

Mighty Dollar and The Gilded Age, or of states of society, including a large constituency, as in Saratoga, and Surf, Ah Sin, and The Danites. Most of these were objected to, I recollect, some years ago, conceptions and all, by our leading critical journal, which took the extraordinary position that Rip Van Winkle — certainly a mere episode without any claim on general interest, if there ever was one — was the only truly American subject and play.

Mr. Boucicault has a subject and many charming details. The manners and customs, if correctly displayed, are not so unlike our own, except for the legal settlements and the ward in chancery, that the whole might not have taken place here. There are four married couples, so differing as to display the subject from as many points of view: Walter and Rosalie, a run-away pair; Meek — an unfortunate name for a very good fellow — and Fannie, who marry in the regular society way; Persimmons and Virginia, an oldish couple whose union has been postponed long beyond the usual age; and the Constant Tiffes, already married, whose quarrels serve as a sarcastic commentary upon the ardor of the people newly entering upon the happy state. The preliminary drill of the wedding procession by the fashionable mother, in Act II. — a scene in its dresses and mountings like a French *genre* picture — is a most amusing and

legitimate piece of light satire. There is a poetic element in the freshness and simplicity of the youngest bride and principal figure. She nestles by her husband, and shows a romantic girlish ideal, based, no doubt, upon reminiscences of sentimental literature, but also upon a capacity for something generous and devoted, in asking him if there is not some dark secret he can impart for her to forgive, so that the bond between them may be closer. There is an element of pathos in the singular dread of Auldjo that Walter, who appears to be his son but is in reality only adopted, will, if he finds out the truth, cease to return his tender affection. The dialogue has many capital things, and there is one *mot*, "Nothing is so deceptive as proofs," worthy to become a standing aphorism.

With all this, and the capital acting, when the curtain falls over an apartment furnished in flowered cretonne, with the sea, broken by a single shining wave, showing through the wide windows as if from a drawing-room at Newport, you can feel that you go away from a profitably amused evening. But that will not blind you to the defects of considerable character drawing, which is farce instead of comedy, and especially of a plot in which there is the complication of three secret marriages, and long-lost brothers, wives and daughters to the point of distraction.

*Raymond Westbrook.*

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### EDWARD GIBBON.

THE Muse of History is a rather worldly personage, who frequently reserves her favors for devotees in easy circumstances. The pushing aspirants who seize the prizes of poetry, fiction, music, the drama, and the other arts in which genius is required, are apt to be snubbed by this more exclusive lady, whose cult

demands long preparation, costly outlays, and ample leisure. She shows to gentlemen of leisure and elegant culture a polite art, one of the very politest, in which industry and perseverance are enough for success and fame, and too often she seems to exact nothing more. A man may not say that he will be a great

poet or a great novelist; but with education, money, and time, one may resolve without unexampled presumption to be a great historian. To be sure, this results in many cases in making great historians what they are: greatest when unread, and the most perishable of the immortals. They have so seldom, indeed, been true literary artists that one has a certain hesitation in pronouncing any historian a man of genius; and it is with a lasting surprise that one recognizes in the greatest of historians one of the greatest of geniuses, a writer who possessed in prose, above any other Englishman of his time, the shaping hand, and who molded the vast masses of his subject into forms of magnificent beauty, giving to their colossal pomp a finish for which there is no word but exquisite.

Yet I think one disposed to be the most sparing of the phrase is quite safe in calling the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire a man of genius; not for what he has done for history, but what he has done for literature, in showing that no theme is so huge but that art may proportion it and adorn it till it charms,—the work which lastingly charms being always and alone the proof of genius. When one turns from other histories to his mighty achievement, one feels that it is really as incomparable for its noble manner as for the grandeur of the story it narrates. That story assumes at his touch the majestic forms, the lofty movement, of an epic; its advance is rhythmical; in the strong pulse of its antitheses is the fire, the life of a poetic sense; its music, rich and full, has a martial vigor, its colors are the blazons of shields and banners. One knows very well that this style would be ridiculous applied to a minor theme; the fact is felt throughout Gibbon's Memoirs, where he apparently cannot unbend from the high historic attitude, though even there, when the thought is eloquent, the language stirs the reader's blood by its matchless fitness. One is aware, too, that the polysyllabic port of the Johnsonian diction has been the mock of vengeful generations escaping from its crushing weight; yet after the thinness

and pallor of much conscious simplicity of later date, its Latin affluence has a deep satisfaction; and though none could ever dream of writing such a style again, yet its use by Gibbon was part of the inspiration with which he wrought his whole work, and gave its magnitude that brilliant texture and thorough solidity which are even more wonderful than its magnitude.

