
FLAUBERT *and* GEORGE
SAND IN THEIR
CORRESPONDENCE

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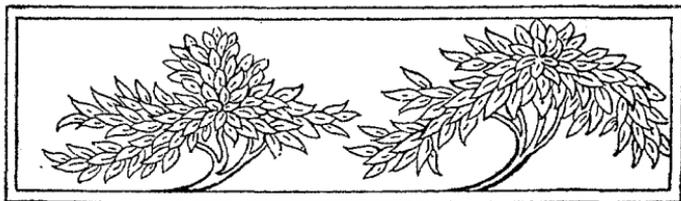
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FLAUBERT AND GEORGE SAND IN THEIR CORRESPONDENCE

ALL human activities, in the last analysis, are viewed from two points, the personal and the impersonal. When these two views are brought face to face, as they are fundamentally irreconcilable, a conflict is sure to arise. This conflict is not necessarily bitter, it may even be friendly: it depends largely on the character and temper of the adversaries. In the case of the Romanticist, George Sand, and the Realist, Gustave Flaubert, who were good friends, the controversy remained amicable. On the pages of their letters, however, the strife is ever present, in a latent state when not openly raging. This contention between two gifted writers, bound by the ties of a deep-seated affection and sincere admiration for each other's character and talent, is to me the main interest of their correspondence.

George Sand's letters were published about ten years after her death and fill six volumes; Flaubert's soon after in four volumes of the same size. But it was not until 1904 that the correspondence of the two was published separately, in a single volume, by George Sand's daughter-in-law, Lina Calamatta Dudevant, Maurice Sand's wife and the real daughter of the novelist, if love forms closer ties than blood. Solanges,

Handwritten notes in the left margin:
L
T
Sept 1897
L. C. Calamatta
Dudevant

George Sand's own daughter, after her marriage lived apart from her mother, with whom she had little in common. Lina Sand worshiped her mother-in-law and devoted the leisure of her later life to the publication of a correct and complete edition of the correspondence of her mother with the last though not the least of her friends. These letters are so remarkable, in many respects, that an American translation was issued two years ago.

The essentially different talents of the two writers, the nobility of their hearts, the everlasting character and interest of the conflict that both divides and unites them, the eminent quality of their epistolary style, and the recent translation of their correspondence combine to draw our attention in a particular manner at this time to these famous literary figures.

Both Sand and Flaubert are so well known by their works and the originality of their personalities that an attempt at a portrayal may seem idle. However, there are some features of their careers which ought to be recalled, in order that we may have a clearer understanding of their respective viewpoints, and follow more intelligently the discussions to be found in their letters.

First of all, both are very sympathetic figures in their profession. The same cannot be said of some of their contemporaries, among whom are found great egotists, quacks, snobs, fools, and poseurs, a collection of types of which the writers' profession has not the monopoly, but has often more than its share. Sincere they both were to the point of improving singularly on the gentle art of making enemies, often without necessity: Gustave, with more success than George, sometimes, it seems, for the mere pleasure of it. She, in addition to social graces, the absence of which is very marked in Flaubert, had more tact and consideration

for the feelings and opinions of others. She was a woman and she was wiser.

With George Sand, forbearance was a natural gift and it grew with the years, fostered by experience and also by her philosophy, when it was not the effect, in her hours of depression, of a touch of weariness. On reaching her sixties, she had experienced so many climes, she had been tossed on so many seas, of life, she had sounded so many hearts and dissected so many intellects, in the real world and in her world of fiction, that she had reached a sort of godlike state, which the naughtiness and wickedness of men and the inherent perversity of things could no longer disturb. Her large black eyes, velvety and veiled, often commented upon by her admirers and detractors alike, but for different reasons, would not have been out of place in the face of a goddess of destiny.

On the contrary, the huge bodily frame of Flaubert had not a shadow of patience. Extremely irascible, he had no control whatever over his temper. Far from trying to subdue his fits of anger, he was convinced that his wrath was befitting a giant like him and he let it go on mortals as if it were a sign of the displeasure of the gods. Could this violence be ascribed to a sort of childish vanity? Not at all. In his dealings with others, he was so honest and straightforward that the least opposition on their part appeared to him not only a reflection on his own character, but a flagrant infraction of justice or a direct insult to eternal truth.

His fondness for retirement and solitude rendered him the worst service in this respect, as well as in others. Suffering from an inborn timidity, he became through his monastic habit more and more unused to the ways and manners of others. Enjoying the advantages conferred by the independence in money-matters that goes

with a small income, able to live comfortably, if simply, without having to waste a thought on earning his daily bread, he could fully indulge his taste for seclusion. This taste grew rapidly into a mania, and he went so far as to fear like fire any business dealings, either for the safekeeping of his property or the publication and success of his writings. With the same fervor, he shunned the stage manager, the theatrical director, the publishing editor, and the real estate man, *notaire*, *huissier*, lawyer, attorney, and other mushrooms of the law, who thrive so luxuriously on the rich soil of his Normandy. His instinctive aversion to all of them was nurtured partly by a genuine fear of their craftiness, partly by his romantic contempt for all those having any connection whatsoever with the class of people whom, in his indignation at their indifference to art and beauty, he branded as *bourgeois*. The ivory tower which is the heaven of the mystic soul had been converted into a castle by Vigny's pride and into a sweatshop by Balzac's industry. Flaubert had also his ivory tower, but I am afraid his was a ground-hole, a burrow, in which his misgivings for the affairs of the world made him take refuge when too hard pressed by the hunters.

