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1926

684TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM D, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8TH, 1926,

AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election of G. Wilson Heath, Esq., F.R.G.S., as a Member; Mrs. Hilprecht, as an Associate; and Miss Agnes M. Naish as a Life Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then, in the enforced absence of Professor Roget, requested the Hon. Secretary to read the paper on "A Philosophic Exponent of Latin Culture: Alexandre Vinet, Protestant Divine and Literary Critic (1797-1847)."

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*A PHILOSOPHIC EXPONENT OF LATIN CULTURE :  
ALEXANDRE VINET, PROTESTANT DIVINE AND  
LITERARY CRITIC.*

By PROFESSOR F. F. ROGET, of Geneva.

I.

THIS title may strike the reader as unusual. A doctor in divinity whose authority is unchallenged as a critic of literature; an expert in the subject of literature whose reputation as a divine is well-founded, widespread, and enduring; that is a rare combination. We know no other of equal merit and conferring credit equally great. That one such example could be, and that there could be only one, will appear shortly.

If you take up Chambers's *Biographical Dictionary*, you will read under the name of VINET twenty-four lines as follows, altogether 200 words :—

“VINET, Alex. Rodolphe (1797–1847), Swiss divine and critic, born at Ouchy near Lausanne, became in 1835 Professor of French Language and Literature at Basel, and in 1837 of Practical Theology at Lausanne. His *Mémoire en faveur de la Liberté des Cultes* (1826) involved him in the struggle against state interference; and in 1845, resigning his chair, he joined the Free Church of Vaud; in 1846 he was compelled to resign his professorship of French literature in Lausanne Academy. Vinet was an eloquent and evangelical preacher. His *Chrestomathie française* (1829), his *Études* on the literature of the nineteenth century (1849–51), his *Histoire* of eighteenth-century literature (1853), *Moralistes des XVI et XVII siècles* (1859), and *Poètes du siècle de Louis XIV* (1862), took high rank. Amongst the works translated into English are *Christian Philosophy* (1846), *Vital Christianity* (1846), *Gospel Studies* (1851), *Pastoral Theology* (1852), *Homiletics* (1853), *Studies in Pascal* (1859); *Outlines of Philosophy and Literature* (1865). See “Studies” by Scherer (1853) and Chavannes (1883); “Lives” by E. Rambert (1875), Louis Molines (1890), and Laura M. Lane (in English, 1890); and his *Letters* (1882 and 1890). A new and complete edition of his works is in course of publication since 1911, with notes and all useful matter—George Bridel and Co., Lausanne.”

I proceed to unfold the meaning of those words, each of which in this summary is extraordinarily precise, illustrative here, we might almost say, of design with a capital “D.” Let us run our eyes along the lines.

First the name, Vinet, which like Godet, Muret, Roget, Grandet, is linguistically as French as French can be; then Swiss, that is, of a nationality which has no language of its own, but expresses itself in three tongues, each borrowed from another nationality, in each case a nationality quite foreign to Swiss nationality; then a divine, which means a trained student of the Bible and servant of God, in the Christian sense of the word, but says no more. That is quite enough to show what sort of literary critic a man so trained must be, if true to the spirit throughout. To this vocation and education Vinet was true: no question yet of belonging to this or that Church.

The next predicate makes him a critic, but does not say of what. We may well assume from what precedes that Gospel

truth is meant. That his standard of criticism will be either Protestant or Roman may further be presumed. That, as a consistent divine, he will carry that, his standard of criticism, into literature is, in all verisimilitude, the conclusion to be drawn from the information we get next.

He was born and educated and trained in divinity in Protestant, French-speaking Canton Vaud, in Switzerland, at Lausanne, where the National School of Protestant Theology dates as far back as 1526. We find next that, at the age of twenty-eight (in 1835) he was appointed Professor of French Literature and Language at Basle, a German-speaking Zwinglian community bordering on Lutheran Alsace. His spiritual vocation (divinity) and his intellectual profession (criticism) keep pace together quite wonderfully; they are reciprocal and alternative.

Two years later (1837) he returns, as Professor of Practical Theology, to the Faculty of Divinity at Lausanne. In that office his persuasion is modified. The civil notion of a State Church is no longer acceptable to his Christian conscience; he turns Evangelical. He resigned his official chair of Theology, resigned his official professorship of French literature in the Academy; this makes him an unattached divine and an unattached intellectualist. He thus reaches a unity and personality of conscience embracing both branches of his life-work, with spiritual and intellectual independence in his public functions.

