CHAPTER VII - CHARLES OF ORLEANS

FOR one who was no great politician, nor (as men go) especially wise, capable or virtuous, Charles of Orleans is more than usually enviable to all who love that better sort of fame which consists in being known not widely, but intimately. "To be content that time to come should know there was such a man, not caring whether they knew more of him, or to subsist under naked denominations, without deserts or noble acts," is, says Sir Thomas Browne, a frigid ambition. It is to some more specific memory that youth looks forward in its vigils. Old kings are sometimes disinterred in all the emphasis of life, the hands untainted by decay, the beard that had so often wagged in camp or senate still spread upon the royal bosom; and in busts and pictures, some similitude of the great and beautiful of former days is handed down. In this way, public curiosity may be gratified, but hardly any private aspiration after fame. It is not likely that posterity will fall in love with us, but not impossible that it may respect or sympathise; and so a man would rather leave behind him the portrait of his spirit than a portrait of his face, FIGURA ANIMI MAGIS QUAM CORPORIS. Of those who have thus survived themselves most completely, left a sort of personal seduction behind them in

the world, and retained, after death, the art of making friends, Montaigne and Samuel Johnson certainly stand first. But we have portraits of all sorts of men, from august Caesar to the king's dwarf; and all sorts of portraits, from a Titian treasured in the Louvre to a profile over the grocer's chimney shelf. And so in a less degree, but no less truly, than the spirit of Montaigne lives on in the delightful Essays, that of Charles of Orleans survives in a few old songs and old account-books; and it is still in the choice of the reader to make this duke's acquaintance, and, if their humours suit, become his friend.

I.

His birth - if we are to argue from a man's parents - was above his merit. It is not merely that he was the grandson of one king, the father of another, and the uncle of a third; but something more specious was to be looked for from the son of his father, Louis de Valois, Duke of Orleans, brother to the mad king Charles VI., lover of Queen Isabel, and the leading patron of art and one of the leading politicians in France. And the poet might have inherited yet higher virtues from his mother, Valentina of Milan, a very pathetic figure of the age, the faithful wife of an unfaithful husband, and the friend of a most unhappy king. The father, beautiful,

eloquent, and accomplished, exercised a strange fascination over his contemporaries; and among those who dip nowadays into the annals of the time there are not many - and these few are little to be envied - who can resist the fascination of the mother. All mankind owe her a debt of gratitude because she brought some comfort into the life of the poor madman who wore the crown of France.

Born (May 1391) of such a noble stock, Charles was to know from the first all favours of nature and art. His father's gardens were the admiration of his contemporaries; his castles were situated in the most agreeable parts of France, and sumptuously adorned. We have preserved, in an inventory of 1403, the description of tapestried rooms where Charles may have played in childhood. (1) "A green room, with the ceiling full of angels, and the DOSSIER of shepherds and shepherdesses seeming (FAISANT CONTENANCE) to eat nuts and cherries. A room of gold, silk and worsted, with a device of little children in a river, and the sky full of birds. A room of green tapestry, showing a knight and lady at chess in a pavilion. Another green room, with shepherdesses in a trellised garden worked in gold and silk. A carpet representing cherry-trees, where there is a fountain, and a lady gathering cherries in a basin." These were some of the pictures over which his fancy might busy itself of an afternoon, or at morning as he lay awake in bed. With our deeper and more logical sense of life, we can have no idea

how large a space in the attention of mediaeval men might be occupied by such figured hangings on the wall. There was something timid and purblind in the view they had of the world. Morally, they saw nothing outside of traditional axioms; and little of the physical aspect of things entered vividly into their mind, beyond what was to be seen on church windows and the walls and floors of palaces. The reader will remember how Villon's mother conceived of heaven and hell and took all her scanty stock of theology from the stained glass that threw its light upon her as she prayed. And there is scarcely a detail of external effect in the chronicles and romances of the time, but might have been borrowed at second hand from a piece of tapestry. It was a stage in the history of mankind which we may see paralleled, to some extent, in the first infant school, where the representations of lions and elephants alternate round the wall with moral verses and trite presentments of the lesser virtues. So that to live in a house of many pictures was tantamount, for the time, to a liberal education in itself.

(1) Champollion-Figeac's LOUIS ET CHARLES D'ORLEANS, p. 348.

At Charles's birth an order of knighthood was inaugurated in his honour. At nine years old, he was a squire; at eleven, he had the escort of a chaplain and a schoolmaster; at twelve, his uncle the king made him a pension of twelve thousand livres d'or. (1) He saw the most brilliant and the

most learned persons of France, in his father's Court; and would not fail to notice that these brilliant and learned persons were one and all engaged in rhyming. Indeed, if it is difficult to realise the part played by pictures, it is perhaps even more difficult to realise that played by verses in the polite and active history of the age. At the siege of Pontoise, English and French exchanged defiant ballades over the walls. (2) If a scandal happened, as in the loathsome thirty-third story of the CENT NOUVELLES NOUVELLES, all the wits must make rondels and chansonettes, which they would hand from one to another with an unmanly sneer. Ladies carried their favourite's ballades in their girdles. (3) Margaret of Scotland, all the world knows already, kissed Alain Chartier's lips in honour of the many virtuous thoughts and golden sayings they had uttered; but it is not so well known, that this princess was herself the most industrious of poetasters, that she is supposed to have hastened her death by her literary vigils, and sometimes wrote as many as twelve rondels in the day. (4) It was in rhyme, even, that the young Charles should learn his lessons. He might get all manner of instruction in the truly noble art of the chase, not without a smack of ethics by the way, from the compendious didactic poem of Gace de la Bigne. Nay, and it was in rhyme that he should learn rhyming: in the verses of his father's Maitre d'Hotel, Eustache Deschamps, which treated of "l'art de dictier et de faire chancons, ballades, virelais et rondeaux," along with many other matters worth

attention, from the courts of Heaven to the misgovernment of France. (5) At this rate, all knowledge is to be had in a goody, and the end of it is an old song. We need not wonder when we hear from Monstrelet that Charles was a very well educated person. He could string Latin texts together by the hour, and make ballades and rondels better than Eustache Deschamps himself. He had seen a mad king who would not change his clothes, and a drunken emperor who could not keep his hand from the wine-cup. He had spoken a great deal with jesters and fiddlers, and with the profligate lords who helped his father to waste the revenues of France. He had seen ladies dance on into broad daylight, and much burning of torches and waste of dainties and good wine. (6) And when all is said, it was no very helpful preparation for the battle of life. "I believe Louis XI.," writes Comines, "would not have saved himself, if he had not been very differently brought up from such other lords as I have seen educated in this country; for these were taught nothing but to play the jackanapes with finery and fine words." (7) I am afraid Charles took such lessons to heart, and conceived of life as a season principally for junketing and war. His view of the whole duty of man, so empty, vain, and wearisome to us, was yet sincerely and consistently held. When he came in his ripe years to compare the glory of two kingdoms, England and France, it was on three points only, - pleasures, valour, and riches, - that he cared to measure them; and in the very outset of that tract he speaks of the life of the great as

passed, "whether in arms, as in assaults, battles, and sieges, or in jousts and tournaments, in high and stately festivities and in funeral solemnities." (8)

(1) D'Hericault's admirable MEMOIR, prefixed to his edition of Charles's works, vol. i. p. xi.