On the part of any other man, this mixture of pride and fear might be singularly unpleasant. Those who do not know him well might get thereby a wrong idea of his real nature. The fact is that Gustave Flaubert, with the body of a viking, the aspect of a Norman pirate, the sonorous voice and the heavy moustache of a third empire colonel of cuirassiers, had the soul of a child. All his life he was a big boy. He had the genial disposition, the good-heartedness, and simplicity characteristic of this lovely state of underdevelopment. For this evident shortcoming he was the dearer to a robust,

calm, and serene matron like her who had become, when she knew him, the "good lady of Nohant."

No doubt the fairies had endowed little Aurore Dupin with this equanimity, for life, with its stress and storm, proved powerless to take it from her. Born in 1804, the year Napoleon crowned himself emperor, at his downfall, ten years later, she had reached the age of consciousness. From then on, her alert mind, so fond of pondering over everything that came under its observation, had numerous opportunities to register most interesting happenings. Between her age of ten and twenty-five, the Bourbons were again the masters of France, and Romanticism ruled art and literature. Then, coinciding with her own emancipation from an unbearable married life and conventional bonds, broke out the Revolution of 1830. It was during the constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe of Orleans that fame rewarded the efforts of this young woman of thirty. To provide for herself and her two children, she had turned from china-painting to novel-writing. Her immediate success, the strange charm of her person, combined with the strength, independence, and originality of her mind, brought her the admiration and love of young romanticists and realists alike: Jules Sandeau, Mérimée, Musset. Her flight to Venice with the last named is too well known to stop us even for a moment. A parenthesis, however, here ought to be inserted. Whatever one thinks of her conduct toward this "grand gamin" and "*enfant terrible*," Alfred de Musset, one has to admit that she was not afraid of the consequences, social and literary, of her act. Her enemies—she had many, she still has some—call effrontery, brazenness, what people less concerned with the private conduct of others might name courage. Granting she was wrong, she was none the less brave. Free love

with her was not a temporary lapse; it was a principle. She had discussed it, preached it, illustrated it in her books. She was consistent and put into practice what she had propounded in theory. She had made it perfectly plain that in renouncing the prerogatives of her sex, since she lived and dressed sometimes like a man, she had acquired *ipso facto* the privileges of the men. Was she not treated by men like one of them? Then, when she acted exactly like most, if not all, of them, what right had they to judge her otherwise than they judged each other? In this affair she may not have acted with the discretion and delicacy expected from a woman. But she was no longer what contemporaneous conventions called a woman, and she acted certainly with the bravado so much admired by her gentlemen friends, the lions and dandies, followers of Don Juan and Beau Brummel. And for that she was subjected to the most cruel and crushing insults that can be heaped on a woman's spirit. But she did not flinch. At the time of the Musset imbroglio and ever since, she has been called by the vilest names. There is one she never deserved: it is coward. After this attack her fortitude could withstand any assault.

In the 1848 movement she took an important part. By her writings and deeds she fostered the cause of liberty. Her generous nature found in this revival of the spirit of '89 an occasion to expand and assert itself. She developed a sort of social mysticism that always pervaded her ideas, writings, and conduct thereafter.

The prince-president's coup d'état of 1851 was a great shock to her, as may be readily assumed. It was the ruin of many illusions. A disciple of Rousseau, she had founded great hopes on the intelligence and virtues of the masses. If, however, her faith in the ability and power of the common people to govern themselves and

enjoy the fruits of liberty had been rudely shaken, she did not stop being lovingly interested in their sufferings and aspirations.

Her mother was a typical eighteenth-century woman. From her she inherited her freedom of thought, her impatience with constituted authority, and her belief in progress. In spite of all her bitter disappointments in men in general, she kept intact the convictions of her youth. The second half of the imperial régime, the so-called "liberal Empire"—on account of the concessions the powers had been forced to grant to the people's demands—brought her not only comfort but an ardent revival of her hopes. It is during this twilight succeeding the darkness of despotism that she and Flaubert became acquainted.

I have dwelt thus at length on George Sand as an artist and as a mere human being, to bring out the fact that the path trodden by her dainty feet was not strewn only with the petals of roses. Plenty of thorns raised their darts to impede her walk and wound her. Her optimism was not the vulgar symptom of good health and success. It was deeply rooted in her heart. Neither was it the source of selfish comfort. She was generous with her advice and purse; many a letter, more from her correspondents' pens than her own, is there to prove it.

