

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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VOL. XXXVI (No. 3)

MARCH, 1922

NO. 790

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## The Open Court Publishing Company

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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT.

BY LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS.

THE centenary of Gustave Flaubert was worthily commemorated by his native city, Rouen. Time has changed the local viewpoint toward the prophet's fame which persisted even after the author's death in 1880. For although he died one of the unassailable glories of France, Norman thrift allowed his villa on the Seine, once the country-house of the monks of Saint Ouen, to be sold for a factory site; a huge chimney—ironic monument—now stands where *Flaubert* wrote *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*; a pillar of smoke replaces the gleam of the student's lamp which until dawn served to guide the belated fisherman to shore. Only the Louis XV pavilion on the river-bank is left, preserved through a national subscription by the piety of a second generation, to be made, some fifteen years ago, the "Musée Flaubert"; the little house where he lounged and smoked, musing perhaps on the Orient of his dreams, and which drew back his thoughts to his Normandy home from the far waters of the Nile, is become the shrine of a martyr to art, who left his mark upon the form of nearly all our contemporary novels.

Flaubert's birthplace has had a better fate than the manor at Croisset. We still possess the gloomy old Hôtel-Dieu of Rouen, where he passed his early years, a naïve, meditative child who would sit for hours with finger in mouth, rapt in reverie. His father, surgeon-in-chief of the hospital, was of Champenois stock, his mother Norman and herself the daughter of a physician who had married into a noble family. Here perhaps we touch the source of Flaubert's sensitive pride. But the Hippocratic stamp left only an analytic tendency; it was his brother, nine years older, who succeeded his father. In Gustave the genius of science was long to struggle with the spirit of dream, the Champenois exuberance to combat the melancholy, idealistic and obstinate Norman. Phy-

sically the latter element predominated; he looked like a young Viking.

It was this contrasted nature which made him love *Don Quirote*, read to him at nine, which lead him to plan stories based upon it, and plays which were acted on his father's billiard table. The first misspelled letter of his correspondence reveals the future writer, divided between imagination and analysis. "If you wish to join with me in writing", he proposes to a boy friend in 1830, "I will write comedies and you shall write your dreams, and as there is a lady who comes to our house and who always talks silly things, I will write them." But eager for self-expression as he was, little Gustave proved not otherwise precocious. He was nearly nine when he learned to read; his sister, three years younger, had to set the example. At school he did not lead his form, except in history and later in philosophy. Mathematics he never understood. He hated the fixed hours, the discipline; he was a born individualist. Boyishly, he boasts to a friend that he has not even tried to see the king, who visited Rouen in 1833. Of course this is a bit of borrowed Romantic liberalism; the Romantic tide has quite bowled him over. At thirteen he starts a novel in the style of Dumas, and bored by his chum's absence, writes: "If I didn't have in my head and at my pen-point a French queen of the fifteenth century, I should be completely disgusted with life and long since a bullet would have delivered me from this mad farce which is called life."

One smiles, for the contagion of romantic rhetoric is always humorous. But the disease itself was serious; French schools, naturally classical and then intent upon pleasing a reactionary bureaucracy, had forbidden their students to read *Werther*, *Byron Faust*, *et hoc genus omne*. They had created a new sin, and rebellious adolescence never failed to take a new sin seriously. Long after, the novelist wrote: "I know not what schoolboys' dreams are now, but ours were superbly extravagant. . . . Whilst enthusiastic souls longed for dramatic passions, with gondolas, black masks, and noble ladies swooning in post-chaises amid the Calabrian hills, a few heroes, more sombre, aspired to the tumult of the press or the tribune, the glory of conspirators. . . . But we were not merely lovers of the Middle Ages, of the Orient, of revolt, we were above all things lovers of art; tasks ended, literature would begin; we ruined our eyes reading novels in the dormitories, we carried daggers in our pockets like Antony, nay more, through dis-



gust with life, B—blew out his brains with a pistol, A—hanged himself with his cravat; little praise was ours, certainly; but what hatred of all platitudes! what soarings toward grandeur! what respect for the classics! how we admired Victor Hugo!"