(2) Vallet de Viriville, CHARLES VII. ET SON EPOQUE, ii. 428, note 2.

(3) See Lecoy de la Marche, LE ROI RENE, i. 167.

(4) Vallet, CHARLES VII, ii. 85, 86, note 2.

(5) Champollion-Figeac, 193-198.

(6) Champollion-Figeac, 209.

(7) The student will see that there are facts cited, and expressions borrowed, in this paragraph, from a period extending over almost the whole of Charles's life, instead of being confined entirely to his boyhood. As I do not believe there was any change, so I do not believe there is any anachronism involved.

(8) THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE HERALDS OF FRANCE AND ENGLAND, translated and admirably edited by Mr. Henry Pyne. For the attribution of this tract to Charles, the reader is referred to Mr. Pyne's conclusive argument.

When he was no more than thirteen, his father had him affianced to Isabella, virgin-widow of our Richard II. and daughter of his uncle Charles VI.; and, two years after (June 29, 1406), the cousins were married at Compiegne, he fifteen,

she seventeen years of age. It was in every way a most desirable match. The bride brought five hundred thousand francs of dowry. The ceremony was of the utmost magnificence, Louis of Orleans figuring in crimson velvet, adorned with no less than seven hundred and ninety-five pearls, gathered together expressly for this occasion. And no doubt it must have been very gratifying for a young gentleman of fifteen, to play the chief part in a pageant so gaily put upon the stage. Only, the bridegroom might have been a little older; and, as ill-luck would have it, the bride herself was of this way of thinking, and would not be consoled for the loss of her title as queen, or the contemptible age of her new husband. PLEUROIT FORT LADITE ISABEAU; the said Isabella wept copiously. (1) It is fairly debatable whether Charles was much to be pitied when, three years later (September 1409), this odd marriage was dissolved by death. Short as it was, however, this connection left a lasting stamp upon his mind; and we find that, in the last decade of his life, and after he had remarried for perhaps the second time, he had not yet forgotten or forgiven the violent death of Richard II. "Ce mauvais cas" - that ugly business, he writes, has yet to be avenged.

(1) Des Ursins.

The marriage festivity was on the threshold of evil days. The great rivalry between Louis of Orleans and John the

Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, had been forsworn with the most reverend solemnities. But the feud was only in abeyance, and John of Burgundy still conspired in secret. On November 23, 1407 - in that black winter when the frost lasted six-and-sixty days on end - a summons from the king reached Louis of Orleans at the Hotel Barbette, where he had been supping with Queen Isabel. It was seven or eight in the evening, and the inhabitants of the quarter were abed. He set forth in haste, accompanied by two squires riding on one horse, a page, and a few varlets running with torches. As he rode, he hummed to himself and trifled with his glove. And so riding, he was beset by the bravoes of his enemy and slain. My lord of Burgundy set an ill precedent in this deed, as he found some years after on the bridge of Montereau; and even in the meantime he did not profit quietly by his rival's death. The horror of the other princes seems to have perturbed himself; he avowed his guilt in the council, tried to brazen it out, finally lost heart and fled at full gallop, cutting bridges behind him, towards Bapaume and Lille. And so there we have the head of one faction, who had just made himself the most formidable man in France, engaged in a remarkably hurried journey, with black care on the pillion. And meantime, on the other side, the widowed duchess came to Paris in appropriate mourning, to demand justice for her husband's death. Charles VI., who was then in a lucid interval, did probably all that he could, when he raised up the kneeling suppliant with kisses and smooth words. Things were at a

dead-lock. The criminal might be in the sorriest fright, but he was still the greatest of vassals. Justice was easy to ask and not difficult to promise; how it was to be executed was another question. No one in France was strong enough to punish John of Burgundy; and perhaps no one, except the widow, very sincere in wishing to punish him.

She, indeed, was eaten up of zeal; but the intensity of her eagerness wore her out; and she died about a year after the murder, of grief and indignation, unrequited love and unsatisfied resentment. It was during the last months of her life that this fiery and generous woman, seeing the soft hearts of her own children, looked with envy on a certain natural son of her husband's destined to become famous in the sequel as the Bastard of Orleans, or the brave Dunois. "YOU WERE STOLEN FROM ME," she said; "it is you who are fit to avenge your father." These are not the words of ordinary mourning, or of an ordinary woman. It is a saying, over which Balzac would have rubbed his episcopal hands. That the child who was to avenge her husband had not been born out of her body, was a thing intolerable to Valentina of Milan; and the expression of this singular and tragic jealousy is preserved to us by a rare chance, in such straightforward and vivid words as we are accustomed to hear only on the stress of actual life, or in the theatre. In history - where we see things as in a glass darkly, and the fashion of former times is brought before us, deplorably adulterated and defaced,

fitted to very vague and pompous words, and strained through many men's minds of everything personal or precise - this speech of the widowed duchess startles a reader, somewhat as the footprint startled Robinson Crusoe. A human voice breaks in upon the silence of the study, and the student is aware of a fellow-creature in his world of documents. With such a clue in hand, one may imagine how this wounded lioness would spur and exasperate the resentment of her children, and what would be the last words of counsel and command she left behind her.

With these instancies of his dying mother - almost a voice from the tomb - still tingling in his ears, the position of young Charles of Orleans, when he was left at the head of that great house, was curiously similar to that of Shakspeare's Hamlet. The times were out of joint; here was a murdered father to avenge on a powerful murderer; and here, in both cases, a lad of inactive disposition born to set these matters right. Valentina's commendation of Dunois involved a judgment on Charles, and that judgment was exactly correct. Whoever might be, Charles was not the man to avenge his father. Like Hamlet, this son of a dear father murdered was sincerely grieved at heart. Like Hamlet, too, he could unpack his heart with words, and wrote a most eloquent letter to the king, complaining that what was denied to him would not be denied "to the lowest born and poorest man on earth." Even in his private hours he strove to preserve a lively

recollection of his injury, and keep up the native hue of resolution. He had gems engraved with appropriate legends, hortatory or threatening: "DIEU LE SCET," God knows it; or "SOUVENEZ-VOUS DE - " Remember! (1) It is only towards the end that the two stories begin to differ; and in some points the historical version is the more tragic. Hamlet only stabbed a silly old councillor behind the arras; Charles of Orleans trampled France for five years under the hoofs of his banditti. The miscarriage of Hamlet's vengeance was confined, at widest, to the palace; the ruin wrought by Charles of Orleans was as broad as France.

(1) Michelet, iv. App. 179, p. 337.