Two years after this achievement his visible life came to a close (1847), but his self did not perish for so much. He was an eloquent man and a good preacher; he was a writer, and had consigned himself to paper. He had prepared at Basle and published (1829) a *Treasury of French Literature*, in three stout volumes, which for four generations now has educated the Swiss youth of either sex in all that is sound in French literature. This book, with its notes and introductory history of French literature, marks down or keeps out anything in French thought, poetry or prose, the acceptance of which would be a playing false to Protestant ethics, or, if paraded before the young, conducive in fact to corruption of taste and morals anywhere.

His Critical Studies of French Literature (animadverting on any implicit morality or immorality, vulgarity or distinction), were published one by one after his death, till 1862. His Studies of Christianity were made public in their sequence, till 1865. His Philosophy, a most valuable product of his religion and

human sense, is now being made available for recension and re-presentation, in a complete edition of all his critical works, which has reached its fourth volume of 560 pages octavo. There have been published in English many translations, based on the earlier editions.

## II.

On the principle that the irreligion of a non-religious man is made, by the law of perversion, his religion, Vinet and Rousseau, both Protestants, are in Protestantism as the poles asunder. Rousseau is the rotted fruit fallen from the tree. Vinet is the pure sap of the vine-stock, its unfermented sweet juice. In his life-work there is an individual purpose made manifest. But the Design, or semblance of a Design, to which we pointed in the beginning—is it made apparent in this? Well, there is, in the background of Vinet's life, a kind of previous adjustment to time and place, and of both to the evolution of Church, State, and Ethics (public feeling) in Europe. Let us make our meaning plain.

The geographical area covered by the French language, and, if we may say so, by the French stock of men and women, is not co-extensive with the territory of France. It extends further to the north and to the east. In the north, that is, in Belgium, public feeling—social ethics—are continuous with those of France. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church has established its universal claim to mould alone the religious spirit and, conversely, the irreligious, in Belgium and in France.

But if we look east, toward Switzerland, what occurred there is a thing apart. The French-speaking parts of Switzerland which are Protestant, form a geographical whole, and have moved together in spiritual unity and in like religious ethics since 1526, without a break or interference. Moreover, the Protestant German-speaking Swiss also form a solid body in which the Zwinglian type of Protestantism has held unbroken sway through the centuries. The Lutheran Reformation did not agree with the Swiss national spirit. But both Calvinism and Zwinglianism, which are practically interchangeable, did arise and flourish there as the national form of adherence to Biblical Christianity. So the Protestant "block" in Switzerland, numbering some two million people, is consistent, self-dependent, national, and of the popular type—no hierarchy.

Protestantism, in France, does not form an aggregate. It is dispersed, sporadic, discontinuous; it has no habitation, neither

in the heart of the nation nor in the ethics of the people. And the irreligion of France—whether it be taken as fostered by the Roman Catholic Church, antagonistically, or as resisting it justly—did not challenge Protestantism in the name of a higher conception and, *ex hypothesi*, a better one, and so has no home in Switzerland as against any of the forms in which Christianity is established there.

Now let me take the Swiss area saved for Latin Christians of Protestant complexion, as by a decree of Providence. Let us mentally remove it—geography, spirit, ethics, and all—to join it to Great Britain, and to the whole Anglo-Saxon race, to which it is kin, the ethnic feature alone excepted. What do we find? We find that, if Protestant Switzerland could be lifted up *en bloc*, so to say, on one huge shovel, and laid, say, on the top of Yorkshire, or Wales, or Scotland, it would fit in perfectly, disturb nothing, and undergo no disturbance. If, on the contrary, we were to place it, *en bloc*, on some part of the map of France, it would prove entirely heterogeneous to France, as a form of faith, as a Church, and in public ethics.

From every point of view fellowship with the British mind would be perfect. The irreligion, even, of the Protestant-born Anglo-Saxon renegade and that of the Swiss-born are as much of one piece as the religion was one which their ancestors held in common. Everybody knows that Calvinism was parent to both Protestant religion and irreligion, as Adam was parent to Abel and to Cain.

