

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

I.

"THE novel of manners grows thick in England, and there are many reasons for it. In the first place, it was born there, and a plant always flourishes in its own country." So wrote M. Taine, the French critic, many years ago. But those were the years of Dickens and Thackeray (as a prelude to a study of the latter of whom the remark was made); and the branch of literature mentioned by M. Taine has no longer, in the soil of our English-speaking genius, so strong a vitality. The French may bear the palm to-day in the representation of manners by the aid of fiction. Formerly, it was possible to oppose Balzac and Madame Sand to Dickens and Thackeray; but at present we have no one, either in England or in America, to oppose to Alphonse Daudet. The appearance of a new novel by this admirable genius is to my mind the most delightful literary event that can occur just now; in other words, Alphonse Daudet is at the head of his profession. I say of his profession advisedly, for he belongs to our modern class of trained men of letters; he is not an occasional or a desultory poet; he is a novelist to his finger-tips—a soldier in the great army of constant producers. But such as he is, he is a master of his art, and I may as well say, definitely, that if I attempt to sketch in a few pages his literary countenance, it will be found that the portrait is from the hand of an admirer. We, most of us, feel that among the artists of our day certain talents have more to say to us and others less; we have our favorites and we have our objects of indifference. I have always had a sympathy for the author of the "Lettres de mon Moulin"; I began to read his novels with a prejudice in their favor. This prejudice sprang from the Letters aforesaid, which do not constitute a novel, but a volume of the lightest and briefest tales. They had, to my mind, an extraordinary charm; they put me quite on the side of Alphonse Daudet, whatever he might do in the future. One of the first things he did was to publish the history of "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné." It is true that this work did not give me the pleasure that some of its successors have done, and though it has been crowned by the French Academy I still think it rather less rich than "Les Rois en Exil" and "Numa Roumestan." But I liked it better on a second reading than

on a first; it contains some delightful things. After that came "Jack" and "Le Nabab," and the two novels I have just mentioned, and that curious and interesting tale of "L'Évangéliste," which appeared a few months since, and which proves that the author's genius, though on the whole he has pressed it hard, is still nervous, fresh and young. Each of these things has been better than the last, with the exception, perhaps, of "L'Évangéliste," which, to my taste, is not superior to "Numa Roumestan." "Numa Roumestan" is a masterpiece; it is really a perfect work; it has no fault, no weakness. It is a compact and harmonious whole. Daudet's other works have had their inequalities, their anomalies, certain places where, if you tapped them, they sounded hollow. His danger has always been a perceptible tendency to the factitious; sometimes he has fallen into the trap laid for him by a taste for superficial effects. In "Fromont Jeune," for instance, it seems to me difficult to care much for the horrid little heroine herself, carefully as she is studied. She has been studied, but she has not been caught, for she is not interesting (even for a *coquine* , as the French say), not even human. She is a mechanical doll, with nothing for the imagination to take hold of. She is one more proof of the fact that it is difficult to give the air of consistency to vanity and depravity, though the portraiture of the vicious side of life would seem, from the pictorial point of view, to offer such attractions. The reader's quarrel with Sidonie Chèbe is not that she is bad, but that she is not *felt* , as the æsthetic people say. In "Jack" the hollow spot, as I have called it, is the episode of Doctor Rivals and his daughter Cécile, which reminds us of the weaker parts of Dickens. It is, perhaps, because to us readers of English speech the figure of the young girl, in a French novel, is almost always wanting in reality—seems to be thin and conventional; in any case, poor Jack's love-affair, at the end of the book, does not produce the illusion of the rest of his touching history. In "Le Nabab" this artificial element is very considerable; it centers about the figure of Paul de Géry, and embraces the whole group of M. Joyeuse and his blooming daughters, with their pretty attitudes—taking in also the very shadowy André Maranne, so touchingly re-united to his mother, who had lived for ten years with an Irish doctor to whom she

was not married. In "Les Rois en Exil," Tom Lévis and the diabolical Séphora seem to me purely fanciful creations, without any relation to reality. They are the weak part of the book. They are very clever, very picturesque, and the comedian Tom is described with immense spirit, an art which speaks volumes as to a certain sort of Parisian initiation. But if this artistic and malignant couple are very clever sketching, they are not really humanity. Ruffians and rascals have a certain moral nature, as well as the better-behaved; but in the case I have mentioned M. Daudet fails to put his finger upon it. The same with Madame Autheman, the evil genius of poor Éline Ebsen, in the "L'Évangéliste." She seems to me terribly, almost grotesquely, hollow. She is an elaborate portrait of a fanatic of Protestantism, a bigot to the point of monstrosity, cold-blooded, implacable, cruel. The figure is painted with Alphonse Daudet's inimitable art; no one that handles the pen to-day is such a pictorial artist as he. But Madame Autheman strikes me as quite automatic; psychologically she is a blank. One does not see the operation of her character. She must have had a soul, and a very curious one. It was a great opportunity for a piece of spiritual portraiture; but we know nothing about Madame Autheman's soul, and I think we fail to believe in her. I should go so far as to say that we get little more of an inside view, as the phrase is, of Éline Ebsen; we are not shown the spiritual steps by which she went over to the enemy—vividly, admirably, as the outward signs and consequences of this disaster are depicted. The logic of the matter is absent in both cases, and it takes all the magic of the author's legerdemain to prevent us from missing it. These things, however, are exceptions, and the tissue of each of his novels is, for all the rest, really pure gold. No one has such grace, such lightness and brilliancy of execution; it is a fascination to see him at work. The beauty of "Numa Roumestan" is that it has no hollow places; the logic and the image melt everywhere into one. Émile Zola, criticising the work in a very friendly spirit, speaks of the episode of Hortense Le Quesnoy and the Provençal *tambourinaire* as a false note, and declares that it wounds his sense of delicacy. Valmajour is a peasant of the south of France; he is young, handsome, picturesque, and a master of the rustic fife and tambourine—instruments that are much appreciated in his part of the country. Mademoiselle Le Quesnoy, living in Paris, daughter of a distinguished member of the French judiciary—"le premier magistrat de France"—young, charming, imaginative, romantic, marked out