The history of the Decline and Fall remains unapproached for qualities of great artistry, but not unapproachable. It needs merely an equal genius in future historians to make every passage of the human epic as nobly beautiful. Its author was indefinitely more than a gentleman of fortune, though he was also this, and frankly glories in the fact in that Autobiography whose involuntary pomps are now so quaint (for he promises that "the style shall be simple and familiar"); and he enters with relish upon a brief account of his ancestors, whose "chief honor" was Baron Say and Seale, lord high treasurer of Henry the Sixth. This nobleman was beheaded by the Kentish insurgents, and his blood seems to have set forever the Tory tint in the politics of the Gibbons. One amusing forefather of the historian, who visited Virginia, had such a passion for heraldry that it caused him to see in the tokens with which the naked bodies of the savages were painted a proof that "heraldry was grafted *naturally* into the sense of the human race." Succeeding Gibbons were Royalists and Jacobites; and the historian himself, in whom the name was extinguished, honored its traditions in his abhorrence of the American rebels and the French revolutionists.

Gibbon's childhood was sickly, and it was not till his sixteenth year that his health became firm enough to permit him a regular course of study. In the mean time he had lost his mother, the effect of whose early death upon his father he describes in touching language, and he remained in the care of a maiden aunt. He had always been more in her care than in that of his mother, and now she made her helpless charge very much her

companion and friend, directing his English studies and watching over his delicate health with all a mother's devotion. His schooling had been intermittent and desultory, and he had but a little Latin and no Greek at the age when "Nature displayed in his favor her mysterious energies," and his disorders "wonderfully vanished." He was then taken from a careless and idle tutor by his father, and suddenly entered at Oxford, of which ancient university the reader will find an amusingly contemptuous account in his Autobiography. Though no scholar, he had always been an omnivorous reader. He arrived at Oxford, as he says, "with a stock of erudition that might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a school-boy would have been ashamed," and he quitted Magdalen College after fourteen months, "the most idle and unprofitable of his whole life," — spent under professors who did not lecture and tutors who did not teach, but drowsed away a learned leisure in monkish sloth and Jacobitish disloyalty. "Tory politics, personal anecdotes, and private scandal" were the talk with which the fellows of Magdalen College astonished the ingenuous young gentleman commoner. It was not unnatural that in his uncontrolled and apparently undirected endeavor he should resolve to write a book, which happened to be *The Age of Sesostri*, still unfinished if ever begun; nor was it quite strange that such a youth should turn from the bigoted indifference of his *alma mater*, in spiritual affairs, to the great mother church. At any rate, Gibbon became at seventeen an ardent Catholic, through pure force of his own reasoning and reading, — a conversion which necessarily resulted in his leaving Oxford at once, and in his being presently sent to Lausanne, in Switzerland, where he was placed by his incensed father in the family of the Calvinist pastor, Pavilliard. His new faith did not long withstand the wise and careful approaches of this excellent man, who found his charge exceedingly well read in the controversial literature of the subject, and who chose silently to let him

convict himself of one illogical position after another rather than openly and constantly to combat him. Upon new premises, Gibbon reasoned himself out of Romanism as he had reasoned himself into it. These changes from faith to faith may have had something to do with unsettling all belief in his mind; but it is not a point upon which he himself touches, and he seems to have reëmbarked in all sincerity the Protestant religion. The letters which the Pasteur Pavilliard wrote from time to time, concerning the progress of his conversion, to Gibbon's father are of curious interest, and paint in suggestive touches not only the mental character of the studious, conscientious, dutiful lad, but that of his firm and gentle guardian. They are glimpses that show them both in a very pleasing light, and one would fain know more of the simple Swiss pastor, for whom Gibbon always retained a grateful reverence, although Madame Pavilliard's coarse and stinted table he remembered long after with lively disgust.

Under Pavilliard's direction he made great advances in learning, and fully repaired the losses of his sickly childhood and the months wasted at Oxford. His reading, which was always wide enough, gained indefinitely in depth; and this English boy, writing from an obscure Swiss town, could maintain a correspondence with the first scholars of France and Germany, in which they treated him with the distinction due his learning. It was not the education of a gentleman which Gibbon, loving the English ideal of the public school and the university, would have desired for himself, but it was thorough training, and it was full of the delight of a purely voluntary pursuit. He wholly disused his mother tongue during his four years' sojourn at Lausanne, and magnificently as he afterwards wrote it, one can see by various little turns that he wrote it always with something of a subtle foreigner's delight in the superb instrument rather than a native's perfect unconsciousness. He had, in fact, grown French-Swiss during these years, and at the bottom of his heart he remained so,

preferring to end his life in the little city under the Alps, in which he spent the happiest period of his youth, and which he loved better, with its simple and blameless social life, than the great capital of the English world. For a long time after his return to England, he looked to the Continent for the public which he aspired to please; his first publication was written in French, that he might the more directly reach this public, and he imagined several histories in that tongue before he used himself, or reconciled himself, to his alienated English.

He came home not only estranged in language, — this his father could have borne, — but in love and in the hope of marriage with the daughter of the pastor of Crassy, Mademoiselle Susan Curchod, and that his father could not endure; he peremptorily forbade the match, and Gibbon, whose obedience was always somewhat timid, and was in this case perhaps too exemplary, records with his usual neat antithesis: "After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate; I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son. My wound was insensibly healed by time, absence, and the habits of a new life."