Thence follows that Alexandre Vinet, answering the description I gave at the beginning of this demonstration, stands to France exactly in the same relation as an Englishman would, supposing that Englishman to be a Protestant divine who was at the same time an ethical critic of French literature.

Yet, strange to say, there is no such Englishman as Vinet was. Why? Because no Englishman has a Latin mind; the English soul is Anglo-Saxon. And so we get to the heart of the matter. We have before us a mind which was a Latin mind, by inheritance, by breeding and by self-culture, sitting in judgment over French literature. He edits it, as it were, critically as to its spirit and contents, but with sympathetic affinity, for the benefit of Protestant-bred people and for general enlightenment. The position is unique in the history of literature. But the vantage of the position depends entirely on the power, penetrativeness, and fairness of the man.

## III.

There has been no greater appreciator of French literature than Vinet. Not a voice has ever been raised in France against his criticism, but all have remarked that it is not catholic in tone, and yet quite apart from the tone prevalent among non-Catholics or anti-Catholics. The tone of Vinet's exposition is strictly ethical; his moral belief in matters literary which are made public matters through the printing office is that licentiousness has no share in beauty, art, style, inventiveness, and resource.

So much, then, for Vinet's post of observation as a retrospective overseer of French culture within France through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. He was a contemporary spectator during the first half of the nineteenth century, in which literature turned from the classic to the romantic expression of the French genius.

But what about his attitude to French literature outside France? This branch was a native sapling in French-speaking Switzerland; it had grown there under the protective shadow, or rather in the light, of Protestantism since 1526, without check or admixture. With the sap of that growth Vinet was fed, and from that nurture of brain, heart, and conscience he drew critical inspiration. And to what was his tone of mind naturally attuned?—To the Anglo-Saxon, which, through the same period of history, had by stages grown Protestant.

So we complete the circle. The tone of Vinet's criticism is the Anglo-Saxon, yet the spontaneous outburst of a Latin mind, quite irrespective of any English contribution; for Vinet was English neither in blood nor by voluntary nurture, nor by mental disposition, nor by habitation, nor by habituation. He did not speak, nor write, nor read English; his acquaintance with the contents of English literature was second-hand.

The case is similar in respect of his Biblical, evangelical, and theological activity. He translated or transferred nothing from English to French, but what he wrote with his Latin mind on religious subjects happened to be of a same spirit with the Anglo-Saxon, was translated and proved easily transferable.

That Vinet's doctrine in literature is an outflow from his doctrine in religion and public morals need not be stressed. *Cela va de soi*. That is his originality. In him are thrown together Geneva, Canterbury and Edinburgh; Calvin, Cranmer, and Knox; Wesley and Fox.



This association is natural. As in Switzerland, Protestantism in Great Britain grew naturally from out the earlier Catholic unity of faith. Not so in France; a detestable and warping element came in—force. In the sixteenth century Catholicism had got out of balance. Protestantism was an effort at restoring, keeping together, the oneness of faith and Church; left to itself, that effort had succeeded.

There can be no doubt that, had force not been applied to the repression of French Protestantism, the Latin world would have fashioned itself to it. Some of the foremost bearers of the new light were Latins. One of the main sources of the Reformation was Latin—the existing Church. Leaders of French extraction were quite numerous enough, sufficiently supported, and convincing to collect round themselves a very large following.

#### IV.

For those reasons, the eyes of Vinet at the outset of his career as a critic were fixed upon Pascal, who seemed to him the right corner-stone for the building up of a new philosophy after the Renaissance period. Pascal also seemed the fit starting-post. Vinet wanted to fulfil his purpose, in laying down from milestone to milestone the rules and the duty of literature.

Why?—Because Pascal (1625–62) was French of the French, a past-master in the use of literature as a moral force, a semi-Protestant who would have made of Catholicism a Biblical Church, had he lived long enough to become a public character in his time, and powerful enough.

The first Protestant edition of the “Thoughts” of Pascal was published in 1856; it is inscribed to A. Vinet, who, more than anybody, stood up in defence of Pascal, and won for him love and approval in the early nineteenth century.