Yet the first act of the young duke is worthy of honourable mention. Prodigal Louis had made enormous debts; and there is a story extant, to illustrate how lightly he himself regarded these commercial obligations. It appears that Louis, after a narrow escape he made in a thunder-storm, had a smart access of penitence, and announced he would pay his debts on the following Sunday. More than eight hundred creditors presented themselves, but by that time the devil was well again, and they were shown the door with more gaiety than politeness. A time when such cynical dishonesty was possible for a man of culture is not, it will be granted, a fortunate epoch for creditors. When the original debtor was so lax, we may imagine how an heir would deal with the

incumbrances of his inheritance. On the death of Philip the Forward, father of that John the Fearless whom we have seen at work, the widow went through the ceremony of a public renunciation of goods; taking off her purse and girdle, she left them on the grave, and thus, by one notable act, cancelled her husband's debts and defamed his honour. The conduct of young Charles of Orleans was very different. To meet the joint liabilities of his father and mother (for Valentina also was lavish), he had to sell or pledge a quantity of jewels; and yet he would not take advantage of a pretext, even legally valid, to diminish the amount. Thus, one Godefroi Lefevre, having disbursed many odd sums for the late duke, and received or kept no vouchers, Charles ordered that he should be believed upon his oath. (1) To a modern mind this seems as honourable to his father's memory as if John the Fearless had been hanged as high as Haman. And as things fell out, except a recantation from the University of Paris, which had justified the murder out of party feeling, and various other purely paper reparations, this was about the outside of what Charles was to effect in that direction. He lived five years, and grew up from sixteen to twenty-one, in the midst of the most horrible civil war, or series of civil wars, that ever devastated France; and from first to last his wars were ill-starred, or else his victories useless. Two years after the murder (March 1409), John the Fearless having the upper hand for the moment, a shameful and useless reconciliation took place, by the king's command, in

the church of Our Lady at Chartres. The advocate of the Duke of Burgundy stated that Louis of Orleans had been killed "for the good of the king's person and realm." Charles and his brothers, with tears of shame, under protest, POUR NE PAS DESOBEIR AU ROI, forgave their father's murderer and swore peace upon the missal. It was, as I say, a shameful and useless ceremony; the very greffier, entering it in his register, wrote in the margin, "PAX, PAX, INQUIT PROPHETA, ET NON EST PAX." (2) Charles was soon after allied with the abominable Bernard d'Armagnac, even betrothed or married to a daughter of his, called by a name that sounds like a contradiction in terms, Bonne d'Armagnac. From that time forth, throughout all this monstrous period - a very nightmare in the history of France - he is no more than a stalking-horse for the ambitious Gascon. Sometimes the smoke lifts, and you can see him for the twinkling of an eye, a very pale figure; at one moment there is a rumour he will be crowned king; at another, when the uproar has subsided, he will be heard still crying out for justice; and the next (1412), he is showing himself to the applauding populace on the same horse with John of Burgundy. But these are exceptional seasons, and, for the most part, he merely rides at the Gascon's bridle over devastated France. His very party go, not by the name of Orleans, but by the name of Armagnac, Paris is in the hands of the butchers: the peasants have taken to the woods. Alliances are made and broken as if in a country dance; the English called in, now by this one,

now by the other. Poor people sing in church, with white faces and lamentable music: "DOMINE JESU, PARCE POPULO TUO, DIRIGE IN VIAM PACIS PRINCIPES." And the end and upshot of the whole affair for Charles of Orleans is another peace with John the Fearless. France is once more tranquil, with the tranquillity of ruin; he may ride home again to Blois, and look, with what countenance he may, on those gems he had got engraved in the early days of his resentment, "SOUVENEZ-VOUS DE - " Remember! He has killed Polonius, to be sure; but the king is never a penny the worse.

(1) Champollion-Figeac, pp. 279-82.
(2) Michelet, iv. pp. 123-4.

II.

From the battle of Agincourt (Oct. 1415) dates the second period of Charles's life. The English reader will remember the name of Orleans in the play of HENRY V.; and it is at least odd that we can trace a resemblance between the puppet and the original. The interjection, "I have heard a sonnet begin so to one's mistress" (Act iii. scene 7), may very well indicate one who was already an expert in that sort of trifle; and the game of proverbs he plays with the Constable in the same scene, would be quite in character for a man who

spent many years of his life capping verses with his courtiers. Certainly, Charles was in the great battle with five hundred lances (say, three thousand men), and there he was made prisoner as he led the van. According to one story, some ragged English archer shot him down; and some diligent English Pistol, hunting ransoms on the field of battle, extracted him from under a heap of bodies and retailed him to our King Henry. He was the most important capture of the day, and used with all consideration. On the way to Calais, Henry sent him a present of bread and wine (and bread, you will remember, was an article of luxury in the English camp), but Charles would neither eat nor drink. Thereupon, Henry came to visit him in his quarters. "Noble cousin," said he, "how are you?" Charles replied that he was well. "Why, then, do you neither eat nor drink?" And then with some asperity, as I imagine, the young duke told him that "truly he had no inclination for food." And our Henry improved the occasion with something of a snuffle, assuring his prisoner that God had fought against the French on account of their manifold sins and transgressions. Upon this there supervened the agonies of a rough sea passage; and many French lords, Charles, certainly, among the number, declared they would rather endure such another defeat than such another sore trial on shipboard. Charles, indeed, never forgot his sufferings. Long afterwards, he declared his hatred to a seafaring life, and willingly yielded to England the empire of the seas, "because there is danger and loss of life, and

God knows what pity when it storms; and sea-sickness is for many people hard to bear; and the rough life that must be led is little suitable for the nobility:" (1) which, of all babyish utterances that ever fell from any public man, may surely bear the bell. Scarcely disembarked, he followed his victor, with such wry face as we may fancy, through the streets of holiday London. And then the doors closed upon his last day of garish life for more than a quarter of a century. After a boyhood passed in the dissipations of a luxurious court or in the camp of war, his ears still stunned and his cheeks still burning from his enemies' jubilations; out of all this ringing of English bells and singing of English anthems, from among all these shouting citizens in scarlet cloaks, and beautiful virgins attired in white, he passed into the silence and solitude of a political prison. (2)

(1) DEBATE BETWEEN THE HERALDS.

(2) Sir H. Nicholas, AGINCOURT.

His captivity was not without alleviations. He was allowed to go hawking, and he found England an admirable country for the sport; he was a favourite with English ladies, and admired their beauty; and he did not lack for money, wine, or books; he was honourably imprisoned in the strongholds of great nobles, in Windsor Castle and the Tower of London. But when all is said, he was a prisoner for five-and-twenty

years. For five-and-twenty years he could not go where he would, or do what he liked, or speak with any but his gaolers. We may talk very wisely of alleviations; there is only one alleviation for which the man would thank you: he would thank you to open the door. With what regret Scottish James I. bethought him (in the next room perhaps to Charles) of the time when he rose "as early as the day." What would he not have given to wet his boots once more with morning dew, and follow his vagrant fancy among the meadows? The only alleviation to the misery of constraint lies in the disposition of the prisoner. To each one this place of discipline brings his own lesson. It stirs Latude or Baron Trenck into heroic action; it is a hermitage for pious and conformable spirits. Beranger tells us he found prison life, with its regular hours and long evenings, both pleasant and profitable. THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS and DON QUIXOTE were begun in prison. It was after they were become (to use the words of one of them), "Oh, worst imprisonment - the dungeon of themselves!" that Homer and Milton worked so hard and so well for the profit of mankind. In the year 1415 Henry V. had two distinguished prisoners, French Charles of Orleans and Scottish James I., who whiled away the hours of their captivity with rhyming. Indeed, there can be no better pastime for a lonely man than the mechanical exercise of verse. Such intricate forms as Charles had been used to from childhood, the ballade with its scanty rhymes; the rondel, with the recurrence first of the whole, then of half the