for a malady of the chest, and with a certain innocent perversity of mind, sees him play before an applauding crowd in the old Roman arena at Nîmes, and forthwith conceives a secret, a singular, but not, under the circumstances, an absolutely unnatural passion for him. He comes up to Paris to seek his fortune at the "variety" theaters, where his feeble and primitive music quite fails to excite enthusiasm. The young girl, reckless and impulsive, and full of sympathy with his mortification, writes him in three words (upon one of her little photographs) an assurance of her devotion; and this innocent missive, falling soon into the hands of his rapacious and exasperated sister (a wonderful figure, one of the most living that has ever come from Daudet's pen), becomes a source of infinite alarm to the family of Mademoiselle Le Quesnoy, who see her compromised, calumniated and blackmailed, and finally of complete humiliation to poor Hortense herself, now fallen into a rapid consumption and cured of her foolish infatuation by a nearer view of the vain and ignorant Valmajour. An agent of the family recovers the photograph (by the aid of ten thousand francs), and the young girl, with the bitter taste of her disappointment still in her soul, dies in her flower. This little story, as I say, is very shocking to M. Zola, who cites it as an example of the folly of a departure from consistent realism. What is observed, says M. Zola, on the whole very justly, is strong; what is invented is always weak, especially what is invented to please the ladies. "See in this case," he writes, "all the misery of invented episodes. This love of Hortense, with which the author has doubtless wished to give the impression of something touching, produces a discomfort, as if it were a violation of nature. It is therefore the pages written for the ladies that are repulsive—even to a man accustomed to the saddest dissections of the human corpse." I am not of M. Zola's opinion—delightful as it would be to be of that opinion when M. Zola's sense of propriety is ruffled. The incident of Hortense and Valmajour is not (to my sense) a blot upon "Numa Roumestan"; on the contrary, it is perfectly conceivable, and it is treated with admirable delicacy. "This romantic stuff," says M. Zola, elsewhere, "is as painful as a pollution. That a young girl should lose her head over a tenor, that may be explained, for she loves the operatic personage in the interpreter. She has before her a young man sharpened and refined by life, elegant, having at least certain appearances of talent and intelligence. But this tambourinist, with his drum and penny-whistle, this village dandy, a poor devil who doesn't even know how to speak!

No, life has not such cruelties as that, I protest, I who certainly, as a general thing, am not accustomed to give ground before human aberrations!" This objection was worth making; but I should look at the matter in another way. It seems to me much more natural that a girl of the temper and breeding that M. Daudet has described should take a momentary fancy to a prepossessing young rustic, bronzed by the sun of Provence (even if it be conceded that his soul was vulgar), than that she should fasten her affections upon a "lyric artist," suspected of pomatum and paint and illuminated by the footlights. These are points which it is vain to discuss, however, both because they are delicate and because they are details. I have come so far simply from a desire to justify my high admiration of "Numa Roumestan." But Émile Zola, again, has expressed this feeling more felicitously than I can hope to do. "This, moreover, is a very slight blemish in a work which I regard as one of those, of all Daudet's productions, that is most personal to himself. He has put his whole nature into it, helped by his southern temperament, having only to make large draughts upon his most intimate recollections and sensations. I do not think that he has hitherto reached such an intensity either of irony or of geniality. * * * Happy the books which arrive in this way, at the hour of the complete maturity of a talent! They are simply the widest unfolding of an artist's nature; they have in happy equilibrium the qualities of observation and the qualities of style. For Alphonse Daudet 'Numa Roumestan' will mark this interfusion of a temperament and a subject that are made for each other, the perfect plenitude of a work which the writer exactly fills."

II.

As I say, however, these are details, and I have touched them prematurely. Alphonse Daudet is a charmer, and the effect of his brilliant, friendly, indefinable genius is to make it difficult, in speaking of him, to take things in their order or follow a plan. In writing of him some time ago, in another place, I so far lost my head as to remark, with levity, that he was "a great little novelist." The diminutive epithet then, I must now say, was nothing more than a term of endearment, the result of an irresistible impulse to express a sense of personal fondness. This kind of feeling is difficult to utter in English, and the utterance of it, so far as this is possible, is not thought consistent with the dignity of a critic. If we were talking French, nothing would be simpler than to say that

Alphonse Daudet is adorable, and have done with it. But this resource is denied me, and I must arrive at my meaning by a series of circumlocutions. I am not able even to say that he is very "personal"; that epithet, so valuable in the vocabulary of French literary criticism, has, when applied to the talent of an artist, a meaning different from the sense in which we use it. "A novelist so personal and so penetrating," says Émile Zola, speaking of the author of "Numa Roumestan." That phrase, in English, means nothing in particular; so that I must add to it, that the charm of Daudet's talent comes from its being charged to an extraordinary degree with his temperament, his feelings, his instincts, his natural qualities. This, of course, is a charm, in a style, only when nature has been generous. To Alphonse Daudet she has been exceptionally so; she has placed in his hand an instrument of many chords. A delicate, nervous organization, active and indefatigable in spite of its delicacy, and familiar with emotion of almost every kind, equally acquainted with pleasure and with pain; a light, quick, joyous, yet ironical, imagination, a faculty of seeing images, making images, at every turn, of conceiving everything in the visible form, in the plastic spirit; an extraordinary sensibility to all the impressions of life, and a faculty of language which is in perfect harmony with his wonderful fineness of perception—these are some of the qualities of which he is the happy possessor and which make his equipment for the work he has undertaken exceedingly rich. There are others besides; but enumerations are ponderous, and we should avoid that danger in speaking of a genius whose lightness of touch never belies itself. His elder brother, who has not his talent, has written a little book about him in which the word *modernité* perpetually occurs. M. Ernest Daudet, in "Mon Frère et Moi," insists upon his possession of the qualities expressed by this barbarous substantive, which is so indispensable to the new school. Alphonse Daudet is, in truth, very modern; he has all the newly-developed perceptions. Nothing speaks so much to his imagination as the latest and most composite things, the refinements of current civilization, the most delicate shades of the actual. It is scarcely too much to say that (especially in the Parisian race) modern manners, modern nerves, modern wealth and modern improvements, have engendered a new sense, a sense not easily named nor classified, but recognizable in all the most characteristic productions of contemporary art. It is partly physical, partly moral, and the shortest way to describe it is to say that it is a more analytic

