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Oscar Wilde
Scrapbook

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who came cautiously over the low wall—parting a way for himself through the tamarisk shrubs—and who then peered warily around. The end of a ladder next appeared, being pushed over from the adjacent garden; and finally, when the ladder had been hauled through, a second figure followed. All this had been but dimly visible; for the only light anywhere reaching this part of the premises was that of a gas-lamp in the public roadway, and that was some distance off.

“Why, they’re thieves!” said Dick, in great excitement. “By the living jingo, we’ll nab them!”

“Nonsense, nonsense!” Mr. Summers said, impatiently—for he was loath to have to take away his eyes from that glorified window, even for a moment. “They’re workmen!”

“They’re not workmen!” Dick insisted—and it was well that his vehemence was drowned by the roar of the surge along the distant beach. “Look at them—they’re taking off their boots! They’re good honest crib-crackers, and they’ll have that ladder up against the balcony in another minute. Look at them sneaking down under the bushes! Come along, man!—the Johnnies have no idea what an awful hole they’ve got into this journey!”

But Summers shrank back. “No, no,” he said. “There might be a noise; the people would come out from the house; and Nan would find me here. No, no; let the fellows take a few candlesticks or things—what’s the difference! Or we can walk down to the sea-front, and send along a couple of policemen—”

He suddenly stopped—and his voice altered.

“Dick,” said he, as if in breathless dismay, “if they were to get into the house—if Nan were by chance to go up to her room—why, the fright might kill her!—the fright might kill her.” And then he instantly added, between his teeth: “By God, they shall not get into the house!”

“Then come round by the other garden,” Dick said, as they hurriedly left their ambush. “They may have put wires across the lawn. We will follow in just where they led.”

It was a matter of little difficulty: their swift movements were completely screened by the wall and the hedge and the row of young trees. Then, when

Summers slipped over, the first thing he saw was that the ladder had been placed against the dark balcony, and that one of the men was already half-way up, while his accomplice waited to see him gain the iron rail before also ascending. And little did this latter guess the fate that was now behind him. With a bound as of a wild beast on its prey, Summers was upon him, and down he went, with two strenuous hands fixed in his throat.

“Here, Dick—pin him!—bash his head if he stirs—I’ll get the other one in a minute.”

But by this time the other scoundrel had gained the balcony, and was now looking down on the capture of his companion, while as for himself he was caught like a rat in a trap—unless, indeed, he dared to risk the hold of certain euonymus bushes trained up against the wall. And here was his pursuer mounting the ladder—a little way up—half-way up: then the hunted man, as a last desperate device, caught the end of the ladder, and with all his might threw it from him: for a second it hung and swayed, then it went over, falling heavily, with Summers underneath. This was the crash that startled those within: Sidney and Stephen Weguelin came rushing out, to see what had happened.

They found Dick Erridge kneeling by a prostrate and senseless body—the two thieves he had thought nothing more of when he saw his friend hurled down.

“Are you hurt, old chap?” he was asking. “Not badly, do you think?”

There was no answer.

“We must carry him in-doors,” Dick said; and as they proceeded to do so, he gave a word of explanation. “There were two men trying to break into the house—he was afraid his daughter might come upon them—and we attempted to get hold of them. Don’t tell her, if you can help it—he would rather not have her know he was in this country—”

But this was Nan herself who was at the head of the steps; and it was with a piteous cry of anguish she recognized the sad burden they bore into the hall; and it was with wringing hands she followed them into the room. They laid him on a couch.

“Dodo, you have come back to me!—say you have come back to me!” she cried, and she clung to the impassive fingers that hung helpless.

There was no reply from the death-like, ashen-gray face and the pallid lips. And meanwhile confusion prevailed in the house—one running for brandy—another sending off for a doctor, and the like; but Nan took no heed of such things—she only continued her despairing appeal with agony in her voice.

"Dodo, won't you speak to me? It's Nan!—it's Nan that's beside you! Dodo, can't you hear me? It's Nan!—it's Nan that's talking to you!—"

And at last he moved slightly—slightly, and heavily, and wearily; and his left hand travelled slowly up to his heart, where it lay half clinched. Then for a space there was silence, and short, difficult breathing. When finally he managed to open his eyes, it was Nan's eyes he found fixed on his—so eager, so imploring, so full of the old affection and companionship and gratitude.

