

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

VOL. XXXV (No. 11)

NOVEMBER, 1921

NO. 786

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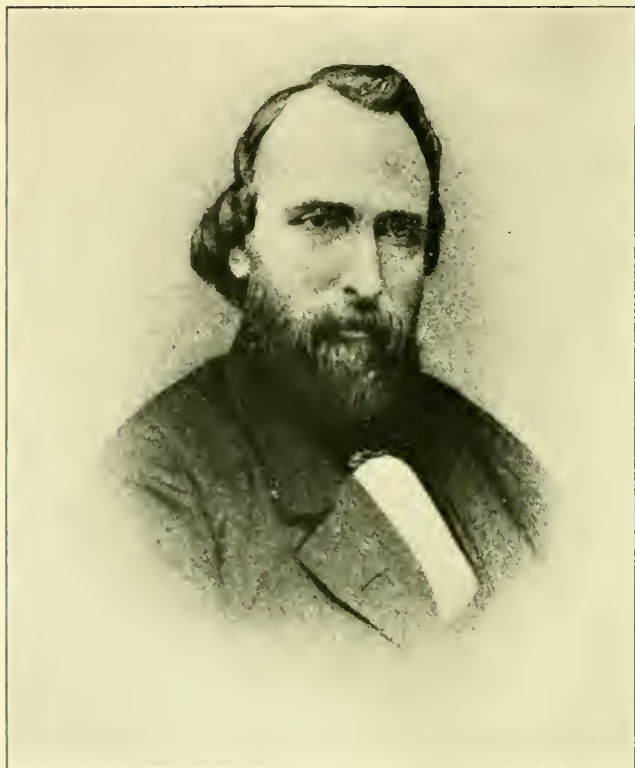
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HENRI-FREDERIC AMIEL, 1821-1881.

BY LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS.

NOT often are we called upon to record the centenary of a school teacher. It is a melancholy fact that the teacher passes like the musician or the actor—though hardly so noisily; and even were he a clarion voice as well as a storehouse of the world's experience, his reputation dies with the memory of that voice. To leave more than a bronze tablet on a wall is given only to the scholar, the actor-dramatist, the musical composer: *littera scripta manet*. But the professor of whom we speak left no monument of scholarship and no mark as a teacher; while the half-dozen little volumes of verse which he offered to the Muses fell one by one into oblivion, silently as autumn leaves in some frozen abyss of his native Alps.

Henri-Frédéric Amiel was the child of autumn, fated to suffer from her early frosts. Born at Geneva, the twenty-seventh of September, 1821, a son of French parents and a grandson of Huguenot refugees, he was destined to lose his mother at the end of 1832, his father in mid-autumn of the second year after, and to grow up, in his uncle's house, apart from the sisters he dearly loved. Yet the education given him was lacking in nothing that seemed needful to develop a talent already manifest; he traveled for many months in Italy and France; he spent four years in Germany, at Heidelberg and in the University of Berlin. At twenty-eight he returned, half-loath, to Geneva, won a *concours* for a vacant chair in the Academy, and there for more than thirty years he taught philosophy, publishing at intervals several short essays and the books of verse mentioned above. Never married, knowing the joys of a family life only in the house of his sister—where he lived for eighteen years—a valetudinarian and a solitary, with few intimates, wholly unrecognized by cultivated Genevans—who classed

him with the radicals to whom he owed his appointment—he knew all the isolation of the professor, and died as he had lived, obscure. But he left a journal of 17,000 pages, which friends reduced to a thirtieth of its bulk and published as he had directed; another friend, the eminent Swiss critic Scherer, prefixed to this selection the essay which planted on an humble grave the laurel of posthumous fame. Given to the world immediately after his death, Amiel's *Fragments d'un Journal Intime* prove both the positive value of friendship and the potential value of isolation.

I.

All confession is interesting, if the writer have the gift of original thought, or vivid sensations, or imaginative style. Endowed with all these gifts and fusing all in the glow of a high spirituality, Amiel fascinates and absorbs the mind curious of other minds. For such readers indeed he lives again in his diary, more real and more convincing than the personality of many a living friend. Although a tragedy of impotence, this record is so full of poetry, so full of pathos in its self-acknowledged weakness, so imbued with idealistic yearning, so heroic in its pictured battle with encroaching infirmity, that it cannot leave unimpressed even those of an opposite temperament, as we may see in the case of Matthew Arnold. Amiel's was a mind too fine ever to attain popularity, were it possible thus to estimate genius. But happily we have not quite reached the age when pint-measures may use the right of majorities to reject all that they cannot individually contain.

