on the occasion of a marriage which was going to take place, and which took place in 1870. The

author values it as perhaps the most *natural* of his works. Indeed, it was Art, violent or delicate, which had affected to reign, almost exclusively, in his former works, and it was only from then that it was possible to trace in him true and simple views concerning nature, physical and moral.

‘SÉRÉNADE

‘La lune blanche  
Luit dans les bois ;  
De chaque branche  
Part une voix  
Sous la ramée . . .

O bien-aimée.

‘L’étang reflète,  
Profond miroir,  
La silhouette  
De saule noir  
Où le vent pleure . . .

Rêvons, c’est l’heure.

‘Un vaste et tendre  
Apaïsement  
Semble descendre  
Du firmament  
Que l’astre irise . . .

C’est l’heure exquise.’

“Life had its way, and distress soon came, not without his own fault, to the household of the poet, who suddenly threw up everything, and went wandering in search of unsatisfying distractions. On the other hand, I will not say remorse (he did not experience it, for he repented of nothing), but vexation and regret, with certain consolations, compensations rather, inspired him in his third collection, ‘Romances sans Paroles,’ thus named in order to express the *real* vagueness and the want of precise meaning which were part of his intention.

‘SPLEEN

‘O triste, triste était mon âme  
A cause, à cause d’une femme.

‘Je ne me suis pas consolé,  
Bien que mon cœur s’en soit allé,

‘Bien que mon cœur, bien que mon âme  
Eussent fui loin de cette femme.

'Je ne me suis pas consolé,  
 Bien que mon cœur s'en soit allé.  
 'Et mon cœur, mon cœur trop sensible  
 Dit à mon âme : Est-il possible,  
 'Est-il possible,—le fût-il,—  
 Ce fier exil, ce triste exil ?  
 'Mon âme dit à mon cœur : Sais-je  
 Moi-même que nous veut ce piège  
 'D'être présents bien qu'exilés,  
 Encore que loin en allés ?'

## 'GREEN

'Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches,  
 Et puis voici mon cœur, qui ne bat que pour vous :  
 Ne le déchirez pas avec vos deux mains blanches  
 Et qu'à vos yeux si beaux l'humble présent soit doux.  
 'J'arrive tout couvert encore de rosée  
 Que le vent du matin vient glacer à mon front.  
 Souffrez que ma fatigue, à vos pieds reposée,  
 Rêve des chers instants qui la délasseront.  
 'Sur votre jeune sein laisser rouler ma tête  
 Toute sonore encor de vos derniers baisers ;  
 Laissez-la s'apaiser de la bonne tempête,  
 Et que je dorme un peu puisque vous reposez.'

"A serious catastrophe interrupted these factitious pains and pleasures.  
 He exaggerated it indeed to the point of writing these lines :

'Un grand sommeil noir  
 Tombe sur ma vie :  
 Dormez, tout espoir,  
 Dormez, toute envie.

'Je ne sais plus rien,  
 Je perds la mémoire  
 Du mal et du bien . . .  
 O la triste histoire !

'Je suis un berceau  
 Qu'une main balance  
 Au creux d'un caveau :  
 Silence, silence !'

"Then a divine resignation (still, to his thinking, divine) came over him, and inspired in him many mystical poems of the purest Catholicism, such as this, which marks a new era in poetry, and may stand for the motto of his life during many years :

' Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse, et ces mains pâles  
Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal,  
Et ces yeux, où plus rien ne reste d'animal  
Que juste assez pour dire : 'assez' aux fureurs mâles,

' Et toujours, maternelle endormeuses des râles,  
Même quand elle ment, cette voix ! Matinal  
Appel, ou chant bien doux à vêpre, ou frais signal,  
Ou beau sanglot qui va mourir au pli des châles ! . . .

' Hommes durs ! Vie atroce et laide d'ici-bas !  
Ah ! que du moins, loin des baisers et des combats,  
Quelque chose demeure un peu sur la montagne,

' Quelque chose du cœur enfantin et subtil,  
Bonté, respect ! Car qu'est-ce qui nous accompagne,  
Et vraiment, quand la mort viendra, que reste-t-il ?'

' Ecoutez la chanson bien douce  
Qui ne pleure que pour vous plaire.  
Elle est discrète, elle est légère :  
Un frisson d'eau sur de la mousse !

' La voix vous fut connue (et chère ?),  
Mais à présent elle est voilée  
Comme une veuve désolée,  
Pourtant comme elle encore fière ;

' Et, dans les longs plis de son voile  
Qui palpite au brises d'automne,  
Cache et montre au cœur qui s'étonne  
La vérité comme une étoile.

' Elle dit, la voix reconnue,  
Que la bonté c'est notre vie,  
Que de la haine et de l'envie  
Rien ne reste, la mort venue.

' Elle parle aussi de la gloire  
D'être simple sans plus attendre.  
Et de noces d'or et du tendre  
Bonheur d'une paix sans victoire.

'Accueillez la voix qui persiste  
 Dans son naïf épithalame.  
 Allez, rien n'est meilleur à l'âme  
 Que de faire une âme moins triste !