The great grand-daughter of Marshall Maurice of Saxony was an enthusiastic girl who had naturally all the qualifications of the romanticist. This disposition was accentuated by her education, associations, and surroundings. Her first novels appeared at a time when French romanticism, fully conscious of what it stood for in opposition to classicism—or rather the ghost of classicism—was at its height. Success has always for its main effect a strengthening of tendencies

and a deepening of convictions. The very sufferings that romantic behavior, in the ordinary walks of life, brings to the devotees of this faith, are not a deterrent, for these sufferings do not go without their compensations. George Sand's calm disposition and masterful self-control allowed her to enjoy romantic emotions to the full. These sentimental experiments she turned to artistic treatment in her works, without shame or remorse. Against the opposition her literary doctrine met in the middle of the century, an opposition coming from a revolution in the public taste tutored by Balzac's genius and the careful workmanship of Stendhal, Mérimée, Flaubert, plus Taine's philosophy, she clung to her ideal and her art. These filled her whole life, and were the sources of untold joys and comforts. When unhappy, she writes; when ill, she writes; when in trouble or in debt, she writes. The bulk of her novels and plays is astounding and many of them are masterpieces by their power or originality. They fill about one hundred and eighty octavos. Think what vitality it requires to conceive and execute a work of that quantity and quality! Aurore Dupin was indeed the worthy descendant of the herculean Maurice. Her letters to Flaubert show her still writing during the silent hours of the night, as she used to do when she was younger, and when one of her plays was in rehearsal, traveling back and forth between Nohant and Paris. When she was tired, her mind and body found a bracing fountain of youth in the icy waters of the river Indre that ran at the foot of her garden.

Physically, in appearance at least, Flaubert was her match, but he was not so normal as she. We know that he suffered from epilepsy. The sedentary life he led, confined in his study, racking his brains to find structures and images that would satisfy his exacting

demands for aesthetic form, was not indeed conducive to betterment in health. But with him the artist takes entire possession of the man; it absorbs him. Flaubert was perfectly conscious of the fact, and he aided a natural bent by the force of his will, which made it worse. He boasted of being a *man-pen*. His only passion was his art. Born a romanticist, he strove diligently and systematically to eliminate from his nature the personal element. Of romanticism, however, he kept the absolute devotion to art, the cult, nay, the idolatry of pure beauty.

When their relations began, he was forty-two and she was fifty-seven. She had written the larger and better part of her work. He had published *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*. The latter was the occasion that brought them together. Why it did not happen earlier, we do not know. It may be that their literary ideas kept them apart. He avoided romanticism, she ignored realism. Outside of literature, their only common ground was the domain of the heart. To meet, they had to wait until fate should make them tread it at the same hour.

Salammbô's publication sounded this hour. The subject offers greater fields for the imagination to wander in than *Madame Bovary*. George Sand seems to have enjoyed his Carthaginian story. Perhaps she was helped in this matter a little by the great admiration her son Maurice and his wife had for this book. She wrote later to Flaubert how her children defended it ferociously and vociferously against those of their guests who were not of the same opinion. As for her, who was asked once in a while by magazine editors to write articles of criticism, she published a eulogistic account of the book and sent to its author a complimentary letter. Flaubert's big heart was deeply

touched by these two testimonials coming from so distinguished an opponent, and the most significant line of his word of acknowledgment was: "Honestly, I love you very much." A year later, he had a chance to return the compliment. She had adapted to the stage her great novel, *Le Marquis de Villemer*, which met with such success that it was played all the year 1864. But before the first performance she was very nervous about its reception, and was most thankful to her new friend for having been on this occasion "kind and sympathetic." Thus it is that their friendship began. As the days passed, they saw a little more of each other, they talked now and then with each other, and especially they wrote to each other. But it is not so much what they did, as it is what they felt. From the first, they loved each other like two good "pals," and that was enough. Neither the long intervals of separation nor the differences of opinions cooled their friendship. It withstood gloriously these two severe tests.

With Gustave, George is perfectly at ease. She feels and behaves as if she were half her age and a man instead of a woman. She lives over again her Latin Quarter days. Indeed, she refers often to the dinners they took together at Magny's, a restaurant where she used to go on regular days to meet artists and men of letters. There Flaubert and George had endless talks, especially on their art. People with ideas and theories, Flaubert said he could always find. In fact, he found more of them than he wanted. But she was one of the few, and soon, alas! the only one, to whom he could speak of the niceties of fine writing and be listened to and understood. Certainly she and he must have presented a picturesque sight, after they had partaken of Magny's palatable food and famous wines, when, with their elbows on the table and in the corner of their

mouths a good cigar or an old pipe—either would do, she was not afraid of either—they argued over the aesthetic merit of a sentence or the intrinsic beauty of an image. It is in these heart-to-heart *tête-à-têtes* that both found what a fine fellow the other was and how congenial. Flaubert's secluded life had allowed him to remain a real Bohemian. Although a grandmother, she still was the Bohemian of her earlier days by her fondness for jolly company, a gay time, and, in short, everything that was not the rut and routine. Among her first letters to him, there are three in which she amuses herself by composing in the style and with the spelling of a person who would make Mrs. Malaprop jealous. Since the two boon companions loved words for their own sake, this folly caused them to pass some delightful moments.