The *Journal Intime* is the mirror of a soul, a soul of especial distinction, and absolutely sincere. Except in Rousseau's Confessions, we have nowhere else in modern literature so careful and unsparing a "portrait of the writer". A philosophical spirit, Amiel naturally paints a psychological likeness, and the dairy form gives us progressive "states" like those of an etching. Let us try to exhibit the first "state", to see this portrait at thirty, before the burin of fate and the aquafortis of thought have ploughed the lines of failure there. This is the moment when he returned from Germany, "loaded down with knowledge", as Scherer describes him, "but carrying his burden lightly; charming in physiognomy, animated in conversation and without affectation. Young and alert, he seemed to be entering upon his career as a conqueror", to hold all

the keys to the future. What lay behind this brilliant exterior may be seen in the Journal.

He came back from Berlin aflame with philosophic idealism, dazzled by the infinite vistas of Hegelian thought, rapt in the august serenity of days when, rising before the dawn to study or meditate, he would light his lamp and go to his desk as to an altar. There, he aspired to "look down upon life and himself from the farthest star", to view the world *sub specie aeterni*, secure in the consciousness that he too is a part of infinity. But in Geneva he found an atmosphere far different from that of university days, an atmosphere which would have chilled had it been free from all hostility. And Amiel, never physically robust, was quick to feel discouragement. Four days after his examination he writes—possibly in doubt as to its issue: "I have never felt the inward assurance of genius, or a presentiment of glory or happiness." This is for him a sign of his incapacity; his part in life is "to let the living live and draw up the testament of his mind and his heart", in a diary which may at least justify that life to posterity.

Yet to him, as to all of us, ambition called. Musing on the death of great men he had known, he heard the summons of fate to mount the rostrum in his turn. The expedient of a journal was but a compromise with his divided impulses, a compromise between the artist and the philosopher. It was the sort of postponement of hard creative effort one expects from the latter, living his real life in books; with Amiel, the philosopher's passion for speculation involved a veritable horror of action. Believing that "every hope is an egg which may bring forth a serpent instead of a dove", he finds reality "repugnant or even terrifying, and the life of ideas alone sufficiently elastic, immense, and free from the irreparable." The absolute poisons all attainment which falls short of his dream: "what might be, spoils for me what is, what ought to be, fills me with sadness."

Thus the idealist justifies a real defect of character, resting upon a deeper cause. For like all the imaginative who are not gifted with something of Balzac's gross sanguine exuberance, Amiel was at heart timid—though he does not admit the word. "I have no trust in myself, no trust in happiness, because I know myself." To know oneself too well at twenty-seven may prove intellectual acumen, but it means despair. The physical force of youth gives merciful spectacles of rose-color to most men's eyes, or the world

would cease to exist. Not so with Aniel. "All that compromises the future or destroys my inward liberty, all that subjects me to things, or that assails my notion of a complete man, wounds me to the heart, even in anticipation." Finally, the boundary of thirty passed, he comes out frankly. "Responsibility is my nightmare. To suffer through one's own fault is a torment of the damned, for grief is envenomed by the sense of the ridiculous, and the worst of that sense is to shame one in one's own sight." Yes, as he says, he expiated his privilege of viewing as a spectator the drama of his life, of watching his rôle upon the stage with the passive self-detachment of a mind familiar with the whole tragedy, a mind in the confidence of the Author. He will not act in order to preserve his freedom, but of what use is a freedom save by abstention from living?

We must not, however, dwell too long upon the shadows of the portrait. This is no misanthrope, cloistered in selfishness, but a man of heart and sense, vibrant to all the manifold beauty of life, and describing his impressions with the warmth of a poet. Like Faust, he loves to refresh a soul weary of thought in a bath of nature; the dawn and the night alike speak to him; dewy sunrise gives its translucent energy to his mind, the starry sky of midnight tells him of the infinite of his constant pursuit. Some of these pages are prose-poems. "Walked half an hour in the garden in a gentle rain", runs one of them. "A landscape of autumn. Sky hung with grey enfolded in various tones, mists trailing over the mountains of the horizon, the melancholy of nature. The leaves were falling on all sides like the last illusions of youth beneath the tears of irremediable grief. A brood of chattering birds were chasing each other through the shrubberies, and playing games among the branches, like a knot of hiding schoolboys. The ground strewn with leaves, brown, yellow and reddish, the trees half stripped, wearing tatters of dark red, scarlet and yellow, the shrubs and the bushes growing russet; a few flowers lingering, roses, nasturtiums and dahlias with dripping petals, the bare fields, the thinned hedges, the fir-tree alone vigorous green, stoical—eternal youth braving decay—all these innumerable and marvelous symbols which forms, colors, plants and living beings, the earth and the sky, offer unceasingly to the eye which knows how to look: all seemed to me filled with charm and significance. I held a poet's wand and had but