consideration of the appearance of things. It is known by its tendency to resolve its discoveries into pictorial form. It sees the connection between feelings and external conditions, and it expresses such relations as they have not been expressed hitherto. It deserves to win victories, because it has opened its eyes well to the fact that the magic of the arts of representation lies in their appeal to the associations awakened by things. It traces these associations into the most unlighted corners of our being, into the most devious paths of experience. The appearance of things is constantly more complicated, as the world grows older, and it needs a more and more patient art to divide it into its parts. Of this art, Alphonse Daudet has a wonderfully large allowance, and that is why I say that he is peculiarly modern. It is very true that his manner is not the manner of patience—though he must always have had a great deal of that virtue in the preparation of his work. The new school of fiction in France is based very much on the taking of notes; the library of the great Flaubert, of the brothers de Goncourt, of Émile Zola, and of the writer of whom I speak, must have been in a large measure a library of memorandum-books. This, of course, only puts the patience back a stage or two. In composition, Daudet proceeds by quick, instantaneous vision, by the happiest divination, by catching the idea as it suddenly springs up before him with a whirr of wings. What he mainly sees is the great surface of life and the parts that lie near the surface. But life is, immensely, a matter of surface, and if our emotions, in general, are interesting, the *form* of those emotions has the merit of being more definite. Like most French imaginative writers (judged, at least, from the English standpoint), he is much less concerned with the moral, the metaphysical world than with the sensible. We proceed usually from the former to the latter, while the French reverse the process. They are uncomfortable in the presence of abstractions, and lose no time in reducing them to the concrete. But even the concrete, for them, is a field for poetry; which brings me to the fact that the delightful thing in Daudet's talent is the inveterate poetical touch. This is what mainly distinguishes him from the other lights of the realistic school—modifies so completely in his case the hardness of consistent realism. There is something very hard, very dry, in Flaubert, in Edmond de Goncourt, in the robust Zola; but there is something very soft in Alphonse Daudet. "Benevolent nature," says Zola, "has placed him at that exquisite point where poetry ends and reality begins." That is happily said;

Daudet's great characteristic is this mixture of the sense of the real with the sense of the beautiful. His imagination is constantly at play with his theme; it has a horror of the literal, the limited; it sees an object in all its intermingled relations—on its sentimental, its pathetic, its comical, its pictorial side. Flaubert, in whom Alphonse Daudet would probably recognize to a certain degree a literary paternity, is far from being a simple realist; but he was destitute of this sense of the beautiful, destitute of facility and grace. He had, to take its place, a sense of the strange, the grotesque, to which "Salamambo," the "Tentation de Saint-Antoine," his indescribable posthumous novel of "Bouvard et Pécuchet," abundantly testify. The talent of the brothers Goncourt strikes us as a talent that was associated originally with a sense of beauty; but we receive an impression that this feeling has been perverted and polluted. It has ceased to be natural and free; it has become morbid, and, as the French say, *raffiné*; it has turned mainly to curiosity and mannerism. And these two authors are capable, during a whole book (as in "Germinie Lacerteux" or "La Fille Éliça"), of escaping from its influence altogether. No one would probably ever think of accusing Émile Zola of having a perception of the beautiful. He has an illimitable, and at times a very valuable, sense of the ugly, of the unclean; but when he "goes in," as the phrase is, for the poetic aspect of things, as in "La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret," he is apt to have terrible misadventures.

III.

It is for the expressive talents that we feel an affection, and Daudet is eminently expressive. His manner is the manner of talk, and if the talk is sincere, that makes a writer touch us. Daudet expresses many things; but he most frequently expresses himself—his own temper in the presence of life, his own feeling on a thousand occasions. This personal note is especially to be observed in his earlier productions—in the "Lettres de mon Moulin," the "Contes du Lundi," "Le Petit Chose"; it is also very present in the series of prefaces which he has undertaken to supply to the octavo edition of his works (very handsome, save that Alphonse Daudet should never be in octavo!). In these prefaces he gives the history of each successive book—relates the circumstances under which it was written. These things are ingeniously told, but what I am chiefly conscious of in regard to them is that Alphonse Daudet must express himself. His brother informs us that he is writing his Memoirs, and this will have been another

opportunity for expression. Ernest Daudet, as well (as I have mentioned), has attempted to express him. "Mon Frère et Moi" is one of those productions which it is difficult for an English reader to judge in fairness; it is so much more confidential than we, in public, ever venture to be. The French have, on all occasions, the courage of their emotion, and M. Ernest Daudet's leading emotion is a boundless admiration for his junior. He lays it before us very frankly and gracefully—not, on the whole, indiscreetly; and I have no quarrel whatever with his volume, for it contains a considerable amount of information on a very interesting subject. Indirectly, indeed, as well as directly, it helps us to a knowledge of his brother. Alphonse Daudet was born in Provence; he comes of an expansive, a confidential race. His style is impregnated with the southern sunshine, and his talent has the sweetness of a fruit that has grown in the warm open air. He has the advantage of being a Provençal converted, as it were—of having a southern temperament and a northern reason. We know what he thinks of the southern temperament—"Numa Roumestan" is a vivid exposition of that. "*Gau de carriero, doulou d'oustau*," as the Provençal has it; "*joie de rue, douleur de maison*"—joy in the street and pain in the house—that proverb, says Alphonse Daudet, describes and formulates a whole race. It has given him the subject of an admirable story, in which he has depicted with equal force and tenderness the amiable weaknesses, the mingled violence and levity, of the children of the clime of the fig and olive. He has put before us, above all, their mania for speech, their irrepressible garrulity, the qualities that, with them, render all passion, all purpose, inordinately vocal. Himself a complete "*produit du Midi*," like the *famille Mère* in "Numa Roumestan," he has achieved the feat of becoming objective to his own vision, getting outside of his ingredients and judging them. This he has done by the aid of his Parisianized conscience, his exquisite taste, and that finer wisdom which resides in the artist, from whatever soil he springs. Successfully as he has done it, however, he has not done it so well but that he too does not show a little of the exaggerated color, the superabundant statement, the restless movement of his compatriots. He is nothing if not demonstrative; he is always in a state of feeling; he has not a very definite ideal of reserve. It must be added that he is a man of genius, and that genius never spends its capital; that he is an artist, and that an artist always has a certain method and order. But it remains characteristic of his origin that the author of "Numa Roumestan," one of the happiest

and most pointed of satires, should have about him the aroma of some of the qualities satirized. There are passages in his tales and in his prefaces that are genuine "*produits du Midi*," and his brother's account of him could only have been written by a Provençal brother.

