

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

THERE has lately appeared an admirable translation by Mrs. Devonshire of M. Emile Faguet's monograph on Flaubert, the great romantic realist or realistic romantic, whichever you choose to call him. Outside its masterly characterization of a figure unique in literary fiction, the study raises the whole question of what 'realism' and 'romanticism' actually mean. Though its analysis both of personality and *métier* is not, we think, without some ambiguities and omissions, it remains, like all Faguet's creative criticism, a model of penetrative suggestion and lucid style. Everything that he has to say on style is authoritative. Not everything, however, that he says about realism and the like compels assent. For the term 'realism,' like so many other ear-satisfying abstracts, is too vague and wide for precision. As a rule, those artists are called realists who do not show their temperament in their works. In one sense all great artists, whatever their materials, are realists. They realize their world, making it vivid, visible, and audible, whether it be the world of yesterday, to-day, to-morrow, or of those mid-regions known as ideas, and whether they do so by temperament or without it. Who has realized Hellenism more than Keats, though he is so absolutely un-Hellenic in method? Who calls him a realist? But the fact is that 'realism' is used more of material than of the means to express it. The *genre*-painters of literature are all styled realists, though they differ quite as much as De Hoogh does from Teniers or Terberg from Mieris. Fielding is a realist both in matter and manner, but the sentimental Richardson is a realist also;

he does not pursue beauty. Is Dickens a realist because he deals with the ordinary world in an extraordinary manner? Is Thackeray not a realist because he romanticizes the familiar? We have not to ask whether Flaubert was the first realist in French fiction (and he was not in face of Le Sage), but what kind of a realist he was. The answer is that Flaubert — the son, be it marked, of a surgeon — was a great, an artistic Naturalist. He operated on human nature, and in the dissecting room of his mind all characters were symptoms. Born the most self-conscious and self-centred of men, he yet — or perhaps therefore — became the least self-conscious of artists. He expressly repudiated any intrusion of personal moods into the realm of his art, and in this — the objective sense — he relates himself — though most modernly divergent — to the old Greek outlook. So, oddly enough, does Baudelaire, the poet of pessimism. But, being so sensitively self-conscious, he also belonged to the subjective world, the world that realizes not 'I' but 'it,' the inner world of the Bible, and, in its truest sense, of impressionism. Self-banned from introducing himself into his creations, he sought as a relief in alternate books to project himself into an alien atmosphere.

His affinities were Oriental — he was the pine-tree dreaming of the palm — and so he escaped into the grandiose or exotic atmosphere of *Salammbô*, or of *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. But while now and again he exhaled himself into the glow of the East, he handled the West coldly and scientifically, and though he loved the one, he was more at ease in the other, which

he had trained himself to like. The bias only occasionally indulged in, the warm Oriental side of him, Faguet calls romanticism. Here again we make bold to dissent. The Romantic is concerned not with material, but with method. It involves a treatment proceeding neither by register nor rule, but by associative sensations—the way in which the scent recalls the flower, the tune the scene, the sound in a shell the sea; such was not Flaubert's medium. He handled themes the most remote and romantic (though with far intenser colors) as he handled the average daily life around him—as a vent for the evasion or suppression of the importunate, impenitent self which tortured him. Always minute in his calculated strokes, he here elaborated without freedom that which artistically demands intuitive largeness and unfettered fantasy. Thus, for all their sombre splendor and ruminative research, these excursions of his became a colossal bore, as a bizarre naturalism almost always must. No doubt he had a romantic vein, but it was submerged in the realism against which it protested. What enlists sympathy in his historical fantasies is the style, both when he describes and when he psychologizes. Here once more he strove to escape from himself, for he was not naturally a stylist—as his correspondence shows—any more than Sterne when he wrote his sloppy *Journal to Eliza*.

Through supreme effort Flaubert became a supreme stylist, nor must it be forgotten by English readers that, where Flaubert is least interesting, the perfection of the style interests a Frenchman most. Flaubert attained this height of expression—this justness of word and gesture—by reading his compositions aloud to himself and making the rhythm beat time to his thoughts and feelings. Perhaps Sterne—the opposite pole in the literary

firmament—did the same. You can be a realist with a sentimental irony, as was Thackeray, or a romantic with a realist's touch, as was Scott. The style of Flaubert is otherwise. It has the restraint, the ring, the terseness and plastic perfection of the Greek Anthology. Yet by nature Flaubert was a shy misanthrope, a pagan hermit, and he turned—as no Greek would have turned—to the ugliness and folly, the rags and tatters around him, whether in the neighborhood of his birthplace near Dieppe or in the Paris which he was to startle more than to charm. But, as he confessed, Flaubert was both a child and a barbarian. 'I am a Barbarian,' he wrote, when he quarreled with his best friend Du Camp; 'I have a Barbarian's muscular apathy, nervous language, green eyes and tall stature. But I also have a Barbarian's impulses . . . obstinacy and irascibility. . . . Du Camp has written me a *kind* and sorrowful letter. I have sent him another from the same cask of vinegar. . . . I think he will for some time feel giddy from the blow and leave me alone. I am very good-natured up to a certain point—the frontiers of my liberty which are not to be overstepped. . . . As he told me that we owed something to others, that we should help each other, I expressed my complete indifference . . . and I added: "Others will do without my lights, and all that I ask in return is that they should not asphyxiate me with their candles."'" After this we can understand that it was only in scientific calm that he could treat with human nature, also that the explosive element which flared up so soon as he was brought into living contact took refuge in the glowing whirl of Carthage, beset by the Barbarians and the mysticism of Salammbô's girdle, or the sands of the Thebaid with an isolated St. Anthony for the central figure.