to touch a phenomenon to have it tell me its moral symbol. Every landscape is a state of the soul."

His attitude toward nature is in fine a romantic one: in most of these pictures one discovers the observer's mind, with its joy or its pain or its self-questioning. His sympathy with nature is not all-sufficient: at thirty, the approach of May fills him with the languors of adolescence. "This morning the poetry of spring, the songs of the birds, the tranquil sunlight and the breeze from the fresh green fields—all rose within me and filled my heart. Now everything is silent. O silence, thou art terrible! Thou showest us in ourselves abysses which make us giddy, needs never to be satisfied. . . . Welcome tempests! Welcome the storms of passion, for the waves they left within us veil the bottomless depths of the soul. In all of us, children of dust, eternity inspires an involuntary anguish, and the infinite a mysterious terror: they seem to us like the kingdom of the dead. Poor heart, thou cravest life, love, illusions; and thy craving is right, for life is sacred." All of Amiel is seen in this reaction to spring at thirty—the price he paid for his monastic intellectual ideal no less than its joys. For he continues: "In these moments of personal converse with the infinite, what a different look life assumes! We seem to ourselves mere marionettes, puppets playing in all seriousness a fantastic show, holding gewgaws as things of great worth. Berkeley and Fichte are right in such moments, Emerson too; the world is but an allegory, the ideal has more reality than the fact; fairy-stories and legends are as true as natural history, and even more true, for they are symbols of more transparency. The only real substance is the soul: consciousness alone is actual and immortal: the world is but a piece of fireworks, a sublime phantasmagoria destined for the soul's delight and education. Consciousness is a universe, and its sun is love."

He should of course have married—espoused an active affection instead of a journal which made him feel at times as abstract as its own pages. Instead of that he only plunged the deeper into study and meditation. The page continues: "already I am falling back into the objective life of thought. It delivers me—no, say rather it deprives me—of the inner life of feeling: reflection dissolves reverie and burns its delicate wings. . . . Ah! let us feel, let us live and not analyse for ever. Let life have its way with us. . . . Shall I never have a woman's heart to rest upon? a son in

whom I can live again, a little world where I can let all I hide within me come to bloom? I draw back in dread, for fear of breaking my dream; I have staked so much on this card that I dare not play it. Let me dream on."

It is an "ideal" love for which he is reserving himself—"the love which shall live by all the soul's forces and in all its fibres". Believing that only such a passion could fix and condense his hopes and energies, not finding in his feminine friendships this miracle of personal transformation, he waits, "calling for this grave and serious love", fearful of "mismating his soul." At thirty and in the materialistic eighteen fifties, he still cherishes the romantic dream of an elective affinity. In fact his whole mind is incurably dyed in Romanticism. His melancholy uses at times the very language of Lamartine; his pessimism that of Obermann. Amiel is at heart one of the disenchanted sons of Werther and René; like the French Romantics, he is a Latin soul poisoned by too much cosmopolitanism—by too deep a draught of a heady Northern vintage, unfamiliar and toxic to one naturally a dreamer.

This heritage of Romanticism, no less than his idealistic longing is a cause of his spiritual isolation. Reaching maturity in the dawn of the Age of Science, when man dreamed of solving the riddle of life by the conquest of facts, he cannot take to his heart this new deity, illumined only by the cold white light of the *amor intellectualis*. He feels the need of a warmer ideal, the lack of a cult and a church wherein he may content his whole nature, in a communion no longer solitary. "My religious needs are not satisfied", he confesses, "they are like my need of society and my need of affection". He consoled himself by a manly resignation, evolving a sort of Christian stoicism. For Amiel the religious view-point alone could give dignity to life, energy for living. "One can only conquer the world in the name of Heaven". He means the victory of renunciation: even at thirty he shows the Buddhistic leaning so evident in his later years. "Human life is but the preparation and the way to the life of the spirit. So keep vigil, disciple of life, chrysalis of an immortal being; labor for your escape to come. The divine journey is but a series of metamorphoses ever more ethereal. . . . A series of successive deaths—that is the life divine."