To be *personnel* to that point, transparent, effusive, gushing, to give one's self away in one's books, has never been, and will never be, the ideal of us of English speech; but that does not prevent our enjoying immensely, when we meet it, a happy example of this alien spirit. For myself, I am free to confess, half my affection for Alphonse Daudet comes from the fact that he writes in a way in which I would not write even if I could. There are certain kinds of feeling and observation, certain impressions and ideas, to which we are unwilling to give a voice and yet are equally unwilling to suppress altogether. In these matters Alphonse Daudet renders us a great service; he expresses such things on our behalf. I may add that he usually does it much better than the cleverest of us could do even if we were to try. I have said that he is a Provençal converted, and I should do him a great injustice if I did not dwell upon his conversion. His brother relates the circumstances under which he came up to Paris, at the age of twenty (in a threadbare overcoat and a pair of india-rubbers), to seek his literary fortune. His beginnings were difficult, his childhood had been hard, he was familiar with poverty and disaster. He had no adventitious aid to success—his whole fortune consisted in his exquisite organization. But Paris was to be, artistically, a mine of wealth to him, and of all the anxious and eager young spirits who on the battle-field of uncarpeted *cinquièmes* have laid siege to the indifferent city, none can have felt more deeply conscious of the mission to take possession of it. Alphonse Daudet, at the present hour, is in complete possession of Paris; he knows it, loves it, uses it; he has assimilated it to its last particle. He has made of it a Paris of his own—a Paris like a vast crisp water-color, one of the water-colors of the school of Fortune. The French have a great advantage in the fact that they admire their capital very much as if it were a foreign city. Most of their artists, their men of letters, have come up from the provinces, and well as they may learn to know the metropolis, it never ceases to be a spectacle, a wonder, a fascination for them. This comes partly from the intrinsic brilliancy and interest of the place, partly from the poverty of provincial life, and partly from the degree to which the faculty of appreciation is developed in Frenchmen of the

class of which I speak. To Daudet, at any rate, the familiar aspects of Paris are endlessly pictorial, and part of the charm of his novels (for those who share his relish for that huge flower of civilization) is in the way he recalls it, evokes it, suddenly presents it, in parts or as a whole, to our senses. The light, the sky, the feeling of the air, the odors of the streets, the look of certain vistas, the silvery, muddy Seine, the cool, gray tone of color, the physiognomy of particular quarters, the whole Parisian expression, meet you suddenly in his pages and remind you again and again that if he paints with a pen he writes with a brush. I remember that when I read "Le Nabab" and "Les Rois en Exil" for the first time, I said to myself that this was the *article de Paris* in supreme perfection, and that no reader could understand such productions who had not had a copious experience of the scene. It is certain, at any rate, that those books have their full value only for minds more or less Parisianized; half their meaning, their magic, their subtlety of intention, is liable to be lost. It may be said that this is a great limitation—that the works of the best novelists may be understood by all the world. There is something in that; but I know not, all the same, whether the fact I indicate be a great limitation. It is certainly a very positive quality. Daudet has caught the tone of a particular development of manners; he applies it with the lightest, surest hand, and his picture shines and lives. The most generalized representation of life cannot do more than that. I shrink very much from speaking of systems, in relation to such a genius as this; I should incline to believe that Daudet's system is simply to be as vivid as he can. Émile Zola has a system—at least, he says so; but I do not remember, on the part of the author of "Numa Roumestan," the smallest technical profession of faith. Nevertheless, he has taken a line, as we say, and his line is to sail as close as possible to the actual. The life of Paris being his subject, his attempt, most frequently, is to put his finger upon known examples; so that he has been accused of portraying individuals instead of portraying types. There are few of his figures to which the name of some celebrity of the day has not been attached. The Nabob is François Bravay; the Duc de Mora is the Duc de Morny. The Irish Doctor Jenkins is an English physician who flourished in Paris from such a year to such another; people are still living (wonderful to say) who took his little pills *à base arsénicale*. Félicia Ruys is Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt; Constance Crenniz is Madame Tagliani; the Queen of Illyria is the Queen of Naples; the Prince of Axel is

the Prince of Orange; Tom Lévis is an English house-agent (*not* in the Rue Royale, but hard by); Élysée Méraut is a well-known journalist, and Doctor Bouchereau a well-known surgeon. Such is the key, we are told, to these ingenious mystifications, and to many others which I have not the space to mention. It matters little, to my mind, whether in each case the cap fits the supposed model; for nothing is more evident than that Alphonse Daudet has proposed to himself to represent not only the people but the persons of his time. The conspicuity of certain individuals has added to the force with which they speak to his imagination. His taste is for salient figures, and he has said to himself that there is no greater proof of being salient than being known. The temptation to "put people into a book" is a temptation of which every writer of fiction knows something, and I hold that to succumb to it is not only legitimate but inevitable. Putting people into books is what the novelist lives upon; the only question in the matter is a question of taste; the operation must be judged by the manner in which it is performed. Daudet has been accused of doing the thing too boldly, and I believe that two or three of his portraits have provoked a protest. He is charged with ingratitude for having produced an effigy of the Duke of Morny, who had been his benefactor and employed him as a secretary. Such a matter as this is between M. Daudet and his conscience, and I am far from pretending to pronounce upon it. The uninitiated reader can only say that the portrait is a very kindly one—such a portrait as (it may be imagined) the Duc de Morny would not be displeased to have inspired. It may fairly be conceded, however, that Daudet is much more an observer than an inventor. The invented parts of his tales, like the loves of Jack and of Paul de Géry and the machinations of Madame Autheman (the theological vampire of "L'Évangéliste," to whom I shall return for a moment), are the vague, the ineffective, as well as the romantic parts. (I remember that, in reading "Le Nabab," it was not very easy to keep Paul de Géry and André Maranne apart.) It is the real—the transmuted real—that he gives us best; the fruit of an observation that is never colorless nor dry. His brightness and gayety are always there, even when the subject is dusky and painful. They are part of his spirit—part of his way of seeing things. "L'Évangéliste" is the saddest story conceivable; but it is lighted, throughout, by the author's irrepressibly humorous view of the conditions in which its successive elements present themselves, and by the extraordinary vivacity with which, in his hands, narration and description