The historian tells us, in touching upon this passage of his life, that he "hesitates from an apprehension of ridicule, when he approaches the delicate subject of his early love;" and in fact it is not easy to forbear the starting smile, though perhaps for a different reason from that supposed. The ardor of the suitor who sighs as a lover while he obeys as a son, and whose wound is insensibly healed by time, absence, and the habits of a new life, is certainly not of the heroic sort. It is indeed a passion of too prudent a kind not to be a little comical. Mademoiselle Curchod, like himself, had for the healing of *her* wound, also, time, absence, and the habits of a new life: her father died; she must leave Crassy and go to Geneva, where she "earned a hard subsistence for herself and her mother" by teaching young ladies. One does not read with quite the composure of the man who left her to this lot his praises of the

nobility with which she bore adversity, while he was sighing as a lover and obeying as a son. Mademoiselle Curchod, who, as he tells us, "in her lowest distress maintained a spotless reputation and a dignified behavior," became the wife of the great Necker and the mother of the great Madame de Staël, "and in the capital of taste and luxury she resisted the temptations of wealth, as she had sustained the hardships of indigence." Her old lover visited her more than once in her exalted station as the wife of the minister upon whom the whole fabric of the French monarchy rested, and was always treated with the confidence which a man who had obeyed as a son while he sighed as a lover truly merited. M. Necker, fatigued with the cares of office, used to go to bed and leave his wife *tête-à-tête* with the undangerous lover of her youth. One smiles at such a close for love's young dream, and yet in its time the passion was no doubt a sweet and tender idyl. Swiss society had, in Gibbon's day, all the blameless freedom and innocent charm of the society in an American town. The young ladies of Lausanne met at each other's houses without chaperonage of any sort, "among a crowd of young men of every nation of Europe. . . . They laughed, they sang, they danced, they played at cards, they acted comedies; but in the midst of this careless gayety they respected themselves, and were respected by the men." In such perfect ease and unrestraint Gibbon met this young girl, — a local prodigy of learning, as beautiful as she was learned, and as good as she was beautiful, — and won the true and great heart which he suffered himself to lose. He never loved, nor thought of loving, any other woman; his hurt was not bravely received, but apparently it was incurable. From time to time he speaks in his letters to Lord Sheffield, after the death of the old friend with whom he went to live in Lausanne, of having a young girl, his relative, to cheer his lonely years and inherit his wealth; but he lived solitary to the end, and a valet smoothed his dying pillow.

It was some seven years after he exhaled his last sigh as a lover that Gibbon first met Madame Necker, who had then been not a great while married. "The Curchod I saw in Paris. She was very fond of me," he writes to Lord Sheffield, "and the husband particularly civil. She is as handsome as ever, and much genteeler; seems pleased with her fortune rather than proud of it." On her part: "I do not know," writes Madame Necker to a friend at Lausanne, in a letter quoted by Sainte-Beuve, "if I have told you that I have seen Gibbon. I have enjoyed that pleasure beyond expression; not that I have any lingering sentiment for a man who, I think, merits none at all," — how keen is the resentment unsheathed for a moment! — "but my feminine vanity has never had a completer, a juster triumph. He stayed two weeks at Paris; I had him every day with me; he has become gentle, pliant, humble, modest to bashfulness. Perpetual witness of the tenderness of my husband, of his genius, and of his happiness, a zealous admirer of opulence, he made me notice for the first time that which surrounds me." How these delicate touches insinuate the man! "He has become humble, . . . a zealous admirer of opulence," who makes her realize that she is rich! Was the great Mr. Gibbon, then, what is called in the more monosyllabic English of our day a snob? One fears that in some degree he was so, if Madame Necker was right and not merely resentful. They remained always friends and often correspondents. Ten years later we find him writing to Lord Sheffield from London, where the Neckers then were: "At present I am busy with the Neckers. I live with her just as I used to do twenty years ago, laugh at her Paris varnish, and oblige her to become a simple, reasonable Suisse." At Paris, where he is again in 1777, the Neckers are his "principal dependence." "I do not indeed lodge in their house, but I live very much with them, and dine and sup whenever they have company, which is almost every day, and whenever I like, for they are not in the least *exigeans*." Mr. Walpole

had introduced him to the famous Madame du Deffand, "an agreeable young lady of eighty-two," who writes him many civilities after his return home. "I have supped once as a third with the Neckers, and have had Madame Necker once at my house. We have spoken of Mr. Gibbon, and what else? Of Mr. Gibbon, always of Mr. Gibbon."

This was when the Neckers were at the height of their power and prosperity. When poor Louis XVI. made his first great mistake in allowing Maurepas to force Necker to a resignation, Gibbon saw his old love once more at Lausanne, where they passed the summer of 1784; and Madame Necker lived to meet her former lover again in 1790, when, after Necker's recall and final downfall in that of the monarchy, they retired to Copet. Again in 1793 Gibbon visited the Neckers, and the next year, when he died in London, was the last year of her life.