Such is Amiel at the end of his third decade: a thinker and a poet; a man buried in self, yet ever seeking escape from feeling in the objective world of thought; a student and a dreamer, torn by

the poet's desire for expression, yet fearful of the limitations of cold print: a mystic and an idealist, absorbed in the Absolute and disdainful of all else: "nothing finite is true, is interesting, is worthy of fixing my thoughts." His youthful portrait is no figure to inspire commiseration: faults recognized may be corrected or at least subdued by a personal adjustment. Rather does he arouse our envy of his keenness, of his range of thought, of his imaginative power. Where else can we find pages of such a cosmic sweep? What would we not give to share his visions, "divine moments, hours of ecstasy in which the soul flies from world to world, unravels the great enigma, breathes as largely, easily and deeply as the respiration of the ocean, floats serene and limitless as the blue firmament"? At such times, it was his to know "the tranquil intoxication, if not the authority, of genius, in those moments of irresistible intuition when a man feels great as the universe and calm as a god!"

II.

An etching in the "first state", lightly sketched, ethereal, rich in possibilities, is a delightful thing, a thing to set one dreaming. But the "second state" is more significant, for thereafter lines can rarely be added to alter the expression of the drawing. What happens to our portrait of Amiel in the next ten years, so vital in every life? What new lines are added by the graver, what shadowy promises defined beyond all hope of change, by that long immersion in the corrosive acid of his thought?

The lines lacking were recognisable by the artist, although the portrait on his easel was his own. No illusion clouded the mirror of his introspective vision. Deficient in will, he might have found a substitute in imagination and its emotive force, as he in fact divined. "What seems impossible to us is often only a quite subjective impossibility. The soul in us, under the influence of the passions, produces by a strange mirage gigantic obstacles, mountains and abysses which stop us short. Breathe upon the passions and that phantasmagoria will vanish." But he feared passion for its bottomless gulf, its vertigo. "Our liberty floats wavering over this void which is always seeking to engulf it. Our only talisman is our concentrated moral force, the conscience." Timidity and a protestant conscience are the bonds of his inhibition.

His timidity it was that kept him from marrying, in his middle thirties, the muse so deeply regretted in the sonnet beginning: "Tout m'attirait verstoff".

Que n'eût pas fait alors ta tendresse, ô Sirène!
 De tout ce qui languit dans mon coeur soucieux?
 Ton amour m'eût donné tout, même le génie!
 Quand il venait à moi, pourquoi l'ai-je évité?
 Hélas! c'est un secret de tristesse infinie.
 L'effroi de ce que j'aime est ma fatalité:
 Je n'ai compris que tard cette loi d'ironie....
 Le Bonheur doit m'avoir, tout jeune, épouvanté!

This was the one serious love of his life, regretted ever afterwards by the lover who had not dared to decide. But he celebrated the lady's marriage in fitting verses before he returned to his books, in a home where a sister's love and the presence of two little nephews mitigated his loneliness. After all it was a spiritual loneliness, and he knew now, that souls were in their inner essence, impenetrable to other souls. At forty, his solitary fate is sealed; he was to have many feminine friendships and yet remain a Platonist; even the loss of his home and the machinations of wily friends are of no avail. He notes in his diary: "I whose whole being—heart and intellect—thirsts to absorb itself in reality, I whom solitude devours, shut myself up in solitude and seem to take pleasure only in my own mind". According to his own confession, he has let his life be set upside down by his spiritual pride and his timidity; he is "a victim of that instinct of death which works continually to destroy that which wishes to live". He has become the slave of his Calvinistic denial of life.

Nor does the ideal task, longed for as ardently as the ideal mate, present itself to this temporiser, although these ten years saw the publication of two of his six little volumes of moral and philosophical verse. In the first are found a collection of *Pensées*—extracted from his journal—which had he known it, showed him his real path. Extended and given a more personal note, the note first struck by Rousseau and repeated *ad nauseam* in modern "confessions", these pages would have given him celebrity at once. But such a self-revelation during his life-time is impossible to imagine. "Quand le rêve est divin, la réserve est sacrée." The poet, like the

potential lover, fears to speak out. He devotes himself to technique, preferring short lines and intricate verse-forms, which provide difficulties to overcome and "turn his attention from his feeling to his artistry". Shy and timid, he can only "practice scales"; paralyzed by conscience in the guise of literary scrupulousness, he can only put off from day to day the masterpiece he dreams of. The analysis of his infertility concludes, sadly, "I can divine myself, but I do not approve of myself." The reader wonders if the epigram he sharpens against the presumption of so-called latent genius—"what does not come into being, was nothing"—shows confidence in destiny so much as a realization of a fancied mediocrity.