"Your bull-dog, Nan," he struggled to say, with something of a forced smile, "has been—hard hit—this time—"

"But you've come back to me, Dodo!—you've come back to me!—you're not going away any more!—"

"There's a letter," he said, obviously with great exertion—"Dick will give it to you. . . . I never was tired—of Crowhurst—"

Suddenly his face altered—he drew a short, quick, gasping breath—and the next second they saw that all was over—all of them, that is to say, but Nan, who

did not seem to realize what had happened until her husband gently raised her and led her, half unconscious, from the room.

When Sidney returned, Dick Erridge was still standing by the side of the couch, crying like a child.

"There's the best friend I ever had," he said, when he had mastered himself somewhat. "And the straightest man that ever breathed. . . . I'll bring you the letter, either to-night or to-morrow morning, whichever you like. But mind you tell her this. No man knew her father and his ways of thinking better than I did; and I know that this is the very end he would himself have chosen. You tell her that. I was in Australia with him. Many a night we sat up talking on the voyage out; and over there too; and I know what he was thinking. He guessed that his time was drawing near a close; and if he had had his choice of every way, this is the end he would have chosen. You tell her that. And tell her he has been down here for some weeks, and just as happy as he could be in seeing her from time to time. You never saw a man so delighted. He just lived for her—"

"And died for her too, as it would seem," Nan's husband said. And there-with came the ringing of a bell, and a knock at the outer door. It was the doctor who had arrived.

THE END.

THE DECADENT MOVEMENT IN LITERATURE.

BY ARTHUR SYMONS.

THE latest movement in European literature has been called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive—Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance. It is easy to dispute over words, and we shall find that Verlaine objects to being called a Decadent, Maeterlinck to being called a Symbolist, Huysmans to being called an Impressionist. These terms, as it happens, have been adopted as the badge of little separate cliques, noisy, brainsick young people who haunt the brasseries of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and exhaust their ingenuities in theorizing over the works they cannot write. But, taken frankly as epithets which express their

own meaning, both Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence. The most representative literature of the day—the writing which appeals to, which has done so much to form, the younger generation—is certainly not classic, nor has it any relation with that old antithesis of the Classic, the Romantic. After a fashion it is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a

spiritual and moral perversity. If what we call the classic is indeed the supreme art—those qualities of perfect simplicity, perfect sanity, perfect proportion, the supreme qualities—then this representative literature of to-day, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.

Healthy we cannot call it, and healthy it does not wish to be considered. The Goncourts, in their prefaces, in their *Journal*, are always insisting on their own pet malady, *la névrose*. It is in their work, too, that Huysmans notes with delight "le style tacheté et faisandé"—high-flavored and spotted with corruption—which he himself possesses in the highest degree. "Having desire without light, curiosity without wisdom, seeking God by strange ways, by ways traced by the hands of men; offering rash incense upon the high places to an unknown God, who is the God of darkness"—that is how Ernest Hello, in one of his apocalyptic moments, characterizes the nineteenth century. And this unreason of the soul—of which Hello himself is so curious a victim—this unstable equilibrium, which has overbalanced so many brilliant intelligences into one form or another of spiritual confusion, is but another form of the *maladie fin de siècle*. For its very disease of form, this literature is certainly typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion or in conduct. It reflects all the moods, all the manners, of a sophisticated society; its very artificiality is a way of being true to nature: simplicity, sanity, proportion—the classic qualities—how much do we possess them in our life, our surroundings, that we should look to find them in our literature—so evidently the literature of a decadence?

Taking the word Decadence, then, as most precisely expressing the general sense of the newest movement in literature, we find that the terms Impressionism and Symbolism define correctly enough the two main branches of that movement. Now Impressionist and Symbolist have more in common than either supposes; both are really working on the same hypothesis, applied in different directions. What both seek is not general truth merely, but *la vérité vraie*, the very essence of truth—the truth of ap-