So Flaubert wrote novels and dramas at school, beginning at fourteen his twenty year apprenticeship for the writing of *Madame Bovary*. There are three volumes of these posthumous *Oeuvres de Jeunesse*; the first two, composed before he was twenty, show strange beginnings for the future precursor of Naturalism. Characteristic titles are *Loys XI, Rage and Impotence, A Dream of Hell, The Dance of the Dead, Agonies, November*; and hardly a page falls below the lurid promise of the captions. With adolescence the influence of morbid Romanticism becomes more than a pose; it colors his whole view of life with a melancholy and a feeling of moral solitude which his favorite Rabelais is unable to conquer except in moments of purely youthful expansion. With them combined in 1836 a passion for a lady ten years his senior, which is recounted in the Wertheresque *Memoirs of a Madman*. This unspoken adoration saved him from the venal loves of youth, and served in the plot of the second *Sentimental Education*.

Indeed the germs of nearly all his works may be found in the letters of this period and the Juvenilia. The mystery play *Smarh* of 1839 is a sketch for the *Temptation of Saint Anthony*; the very first letter reveals the interest in human stupidity which produced *Bouvard and Pécuchet*; *Salammbô* expresses his Romantic longing for the Orient and his love of antiquity seen in the essay *Rome and the Caesars*; *Madam Bovary* crystallizes the disillusion left by all his youthful debauch of Romantic dreams: "I have laid waste my heart with a lot of factitious things."

One could hardly expect that such a boy would take kindly to the study of the law, which seemed to his family the most practical career for him. Worry over the matter affected his health; he was sent South with a friend of his father's, Dr. Cloquet. Two months were spent on this journey, which included the Pyrenees, Provence and Corsica, and which only intensified his desire for other lands. Back in Rouen he wrote: "A fig for Normandy and our fair France. Ah, how I should like to live in Spain, in Italy or even in Provence. . . . I think I was born elsewhere, for I have always had a sort of memory or instinct for balmy shores, for blue seas. I was born to be emperor of Cochin-China, to smoke pipes thirty

fathoms long, to have 6,000 wives, scimitars to chop off the heads of people whose faces I don't like . . . and I have nothing but huge insatiable desires, an atrocious emui and yawnings without end."

Paris itself failed to distract him; the law bored him profoundly, and the vulgar gaieties of the Latin Quarter drove him to his room, to console his exile by copious letters to his sister.

To a friend concerned over his approaching examinations he replies: "Do I long to be successful, I, to be a great man? a man known in a district, in three provinces, a thin man, a man with a weak digestion? . . . All that seems to me very dismal . . . and were it only to be singular, it is a good thing now to leave all that to the scum, who are forever pushing themselves. . . . As for us, let us stay at home, let us watch the public pass from the height of our balcony; and if from time to time we are over-bored, well, let us spit on their heads, and then calmly continue our talk, and watch the sun setting in the west."

The expected happened. Flaubert was absolutely confused before the examiners; he collapsed utterly; and when after vacation the time came to return for a second trial, he was seized with that hysterico-epileptic attack which was to confirm his solitary misanthropy by making him withdraw from life. To lie for months in forced inaction, humoring nerves which at the least sensation "tremble like violin-strings", to be denied all excitement, all stimulant, even his cherished pipe, to endure the violent bleeding, starving and purging then used as treatment, was enough to make a sensitive youth irritable and to darken his outlook upon a world he did not fit. His nerves were unequal to life in the market-place. A need of avoiding all feeling—or shall we say the reality of his pain?—seems to have bred a disgust for Romantic subjectivity which gave him a more objective and intellectual taste in reading. His favorite books are now Montaigne, Rabelais, Régnier and LeSage; he adores Voltaire and has read *Candide* twenty times; he re-reads Tacitus and plans to re-read Homer and Shakespeare. He is growing up; the third volume of his *Oeuvres de Jeunesse*, written from 1842 to 1845, is a new, if abortive, attempt to write an objective novel (the first *Sentimental Education*); and its hero Jules shows us by what discipline Flaubert overcame his life of romantic subjectivity.