proceed. His humor is of the finest; it is needless to say that it is never violent nor vulgar. It is a part of the high spirits—the animal spirits, I should say, if the phrase had not an association of coarseness—that accompany the temperament of his race; and it is stimulated by the perpetual entertainment which so keen a visual faculty naturally finds in the spectacle of life, even while encountering there a multitude of distressing things. Daudet's gayety is a part of his poetry, and his poetry is a part of everything he touches. There is little enough gayety in the subject of "Jack," and yet the whole story is told with a smile. To complete the charm of the thing, the smile is full of feeling. Here and there he has given great liberty to his humor, and the result is a delightful piece of drollery. "Les Aventures Prodigieuses de Tartarin de Tarascon" contains all his high spirits; it is one of his few stories in which laughter and tears are not intermingled. This little tale, which is one of his first, is, like "Numa Roumestan," a satire on a southern foible. Tartarin de Tarascon is an excellent man who inhabits the old town on the Rhone, over which the palace of the good King René keeps guard; he has not a fault in the world except an imagination too vivid. He is liable to visions, to hallucinations; the desire that a thing shall happen speedily resolves itself into the belief that the thing will happen—then that it is happening—then that it *has* happened. Tartarin accordingly presents himself to the world (and to himself) as a gentleman to whom all events are familiar; his experience blooms with the flowers of his ambition. The coveted thing for a man of his romantic mold is that he shall be the bravest of the brave, and he passes his life in a series of heroic exploits, in which, as you listen to him, it is impossible not to believe. He passes over from Marseilles to Algiers, where his adventures deepen to a climax, and where he has a desperate flirtation with the principal ornament of the harem of a noble Arab. The lady proves, at the end, to be a horribly improper little Frenchwoman, and poor Tartarin, abused and disabused, returns to Tarascon to meditate on what might have been. Nothing could be more charming than the light comicality of the sketch, which fills a small volume. This is the most joyous, the most completely diverting of all Daudet's tales; but the same element, in an infinitely subtler form, runs through the others. The essence of it is the wish to please, and this brings me back to the point to which I intended to return. The wish to please is the quality by which Daudet touches his readers most; it is this that elicits from them that

tender interest, that confession that they are charmed, of which I spoke at the beginning of these remarks. It gives a brightness and sweetness to his manner, in spite of the fact that he describes all sorts of painful and odious things. This contradiction is a part of his originality. He has no pretension to being simple, he is perfectly conscious of being complex, and in nothing is he more modern than in this expressive and sympathetic smile—the smile of the artist, the skeptic, the man of the world—with which he shows us the miseries and cruelties of life. It is singular that we should like him for that—and doubtless many people do not, or think they do not. What they really dislike, I believe, is the things he relates, which are often most lamentable.

IV.

THE first of these were slight and simple, and for the most part cheerful; little anecdotes and legends of Provence; impressions of an artist's holidays in that strange, bare, lovely land, and of wanderings further afield, in Corsica and Algeria; sketches of Paris during the siege; incidents of the invasion, the advent of the Prussian rule in other parts of the country. In all these things there is *la note émue*, as the French have it, the smile which is only a more synthetic sign of being touched at the heart. And then such grace of form, such lightness of touch, such suppleness of observation! Some of the chapters of the "Lettres de mon Moulin" are such perfect vignettes that the brief treatment of small subjects might well have seemed, at first, Alphonse Daudet's appointed work. He had almost invented a manner, and it was impossible to do better than he what the French call the *pièce*, or even the passage. Glimpses, reminiscences, accidents, he rendered them with the brilliancy of a violinist improvising on a sudden hint. The "Lettres de mon Moulin," moreover, are impregnated with the light, with the fragrance of a Provençal summer; the rosemary and thyme are in the air as we read, the white rocks and the gray foliage stretch away to an horizon of hills—the Alpilles, the little Alps—on which color is as iridescent as the breast of a dove. The Provence of Alphonse Daudet is a delightful land; even when the mistral blows there it has a music in its whistle. Émile Zola has protested against this; he, too, is of Provençal race, he passed his youth in the old Languedoc, and he intimates that his fanciful friend throws too much sweetness into the picture. It is beyond contradiction that Daudet, like Tartarin de Tarascon and Numa Roumestan, exaggerates a little; he sees with great intensity and is very sensitive to agreeable impressions.

"Le Petit Chose," his first long story, reads to-day like the attempt of a beginner, and of a beginner who had read and enjoyed Dickens. I risk this allusion to the author of "Copperfield" in spite of a conviction that Alphonse Daudet must be tired of hearing that he imitates him. It is not imitation; there is nothing so gross as imitation in the length and breadth of Daudet's work; but it is conscious sympathy, for there is plenty of that. There are pages in his tales which seem to say to us that at one moment of his life Dickens had been a revelation to him—pages more particularly in "Le Petit Chose," in "Fromont Jeune," and in "Jack." The heroine of the first of these works (a very shadowy personage) is never mentioned but as the "black eyes"; some one else is always spoken of as the *dame de grand mérite*; the heroine's father, who keeps a flourishing china-shop, never opens his mouth without saying "*C'est le cas de le dire*." These are harmless, they are, indeed, sometimes very happy, Dickensisms. We make no crime of them to M. Daudet, who must have felt as intelligently as he has felt everything else the fascinating form of the English novelist's drollery. "Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné" is a study of life in the old quarter of the Marais, the Paris of the seventeenth century, whose stately *hôtels* have been invaded by the innumerable activities of modern trade. When I say a study, I use the word with all those restrictions with which it must be applied to a genius who is truthful without being literal, and who has a pair of butterfly's wings attached to the back of his observation. If sub-titles were the fashion to-day, the right one for "Fromont Jeune" would be—"or the Dangers of Partnership." The action takes place for the most part in a manufactory of wall-papers, and the persons in whom the author seeks to interest us are engaged in this useful industry. There are delightful things in the book, but, as I intimated at the beginning of these remarks, there are considerable inequalities. The pages that made M. Daudet's fortune—for it was with "Fromont Jeune" that his fortune began—are those which relate to the history of M. Delobelle, the superannuated tragedian, his long-suffering wife, and his adorable lame daughter, who makes butterflies and humming-birds for ladies' head-dresses. This eccentric and pathetic household was an immense hit, and Daudet has never been happier than in the details of the group. Delobelle himself, who has not had an engagement for ten years and who never will have one again, but who holds none the less that it is his duty not to leave the stage, "not to renounce the theater," though his