All confession is dangerous, even to a diary, for the mere act of giving expression to a fault in a way absolves. That is the price man extracts from his self-respect. When Amiel ascribes his terror of action to timidity and his timidity to an abuse of reflection which has destroyed his spontaneity, when he speaks of his vulnerability to pain, his incurable doubt of the future, his feeling of "the justice and not the goodness of God" (oh Calvinist!)—he does not forget a sort of idealist's apologia. "Might it not be", says the casuist, "might it not be at bottom my infinite self-respect, the purism of perfection (!) an incapacity to accept our human condition, a tacit protest against the order of the world, which is the centre of my inertia? It is the Whole or nothing, Titanic ambition made inactive through disgust, the nostalgia of the ideal, offended dignity and wounded pride which refuse all homage to things they feel beneath them; it is irony . . . it is mental reservation . . . it is perhaps disinterestedness through indifference . . . it is weakness which knows not how to conquer itself and will not be conquered, it is the isolation of a disenchanted soul which abdicates even hope. Our highest aspirations prevent us from being happy."

Even the word "weakness" is not too unflattering, provided it "will not be conquered". But why blame Amiel for any illusion which helped him to live? Would that the perception of his own subtlety, seen in the notes of October, 1853, had given him the illusions of vanity and confidence, saved him from always measuring his inferiority with others' accomplishment and urged him to write some book of objective scholarship. He did revise his lectures constantly, keeping up with all the new publications in both French and German, but metaphysics merely exaggerates faults like his, and increase of knowledge brings only sorrow. "La tristesse

soucieuse augmentée", he notes so early as 1858. Finally the result of all this study and speculation, unmingled with any tonic creative effort, is for him a sort of evaporation of the self: he complains that yesterday is as distant as last year, that all his days are merged and lost in his memory, like water poured into a lake; he feels "stripped and empty, like a convalescent (who remembers nothing".) "I pass gently into my tomb, still living. I feel as it were the peace of annihilation and the dim quiet of Nirvâna. Before me and within me I experience the swift flow of the river of time, the gliding past of life's impalpable shadows, and I feel it with the tranquility of a trance". As he admits, this pleasure is deadly, it is slow suicide. So, at forty, he comes to the realization that self-criticism had not helped him as a literary training, (as he had hoped). Like Psyche's, his curiosity is punished by the flight of the beloved. The mind must work on things external or destroy itself. When he writes: "*par l'analyse je me suis annulé*", we may already divine the Amiel of five years later, surprised at his survival through all his disillusion. "And yet I read, I speak, I teach, I write. But no matter, it is as a sleep-walker may do". He is become a ghost in a world of living men.

III.

You have seen those etchings whose margins are enriched by a multitude of little sketches, expressive heads, exquisite glimpses of trees or lakes, wherein the artist records some personal truth or fancy of the moment. The "final state" of our portrait, with its deeply bitten shadows, the darkened face now turned towards eternity and lighted only by faith, with eyes resigned but still regretful of lost youth and its dreams, with lips set by a ten-year struggle against infirmity, may be for a time laid aside, in order to consider the cameos of criticism and landscape which distract the etcher's eye and mind from a portrait seen too closely. After all they prove his intellectual joys and his communion with nature; life is never so dark as one paints it in a library, in a student's cell. Life is never so hopeless as when one is examining one's conscience, and Amiel, re-reading a section of his journal, is surprised at the gloom he has diffused over the portrait. We must remember what he often tells us, that writing down his sadness dispelled it. Nor must we forget that other portrait of the philosopher-poet left us

by his pupil and biographer,*—the amiable old gentleman who loved to read poetry to his fellow-vacationers, and even to compose acrostics for the ladies. There was another resource against melancholy: “le plus petit talent peut être d’un grand bien”. How much this love of versifying meant to him may be seen in the mere bulk of his volumes. Nor are they throughout so mediocre as has been asserted; his rhymed translations are faithful re-creations of the original; even his occasional verses are clever; and once, when the mailed fist of Prussia seemed to threaten his fatherland, in 1857, his inspiration gave the Swiss a national hymn, “Roulez, tambours”. Not passionate enough to write many pages of real poetry, he found in the brief life of the dragon-fly and the fleeting glories of soap-bubbles symbols which fill him with a breath of genuine poetic feeling; one would like to quote the latter entire:

Perle que traverse le jour,
 Qu’emplit l’orageuse espérance,
 Au chalumeau qui te balance,
 S’enfle ton ravissant contour;
 Et tout un tourbillon de choses
 Roule en mon âme, et je revois
 Passer, comme aux jours d’autrefois,
 La ronde des métamorphoses. . . .

Bulles de savon, globes d’air,
 Illusions d’or et de flamme,
 Vous charmez l’oeil, vous touchez l’âme,
 Vous humiliez le cœur fier.
 Que faibles sont nos différences
 D’avec vous, hochets gracieux!
 Nous nous prenons au sérieux
 Et nous sommes des apparences. . . .

Et quand, sous un coup d’éventail,
 La bulle, s’ouvrant affolée,
 S’éparpille en une volée
 De sphérules au vif émail,
 Alors, sous les voûtes profondes
 Du ciel, où l’univers germa,
 Alors nous croyons voir Brahma,
 Brahma jouant avec les mondes.

*Mlle. Berthe Vadier: *Etude Biographique*, Paris, 1886.

It is true that he dallied overlong with difficult rythms, after the example of Gautier, but as he says, "*réussir rafraichit, et créer met en joie*". Had he written only for himself, he would still have found verse a greater consolation than his diary, for in the squirrel-cage of introspection the mind which stops to view its progress always finds itself at the bottom of the arc. The artist has, however, another mode of escape from hypochondria, as the journal shows. A country road, a glimpse of a city park, a tree drooping leafy branches over a red brick wall is itself a talisman if beheld with a poet's eyes. And such certainly were Amiel's. A June morning makes him joyous as a butterfly; never does he fail to note the coming of spring and his response to the rising sap. Even the year before he died, he sets down with delight the quality of the spring sunlight and air, the song of the birds, the special timber of distant sounds, a youthful, springlike note. "It is indeed a Renaissance. . . . The Ascension of our Saviour is symbolized by this flowering forth of nature in a heavenward aspiration. . . . I feel myself born again; my soul looks out through all its windows". Scarcely less loved are the effects of autumn, in which he distinguishes the vaporous dreamy landscape and the scene full of living color. This season tells him that he too is entering into the autumn of life, but that October also has its beauty. One is not surprised that a poet's pictures of summer are fewer, yet here is one which must be cited entire:

"Returned late beneath a deep sky magnificently filled with stars, while fires of silent lightnings flashed behind the Jura. Intoxicated with poetry and overwhelmed with sensations I walked slowly home, blessing the God of life and sunk in the beatitude of the infinite. One thing alone was lacking—a soul to share it with, for emotion overflowed from my heart as from a cup too full. The Milky Way, the great black poplars, the ripple of the waves, the shooting stars, the distant singing, the city with its lights, all spoke to me in a divine language; I felt myself almost a poet. . . . My God, how wretched we should be without beauty! With it, all is reborn within us, the senses, the imagination, the heart, the reason, the will. . . . What is happiness, if not this plentitude of existence, this intimate harmony with the life of the universe and of God?"

Many a page of the diary might be set beside this prose nocturne, for the night speaks to the philosopher no less than to the

poet. A star-filled sky is to him a concrete glimpse of the Absolute; he is "God's guest in the temple of the infinite", he feels the earth floating like a skiff beneath him on that ocean of blue." He marks the effect of cloudless moonlight on the mountains: "A grave majestic night. The troop of giant Alps is sleeping, watched by the stars. Through the vast shadows of the valley sparkle a few roofs, while the eternal organ-note of the torrent booms through this cathedral of mountains vaulted by the starry sky". He prefers the Alps wrapped in the glamour of rolling mists, as he prefers a rainy landscape or a day of silver fog. There he can enjoy a concentration of his timid personality, dispersed and annihilated under the flaming sunlight of midsummer afternoons. The everlasting on-rush of nature's energy appals him; but how fine his picture of Lake Lemán, "serenely melancholy, unvaried, lustreless and calm, with the mountains and clouds reflecting in it their monotony and their cold pallor." The lake tells him "that a disillusioned life may be lighted by duty, by a memory of heaven", speaks to him of "the flight of all things, of the fatality of every life, of the melancholy which lies beneath the surface of all existence, but also of the depths beneath their moving waves". After all he is essentially elegiac, taking his pleasures in the romantic fashion, a little sadly. Is great sensitiveness ever joined to a bluff pagan virility? One must not ask a poet for incompatible qualities, and Amiel's harp is capable of effects unknown to the bards of bass-drum and bassoon.