Here is, in short, Pascal’s doctrine as to literature: Pascal proclaims in Jesus Christ the “restorer of mankind through Scripture (Holy Writ).” Now, Scripture is of Jewish origin, and became Christian with Christ; we have Him recorded only in writing. The foundation of literature, thus, because Scriptural, is at once Christian and moral: the link is established; it is a thing of religious and moral origin. Throughout the Middle Ages the fount of literature is Christianity, even when its publication is by word of mouth only among the illiterate masses of the people. That, subsequently, all literature should come

under this religious and moral canon of criticism is consequential enough. Vinet draws rigorously the conclusion to be applied to profane literature in its relation to the law of morals. As a free production of the mind of man, it is subject to Christian morality.

This standard he applies to the appreciation of the Latin spirit in literary culture. "The effects of religion appear fully and completely only in history," says Vinet. "Speech is the greatest instrument of good and of evil. Speech, the child of thought, reacts upon thought, and, through thought, upon life, made up of will, conscience, and acts, wherefrom proceeding the social effects are seen," says again Vinet. He traces himself back to Pascal, who says, "Eloquent speech is an enforcement of thought by emotion. The thought is painted up, and oratory is the painter. The effect is jointly attained by concordance: by the attuning of the mind and heart of the reader or listener to the mind and heart of the speaker or writer through the instrumentality of thought and expression, with an infusion of passion. The less art, the better the art: one expected an author and one finds a man: a supreme delight."

*Plus humane quam poetice locutus est* is the highest praise Vinet would grant an author. And here his Protestant nature shines through his Latin mentality. As a Protestant he was made aware of the deflection, the deviation which French literature had undergone, the one-sidedness which it got from the continued subjection of the French mind to the Roman Catholic in its historical development, outside of, and as opposed to, the Reformation. We cannot repeat it too confidently. Protestantism, freedom being given, was the natural outcome of Mediæval Christianity. It was wiped out by force—first by the Inquisition, next by the State, and last by the Revolution, which, assuming that it was a corrective justly applied to the evils of autocracy, was the third Inquisition, persecution, and horror. This was the last bloody artifice of a long series, the last systematic throttling of the spirit. The Protestant spirit could not be revived, because its bearers in flesh and blood had been physically ruled out of existence. French nationhood remained out of balance. One of its natural limbs, cut out of the normal social body, was suppressed.

That French literature, compared with the wealth, depth, and breadth of that of England, is defective on that account struck Vinet, and, as a Latin, he wept over this impoverishing of the sources of literature. Like the maimed French social body,

artificially supported, the literature of France has its share of artificiality, perceptible mainly in the realm of poetry, as compared with the corresponding province of English literature. This, of untold wealth down the ages, shows that none of the richness of the native soil has been extirpated with spade and shovel. Wherever the spirituality fanned into life by Protestantism has been preserved in social institutions, such as schools, for instance, as is the case throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, the spiritual life of the laity has been made manifold, many times over. It has acquired multitudinous strength. Vinet knew this. When speaking of the fecundity of sentiment in literature (the sense of which he got from the English rendering of the Psalms), he enlarged upon Pascal's saying that those whose nature it is to judge by sentiment, do not, when reasoning, bear out those who make of their feelings the servants of grandiose principles of logic. The first do embrace at a glance the whole field of vision; the others, caught in the grip of reason, confine their sentiment within the conceits of reason. "Why not call in piety," says Vinet, "which is a love infused with a respect for man—a creature visited by God?" Science, in human respects, cannot replace the immediacy of feeling. Could the works of religion and piety be kindled into life by principle? Suppose those words did not exist, could their meaning be supplied by logic? The use of speech is always an act; it may be moral or immoral. In Vinet, as in Pascal, the trend of language is always moral. And so would Protestantism have it, which is directly founded on the Word, our guardian against impiety, irreligion, and inhumanity.

## V.

Let us place Vinet in contrast with the spirit of French literature in the seventeenth century of which Pascal should have been the leader in the department of written thought. The display along the avenue of time cannot but interest us.

The display is magnificent. The Church has it well in hand; conformity is triumphant; literature is disciplined; its discipleship is unfailing; one sound it gives forth, indeed that of an instrument of social morality under religious guidance. There is not a dissonant voice. The persecution and expulsion of the Protestants, the expunging of their spirit, are systematic, publicly approved and successful. The tone of literature is unified. There

is no such turbulence as marks the politically seething and anarchically religious atmosphere in England. There physical violence, reciprocal proscription, revolt and repression, earthquake tremors, accompany every manifestation of the warring spirits; but it is all about religion and political principles upheld with a tenacity akin to religious belief; it is all strong, untractable conviction. It is the will of rival written and vocal propagandas to be free, which exultingly clash one against another in the conflict of views. The turmoil is irrepressible and the pitched battle never remiss.