platonic passion is paid for by the weary eyesight of his wife and daughter, who sit up half the night attaching little bead-eyes to little stuffed animals—the blooming and sonorous Delobelle, ferociously selfish and fantastically vain, under the genial forms of melodrama, is a beautiful representation of a vulgarly factitious nature. The book revealed a painter; all the descriptive passages, the pictorial touches, had the truest felicity. No one better than Daudet gives what we call the feeling of a place. The story illustrates, among other things, the fact that a pretty little woman who is consumed with the lowest form of vanity and unimpeded in her operations by the possession of a heart, may inflict an unlimited amount of injury upon people about her if she only have the opportunity. The case is well demonstrated, and Sidonie Chèbe is an elaborate study of flimsiness; her papery quality, as I may call it, her rustling dryness, are effectively rendered. But I think there is a limit to the interest which the English-speaking reader of French novels can take to-day in the adventures of a lady who leads the life of Madame Sidonie. In the first place, he has met her again and again—he knows exactly what she will do and say in every situation; and in the second, there always seems to him to be in her vices, her disorders, an element of the conventional. There is a receipt among French novelists for making little high-heeled devils. However this may be, he has at least a feeling that at night all cats are gray and that the particular *nuance* of depravity of a woman whose nature has the shallowness of a sanded floor is not a very fruitful object of consideration. Daudet has expended much ingenuity in endeavoring to hit the particular *nuance* of Sidonie; he has wished to make her a type—the type of the daughter of small unsuccessful shopkeepers (narrow-minded and self-complacent to imbecility), whose corruption comes from the examples, temptations, opportunities of a great city, as well as from her own poor blood and the infection of the meanest circumstances. But there is something too arid in such specifications. The early chapters of "Jack" are admirable; the later ones suffer a little, I think, from the story being drawn out too much, like an accordion when it wishes to be plaintive. Jack is a kind of younger brother of the Petit Chose, though he takes the troubles of life rather more stoutly than that delicate and diminutive hero; a poor boy with a doting and disreputable mother, whose tenderness is surpassed by her frivolity and who sacrifices her son to the fantastic egotism of an unsuccessful man of letters, with whom she passes

several years of her life. She is another study of flimsiness—she is another *nuance*; but she is a more apprehensible figure than Sidonie Chèbe—she is, indeed, a very admirable portrait. The success of the book, however, is the figure of her lover—that is, of her tyrant and bully, the unrecognized genius aforesaid, author of “*Le Fils de Faust*,” an uncirculated dramatic poem in the manner of Goethe, and center of a little group of *ratés*—a collection of dead-beats, as we say to-day, as pretentious, as impotent, as envious and as bilious as himself. He conceives a violent hatred of the offspring of his amiable companion, and the subject of “*Jack*” is the persecution of the boy by this monstrous charlatan. This persecution is triumphantly successful; the youthful hero dies on the threshold of manhood, broken down by his tribulations and miseries (he has been thrown upon the world to earn his bread, and among other things seeks a livelihood as a stoker on an Atlantic steamer). *Jack* has been taken young, and though his nature is gentle and tender, his circumstances succeed in degrading him. He is reduced at the end to a kind of bewildered brutishness. The story is simply a history of continuous suffering, elaborately, expansively told, and I am afraid that Mr. Charles Dudley Warner, who, in writing lately about “*Modern Fiction*,”* complains of the abuse of pathetic effects in that form of composition, would find little to commend in this brilliant photography of pain. Mr. Warner’s complaint is eminently just, and the fault of “*Jack*” is certainly the abuse of pathos. Mr. Warner does not mention Alphonse Daudet by name, but it is safe to assume that in his reflections upon the perversity of those writers who will not make a novel as comfortable as one’s stockings or as pretty as a Christmas card, he was thinking of the author of so many uncompromising *dénouements*. It is true that this probability is diminished by the fact that when he remarks that surely “the main object in the novel is to entertain,” he appears to imply that the writers who furnish his text are faithless to this duty. It is possible he would not have made that implication if he had had in mind the productions of a story-teller who has the great peculiarity of being “amusing,” as the old-fashioned critics say, even when he touches the source of tears. The word entertaining has two or three shades of meaning; but in whatever sense it is used I may say, in parenthesis, that I do not agree with Mr. Warner’s description of the main object of the novel. I should put the case differently; I should say that the main object of the novel is to represent life.

* In the “*Atlantic Monthly*,” for April, 1883.

I cannot understand any other motive for combining imaginary incidents, and I do not perceive any other measure of the value of such combinations. The *effect* of a novel—the effect of any work of art—is to entertain; but that is a very different thing. The success of a work of art, to my mind, may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the time that we have lived another life—that we have had a miraculous enlargement of experience. The greater the art, the greater the miracle, and the more certain also the fact that we have been entertained—in the best meaning of that word, at least, which signifies that we have been living at the expense of some one else. I am perfectly aware that to say the object of a novel is to represent life does not bring the question to a point so fine as to be uncomfortable for any one. It is of the greatest importance that there should be a very free appreciation of such a question, and the definition I have hinted at gives plenty of scope for that. For, after all, may not people differ infinitely as to what constitutes life—what constitutes representation? Some people, for instance, hold that Miss Austen deals with life, that Miss Austen represents. Others attribute these accomplishments to the brilliant “*Ouida*.” Some people find that illusion, that enlargement of experience, that miracle of living at the expense of others, of which I have spoken, in the novels of Alexandre Dumas. Others revel in them in the pages of Mr. Howells.

v.