Something very high, very pure, very noble, characterized her always, and amidst the corrupt and brilliant society of which she became a leader, and to the good qualities of which she did justice, she was honored for the virtues which few others practiced. "Her faults," says Sainte-Beuve, "were not French faults;" she wanted tact, and sometimes she wanted taste, but she never wanted principle, nor a generous mind by which to judge people and conditions so unexpectedly and wholly new to her as those of Paris. "When I came to this country," she wrote back to a friend in Lausanne, "I thought that literature was the key to everything; that men cultivated their minds only by books, and were great only through knowledge;" and this sentence, which so perfectly characterizes the young, unworldly, enthusiastic country-girl, also indicates how great was the work before her, — to remodel all her standards and criterions, to make herself over. Sainte-Beuve believes that her health first began to sink under the anxieties and disappointments of this effort. She lamented that she did not even know the language of society; that she hurt people's self-love when she meant to flatter it. "What is

called frankness in Switzerland is egotism in Paris," she says. She saw that there her old ideas were all wrong; and, as she says, she hid away her little capital and began working for a living. It must have been by very hard work indeed that she made herself acceptable to the circle of philosophers and *litterati* whom her husband's distinction drew about her, but she did so, and most acceptable to the best men among them. Better than this, she entered, with her Swiss zeal and practical goodness, upon a life of beneficence as well as social eminence. The Paris hospitals were savage lairs, in which the sick were herded together without comfort or decency, and she founded a hospital of her own which still bears her name. Her husband, proud of its success, mentioned it in his official reports to the king, and this fondness made the Parisians laugh. Her most intimate friends, too, had their reserves to the last, which Marmon- tel at least has but too keenly expressed. To his thinking, she had not the air of the world; she had not taste in dress, nor an easy manner, nor an attractive politeness; her mind and her countenance were too formal for grace. But, on the other hand, she had propriety, candor, kindness, and culture. Her tastes were from her opinions, not from her feelings. She was a devoted hostess, and eagerly strove to please her guests, but "even her amusements had their reason, their method; . . . all was premeditated, nothing flowed naturally." If much of the school-mistress, in fine, lingered in this great-hearted and good woman, Gibbon apparently never saw it. On all that he says of her there is imaginable a sunset light from his early and only love,—from the days when the ingenious young Englishman saw the Swiss pastor's daughter in the blossom of "that beauty, pure, virginal, which," as Sainte-Beuve says, "has need of the first youth," with her lovely face "animated by a brilliant freshness, and softened by her blue eyes, full of candor." Her married life was in the highest degree happy: she and her husband reciprocally admired and adored each other;

and it must have been with a sense of the perplexing unreality of all past experience that she saw her old unworthy lover reënter the world, and grow year by year more famous and more enormously fat in the narrowing circle of her life. What perpetual curiosity and generous pity must have piqued her; how strange and sad it must all have been! Upon the whole, I do not know a more provoking love-story in the annals of literature, and though, as Sainte-Beuve says, Gibbon bore his disappointment with a tranquillity that makes one smile, it is not with a smile only that one dwells upon "the delicate subject of his early love."

When he had definitely sighed as a lover and obeyed as a son, he settled down to the dullness of English country life, the trivial pleasures of which, the visits, the talk with commonplace people, afflicted him even more than its monotony, though less perhaps than his misspent service as a captain of the militia, which Pitt kept under arms after its supposed usefulness in defying invasion during the Old French War was quite past: this he felt was unfit and unworthy of him. At this time he was occupied with his *Essay on the Study of Literature*, which he wrote in French, and which in his maturer years humbled him by excellences he had so little improved upon; and he projected a number of histories before he fixed at last upon his great work: he thought of writing the history of the crusade of Henry the First, of the barons' wars against John, the lives of Henry the Fifth and Titus, the life of Sir Philip Sidney, the history of the liberty of the Swiss, and that of the republic of Florence under the Medici. But his studies for an Italian tour and his subsequent visit to Italy insensibly confirmed his tendency toward the work of his life, the first conception of which occurred to him at Rome, as he "sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter."

It was not till after seven years' preparation that, full of uncertainty and

misgiving, this man of a genius unsurpassed and even unapproached in its kind sat down to write the first chapter of a history which he had not yet named in his own mind; and then he toiled at the mere technique of his work with a patience which teaches the old lesson, eternally true, that genius absolves from no duty to art, and that it achieves its triumphs by endeavors proportioned to its own greatness.

Gibbon had now fixed his home in London, where he became a man of fashion and of the great world, which not many years later he deliberately forsook for the little comfortable world of Lausanne, in whose simple quiet he finished the work begun and largely advanced in the tumult of the English capital. There were, he tells us, few persons of any eminence in literature or politics to whom he was a stranger, and he stoops to specify, in a grandiose footnote, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Burke, Dr. Goldsmith, Mr. Topham Beauclerk, and others, as his fellow-members of the Literary Club. At this period also he entered into political life, and took his seat for the borough of Liskeard.