His sister married in 1845, and as all the family accompanied the wedded pair on their honeymoon journey, Gustave saw Provence

again and with it something of North Italy. At Milan, regretting the blue Mediterranean and longing for the East, his relapse into lyricism convinced him of the danger in travel for the young writer; his present duty was "to rid himself of everything really intimate, original, individual . . . to shut himself up in art and count all else for naught, since pride replaces all." His decision is made, and "unregretful of riches or love of the flesh, he has said to practical life an irrevocable adieu." Back at Croisset, he finds a new peace in his settled future, a calm exempt from laughter or gloom. He is "mature", and like a good workman, can now pound away at his anvil without care of the weather, confident that the will which has helped him accomplish this change is going to carry him further. He has learned "one thing, that happiness for men of his stamp lies in *the Idea* and not elsewhere." And with this he is advancing toward realistic objectivity: "There are actions, voices, that I cannot get over, and inanities which almost make me reel."

But his exasperated sensitiveness was not long allowed this escape into things external. Hardly had the family moved to Croisset, just purchased, when his father died, and three months later his sister Caroline, after giving birth to a daughter. Flaubert's grief was terrible, and his reaction upon it characteristic. A born pessimist, he notes his early prevision that "life was like a sickly smell of cooking escaping from a ventilator. One has no need to have eaten to know that it will nauseate. . . . My last misfortunes have saddened me, but have not surprised me. Without taking anything from my feelings, I have analysed them like an artist. . . . It is said that religious people bear the troubles of this world better than ourselves, but the man who is convinced of the great harmony, who hopes for the annihilation of his body while his soul will return to sleep in the bosom of the great whole . . . that man is tortured no more."

It is not grief which has made him a literary Buddhist. It is his readings for the *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, begun in 1845. No less than Leconte de Lisle, Flaubert becomes infatuated with the Hindus, borrows books from Paris, quotes Sakya Mouni on the grief which comes from attaching oneself to others and the necessity of solitude. But at twenty-five he, too, would have been a saint had he been consistent. Buried in the history of religions, Greek, and Latin, striving to live in the antique world and "daily growing more devoted to the classics", he forgets that the death of his sister

and the marriage of his bosom-friend, LePoittevin, have left him undefended against the Cyprian queen. This young recluse was destined to love and to suffer, and it was Madame Louise Colet, met during one of the visits to Paris with which he broke the tedium of long stays at Croisset, who inherited the vacant place he had already begun to feel in his heart.

They met at Pradier's studio—a sort of artistic and literary salon, frequented by Flaubert since his student days. Madame Colet was a literary lady some ten years older than he, but still very beautiful; she knew every celebrity in Bohemian Paris; she was in fact a Romantic Muse. Within ten days she and Flaubert called each other thee and thou; repeatedly she sent him orange-blossoms in her letters, but he had the resolution to keep her a Romantic Muse, refusing to desert his mother still sunk in her double grief, in order to live with his lady in Paris. His work too held him at Croisset; indeed, he is soon writing her mostly at week-ends, "keeping her in the shop-parlor of his heart until Sundays come." Interrupted by only occasional visits to Paris and by his travels, their correspondence lasted for eight years; it is a curious mixture of wildly romantic love, merciless self-dissection, discussions of Art and literature or corrections of his lady's verses. Flaubert certainly loved her to adoration, but he always loved art more.

Within nine months occurred several attacks of his malady; *quibus nervi dolent Venus inimica*. In May 1847 his Parisian friend DuCamp took him away for a walking trip through the Châteaux-country and Brittany. This pilgrimage of three months was to be recounted by each in turn, chapter by chapter, in a semi-humorous journal, digressive and aggressive. Flaubert's half was published after his death under the original title: *Par les Champs et par les Grèves*. A mixture of impartial observation and pungent comment, with bursts of rhetoric worthy of Châteaubriand, its personal tone makes this volume dear to lovers of the real Flaubert, so carefully hidden in his acknowledged works. In these vivid pages, one feels the student, the artist and the lover of the past. At each castle or cathedral, he delights in reliving the days entombed there; like men and their passions, these relics are magnified for him by memory, completed by the death of those who made them shrines. There is a constant sense of reality, of exact detail, in the monument or landscape, but there is also a consciousness of

the ironic indifference of Nature to man's crumbling works, which suffuses the whole with restrained romantic feeling.