burthen, in thirteen verses, seem to have been invented for the prison and the sick bed. The common Scotch saying, on the sight of anything operose and finical, "he must have had little to do that made that!" might be put as epigraph on all the song books of old France. Making such sorts of verse belongs to the same class of pleasures as guessing acrostics or "burying proverbs." It is almost purely formal, almost purely verbal. It must be done gently and gingerly. It keeps the mind occupied a long time, and never so intently as to be distressing; for anything like strain is against the very nature of the craft. Sometimes things go easily, the refrains fall into their place as if of their own accord, and it becomes something of the nature of an intellectual tennis; you must make your poem as the rhymes will go, just as you must strike your ball as your adversary played it. So that these forms are suitable rather for those who wish to make verses, than for those who wish to express opinions. Sometimes, on the other hand, difficulties arise: rival verses come into a man's head, and fugitive words elude his memory. Then it is that he enjoys at the same time the deliberate pleasures of a connoisseur comparing wines, and the ardour of the chase. He may have been sitting all day long in prison with folded hands; but when he goes to bed, the retrospect will seem animated and eventful.

Besides confirming himself as an habitual maker of verses, Charles acquired some new opinions during his captivity. He

was perpetually reminded of the change that had befallen him. He found the climate of England cold and "prejudicial to the human frame;" he had a great contempt for English fruit and English beer; even the coal fires were unpleasing in his eyes. (1) He was rooted up from among his friends and customs and the places that had known him. And so in this strange land he began to learn the love of his own. Sad people all the world over are like to be moved when the wind is in some particular quarter. So Burns preferred when it was in the west, and blew to him from his mistress; so the girl in the ballade, looking south to Yarrow, thought it might carry a kiss betwixt her and her gallant; and so we find Charles singing of the "pleasant wind that comes from France." (2) One day, at "Dover-on-the-Sea," he looked across the straits, and saw the sandhills about Calais. And it happened to him, he tells us in a ballade, to remember his happiness over there in the past; and he was both sad and merry at the recollection, and could not have his fill of gazing on the shores of France. (3) Although guilty of unpatriotic acts, he had never been exactly unpatriotic in feeling. But his sojourn in England gave, for the time at least, some consistency to what had been a very weak and ineffectual prejudice. He must have been under the influence of more than usually solemn considerations, when he proceeded to turn Henry's puritanical homily after Agincourt into a ballade, and reproach France, and himself by implication, with pride, gluttony, idleness, unbridled covetousness, and

sensuality. (4) For the moment, he must really have been thinking more of France than of Charles of Orleans.

(1) DEBATE BETWEEN THE HERALDS.

(2) Works (ed. d'Hericault), i. 43.

(3) IBID. 143.

(4) Works (ed. d'Hericault), i. 190.

And another lesson he learned. He who was only to be released in case of peace, begins to think upon the disadvantages of war. "Pray for peace," is his refrain: a strange enough subject for the ally of Bernard d'Armagnac. (1) But this lesson was plain and practical; it had one side in particular that was specially attractive for Charles; and he did not hesitate to explain it in so many words. "Everybody," he writes - I translate roughly - "everybody should be much inclined to peace, for everybody has a deal to gain by it." (2)

(1) IBID. 144.

(2) IBID. 158.

Charles made laudable endeavours to acquire English, and even learned to write a rondel in that tongue of quite average mediocrity. (1) He was for some time billeted on the unhappy Suffolk, who received fourteen shillings and fourpence a day for his expenses; and from the fact that Suffolk afterwards

visited Charles in France while he was negotiating the marriage of Henry VI., as well as the terms of that nobleman's impeachment, we may believe there was some not unkindly intercourse between the prisoner and his gaoler: a fact of considerable interest when we remember that Suffolk's wife was the granddaughter of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. (2) Apart from this, and a mere catalogue of dates and places, only one thing seems evident in the story of Charles's captivity. It seems evident that, as these five-and-twenty years drew on, he became less and less resigned. Circumstances were against the growth of such a feeling. One after another of his fellow-prisoners was ransomed and went home. More than once he was himself permitted to visit France; where he worked on abortive treaties and showed himself more eager for his own deliverance than for the profit of his native land. Resignation may follow after a reasonable time upon despair; but if a man is persecuted by a series of brief and irritating hopes, his mind no more attains to a settled frame of resolution, than his eye would grow familiar with a night of thunder and lightning. Years after, when he was speaking at the trial of that Duke of Alencon, who began life so hopefully as the boyish favourite of Joan of Arc, he sought to prove that captivity was a harder punishment than death. "For I have had experience myself," he said; "and in my prison of England, for the weariness, danger, and displeasure in which I then lay, I have many a time wished I had been slain at the battle where

they took me." (3) This is a flourish, if you will, but it is something more. His spirit would sometimes rise up in a fine anger against the petty desires and contrarieties of life. He would compare his own condition with the quiet and dignified estate of the dead; and aspire to lie among his comrades on the field of Agincourt, as the Psalmist prayed to have the wings of a dove and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. But such high thoughts came to Charles only in a flash.

(1) M. Champollion-Figeac gives many in his editions of Charles's works, most (as I should think) of very doubtful authenticity, or worse.
(2) Rymer, x. 564. D'Hericault's MEMOIR, p. xli. Gairdner's PASTON LETTERS, i. 27, 99.
(3) Champollion-Figeac, 377.

John the Fearless had been murdered in his turn on the bridge of Montereau so far back as 1419. His son, Philip the Good - partly to extinguish the feud, partly that he might do a popular action, and partly, in view of his ambitious schemes, to detach another great vassal from the throne of France - had taken up the cause of Charles of Orleans, and negotiated diligently for his release. In 1433 a Burgundian embassy was admitted to an interview with the captive duke, in the presence of Suffolk. Charles shook hands most affectionately with the ambassadors. They asked after his health. "I am

well enough in body," he replied, "but far from well in mind. I am dying of grief at having to pass the best days of my life in prison, with none to sympathise." The talk falling on the chances of peace, Charles referred to Suffolk if he were not sincere and constant in his endeavours to bring it about. "If peace depended on me," he said, "I should procure it gladly, were it to cost me my life seven days after." We may take this as showing what a large price he set, not so much on peace, as on seven days of freedom. Seven days! - he would make them seven years in the employment. Finally, he assured the ambassadors of his good will to Philip of Burgundy; squeezed one of them by the hand and nipped him twice in the arm to signify things unspeakable before Suffolk; and two days after sent them Suffolk's barber, one Jean Carnet, a native of Lille, to testify more freely of his sentiments. "As I speak French," said this emissary, "the Duke of Orleans is more familiar with me than with any other of the household; and I can bear witness he never said anything against Duke Philip." (1) It will be remembered that this person, with whom he was so anxious to stand well, was no other than his hereditary enemy, the son of his father's murderer. But the honest fellow bore no malice, indeed not he. He began exchanging ballades with Philip, whom he apostrophises as his companion, his cousin, and his brother. He assures him that, soul and body, he is altogether Burgundian; and protests that he has given his heart in pledge to him. Regarded as the history of a

vendetta, it must be owned that Charles's life has points of some originality. And yet there is an engaging frankness about these ballades which disarms criticism. (2) You see Charles throwing himself headforemost into the trap; you hear Burgundy, in his answers begin to inspire him with his own prejudices, and draw melancholy pictures of the misgovernment of France. But Charles's own spirits are so high and so amiable, and he is so thoroughly convinced his cousin is a fine fellow, that one's scruples are carried away in the torrent of his happiness and gratitude. And his would be a sordid spirit who would not clap hands at the consummation (Nov. 1440); when Charles, after having sworn on the Sacrament that he would never again bear arms against England, and pledged himself body and soul to the unpatriotic faction in his own country, set out from London with a light heart and a damaged integrity.