pearances to the senses, of the visible world to the eyes that see it; and the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision. The Impressionist, in literature as in painting, would flash upon you in a new, sudden way so exact an image of what you have just seen, just as you have seen it, that you may say, as a young American sculptor, a pupil of Rodin, said to me on seeing for the first time a picture of Whistler's, "Whistler seems to think his picture upon canvas—and there it is!" Or you may find, with Sainte-Beuve, writing of Goncourt, the "soul of the landscape"—the soul of whatever corner of the visible world has to be realized. The Symbolist, in this new, sudden way, would flash upon you the "soul" of that which can be apprehended only by the soul—the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident. And naturally, necessarily, this endeavor after a perfect truth to one's impression, to one's intuition—perhaps an impossible endeavor—has brought with it, in its revolt from ready-made impressions and conclusions, a revolt from the ready-made of language, from the bondage of traditional form, of a form become rigid. In France, where this movement began and has mainly flourished, it is Goncourt who was the first to invent a style in prose really new, impressionistic, a style which was itself almost sensation. It is Verlaine who has invented such another new style in verse.

The work of the brothers De Goncourt—twelve novels, eleven or twelve studies in the history of the eighteenth century, six or seven books about art, the art mainly of the eighteenth century and of Japan, two plays, some volumes of letters and of fragments, and a *Journal* in six volumes—is perhaps, in its intention and its consequences, the most revolutionary of the century. No one has ever tried so deliberately to do something new as the Goncourts; and the final word in the summing up which the survivor has placed at the head of the *Préfaces et Manifestes* is a word which speaks of "tentatives, enfin, où les deux frères ont cherchés à faire du neuf, ont fait leurs efforts pour doter les diverses branches de la littérature de quelque chose que n'avaient point songé à trouver leurs prédécesseurs." And in the preface to *Chérie*, in that pathetic passage which tells of the two brothers (one mortally stricken, and within a few months

of death) taking their daily walk in the Bois de Boulogne, there is a definite demand on posterity. "The search after *reality* in literature, the resurrection of eighteenth-century art, the triumph of *Japonisme*—are not these," said Jules, "the three great literary and artistic movements of the second half of the nineteenth century? And it is we who brought them about, these three movements. Well, when one has done that, it is difficult indeed not to be *somebody* in the future." Nor, even, is this all. What the Goncourts have done is to specialize vision, so to speak, and to subtilize language to the point of rendering every detail in just the form and color of the actual impression. M. Edmond de Goncourt once said to me—varying, if I remember rightly, an expression he had put into the *Journal*—"My brother and I invented an opera-glass: the young people nowadays are taking it out of our hands."

An opera-glass—a special, unique way of seeing things—that is what the Goncourts have brought to bear upon the common things about us; and it is here that they have done the "something new," here more than anywhere. They have never sought "to see life steadily, and see it whole": their vision has always been somewhat feverish, with the diseased sharpness of over-excited nerves. "We do not hide from ourselves that we have been passionate, nervous creatures, unhealthily impressionable," confesses the *Journal*. But it is this morbid intensity in seeing and seizing things that has helped to form that marvellous style—"a style perhaps too ambitious of impossibilities," as they admit—a style which inherits some of its color from Gautier, some of its fine outline from Flaubert, but which has brought light and shadow into the color, which has softened outline in the magic of atmosphere. With them words are not merely color and sound, they live. That search after "l'image peinte," "l'épithète rare," is not (as with Flaubert) a search after harmony of phrase for its own sake; it is a desperate endeavor to give sensation, to flash the impression of the moment, to preserve the very heat and motion of life. And so, in analysis as in description, they have found out a way of noting the fine shades; they have broken the outline of the conventional novel in chapters, with its continuous story, in order to indicate—some-

times in a chapter of half a page—this and that revealing moment, this or that significant attitude or accident or sensation. For the placid traditions of French prose they have had but little respect; their aim has been but one, that of having (as M. Edmond de Goncourt tells us in the preface to *Chérie*) "une langue rendant nos idées, nos sensations, nos figurations des hommes et des choses, d'une façon distincte de celui-ci ou de celui-là, une langue personnelle, une langue portant notre signature."

What Goncourt has done in prose—inventing absolutely a new way of saying things, to correspond with that new way of seeing things which he has found—Verlaine has done in verse. In a famous poem, "Art Poétique," he has himself defined his own ideal of the poetic art:

"Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la Nuance!
Oh! la Nuance seule fiancée
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor!"

