

Voltaire in England.

PART I.

THE residence of Voltaire in England is an unwritten chapter in the literary history of the eighteenth century. And yet assuredly few episodes in that history are so well worth attentive consideration. In his own opinion it was the turning-point of his life. In the opinion of Condorcet it was fraught with consequences of momentous importance to Europe and to humanity. What is certain is that it left its traces on almost everything which he subsequently produced, either as the professed disciple and interpreter of English teachers, or as an independent inquirer. Its influence extended even to his poetry and to his criticism, to his work as an historian and to his work as an essayist. Nor is this all. The circumstances under which he sought our protection; his strange experiences among us; his relations with Pope, Swift, and Bolingbroke, with the Court, with our aristocracy, with the people; the zeal and energy with which he studied our manners, our government, our science, our history, our literature; his courageous attempts to distinguish himself as a writer in English—all combine to form one of the most interesting passages in his singularly interesting career.

But unfortunately no portion of Voltaire's biography is involved in greater obscurity. "On ignore," writes Charles Rémusat, "à peu près quelle fut sa vie en Angleterre. Ces deux années sont une lacune dans son histoire. C'est un point de sa biographie qui mériterait des recherches." Carlyle, who attempted in the third volume of his *Frederick the Great* to throw some light on it, abandoned the task in impatient despair. Mere inanity and darkness visible—such are his expressions—reign in all Voltaire's biographies over this period of his life. Seek not to know it; no man has inquired into it, probably no competent man ever will. It happened, however, that at the very time Carlyle was thus expressing himself, a very competent man was engaged on the task. The researches of Desnoiresterres succeeded in dispersing a portion at least of the obscurity which hung over Voltaire's movements during these mysterious years. He took immense pains to supply the deficiencies of preceding biographers. Judging rightly that all that could now be recovered could be recovered only in scattered fragments, he diligently collected such information as lay dispersed in Voltaire's own correspondence and writings, and in the correspondence and writings of those with whom his illustrious countryman had when in England been brought into contact. Much has, it is true, escaped him; much which he has collected he has not, perhaps, turned to the best account; but it is due to him—the fullest and

the most satisfactory of Voltaire's biographers—to say that his chapter "Voltaire et la Société Anglaise" must form the basis of all future inquiries into this most interesting subject. To higher praise he is not, we think, entitled. Some of Desnoiresterres' deficiencies are supplied by Mr. Parton, whose *Life of Voltaire* appeared in two goodly octavos a few months ago. Mr. Parton has made one or two unimportant additions to what was already known, but he has, we are sorry to find, done little more. We gratefully acknowledge our obligations both to Desnoiresterres and to Mr. Parton. But these obligations are slight.

The first point to be settled is the exact date of his arrival in England, and that date can, we think, be determined with some certainty. On May 2 (n.s.), 1726, an order arrived for his release from the Bastille, on the understanding that he would quit France and betake himself, as he had offered to do, to England. On May 6 he was, as his letter to Madame de Ferriole proves, at Calais; and at Calais he remained for some days the guest of his friend Dunoquet. How long he remained at Calais it is not possible to discover, but he tells us himself that he disembarked at Greenwich, and it is clear from the passage which follows that he landed on the day of Greenwich Fair. That fair was invariably held on Whit-Monday, and Whit-Monday fell in 1726 on May 30 (o.s.) Now a reference to the *Daily Courant* for May 30 shows that a mail arrived from France on Sunday the 29th, which would be, of course, according to the new style, May 18. Supposing, therefore, that his visit at Calais was protracted to twelve days after his letter to Madame de Ferriole—and there is no reason for supposing that it was not—the time would exactly tally. That he should have remained on board till Monday morning need excite no surprise. But there is other evidence in favour of this date. In the remarkable passage in which he describes what he saw on landing, he tells us that the vessels in the river had spread their sails (*déployé leurs voiles*), to do honour to the King and Queen, and he particularly notices the splendid liveries worn by the King's menials. We turn to the *London Gazette* for Monday, May 30, and we find that on that day, the King's birthday, the rejoicings for which had been deferred from the preceding Saturday, was "celebrated with the usual demonstrations of public joy;" and in the *British Gazetteer* for Saturday, May 21, we read that "great preparations are making for celebrating the King's birthday," and that "the King's menial servants are to be new clothed on that occasion." We believe, then, that Voltaire first set foot in England on Whit-Monday, May 30 (18), 1726.

On the voyage he had been the prey of melancholy thoughts. He drew, in the bitterness of his soul, a parallel between his own position and the position in which his favourite hero once stood. And his feelings found expression in verse—

Je ne dois pas être plus fortuné
Que le héros célébré sur ma vielle.
Il fut proscrit, persécuté, damné

Par les dévots et leur douce séquelle.
 En Angleterre il trouva du secours,
 J'en vais chercher.*

But on landing he soon recovered his cheerfulness, and throwing himself in a transport of joy on the earth, he reverently saluted it.† Many of his countrymen have described their first impressions of the land of Shakespeare and Newton, but to none of them has it ever presented itself as it presented itself to the fascinated eye of Voltaire. Everything combined to fill the young exile with delight and admiration. Though his health was delicate, he was in exuberant spirits. It was a cloudless day in the loveliest month of the English year. 'A soft wind from the west—we are borrowing his own glowing description—tempered the rays of the hot spring sun. The Thames, rolling full and rapid, was in all its glory; and in all their glory, too, were the stately trees which have now disappeared, but which then fringed the river banks on both sides for many miles. Nor was it nature only that was keeping carnival. It was the anniversary of the Great [Fair, and it was the anniversary of the King's birthday. The river between Greenwich and London was one unbroken pageant. Farther than the eye could see, stretched with every sail, crowded two lines of merchant ships drawn up to salute the royal barge, which, preceded by boats with bands of music, and followed by wherries rowed by men in gorgeous liveries, floated slowly past. Loyal acclamations rent the air, and Voltaire observed with interest that a nation of freemen was a nation of dutiful subjects. From the river he turned to the park, and, curious to see English society in all its phases, he spent the afternoon in observing what was going on. He wandered up and down the park, questioning such holiday-makers as could understand him about the races, and the arrangements for the races. He admired the skill with which the young women managed their horses, and was greatly struck with the freshness and beauty of their complexions, the neatness of their dress, and the graceful vivacity of their movements. In the course of his rambles he accidentally met some English merchants to whom he had letters of introduction. By them he was treated with great courtesy and kindness. They lent him a horse, they provided him with refreshments, and they placed him where both the park and the river could be seen to most advantage. While he was enjoying the fine view from the hill, he perceived near him a Danish courier who had like himself just arrived in England. The man's face, says Voltaire, was radiant with joy; he believed himself to be in a paradise where the women were always beautiful and animated, where the sky was always clear, and where no one thought of anything but pleasure. "And I," he adds, "was even more enchanted than the Dane."

* Quoted in the *Historical Memoirs* of the author of the *Henriade* (1778), where the writer speaks of having seen these verses in a letter in Voltaire's own handwriting addressed to M. Dumas d'Aiguebère.

† Duvernet, *Vie de Voltaire*, p. 64.

The same evening he was in London, in all probability the guest of Bolingbroke. His acquaintance with that distinguished man had begun at *La Source* in the winter of 1721. Their acquaintance had soon ripened into intimacy, and though since then their personal intercourse had been interrupted, they had interchanged letters. At that time Bolingbroke was an exile; he had recently obtained a pardon, and was now settled in England, where he divided his time between his town house in Pall Mall and his country house at Dawley. The friendship of Bolingbroke would have been a sufficient passport to the most brilliant literary circles in London, but as the connection of Bolingbroke lay principally among the Tories, the young adventurer had taken the precaution to secure a protector among the Whigs. The name of Bubb Dodington is now a synonym for all that is vilest and most contemptible in the trade of politics, but at the time of which we are writing his few virtues were more prominent than his many vices. His literary accomplishments, his immense wealth, and his generous though not very discriminating patronage of men of letters, had deservedly given him a high place among the Mæcenases of his age. At his palace in Dorsetshire he loved to assemble the wits and poets of the Opposition, the most distinguished of whom were Thomson and Young—the one still busy with his *Seasons*, the other slowly elaborating his brilliant *Satirics*. For his introduction to Dodington he was indebted to the English Ambassador at Paris, Horace Walpole the elder, who had, at the instigation of the Count de Morville, written a letter recommending him to the patronage of Dodington. How fully he availed himself of these and other influential friends is proved by the fact that when he quitted England in 1729 there was scarcely a single person of distinction, either in letters or politics, with whom he was not personally acquainted. But his most intimate associate was an opulent English merchant who resided at Wandsworth, and whose name was Everard Falkener. He had become acquainted with him in Paris, and had promised, should opportunity offer, to visit him in England.* Falkener's house he seems to have regarded as his home, and of Falkener himself he always speaks in terms of affection and gratitude. He dedicated "*Zaire*" to him; he regularly corresponded with him; and to the end of his life he loved to recall the happy days spent under his good friend's hospitable roof at Wandsworth. Many years afterwards, when he wished to express his sense of the kindness he had received from King Stanislaus, he described him "as a kind of Falkener." Of Falkener few particulars have survived. We know from Voltaire that he was subsequently appointed Ambassador to Constantinople, that he held some appointment in Flanders, and that he was knighted. We gather from other sources that he became secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, and that he was one of the witnesses called on the trial of Simon Lord Lovat in 1746. To this it may be added