The following spring came the death of LePoittevin—his literary Mentor, a philosophical and lyrical spirit, to whose encouragement we probably owe *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Curiously, Flaubert's realistic books are always followed by romantic ones. After the first *Sentimental Education* and the Brittany journal, the Romanticist in him was eager to escape from contemporary life into the past, from the Occident into the Orient. A painting by Breughel, seen at Genoa in 1845, had revived the inspiration of his old mystery play; the lover of *Faust*, who at his first reading "had ceased to feel the world beneath him"—the Old Adam he had tried so hard to subdue—came to the front again. "What is natural to me is the non-natural for others, the extraordinary, the fantastic, the clarion voice of metaphysics and mythology." The subject moreover haunted him; it had to be worked out; only thus could he rid himself of its obsession. So Flaubert, who loved to repeat Michelet's motto: "Nothing tempting but the impossible," began this masterpiece of dream-literature, not to be published until 1874. He made the legend of Saint Anthony a vision of dying religions: all modes of life and thought and belief—all the gods from remotest antiquity to the modern divinity Science—pass before the half-dazed anchorite, a mad procession whose lesson is the vanity of all things beneath the sun. There was no action, and this version was much longer than the final one; it took Flaubert thirty-two hours to read it to Bouilhet and DuCamp, summoned to Croisset for the occasion.

Asked for their verdict when the last sitting was ended, his friends frankly replied: "We think you ought to throw it into the fire and never speak of it again." More alive to actuality than he, they knew that the book was twenty years too late: to begin publishing in 1850 with such a lyrical extravaganza would have been literary suicide. Flaubert, "plutôt vaincu que convaincu", sadly put the manuscript away. Concern for his health, much worse since the death of LePoittevin, now made his mother approve the journey to the East proposed by young DuCamp, and before the end of October the two friends set forth from Marseilles. From the start his letters are for his mother, not his mistress; there is something paternal in these letters, something of the son who later called her "ma fille."

The Eastern journey included Egypt, Syria, Constantinople, Greece and Italy. It was for Flaubert a real debauch of Romanticism, and he made the most of it. At Cairo he had his head shaved and adopted the red fez of the Turks, he tried to learn the cry of the camel, imitated the senile sheik and the howling dervish. He was tremendously impressed by the Pyramids, and the sight of the Sphinx gave him "one of the most vertiginous pleasures of his life." All this was of course to serve him later for the final *Saint Anthony*. They went up the Nile in a native boat, they saw the Red Sea, the Desert, the Thebaïd. He took notes at first, but the wealth of material soon made him stop: "it is better to be all eyes." Yet gorged with colour and thrilled by an exotic existence, he did not get over the verdict on his *Saint Anthony* for nearly four months.

The travellers journeyed by sea to Beyrouth, and from there to Jerusalem, which as usual proved a disappointment. At Damascus Flaubert went to see the lepers, a macabre pleasure which profited him in writing the legend of *Saint Julian the Hospitaller*. At Constantinople, with his face turned homeward, he had wild longings to continue the journey which he himself had shortened, to see Persia, China. The Acropolis moved him more than Jerusalem, and "more sincerely." "Oh the Greeks!" he cries: "what artists! I am breathing-in the antique with all my intellect. The sight of the Parthenon is one of the things which have most impressed me in all my life. Say what you will, art is no falsehood. Let the bourgeois be happy, I do not envy them their stupid felicity."

Yet here too, as in the case of the Sphinx, his emotion wears him out. His aesthetic delight is followed by the same nervous depression: "For all your travelling, you get no gaiety from it." He must see Italy for its art-treasures; he will not pass that way again. But he is plainly sighing for the "concentration" of solitude, for his literary evenings with Bouilhet, who came every Sunday to Croisset for their literary holiday of reading and discussion and mutual criticism; he begs him for his latest verses; he is tormented by lyric desires for "style", which thrill him even to tears. Again he speaks of the Dictionary of Accepted Opinions, which he had planned with Bouilhet in Rouen; his eyes are sharper to catch the stupidities of life; travel has developed his contempt for men by a closer contact. "One takes a deal of trouble to see

ruins and trees, but between the ruin and the tree one finds something quite different, and from all that, landscapes and depravities, results for you a calm and impassive pity." It is easy to see that this voyage was a good preparation for *Madame Bovary*.