He was, therefore, just seated in Parliament when our troubles with the mother country began, and he took a lively interest in American affairs. But it was not in our behalf; on the contrary, he disliked our cause with all the spirit of a gentleman whose sense of propriety and of property was hurt by our insubordination, and he steadily voted with the government against us, or, as he says, with characteristic pomp, he "supported, with many a sincere and silent vote, the rights, though not perhaps the interest, of the mother country." His memoir, once clearly defining his attitude, has nothing more to say about us; but the letters mention us often enough, in hope or in despair, as the chance of war is against us or for us. It is always curious to note these fluctuations; it is like a glimpse, by instantaneous photograph, of the feeling of the past. In this case the feeling is that of the great mass of the English nation, and of some of the best Englishmen; for

hard as it is for us to understand (the time being so distant, and ourselves being concerned), our friends in England then must have been excusable to most of their fellow-countrymen only as sentimental idealists, and to many inexcusable as disloyal demagogues. For his part, Mr. Gibbon, in 1774, had no misgivings in supporting Lord North's Boston Port Bill, removing the customs and courts to Salem, "a step so detrimental to the former town that it must soon reduce it to our own terms, and yet of so mild an appearance" that in the Lords it passed with "some lively conversation but no division." These facts are intermixed with some indecent gossip of the town, in which Mr. Gibbon seems to have had the interest of a student of civilization; and his letters do not mention America again till the following year, when we find him tempted by the greatness of the subject to "expose himself" in a speech on American affairs. He never did so, but he was soon one of "three hundred and four to one hundred and five" who voted an address to the throne, "declaring Massachusetts Bay in a state of rebellion. More troops, but I fear not enough, go to America, to make an army of ten thousand men at Boston. . . . I am more and more convinced that with firmness all may go well; yet," he prudently adds, "I sometimes doubt." In the autumn of this year he mentions the government negotiations with the Russians, failing which, we had the Hessians sent us. "We have great hopes of getting a body of these barbarians," the Russians, — five and twenty thousand of them, who are to go out as mercenaries, not allies. "The worst of it is that the Baltic will soon be frozen up, and that it must be late next year before they can get to America." In his next letter he is pleased to observe that "the old report of Washington's resignation and quarrel with Congress seems to revive," and thinks later that "things go on very prosperously in America," Howe being "in the Jerseys," on his way to the Delaware, and Washington, "who wishes to cover Philadelphia," having "not more than six

or seven thousand men with him," while, best of all, a province ("it is indeed only poor little Georgia") has "made its submission, and desired to be reinstated in the peace of the king;" yet presently we read that "America affords nothing very satisfactory," and this being written at Almack's, "Charles Fox is now at my elbow, declaiming on the impossibility of keeping America." The Americans are by this time (the spring of 1777) not only behaving very unsatisfactory at home, but on the night of the 5th of May "a small privateer fitted out at Dunkirk attacked, took, and has carried into Dunkirk road the Harwich packet. The king's messenger had just time to throw his dispatches overboard," and Mr. Gibbon, hearing of this affair at Dover on his way to Paris, is in great doubt whether he had better go on. But he goes on, and at Paris he actually dined with Franklin, the terrible, "by accident," as he tells his friend in expressive italics, but dined with him nevertheless, and, let us hope, liked him. At that distance from London he sees clearly the mismanagement of the American business, — "a wretched piece of work. The greatest force which any European power ever ventured to transport into that continent is not strong enough even to attack the enemy, . . . and in the mean time you are obliged to call out the militia to defend your own coasts against their privateers." Being returned to England in December, he has to communicate from his place in the House of Commons "dreadful news indeed! . . . An English army of nearly ten thousand men laid down their arms, and surrendered prisoners of war on condition of being sent to England, and of never serving against America. . . . Burgoyne is said to have received three wounds. General Fraser, with two thousand men, killed. Colonel Ackland likewise killed. A general cry for peace."

It was at last beginning to be time, though peace was far off yet, and Mr. Gibbon's party had much to learn. A year before this he had written: "We talk chiefly of the Marquis de la Fayette, who

was here a few weeks ago. He is about twenty, with a hundred and thirty thousand livres a year; the nephew of Noailles, who is ambassador here. He has bought the Duke of Kingston's yacht, and is gone to join the Americans;" and now "it is positively asserted both in private and in Parliament, and not contradicted by ministers, that on the 5th of this month" — February, 1778 — "a treaty of commerce (which naturally leads to a war) was signed at Paris with the independent States of America." At this point Mr. Gibbon leaves pretty much all mention of our affairs, and we find only one allusion to America afterwards in his letters, — a passage in which he begs his stepmother to learn for him the particulars concerning "an American mother who in a short time had lost three sons: one killed by the savages, one run mad from that accident, and the third taken at sea, now in England, a prisoner at Forton Hospital. For *him* something might perhaps be done, . . . but you will prudently suppress my request, lest I should raise hopes which it may not be in my power to gratify." In announcing the rumored submission of "poor little Georgia," Mr. Gibbon had been rather merry over the fright of the Georgians at the Indians, who had "begun to amuse themselves with the exercise of scalping on their back settlements;" but matters of that kind are always different when brought to one's personal notice, and cannot be so lightly treated as at a distance of four thousand miles. In fine, Mr. Gibbon was our enemy upon theory and principle, as a landed gentleman of Tory family should be, and there can be no doubt of his perfect sincerity and uprightness in his course. For my own part, my heart rather warms to his stout, wrong-headed patriotism, as a fine thing in its way, and immensely characteristic, which one ought not to have otherwise, if one could.