* Goldsmith's *Life of Voltaire*, *Miscell. Works*, iv. p. 20.

that he became towards the end of George the Second's reign one of the Postmasters-General; that in 1747* he married a daughter of General Churchill; and that he died at Bath, November 16, 1758.† That Voltaire should have delighted in his society is not surprising, for though we know little of Falkener's character, we know enough to understand its charm. "I am here"—so runs a passage in one of his letters, quoted by Voltaire in his remarks upon Pascal—"just as you left me, neither merrier nor sadder, nor richer nor poorer; enjoying perfect health, having everything that renders life agreeable, without love, without avarice, without ambition, and without envy; and as long as all that lasts I shall call myself a very happy man."‡

To what extent Voltaire was acquainted with the English language on his arrival at Greenwich it is impossible to say. We can find no traces of his having been engaged in studying it before his retirement subsequent to the caning he received from the Chevalier de Rohan at the beginning of February 1726. If this was the case, what he knew of our language was what he had been able to pick up in about three months. His progress must have been unusually rapid, for he had not only made himself understood at Greenwich Fair, but on the following day he had mingled familiarly in conversation at the coffee-houses. It is of course possible that the conversation had on these occasions been carried on in his native language. Then, as now, large numbers of French refugees had found a home in London. They had their own places of worship; they had their own coffee-houses, the principal being the "Rainbow" in Marylebone. Then, as now, almost all educated Englishmen were conversant with the language of Racine and Molière. Regularly as each season came round a Parisian company appeared. At Court it was the usual mode of communication. By 1728 its attainment was held to be so essential a part of education that in the October of that year a journal was started, the proposed object of which was to facilitate the study of it.§ Indeed, wherever he went he would encounter his countrymen, or Londoners who could converse with him in the language of his countrymen. In Bolingbroke's house he would probably hear little else, for Lady Bolingbroke scarcely ever ventured to express herself in English; and of Falkener's proficiency in French we have abundant proof. But among the cultivated Englishmen of that day there was one remarkable exception, and that was unfortunately in the case of a man with whom Voltaire was most anxious to exchange ideas. "Pope," wrote Voltaire many years afterwards, could hardly read French, and spoke not one "syllable of our language."|| Voltaire's desire to meet Pope had no doubt been sharpened by the flattering remarks which Pope had two

* *Gentleman's Magazine* for Feb. 1747.

† *Id.* for Nov. 1758.

‡ *Œuvres Complètes*, Beauchot, vol. xxxviii. p. 46.

§ See the *Flying Post* or *Weekly Medley*, the first number of which appeared on October 8, 1728.

|| See Spence's *Anecdotes* (Singer, 8vo), p. 204, note.

years before made about the *Henriade*, or, as it was then entitled, *La Ligue*. A copy of the poem had been forwarded to him from France by Bolingbroke, and to oblige Bolingbroke he had managed to spell it out. The perusal had given him, he said, a very favourable idea of the author, whom he pronounced to be "a bigot but no heretic; one who knows authority and national sanctions without prejudice to truth and charity; in a word, one worthy of that share of friendship and intimacy with which you honour him." * These complimentary remarks Bolingbroke had, it seems, conveyed to Voltaire, and a correspondence appeared to have ensued between the two poets, though no traces of that correspondence are now to be found.† Of his first interview with Pope three accounts are now extant. The first is that given by Owen Ruffhead, the substance of which is repeated by Johnson in his life of Pope; the second is that given by Goldsmith, and the third is that given by Duvernet. It will be well, perhaps, to let each authority tell his own story.

"Mr. Pope," writes Owen Ruffhead, "told one of his most intimate friends that the poet Voltaire had got some recommendation to him when he came to England, and that the first time he saw him was at Twickenham, where he kept him to dinner. Mrs. Pope, a most excellent woman, was then alive, and observing that this stranger, who appeared to be entirely emaciated, had no stomach, she expressed her concern for his want of appetite, on which Voltaire gave her so indelicate and brutal an account of the occasion of his disorder, contracted in Italy, that the poor lady was obliged immediately to rise from table. When Mr. Pope related that, his friend asked him how he could forbear ordering his servant John to thrust Voltaire head and shoulders out of his house? He replied that there was more of ignorance in this conduct than a purposed affront; that Voltaire came into England, as other foreigners do, on a prepossession that not only all religion, but all common decency of morals, was lost among us."—*Life of Pope*, 4to, p. 156.

Next comes Goldsmith:—

M. Voltaire has often told his friends that he never observed in himself such a succession of opposite passions as he experienced upon his first interview with Mr. Pope. When he first entered the room and perceived our poor, melancholy poet, naturally deformed and wasted as he was with sickness and study, he could not help regarding him with the utmost compassion; but when Pope began to speak and to reason upon moral obligations, and dress the most delicate sentiments in the most charming diction, Voltaire's pity began to be changed into admiration, and at last even into envy. It is not uncommon with him to assert that no man ever pleased him so much in serious conversation, nor any whose sentiments mended so much upon recollection.—*Life of Voltaire*, Miscellaneous Works, iv. p. 24.

It is difficult to reconcile these accounts with the narrative of Duvernet, who, as he almost certainly had his information from Thiériot, is an authority of great weight:—

Dans leur première entrevue ils furent fort embarrassés. Pope s'exprimait très péniblement en français, et Voltaire n'étant point accoutumé aux sifflements de la langue anglaise ne pouvait se faire entendre. Il se retira dans un village et ne rentra dans Londres que lorsqu'il eut acquis une grande facilité à s'exprimer en anglais.

* Letter to Bolingbroke, dated April 9, 1724.

† See Pope's letter to Carye, dated December 25, 1725.

This seems to us by far the most probable account. It is certain that Voltaire devoted himself with great assiduity to the systematic study of English shortly after his arrival among us. He provided himself with a regular teacher, who probably assisted him not only in the composition of his letters, which he now regularly wrote in English, but in the composition of his two famous essays.* He obtained an introduction to Colley Cibber, and regularly attended the theatres, following the play in a printed copy.† His studies were, however, interrupted by his suddenly leaving England for France—an expedition attended with considerable peril, and conducted with the utmost secrecy. The particulars of this journey are involved in great obscurity. That he undertook it with the object of inducing the Chevalier de Rohan to give him an opportunity of avenging his wounded honour—that for some time, at least, he remained concealed in Paris, not venturing to have an interview with any friend or with any relative—is clear from his letter to Thiériot dated August 12, 1726. That he was at Wandsworth again, almost immediately afterwards, is proved by a letter to Mademoiselle Bessières, dated October 15, in which he speaks of himself as having been there for two months.

He arrived in England in a state of abject depression, and this depression was aggravated by ill-health and the cross accidents of fortune. He had brought with him a bill of exchange of the value of 20,000 francs, and this bill—not being in immediate need of money—he had neglected to present. On presenting it to the man on whom it had been drawn—one D'Acosta, a Jew—D'Acosta informed him that three days before he had become bankrupt; and the money was lost. His misfortune, however, happening to reach the ears of the King, the King good-naturedly sent him a sum which has been variously estimated, but which probably amounted to a hundred guineas, and so relieved him from pressing embarrassment. But what affected him most was the news of the death of his sister. This threw him into an agony of grief. There is nothing in the whole range of Voltaire's voluminous correspondence so touching as the letter in which his feelings on this sad occasion found vent. It was addressed to Mademoiselle Bessières, the lady who had sent the intelligence. It is dated "Wandsworth, October 15, 1726." He describes himself as acquainted only with the sorrows of life; he is dead, he says, to everything but the affection he owes to his correspondent. He alludes bitterly to the "retraite ignorée" from which he writes; and he says it would have been far better, both for his relatives and himself, had death removed him instead of his sister. "Les amertumes et les souffrances"—so run his gloomy reflections—"qui en ont marqué presque tous les jours ont été souvent mon ouvrage. Je sens le peu que je vaux; mes faiblesses me font pitié et mes fautes me font

* *La Voltairomanie*, pp. 46, 47.