'Elle est en peine et de passage,  
 L'âme qui souffre sans colère,  
 Et comme sa morale est claire ! . . . .  
 Ecoutez la chanson bien sage.'

"Then, weary of men and women, of their baseness and frailty, and weary of himself, the poet turned to God :

'O mon Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour  
 Et la blessure est encor vibrante,  
 O mon Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour.

'O mon Dieu, votre crainte m'a frappé,  
 Et la brûlure est encor là qui tonne,  
 O mon Dieu, votre crainte m'a frappé.

'O mon Dieu, j'ai connu que tout est vil  
 Et votre gloire en moi s'est installée,  
 O mon Dieu, j'ai connu que tout est vil.

'Noyez mon âme aux flots de votre Vin,  
 Fondez ma vie au Pain de votre table,  
 Noyez mon cœur aux flots de votre Vin.

'Voici mon sang que je n'ai pas versé,  
 Voici ma chair indigne de souffrance,  
 Voici mon sang que je n'ai pas versé.

'Voici mon front qui n'a pu que rougir,  
 Pour l'escabeau de vos pieds adorables,  
 Voici mon front qui n'a pu que rougir.

'Voici mes mains qui n'ont pas travaillé,  
 Pour les charbons ardents et l'encens rare <sup>1</sup>  
 Voici mes mains qui n'ont pas travaillé.

'Voici mon cœur qui n'a battu qu'en vain,  
 Pour palpiter aux ronces du Calvaire,  
 Voici mon cœur qui n'a battu qu'en vain.

'Voici mes pieds, frivoles voyageurs,  
 Pour accourir au cri de votre grâce,  
 Voici mes pieds, frivoles voyageurs.

'Voici ma voix, bruit maussade et menteur,  
 Pour les reproches de la Pénitence,  
 Voici ma voix, bruit maussade et menteur.

<sup>1</sup> "Ascendit fumus aromatum in conspectu Domini de manu angeli."

'Voici mes yeux, luminaires d'erreur,  
Pour être éteints aux pleurs de la prière,  
Voici mes yeux, luminaires d'erreur.

'Hélas ! Vous, Dieu d'offrande et de pardon,  
Quel est le puits de mon ingratitude,  
Hélas ! Vous, Dieu d'offrande et de pardon,

'Dieu de terreur et Dieu de sainteté,  
Hélas ! ce noir abîme de mon crime,  
Dieu de terreur et Dieu de sainteté,

'Vous, Dieu de paix, de joie et de bonheur,  
Toutes mes peurs, toutes mes ignorances,  
Vous Dieu de paix, de joie et de bonheur,

'Vous connaissez tout cela, tout cela,  
Et que je suis plus pauvre que personne,  
Vous connaissez tout cela, tout cela,

'Mais ce que j'ai, mon Dieu, je vous le donne.'

(*Stickney*, 1875.)

"Then, as it was bound to happen, overstrained humanity resumed, or seemed to resume, its rights, or its fancied rights ; whence a series of volumes, 'Chansons pour Elle,' 'Odes en son Honneur,' 'Élégies,' in which the new affections were celebrated in appropriate measures. Trouble returned under other forms : there are so many, and the sharpest of them all is sickness. It was under this dominion that the poet made a certain return upon himself, and, putting an end or a pause to his recent lucubrations, resumed at times the sadness and serenity of 'Sagesse,' 'Amour,' and 'Bonheur,' not without an echo, but a rigorously diminished echo, of the sinful chants of 'Parallèlement,' the most sensual, the most reprehensible, if you will, of his books. Here is a last poem, which, at all events, will carry me somewhat further back towards the 'Fêtes Galantes' (and then I shall have the honour of thanking you for your gracious attention), though my next volume, 'Varia,' shortly to appear, will give evidence rather of the philosophic and serious side of what people are pleased to term my talent :

'IMPRESSION DE PRINTEMPS

'Il est des jours, avez vous remarqué ?  
Où l'on se sent plus léger qu'un oiseau,  
Plus jeune qu'un enfant, et vrai, plus gai  
Que la même gaieté d'un damoiseau.

'On se souvient sans bien se rappeler . . .  
 Evidemment l'on rêve et non pourtant.  
 L'on semble nager et l'on croirait voler.  
 L'on aime ardemment sans aimer cependant,

'Tant est léger le cœur sous le ciel clair  
 Et tant l'on va, sûr de soi, plein de foi  
 Dans les autres que l'on trompe avec l'air  
 D'être plutôt trompé gentiment, soi.

'La vie est bonne et l'on voudrait mourir  
 Bien que n'ayant pas peur du lendemain.  
 Un désir indécis s'en vient fleurir,  
 Dirait-on, au cœur plus et moins qu'humain.

'Hélas ! faut-il que meure ce bonheur ?  
 Meurent plutôt la vie et son tourment !  
 O dieux cléments, gardez-moi du malheur  
 D'à jamais perdre un moment si charmant.'

(May, 1893.)