They returned to France in May, 1851, and after a visit to England with his family—it was the year of the first Exhibition—Flaubert set to work on his masterpiece. For him the subject was nearly two years old, if we are to believe DuCamp; why is it never mentioned in his travel letters? It had its origin in real life: a certain Delaunay, a medical officer in a small town near Rouen, had been ruined and betrayed by a worthless wife, who died a suicide. As the three friends sat silent in the garden of Croisset the day after the *Saint Anthony* was condemned, Bouilhet had suggested: "Why shouldn't you write the story of Delaunay?" And Flaubert had shaken off his depression and cried "What an idea!"

Thus goes the story in DuCamp's *Souvenirs*, often more picturesque than trustworthy. Be that as it may, Flaubert's originality is indisputable. It was he, and he alone, who made of the obscure medical officer's wife a world-type. For Emma Bovary is not simply a realistic heroine; she is as real as reality. She is not merely a woman, she is woman herself under more than one aspect, and her tragedy is the ever-recurrent tragedy of disillusion. Reflecting her age, she reflects one side of every age, typifies all those whom romantic literature has spoiled for living. She is a martyr to the ideal, a victim of The Book, unable to fight reality in the borrowed armour of poetry. *Madame Bovary* is more than the *Don Quixote* of Romanticism; it is the indictment of life against a large part of our fiction.

But the character of the book only increases our wonder at the miracle of its creation. How could it come from the pen of a Romanticist? Flaubert first denied, but in later life admitted the personal basis: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." In fact all his youthful dreams are there, beheld as through the wrong end of a dusty, distorted opera-glass, reduced to the measure of the weak and futile woman they are to drive down to sordid adultery and defalcation and self-inflicted death. But the characterization is perfect; she is never Flaubert, never the genius; she is always the drifting dreamer; and though typical, she remains throughout an individual. That she is a grandchild of Cervantes' hero is proved by what Flaubert says in letters of this period regarding

the persistence of this early influence on the mature cast of his intellect. As for Sancho Panza, the novelist has given us in his stead a whole group of characters, all bourgeois, all profoundly trivial, yet so absolutely distinguished that some have passed into literature and are quoted like real persons. Herein lies the triumph of the book, which took five years to write, and the writing of which the author compared to playing the piano with balls of lead tied to his fingers. To inform with life his heroine was as nothing to this stupendous creation; the actor in Flaubert had to "palpitate with the emotions" of characters which at times actually gave him fits of nausea. The day he "poisoned" his heroine, he vomited twice, and could not get rid of the imagined taste of arsenic in his mouth.

To walk the hair-line between twin gulfs of lyricism and vulgarity—that is how the novelist expresses the difficulty of his task in a letter to Madame Colet. Unusually full until their separation in 1854, this correspondence certainly provided an outlet for the writer's personality; we know how many poets have been made objective by a satisfied passion. Flaubert is now conscious of his two literary selves, "one in love with rhetoric and lyricism" and the other "a digger and seeker after truth, who loves to give relief to detail, who would like to make you feel *almost materially* the things he is reproducing." There the conflict is stated, and the constant struggle involved in this project—a struggle which cries out from almost every page of the letters—shows the book is a veritable triumph of will.

The reward of this pursuit of reality was the author's indictment for writing an "immoral" book, his trial and condemnation to pay a sum far greater than the price for which he sold it, only 400 francs. It seems that Flaubert was largely the victim of a censorship irritated by the political attitude of the *Revue de Paris*, which first published the novel in 1856. More disgusted than ever, he again declared that the artist must hold aloof from the mob and write for himself alone. So, after correcting the *Saint Anthony*, he put it aside as likely to bring him into further trouble. Months before *Madame Bovary* was finished, he had been sighing for a romantic subject, something allowing free scope to his long-repressed love of colour. The letters show him reading for the *Saint Julian*, but that too is given up for the time being. Finally he announces: "I am going to write a novel whose action



will take place three centuries before Christ. I feel the need of quitting this modern world, in which my pen has dipped too long, and which moreover tires me as much to reproduce as it disgusts me to behold." The result of this was *Salammbô*.

