

whom he could name: men who have ambition, industry, intelligence, and a little money, and who would at any cost buy up the lots of their less thrifty and intelligent neighbors. So that the turn of the wheel that was to bring about peasant proprietors, would only bring about a fresh crop of land-owners or large tenants.

R. G. K.

#### A RISING FRENCH CRITIC.

PARIS, January 14, 1887.

NOT far from the Pantheon is a deserted and silent street, the Rue d'Ulm, which reminds one of the streets painted with an almost painful accuracy by Balzac. In this street is the École Normale, the great school which furnishes the French University with its best professors. The examinations for entrance are difficult, and the successful competitors remain four years in the school, where they receive instruction from the first men of the Faculty of Letters and of the Faculty of Sciences. With very few exceptions, the pupils of the school are very poor; they have to make their way by their own efforts; they live almost in seclusion; and when they come out, they are admirably trained—they are admirably versed in the dead languages and in the French language. Many of them, instead of accepting a modest professorship in the provinces, try the career of letters, and generally they begin with journalism. They are more or less envious of their predecessors—of Prévost-Paradol, of Caro, of Rigault, of Taine, of About, of Francisque Sarcey. All these said in the days of their youth, as young Rastignac did when he looked down on the great Parisian ocean from the height of Montmartre: "À nous deux maintenant." Many "Normalians" have become famous; some have become ministers, like Beulé, who wrote the history of the Roman Caesars. The Institute, the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, are not so far from the lonely Rue d'Ulm.

Journalism is always tempting to a young man. Some of our best papers are readily open to young Normalians, since the editors are aware that they really know how to write. The younger they are the more they are still under the influence of a strong literary discipline, ready for everything, full of information, sharp, clever, ardent, curious of life. They have been fed with the lion's marrow. They are generally brilliant writers, but sometimes they are nothing more than artists of style; they have no experience of the world, no acquaintance with the daily life of the province and the city. They are like the *rhéteurs* of antiquity; they are like brilliant stars shooting through the night and often expiring in the night. Few now remember Assollant, also a Normalian, who inspired great hopes at first, and who died the other day, after having consumed his life in writing newspaper articles and novels. The best men even who come out of the École Normale, find it difficult to acquire the experience which is the lot of the man of the world, of the landlord, of the lawyer. Prévost-Paradol acquired his political education in the salon of M. Thiers, to whom he was a sort of Benjamin, and wrote every morning in the *Débats* what he had heard the night before at the Place St. Georges, with that peculiar charm and wit which was his own; but Prévost-Paradol made a terrible mistake when he accepted office from Napoleon III.—a mistake which cost him his life.

About went to Rome on leaving the École Normale, and afterwards to Greece (a certain number of pupils are sent every year to the French schools maintained by the Government in the Italian capital and at Athens). We owe to this circumstance 'Tolla' and the 'Roi des Montagnes,' the two best novels of About's, written at a time when his talent was still in its

freshness. About also was seized with political ambition; he became a journalist after the war, and M. Thiers found in him one of his ardent supporters, but did not recompense his efforts. About said once, speaking of Thiers: "He offered me everything, I accepted everything; he gave me nothing." The last years of About were spent in the work of journalism, and, to the astonishment of all, in speculations of all sorts. His ambition was to become a great financier, but he might have said as Talleyrand said: "I have always lost money at the Bourse, because I always knew everything before anybody."

Among the younger and more successful Normalians we can cite now M. Jules Lemaitre. His reputation was made almost in a day. He published a series of critical articles in the *Revue Bleue*, which attracted so much attention that the *Journal des Débats* offered him at once the succession to J. J. Weiss (also a Normalian), who wrote its theatrical feuilleton during the past few years, and is now prevented from doing so by illness. More than that, the *Figaro*, the great *Figaro*, opened its columns to him—those columns which to many young aspirants appear as the ne plus ultra of literary glory. The name of M. Jules Lemaitre, unknown a short time ago, will very soon become a popular name. It may be that M. Lemaitre will sink under his new reputation, that he will rapidly disappear in the Parisian vortex; it may also be that he will wear well. His two first volumes are certainly youthful, but they have nevertheless a certain solidity. He has, of course, chosen for his studies contemporary writers. He might have left some behind, in the cold, in the dubious light of a purely ephemeral notoriety; he ought to have turned away from some others, who have only won notoriety by the abandonment of all the rules of common decency. He has admitted to his gallery names which are entirely unknown outside of the smallest horizon; but we have read with interest and with pleasure his essays on Théodore de Banville, Sully-Prudhomme, Coppée, Leconte de Lisle, the poets; on Daudet, Renan, Zola; on Francisque Sarcey; on J. J. Weiss. M. Lemaitre is terribly modern. Speaking of Bossuet, he says:

"Frankly, I always have to make an effort to read Bossuet. It is true, that when I have read a few pages, I feel that he is, as we say nowadays, *très fort*, but he gives me no pleasure, while often when I open a book of to-day or of yesterday, it befalls me that I shudder easily, or am penetrated with pleasure to the marrow of my bones—so much do I like this literature of the second half of the nineteenth century, so intelligent, so uneasy, so mad, so sorrowful, so odd, so subtle. I love it even in its affectations, its ridiculousness, its exaggerations, of which I feel the germ in me and which I can make mine. And if we speak seriously, let us make our accounts. If perhaps Corneille, Racine, Bossuet have to-day no equivalents, has the 'grand siècle' the equivalent of Lamartine, of Victor Hugo, of Musset, of Michelet, of George Sand, of Sainte-Beuve, of Flaubert, of Renan? Is it my fault if I prefer reading a chapter of Renan's to a sermon of Bossuet's, the 'Nabab' to the 'Princesse de Clèves,' and a comedy of Meilhac and Halévy's to a comedy of Molière's?"

Comparisons are odious, and M. Lemaitre has a right to his preference. His enthusiasm, however, is perhaps a little too accommodating, and among the names which he cites in this passage there are certainly a few which ought not to have been cited. But this sincere love of modern literature gives a certain charm and color to his criticism. We often describe well what we like well.

The article on Renan made much noise at the time it appeared. Lemaitre belongs to the school of realists who wish to see before they describe anything. He was not content with reading Renan's books, he went to his lectures; he describes the public of the famous professor:

"Many old gentlemen, who resemble all old

gentlemen; students, ladies, sometimes Englishwomen, who have come because M. Renan is a part of the curiosities of Paris." . . . He enters and is applauded. He thanks with a nod of his head, with a good-natured look. He is fat, short, red, with long features, long gray hair; a big nose, a fine mouth; moving all about as in one piece his large head between his shoulders. He seems happy to live, and he explains with gaiety the formation of the historical *Corpus* which contains the Pentateuch."

The familiarity of Renan's exposition and explanations amuses M. Lemaitre—the slang which he sometimes uses, the simplicity of his manner. He calls him a "Labiche exégète" (Labiche is the author of some comical plays at the Palais Royal). He is somewhat disappointed also, and wonders how a man who has gone through such a terrible moral crisis can be so unconcerned, so little transcendental. He compares his face to some of those which Gustave Doré drew in his 'Rabelais' or in the 'Contes Drolatiques.' What is the secret of this gaiety? In a speech which he made at Quimper, on the 17th of August, 1883, Renan said: "A critic reproached me some time ago [it was M. Scherer of the *Temps*] with my good humor as if it were hypocrisy, and seeing its true causes. Well, I will tell you its causes. I am very gay because, having amused myself very little when I was young, I have kept all the freshness of my illusions; but, what is more serious, I am gay because I am sure that I have made a good use of my life. I am sure of it."

It must be very comfortable to feel so much security. Lamennais, who went through the same ordeal as Renan, did not feel it.

"Pascal," says M. Lemaitre, "became mad, M. Renan is gay! If he had ever completely altered his faith, he might have the serenity which often goes with strong convictions. But this philosopher has preserved the imagination of a Catholic. He still loves what he has left. He has remained a priest; he gives even to negation the tone of Christian mysticism. His brain is a disendowed (*désaffectée*) cathedral (the word is Alphonse Daudet's). You can fill it with hay; you can deliver lectures in it; it remains a church."

The essay on Zola is one of the best. Lemaitre dares to say that Zola is not a true realist, and that he magnifies and transforms reality. Zola pretends to be a "naturalist," but "he is also an epic poet and a pessimist poet," if you call a poet a writer who, in view of a certain idea, transforms reality. His pessimism is frightful. In his first writings he at times glorified nature and her works. In the latest he seems to hate and to be afraid of her. He tries to insult human pride in every possible manner. He takes pleasure in showing original sin not in the spirit of a moralist, of a priest, of a philosopher, but in the spirit of a physiologist, of a vivisectionist. He surrounds vice and crime with the most horrible, disgusting, repulsive, and ridiculous circumstances. He degrades love; he sees in man and woman miserable brutes. He lives in a *clinique*. Bestiality and imbecility are in his eyes the two great characteristics of mankind. "But," says M. Lemaitre, "it would be great injustice to accuse M. Zola of immorality, and to believe that he speculates in the bad instincts of the reader." Zola remains grave; if he enters into certain details it is because he thinks it necessary.