It is a pity not to know how he felt towards us when all was over, and whether he ever forgave us our success. But after his retirement to Lausanne, the political affairs which chiefly find place in his letters are those of France, which



were beginning to make themselves the wonder and concern of the whole polite world. He first felt the discomfort of having the emigrant *noblesse* crowding into his quiet retreat, and he murmurs a little at this, although Lausanne is always "infested in summer" by the traveling English, and it "escapes the superlatively great" exiles, the Count d'Artois, the Polignacs, etc., who slip by to Turin. But France is a horrid scene, with the assembly voting abstract propositions, Paris an independent republic, all credit gone, according to "poor Necker," and nobody paying taxes; and it becomes still more abhorrent to the friends of order, as the dissolution of the ancient monarchy advances, "the king brought a captive to Paris, the nobles in exile, the clergy plundered in a way that strikes at the root of all property." Lord Sheffield need not send Mr. Gibbon to Chambery to see a prince and an archbishop in exile; there are now exiles enough and of the noblest at Lausanne, whom in their cheerful adversity and gay destitution one must admire. He is always looking anxiously at England, and he distrusts even the movement, then beginning, against the great crime of civilization. He would be glad if it proceeded from an impulse of humanity, "but in this rage against slavery, in the numerous petitions against the slave-trade, was there no leaven of new democratical principles, no wild ideas of the rights and natural equality of man?" For that would never do, and would as surely go to the roots of all property in England as in France. He sees clearly the follies of that wonderful time, and he sees as yet no rising master of the situation, no Richelieu, no Cromwell, "either to restore the monarchy or to lead the commonwealth;" it is not in his philosophy, wise as he is in all the past, to imagine a people so inspired with a sense of freedom and of the value of their new-won rights as to be able to maintain them against the whole of Europe; and to carry the revolution wherever their wild armies go.

This conception comes later, after the

fact, and not till the historian, with prodigious amaze, sees these Gallic dogs, these Gallic wolves, these wretched French republican soldiers, whose "officers, scarcely a gentleman among them," — fancy it! — "without servants, or horses, or baggage, lie higgledy-piggledy on the ground with the common men, yet maintain a kind of rough discipline over them," — not, I say, till these armies "force the Prussians to evacuate their country, conquer Savoy, pillage Germany, threaten Spain, invade the Low Countries, make Rome and Italy tremble, scour the Mediterranean, and talk of sending a squadron into the South Sea." It is indeed a tremendous and a hateful spectacle, and well may a middle-aged literary Tory gentleman of landed property forebode that if England "should now be seduced to eat the apple of false freedom," himself and his best friends may soon be "reduced to the deplorable state of the French emigrants." Wolves and dogs? The names are too good for the wretches who have not only beheaded their king, but have involved their upper classes in more distress than any former revolutionists, and have rendered landed property insecure everywhere; henceforth they are "cannibals" and "devils," their "democratical principles lead by a path of flowers into the abyss of hell," and "the blackest demon in hell is the demon of democracy." It is droll to observe how, in these moments of deep emotion, a pagan gentleman is forced back upon a forsaken superstition for the proper imagery in which to clothe his indignation; but where gentility and landed property are concerned, Mr. Gibbon is as good a Christian as any. Indeed, he is so arch-conservative that he humorously accounts for his historical treatment of Christianity on the ground of a sort of high Tory affection "for the old Establishment of Paganism," and no reader of his letters can help observing how intimately the best feelings of his nature are bound up with the sacred tenure of real estate and the hallowed security of the funds. Yet after all, when he thinks of visiting England, he is great-

ly minded to go home through France. "I am satisfied that there is little or no real danger in the journey; and I must arm myself with patience to support the vexatious insolence of democratical tyranny. I have even a sort of curiosity to spend a few days at Paris, to assist at the debates of the Pandemonium, to seek an introduction to the principal devils, and to contemplate a new form of public and private life, which never existed before, and which I devoutly hope will not long continue to exist," — a burst of piety scarcely to be matched elsewhere in the author's writings.

When, however, he did return to England, in 1793, it was not by way of France, and his errand was not one of curiosity or pleasure. He came home to comfort his friend Lord Sheffield, then broken by the recent death of his wife, and he traveled by a circuitous route through Belgium, as his friend tells us, "along the frontiers of an enemy worse than savage, within the sound of their cannon, and through roads ruined by the enormous machinery of war." Gibbon had now grown portentously stout, but "neither his great corpulency, nor his extraordinary bodily infirmities, nor any other consideration could prevent him a moment from resolving on an undertaking that might have deterred the most active young man." This was after ten years of the tranquil life of Lausanne, which he had voluntarily chosen eight years after his settlement in London, to the vast surprise of all his London friends. They believed that he never would be able to endure it, and they predicted that he would soon be glad to come back. He shared their misgivings in some degree, and he considers in letters to his different friends the respective advantages of London and Lausanne very seriously. He knew that the larger the place, the more one is let alone in it; he looked forward not only with tenderness but with some alarm to meeting the friends of his youth. But he was tired of political life, and he despaired of political preferment after Burke's Reform Bill had abolished his place on the Board of Trade; his strait-

ened income obliged him to save, and London was expensive. At Lausanne lived his life-long friend George Deyverdun, whose house and heart he might share; in his celibate loneliness he felt the need of intimate daily companionship, and perhaps the place secretly called him by yet fonder associations. Its society, if provincial, was refined, as every society is in which the women are superior to the men; it was simple and comparatively unexact. His friend's terrace commanded a magnificent prospect, and the climate was good for his gout. His arrangement was not complex: M. Deyverdun lodged Mr. Gibbon, and Mr. Gibbon boarded M. Deyverdun.