(1) Dom Plancher, iv. 178-9.
(2) Works, i. 157-63.

In the magnificent copy of Charles's poems, given by our Henry VII. to Elizabeth of York on the occasion of their marriage, a large illumination figures at the head of one of the pages, which, in chronological perspective, is almost a history of his imprisonment. It gives a view of London with all its spires, the river passing through the old bridge and busy with boats. One side of the White Tower has been taken

out, and we can see, as under a sort of shrine, the paved room where the duke sits writing. He occupies a high-backed bench in front of a great chimney; red and black ink are before him; and the upper end of the apartment is guarded by many halberdiers, with the red cross of England on their breast. On the next side of the tower he appears again, leaning out of window and gazing on the river; doubtless there blows just then "a pleasant wind from out the land of France," and some ship comes up the river: "the ship of good news." At the door we find him yet again; this time embracing a messenger, while a groom stands by holding two saddled horses. And yet further to the left, a cavalcade defiles out of the tower; the duke is on his way at last towards "the sunshine of France."

III.

During the five-and-twenty years of his captivity, Charles had not lost in the esteem of his fellow-countrymen. For so young a man, the head of so great a house, and so numerous a party, to be taken prisoner as he rode in the vanguard of France, and stereotyped for all men in this heroic attitude, was to taste untimeously the honours of the grave. Of him, as of the dead, it would be ungenerous to speak evil; what little energy he had displayed would be remembered with

piety, when all that he had done amiss was courteously forgotten. As English folk looked for Arthur; as Danes awaited the coming of Ogier; as Somersetshire peasants or sergeants of the Old Guard expected the return of Monmouth or Napoleon; the countrymen of Charles of Orleans looked over the straits towards his English prison with desire and confidence. Events had so fallen out while he was rhyming ballades, that he had become the type of all that was most truly patriotic. The remnants of his old party had been the chief defenders of the unity of France. His enemies of Burgundy had been notoriously favourers and furtherers of English domination. People forgot that his brother still lay by the heels for an unpatriotic treaty with England, because Charles himself had been taken prisoner patriotically fighting against it. That Henry V. had left special orders against his liberation, served to increase the wistful pity with which he was regarded. And when, in defiance of all contemporary virtue, and against express pledges, the English carried war into their prisoner's fief, not only France, but all thinking men in Christendom, were roused to indignation against the oppressors, and sympathy with the victim. It was little wonder if he came to bulk somewhat largely in the imagination of the best of those at home. Charles le Boutteillier, when (as the story goes) he slew Clarence at Beauge, was only seeking an exchange for Charles of Orleans. (1) It was one of Joan of Arc's declared intentions to deliver the captive duke. If there was no other way, she

meant to cross the seas and bring him home by force. And she professed before her judges a sure knowledge that Charles of Orleans was beloved of God. (2)

(1) Vallet's CHARLES VII., i. 251.
(2) PROCES DE JEANNE D'ARC, i. 133-55.

Alas! it was not at all as a deliverer that Charles returned to France. He was nearly fifty years old. Many changes had been accomplished since, at twenty-three, he was taken on the field of Agincourt. But of all these he was profoundly ignorant, or had only heard of them in the discoloured reports of Philip of Burgundy. He had the ideas of a former generation, and sought to correct them by the scandal of a factious party. With such qualifications he came back eager for the domination, the pleasures, and the display that befitted his princely birth. A long disuse of all political activity combined with the flatteries of his new friends to fill him with an overweening conceit of his own capacity and influence. If aught had gone wrong in his absence, it seemed quite natural men should look to him for its redress. Was not King Arthur come again?

The Duke of Burgundy received him with politic honours. He took his guest by his foible for pageantry, all the easier as it was a foible of his own; and Charles walked right out of prison into much the same atmosphere of trumpeting and bell-

ringing as he had left behind when he went in. Fifteen days after his deliverance he was married to Mary of Cleves, at St. Omer. The marriage was celebrated with the usual pomp of the Burgundian court; there were joustings, and illuminations, and animals that spouted wine; and many nobles dined together, COMME EN BRIGADE, and were served abundantly with many rich and curious dishes. (1) It must have reminded Charles not a little of his first marriage at Compiegne; only then he was two years the junior of his bride, and this time he was five-and-thirty years her senior. It will be a fine question which marriage promises more: for a boy of fifteen to lead off with a lass of seventeen, or a man of fifty to make a match of it with a child of fifteen. But there was something bitter in both. The lamentations of Isabella will not have been forgotten. As for Mary, she took up with one Jaquet de la Lain, a sort of muscular Methody of the period, with a huge appetite for tournaments, and a habit of confessing himself the last thing before he went to bed. (2) With such a hero, the young duchess's amours were most likely innocent; and in all other ways she was a suitable partner for the duke, and well fitted to enter into his pleasures.

(1) Monstrelet.

(2) Vallet's CHARLES VII., iii. chap. i. But see the chronicle that bears Jaquet's name: a lean and dreary book.

When the festivities at Saint Omer had come to an end,

Charles and his wife set forth by Ghent and Tourney. The towns gave him offerings of money as he passed through, to help in the payment of his ransom. From all sides, ladies and gentlemen thronged to offer him their services; some gave him their sons for pages, some archers for a bodyguard; and by the time he reached Tournay, he had a following of 300 horse. Everywhere he was received as though he had been the King of France. (1) If he did not come to imagine himself something of the sort, he certainly forgot the existence of any one with a better claim to the title. He conducted himself on the hypothesis that Charles VII. was another Charles VI. He signed with enthusiasm that treaty of Arras, which left France almost at the discretion of Burgundy. On December 18 he was still no farther than Bruges, where he entered into a private treaty with Philip; and it was not until January 14, ten weeks after he disembarked in France, and attended by a ruck of Burgundian gentlemen, that he arrived in Paris and offered to present himself before Charles VII. The king sent word that he might come, if he would, with a small retinue, but not with his present following; and the duke, who was mightily on his high horse after all the ovations he had received, took the king's attitude amiss, and turned aside into Touraine, to receive more welcome and more presents, and be convoyed by torchlight into faithful cities.