"As he pretends to paint reality, and as he is persuaded that reality is ignoble, he shows it as such, with the scruples of a soul which is delicate in its own fashion, which has no desire to deceive us, and which wishes to give the full measure of truth. Sometimes he forgets himself—he makes a great picture from which the ignominy of the flesh is absent; and suddenly he is seized with remorse, he remembers that the beast is everywhere, and, so as not to fail in his duty, when you least expect it, he introduces some indecent detail as a memento of the universal corruption."

Many refuse to Zola what, after all, preserves the work of art, style. Lemaitre believes them to

be unjust, and he defends the style of Zola—"a magnifying style, without shades, often without precision, but eminently calculated, by its monotonous exaggerations and its multiplied insistence, to give greatness to the great ensembles of things concrete."

## Correspondence.

### THE SHARPLES PORTRAITS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Now that there is some discussion as to the genuineness of the Sharples portraits, the following statement may possess some interest:

These portraits were exhibited once before in this country—I cannot remember the precise date, but it must have been near the time of, or before, the Centennial. Among other places, they were shown in Cincinnati. While they were on exhibition there, two of the portraits were partially cut from their frames, and it was considered evident that an attempt to steal them had been made. I saw the portraits shortly after (I think, the next day), and the manner of the cutting convinced me that it had not been done by a thief, but by some one who had an interest in advertising the pictures. Two of the pictures were cut, and both were cut in the same way. In each canvas there were four long slits, one on each side, *not quite meeting at the corners*, so that there was the largest possible amount of cutting that should still leave the canvas firmly attached to its stretcher. Any man who has ever cut a canvas from its stretcher (as what artist has not?) knows how it is done. One begins at one corner and *cuts around* until he gets back to the corner he started from, and the work is done. Now, if the cutting of these so-called Sharples portraits was done by a thief, he must have made four cuts in one canvas, still leaving it firmly attached at all four corners, and then have gone to the other portrait and done the same thing, and then have been interrupted, having done the utmost amount of cutting, with no result. Or, if there were two thieves, each of them must have gone to work in the same awkward way, and have got to the same point when the interruption came.

The improbability of either of these suppositions, together with the fact that no one ever explained how, when, or by whom the attempt could have been made, served to convince me that the supposed theft was a mere advertising "dodge"; and I have never had much faith since then in the authenticity or value of the portraits.

KENYON COX.

NEW YORK, January 20, 1887.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: The report of the Massachusetts Historical Society upon the Sharples portraits has attracted widespread attention. In it the authenticity of the pictures is impeached upon the strength of the written testimony alone. It does not weigh any evidence which may be derived from an examination of the pictures themselves. Such an examination would at once convince any competent observer that the collection of portraits now exhibiting in the country under the name of Sharples cannot possibly be all from the same hand. It is true that the explanatory volume acknowledges that several of the ladies' portraits were worked upon by distinguished artists with a view to beautifying and making more acceptable, yet all are claimed to be at bottom the work of the one painter. In truth they bear every mark of being the work of several men.

The portrait of the wife of Alex. Hamilton is so

like Maclise that that distinguished artist must have painted it outright, instead of merely touching it up, as Macready's letter says. Of the others it is not difficult to assign them to three or four different hands. The three men's portraits—those of Priestly, Fulton, and Marshall—resemble one another, and may all have been painted by Sharples, though they are very different in style from the Sharples pastels which hang in Independence Hall. But if Sharples painted them, or any of those in the general collection, then assuredly he did not paint the Washington portraits. In these the handling of the brush, the quality of the color, and, indeed, all technical details, are unlike anything in the other pictures. Not only so; the painters' conception of what a portrait should be is different. While all the others are more or less flimsy and flat, painted with little pigment and much oil, and with a constant striving after the doll-like prettiness much in vogue thirty or forty years ago, the Washington portraits are massive and round, painted with a large body of color and considerable skill. One of the heads of Washington is in profile, as is that of his wife. These profiles are erect and rigid, relieved against a dark, opaque background. It seems scarcely possible that a man who could paint so good a head, if working directly from nature, would have contented himself with this upright rigidity. It, however, corresponds exactly with what we find in the unquestioned portraits in pastel by Sharples, of which many exist.

The full face of Washington is undoubtedly from the hand of the same painter. It, however, represents a much younger man, and is in military uniform. It is well and strongly modelled, with a full brush and a good deal of skill. It at once suggests the bust made by Houdon about ten years before Sharples came to America, and a close examination of the two shows a striking resemblance.

A careful consideration of the evidence afforded by the pictures, aided by our knowledge of facts which are unquestioned, brings us to the conclusion that the profile portraits of Washington and his wife are copies by an unknown but skilful hand, from originals, either in pastel or oil, made by Sharples from life; and that the full face is the work of the same painter, who probably took for foundation a sketch by Sharples, but in finishing used the bust by Houdon. This would account for the alleged mistake in the color of the eyes, and for the strange lack of vitality, very observable in a head otherwise so well executed.