In a letter giving to the aunt who watched over his childhood (and whom after so many years of reciprocal affection he addresses as Dear Madam) an account of his way of life at Lausanne, he says of himself and his friend: —

"In this season I rise (not at four in the morning) but a little before eight; at nine, I am called from my study to breakfast, which I always perform alone in the English style; and, with the aid of Caplin,<sup>1</sup> I perceive no difference between Lausanne and Bentinck Street. Our mornings are usually passed in separate studies; we never approach each other's door without a previous message or thrice knocking; and my apartment is already sacred and formidable to strangers. I dress at half past one, and at two (an early hour, to which I am not perfectly reconciled) we sit down to dinner. After dinner and the departure of our company, one, two, or three friends, we read together some amusing book, or play at chess, or retire to our rooms, or make visits, or go to the coffee-house. Between six and seven the assemblies begin, and I am oppressed only with their number and variety; whist, at shillings or half-crowns, is the game I generally play, and I play three rubbers with pleasure. Between nine and ten we withdraw to our bread and cheese, and friendly converse, which sends us to bed at eleven; but these sober hours are too

<sup>1</sup> His English valet de chambre.

often interrupted by private or numerous suppers, which I have not the courage to resist, though I practice a laudable abstinence at the best-furnished tables."

To Lord Sheffield he writes some facts and figures which have a curious interest, as showing the cost of a gentleman's bachelor establishment in England and Switzerland a hundred years ago:—

"What is, then, you will ask, my present establishment? This is not by any means a cheap country; and, except in the article of wine, I could give a dinner, or make a coat, perhaps for the same price in London as at Lausanne. My chief advantage arises from the things which I do not want; and in some respects my style of living is enlarged by the increase of my relative importance; an obscure bachelor in England, the master of a considerable house at Lausanne. Here I am expected to return entertainments, to receive ladies, etc., and to perform many duties of society which, though agreeable enough in themselves, contribute to inflame the housekeeper's bills. But in a quiet, prudent, regular course of life, I think I can support myself with comfort and honor for six or seven hundred pounds a year, instead of a thousand or eleven hundred in England."

After Deyverdun's death, which was a terrible bereavement to Gibbon, he bought a life-interest in his estate on the favorable terms fixed by his friend's will and continued to live in the same house where they had dwelt together nearly six years in such perfect harmony. Two years before this he had ended his mighty work, an event celebrated in the famous passage which one cannot read without a strong thrill of sympathy with its lofty emotion:—

"I have presumed to mark the moment of conception; I shall now commemorate the hour of my final deliverance. It was on the day, or rather night, of the 27th of June, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page, in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of

acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on recovery of my freedom and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future date of my History, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

One could desire a further account of Gibbon's habits of labor on his history than the very succinct sketch given in his memoir, but his letters are not much more satisfactory on this point. Method and assiduity were of course the open secrets of his success in an undertaking, the mere material grandeur of which was appalling; but there is something to show that the strain was no day so great as it was continual from day to day. He enjoyed life very well in Lausanne, and he seems not to have curtailed his social pleasures till the year before the completion of his task. In January of the year that saw its close, he wrote to Lord Sheffield:—

"A long while ago, when I contemplated the distant prospect of my work, I gave you and myself some hopes of landing in England last autumn; but alas, when autumn grew near, hills began to rise on hills, Alps on Alps, and I found my journey far more tedious and toilsome than I had imagined. When I look back on the length of the undertaking and the variety of materials, I cannot accuse or suffer myself to be accused of idleness; I can exactly compute, by the square foot or the square page, all that remains to be done; and after concluding texts and notes, after a general review of my time and my ground, I now can decisively ascertain the final period of the Decline and Fall, and can boldly promise that I will dine with you at Sheffield Place in the month of August, or perhaps of July, in the present

year, — within less than a twelvemonth of the term which I had loosely and originally fixed. And perhaps it would not be easy to find a work of that size and importance in which the workman has so tolerably kept his word with himself and the public.”

So good a man of business was this great man of genius! He kept his word with the public, but his infirmities conspired with other causes to make him break it to his friend. He did not dine with Lord Sheffield as he proposed; he did not go to England till six years later, when he felt himself imperatively called by his friend's sorrows; and then he came also to lay down his own life in his native land. He had long suffered from a dropsical affection resulting from a neglected rupture; it had now become a terrible burden as well as a grotesque deformity, and within a short time after his arrival in England he underwent three operations. They gave relief, but they tried his strength too far, for he succumbed to the third.

