

causing the last sacrament to be administered to him, a sceptic, or, if he was anything at all, a Mussalman, after the breath was out of his body; and, not content with this ridiculous crime, violated the inmost soul of him by destroying his diaries and manuscripts.

The estimate of George Meredith, and that of Robert Browning, are singularly shrewd and just, but that of Swinburne appears to me to overlook the cardinal. Mr. Harris says that Swinburne was the soul of the new Paganism, the Poet of Revolt, but he does not emphasize it. Swinburne overthrew Victorianism. He is as important as, nay, more important than, Martin Luther. He did not influence his contemporaries, of course. No great man can. But those who were born with the first echoes of his song ringing in their ears were born free. We are all Pagans today; and Swinburne is our father. I think, too, that the tragedy of Swinburne might have been presented with more emphasis. The Swinburne who wrote *Laus Veneris* was killing himself in the manner proper to those whose souls too obviously outweigh their bodies. That unspeakable animal, Watts-Dunton, rescued him, reformed him, ruined him. Owen Seaman, the tapeworm of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, was able to make him say:

"I have sung of the Spanish Armada,  
I have posed in a Jubilee pose;  
I have babbled of babies, and played a  
New tune on the turn of their toes.  
Washed white from the stain of Astarte,  
My books any virgin may buy."

This is surely as epic as the poisoning of Hercules.

I am very grateful to Frank Harris for putting Mathew Arnold in his place.

So much for the English.

The study of Guy De Maupassant is wonderfully fine. One recognizes the exquisite art of Mr. Harris' reticence with regard to the actual facts connected with the Vampire. But for all that I confess to many pangs of unsatisfied curiosity.

In the study of Paul Verlaine one might have wished for a deeper appreciation of his art. The wonderful portrait of the man somewhat obscures the fact that he was just as great in France as Shelley, Blake or Keats in England. The music of Verlaine amounts to a reconstruction of the French language. He has not the profound passion and profundity of Baudelaire. The thoughts that he expresses, pathetic, delicate, exquisite as they are, have no intense virility behind them. Verlaine was rather a small man, just as the nightingale is rather a small bird. But he certainly did in French what no one else had ever done or even thought to do, that is, to raise the language from articulate speech to melody.

The essay on Fabre is a little disappointing, but the reason is apparent. There is nothing very much in Fabre, no personality for Frank Harris to describe. He is a very charming, simple, shrewd old man; and that is all. We consequently find the essay more concerned with the marriage of the scorpion than with the naturalist who observed it.

It is very refreshing to find Maurice Maeterlinck made visibly absurd. Maeterlinck is after all nothing but an atmosphere. So far as he is anything definite he is a thief. He is almost as much the successful tradesman as Arnold Bennett or Holbrook Jackson. I remember in one of my early meetings with the latter light of literature how he told me that he had given up a position in linendraping worth £800 a year for literature. I shook my head sadly. "No," I said, "once a linendraper, always a linendraper." And the tragedy is that I do not even know whether he thought me rude!

I am not particularly pleased with the sketch of Rodin. Fortunately Rodin had done his life's work before success came to him. His subsequent commercialization and vulgarization have no interest for us. It should have been beneath Frank Harris to notice the rubbish written about him by such creatures as Gaell. He says, however, that Rodin is "a French peasant . . . with a tremendous sensual endowment." Put shorter, as Frank Harris does in conversation, the description is more pungent and more true. But he should have emphasized the fact that Rodin has no power of speech whatever. I once went to stay with him to study him for a book that I was writing, and I looked to him for Views on Art. He told me nothing that his own gardener did not know. And this is the great strength of Rodin. His mind has not been spoiled by education. Almost the only thing of interest that he told me was that in order to study his Balzac he furnished himself with all possible documents and portraits, and made laborious sketches from this material. After all that nonsense, the God in him suddenly asserted itself; he threw everything out of the window and produced the masterpiece we know, which is no more like Balzac than it is like Pontius Pilate, but which is the very incarnation of "La Comédie Humaine." All the things that Rodin is supposed to have said about art are the inventions of parasitic journalists. It reminds one of the story of Harry Vardon, when he had to write his book on golf. Three literary persons, waiting for "copy," foregathered in the master's cottage with plenty of pens, ink, and paper. After about an hour's continuous smoking, the great golfer removed his pipe and said: "Gentlemen, golf is a very funny game." There the book began and ended. It had to be written without the co-operation of the author.

This great book ends finally with the study of Anatole France. The sketch is very slight, but it is extraordinarily endowed with insight and just appreciation.

To conclude, I wish to emphasize the fact that this book is no mere collection of sketches, hastily drawn and hurriedly flung together. It has a value for all time. It will last historically as not merely the best, but the only attempt to formulate sane judgments, based on perception of eternal truth, concerning the great men of the period. These estimates will endure; for not only are they on practically every point so right that I have no doubt whatever that time will endorse them to the full, but they are carved so richly and delicately in such pure marble that if every word of them were a lie, the book would still stand on its own base as a monument, if not of its modes, then of the figure of Frank Harris.