We remember his first historical novel, and the queen of France who saved him from suicide. Then it was the later Middle Ages or the Renaissance which fired his inspiration; now, with those veins exhausted by a host of novelists, Flaubert, after Gautier, reverted to an age more remote and more exotic. Not history but the young science of archaeology pointed the way, and Gautier had been quick to follow with his splendidly plastic classical and Egyptian tales. Why not then a Carthaginian romance? The task was certainly hard enough to be tempting, even to Flaubert: if he had in Polybius an outline of his subject, the War with the Mercenaries, this bare skeleton had to be clothed with flesh and muscle, draped in barbaric colours, vitalized with Punic ferocity. What better field for a poetic imagination?

It was as a scholar however that the historian of Emma Bovary attacked the problem. He spent months in gathering material. In two weeks, for instance, he "swallowed" the eighteen volumes of Cahen's translation of the Bible, together with the notes, finding in them not a few precious details for costumes, architecture, musical instruments and habits generally. But the mass of the material used was drawn from the classics: Xenophon, Ælian, Pausanias, Athenæus, Pliny, Silvius Italicus, Strabo, Theophrastus, Herodotus, Appian, Plutarch and the whole dusty ant-hill of modern archaeological research had to be ransacked; "one must be stuffed with one's subject up to the ears" in order to paint the local colour which comes without effort and "makes a book exude reality." Like *Madame Bovary*, the novel was to take more than five years of incessant toil, broken only by a visit to Africa in search of his landscapes—a journey which caused him to demolish as false the labour of months.

*Salammbô* has been called a magnificent failure, criticized as too remote, too barbaric, too full of archaeological detail, too lacking in plot despite the mysterious heroine added to provide a love interest. Something of all this is true; the author himself admitted that the statue was too small for the pedestal. But what a pedestal! Flaubert shows us a living Carthage, almost too real in its truculent splendour and cruelty, a Carthage built of gold and ivory

and blood, opulent, exotic, terrible as its god Moloch glutted with children's flesh. Gossip has it that Flaubert was trying, rhetorically, to reproduce the effect of purple, as in his previous book he had sought to render the colour of wood-lice. If gore unstinted will give purple, *Salammbô* fully attains his purpose. The book is an epic nightmare of horrors, with battles, massacres and tortures enough to prove a Freudian reflex to his self-repression; it escapes melodrama only by the muscular tenseness of its diction, the sheer force of a classic style. A masterpiece of scholarship and a triumph of imagination, *Salammbô* will always remain caviare to the general public; Flaubert himself said that he was writing for ten or twelve readers. Yet he obtained with it, in 1863 a *succès de'estime*.

The inevitable reaction followed, announced long before. "The deeper I plunge into antiquity, the more the need of the modern recaptures me," he wrote in 1859; even then he was "cooking up in his brain a mess of ordinary people." This literary ragôût was the final *Sentimental Education*. He did not again spoil things by giving himself a rôle; after twenty years that lesson was learned; indeed, his passion for objective facts and his desire for finality in externals made him plan to set forth the whole "histoire morale" of the men of his generation. For this picture of French society from 1840 to 1852 the scholar turned sociologist, demanding bits of personal experience from friends, spending months over books, newspaper-files and old reviews. The book is invaluable to the historian, but it took Anatole France, with his *Histoire Contemporaine*, to make such novels popular. Again the setting overshadows the actors; even the hero Frédéric, a weaker brother of Emma Bovary, fails to hold our interest; they are half-despicable nonentities, excepting Madame Arnoux who incarnates Flaubert's first love—the one really sympathetic figure in all his books. Characters and style alike are nerveless; the plot drifts aimlessly on the tide of events; one is crushed by the author's fatalism, overcome by the miasma of boredom reflected here from his weary days as student in Paris. His dislike for men was now become contempt, with dire results to artistic relief. Yet there are some who think this book Flaubert's best, because of its absolute reproduction of life in all its vulgar triviality.