† Chetwood's *History of the Stage*, p. 46.

horreur." On the following day he wrote in a similar strain to Madame de Bernières. He was in deep distress, too, at the cruelty and injustice with which he had been treated by his brother; and to this distress he subsequently gave passionate utterance in a letter to Thiériot.* But neither depression nor sorrow ever held long dominion over that buoyant and volatile spirit. On the very day on which he was thus mournfully expressing himself to Madame de Bernières, he was, in another letter, dilating with enthusiasm on the beauties of Pope's poetry. This we learn from a very interesting fragment preserved by Warburton in his notes to the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. As the fragment appears to have escaped the notice of all Voltaire's editors and biographers, and as it proves the very high opinion he entertained of Pope's genius, we will quote a portion of it:—

I look upon his poem called the *Essay on Criticism* as superior to the *Art of Poetry* of Horace, and his *Rape of the Lock* is, in my opinion, above the *Lutrin* of Despreaux. I never saw so amiable an imagination, so gentle graces, so great variety, so much wit, and so refined knowledge of the world, as in this little performance.

It would be interesting to know if this manuscript letter, which Warburton describes as being before him as he wrote, is now in existence. It was dated October 15, 1726.

Of his movements during the autumn of 1726 we know nothing. The probability is that he was engaged in close study, and saw little society. He instructs his correspondents in France to direct their letters to the care of Lord Bolingbroke; but he was evidently not in personal communication with Bolingbroke or with any member of the Twickenham circle. This is proved by the fact that he knew nothing of the serious accident by which Pope nearly lost his life until two months after it had happened, as his letter to Pope, dated November 16, shows. Another letter,† too—a letter undated, but evidently belonging to this period, and written in English—addressed to John Brinsden, Bolingbroke's secretary, points to the same conclusion. Very little, however, of the following year was spent in retirement, for we find traces of him in many places. His attenuated figure and eager, haggard face grew familiar to the frequenters of fashionable society. He passed three months at the seat of Lord Peterborough, where he became intimate with Swift,‡ who was a fellow-visitor. At Bubb Dodington's mansion, at Eastbury, he met Young, who had not as yet taken orders, but was seeking fortune as a hanger-on at great houses. It was a curious chance which brought together the future author of the *Night Thoughts* and the future author of *La Pucelle*; it was a still more curious circumstance

* See letter dated "Wandsworth, June 14, 1727," *Œuvres Complètes* (ed. 1880), vol. xxxiii. p. 172.

† Preserved in Colet's *Relics of Literature*, p. 70.

‡ See a very interesting extract from a MS. journal kept by a Major Brooms, who visited Voltaire in 1765, and who heard this and other particulars from Voltaire himself. It is printed in *Notes and Queries* (first series), vol. x. p. 403.

that they should have formed a friendship which remained unbroken when the one had become the most rigid of Christian divines and the other the most daring of anti-Christian incendiaries.* At Eastbury occurred a well-known incident. A discussion had arisen as to the merits of *Paradise Lost*. Young spoke in praise of his favourite poet; Voltaire, who had as little sympathy with Milton as he had with Æschylus and Dante, objected to the episode of Sin and Death, contending that as they were abstractions it was absurd to assign them offices proper only to concrete beings. These objections he enforced with his usual eloquence and sarcastic wit. The parallel between the hungry monster of Milton, "grinning horrible its ghastly smile," and the meagre form of the speaker—his thin face lighted up, as it always was in conversation, with that peculiar sardonic smile familiar to us from his portraits—was irresistible. And Young closed the argument with an epigram (we quote Herbert Croft's version):—

You are so witty, profligate, and thin,
At once we think thee Milton, Death, and Sin.

It appears, however, from Young's poem, where he plainly alludes to this conversation, that he succeeded in impressing on his friendly opponent "that Milton's blindness lay not in his song."

A letter written about this time to a friend in France, dated by the editors—but dated, we suspect, wrongly—1726, is a sufficient proof that the young exile was no longer either discontented or unhappy. "You who are a perfect Briton," thus the letter runs, "should cross the Channel and come to us. I assure you that a man of your temper would not dislike a country where one obeys to (*sic*) the laws only, and to one's whims. Reason is free here, and walks her own way. Hypochondriacs are especially welcome. No manner of living appears strange. We have men who walk six miles a day for their health, feed upon roots, never taste flesh, wear a coat in winter thinner than your ladies do in the hottest days." †

In March he was present at the funeral of Sir Isaac Newton. It was a spectacle which made a profound impression on him, and he ever afterwards delighted to recall how he had once been the denizen of a country in which the first officers of the State contended for the honour of supporting the pall of a man whose sole distinction had lain in intellectual eminence. How differently, he thought, would the author of the *Principia* have fared in Paris. He subsequently made the acquaintance of the philosopher's niece, Mrs. Conduit, and of the physician and surgeon who attended him in his last moments; from them he learned many interesting particulars. It is perhaps worth mentioning that we owe to Voltaire the famous story of the falling apple, and the preservation of the reply which Newton is said to have

* Young dedicated to Voltaire in the most flattering terms his *Sea Piece*. See his poems.

† *Pièces Inédites de Voltaire*. Paris, 1820.

given to the person who asked him how he had discovered the laws of the universe.*

In the course of this year he met Gay, who showed him the *Beggar's Opera* before it appeared on the stage; † and it was probably in the course of this year that he paid his memorable visit to Congreve. His admiration of the greatest of our comic poets is sufficiently indicated in the *Lettres Philosophiques*, and that admiration he lost no time in personally expressing. But Congreve, whose temper was probably not improved by gout and blindness, and who was irritated perhaps by the ebullience of his young admirer, affected to regard literary distinction as a trifle. "I beg," he said, "that you will look upon me, not as an author, but as a gentleman." "If," replied Voltaire, disgusted with his foppery, "you had had the misfortune to be simply a gentleman, I should not have troubled myself to wait upon you." To Congreve he owed, we suspect, his introduction to the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough, who not only communicated to him some interesting particulars which he afterwards wove into his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, but is said to have solicited his assistance in drawing up her memoirs. This task he at first consented to undertake. The Duchess laid the papers before him, and issued her instructions. Finding, however, that he was to write, not as unbiassed historical justice required, but as her Grace's capricious prejudices dictated, he ventured to expostulate. Upon that her manner suddenly changed. Flying into a passion, she snatched the paper from him, muttering, "I thought the man had sense; but I find him, at bottom, either a fool or a philosopher." The story is told by Goldsmith; ‡ it would be interesting to know on what authority.

Another story, resting, it is true, on no very satisfactory testimony, but in itself so intrinsically probable that we are inclined to believe it genuine, is related by Desnoiresterres. Voltaire, hearing that the Duchess was engaged in preparing her memoirs for publication, ventured to ask if he might be permitted to glance at the manuscript. "You must wait a little," she said, "for I am revising it;" coolly observing that the conduct of the Government had so disgusted her that she had determined to recast the character of Queen Anne, "as I have," she added, "since these creatures have been our rulers, come to love her again." Pope's *Atossa* was assuredly no caricature, and a better commentary on it it would be impossible to find.

Like most of his countrymen Voltaire appears to have been greatly struck with the beauty of the English women, and about this time he became acquainted with one whose charms have been more frequently celebrated than those of any other woman of that age. Voltaire was one of the thousand adorers of Molly Lepel, then the wife of Lord Hervey. To her he addressed a copy of verses which are interesting as being the

* *Lettres Philosophiques*, passim.

† MS. letter written by a Major Broome, who visited Voltaire in 1765: printed in *Notes and Queries* (first series), vol. x. p. 403.

‡ *Life of Voltaire*, Miscellaneous Works, iv. p. 25.

only verses now extant composed by him in English. Their intrinsic merit is not, it must be admitted, of a high order, but as a literary curiosity they will bear repetition :—

Hervey, would you know the passion
You have kindled in my breast ?
Trifling is the inclination
That by words can be express'd.
In my silence see the lover—
True love is best by silence known ;
In my eyes you'll best discover
All the power of your own.