Music first of all and before all, he insists; and then, not color, but *la nuance*, the last fine shade. Poetry is to be something vague, intangible, evanescent, a winged soul in flight "toward other skies and other loves." To express the inexpressible he speaks of beautiful eyes behind a veil, of the palpitating sunlight of noon, of the blue swarm of clear stars in a cool autumn sky; and the verse in which he makes this confession of faith has the exquisite troubled beauty—"sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose"—which he commends as the essential quality of verse. In a later poem of poetical counsel he tells us that art should, first of all, be absolutely clear, absolutely sincere: "L'art, mes enfants, c'est d'être absolument soi-même." The two poems, with their seven years' interval—an interval which means so much in the life of a man like Verlaine—give us all that there is of theory in the work of the least theoretical, the most really instinctive, of poetical innovators. Verlaine's poetry has varied with his life; always in excess—now furiously sensual, now feverishly devout—he has been constant only to himself, to his own self-contradictions. For, with all the violence, turmoil, and disorder of a life which is almost the life of a modern Villon, Paul Verlaine has always retained that childlike simplicity, and, in his verse, which has been his confessional, that fine sincerity, of which Villon may



PAUL VERLAINE AT THE CAFÉ.

be thought to have set the example in literature.

Beginning his career as a Parnassian with the *Poèmes Saturniens*, Verlaine becomes himself, in his exquisite first manner, in the *Fêtes Galantes*, caprices after Watteau, followed, a year later, by *La Bonne Chanson*, a happy record of too confident a lover's happiness. *Romances sans Paroles*, in which the poetry of Impressionism reaches its very highest point, is more *tourmenté*, goes deeper, becomes more poignantly personal. It is the poetry of sensation, of evocation; poetry which paints as well as sings, and which paints as Whistler paints, seeming to think the colors and outlines upon the canvas, to think them only, and they are there. The mere magic of words—words which

evoke pictures, which recall sensations—can go no further; and in his next book, *Sagesse*, published after seven years' wanderings and sufferings, there is a graver manner of more deeply personal confession—that "sincerity, and the impression of the moment followed to the letter," which he has defined in a prose criticism on himself as his main preference in regard to style. "Sincerity, and the impression of the moment followed to the letter," mark the rest of Verlaine's work, whether the sentiment be that of passionate friendship, as in *Amour*; of love, human and divine, as in *Bonheur*; of the mere lust of the flesh, as in *Parallèlement* and *Chansons pour Elle*. In his very latest verse the quality of simplicity has become exaggerated, has become, at

times, childish; the once exquisite depravity of style has lost some of its distinction; there is no longer the same delicately vivid "impression of the moment" to render. Yet the very closeness with which it follows a lamentable career gives a curious interest to even the worst of Verlaine's work. And how unique, how unsurpassable in its kind, is the best! "Et tout le reste est littérature!" was the cry, supreme and contemptuous, of that early "Art Poétique"; and, compared with Verlaine at his best, all other contemporary work in verse seems not yet disenfranchised from mere "literature." To fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly; to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul: that is the ideal of Decadence, and it is what Paul Verlaine has achieved.

And certainly, so far as achievement goes, no other poet of the actual group in France can be named beside him or near him. But in Stéphane Mallarmé, with his supreme pose as the supreme poet, and his two or three pieces of exquisite verse and delicately artificial prose to show by way of result, we have the prophet and pontiff of the movement, the mystical and theoretical leader of the great emancipation. No one has ever dreamed such beautiful, impossible dreams as Mallarmé; no one has ever so possessed his soul in the contemplation of masterpieces to come. All his life he has been haunted by the desire to create, not so much something new in literature, as a literature which should itself be a new art. He has dreamed of a work into which all the arts should enter, and achieve themselves by a mutual interdependence—a harmonizing of all the arts into one supreme art—and he has theorized with infinite subtlety over the possibilities of doing the impossible. Every Tuesday for the last twenty years he has talked more fascinatingly, more suggestively, than any one else has ever done, in that little room in the Rue de Rome, to that little group of eager young poets. "A seeker after something in the world, that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all," he has carried his contempt for the usual, the conventional, beyond the point of literary expression, into the domain of practical affairs. Until the publication, quite recently, of a selection of *Vers et Prose*, it was only possible to get his poems in a