M. DAUDET’S unfortunate *Jack*, at any rate, lives altogether at his own cost—that of his poor little juvenile constitution and of his innocent affections and aspirations. He is sent to the horrible *Gymnase Moronval*, where he has no beguiling works of fiction to read. The *Gymnase Moronval* is a *Dotheboys’ Hall* in a Parisian “*Passage*”—a very special class of academy. Nothing could be more ingenious than Daudet’s picture of this horrible institution, with its bankrupt and exasperated proprietors, the greasy penitentiary of a group of unremunerative children whose parents and guardians have found it convenient to forget them. The episode of the wretched little hereditary monarch of an African tribe who has been placed there for a royal education, and who, livid with cold, short rations and rough usage, and with his teeth chattering, with a sense of dishonor steals away and wanders in the streets of Paris, and then, recaptured and ferociously punished, sur-

renders his little dusky soul in the pestilential dormitory of the establishment—all this part of the tale is a masterpiece of vivid description. We seem to assist at the terrible soirées where the *ratés* exhibit their talents (M. Moronval is of course a *raté*) and where the wife of the principal, a very small woman with a very big head and a very high forehead, expounds the wonderful *Méthode-Décostère* (invented by herself and designated by her maiden name) for pronouncing the French tongue with elegance. My criticism of this portion of the book, and indeed of much of the rest of it, would be that the pathetic element is too intentional, too *voulu*, as the French say. And I am not sure that the reader enters into the author's reason for making Charlotte, Jack's mother, a woman of the class that we don't specify in American magazines. She is a good-natured idiot, but her good nature is unfortunately not consecutive, and she consents at the instigation of the diabolical d'Argenton, to her child's being brought up like a pauper. D'Argenton, like Delobelle, is a study of egotism pushed to the grotesque; but the portrait is still more complete, and some of the details are inimitable. As regards the infatuated Charlotte, who sacrifices her child to the malignity of her lover, I repeat, that certain of the features of her character appear to me a mistake, judged in relation to the effect that the author wishes to produce. He wishes to show us all that the boy loses in being disinherited—if I may use that term with respect to a situation in which there is nothing to inherit. But his loss is not great when we consider that his mother had, after all, very little to give him. She had divested herself of important properties. Bernard Jansoulet, in "Le Nabab," is not, like the two most successful figures that Daudet has previously created, a representation of full-blown selfishness. The unhappy nabob is generous to a fault; he is the most good-natured and accommodating of men, and if he has made use of all sorts of means to build up his enormous fortune, he knows an equal number of ways of spending it. This voluminous tale had an immense success; it seemed to show that Daudet had found his manner, a manner that was perfectly new and remarkably ingenious. As I have said, it held up the mirror to contemporary history, and attempted to complete for us, by supplementary revelations, those images which are projected by the modern newspaper and the photographic album. "Les Rois en Exil" is an historical novel of this pattern, in which the process is still more thoroughly applied. In these two works Daudet enlarged his canvas surprisingly, and showed his ability to deal with a multitude of figures.

The distance traversed artistically from the little anecdotes of the "Lettres de mon Moulin" to the complex narrative of "Le Nabab" and its successor are like the transformation—often so rapid—of a slim and charming young girl into a blooming and accomplished woman of the world. The author's style had taken on bone and muscle and become conscious of treasures of nervous agility. I have left myself no space to speak of these things in detail, and it was not part of my purpose to examine Daudet's novels piece by piece; but I may say that it is the items, the particular touches, that make the value of writing of this kind. I am not concerned to defend the process, the system, so far as there is a system; but I cannot open either "Le Nabab" or "Les Rois en Exil," cannot rest my eyes upon a page, without being charmed by the brilliancy of execution. It is difficult to give an idea, by any general terms, of Daudet's style—a style which defies convention, tradition, homogeneity, prudence, and sometimes even syntax, gathers up every patch of color, every colloquial note, that will help to illustrate, and moves eagerly, lightly, triumphantly along, like a clever woman in the costume of an eclectic age. There is nothing classic in this mode of expression; it is not the old-fashioned drawing in black and white. It never rests, never is satisfied, never leaves the idea sitting half-draped, like Patience on a monument; it is always panting, straining, fluttering, trying to add a little more, to produce the effect which shall make the reader see with his eyes, or rather with those marvelous eyes of Alphonse Daudet. "Le Nabab" is full of episodes which are above all pages of execution, triumphs of *rendu*, as the French say, in that ingenious vocabulary in which they express the technicalities of art. The author has drawn up a list of the great Parisian occasions and painted the portrait—or given a summary—of each of them. The opening day at the Salon, a funeral at Père-la-Chaise, a debate in the Chamber of Deputies, the *première* of a new play at a favorite theater, furnish him with as many opportunities for his gymnastics of observation. I should like to say how rich and entertaining I think the figure of Jansoulet, the robust and good-natured son of his own works (originally a dock-porter at Marseilles), who, after amassing a fabulous number of millions in selling European luxuries on commission to the Bey of Tunis, comes to Paris to try to make his social fortune, as he has already made his financial, and after being a nine-days' wonder, a public joke, and the victim of his boundless hospitality; after being flattered by charlatans, rifled by advent-

urers, belabored by newspapers, and "exploited" to the last penny of his coffers and the last pulsation of his vanity by every one who comes near him, dies of apoplexy in his box at the theater, while the public hoots him for being unseated for electoral frauds in the Chamber of Deputies, where for a single mocking hour he has tasted the sweetness of political life. I should like to say, too, that however much or however little the Duc de Mora may resemble the Duc de Morny, the character depicted by Daudet is a wonderful study of that modern passion, the love of "good form." The chapter that relates the death of the Duke, and describes the tumult, the confusion of his palace, the sudden extinction of the rapacious interests that cluster about him and to which the collapse of his splendid security comes as the first breath of a revolution—this chapter is famous, and gives the fullest measure of what Daudet can do when he fairly warms to his work. "Les Rois en Exil," however, has a greater perfection. It is simpler, more equal, and it contains much more of the beautiful. In "Le Nabab" there are various lacunæ and a certain want of logic; it is not a sustained narrative, but a series of almost diabolically clever pictures. But the other book has more largeness of line—a fine tragic movement which deepens and presses to the catastrophe. Daudet had observed that several dispossessed monarchs had taken up their residence in the French capital—some of them waiting and plotting for a restoration and chafing under their disgrace; others indifferent, resigned, relieved, eager to console themselves with the pleasures of Paris. It occurred to him to suppose a drama in which these exalted personages should be the actors, and which, unlike either of his former productions, should have a pure and noble heroine. He was conscious of a dauntless little imagination, the idea of making kings and queens talk among themselves had no terror for him; he had faith in his good taste, in his exquisite powers of divination. The success is worthy of the spirit—the gallant artistic spirit—in which it was invoked. "Les Rois en Exil" is a masterly production. He has had, it is true, to simplify his subject a good deal to make it practicable; the court of the king and queen of Illyria, in the suburb of Saint-Mandé, is a little too much like a court in a fairy-tale. But the amiable depravity of Christian, in whom conviction, resolution, attention, are hopelessly dead, and whose one desire is to enjoy Paris with the impunity of a young man about town; the proud, serious, concentrated nature of Frederica, who believes ardently in her royal function and lives with her eyes