(1) Monstrelet.

And so you see, here was King Arthur home again, and matters nowise mended in consequence. The best we can say is, that this last stage of Charles's public life was of no long duration. His confidence was soon knocked out of him in the contact with others. He began to find he was an earthen vessel among many vessels of brass; he began to be shrewdly aware that he was no King Arthur. In 1442, at Limoges, he made himself the spokesman of the malcontent nobility. The king showed himself humiliatingly indifferent to his counsels, and humiliatingly generous towards his necessities. And there, with some blushes, he may be said to have taken farewell of the political stage. A feeble attempt on the county of Asti is scarce worth the name of exception. Thenceforward let Ambition wile whom she may into the turmoil of events, our duke will walk cannily in his well-ordered garden, or sit by the fire to touch the slender reed. (1)

(1) D'Hericault's MEMOIR, xl. xli. Vallet, CHARLES VI., ii. 435.

IV.

If it were given each of us to transplant his life wherever he pleased in time or space, with all the ages and all the

countries of the world to choose from, there would be quite an instructive diversity of taste. A certain sedentary majority would prefer to remain where they were. Many would choose the Renaissance; many some stately and simple period of Grecian life; and still more elect to pass a few years wandering among the villages of Palestine with an inspired conductor. For some of our quaintly vicious contemporaries, we have the decline of the Roman Empire and the reign of Henry III. of France. But there are others not quite so vicious, who yet cannot look upon the world with perfect gravity, who have never taken the categorical imperative to wife, and have more taste for what is comfortable than for what is magnanimous and high; and I can imagine some of these casting their lot in the Court of Blois during the last twenty years of the life of Charles of Orleans.

The duke and duchess, their staff of officers and ladies, and the high-born and learned persons who were attracted to Blois on a visit, formed a society for killing time and perfecting each other in various elegant accomplishments, such as we might imagine for an ideal watering-place in the Delectable Mountains. The company hunted and went on pleasure-parties; they played chess, tables, and many other games. What we now call the history of the period passed, I imagine, over the heads of these good people much as it passes over our own. News reached them, indeed, of great and joyful import. William Peel received eight livres and five sous from the

duchess, when he brought the first tidings that Rouen was recaptured from the English. (1) A little later and the duke sang, in a truly patriotic vein, the deliverance of Guyenne and Normandy. (2) They were liberal of rhymes and largesse, and welcomed the prosperity of their country much as they welcomed the coming of spring, and with no more thought of collaborating towards the event. Religion was not forgotten in the Court of Blois. Pilgrimages were agreeable and picturesque excursions. In those days a well-served chapel was something like a good vinery in our own, an opportunity for display and the source of mild enjoyments. There was probably something of his rooted delight in pageantry, as well as a good deal of gentle piety, in the feelings with which Charles gave dinner every Friday to thirteen poor people, served them himself, and washed their feet with his own hands. (3) Solemn affairs would interest Charles and his courtiers from their trivial side. The duke perhaps cared less for the deliverance of Guyenne and Normandy than for his own verses on the occasion; just as Dr. Russell's correspondence in THE TIMES was among the most material parts of the Crimean War for that talented correspondent. And I think it scarcely cynical to suppose that religion as well as patriotism was principally cultivated as a means of filling up the day.

(1) Champollion-Figeac, 368.

(2) Works, i. 115.

(3) D'Hericault's MEMOIR, xlv.

It was not only messengers fiery red with haste and charged with the destiny of nations, who were made welcome at the gates of Blois. If any man of accomplishment came that way, he was sure of an audience, and something for his pocket. The courtiers would have received Ben Jonson like Drummond of Hawthornden, and a good pugilist like Captain Barclay. They were catholic, as none but the entirely idle can be catholic. It might be Pierre, called Dieu d'amours, the juggler; or it might be three high English minstrels; or the two men, players of ghitterns, from the kingdom of Scotland, who sang the destruction of the Turks; or again Jehan Rognelet, player of instruments of music, who played and danced with his wife and two children; they would each be called into the castle to give a taste of his proficiency before my lord the duke. (1) Sometimes the performance was of a more personal interest, and produced much the same sensations as are felt on an English green on the arrival of a professional cricketer, or round an English billiard table during a match between Roberts and Cooke. This was when Jehan Negre, the Lombard, came to Blois and played chess against all these chess-players, and won much money from my lord and his intimates; or when Baudet Harenc of Chalons made ballades before all these ballade-makers. (2)

(1) ChampoIlion-Figeac, 381, 361, 381.

(2) Champollion-Figeac, 359,361.

It will not surprise the reader to learn they were all makers of ballades and rondels. To write verses for May day, seems to have been as much a matter of course, as to ride out with the cavalcade that went to gather hawthorn. The choice of Valentines was a standing challenge, and the courtiers pelted each other with humorous and sentimental verses as in a literary carnival. If an indecorous adventure befell our friend Maistre Estienne le Gout, my lord the duke would turn it into the funniest of rondels, all the rhymes being the names of the cases of nouns or the moods of verbs; and Maistre Estienne would make reply in similar fashion, seeking to prune the story of its more humiliating episodes. If Fredet was too long away from Court, a rondel went to upbraid him; and it was in a rondel that Fredet would excuse himself. Sometimes two or three, or as many as a dozen, would set to work on the same refrain, the same idea, or in the same macaronic jargon. Some of the poetasters were heavy enough; others were not wanting in address; and the duchess herself was among those who most excelled. On one occasion eleven competitors made a ballade on the idea,

"I die of thirst beside the fountain's edge"
(Je meurs de soif empres de la fontaine).

These eleven ballades still exist; and one of them arrests the attention rather from the name of the author than from any special merit in itself. It purports to be the work of Francois Villon; and so far as a foreigner can judge (which is indeed a small way), it may very well be his. Nay, and if any one thing is more probable than another, in the great TABULA RASA, or unknown land, which we are fain to call the biography of Villon, it seems probable enough that he may have gone upon a visit to Charles of Orleans. Where Master Baudet Harenc, of Chalons, found a sympathetic, or perhaps a derisive audience (for who can tell nowadays the degree of Baudet's excellence in his art?), favour would not be wanting for the greatest ballade-maker of all time. Great as would seem the incongruity, it may have pleased Charles to own a sort of kinship with ragged singers, and whimsically regard himself as one of the confraternity of poets. And he would have other grounds of intimacy with Villon. A room looking upon Windsor gardens is a different matter from Villon's dungeon at Meun; yet each in his own degree had been tried in prison. Each in his own way also, loved the good things of this life and the service of the Muses. But the same gulf that separated Burns from his Edinburgh patrons would separate the singer of Bohemia from the rhyming duke. And it is hard to imagine that Villon's training amongst thieves, loose women, and vagabond students, had fitted him to move in a society of any dignity and courtliness. Ballades are very

admirable things; and a poet is doubtless a most interesting visitor. But among the courtiers of Charles, there would be considerable regard for the proprieties of etiquette; and even a duke will sometimes have an eye to his teaspoons. Moreover, as a poet, I can conceive he may have disappointed expectation. It need surprise nobody if Villon's ballade on the theme,

"I die of thirst beside the fountain's edge,"

was but a poor performance. He would make better verses on the lee-side of a flagon at the sign of the Pomme du Pin, than in a cushioned settle in the halls of Blois.