Published in 1869, the novel's picture of '48 was soon forgotten in the stress of war and a greater revolution. The Prussian invasion made the writer a patriot; Flaubert in uniform drill-

ing a squad of militia is a pathetic figure dignified only by the tragedy he shared with France. "The Terrible Year" struck him down in his tenderest spot, his pride. "One cannot write when one has lost one's self-esteem." But he did write, mainly to escape the griefs already falling thick and fast upon him. In 1869 Bouilhet had died, his alter ego, "his literary conscience", and to the task of rewriting the *Saint Anthony* was added the duty of editing, with a preface, the poems left by his friend. Not long after the war other companions of letters followed—Jules de Goncourt, Duplan and Sainte-Beuve. In 1872 his mother died, whose self-effacing devotion had so long made possible his literary seclusion, who after his nightly debauches of composition, would keep the house quiet until he rose at eleven—his first unfailing morning visitor, come to sit a moment on the bed of her big boy and ask news of his work or sleep.

In 1872 also passed his brother-at-arms Théophile Gautier. Among the older generation there now remained only Tourgueneff and George Sand; after Bouilhet's death Flaubert had turned instinctively to the latter. He needed affection, and her generous heart, always in want of someone to care for, was quick to call him to its warmest corner. Her letters to him are admirable in affection and counsel; when she too died in 1876, he can only cry: "I have lost my mother a second time." After her death his literary letters are mainly to LePoittevin's nephew, Guy de Maupassant, whom Flaubert trained in his classic art and came to love almost as a son. But he clings most to his old friends, and one is glad that his sister's child, grown up in his home and loved and taught by him for many years, was to save him from the obligatory solitude of old age. When in 1875 this niece faced ruin through her husband's failure in business, Flaubert generously turned over his fortune, £46,000, receiving in return an allowance and a home with her. The needy novelist had to accept a sinecure as librarian to assure his modest luxuries.

The work of this gloomy decade shows no slackening in effort. Completely rewritten after much additional research, the *Temptation of Saint Anthony* failed to win the suffrage of the mob in 1874; two other dramatic ventures were no more successful. Flaubert now planned and began a work of satiric realism, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. Finding this too difficult, he laid it aside in 1876 and wrote his long-projected *Saint Julian the Hospitaller*, a naïve

mediaeval legend inspired by a window in the cathedral at Rouen. After this short tale he returned to modern reality in a longer narration, *A Simple Heart*, the story of a poor rustic maid-servant, tender and devoted throughout a sordid life of toil, turning in love to all that surrounds her and sunk in her illusions to the end. A marvel of restrained pathos, the story shows that for once the novelist has listened to the good advice of George Sand. Next came the classically Oriental *Hérodiad*, with its vivid evocation of the past—a tale much admired and often imitated. It is a fine study of the opposition of races—the religious fanaticism of the Jews, the proud indifference of the world-conquering Romans: every figure of the story is living: Herod sated with vices, the wicked *Hérodiad* and her siren daughter, the fiercely vituperative prophet; the setting has a dazzling brilliance, a magic Syrian colour. These stories were published in 1877 under the title of *Trois Contes*. In artistry if not in significance the volume ranks with *Madame Bovary*; undertaken in a holiday mood, it shows what books Flaubert might have written had he developed the historical tale, instead of leaving it to his disciple and successor Anatole France.

His triptych finished, Flaubert returned to *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the realistic satire in which he hoped to “spew forth his venom” upon a detested world of materialism. Taking as his heroes two middle-aged clerks, copyists both, he shows them spending an unexpected legacy in a mad attempt to satisfy their various desires for knowledge. Ambitious but inept, they “investigate” all the sciences, using stupid and contradictory texts; at each failure their curiosity turns to a new hobby, until, disgusted with the collapse of everything in their hands, they resolve to copy again as before. The two decide to set down (all) the silly and impossible things that books have shown them, for they hope by comparison to arrive at truth. This was to be the Dictionary of Accepted Opinions conceived by Flaubert in 1850, the book “which will make the reader no longer dare to speak for fear of uttering some of its platitudes.” It is a satire of human stupidity, nihilistic as all his books except *Salammbô*; after treating the vanity of religions, of romantic love, of modern politics, Flaubert wished to show the vanity of education made universal, the democratic dream; and for this monument to folly he read 1500 volumes and piled up a stack of notes eight inches high. Some think that this unique creation alone definitely proves his genius; others,

expanding a *boutade* of his own, that he had become "bête" by contagion. Obviously we cannot decide the matter, for this "book of his revenge" was destined never to be finished. The first half was not quite completed when the eighth of May, 1880, Flaubert fell dead of apoplexy at the foot of his desk, "hurrying desperately", as he tells us in his last published letter, and "weary even to the marrow."