It did not take them long to be on terms of intimacy. They soon gave each other the romantic name, "My old" or "My dear Troubadour," an ironic allusion to their common fondness for the good old time when everything was better than it is now. Were not also their ideas and feelings somewhat out of place in the modern practical world? On his part, there is always respect and deference. She is "*Chère Mère*" with *chère* in the feminine gender, a charming association of words representing perfectly his attitude toward her, the comrade tenderly dear and the great creator of the ideal world where lives assume shape and beauty.

George is more familiar. Although *Madame Bovary's* author is older than *Camille's*, she addresses him affectionately as thee or thou—something that she never did in writing to Alexandre Dumas, whom she regarded and treated like her own son, while he confided his joys and sorrows to her as he would to his own

mother. Dumas she called either "My dear son," or "My dear child," and signed herself, "Your mother."

She writes oftener and longer than Flaubert. Although her work takes a great deal of her time, she finds always a few minutes for writing to her friends, and even hours to spend with her family. She is much concerned with Flaubert's health and secluded mode of living. She tells him he is wrong to live like a hermit. It is bad for his intellectual as well as his physical health. She wants him to come out of his shell and meet people. She urges him again and again to take exercise, to walk on the roads of his lovely country, and breathe deeply the bracing air of his native Normandy. Why does he not come to Nohant? She would take him around her place, through the meadows, the fields, and the woods which she loves so much and, as we know, has so felicitously painted in her stories of rustic life. She advises him to marry, to introduce a woman into his life, in order to take his mind off his literary task. He retorts that the feminine element does not fit into his scheme of things, that for the artist celibacy is as necessary as for the priest. Is not the artist a sort of priest? In the penance of the flesh both find the vigor of the mind! Anyway, there is a monk in him. He will explain all that to her by word of mouth, to her to whom he can confide so much, for she is of the *third sex*.

Flaubert's resolution is taken and he remains obdurate. Art is long, life is short. It takes him so much time and labor to achieve very little. Six pages mean six days of travail. Moreover, the trip from Croisset to Nohant is not only long, it is expensive, and his income is hardly sufficient for his modest needs. Heaven knows how glad he would be to see her and talk with her! All he can do is to go to Paris when she her-

self will be there, and they will dine together and talk all the evening of their dreams and art. Yes, she answers, this visit to Paris is better than nothing, but when they are together they have so much to say that time flies always too fast. Then, they are too tired, he from his long hours of reading in libraries, she from a rehearsal or a wrangling over a contract with a publisher. Only the quiet evening hours in Nohant will satisfy her. This is the only suitable place for a visit. It is all arranged, her family expect him, everything is prepared to receive him. Her home is his, better than his, for all the members of her household love him. He can stay the whole day in his dressing gown and slippers. Nobody will object.

To this pressing invitation he owes a full explanation for his refusal. He is most happy with her and her children and children's child, pretty Aurore, whom he kissed on her "four" cheeks. (Aurore was two years old.) In fact, he is so happy among them all in Nohant that, once back in his garret in Croisset, it takes him a week to recover from her parties. It is absurd, but it is the truth. He cannot gather his thoughts together; he cannot concentrate on his work. He remembers Maurice's marionettes who perform so wonderfully George's plays. He remembers the endless dinners and the spirited literary discussions between courses. He remembers the dances and frolics of the younger set from which, like an old fool, he had not the courage to stay away. Like the Saint Anthony of his *Tentation*, he is ceaselessly haunted by all kinds of charming visions. No, he cannot come to Nohant. His writer's conscience is against this trip. His art compels him to shut himself up in his garret, with his books, for he reads extensively; with his notes, for he compiles abundantly; with his paper, pen, and cigars, for he

writes over and over again the same description, the same image, the same dialogue, dreaming over them, turning them over in his head, which is pretty near bursting, until he reaches the point that he regards as satisfactory, if not perfect.

On reading these lines, George Sand must have wondered whether this torture is the same process known to her as the joy of conception. Since she could not see her friend, she had a mental picture of him. He was laboring in his quest after beauty like an ox at the plow. On the ocean of his dreams he sweated like a galley-slave chained to his bench, so busy with his heavy oars, so intent on following his course that he was perfectly deaf to the sirens' songs full of grace and charm. The unfortunate one never knows what they say, nor has he the least suspicion of their manner of saying it. Grace and charm, ease and abandon are not found in his books, to their greatest detriment. Mere beauty of form and color, exact reproduction of nature ugly or beautiful, not glazed with the magic azure of the soul, are not powerful enough to make men forget their sorrows.

It was not only to work that Flaubert stayed shut up in his study. As already said, his timidity and his horror of practical affairs caused him to shun company. Other causes of dissatisfaction with men and things came to convert this retiring disposition into a permanent state of disgust. Where lies the origin of this misanthropy? It cannot be found in life. Fate had not been cruel to this son of a good middle-class family. From his father he had inherited enough to live with his mother comfortably, though modestly. In his youth he had been given the opportunity of taking an extensive trip in the East, rather a luxury at that time, and an inexhaustible source of artistic recollec-

tions. No experience that embitters the whole existence ever happened to him. The fact is that Flaubert had no personal reason to be sick of men or of life. But, he was sick of them—sincerely, constantly, and trenchantly. He was perfectly aware of the progress he made along this line. Far from becoming blunt with the years, his sensitiveness became sharper, often for things that were of no account whatever. Now, how could a man who had so little to do with other men entertain such a harsh feeling against them? The answer is to be found in that very fact. The less he had to do directly with them, the less he could reconcile himself with them. This is the story of all natural dispositions that are allowed to follow their course unobstructed. Strangers are always regarded first as enemies. Finally, he read too much about men and what they did.