In fine, nature is for him a book of symbols, vocal with meaning, plain to his inner vision. The hoar-frost in the November woods, turning the spider-webs among the fir-branches into little fairy-palaces, suggests to him the spirit of the Northern literatures, the vaporous lines of Ossian, the Edda and the Sagas. "Each element has its poetry, he says somewhere, "but the poetry of the air is liberty". He has the vision of a child—unblurred by use and wont; he has the sensitivity of the musician, and music is to him "a reminiscence of Paradise". There are some fine pages of musical criticism in the *Journal*; the best are certainly the comparisons of Mozart with Beethoven. These pages show clearly his nice balance between a love of classical form and a joy in romantic expressiveness.

But Amiel as a critic is better portrayed through his literary judgments, more numerous and of wider range. He would have made a successful critic, could he have forgotten philosophic love

of synthesis and abstraction long enough to clothe his admirable summaries with the flesh and blood we require in a portrait. His sympathies are very catholic; he possesses that faculty of intellectual metamorphosis, of entering into the soul of the writer, which he rightly calls the first faculty of the critic; he understands types so different as Montesquieu and Alfred de Vigny, penetrates alike the spirit of Goethe and Eugénie de Guérin. He shows the French love of form, of style—the classical inheritance—and knows half of LaFontaine's fables by heart. But he lays an unerring finger on the pompous artificiality of Corneille's heroes, puppets galvanised by rhetoric, "rôles rather than men". He prefers Racine and Shakespeare—a pairing which proves the breadth of his classicism. Significantly, he fails to mention Molière, being too subjective to enjoy the comic; his omission of Rabelais further evinces his delicacy of taste. Taste makes him conscious of the lack of elegance and distinction in that master of Swiss writers, Rousseau; hailing Jean-Jacques as a precursor in every type of literature, he indicts his work for its sophistry, its abuse of paradox and its morbidity. Paul and Virginia, on the other hand, or Lamartine's Jocelyn, make him thrill with tender emotion; at heart he is mildly Romantic. With all his generation he admires René, but not its author, and he blames Victor Hugo for his spasmodic eloquence, his lack of measure, taste and sense of the comic. To be merely dazzled or blinded does not impress him; he prefers the mountain to the volcano, the beautiful to the sublime, and Alfred de Vigny to the chief of the French Romanticists.

A similar type, one might object. But Eugénie de Guérin is also a similar type to his own, and with all his sympathy for her work Amiel finally rejects it for its narrow intellectual horizon. No, he loves Vigny for his classical reserve: sensibility does not bandage his eyes to the really great. He admires Goethe, especially in *Faust* which he calls the "spectre of his consciousness", but he cannot approve an Olympian egoism for which charity and love of humanity are non-existent. His taste finds repellent the algebraic stiffness and chemical formulas of Taine's style, but when he hears the Frenchman lecture he notes his qualities of simplicity, objectivity and love of truth. Taste makes him prefer Renan's more elegant pen, except when it touches the figure of Christ, and his constant moral preoccupation rejects all the literature of Naturalism for its cynical physiological attitude toward man and his ideals.

Taste leads him to prefer Art to Science, a fine page to the discovery of a new fact. But his taste is cosmopolitan, and dominated by pure idealism. A citizen of a republic, he points out relentlessly the moral levelling of democracy, characterizes equality as "a hate masquerading as love". His cosmopolitanism shows no preferences—the idealist can see the defects of every race. He has the independence of so many of the greater minds in small countries; he is never swept away by mass-judgments. Far from Paris and London and Berlin, the critic has the right of self-determination. If this timid dreamer failed in practical life because his love of liberty held him aloof from action, in his diary too that spirit of freedom glows as brightly as when it led his ancestors to a haven in Switzerland.

IV.