fixed on the crown, which she regards as a symbol of duty; both of these conceptions do M. Daudet the utmost honor, and prove that he is capable of handling great situations—situations which have a depth of their own, and do not depend for their interest on amusing occasions. It takes, perhaps, some courage to say so, but the feelings, the passions, the view of life, of royal personages, differ essentially from those of common mortals; their education, their companions, their traditions, their exceptional position, take sufficient care of that. Alphonse Daudet has embraced the difference; and I scarcely know, in the last few years, a straighter flight of imagination. The history of the Queen of Illyria is a tragedy. Her husband sells his birthright for a few million of francs and rolls himself in the Parisian gutter; her child perishes from poverty of blood; she herself dries up in her despair. There is nothing finer in all Daudet than the pages at the end of the book, which describe her visits to the great physician Bouchereau, when she takes her poor half-blind child by the hand and (wishing an opinion unbiased by the knowledge of her rank) goes to sit in his waiting-room like one of the vulgar multitude. Wonderful are the delicacy, the verity, the tenderness of these pages; I always point to them to justify my predilection. But I must stop pointing. I will not say more of "Numa Roumestan" than I have already said; for it is better to pass so happy a work by than to speak of it inadequately. I will only repeat that I delight in "Numa Roumestan." Alphonse Daudet's last book is a novelty at the time I write; "L'Évangéliste" has been before the public but a month or two at the moment of writing. I will say but little of it, partly because my opportunity is already over, and partly because I have found that, for a fair judgment of one of Daudet's works, the book should be read a second time, after a certain interval has elapsed. This interval has not brought round my second perusal of "L'Évangéliste." My first suggests that, with all the author's present mastery of his resources, the book has a grave defect. It is not that the story is painful; that is a defect only when the sources of this element are not, as I may say, well founded. It treats of a young girl (a Danish Protestant) who is turned to stone by a Medusa of Calvinism, the somber and fanatical wife of a great Protestant banker. Madame Autheman persuades Éline Ebsen to wash her hands of her poor old mother, with whom, up to this moment, she has lived in the closest affection, and go forth into strange countries to stir up the wicked to conversion. The excellent Madame Ebsen, bewildered, heart-broken, desperate, terrified at

the imagined penalties of her denunciation of the rich and powerful bigot (so that she leaves her habitation and hides in a household of small mechanics to escape from them—one of the best episodes in the book), protests, struggles, goes down on her knees in vain; then, at last, stupefied and annihilated, desists, looks for the last time at her inexorable, impenetrable daughter, who has hard texts on her lips and no recognition in her eye, and who lets her pass away, without an embrace, forever. The incident in itself is perfectly conceivable; many well-meaning persons have held human relationships cheap in the face of a religious call. But Daudet's weakness has been simply a want of acquaintance with his subject. Proposing to himself to describe a particular phase of French Protestantism, he has "got up" certain of his facts with commendable zeal; but he has not felt nor understood the matter, has looked at it solely from the outside, sought to make it above all things grotesque and extravagant. Into these excesses it doubtless frequently falls; but there is a general human verity which regulates even the most stubborn wills, the most perverted lives; and of this saving principle the author, in the quest of striking pictures, has rather lost his grasp. His pictures are striking, as a matter of course; but to us readers of Protestant race, familiar with the large, free, salubrious life which the children of that faith have carried with them over the globe, there is almost a kind of drollery in these overingenious pictures of the Protestant temperament. The fact is that M. Daudet has not, (to my belief) any natural understanding of the religious passion; he has a quick perception of many things, but that province of

the human mind cannot be quickly perceived; experience, there, is the only explorer. Madame Autheman is not a real bigot; she is simply a dusky effigy, she is undemonstrated. Éline Ebsen is not a victim, inasmuch as she is but half alive, and victims are victims only in virtue of being thoroughly sentient. I do not easily perceive her spiritual joints. All the human part of the book, however, has the author's habitual felicity; and the reader of these remarks knows what I hold that to be. It may seem to him, indeed, that in making the concession I made just above—in saying that Alphonse Daudet's insight fails him when he approaches the question of spiritual things—I partly take back some of the admiration I have expressed for him. For that amounts, after all, to saying that he has no high imagination, and, as a consequence, no philosophy. It is very true, I am afraid, that he has but little philosophy. There are certain things he does not conceive—certain forms that never appear to him. Imaginative writers of the first order always give us an impression that they have a kind of ideal. I should be at a loss what to say about Daudet's ideal. "And yet you have praised him so much," I fancy I hear it urged; "you have praised him as if he were one of the very first." All that is very true, and yet I take nothing back. Determinations of rank are a delicate matter, and it is sufficient priority for an author that one likes him immensely. Daudet is bright, vivid, tender; he has an intense artistic life. And then he is so free. For the spirit that moves slowly, going carefully from point to point, the sight of that freedom is delightful.

Henry James.



A ROSE.

TOO-PERFECT rose, thy heavy breath has power
To wake a dim, an unexplained regret:
Art body to the soul of some deep hour
That all my seasons have not yielded yet?

But if it be so — Hour, too-perfect Hour,
Ah, blow not full, though all the yearning days
Should tremble bud-like! since the wind must shower
Thine unreturning grace along the ways.

Helen Gray Cone.



Alphonse Daudet.