His passion for documentation played him a mean trick in this respect. In his search for real things to write about, he used to consult all the authors in favor of a question and as many against it. It is easy to guess what he got. A picture of contrasts, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions. Now, if there was ever a writer of talent deprived of a critical sense, outside of style, it is Gustave Flaubert. Perhaps, in this muddle, a sense of humor would have helped him, but he had none. This lack of humor was an excellent background to set off his originality as an artist, but it was greatly injurious to him as an observer. Perhaps I should say onlooker, for an observer Flaubert was not, since he was satisfied with his books, where observations were already made for him. Instead of reading for himself the big book of life, where, as he says, the good God does not express an opinion—this was, by the way, an argument in favor of impersonality in art!—he saw life only through the eyes of others. These views were

necessarily fragmentary, and, as the fragments did not fit, he was unable to construct a harmonious whole, for it must not be forgotten that imagination, in the sense of imaginative intuition, has no more part to play in his conception of art than sentiment. Unlike Pierre Bayle, Flaubert could not enjoy the discrepancies of human nature, and his primitive logic was unable to reconcile them. The study of history and archaeology for *Salammô*, of catholic theology and asceticism in the Middle Ages for the two *Tentations de Saint Antoine*, of everything under the sun for the crazy enterprises of his two maniacs *Boward et Pécuchet*—all this medley of truth, ignorance, and fancy seems to have been a little too much for a mind famished for the absolute. He learned of so much nonsense and folly that he came to the same conclusion as Voltaire and Renan, without having for an excuse the devotion to the enlightenment of mankind of the former or the benevolent and resigned philosophy of the latter. He subscribed heartily to Voltaire's "The history of the human mind is the history of human stupidity"; and to Renan's "There is only one thing that has ever given me the idea of the Infinite: it is man's stupidity." One understands readily how fatal this point of view is to an artist whose subject is man, for the first condition of art is sympathetic treatment. The comic playwright may ridicule the foibles, defects, and vices of man; the satirist those of a certain individual; but the novelist, who should aim to depict human beings, but instead sees in his personages only a crowd of fools deserving to be interned in an insane asylum, is bound to give a curious picture of life first, and second to perform on his artist's sensitiveness a disastrous operation. As a surgeon's son, who himself had been "raised in the dissecting room" and had begun medical studies, Flaubert should have known

better. He was not blind to this infirmity, he knew that his sensitiveness was injured by its being too sharp, but instead of reacting against such a deplorable state, he insisted in the name of his theory of art. He who had become so sick of principles and slogans, the only causes of man's misery; he who did not want to recognize as valuable anything but facts, was fighting tooth and nail for the principles of Realism, which had no other illustrious origin than to be born of the excesses of a silly Romanticism. He has summed up his theory in no uncertain words:

I even think that a novelist *has not the right to express his own opinion* on any subject whatever. He may communicate it, but I do not like him to say it. (That is part of my art of poetry.) I limit myself, then, to declaring things as they appear to me, to expressing what seems to me to be true. And the devil take the consequences; rich or poor, victors or vanquished, I admit none of all that. I want neither love nor hate, nor pity nor anger. . . . Great art is scientific and impersonal.

To place Flaubert in contradiction with himself is a game too easy to be indulged in. He, whose permanent state of heart was in turn love and hate, pity and anger, refused systematically to put his own self in his works. He closed his ears to the sound and simple advice of his great friend, who, in her letters to him, deplored incessantly the fact that his simple, naïve, and beautiful nature should be absent from his artistically magnificent productions. In him the artist succeeded in stifling the poet. He who could love so well insisted on hating. This hatred, offspring of his anger, took after its parent. Like it, it was sudden, violent, and ended in smoke. He worked assiduously to keep out of his stories its terrifying face, but it crept in under the mask of irony, as is obvious in his last novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The Romanticist who lurked in the author of *La Tentation*

tion de Saint Antoine had kept an admiration for the evil passions that are the fabric of tales of horror. For the Romanticists, the violence of hatred was far more attractive and aesthetic than the gentleness of love, and so this good man and impassible artist strove to hate and urged his gentle friend to hate with him:

Ah! dear good master, if only you could hate! That is what you lack, hate. In spite of your great Sphynx eyes, you have seen the world through a golden color. That comes from the sun in your heart; but so many shadows have arisen that now you are not recognizing things any more. Come now! Cry out! Thunder! Take your great lyre and touch the brazen string: the monsters will flee. Bedew us with the drops of the blood of wounded Themis.