Charles liked change of place. He was often not so much travelling as making a progress; now to join the king for some great tournament; now to visit King Rene, at Tarascon, where he had a study of his own and saw all manner of interesting things - oriental curios, King Rene painting birds, and, what particularly pleased him, Triboulet, the dwarf jester, whose skull-cap was no bigger than an orange. (1) Sometimes the journeys were set about on horseback in a large party, with the FOURRIERS sent forward to prepare a lodging at the next stage. We find almost Gargantuan details of the provision made by these officers against the duke's arrival, of eggs and butter and bread, cheese and peas and chickens, pike and bream and barbel, and wine both white and

red. (2) Sometimes he went by water in a barge, playing chess or tables with a friend in the pavilion, or watching other vessels as they went before the wind. (3) Children ran along the bank, as they do to this day on the Crinan Canal; and when Charles threw in money, they would dive and bring it up. (4) As he looked on at their exploits, I wonder whether that room of gold and silk and worsted came back into his memory, with the device of little children in a river, and the sky full of birds?

(1) Lecoy de la Marche, ROI RENE, II. 155, 177.
(2) Champollion-Figeac, chaps. v. and vi.
(3) IBID. 364; Works, i. 172.
(4) Champollion-Figeac, 364: "Jeter de l'argent aux petis enfans qui estoient au long de Bourbon, pour les faire nonner en l'eau et aller querre l'argent au fond."

He was a bit of a book-fancier, and had vied with his brother Angouleme in bringing back the library of their grandfather Charles V., when Bedford put it up for sale in London. (1) The duchess had a library of her own; and we hear of her borrowing romances from ladies in attendance on the blue-stocking Margaret of Scotland. (2) Not only were books collected, but new books were written at the court of Blois. The widow of one Jean Fougere, a bookbinder, seems to have done a number of odd commissions for the bibliophilous count. She it was who received three vellum-skins to bind the

duchess's Book of Hours, and who was employed to prepare parchment for the use of the duke's scribes. And she it was who bound in vermilion leather the great manuscript of Charles's own poems, which was presented to him by his secretary, Anthony Astesan, with the text in one column, and Astesan's Latin version in the other. (3)

(1) Champollion-Figeac, 387.
(2) NOUVELLE BIOGRAPHIE DIDOT, art. "Marie de Cleves." Vallet, CHARLES VII, iii. 85, note 1.
(3) Champollion-Figeac, 383, 384-386.

Such tastes, with the coming of years, would doubtless take the place of many others. We find in Charles's verse much semi-ironical regret for other days, and resignation to growing infirmities. He who had been "nourished in the schools of love," now sees nothing either to please or displease him. Old age has imprisoned him within doors, where he means to take his ease, and let younger fellows bestir themselves in life. He had written (in earlier days, we may presume) a bright and defiant little poem in praise of solitude. If they would but leave him alone with his own thoughts and happy recollections, he declared it was beyond the power of melancholy to affect him. But now, when his animal strength has so much declined that he sings the discomforts of winter instead of the inspirations of spring, and he has no longer any appetite for life, he confesses he

is wretched when alone, and, to keep his mind from grievous thoughts, he must have many people around him, laughing, talking, and singing. (1)

(1) Works, ii. 57, 258.

While Charles was thus falling into years, the order of things, of which he was the outcome and ornament, was growing old along with him. The semi-royalty of the princes of the blood was already a thing of the past; and when Charles VII. was gathered to his fathers, a new king reigned in France, who seemed every way the opposite of royal. Louis XI. had aims that were incomprehensible, and virtues that were inconceivable to his contemporaries. But his contemporaries were able enough to appreciate his sordid exterior, and his cruel and treacherous spirit. To the whole nobility of France he was a fatal and unreasonable phenomenon. All such courts as that of Charles at Blois, or his friend Rene's in Provence, would soon be made impossible; interference was the order of the day; hunting was already abolished; and who should say what was to go next? Louis, in fact, must have appeared to Charles primarily in the light of a kill-joy. I take it, when missionaries land in South Sea Islands and lay strange embargo on the simplest things in life, the islanders will not be much more puzzled and irritated than Charles of Orleans at the policy of the Eleventh Louis. There was one thing, I seem to apprehend, that had always particularly

moved him; and that was, any proposal to punish a person of his acquaintance. No matter what treason he may have made or meddled with, an Alencon or an Armagnac was sure to find Charles reappear from private life, and do his best to get him pardoned. He knew them quite well. He had made rondels with them. They were charming people in every way. There must certainly be some mistake. Had not he himself made anti-national treaties almost before he was out of his nonage? And for the matter of that, had not every one else done the like? Such are some of the thoughts by which he might explain to himself his aversion to such extremities; but it was on a deeper basis that the feeling probably reposed. A man of his temper could not fail to be impressed at the thought of disastrous revolutions in the fortunes of those he knew. He would feel painfully the tragic contrast, when those who had everything to make life valuable were deprived of life itself. And it was shocking to the clemency of his spirit, that sinners should be hurried before their judge without a fitting interval for penitence and satisfaction. It was this feeling which brought him at last, a poor, purblind blue-bottle of the later autumn, into collision with "the universal spider," Louis XI. He took up the defence of the Duke of Brittany at Tours. But Louis was then in no humour to hear Charles's texts and Latin sentiments; he had his back to the wall, the future of France was at stake; and if all the old men in the world had crossed his path, they would have had the rough side of his tongue

like Charles of Orleans. I have found nowhere what he said, but it seems it was monstrously to the point, and so rudely conceived that the old duke never recovered the indignity. He got home as far as Amboise, sickened, and died two days after (Jan. 4, 1465), in the seventy-fourth year of his age. And so a whiff of pungent prose stopped the issue of melodious rondels to the end of time.

V.

The futility of Charles's public life was of a piece throughout. He never succeeded in any single purpose he set before him; for his deliverance from England, after twenty-five years of failure and at the cost of dignity and consistency, it would be ridiculously hyperbolical to treat as a success. During the first part of his life he was the stalking horse of Bernard d'Armagnac; during the second, he was the passive instrument of English diplomatists; and before he was well entered on the third, he hastened to become the dupe and catspaw of Burgundian treason. On each of these occasions, a strong and not dishonourable personal motive determined his behaviour. In 1407 and the following years, he had his father's murder uppermost in his mind. During his English captivity, that thought was displaced by a more immediate desire for his own liberation. In 1440 a

sentiment of gratitude to Philip of Burgundy blinded him to all else, and led him to break with the tradition of his party and his own former life. He was born a great vassal, and he conducted himself like a private gentleman. He began life in a showy and brilliant enough fashion, by the light of a petty personal chivalry. He was not without some tincture of patriotism; but it was resolvable into two parts: a preference for life among his fellow-countrymen, and a barren point of honour. In England, he could comfort himself by the reflection that "he had been taken while loyally doing his devoir," without any misgiving as to his conduct in the previous years, when he had prepared the disaster of Agincourt by wasteful feud. This unconsciousness of the larger interests is perhaps most happily exampled out of his own mouth. When Alencon stood accused of betraying Normandy into the hands of the English, Charles made a speech in his defence, from which I have already quoted more than once. Alencon, he said, had professed a great love and trust towards him; "yet did he give no great proof thereof, when he sought to betray Normandy; whereby he would have made me lose an estate of 100,000 livres a year, and might have occasioned the destruction of the kingdom and of all us Frenchmen." These are the words of one, mark you, against whom Gloucester warned the English Council because of his "great subtility and cautelous disposition." It is not hard to excuse the impatience of Louis XI., if such stuff was foisted on him by way of political deliberation.