A curious fortune attended these verses. They were subsequently transcribed and addressed to a lady named Laura Harley—the wife of a London merchant—by one of her gallants, and they formed part of the evidence on which her husband grounded his claim for a divorce.* This has misled Mr. Parton, who supposes that Voltaire wrote them, not in honour of Lady Hervey, but in honour of poor Mr. Harley's erring wife. That they awoke no jealousy in Lord Hervey is proved by Voltaire's letter to Thiériot, dated April 1732, and by a letter he addressed to Hervey himself in 1740. But the beautiful wife of Lord Hervey was not the only lady distinguished by the admiration of Voltaire. He has spoken in rapturous terms of the graces and accomplishments of Lady Bolingbroke, for whom he finds a place in his *Siècle de Louis XIV.* ; and an unpublished letter in the British Museum shows that he had paid assiduous court to Lady Sundon, who had evidently not been insensible to his flattery.†

And now we come to a very curious story, a story which is related in detail by Ruffhead, and has been repeated by Johnson. It had long been suspected by Pope and Bolingbroke that Voltaire was playing a double part ; in other words, that he had formed a secret alliance with the Court party, and was acting as their spy. Their suspicion was soon confirmed. In February 1727 appeared the third of a series of letters in which the character and policy of Walpole were very severely handled. The letter was written with unusual energy and skill ; it attracted much attention, and Walpole's friends were anxious to discover the author. While it was still the theme of conversation Voltaire came to Twickenham, and asked Pope if he could tell him who wrote it. Pope, seeing his object, and wishing to prove him, informed him in the strictest confidence that he was himself the author of it, "and," he added, "I trust to your honour as a gentleman, Mr. Voltaire, that you will communicate this secret to no living soul." The letter had really been written by Bolingbroke, and bore in truth no traces of Pope's style ; but the next day every one at Court was speaking of it as Pope's composition, and Voltaire's treachery was manifest. To this Bolingbroke apparently alludes in a letter to Swift (May 18, 1727) : "I would have you insinuate that

* This circumstance is mentioned by Châteauneuf in his *Les Divorces Anglais*, and is discussed by Desnoiresterres.

† Additional MSS.

the only reason Walpole can have to ascribe them (*i.e.* the occasional letters just alluded to) to a particular person is the authority of one of his spies, who wriggles himself into the company of those who neither love, esteem, nor fear the Minister, that he may report, not what he hears, since no man speaks with any freedom before him, but what he guesses." Conduct so scandalous as this ought not to be lightly imputed to any man, and it would be satisfactory to know that Voltaire had either been traduced or misrepresented. It is not likely, however, that the story was invented by Warburton, from whom Ruffhead almost certainly had it, and there is, moreover, strong presumptive evidence in its favour. Voltaire had undoubtedly been meddling with the matter, for in a letter to Thiériot dated May 27, 1727, he says:—"Do not talk of the Occasional Writer. Do not say that it is not of my Lord Bolingbroke. Do not say that it is a wretched performance. You cannot be judge." It is certain that he twice received money from the Court; it is certain that he visited Walpole, and that he sought every opportunity of ingratiating himself with the King and with the King's friends. It is clear that neither Pope nor any member of Pope's circle had much confidence in him. Bolingbroke has indeed expressly declared that he believed him capable of double-dealing and insincerity,* and what Bolingbroke observed in him was observed also by Young.† Nor was such conduct at all out of keeping with the general tenor of Voltaire's behaviour during his residence among us. Throughout his aims were purely selfish, and to attain those ends he resorted to means which no man of an honest and independent spirit would have stooped to use. It would perhaps be unduly harsh to describe him as a parasite and a sycophant; but it is nevertheless true that he too often figures in a character closely bordering on both. His correspondence—and his conversation no doubt resembled his correspondence—is almost sickening. His compliments are so fulsome, his flattery so exaggerated, that they might excusably be mistaken for elaborate irony. He seems to be always on his knees. There was scarcely a distinguished man then living in England who had not been the object of this nauseous homage. He pours it indiscriminately on Pope, Swift, Gay, Clarke, on half the Cabinet and on half the peerage. In a man of this character falsehood and hypocrisy are the very essence of his composition. There is nothing, however base, to which he will not stoop; there is no law in the code of social honour which he is not capable of violating. The fact that he continued to remain on friendly terms with Pope and Bolingbroke can scarcely be alleged as a proof of his innocence, for neither Pope nor Bolingbroke would, for such an offence, be likely to quarrel with a man in a position so peculiar as that of Voltaire. His flattery was pleasant, and his flattery, as they well knew, might some day be worth having. No injuries are so readily overlooked as those which affect neither men's purses nor men's vanity.

Meanwhile he was diligently collecting materials which were after-

* See his letter to Madame de Ferriole, dated December 1725, *Lettres Historiques*, vol. iii. p. 274.

† Spence's *Anecdotes*, p. 185.

wards embodied in his *Lettres Philosophiques*, his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and his *Histoire de Charles XII.* First he investigated the history and tenets of the Quakers. He sought the acquaintance of one Andrew Pitt, who resided in the country not far from London, and he attended a Quakers' meeting, of which he gives a very amusing account, near the Monument. The substance of his conversation with Pitt, supplemented by his own independent study of Quaker literature, he has embodied in the article on Quakers in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, and in the first four *Philosophical Letters*. He investigated the various religious sects into which English Protestantism had divided itself, and to these schisms he somewhat paradoxically ascribes the harmony and contentment reigning in the religious world of England. "If," he observes, "only one religion were allowed in England, the government would very possibly become arbitrary; if there were but two, the people would cut one another's throats; but as there are such a multitude, they all live happy and in peace." He studied the economy of the Established Church, and the habits and character of the clergy. Our commerce, our finance, and our government, each engaged his attention, and on each he has commented with his usual superficial cleverness. Three things he observed with especial pleasure, because they contrasted so strongly with what he had been accustomed to witness in France. He found himself for the first time in his life in the midst of a free people, a people who lived unshackled save by laws which they had themselves enacted; a people who, enjoying the inestimable privilege of a free press, were, in the phrase of Tacitus, at liberty to think what they pleased, and to publish what they thought. He beheld a splendid and powerful aristocracy, not, as in Paris, standing contemptuously aloof from science and letters, but themselves not unfrequently eager candidates for literary and scientific distinction. The names of many of these noble authors he has recorded, and they are, he adds, more glorious for their works than for their titles. With not less pleasure he beheld the honourable rank assigned in English society to a class who were in the Faubourg St. Germain regarded with disdain. Voltaire was perhaps the first writer of eminence in Europe who had the courage to vindicate the dignity of trade. He relates with pride how, when the Earl of Oxford held the reins of Great Britain in his hands, his younger brother was a factor at Aleppo; how, when Lord Townshend was directing the councils of his Sovereign in the Painted Chamber, one of his nearest relatives was soliciting custom in a counting-house in the City. He draws a sarcastic parallel between a "seigneur, powdered in the life of the mode, who knows exactly what o'clock the King rises and goes to bed, and who gives himself airs of grandeur and state at the same time that he is acting the slave in the antechamber of a Prime Minister," and a merchant who enriches his country, despatches orders from his counting-house to Surat and Grand Cairo, and contributes to the felicity of the world.*

* See the remarkable passage at the end of the tenth letter in the *Lettres Philosophiques*. It may be worth mentioning that this work is in two forms—the English

But nothing impressed him so deeply as the homage paid, and paid by all classes, to intellectual eminence. Parts and genius were, he observed, a sure passport, not, as in France, to the barren wreath of the Academy, but to affluence and popularity. By his pen Addison had risen to one of the highest offices of the State. A few graceful poems had made the fortunes of Stepney, Prior, Gay, Parnell, Tickell, and Ambrose Philipps. By his Essays Steele had won a Commissionership of Stamps and a place in Parliament. A single comedy had made Congreve independent for life. Newton was Master of the Mint, and Locke had been a Commissioner of Appeals. He records with pride that the portrait of Walpole was to be seen only in his own closet, but that the portraits of Pope were to be seen in half the great houses in England. "Go," he says, "into Westminster Abbey, and you find that what raises the admiration of the spectator is not the mausoleums of the English Kings, but the monuments which the gratitude of the nation has erected to perpetuate the memory of those illustrious men who contributed to its glory." He thought bitterly how in his own country he had seen Crébillon on the verge of perishing by hunger, and the son of Racine on the last stage of abject destitution. When, too, on his return to France, he saw the body of poor Adrienne le Couvreur refused the last rites of religion, and buried with the burial of a dog, "because she was an actress," his thoughts wandered to the generous and large-hearted citizens who laid the coffin of Anne Oldfield beside the coffins of their kings and of their heroes.

O rivale d'Athènes, O Londres ! heureuse terre,
Ainsi que les tyrans, vous avez su chasser
Les préjugés honteux qui vous livraient la guerre.
C'est là qu'on sait tout dire et tout récompenser.
Nul art n'est méprisé, tout succès a sa gloire.
Le vainqueur de Tallard, le fils de la victoire,
Le sublime Dryden, et le sage Addison,
Et la charmante Oldfield, et l'immortel Newton
Ont part au temple de mémoire,
Et le Couvreur à Londres aurait eu des tombeaux
Parmi les beaux-esprits, les rois et les héros.
Quiconque a des talents à Londres est un grand homme.