"Since the course of my causerie, and the tone of its development, have led me to end with these lines :

'O dieux cléments, gardez-moi du malheur  
 D'à jamais perdre un moment si charmant,'

I take the opportunity of making them the transition to my 'last word,' or rather of ending with them. Thanks, then, once more, ladies and gentlemen, for the delicious hour in which I have felt your sympathy about me, as I have spoken of my own country in a country I so greatly love and admire, of things and men dear and precious to me ; thanks for the attention you have given to the words of a guest, for whom this evening will remain memorable and honourable among all the hours of a life which has all been devoted to the cause of letters."

The English press, both London and provincial, was, on the whole, favourable to me, and I would here offer my best "shake-hand" to the staff of many papers, particularly the "Times," the "Pall Mall Gazette," the "Star" (which, I may add in parentheses, has published a portrait of me in which I trace more resemblance to my friend the excellent Breton poet, Le Goffic), the "St. James's Gazette," the "Liverpool Post," the "Manchester Guardian," the "Sketch," etc., to all of which my warmest gratitude is due. Certain articles, intended to give more precise information, require perhaps a few corrections. But what difference will any contradictions, any improbabilities, on my account, puzzling to posterity as they are likely to be, what harm will they

do to my good or bad reputation a thousand years from now? What real harm?

Next day I was off to Oxford, where I lunched with my friend Rothenstein, in company with the distinguished professor, York Powell, and a French poet, M. Bonnier, long since settled in England, an ideal companion, full of stories and recollections. Then, with the aid of hansoms, we were able to see some of the town, deliciously dainty, almost rustic, in its commercial quarters, tiny shops as it were illuminated with cheap confectionaries, and goods of popular sorts, sweets for little people and little purses; sweet little houses, little gardens full of rest, trees showing their last red leaves above the red, comfortable, flat roofs, somewhat like the proper and modest little streets of Boston, of which I have spoken in another paper; and unique in its mediæval majesty, its buildings, colleges, churches, of the *good period* (I refer neither to our century, nor to the two centuries and a half before it).

My lecture took place in a hall, situated at the end of a labyrinth of rooms crammed with books, an ancient hall, with an arched roof of stone and wood, severely furnished, where, under the presidency of Professor Powell, I gave once more, with such change as the place demanded, the lecture which I had given the previous night, before an audience mainly of students, most of them in the historic dress of the university, a black robe, short or long, according to the "degree," and completed, out of doors, by the traditional flat square cap, which gives to them, as to their professors, a half clerical, half magisterial air, well in keeping with those faces, grave with the majesty of young or matured learning, and all friendly and welcoming with smile or greeting.

On my return to London, I spent a few days in seeing the city which I once knew so well, and which I found, at all events in its purely "continental" quarter, much changed, and much to its advantage, from the point of view, somewhat narrow perhaps, of an old Parisian; and all this did but increase my long and profoundly felt sympathy for a city which I have praised so often for its force, its splendour, its infinite charm, too, in fine weather and foul, and which I am forced, in all good faith, to praise now for its charm of the moment, and a limitless hospitality, the understanding of tastes, the forgiveness of shortcomings, the appreciation of merits, of defects even: I do but speak, be sure, of elegant, *respectable* defects.

Early in December I set out for Manchester, leaving by the admirable station of St. Pancras, all brick, marble, pointed arches and bell-towers, which

was in course of building at the time of my first visit to London in 1873: 1873 to 1894, a good age for an "old dog!"

This town, proverbially a business town, black and splendid, a larger Lyons, struck me as being all swathed in smoke, with open promenades by the side of a very low-lying river. I only saw Salford, which forms half of the rival of Liverpool, and my visit, as at Oxford, only lasted twenty-four hours. I was received by Mr. Theodore C. London, a young clergyman of the Congregational Church, and by his sister and brother, a lad of eighteen or nineteen, all more friendly one than another. A friend of Mr. London, a charming young man, professor at the Grammar School, M. Emile Bally, a Swiss from Geneva, who, naturally, spoke French as his mother tongue, and English with absolute perfection, came to see us during the day. Both were steeped in literature to the finger-tips, and ardent admirers of poetry, and it was they who looked after the lecture which I had been invited to give. I had a most sympathetic audience for my speechifying, which was similar to those I had already given. I was well aware that Manchester, apart from its immense industrial importance, formed an important intellectual and artistic centre. If I had had the time, I should have made some endeavour to get a sight of a large picture which had attracted deserved attention at the Salon of 1872. The picture was signed Fantin-Latour; the title, "Coin de Table"; the persons, Léon Valade, Camille Pelletan, Ernest d'Hervilly, Jean Aicard, Arthur Rimbaud,—and your humble servant.

Then, all too soon, the time came for me to leave England, and, after some days of delightful dawdling through a London of theatres (a very fairy-land!), music-halls (a very paradise!), of good and excellent visits received and returned; after having shaken so many really friendly hands, William Heinemann, William Rothenstein, A. Symons, H. Horne, H. Harland, E. Gosse, Image, Lane, Frank Harris, the sympathetic editor of the "Fortnightly," I embarked once more, this time on a sea as still as glass, happy, certainly, at the thought of seeing France again, but very happy, too, at the thought of so agreeable a visit and of such good and enduring memories!

PAUL VERLAINE.

(*Translated by Arthur Symons.*)