PICTOR.

### PERVERSION OF HISTORY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Will you allow me to call attention to the extraordinary way in which Messrs. Hay and Nicolay, the authors of the Life of Lincoln now appearing in the *Century*, have, in the January number, glossed over the acquisition of Texas? However great may be the value of Texas to the United States, and however worthy may be the Texans of to-day, the fact remains that the annexation of Texas was the consummation of a gigantic land robbery, planned and carried out in the interest of slavery, and practised upon a friendly but weaker neighbor. This national crime, of which even at this day all patriotic Americans should feel heartily ashamed, is thus described by Messrs. Hay and Nicolay:

"It was impossible to defeat or greatly delay the annexation of Texas, and it showed a certain lack of sagacity on the part of the Whigs not to recognize this fact. Here was a great empire offering itself to us, a State which had gained its independence, and built itself into a certain order and thrift through American valor and enterprise. She offered us a magnificent

estate of 376,000 square miles of territory, all of it valuable and much of it unsurpassed richness and fertility. Even those portions of it once condemned as desert now contribute to the markets of the world vast stores of wool and cotton, herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Not only were these material advantages of great attractiveness to the public mind, but many powerful sentimental considerations reinforced the claim of Texas. The Texans were not an alien people. The few inhabitants of that vast realm were mostly Americans, who had occupied and subdued a vacant wilderness. The heroic defence of the Alamo had been made by Travis and David Crockett, whose exploits and death form one of the most brilliant pages of our border history. Fannin and his men, 400 strong, when they laid down their lives at Goliad, had carried mourning into every southwestern State; and when, a few days later, Houston and his 800 raw levies defeated and destroyed the Mexican army at San Jacinto, captured Santa Anna, the Mexican President, and, with American thrift, instead of giving him the death he merited for his cruel murder of unarmed prisoners, saved him to make a treaty with, the whole people recognized something of kinship in the unaffected valor with which these borderers died, and the humorous shrewdness with which they bargained, and felt as if the victory over the Mexicans was their own. Under these conditions the annexation, sooner or later, was inevitable. . . . Whenever a region contiguous to the United States becomes filled with Americans, it is absolutely certain to come under the American flag."

Strip off the glowing words that cover them, and you find but two arguments in the above quotation, greed and revenge—the one worthy of an Ahab, the other of a burglar whose pal has been shot in the act of housebreaking. Compare with this the views of an impartial foreigner, expressed in 1862, when the slaveholders' triumph of nearly twenty years before was bearing bloody fruit. Prof. Cairnes says in his 'Slave Power':

"The annexation of Texas . . . has long passed into a by-word for unprovoked and unscrupulous plunder of a weak by a strong Power. The designs of its authors have always been notorious. . . . Texas, as all the world knows, was before its annexation to the Union a province of Mexico—a country at peace with the Union, and anxious to cultivate with it friendly relations. Mexico, however, was a weak State, still fresh from the throes of revolution. The district in question was one of great fertility, possessing in this respect, as well as in its climate and river communications, remarkable advantages for slave settlement; it was, moreover, but thinly peopled, and was separated by an immense distance from the seat of government. So early as 1821, while Spanish authority was still maintained in Mexico, 300 families from Louisiana were permitted to settle in this tempting region under the express condition that they should submit to the laws of the country. . . . As the colony increased in numbers and wealth, it became evident to the slave-owners of the neighboring States that they had a natural right to the territory. It offered an admirable field for slave cultivation; it was in their immediate proximity; of all claimants they were the strongest and 'smartest'; in short, they wanted the country, and felt themselves able to take it, and they resolved it should be theirs. 'Manifest destiny' beckoned them forward, and they prepared, with reverent submission to the decrees of Providence, to fulfil their fate."

Going on to speak of the wild-cat land speculation, and manufacture of fictitious titles, which was used to stir up interests hostile to Mexican rule in Texas, and the attempts of the Texan settlers to evade the Mexican laws against slavery, Prof. Cairnes says:

"The project of dismembering a neighboring republic that slaveholders and slaves might overspread a region which had been consecrated to a free population, was discussed in the newspapers as coolly as if it were a matter of obvious right and unquestioned humanity. The plot having been carried to this point, the consummation of the plunder was easy. A conspiracy was hatched; a rebellion organized; filibusters were introduced from the border States; and a population which, at the commencement of the outbreak, did not number 20,000 persons, asserted its independence, was recognized by the Federal Government, and with little delay annexed to the Union."