La Mort de Mlle. le Couvreur.

Here we must pause. The history of Voltaire between the period at which we have now arrived and his departure from England in the spring of 1729 is too interesting and important to be treated cursorily. We hope in a future number to complete our sketch.

J. C. C.

translation, which preceded all extant French editions, appeared in 1733, and was executed under the superintendence of Thiériot, its title being *Letters concerning the English Nation*, by M. Voltaire. It appeared in French the following year as *Lettres Philosophiques*.

Voltaire in England.

PART II.

THE variety and extent of Voltaire's English studies are, considering his comparatively short residence and his numerous occupations during that residence, amazing. He surveyed us on all sides, and his survey was not confined to the living world before him; it extended back to the world of the past, for, as his writings prove, he was versed both in our antiquities and in our history. But the subjects which most interested him were, as was natural, philosophy and polite letters. In philosophy two great movements were at this time passing over England; the one was in a scientific, the other in a theological or metaphysical direction; the one emanated from Bacon and Newton, the other from that school of deists which, originating with Herbert and Hobbes, had found its modern exponents in Tindal, Toland, Collins, and Woolston. His guides in these studies were Bolingbroke and Dr. Samuel Clarke. Of all Newton's disciples Clarke was the most generally accomplished. In theology, in metaphysics, in natural science, in mathematics, and in pure scholarship, he was almost equally distinguished. He had lived on terms of close intimacy with Newton, whose *Optics* he had translated into Latin. He was as minutely versed in the writings of Bacon and Locke as in the writings of Descartes and Leibnitz; and of the learned controversies of his time there was scarcely one in which he had not taken a leading part. With this eminent man Voltaire first came into contact in 1726. At that time their conversation turned principally on metaphysics. Voltaire was fascinated by the boldness of Clarke's views, and blindly followed him. In his own expressive phrase, "Clarke sautait dans l'abîme, et j'osai l'y suivre." But he soon recovered himself, and was on firm ground again.

His acquaintance with Clarke probably led to his acquaintance with another distinguished disciple of Newton. This was Dr. Henry Pemberton. Pemberton was then busy preparing for the press the first popular exposition of Newton's system, a work which appeared in 1728 under the title of *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*. It is clear that Voltaire had seen this work either in proof or in manuscript. For in a letter to Thiériot dated some months before the treatise was published he speaks of it in a manner which implies that he had inspected it. It was most likely under Pemberton's auspices that he commenced the study of the *Principia* and *Optics* which he afterwards resumed more seriously at Cirey. That the work was of immense

service to him in his Newtonian studies is certain. Indeed his own account of the Newtonian philosophy in the *Lettres Philosophiques*, and in the *Éléments de la Philosophie de Newton*, is in a large measure based on Pemberton's exegesis.

From Newton, whose *Metaphysics* disgusted him, he proceeded to Locke. Locke's *Essay* he perused and reperused with delight. It became his philosophical gospel. In his writings and in his conversation he scarcely ever alluded to it except in terms of almost extravagant eulogy; and to Locke he remained loyal to the last. "For thirty years," he writes in a letter dated July 1768, "I have been persecuted by a cloud of fanatics because I said that Locke is the Hercules of Metaphysics who has fixed the boundaries of the human mind."* His acquaintance with Bacon was probably slight, and what he knew of his Latin works was, we suspect, what he had picked up in conversation from Bolingbroke and Clarke. No man who had read the *Novum Organum* would speak of it as Voltaire speaks of it in his Twelfth Letter. But Bacon's English writings, the *Essays* that is to say, and the History of Henry VII., he had certainly consulted. He appears also to have turned over the works of Hobbes, Berkeley, and Cudworth. Nor did his indefatigable curiosity rest here. He took a lively interest in natural science, and was acquainted with several members of the Royal Society, and particularly with the venerable President, Sir Hans Sloane, to whom he presented a copy of the English *Essays*.† Of that society he was some years after elected a Fellow, an interesting fact which has apparently escaped the researches of his biographers. ‡

But what most engaged his attention was the controversy then raging between the opponents and the apologists of Christianity. It was now at its height. Upwards of two years had passed since Anthony Collins had published his *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. No work of that kind had made so deep an impression on the public mind. It had been denounced from the pulpit; it had elicited innumerable replies from the press. Other works of a similar kind succeeded, each in its turn aggravating the controversy. In 1727 appeared, dedicated to the Bishop of London, the first of Woolston's *Six Discourses on the Miracles of Christ*, a work which brought into the field the most distinguished ecclesiastics then living. We believe that Voltaire owed infinitely more to Bolingbroke than to all the other English deists put together, but how carefully he had followed the course of this controversy is obvious from innumerable passages in his subsequent writings. Of Woolston in particular he always speaks with

* See the very interesting letter to Horace Walpole printed in the appendix to the *Historical Memoirs of the Author of the Henriades*.

† See the copy with the autograph inscription in the British Museum.

‡ He was elected a Fellow on November 3, 1743. (Archives of the Royal Society.)

great respect, and he has, in an article in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, given a long and appreciative account of the labours of that courageous freethinker. Nor was his admiration confined to mere eulogy, for when, three years later, Woolston was imprisoned and fined for his heterodox opinions, Voltaire at once wrote off from France voluntarily to be responsible for a third of the sum required.*

In the winter of 1727 he published a little volume, which is not only among the curiosities, but among the marvels of literature. It contained two essays. The first was entitled "An Essay upon the Civil Wars in France," the other, "An Essay upon Epic Poetry." Both these essays are composed in English—not in such English as we should expect to find written by one who had acquired the language, but in such English as would in truth have reflected no discredit on Dryden or Swift. If we remember that at the time when he accomplished this feat he had only been eighteen months in England, and that he was, as he informs us in the preface, writing in a language which he was scarcely able to follow in conversation, his achievement may be fairly pronounced to be without parallel in linguistic triumphs.† As the work is neither generally known nor very accessible, we will transcribe a short extract from each discourse. The first essay is an historical sketch of the civil troubles in France between the accession of Francis the Second and the reconciliation of Henry the Fourth with the Church of Rome. The character and position of the Protestants are thus described:—

The Protestants began then to grow numerous, and to be conscious of their strength. The superstition, the dull, ignorant knavery of the monks, the overgrown power of Rome, men's passions for novelty, the ambition of Luther and Calvin, the policy of many princes—all these had given rise and countenance to this sect, free indeed from superstition, but running as headlong towards anarchy as the Church of Rome towards tyranny. The Protestants had been unmercifully persecuted in France, but it is the ordinary effect of persecution to make proselytes. Their sect increased every day amidst the scaffolds and tortures. Condé, Coligni, the two brothers of Coligni, all their adherents, all who were oppressed by the Guises, turned Protestants at once. They united their griefs, their vengeance, and their interests together, so that a revolution both in the State and in religion was at hand.

The second essay, which is a dissertation on Epic Poetry, and a review of the principal epic poems of antiquity and of modern Europe, is a piece not unworthy of a place beside the best of Dryden's prefaces. The remarks on Virgil, Lucan, and Tasso are admirable, and the critique on *Paradise Lost*, which is described as "the noblest work which human imagination hath ever attempted," gives us a higher idea of Voltaire's critical powers than any of his French writings. Indeed, the whole treatise well deserves attentive study. The marvellous purity, vigour, and

* Duvernet, *Vie de Voltaire*, p. 72.

† He told Martin Sherlock that he was never able to pronounce the English language perfectly, but that his ear was sensitively alive to the harmony of the language and the poetry.—*Letters from an English Traveller*.

elegance of the style will be at once evident from the following extract, which is, we may add, a fair average sample :—

The greatest part of the critics have filched the rules of epic poetry from the books of Homer, according to the custom, or rather to the weakness, of men who mistake commonly the beginning of an art for the principles of the art itself, and are apt to believe that everything must be by its own nature what it was when contrived at first. But as Homer wrote two poems of a quite different nature, and as the *Æneid* of Virgil partakes of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey*, the commentators were forced to establish different rules to reconcile Homer with himself, and other new rules again to make Virgil agree with Homer, just as the astronomers laboured under the necessity of adding to or taking from their systems, and of bringing in concentric and eccentric circles, as they discovered new motions in the heavens. The ignorance of the ancients was excusable, and their search after the unfathomable system of nature was to be commended, because it is certain that nature hath its own principles, unvariable and unerring, and as worthy of our search as remote from our conceptions. But it is not with the inventions of art as with the works of nature.