limited and expensive edition, lithographed in fac-simile of his own clear and elegant handwriting. An aristocrat of letters, Mallarmé has always looked with intense disdain on the indiscriminate accident of universal suffrage. He has wished neither to be read nor to be understood by the bourgeois intelligence, and it is with some deliberateness of intention that he has made both issues impossible. M. Catulle Mendès defines him admirably as "a difficult author," and in his latest period he has succeeded in becoming absolutely unintelligible. His early poems, "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," "Hérodiade," for example, and some exquisite sonnets, and one or two fragments of perfectly polished verse, are written in a language which has nothing in common with every-day language—symbol within symbol, image within image; but symbol and image achieve themselves in expression without seeming to call for the necessity of a key. The latest poems (in which punctuation is sometimes entirely suppressed, for our further bewilderment) consist merely of a sequence of symbols, in which every word must be taken in a sense with which its ordinary significance has nothing to do. Mallarmé's contortion of the French language, so far as mere style is concerned, is curiously similar to the kind of deprecation which was undergone by the Latin language in its decadence. It is, indeed, in part a reversion to Latin phraseology, to the Latin construction, and it has made, of the clear and flowing French language, something irregular, unquiet, expressive, with sudden surprising felicities, with nervous starts and lapses, with new capacities for the exact noting of sensation. Alike to the ordinary and to the scholarly reader, it is painful, intolerable; a jargon, a massacre. Supremely self-confident, and backed, certainly, by an ardent following of the younger generation, Mallarmé goes on his way, experimenting more and more audaciously, having achieved by this time, at all events, a style wholly his own. Yet the "chef-d'œuvre inconnu" seems no nearer completion, the impossible seems no more likely to be done. The two or three beautiful fragments remain, and we still hear the voice in the Rue de Rome.

Probably it is as a voice, an influence, that Mallarmé will be remembered. His personal magnetism has had a great deal

to do with the making of the very newest French literature; few literary beginners in Paris have been able to escape the rewards and punishments of his contact, his suggestion. One of the young poets who form that delightful Tuesday evening coterie said to me the other day, "We owe much to Mallarmé, but he has kept us all back three years." That is where the danger of so inspiring, so helping a personality comes in. The work even of M. Henri de Regnier, who is the best of the disciples, has not entirely got clear from the influence that has shown his fine talent the way to develop. Perhaps it is in the verse of men who are not exactly following in the counsel of the master—who might disown him, whom he might disown—that one sees most clearly the outcome of his theories, the actual consequences of his practice.

In regard to the construction of verse, Mallarmé has always remained faithful to the traditional syllabic measurement; but the freak or the discovery of "le vers libre" is certainly the natural consequence of his experiments upon the elasticity of rhythm, upon the power of resistance of the cæsura. "Le vers libre" in the hands of most of the experimenters becomes merely rhymeless irregular prose; in the hands of Gustave Kahn and Édouard Dujardin it has, it must be admitted, attained a certain beauty of its own. I never really understood the charm that may be found in this apparently structureless rhythm until I heard, not long since, M. Dujardin read aloud the as yet unpublished conclusion of a dramatic poem in several parts. It was rhymed, but rhymed with some irregularity, and the rhythm was purely and simply a vocal effect. The rhythm came and went as the spirit moved. You might deny that it was rhythm at all; and yet, read as I heard it read, in a sort of slow chant, it produced on me the effect of really beautiful verse.



STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ.

But M. Dujardin is a poet: "vers libres" in the hands of a sciolist are the most intolerably easy and annoying of poetical exercises. Even in the case of *Le Pèlerin Passionné* I cannot see the justification of what is merely regular syllabic verse lengthened or shortened arbitrarily, with the Alexandrine always evident in the background as the foot-rule of the new metre. In this hazardous experiment M. Jean Moréas, whose real talent lies in quite another direction, has brought nothing into literature but an example of deliberate singularity for singularity's sake. I seem to find the measure of the man in a remark I once heard him make in a café, where we were discussing the technique of metre: "You, Verlaine!" he cried, leaning across the table, "have only written lines of sixteen syllables; I have written lines of twenty syllables!" And turning to me, he asked anxiously if Swinburne had ever done that—had written a line of twenty syllables.