He died a martyr to art, regretting like all old bachelors the children and especially the grandchildren foregone by his celibacy, confessing to George Sand the folly of his choice and its reason: "I was afraid of life." But this fear was reasoned, the effect of his malady; he was no weak character, like Amiel. Pride had early taught him how to overcome the timidity inherent in all imaginative natures. A mere boy, he cured himself of dread of the dark and dizziness when on a height—prowling in the school court-yard at dead of night, climbing steeples and walking on high balustrades. Even then Flaubert showed the will-power and virility which were to sustain him in his double battle with disease and with the muse. It is this which makes him, a grown man, keep at his Latin and Greek until he can read them, and which explains his victory over a natural lyricism. Will, supported by pride, gave him force to die a martyr to art.

His life has the unity of a great purpose. "I have always lived without distractions", he tells Louise Colet. "I was born with a lot of vices which have never put their heads out of the window. I am fond of gaming and have never touched a card. I like dissipation and I live like a monk . . . My life has never balked from the days when I could only write by asking my nurse for the necessary letters, down to this evening when the ink is drying on my corrections. I have followed a straight line, constantly prolonged and direct, through everything, and have always seen the goal retreat before me from year to year. How many times, between advances, have I fallen flat just as I seemed to reach it. Yet I feel that I am not destined to die until I have left somewhere a clarion style such as I hear in my brain, which may well rise above the voices of the parrots and locusts."

When he wrote this, he had not published a word. Yet he felt he was one of the Olympians. Before he died, he knew it. For twenty years he worked in obscurity, studying for hours each day at the fountain-head of antiquity, analyzing the great French writ-

ers to learn all the resources of his palette. It was the ideal which delayed him, not the conflicting forces of his environment and his literary heredity, confusing as they were. "My admiration of the masters increases as I progress," he tells us, "and far from losing hope at that crushing parallel, it strengthens on the contrary my unconquerable whim to write." He remembers the maxim on the identity of patience and genius, and cries: "Would to God that Buffon's impious speech were true! I should be sure to be one of the first!"

He knew all the martyr's joys. If he sacrificed all to his religion, he glimpsed in days of enthusiasm "a state of soul superior to life, oblivious of glory and happiness"; he strove to attain an aesthetic stoicism, and actually lived for days rapt in the world of his fancy. With all his vexations, he "would not exchange his life for anything." "I love my work with a love frantic and perverse as an anchorite's", he exclaims; begs his mistress to "save the essence of her passion for her poetry, for Art is great enough to use the whole of a man." Through Art he attains the secret of the mystics; "constant looking at the sky will give the seeker wings."

Critics have exaggerated the price he paid; it was only the price we all pay for the exclusive pursuit of a single end in a World of the Many. If his art, his solitude and his ambitions exasperated his sensibility, if he died a perfect misanthrope, content to be alone "because he then heard no stupidities", would he have found the pin-pricks of family life or the amenities of politics more endurable? He had a devoted mother, and he had friends to the end, for he was above all a friend; and they were always glad to receive him. But even in his last years, in his greatest literary loneliness, he refuses to visit Madame Sand in her lovely country-seat at Nohant, because he knows from experience that a visit would cost him three months of reveries, filling his brain with real images instead of the fictitious ones he had built up so laboriously. To regret that he never married may please the sentimentalist, but Flaubert knew that he was "a man-pen", destined to find ink "his natural element", that "thoughts and books and literary conversations of five and six hours with LePoincvin" were the things he best remembered, and that for him, as he superbly tells Colet, "living had no concern." He died a solitary, but not without love, and as he thought with gratitude of the masters whose silent company had helped to make him a master, so his tenderness often

went out to the strangers, to the unborn who were to share his dreams. He did not die childless; no artist can read his books and his letters unconscious of his kinship with that Don Quixote of Art. As Flaubert himself said: "A book creates for you a family which will never die; all those who shall live in your thoughts are like children eating at your hearth-stone."