It was another favorite tenet of the Romanticists that the modern world is unbearable. It is practical and ugly. Machinery has ruined the handicrafts. Money displaces ideals one after the other; and so on and so forth. Flaubert's realism did not save him from this conviction. Like others, therefore, he took refuge in the past and cursed the present. The French Revolution, the beginning of the modern era, is for him the scapegoat of our sins that can be traced, as a whole, to education for all and fraternity, that is to say, Christian charity substituted for Justice.

But, since the evil is done, the best use we can make of it is to have an educated *élite* to rule us.

What we need most of all is a natural, that is to say, a *legitimate aristocracy*. No one can do anything without a head, and universal suffrage, as it exists, is more stupid than divine right. . . . The only reasonable thing is a government by mandarins, provided the mandarins know something and even that they know many things. The people is for ever a minor, a person who cannot take care of its own affairs, and it will be (in the hierarchy of social elements) always in the last row, since it is number, mass, the unlimited. It is of little

moment whether many peasants know how to read, and listen no longer to their priest; but it is of great moment that many men like Renan and Littré should be able to live and be listened to! Our safety is now only in a legitimate aristocracy, I mean by that a majority that is composed of more than mere numbers. As long as we do not bow to mandarins, as long as the Academy of Sciences does not replace the pope, politics as a whole and society, down to its very roots, will be nothing but a collection of disheartening humbugs. We are floundering in the after-birth of the Revolution, which was an abortion, a misfire, a rank failure, whatever they say. And the reason is that it proceeded from the Middle Ages and Christianity. The idea of equality (which is inherent in modern democracy) is an essentially Christian idea and opposed to that of Justice. Observe how mercy predominates now. Sentiment is everything, Justice is nothing. The doctrine of grace has so thoroughly permeated us that Justice has disappeared. People are now not even indignant against murderers. . . . The school of rehabilitation has led us to see no difference between a rascal and an honest man. As for the good people, "free and compulsory" education will finish them. When everyone is able to read *le Petit Journal* and *le Figaro*, he won't read anything else, because the bourgeois and the rich man read only these. Consequence: it will do nothing but augment the number of imbeciles. The press is a school of demoralization, because it dispenses with thinking. . . . The first remedy will be to do away with universal suffrage, the shame of the human mind. As it is constituted, one single element prevails to the detriment of all the others: numbers dominate over mind, education, race, and even money, which is worth more than numbers. . . . The infinite stupidity of the masses makes me indulgent to individualities, however odious they may be. The whole dream of democracy is to elevate the proletarian to the level of the imbecility of the bourgeois. The dream is partly accomplished. He reads the papers and has the same passions. . . . Axiom: Hatred of the bourgeois is the beginning of virtue. But I include in the word bourgeois, the bourgeois in overalls and the bourgeois in the white collar. . . . The three degrees of education have shown within the last year what they can accomplish: 1) higher education made Prussia win; 2) secondary education, bourgeois, produced the men of the 4th of September; 3) primary education gave us the Commune. . . .

As a general conclusion, this sweeping statement will sum up very well Flaubert's characteristically romantic point of view: "Man's evolution is divided into three periods: Antiquity, Christianity, Vulgarity." His misfortune, he adds, is that he has to live at the beginning of the third. Fortunately for him, he can be a writer, for "It is we and we alone, that is to say the literary men, who are the people, or to say it better: the tradition of humanity." So roared and decreed Flaubert.

What we know of George Sand, what has been especially emphasized in this paper concerning her character, career, and ideals, would be sufficient to foretell fairly well the substance of her answers. Her friend's opinions did not shake hers in the least. It was to be so to the end in this everlasting duel of the two last troubadours. These truculent statements she read with the same smile on her lips and the same sadness in her eyes as when she listened to the obstreperous *boutades* with which he punctuated their literary discussions at Magny's or in her home, in taking coffee and smoking after a fine dinner, when one feels so good that he could conquer the world to his ideal. After some of his sallies, noticing the expression on her face, he would say: "You are not like me! You are full of compassion. There are days when I choke with wrath. I should like to drown my contemporaries in latrines, or at least deluge their haughty heads with torrents of abuse, cataracts of invectives. Why? I wonder myself." And, like a big watch-dog that satisfies its conscience by barking fiercely at a passing cart on the road, and, its duty done, returns sullenly to its kennel, big Gustave gave vent to his bile. I do not exaggerate. Two incidents that he relates in his letters give a fair idea of his absurd manners.

Although I consider myself a good man, I am not always an agreeable gentleman—witness what happened to me Thursday last. After having lunched with a lady whom I had called “imbecile,” I went to call on another who I had said was “a perfect ninny”; such is my French gallantry of yore. The first one had bored me to death with her lecture on spirituality and her pretensions to ideality; the second outraged me by telling me that Renan was a rascal. She had not even read his books.

The American HARRISSE maintained to me the other day that Saint-Simon wrote badly. At that I burst out and talked to him in such a way that he will never more before me belch his idiocy. It was at dinner at the Princess’s; my violence cast a chill. You see that your Cruchard continues not to listen to jokes on religion! He does not become calm! quite the contrary! Yes, I am susceptible to disinterested angers and I love you all the more for loving me for that. Stupidity and injustice make me roar,—and I howl in my corner against a lot of things that do not concern me. It is true that many things exasperate me. On the day when I am no longer outraged, I shall fall as flat as the marionette from which one withdraws the support of the stick.