If Voltaire was able after a few months' residence in London to produce such prose as this, it is not too much to say that he might with time and practice have taken his place among our national classics. With the exceptions of De Lolme and Blanco White, it may be doubted whether any writer to whom English was an acquired language has achieved so perfect a mastery over it. It is, however, not improbable that he obtained more assistance in composing these essays than his vanity would allow him to own. The Abbé Desfontaines asserts indeed that the essay on Epic Poetry was composed in French, and that it was then translated into English under the superintendance of Voltaire's "maitre de langue."* But the testimony of that mean and malignant man carries little weight, and if it had not been partially at least confirmed by Spence we should have left it unnoticed. What Spence says is this: "Voltaire consulted Dr. Young about his essay in English, and begged him to correct any gross faults he might find in it. The Doctor set very honestly to work, marked the passages most liable to censure, and when he went to explain himself about them, Voltaire could not avoid bursting out a-laughing in his face." The reason of this ill-timed merriment it is not very easy to see: the anecdote is perhaps imperfectly reported. But in spite of Desfontaines and Spence, there can be no doubt that the Essays are what they pretend to be, the genuine work of Voltaire. We have only to turn to his English correspondence at this period to see that he was quite equal to their production. The little book was favourably received. In the following year a second edition was called for, a third followed at no long interval, and in 1731 it reached a fourth; a Discourse on Tragedy, which is merely a translation of the French "Discours sur la Tragédie" prefixed to Brutus, being added. And it long held its own. Its popularity is sufficiently attested by the fact that in 1760 it was reprinted at Dublin, with a short notice

* *La Voltairomanie*, p. 46

attributed, but attributed erroneously, to Swift, who had of course been long dead.

Voltaire was not the man to waste his energy on the production of a mere *tour de force*. The volume had an immediate practical object. That object was to prepare the public for the appearance of the *Henriade*, which was now receiving the finishing touches, and was almost ready for the printer. It was probably to facilitate its publication that he removed about this time (end of 1727) from Wandsworth to London, where he resided, as the superscriptions of two of his letters show, in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, at the sign of the White Peruke. Nor is Maiden Lane the only part of London associated with Voltaire during this period. It would seem that Billiter Square is entitled to the honour of having once numbered him among its occupants. This we gather from an undated letter addressed to John Brinsden, Bolingbroke's confidential secretary,* in which Brinsden is directed to address his reply to Mr. Cavalier, Belitery (*sic*) Square, by the Royal Exchange, a request which Voltaire would scarcely have made had he not been residing there. In Billiter Square, then, to borrow the words of a contemporary topographer, "a very handsome, open, and airy place, with good new brick buildings," he would be within a few paces of his agents, Messrs. Simon and Benezet.

Of the many letters which were doubtless written by him at this time, some have been preserved. One is addressed to Swift, to whom he had a few months before given a letter of introduction to the Count de Morville. He sends him a copy of the *Essays*, informs him that the *Henriade* is almost ready, and asks him to exert his interest to procure subscribers in Ireland. In another letter he solicits the patronage of the Earl of Oxford, informing him of the distinguished part which one of his ancestors plays in the *Henriade*, alluding to his own personal acquaintance with Achilles de Harley, and importuning the Earl to grant him the favour of an interview.† With Thiériot, on whom he relied to push the poem in France, he regularly corresponded. All through the summer and early autumn of 1728 he was hard at work on the manuscript or the proofs,‡ and had apparently returned to Wandsworth. But this was not the only task he had in hand. He was busy with his *Essai sur la Poésie Epique*, which is not, he is careful to explain, a translation of his English essay, but an independent work, a work of which the English essay was to be regarded as the preliminary sketch.§ It was afterwards

* Preserved in Colet's *Relics of Literature*, p. 70.

† Unprinted letter among the manuscripts at Longleat, for a copy of which we are indebted to the kindness of the librarian.

‡ Letter to Thiériot, dated August 1728.

§ See his English letter to Thiériot, wrongly dated by the editors June 1727. The chronology of Voltaire's letters is almost maddening, and we regret to see that there is no attempt made to rectify even the most palpable blunders in the last elaborate Paris edition of the collected works.

prefixed to the *Henriade*. A comparative study of the two will show with what skill he adapts himself even as a critic to the countrymen of Boileau and Racine on the one hand, and to the countrymen of Milton and Addison on the other.

At last the *Henriade* was ready. The subscribers had at first been alarmingly slow in coming forward; but when the day of publication arrived the names on the subscription list amounted to three hundred and forty-four; and among the subscribers were the King, the Queen, and the heads of almost all the noble families connected with the Court. In its first form the poem had been dedicated to Louis XV. That dedication was now cancelled, and a dedication, written in flowing English, to Queen Caroline was substituted. Descartes, said the poet, had inscribed his "Principles" to the Princess Palatine Elizabeth, not because she was a princess, but because of all his readers she understood him best; he too, without presuming to compare himself to Descartes, had ventured to lay his work at the feet of a Queen who was not only the patroness of all arts and sciences, but the best judge of them also. "He reminded her that an English Queen, the great Elizabeth, had been the protectress of Henry IV., and by whom, he asked, can the memory of Henry be so well protected as by one who so much resembles Elizabeth in her personal virtues?" The Queen was not insensible of the honour which had been paid her, and the fortunate poet received a substantial mark of the royal gratitude. It is not easy to determine the exact sum. Voltaire himself states it to have been two thousand crowns (*écus*), which would, supposing he means English crowns, have been equivalent to five hundred pounds sterling. Baculard says it was "six mille livres."* Nor was this all. The King honoured him with his intimacy, and invited him to his private supper parties.† Goldsmith adds, but adds erroneously, that the Queen presented him with her portrait. A portrait of Queen Caroline Voltaire certainly possessed, but it was a medallion, and it came to him, not from the Queen herself, but from the Queen of Prussia. The poem succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectation. Every copy of the quarto impression was disposed of before the day of publication. In the octavo form, three editions were exhausted in less than three weeks, "which I attribute," he says in a letter to a friend, "entirely to the happy choice of the subject, and not to the merit of the poem itself." Owing to the carelessness of Thiériot, he lost the subscription money due to him from France, but the sum realised from the sale in England was undoubtedly considerable. It has been variously estimated: Nicolardot, in his *Ménage et Finances de Voltaire*, calculates it to have been ten thousand francs; and that is the lowest computation. Baculard asserts that from the quarto edition (*édition imprimé par souscriptions*) alone

* Préface d'une édition des Œuvres de M. de Voltaire, Longchamp et Wagnière, vol. ii. p. 492.

† *Id.* same page.

the poet cleared ten thousand crowns. Perhaps we should not be far wrong if we estimated the sum, including the money received from George II., at two thousand pounds sterling. Whatever it was, it formed the nucleus of the most princely fortune ever yet amassed by a man of letters.* The money realised from the sale of the *Henriade* was the more acceptable as it was sorely needed. For upwards of a year he had been in straitened circumstances. To live in society was then an expensive luxury, and the expenses were greatly swelled by the fees which the servants of the aristocracy were permitted to levy on their masters' guests. At no house in London did the abuse reach a higher pitch than at Lord Chesterfield's; and Voltaire, who dined there once, was so annoyed at the imposition that, on Chesterfield asking him to repeat his visit, he declined, sarcastically adding that his lordship's ordinary was too dear.† His wretched health had, moreover, necessitated medical attendance, and had thus added greatly to his expenses. As early as February 1727 we find him complaining of these difficulties to Thiériot: "Vous savez peut-être que les banqueroutes sans ressource que j'ai essuyées en Angleterre" (an allusion of course to his mishap with Acosta), "le retranchement de mes rentes, la perte de mes pensions, et les dépenses que m'ont coûtées les maladies dont j'ai été accablé ici, m'ont réduit à un état bien dur."‡ He was now enabled to relieve the necessities of his unfortunate fellow-countrymen, many of whom were assisted by him when he was in London, particularly one St. Hyacinthe.§

When the poem was passing through the press a curious incident occurred. A proof-sheet of the first page had by some accident found its way into the hands of one Dadichy, a Smyrniate Greek, who was at that time residing as an interpreter in London, and who appears to have been a scholar of some pretensions. The poem then opened, not with the simple ringing verses with which it now opens, but with a series of verses of which the first couplet may serve as a specimen:—

Je chante les combats et ce roi généreux,
Qui força les Français à devenir heureux.

The man whose taste had been formed on purer models was justly offended by this obscure and forced epigram. He made his way to Voltaire's residence, and abruptly announcing himself as the "countryman of Homer," proceeded to inform him that Homer never opened his poems with strokes of wit and enigmas. Voltaire had the good sense to take the hint given him by his eccentric visitor, and the lines were altered into the lines with which all the world is familiar.||

* Carlyle (*Life of Frederick*, vol. iii. p. 220) computes Voltaire's annual income during his latter years to have been, according to the money value of the present day, about 20,000*l.*

† John Taylor's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 330.