That is indeed the measure of the man, and it points a criticism upon not a few of the busy little *littérateurs* who are found-

ing new *revues* every other week in Paris. These people have nothing to say, but they are resolved to say something, and to say it in the newest mode. They are Impressionists because it is the fashion, Symbolists because it is the vogue, Decadents because Decadence is in the very air of the cafés. And so, in their manner, they are mile-posts on the way of this new movement, telling how far it has gone. But to find a new personality, a new way of seeing things, among the young writers who are starting up on every hand, we must turn from Paris to Brussels—to the so-called Belgian Shakespeare, Maurice Maeterlinck. M. Maeterlinck was discovered to the general French public by M. Octave Mirbeau, in an article in the *Figaro*, August 24, 1890, on the publication of *La Princesse Maleine*. "M. Maurice Maeterlinck nous a donné l'œuvre la plus géniale de ce temps, et la plus extraordinaire et la plus naïve aussi, comparable et—oserai-je le dire?—supérieure en beauté à ce qui il y a de plus beau dans Shakespeare . . . plus tragique que *Macbeth*, plus extraordinaire en pensée que *Hamlet*." That is how the enthusiast announced his discovery. In truth, M. Maeterlinck is not a Shakespeare, and the Elizabethan violence of his first play is of the school of Webster and Tourneur rather than of Shakespeare. As a dramatist he has but one note, that of fear; he has but one method, that of repetition. In *La Princesse Maleine* there is a certain amount of action—action which is certainly meant to reinvest the terrors of *Macbeth* and of *Lear*. In *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* the scene is stationary, the action but reflected upon the stage, as if from another plane. In *Les Sept Princesses* the action, such as it is, is "such stuff as dreams are made of," and is literally, in great part, seen through a window.

This window, looking out upon the unseen—an open door, as in *L'Intruse*, through which Death, the intruder, may come invisibly—how typical of the new kind of symbolistic and impressionistic drama which M. Maeterlinck has invented! I say invented, a little rashly. The real discoverer of this new kind of drama was that strange, inspiring, incomplete man of genius whom M. Maeterlinck, above all others, delights to honor, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Imagine a combination of Swift, of Poe, and of Coleridge,

and you will have some idea of the extraordinary, impossible poet and cynic who, after a life of brilliant failure, has left a series of unfinished works in every kind of literature; among the finished achievements one volume of short stories, *Contes Cruels*, which is an absolute masterpiece. Yet, apart from this, it was the misfortune of Villiers never to attain the height of his imaginings, and even *Axël*, the work of a lifetime, is an achievement only half achieved. Only half achieved, or achieved only in the work of others; for, in its mystical intention, its remoteness from any kind of outward reality, *Axël* is undoubtedly the origin of the symbolistic drama. This drama, in Villiers, is of pure symbol, of sheer poetry. It has an exalted eloquence which we find in none of his followers. As M. Maeterlinck has developed it, it is a drama which appeals directly to the sensations—sometimes crudely, sometimes subtly—playing its variations upon the very nerves themselves. The "vague spiritual fear" which it creates out of our nervous apprehension is unlike anything that has ever been done before, even by Hoffmann, even by Poe. It is an effect of atmosphere—an atmosphere in which outlines change and become mysterious, in which a word quietly uttered makes one start, in which all one's mental activity becomes concentrated on something, one knows not what, something slow, creeping, terrifying, which comes nearer and nearer, an impending nightmare.

La Princesse Maleine, it is said, was written for a theatre of marionettes, and it is certainly with the effect of marionettes that these sudden, exclamatory people come and go. Maleine, Hjalmar, Uglyane—these are no men and women, but a masque of shadows, a dance of silhouettes behind the white sheet of the "Chat Noir," and they have the fantastic charm of these enigmatical semblances, "luminous, gemlike, ghostlike," with, also, their somewhat mechanical eeriness. The personages of *L'Intruse*, of *Les Aveugles*—in which the spiritual terror and physical apprehension which are common to all M. Maeterlinck's work have become more interior—are mere abstractions, typifying age, infancy, disaster, but with scarcely a suggestion of individual character. And the style itself is a sort of abstraction, all the capacities of language being deliberately abandoned

for a simplicity which, in its calculated repetition, is like the drip, drip, of a tiny stream of water. M. Maeterlinck is difficult to quote, but here, in English, is a passage from Act I. of *La Princesse Maleine*, which will indicate something of this Biblically monotonous style:

"I cannot see you. Come hither, there is more light here; lean back your head a little towards the sky. You too are strange to-night! It is as though my eyes were opened to-night! It is as though my heart were half opened to-night! But I think you are strangely beautiful! But you are strangely beautiful, Uglyane! It seems to me that I have never looked on you till now! But I think you are strangely beautiful! There is something about you. . . . Let us go elsewhither—under the light—come!"