It was in London that he made his end. The operation seemed to have afforded him distinct relief; he talked of a radical cure of getting back to his beloved Lausanne. He saw his friends on the afternoon before the day of his death (the 16th of January), among them several ladies, with whom he talked, as he liked to do, of the probable duration of his life, which he fixed at from ten to twenty years. No words can be better than those in which Lord Sheffield describes the last moments of the great friend to whose bedside he came too late to see him alive: —

“On that morning, about seven, the servant asked whether he should send for Mr. Farquhar. He answered, no; that he was as well as he had been the day before. At about half past eight he got out of bed, and said he was *plus adroit* than he had been for three months past, and got into bed again, without assistance, better than usual. About nine, he said that he would rise. The servant, however, persuaded him to remain in bed till Mr. Farquhar, who was expected at eleven, should come. Till about

that hour he spoke with great facility. Mr. Farquhar came at the time appointed, and he was then visibly dying. When the valet de chambre returned, after attending Mr. Farquhar out of the room, Mr. Gibbon said, ‘*Pourquoi est-ce que vous me quittez?*’ This was about half past eleven. At twelve he drank some brandy and water from a tea-pot, and desired his favorite servant to stay with him. These were the last words he pronounced articulately. To the last he preserved his senses; and when he could no longer speak, his servant having asked a question, he made a sign to show that he understood him. He was quite tranquil, and did not stir; his eyes half shut. About a quarter before one he ceased to breathe.”

Vastly the greater number of Gibbon's letters are addressed to Lord Sheffield, his faithful friend, with whom he became intimate in their young manhood, and with whom he maintained the closest relations as long as he lived. His letters have, with all their occasional polysyllabic ponderosity, a lively air of unconsciousness and of not being written for the public eye, as most letters of that epistolary age seem to have been. It would be unfair to accuse them of a witty or humorous levity, but they are certainly sprightly, after their kind, and are not so hard reading as letters often are. Some of the sprightliest are to Lady Sheffield and to Miss Maria Holroyd, a young lady who amuses herself with his abhorrence of the French democrats so far as to subscribe herself, “*Citoyen Gibbon, je suis ton égal.*” Some of the letters relate to the controversy excited by the skeptical character of his history, but all this matter is treated with sufficient fullness in his memoir, and with a scornful bitterness which spares but one or two of his assailants. “At a distance of twelve years I calmly affirm my judgment of Davies, Chelsum, etc.,” — clergymen who had combated his doubts with the weapons of the church militant. “A victory over such antagonists was a sufficient humiliation. They, however, were rewarded in this world. Poor Chelsum was indeed neglected, and

I dare not boast of making Dr. Watson a bishop; he is a prelate of a large mind and a liberal spirit; but I enjoyed the pleasure of giving a royal pension to Mr. Davies, and of collating Dr. Apthorpe to an archiepiscopal living." With keen antitheses, like the scythes projecting from either side of the war-cars of the Cimbrians, the historian drives down upon the ranks of his opponents, and leaves them behind him in long swaths. Let us not look longer upon the carnage. He did not spare those who at any period of life wronged or offended him, and many a passage of his memoir is rounded or pointed with the fragments of such criminals.

Lord Sheffield says of Gibbon's letters that they bear "in general a strong resemblance to the style and turn of his conversation, the characteristics of which were vivacity, elegance, and precision, with knowledge astonishingly extensive and correct," — a judgment with which, so far as the knowledge, elegance, and precision go, one cannot, very well dispute. The vivacity is apt to die out of letters; so apt that I for one cannot regret the lapse of the epistolary age, and Mr. Gibbon's sprightliness has something of horse, not to say river-horse, play in it now and then. His letters reveal a love of gossip, which one rather likes, and a tooth for scandal now and then, which is but human. Occasionally the letters are coarse, but not

often: a gentleman would not now write some things he wrote to the beautiful Lady Elizabeth Foster; but the gentleman changes very much from century to century, and so does the lady, fortunately.

It is well, in any study of this sort, to let the man who is the subject of inquiries necessarily vague and unsatisfactory have the last word for himself; and there are words of Gibbon's, written on his twenty-sixth birthday, which probably sum up his qualities better than the language of any other critic, allowing, of course, for the changes which years, self-study, and self-discipline gradually made in him: —

"This was my birthday, on which I entered into the twenty-sixth year of my age. This gave me occasion to look a little into myself, and consider impartially my good and bad qualities. It appeared to me, upon this inquiry, that my character was virtuous, incapable of a base action, and formed for generous ones; but that it was proud, violent, and disagreeable in society. These qualities I must endeavor to cultivate, extirpate, or restrain, according to their different tendency. Wit I have none. My imagination is rather strong than pleasing; my memory both capacious and retentive. The shining qualities of my understanding are extensiveness and penetration; but I want both quickness and exactness."

*W. D. Howells.*

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## MARS AS A NEIGHBOR.

It is about three years since the little stir in the astronomical world occasioned by the "transit of Venus" communicated itself in some degree to the public at large. It is still well remembered that our government and others sent out, in 1874, expeditions to many distant places, — some of them previously un-

known except to map-makers and clever school-boys, — with the object of securing certain astronomical observations to be used in a fresh determination of the distance of the sun. Most of us also know that the process is to be repeated in 1882, and some of us may live long enough to hear what has been proved