This incapacity to see things with any greatness, this obscure and narrow view was fundamentally characteristic of the man as well as of the epoch. It is not even so striking in his public life, where he failed, as in his poems, where he notably succeeded. For wherever we might expect a poet to be unintelligent, it certainly would not be in his poetry. And Charles is unintelligent even there. Of all authors whom a modern may still read and read over again with pleasure, he has perhaps the least to say. His poems seem to bear testimony rather to the fashion of rhyming, which distinguished the age, than to any special vocation in the man himself. Some of them are drawing-room exercises and the rest seem made by habit. Great writers are struck with something in nature or society, with which they become pregnant and longing; they are possessed with an idea, and cannot be at peace until they have put it outside of them in some distinct embodiment. But with Charles literature was an object rather than a mean; he was one who loved bandying words for its own sake; the rigidity of intricate metrical forms stood him in lieu of precise thought; instead of communicating truth, he observed the laws of a game; and when he had no one to challenge at chess or rackets, he made verses in a wager against himself. From the very idleness of the man's mind, and not from intensity of feeling, it happens that all his poems are more or less autobiographical. But they form an autobiography singularly bald and uneventful.

Little is therein recorded beside sentiments. Thoughts, in any true sense, he had none to record. And if we can gather that he had been a prisoner in England, that he had lived in the Orleannese, and that he hunted and went in parties of pleasure, I believe it is about as much definite experience as is to be found in all these five hundred pages of autobiographical verse. Doubtless, we find here and there a complaint on the progress of the infirmities of age. Doubtless, he feels the great change of the year, and distinguishes winter from spring; winter as the time of snow and the fireside; spring as the return of grass and flowers, the time of St. Valentine's day and a beating heart. And he feels love after a fashion. Again and again, we learn that Charles of Orleans is in love, and hear him ring the changes through the whole gamut of dainty and tender sentiment. But there is never a spark of passion; and heaven alone knows whether there was any real woman in the matter, or the whole thing was an exercise in fancy. If these poems were indeed inspired by some living mistress, one would think he had never seen, never heard, and never touched her. There is nothing in any one of these so numerous love-songs to indicate who or what the lady was. Was she dark or fair, passionate or gentle like himself, witty or simple? Was it always one woman? or are there a dozen here immortalised in cold indistinction? The old English translator mentions gray eyes in his version of one of the amorous rondels; so far as I remember, he was driven by some emergency of the verse; but

in the absence of all sharp lines of character and anything specific, we feel for the moment a sort of surprise, as though the epithet were singularly happy and unusual, or as though we had made our escape from cloudland into something tangible and sure. The measure of Charles's indifference to all that now preoccupies and excites a poet, is best given by a positive example. If, besides the coming of spring, any one external circumstance may be said to have struck his imagination, it was the despatch of FOURRIERS, while on a journey, to prepare the night's lodging. This seems to be his favourite image; it reappears like the upas-tree in the early work of Coleridge: we may judge with what childish eyes he looked upon the world, if one of the sights which most impressed him was that of a man going to order dinner.

Although they are not inspired by any deeper motive than the common run of contemporaneous drawing-room verses, those of Charles of Orleans are executed with inimitable lightness and delicacy of touch. They deal with floating and colourless sentiments, and the writer is never greatly moved, but he seems always genuine. He makes no attempt to set off thin conceptions with a multiplicity of phrases. His ballades are generally thin and scanty of import; for the ballade presented too large a canvas, and he was preoccupied by technical requirements. But in the rondel he has put himself before all competitors by a happy knack and a prevailing distinction of manner. He is very much more of a duke in his

verses than in his absurd and inconsequential career as a statesman; and how he shows himself a duke is precisely by the absence of all pretension, turgidity, or emphasis. He turns verses, as he would have come into the king's presence, with a quiet accomplishment of grace.

Theodore de Banville, the youngest poet of a famous generation now nearly extinct, and himself a sure and finished artist, knocked off, in his happiest vein, a few experiments in imitation of Charles of Orleans. I would recommend these modern rondels to all who care about the old duke, not only because they are delightful in themselves, but because they serve as a contrast to throw into relief the peculiarities of their model. When de Banville revives a forgotten form of verse - and he has already had the honour of reviving the ballade - he does it in the spirit of a workman choosing a good tool wherever he can find one, and not at all in that of the dilettante, who seeks to renew bygone forms of thought and make historic forgeries. With the ballade this seemed natural enough; for in connection with ballades the mind recurs to Villon, and Villon was almost more of a modern than de Banville himself. But in the case of the rondel, a comparison is challenged with Charles of Orleans, and the difference between two ages and two literatures is illustrated in a few poems of thirteen lines. Something, certainly, has been retained of the old movement; the refrain falls in time like a well-played bass; and the

very brevity of the thing, by hampering and restraining the greater fecundity of the modern mind, assists the imitation. But de Banville's poems are full of form and colour; they smack racily of modern life, and own small kindred with the verse of other days, when it seems as if men walked by twilight, seeing little, and that with distracted eyes, and instead of blood, some thin and spectral fluid circulated in their veins. They might gird themselves for battle, make love, eat and drink, and acquit themselves manfully in all the external parts of life; but of the life that is within, and those processes by which we render ourselves an intelligent account of what we feel and do, and so represent experience that we for the first time make it ours, they had only a loose and troubled possession. They beheld or took part in great events, but there was no answerable commotion in their reflective being; and they passed throughout turbulent epochs in a sort of ghostly quiet and abstraction. Feeling seems to have been strangely disproportioned to the occasion, and words were laughably trivial and scanty to set forth the feeling even such as it was. Juvenal des Ursins chronicles calamity after calamity, with but one comment for them all: that "it was great pity." Perhaps, after too much of our florid literature, we find an adventitious charm in what is so different; and while the big drums are beaten every day by perspiring editors over the loss of a cock-boat or the rejection of a clause, and nothing is heard that is not proclaimed with sound of trumpet, it is not wonderful if

we retire with pleasure into old books, and listen to authors who speak small and clear, as if in a private conversation. Truly this is so with Charles of Orleans. We are pleased to find a small man without the buskin, and obvious sentiments stated without affectation. If the sentiments are obvious, there is all the more chance we may have experienced the like. As we turn over the leaves, we may find ourselves in sympathy with some one or other of these staid joys and smiling sorrows. If we do we shall be strangely pleased, for there is a genuine pathos in these simple words, and the lines go with a lilt, and sing themselves to music of their own.