As an experiment in a new kind of drama, these curious plays do not seem to exactly achieve themselves on the stage; it is difficult to imagine how they could ever be made so impressive, when thus externalized, as they are when all is left to the imagination. *L'Intruse*, for instance, which was given at the Haymarket Theatre on January 27, 1892—not quite faithfully given, it is true—seemed, as one saw it then, too faint in outline, with too little carrying power for scenic effect. But M. Maeterlinck is by no means anxious to be considered merely or mainly as a dramatist. A brooding poet, a mystic, a contemplative spectator of the comedy of death—that is how he presents himself to us in his work; and the introduction which he has prefixed to his translation of *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, of Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, shows how deeply he has studied the mystical writers of all ages, and how much akin to theirs is his own temper. Plato and Plotinus, St. Bernard and Jacob Boehm, Coleridge and Novalis—he knows them all, and it is with a sort of reverence that he sets himself to the task of translating the as-



MAURICE MAETERLINCK.

tonishing Flemish mystic of the thirteenth century, known till now only by the fragments translated into French by Ernest Hello from a sixteenth century Latin version. This translation and this introduction help to explain the real character of M. Maeterlinck's dramatic work—dramatic as to form, by a sort of accident, but essentially mystical.

Partly akin to M. Maeterlinck by race, more completely alien from him in temper than it is possible to express, Joris Karl Huysmans demands a prominent place in any record of the Decadent movement. His work, like that of the Goncourts, is largely determined by the *maladie fin de siècle*—the diseased nerves that, in his case, have given a curious personal quality of pessimism to his outlook on the world, his view of life. Part of his work—*Marthe*, *Les Sœurs Vatard*, *En Ménage*, *À Vau-l'Eau*—is a minute and searching study of the minor discomforts, the commonplace miseries of life, as seen by a peevishly disordered vision, delighting, for its own self-tor-

ture, in the insistent contemplation of human stupidity, of the sordid in existence. Yet these books do but lead up to the unique masterpiece, the astonishing caprice of *À Rebours*, in which he has concentrated all that is delicately depraved, all that is beautifully, curiously poisonous, in modern art. *À Rebours* is the history of a typical Decadent—a study, indeed, after a real man, but a study which seizes the type rather than the personality. In the sensations and ideas of *Des Esseintes* we see the sensations and ideas of the effeminate, over-civilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of our society: partly the father, partly the offspring, of the perverse art that he adores. *Des Esseintes* creates for his solace, in the wilderness of a barren and profoundly uncomfortable world, an artificial paradise. His *Thébaïde raffinée* is furnished elaborately for candle-light, equipped with the pictures, the books, that satisfy his sense of the exquisitely abnormal. He delights in the Latin of Apuleius and Petronius, in the French of Baudelaire, Goncourt, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Villiers; in the pictures of Gustave Moreau, the French Burne-Jones, of Odilon Redon, the French Blake. He delights in the beauty of strange, unnatural flowers, in the melodic combination of scents, in the imagined harmonies of the sense of taste. And at last, exhausted by these spiritual and sensory debauches in the delights of the artificial, he is left (as we close the book) with a brief, doubtful choice before him—madness or death, or else a return to nature, to the normal life.

Since *À Rebours*, M. Huysmans has written one other remarkable book, *Là-Bas*, a study in the hysteria and mystical corruption of contemporary Black Magic. But it is on that one exceptional achievement, *À Rebours*, that his fame will rest; it is there that he has expressed not merely himself, but an epoch. And he has done so in a style which carries the modern experiments upon language to their furthest development. Formed upon Goncourt and Flaubert, it has sought for novelty, *l'image peinte*, the exactitude of color, the forcible precision of epithet, wherever words, images, or epithets are to be found. Barbaric in its profusion, violent in its emphasis, wearying in its splendor, it is—especially in regard to things seen—extraordinarily

expressive, with all the shades of a painter's palette. Elaborately and deliberately perverse, it is in its very perversity that Huysmans' work—so fascinating, so repellent, so instinctively artificial—comes to represent, as the work of no other writer can be said to do, the main tendencies, the chief results, of the Decadent movement in literature.