This is fundamental, and it explains Renan's failure to understand a writer who was after all French only in language and artistic preferences. Born in Geneva, Amiel is Genevan by a protestant conscience which insists on thinking for itself; and like Scherer, he remains a protestant even in his criticism. His philosophy and his cosmopolitanism—the impress of his travels and his study abroad—save him from the religious intolerance of Calvinism; he knows not the suspicion of others, the hard irony of his fellow-Genevan Rousseau. Both Amiel and Jean-Jacques lack the practical character of the typical Genevan: both are discontented idealists, descendants of those who from the sixteenth century gave to this city of refuge the name of "cité des mécontents". But his discontent is lifted above Rousseau's by a purer vision, a greater spirituality. Finally, both are Genevan in their lack of Gallic vanity and in that Swiss pride which quietly disdains opinion: both too are essentially and profoundly religious.

This is the side which comes ever more to the front as the Journal progresses to its end. However deeply he plunges into philosophy, seeking in vain a harmony of science and religion, despite his dallings with the nihilistic systems of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, he always finds a way to justify the faith and the revelation of God which he feels within. A protestant desire to solve for himself and with his own reason the riddle of the universe, a Celtic imagination which loves his *maladie de l'idéal* underlie in

him that German passion for speculation which repels his critics—a trait whose only value, Bourget remarks, is to show us how the mind spins from its own substance the spider-webs of a philosophic system. A Catholic, he would have escaped all this disquiet, felt no dread of responsibility, found his imagination satisfied and his heart at peace. Does he not criticise his church for its want of sympathy, of “*suavité religieuse*,” of mystical sense? A former Catholic, he would have fallen quietly, like Renan, into the Temple of Science and the joys of an intellectual dilettanteism.

But no! he must work out the problem personally, by the methods he has learned in protestant Prussia. And being a poet and a mystic, he often falls into the language of mysticism. With this, Matthew Arnold has little patience, and by the simple means of cutting from their context sentences almost untranslatable, contrives to present a portrait of the man which almost makes him a candidate for the mad-house. But it is palpably foolish to blame a professor of philosophy for thinking about his subject and for using its vocabulary; why should he not seek a living relation between the things he teaches and the life he has to live? Why should a philosopher refrain from philosophizing? One concludes that too many enthusiasts had asked Arnold if he had read Amiel, and that the aged critic resented their excessive praise. In any case Arnold did not read the book in his youth, so to condemn the fire of idealism which burns through the smoke of over-mystical pages. Those who came across the *Journal* in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century found in that heaven-mounting flame and smoke the symbol of their own spiritual inquietude, an inquietude common to every soul left stranded by “the bankruptcy of science.” From beyond the tomb Amiel spoke to the future, to the youth of a new generation, and to them he still speaks of a time no longer dream but memory.

For himself the vision was at once the torture and the joy of his life, and if he paid for it, as all things must be paid for, by moments of despair, this dream merged at last into the vision divine: he did not die unreconciled with God. His resignation, his consciousness of increasing infirmity, his very despair were but stages in his progress toward a final goal. He died in peace and without regret, like a stoic or a Christian saint. He sleeps now in that Infinite for which he thirsted; he is one with the earth which he loved in its tender April beauty and in the rich pall of its vintage

purple. He has proved the truth of the Spanish proverb that no evil lasts a century: *no hay malo qui dure cien años*.

He did not succeed in finding his literary form—the real touchstone of genius, and failing in this, lacked the crown of approval which confers the kingship of faith in self. But how many of his lesser brothers, how many of those who have vainly hitched their wagon to a star, are drawn to him by these almost lyric struggles of a poet's impotence? Success would have destroyed his self-doubt, made him a different man: and nothing is sadder than his '*omnis moriar*', three months before he died. But he was too clear-sighted not to see that destiny can shatter us by accomplishing our desires no less than by refusing them, as he tells us on the last page of his Journal. "He who wills only what God wills, escapes both catastrophes. Everything turns out to his good." The faith of his death-bed recalls Dante's line: "*In la sua voluntad é nostra pace*."

A failure? Perhaps all lives are failures judged in the light and glory of those youthful ideals which Amiel never quite laid aside. The practical man achieves only a practical success, and the pursuit of the practical pushed to its limits resulted in the world-war. Better than that—if we must choose an extreme—an impractical goal, a goal among the clouds, better even Nirvāna and the Wheel of Illusion, however such a search for the infinite be decried by Occidental pragmatists. Better to return now and again to Amiel, if one feel oneself in danger of forgetting the days when one knew how to dream, when one was capable of being touched by dreams like his.