In Switzerland, too, neither Protestantism nor Roman Catholicism in the seventeenth century are pacific. But this quarrel is not carried on to the pitch of political discord among parties. The Roman Catholic and Protestant states, bound together in a national confederation, are kept geographically distinct by border-lines marked out on the ground as with indelible chalk. They are unmixed confessionally, each enclosed in its own rigid framework by the perfect local agreement of Church with State in each community. On those clear outlines is some civil war waged, and dies out in the eighteenth century.

In France, on the contrary, the complete deletion of Protestant public thought by force (1685) establishes a dead level of conformity in the national spiritual life, till the hurricane of social revolution sweeps over the country from 1789 onwards and dissolves the old State, a hurricane from which the Roman Catholic unity of creed emerges once more entire, and the nation is more than ever forbidden the fruits of Protestantism.

What is, then, the attitude of Vinet to the "century of Louis XIV," as it is called in literature, a subject which, busy in his own field of social philosophy, Matthew Arnold evoked in his book *Literature and Dogma*? Vinet writes:—

"In the century of Louis XIV criticism has not entered the domain of faith. Belief, not faith, is, as it were, the mood and temperament of that period. The 'authorized' Frenchman of the age—he is not a free agent—believes in political institutions where Roman Catholicism combines with the right of monarchy to claim obedience. The French mind is at rest in that double religion, secular and ecclesiastic. The tone of the upper middle-class makes for solidity, upholds strictly traditional morals, which Molière stands for even on the comic stage (Madame Jourdain, his Orgon in *Tartuffe* and his *Le Misanthrope*)."

In the matter of general morals the disposition of the seventeenth-century spirit in France was not amiss. In literature it compares favourably with the tone of the English stage, and of much unrestrained imaginative composition in the same age. But the English age of genuine moral efficiency, protecting evangelical morals in private life was, in French literature, kept back and did never dawn. There, survive the trite, staple subjects of the social novel and of the playhouse—adultery in aspiration or in effect—a woeful Latin inheritance, sprung up again after a long period of disciplinary repression.

“Of evangelical morals, Milton,” says Vinet, “was a genuine interpreter in the relevant books of *Paradise Lost*. But,” continues Vinet, “we should not expect too much from literature in that respect. Literature is a mirror to society. A literature exclusively Christian would not command complete adhesion. Every literature has to strike a mean as a public vehicle for moral standards. By keeping above the middle line it may gather under its command discreet admirers, but would fail to satisfy general curiosity. Yet there is hope in the naïve delusion of the multitude—a most commendable feature of man taken as a crowd—that literature is privileged to convey to his mind utterances ripe and good in themselves. This instinctive expectation is exposed to sore disappointments. It rebels somewhat when its curiosity is offered mean satisfactions, instead of the better ones, however much spectators may be reconciled thereto by the spell of literary expression.”

Imagination has emerged, partially corrupt, from the Fall, and that is where Milton's standard comes in restoratively. Such a fundamental prepossession—the presupposition of rightness in literature—being derived from early religious use, it is not easy to overcome it. As an interpreter of unrighteousness, an advocate of open wrong, an adversary of God, literature is not very effective without the aid of much talent in ensnaring credulity, the bastard offspring of trust.

Strictly speaking, therefore, to literature taken as a social function, we may ascribe as an attribute neither non-moral qualities nor a truly and profoundly moral office. A scale, degrees, have to be allowed for in literature. What we must allow in French seventeenth-century literature is that it has the ethical quality in a higher degree than the immoral. We must grant that, in morality, it stands above the religious standard of the sixteenth century, and that it is purer than it will be in the

eighteenth century. The element of Christianity is inherent ; it presents moral ideality in a good state of preservation. The breach made therein later is not wide at that period. Moral ideality is a predicate hard to uproot in civilized man ; even the eighteenth century, which destroyed so much of it, could not extinguish it.