‡ *Correspondance Générale*, 1727.

§ Duvernet, p. 72.

|| For this anecdote see *Henriade Variantes du Chant Premier*.

We have not, after a careful search, been able to find any notice or critique of the *Henriade* in journals then current in London. But before the year was out there appeared in an edition published by a firm in Russell Street, Covent Garden, some remarks which are no doubt a fair indication of the impression made by the poem on the mind of contemporary England. The writer, who writes in French, begins by observing that as a rule he cares little for French poetry, it lacks energy, and it is monotonous, but in the *Henriade* he discerns qualities which he has not discerned elsewhere in the verse of Frenchmen; it is various, brilliant, and forcible. But he is, he says, at a loss to understand how a poet whose conception of the deity is so wise and noble could have selected for his hero a character so contemptible as Henri Quatre, who was not merely a Papist but a Papist "par lâche interest." He is angry that Voltaire should throughout the poem lean so decidedly to the side of Popery; he is still more angry that he should have placed on the same footing Popery and Protestantism, for the essence of Popery is intolerance, and the essence of Protestantism is enlightened toleration. "You arrived in our island," he goes on to say, "with a book against our religion, and we received you with open arms, our king and our queen presented you with money. I wonder," he adds, "how an Englishman who introduced himself to Cardinal Fleury with an attack on Popery would be likely to fare." He concludes by hoping that Voltaire will continue to reside in England, and he exhorts him to prepare "une nouvelle édition moins Papiste de la *Henriade*." This critique purported to be the work of an English nobleman. It was in reality the work of a French refugee named Faget. Voltaire was greatly amused at his being taken for a Catholic propagandist. "You will see," he writes in a letter to a friend in France, "by some annotations tacked to my book, and fathered upon an English lord, that I am here a confessor of Catholic religion." To this criticism he made no reply during his residence in England, but on it reappearing under another title in an edition of the *Henriade* printed at the Hague he answered it.

It was probably during his sojourn either in Maiden Lane or in Billiter Square that his adroitness and fluent mastery over our language saved him from what might otherwise have been an unpleasant adventure. He chanced one day to be strolling along the streets when his peculiar appearance attracted attention. A crowd collected, and some ribald fellow began with jeers and hoots to taunt him with his nationality. Nothing is so easily excited as the passions of a rabble, and the passions of a rabble, when their victim is defenceless, rarely exhaust themselves in words. The miscreants were already preparing to pelt him with mud, and mud would no doubt have been followed with missiles of a more formidable kind. But Voltaire was equal to the crisis. Boldly confronting his assailants, he mounted on a stone which happened to be at hand, and began an oration of which the first sen-

tence only has been preserved. "Brave Englishmen," he cried, "Am I not sufficiently unhappy in not having been born among you?" How he proceeded we know not, but his harangue was, if we are to believe Wagnière, so effective that the crowd was not merely appeased, but eager to carry him on their shoulders in triumph to his lodgings.* This was not the only occasion on which he experienced the rudeness with which the vulgar were in those days accustomed to treat his countrymen. He happened to be taking the air on the river when one of the men in charge of the boat, perceiving that his passenger was a Frenchman, began to boast of the superior privileges enjoyed by English subjects; he belonged, he said, not to a land of slaves but to a land of freemen. Warming with his theme, the fellow concluded his offensive remarks by exclaiming with an oath that he would rather be a boatman on the Thames than an Archbishop in France. The sequel of the story is amusing. Within a few hours the man had been seized by a press-gang, and next day Voltaire saw him at the window of a prison with his legs manacled and his hand stretched through the bars, craving alms. "What think you now of a French Archbishop?" he cried. "Ah, sir," replied the captive, "the abominable government have forced me away from my wife and children to serve in a king's ship, and have thrown me into prison and chained my feet for fear I should escape before the ship sails." A French gentleman who was with Voltaire at the time owned that he felt a malicious pleasure at seeing that the English, who were so fond of taunting their neighbours with servitude, were in truth quite as much slaves themselves. "But I," adds Voltaire in one of those noble reflections which so often flash across his pages, "felt a sentiment more humane: I was grieved to think that there was so little liberty on the earth." †

As soon as the *Henriade* was off his hands he applied himself steadily to his *History of Charles XII*. In the composition of this delightful biography, which he appears to have begun as early as 1727, he was greatly assisted by Von Fabrice. Few men then living knew more of the public and private life of the great Swede than Fabrice, and what he knew he liberally communicated. Much useful information was derived from Bolingbroke and the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough. But *Charles XII* was not the only work with which he was occupied. He began, prompted by Bolingbroke and inspired by Shakespeare, the tragedy of *Brutus*, the first act of which he sketched in English prose. We give a short specimen, which the reader may find it interesting to compare with the corresponding passage in the French text as it now stands. It is the speech of Brutus in the second scene of the first act:—

Brutus. Allege not ties: his (Tarquin's) crimes have broken them all. The gods themselves, whom he has offended, have declared against him. Which of on

* Longchamp and Wagnière, vol. i. p. 23.

† See for the whole story his Letters to M——, *Œuvres Complètes* (Beuchot), vol. xxxviii. p. 22.

rights has he not trod upon? True, we have sworn to be his subjects, but we have not sworn to be his slaves. You say you've seen our Senate, in humble supplication, pay him their vows. Even he himself has sworn to be our father, and make the people happy in his guidance. Broken from his oaths, we are let loose from ours. Since he has transgressed our laws, his is the rebellion. Rome is free from guilt.

This tragedy, which he completed on his return to Paris, he dedicated to Bolingbroke. Mr. Parton in his list of Voltaire's writings enters among them an edition of *Brutus* published in London in 1727. Of that edition after a laborious search we can find no trace. It was certainly unknown to Desnoiresterres, to Beuchot, and to all the editors; and—what is, we think, final—there is no mention of it in the exhaustive bibliography of Voltaire just published by M. Georges Bengesco.* Mr. Parton has, we suspect, been misled by an ambiguous paragraph at the end of the preface to the fourth edition of the *Essay on Epic Poetry*. At Wandsworth, or possibly in London, he sketched also another tragedy, a tragedy which was not, however, completed till 1734. This was *La Mort de César*, suggested, as we need scarcely say, by the masterpiece of Shakespeare.† But the indefatigable energy of Voltaire did not exhaust itself in study and composition. It appears, from Duvernet, that he attempted to open a permanent French theatre in London, and with this object he induced a company of Parisian actors to come over; but the project met with so little encouragement that he was forced to abandon it, and the company went back almost immediately to Paris.

In the midst of these multifarious pursuits he had found time to peruse almost everything of note both in our poetry and in our prose. He began with Shakespeare, whose principal dramas he studied with minute attention, analysing the structure, the characterisation, the diction. His criticisms on Shakespeare are, it is true, seldom cited except to be laughed at, but the defects of these criticisms originated neither from ignorance nor from inattention. His real opinion of Shakespeare is not to be gathered from the *Des Théâtres Anglais* and from the *Lettres à l'Académie*, but from the *Lettres Philosophiques* and from the admirable letter to Horace Walpole. The influence of Shakespeare on Voltaire's own tragedies is very perceptible, and the extent of that influence will be at once apparent if we compare the plays produced before his visit to England with the plays produced on his return to France, if we compare *Œdipe*, *Artémise*, and *Mariamne*, with *Brutus*, *Eryphile*, and *Zaïre*. *Brutus* and *La Mort de César* flowed not more certainly from *Julius Cæsar* than *Zaïre* from *Othello*; while reminiscences of *Hamlet* are unmistakable both in *Eryphile* and in *Sémiramis*. The first three acts of *Julius Cæsar* he subsequently translated into French, and he has in the *Lettres Philosophiques* given an admirable

* We take this opportunity to direct the attention of all students of Voltaire to this invaluable contribution to Voltairian literature.