George Sand’s fortitude was not without its breaks of depression. If she had invariably been strong, like the typical Cornelian heroine, she would have been less human, and so less sympathetic, less admirable. The Franco-Prussian war and the Commune, both disastrous results of a form of government she cordially detested, left her “indignant and disgusted.” To forget, to recover her poise and the free exercise of her thought, she did not take refuge in the past, like Flaubert, but in the burning present, especially in her tender feelings for her close friends and her ardent love for her children and their daughter, Aurore. The secret of happiness, she says, is to get really infatuated. This infatuation she had not only for persons, but for her work, in which she found joy and comfort as well as a means of livelihood. No wonder that her sustained

and superior production and her ability to earn her own living and her family's aroused the admiration of Flaubert, who was as if paralyzed when circumstances demanded action, who published so little, worked so much, and felt unable to gain money with his pen. She, like Antaeus, drew a new moral, intellectual, and spiritual force from her contact with her children and friends, their affection and love.

All she had written to Flaubert, at different times and on different occasions, about his attitude toward democracy, education, the modern world, the uplifting of the masses, bourgeois and workingmen, artists and philistines, false great men and unworthy men of letters, she gathered and developed in a long letter. It is dated Nohant, September 14, 1871, appeared in the paper *Le Temps*, under the title *Réponse à un ami*, and was published later with other articles collected under the name *Impressions et Souvenirs*. It is truly worth reading in its entirety, if one desires to get a deep insight into the lofty character, and realize the clearness of vision, of this superwoman.

Here follows a summary of it:¹

A strange reproach, indeed, is it to blame me for loving; a strange boast to be proud of finding mankind as vile as one had suspected. Such wisdom befits old age. To have always been in possession of it is to confess that one has never been young. Well, I have remained young, for, in spite of all, I am still loving.

Why be so hard on poor mankind? Are they not her friend and she parts of it? Or, if withdrawing from it, are they to isolate themselves? Impossible. At least for her, for she cannot remain indifferent to the sufferings of others. Just like a good many, she has foreseen that evil was coming; she has seen the approach of the cataclysm. Understanding

¹ Whenever she condenses her idea into a vivid expression, I have quoted her literally. I have used Mrs. Aimée McKenzie's rendering, when it seemed to me particularly felicitous.

thoroughly, however, the patient's illness is no consolation, when he is writhing in agony. No man can stay away from his fellowmen. We all feel the need of one another. "Humanity is not a vain word. Our life is all love; not to love is to cease to live."

To be harsh with the common people is to be harsh with ourselves. Classes are more apparent than real. You and I, my friend, belong to the same common stock. "First men were hunters and shepherds, then farmers and soldiers." Brigandage is the family portrait hanging in the ancestral hall of any aristocracy. We have to endure this ancestor, rather than to be proud of him. "The people always ferocious," you say? I say: "The nobility always savage." Peasants and nobles are the most hostile to progress. Thinkers should be happy not to be any of them. Then, why bend before them? "Whoever denies the people, cheapens himself, and gives to the world the shameful spectacle of apostasy." Since the bourgeoisie, daughter of the French Revolution, has been content with draping her shoulders with the nobleman's embroidered coat and stepping into his red-heeled slippers, is it a wonder that the common people abandon this aristocratic bourgeoisie?

The masses are neither ferocious nor imbecile; they are ignorant and foolish. The worst members of the Commune did not belong to the common herd, and the Commune itself did not represent the common people of France.

Distinctions based on education are meaningless. Education, among the French, is not yet old enough to be judged on its merits. It is the man's character that gives its true value to his education.

Distinctions based on wealth are unstable. Rich men of today may be poor tomorrow and viceversa.

Any classification is impossible. Reason and morality only assign to men their relative places.

Free and compulsory education, in spite of its disadvantages, we cannot reject on account of our respect for human rights. Like all things that man uses and abuses, it is both the poison and the antidote. No infallible remedy for our woes will ever be discovered. The only advance possible comes through the amelioration of habits and the reconciliation of interests.

Although you have been wise enough to predict the deluge, this prediction will not save you. You will perish with the

rest of us, and "you will be no greater a philosopher for not having loved, than those who threw themselves into the flood to save some débris of humanity." If they are not worth the effort, "we shall perish with them, just the same, but better die in the fullness of life. I prefer that to hibernation in ice. Any way, I could not do otherwise. Love does not reason. . . . More than ever I feel the need of raising what is low, and of lifting again what has fallen." . . . I do not care for groups of men. "I know only wise and foolish, innocent and guilty."

"If it is not liberty for all and fraternity towards all, do not let us attempt to solve the problem of humanity; we are not worthy of defining it, we are not capable of comprehending it."

"Equality does not impose itself; it is a free plant that grows only on fertile lands, in salubrious air. It does not take root on barricades. . . . It is immediately trodden under the foot of the conqueror, whoever he may be."