Such, then, is the typical literature of the Decadence—literature which, as we have considered it so far, is entirely French. But those qualities which we find in the work of Goncourt, Verlaine, Huysmans—qualities which have permeated literature much more completely in France than in any other country—are not wanting in the recent literature of other countries. In Holland there is a new school of Sensitivists, as they call themselves, who have done some remarkable work—Couperus, in *Ecstasy*, for example—very much on the lines of the French art of Impressionism. In Italy, Luigi Capuana (in *Giacinta*, for instance) has done some wonderful studies of morbid sensation; Gabriele d'Annunzio, in that marvellous, malarious *Piacere*, has achieved a triumph of exquisite perversity. In Spain, one of the principal novelists, Señora Pardo-Bazan, has formed herself, with some deliberateness, after Goncourt, grafting his method, curiously enough, upon a typically Spanish Catholicism of her own. In Norway, Ibsen has lately developed a personal kind of Impressionism (in *Hedda Gabler*) and of Symbolism (in *The Master-BUILDER*)—"opening the door," in his own phrase, "to the younger generation." And in England, too, we find the same influences at work. The prose of Mr. Walter Pater, the verse of Mr. W. E. Henley—to take two prominent examples—are attempts to do with the English language something of what Goncourt and Verlaine have done with the French. Mr. Pater's prose is the most beautiful English prose which is now being written; and, unlike the prose of Goncourt, it has done no violence to language, it has sought after no vivid effects, it has found a large part of mastery in reticence, in knowing what to omit. But how far away from the classic ideals of style is this style in which words have their color, their music, their perfume, in which there is "some strangeness in the proportion" of every beauty! The *Studies in the Renaissance* have

made of criticism a new art—have raised criticism almost to the act of creation. And *Marius the Epicurean*, in its study of "sensations and ideas" (the conjunction was Goncourt's before it was Mr. Pater's), and the *Imaginary Portraits*, in their evocations of the Middle Ages, the age of Watteau—have they not that morbid subtlety of analysis, that morbid curiosity of form, that we have found in the works of the French Decadents? A fastidiousness equal to that of Flaubert has limited Mr. Pater's work to six volumes, but in these six volumes there is not a page that is not perfectly finished, with a conscious art of perfection. In its minute elaboration it can be compared only with goldsmith's work—so fine, so delicate is the handling of so delicate, so precious a material.

Mr. Henley's work in verse has none of the characteristics of Mr. Pater's work in prose. Verlaine's definition of his own theory of poetical writing—"sincerity, and the impression of the moment followed to the letter"—might well be adopted as a definition of Mr. Henley's theory or practice. In *A Book of Verses* and *The Song of the Sword* he has brought into the traditional conventionalities of modern English verse the note of a new personality, the touch of a new method. The poetry of Impressionism can go no further, in one direction, than that series of rhymes and rhythms named *In Hospital*. The ache and throb of the body in its long nights on a tumbled bed, and as it lies on the operating-table awaiting "the thick, sweet mystery of chloroform," are brought home to us as nothing else that I know in poetry has ever brought the physical sensations. And for a sharper, closer truth of rendering, Mr. Henley has resorted (after the manner of Heine) to a rhymeless form of lyric verse, which in his hands, certainly, is sensitive and expressive. Whether this kind of *vers libre* can fully compensate, in what it gains of freedom and elasticity, for what it loses of compact form and vocal appeal, is a



W. E. HENLEY.
From a photograph by Frederick Hollyer, London.

difficult question. It is one that Mr. Henley's verse is far from solving in the affirmative, for, in his work, the finest things, to my mind, are rhymed. In the purely impressionistic way, do not the *London Voluntaries*, which are rhymed, surpass all the unrhymed vignettes and nocturnes which attempt the same quality of result? They flash before us certain aspects of the poetry of London as only Whistler had ever done, and in another art. Nor is it only the poetry of cities, as here, nor the poetry of the disagreeable, as in *In Hospital*, that Mr. Henley can evoke; he can evoke the magic of personal romance. He has written verse that is exquisitely frivolous, daintily capricious, wayward and fugitive as the winged remembrance of some momentary delight. And, in certain fragments, he has come nearer than any other English singer to what I have called the achievement of Verlaine and the ideal of the Decadence: to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul.



"I GAZED UPON MY LOVE."