† See *Œuvres Complètes* (edit. 1877), vol. ii. note.

version of the famous soliloquy in *Hamlet*. Milton he studied, as his *Essay on Epic Poetry* proves, with similar diligence. He had, in addition to *Paradise Lost*, read *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, neither of which he thought of much value.* He was well acquainted with the poems, the dramas, and the essays of Dryden, and with the writings of Dryden's contemporaries. Even such inferior poets as Oldham, Roscommon, Dorset, Sheffield, Halifax, and Rochester had not escaped his curious eye. Rochester, indeed, he pronounced to be a poet of great genius; he places his satires on a level with those of Boileau, and in one of the *Philosophical Letters* (the twenty-first) he turns a portion of the satire on Man into French heroics. With the poems of Denham he was greatly pleased; and of Waller, whose *Elegy on the Death of Cromwell* he has translated into French verse, he speaks in terms of enthusiastic admiration, ranking him above Voiture, and justly observing that "his serious compositions exhibit a strength and vigour which could not have been expected from the softness and fluency of his other pieces." He read Otway, he was acquainted with Lee, and he enjoyed the comedies of Wycherley, Vanburgh, and Congreve, on which he has left many just and interesting observations. But nothing illustrates his mastery over our language, and his power of entering into the spirit of our literature, even when that literature is most esoteric, so strikingly as his remarks on *Hudibras*. "I never found," he says, "so much wit in any single book as that. It is *Don Quixote* and the *Satire Ménippée* blended together." Of the opening lines he has, in the *Lettres Philosophiques*, given a French version, reproducing with extraordinary felicity both the metre and the spirit. With not less pleasure he perused the poems of Prior. In the *Philosophical Dictionary* he devotes an article to him, and in another article he pauses to draw attention to the merits of *Alma*. With the essays and poems of Addison, whom he pronounces to be the best critic as well as the best writer of his age, he was well acquainted. His *Allegories* he has imitated; * from his criticism on Milton he has borrowed; and his *Cato* he placed at the head of English tragedies. Indeed, he has gone so far as to say that the principal character in that drama is the "greatest that was ever brought upon any stage." His observations upon the defects of the play are less open to question, and prove that if he had the bad taste to prefer Addison to Shakespeare, he was sufficiently acquainted with the history of our drama to be able to point out in what way the appearance of *Cato* marked an era in its development. To the genius of Swift he paid enthusiastic homage. He owed, he said, to Swift's writings the love he bore to the English language. He considered him immeasurably superior to Rabelais; and he was so delighted with *Gulliver's Travels* that he encouraged his friend Thiériot to undertake a translation of them into French, judiciously advising him, however, to confine his efforts to the first part. His own *Micromégas*

* See particularly the Vision in section ii. of the article on "Religion" in the *Philosophical Dictionary*.

is largely indebted to *Gulliver*. Nor did his nice and discriminating appreciation end here. Voltaire was the first critic who drew attention to the peculiar merits of Swift's verses.*

With the poems and tragedies of Thomson he was, as a very interesting letter to George, Lord Lyttleton, shows,† thoroughly conversant. "I was acquainted," so runs the letter, which is written in English and is dated Paris, May 17, 1750 (N.S.), "with Mr. Thomson when I stayed in England. I discovered in him a great genius and a great simplicity. I liked in him the poet and the true philosopher, I mean the lover of mankind. I think that without a good stock of such a philosophy a poet is just above a fiddler who amuses our ears and cannot go to our soul. I am not surprised your nation has done more justice to Mr. Thomson's *Seasons* than to his dramatic performances." As this letter has never, we believe, been printed, and as it is an interesting specimen of Voltaire's composition nearly twenty years after he had left us, our readers may perhaps like to see more of it. We will, therefore, transcribe a few paragraphs. He is accounting for the comparative indifference with which the English public regarded Thomson's tragedies.

There is one kind of poetry of which the judicious readers and the men of taste are the proper judges. There is another kind, that depends on the vulgar great or small; tragedy and comedy are of these last species; they must be suited to the turn of mind and proportioned to their taste. Your nation two hundred years since is used to a wild scene, to a crowd of tumultuous events, to an emphatical poetry mixed with low and comical expressions, to a lively representation of bloody deeds, to a kind of horror which seems often barbarous and childish, all faults which never sullied the Greek, the Roman, and the French stage. And give me leave to say that the taste of your politest countrymen differs not much in point of tragedy from the taste of the mob at bear gardens. 'Tis true we have too much of action, and the perfection of this art should consist in a due mixture of the French taste and the English energy. . . . Mr. Thomson's tragedies seem to me wisely intricate and elegantly writ. They want perhaps some fire, and it may be that his heroes are neither moving nor busy enough, but taking him all in all, methinks he has the highest claims to the greatest esteem.

But to return from our digression. The poetry of Pope he read and re-read with an admiration which occasionally expresses itself in hyperbole. The *Essay on Criticism* he preferred both to the masterpiece of Horace and to the *Art Poétique* of Boileau; the *Rape of the Lock* he considered the best mock heroic poem in existence; and the *Essay on Man*, which appeared about five years after he had returned to France, he describes as "the most beautiful didactic poem—the most useful—the most sublime—that has ever been written in any language."

It would be interesting to trace the influence of Pope's poetry upon his own. We can here only pause to point out that the *Temple du Goût*

* *Lettres Philosophiques*, xxii.

† This letter is among the archives at Hagley, and we are indebted for a copy of it to the courtesy and kindness of Lord Lyttleton.

was undoubtedly suggested by the *Dunciad*, that the *Le Désastre de Lisbonne* bears the impress of the *Essay on Man*, and the *Discours en vers sur l'Homme*. Into the question of his relations with Bolingbroke we cannot enter here. To the conversation and writings of that most brilliant but shallow and inaccurate philosopher he owed, we believe, more than he owed to any other single man in Europe.

At the beginning of 1729 he prepared to quit England for his native country. As far back as July 1727 he had obtained permission to visit Paris for three months; of that permission he had not availed himself, in consequence, no doubt, of his numerous engagements in London. There was now nothing to detain him. He had published the *Henriade*; he had completed his collections for the *Lettres Philosophiques*; he had collected materials for the *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and for the *History of Charles XII.*; he had made what friends he cared to make; he had seen all he wished to see; and, what was of equal importance to him, he had made money. But it must be doing him great injustice to suppose that the only ties which bound him to England were ties of self-interest. He had become sincerely attached to the country and to the people. "Had I not been obliged," he said in a letter to Thiériot, "to look after my affairs in France, depend upon it I would have spent the rest of my days in London." The kindness and hospitality which he received he never forgot, and he took every opportunity of repaying it. To be an Englishman was always a certain passport to his courteous consideration. When in 1776 Martin Sherlock visited him at Ferney he found the old man, then in his eighty-third year, still full of his visit to England. He had had the garden laid out in the English fashion: the books with which he was surrounded were the English classics, the subject to which he persistently directed the conversation was the English nation: His departure from England is said to have been hastened by a quarrel with his bookseller Prévost; and a story was afterwards circulated by Desfontaines, that, previous to his departure, he was severely cudgelled by an infuriated member of the trade—for what reason, and under what circumstances, is not recorded.* However this may be, it seems clear that he had either done or said something which had made him enemies: there was certainly an impression in the minds of some that he quitted England under a cloud. This we gather from a passage in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May 1732 which we transcribe: "Mr. Voltaire enriched himself with our contributions and behaved so ill that he was refused admittance into those noblemen's and gentlemen's families in which he had been received with great favour and distinction. He left England full of resentment, and wrote the King of Sweden's Life to abuse this nation and the Hanoverian family." The latter statement is, as we need scarcely say, quite untrue: the former statement is as plainly a gross exaggeration. Before

* See Desnoiresterre, *La Jeunesse de Voltaire*, p. 397.

setting out he went down to Twickenham, to have a final interview with Pope. "I am come," he said "to bid farewell to a man who never treated me seriously from the first hour of my acquaintance with him to the present moment." To this, Pope—who as soon as Voltaire's back was turned acknowledged the justice of the remark—probably replied with evasive politeness, or with an emphatic assurance to the contrary; for it is certain that in none of Voltaire's subsequent writings are there any indications either of unfriendliness or ill-will towards him. And it is equally certain that, had he quitted Pope under the impression that he had been ill-treated by him, his vengeance would have been sure, prompt, and signal.*

The exact date of Voltaire's departure from England we have not been able to discover. We may, however, conjecture with some certainty that it took place either at the end of February or in the beginning of March 1728-29, and our reasons for believing so are these: In a letter to Thiériot, undated, but apparently written about January of 1729 (N.S.), he says that he hopes to be in Paris about the fifteenth of March. From another letter dated March 10 (Feb. 27, O.S.) we infer that he was still in England. But in a letter dated March 2 (N.S.) we find him at St. Germain en Laye; apparently showing that he must have left England between the 27th of Feb. and the first of March 1729 (N.S.). The time, therefore, spent by Voltaire in England was, deducting a month for his short visit to France in the summer of 1727, about two years and nine months, and not, as Carlyle and others erroneously assert, two years.

J. C. C.

* The authority for this is Owen Ruffhead (*Life of Pope*, p. 165), who almost certainly had the anecdote, which was communicated by Pope himself, from Warburton.