"Now, friend, you want me to say that the people have always been ferocious, the priest always hypocritical, the bourgeois always cowardly, the soldier always a brigand, the peasant always stupid. No, a hundred times no. Humanity is outraged in me and with me. We must not dissimulate nor try to forget this indignation which is one of the most passionate forms of love. We must make great efforts in behalf of brotherhood to repair the ravages of hate. We must put an end to the scourge, wipe out infamy with scorn, and inaugurate by faith the resurrection of our country."

These are some of the important passages of her answer, greatly condensed.

This beautiful and eloquent open letter did not convert the friend. Flaubert shed a tear, but was not persuaded. He looked vainly in her article, he said, for one word: *Justice*, for all our ill comes from forgetting absolutely that first notion of morality, which, to his way of thinking, composes all morality. Humanitarianism, sentiment, the ideal, have played us sufficiently mean tricks for us to try righteousness and science.

His obstinancy did not discourage her. After this attack on his social and political opinions and theories, she made an assault on his literary doctrines. This time it was not an article, but a sort of formal letter. She had been very ill all the summer, she was in her seventy-second year, she seemed to realize that her end was not far off, and this letter sounded like a solemn warning.

Flaubert had just passed through one of his periods of discouragement. She, who was old and ill, began her letter with words of hope and faith:

At last, I discover my old troubadour who was a subject of sorrow and serious worry to me. Here you are on your feet again, trusting to luck in outside matters, and rediscovering in yourself the power to dismiss them, whatever they may be, by work. Then, you are going to start grubbing again? So am I.

What is our next move? You, of course, will beget *desolation*, and I, *consolation*. Your impassibility before the human show will make your readers sadder. I shall endeavor to make them less miserable. I am afraid that your doctrine of impersonality in art comes more from a lack of conviction than from an aesthetic principle. Let me tell you, the Goncourts and you, you especially, you lack a well-defined and comprehensive view of life. Art is not merely painting. True painting, besides, is full of the soul that wields the brush. Art is not merely criticism and satire; criticism and satire depict only one side of the truth.

Your school, it seems to me, is more concerned with the appearance than with the real nature of things. Striving after the form, it ignores the substance. It addresses itself to the men of taste. But there are no men of taste, properly speaking. First of all, one is a man, and it is the man one wants to find at the basis of every story and every deed. That is what the defect is of *l'Education sentimentale*, about which I have so often thought, wondering why a work so well done and so solid caused so much exasperation. This defect was the absence of *action* of the characters on themselves. They submitted to the event and never directed it. Well, I think that the chief interest in a story is the very thing you

purposely avoided. If I were you, I would try to do the opposite; you are feeding on Shakespeare just now. You can't do better. Here is one who puts men at grips with events; observe that by them, whether for good or for ill, the event is always conquered. He, with them, crushes it under foot.

You seem to think that I want to convert you to a doctrine. I never had such an idea. Every one has his point of view and every one has a right to it. Here is mine in a few words: not to place one's self behind an opaque glass through which one can see only the reflection of one's own nose. To see as far as possible the good, the bad, around, near by, yonder, everywhere; to notice the continual gravitation of all tangible and all intangible things towards the necessity of the good, the true, the beautiful.

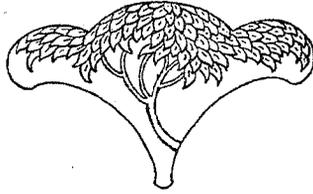
What the reader wants first of all, is to penetrate into our thought, and that is what you deny him arrogantly. He thinks that you scorn him and covertly ridicule him. For my part, I understand you, because I know you.

I have always combated your favorite heresy, which is that one writes for twenty intelligent people and does not care a fig for the rest. It is not true, since the lack of success irritates you and chagrins you. Besides, there have not been twenty critics favorable to this book which was so well done and so important. So, one must not write for twenty persons any more than for three, or a hundred thousand. One must write for all those who have a thirst to read and who can profit by good reading. Hence the necessity to draw from one's highest morality, and the duty to make it evident in one's work.

Thus, the two knights of hopelessly opposite causes broke lances in their tournament, without touching each other. Each was safely on the other side of the fence. Their pride or their blindness prevented them from making any concessions. Perhaps if one had defined Justice and the other Love, they might have agreed on a compromise. Justice does not always mean sternness, nor love always weakness. Both were fascinated by the stars of their ideals, he by his red sun, she by her blue one.

By his boyish ups and downs, his awkward disinterestedness in worldly matters, his uncompromising attitudes so candid, if somewhat naïve, his thorough devotion to art, and above all his comrade-like affection for her, Gustave Flaubert brought a golden glow into her Indian Summer. After her death he wrote to Maurice: "It seemed to me that I was burying my mother the second time. Poor dear great woman! What genius and what heart! But she lacks nothing. It is not she whom we must pity."

Not the least charm of their letters is the contrast presented by their two figures: he, pathetic in his grandeur as an artist and weakness as a man, in the fulness of life; she, though old, so strong and confident, so ready to help and to love.



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