After all, it is through *Madame Bovary*, with its petty, provincial setting, that Flaubert is immortal, for there he found at once the finest outlet for his genius and the safest shelter from his passions. *Salammbô* — in one aspect an archaeological museum, in another, a gorgeous overcrowded antiquarian ballet — was the result of that visit to the East which realized Flaubert's temperament but contradicted his art. *The Temptation of St. Anthony* — a more spiritual ballet — is on the austerer side of the same mood. But *Madame Bovary*, as in a less degree *The Sentimental Education*, shows him in tense seclusion with the microscope applied to his province. Of *The Three Stories*, two — *The Legend of the Knight of St. John* and *Herodias* — are akin, though in, as it were, the miniature of a stained-glass window, to *St. Anthony* and *Salammbô*; while *The Story of the Simple Heart*, that of an old maid and her parrot, fails to convince us. But *Madame Bovary* is a masterpiece far transcending Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* in its pitiless yet pathetic precision. It is neither immoral nor moral. It neither mocks nor preaches. It is no mere artistic record, still less the photography of Zola. It outdoes Balzac on his own ground, because its ten characters are never confused and never types. And just as Don Quixote makes us sympathize with the sentimentality which it assails, so Madame Bovary herself, the victim of Sand's sentimentalism, makes us sympathize with the very element which proves her downfall. Who does not know the tragedy of Emma's gradual descent, the catastrophe of her climax? Contrasted with the simpering *Lady of the Camelias*, the book stands as Hogarth does to Greuze. Faguet goes so far as to say that the heroine is the most complete woman's portrait in the whole of literature, including Shake-

speare and Balzac. Surely he is right, for, as Faguet again puts it, we get the itinerary, not the inventory, of a soul. Homais, too, is unsurpassable of his kind, and all the persons of that tragedy make an appeal so intimate — even when they belong to the 'sad-grotesque' — that they become part of our abiding consciousness. Perhaps the most wonderful of all its passages is that about Emma's dreams, when the dull, undisillusioned husband returns to find her sleeping: 'Emma, was not asleep; she pretended to be; and while he fell asleep at her side, she awoke to other dreams. She was being carried away by four galloping horses . . . towards a new country, whence they [she and her lover] would never return. They went, their arms locked, without speaking. Often from the summit of a mountain, they suddenly perceived some splendid city with domes, bridges, forests, ships, forests of lemon trees, and white marble cathedrals with storks' nests in their pointed steeples. The horses went slowly because of the slippery marble pavement, and on the ground lay bunches of flowers, which were offered by women dressed in red corselets. . . . However, in the immensity of this future which she evoked nothing particularly emerged; the days, all of them magnificent, were like waves, and the whole swung gently on the horizon, infinite, harmonious. . . .'

— We have no space for Flaubert's last effort *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the tale of a doubled individuality in differing environment — the last cynicism of this 'Unfrocked Romantic,' as Heine once called himself. At any rate, with all drawbacks, Flaubert is perhaps the most distinguished instance of applying Molière's test to the portrayal of life:

Je veux que l'on soit homme et que dans
toute rencontre
Le fond de notre cœur dans nos discours se
montre.

THE OPIUM HOUND

PHILIP is a solicitor whose solicitations are confined to Hongkong and the Far East generally. Just now he is also a special constable, for the duration. He is other things as well, but the above should serve as a general introduction.

In his capacity as special constable he keeps an eagle eye upon the departing river steamers and the passengers purposing to travel in them, his idea being to detect them in the act of attempting to export opium without a permit, one of the deadly sins.

A little while ago Philip came into the possession of a dog of doubtful ancestry and antecedents, but reputed to be intelligent. It was called 'Little Willie' because of its marked tendency to the predatory habit. His other leading characteristic was an inordinate craving for Punter's 'Freak' biscuits.

One day Philip had a brain-wave. 'I will teach Little Willie,' he said, 'to smell out opium concealed in passengers' luggage, and I shall acquire merit and the Superintendent of Imports and Exports will acquire opium.' So he borrowed some opium from that official and concealed it about the house and in his office, and by-and-by what was required of him seemed to dawn on Little Willie, and every time he found a *cache* of the drug he was rewarded with a Punter's 'Freak' biscuit.

At last his education was pronounced to be complete and Philip marched proudly down to the Canton wharf with the Opium Hound. There was a queue of passengers waiting to be allowed on board, and the ceremony of the examination of their baggage was going on. Little Willie was invited to take a hand, which he did in a rather

perfunctory way, without any real interest in the proceedings. Indeed, his attention wandered to the doings of certain disreputable friends of his who had come down to the wharf in a spirit of curiosity, and Philip had to recall him to the matter in hand.

On a sudden a wonderful change came over the Opium Hound. A highly respectable old lady of the *amah* or domestic servant class came confidently along, carrying the customary round, lacquered wooden box, a neat bundle, and a huge umbrella. She was followed by a ragged coolie bearing a plethoric basket, lashed with a stout rope, but bulging in all directions. Little Willie sniffed once at the basket and stiffened. 'Good dog,' said Philip; 'is that opium you have found?' The hound's tail wagged furiously, and he scratched at the basket in a paroxysm of excitement. The coolie dropped it and ran away. The *amah* waxed voluble and attacked Little Willie with the family umbrella. The hound grew more and more enthusiastic for the quest. Philip issued the fiat, 'Open that basket, it contains opium,' and struck an attitude.

The basket was solemnly unlashed amid the *amah's* shrill expostulations, and the contents soon flowed out upon the floor of the examination hut. There was the usual conglomeration: Two pairs working trousers (blue cotton), two ditto jackets to match, one suit silk brocade for high days and holidays, two white aprons, three pairs Chinese shoes, three and a half pairs of Missy's silk stockings, several mysterious under-garments (from the same source); one cigarette tin containing sewing materials, buttons of all sorts