But the Protestant "leavening of the lump" was made impossible by a social surgical operation performed on the body of France. To say that, by this operation, the modern peoples generically Latin—with the exception of the Swiss Protestant Republics of French stock—cut themselves adrift from the Middle Ages, and maimed themselves wantonly, may seem paradoxical—though, as a strict historical fact, it is quite right to say that seventeenth-century France is no daughter to the Middle Ages. Nobody will question this asseveration in connection with the so-called *classical* literature of France straight on to the nineteenth century, when that literature passed into the *romantic* form. Why not recognise the same dissentient course in the whole social fabric of France ? This reversal was consciously entered upon in the days of Richelieu (died 1642 ; Mazarin died 1661). It was made complete by the reversal, in 1685, of Henry the Fourth's (the last French liberal king) Toleration Edict, of 1598, which centralized the moral life of the French nation under the one rule of Pope and monarch. During the Middle Ages, the said life was carried on in a decentralized form. There is no use in blinding oneself to, or screening out of sight, that lamentable fact. A glance at the composition of the British State, Church and Society, whithersoever it has been carried, is by comparison irrefragable evidence thereof. Every Protestant must wish that France had continued its growth on the mediæval lines of nation-building.

"But there is no arguing against the event," says Vinet, "and the classical literature bears the taint thereof." Clerical and secular despotism cut Protestantism out of the growing social organism, wherefrom thought suffered much and society no less. Under that combined weight civilian life was borne down, philosophic imagination, with its ideas contributory to social development, was submerged wherever it was a renovating process in religion or a display of theories in the field of metaphysical speculation. It was impossible that such conditions should not narrow and contract the avenues opening up before writers and that the public mind should not be underfed.

The price had to be paid for that kind of languid conformity of public opinion. Its apparent compliance and insensibility show how inanimate it was. Literary activity is, throughout that period, of an "abstract" type. It is not a public affair, or a public voice, or a general spokesman; it has no outer application. Prose and poetry are autonomous concerns; they have no other purpose, no other scope than self-realisation.

## VI.

From Pascal, who was a Jansenist, to Racine, whose spiritual disposition was not averse to it, we pass on easily under Vinet's leadership, faithful to his tenet in literary criticism that the standard of evangelical morals is one whereby all published literature should be judged. Racine gave him satisfaction in three ways: First, he was a man of Protestant leanings as a disciple of Port Royal, the Jansenistic centre of opposition to Jesuitism; secondly, his good taste in dramatic literature is perfect and free from any such spurious admixture as is habitual among those who aim at publicity before perfection; thirdly, he would publish nothing but that which—while presenting perfect dramatic and literary construction on the classic lines of the old Greek plays—represented also to the life the struggle of a would-be noble and generous spirit with adversity, or with some passion of which his soul felt inwardly the inherent guilt, or the moral inferiority to one's better human nature.

From that point of view did Vinet write his volumes on the aspects of French dramatic literature in the seventeenth century. There was happily a distinct harmony in this between the acknowledged French dramatic stage at that time and Vinet's moral prepossessions, as a critic of the examples put before the world by tragedians and comedians. There is, in the masterly dramatic productions of seventeenth-century French art, a decorousness that is unchallengeable. This put Vinet quite at his ease in imprinting upon them the stamp of his approval, as an evangelical moralist bent upon truthful philosophic presentation of realities. He felt that the conformation of civilized modern man is such that the stage and the moral thereof are the principal sources to which his receptive imagination turns for refreshment, nourishment and suggestive impressions, though often finding inducements to yield to the blind impulses of his imitative faculty.

Vinet attached himself particularly to the "Phædra" of Racine, and so must we, if we would derive from his consideration thereof the sum total of his instruction. The topic is the sexual passion which a married woman may conceive for her stepson. The issue is not one that we can now pursue. Racine, a moralist moving within the pale of Christian morals, and Vinet both view this theme in its setting at once carnal and spiritual: a chapter in the morals of family, or domestic, life. Racine, being a dramatic exponent, distributes among persons the destructive forces let in through the breach opened in the family complex. There is a disruption of human instincts which would be harmonious. A distraction in the calls of ethical law is the result; confusion is brought about in holy relationships; the tear and wear of soul transcends the inhibitive faculty; disaster overtakes the sophisticated home and its inmates; the sense of wrong-doing, or suffering from evil, festers.

The transformation of one's resentment to compassion and pity, effected by Racine, is a masterpiece of art, and shows, says Vinet, the inspiration of a Christian directing the hand of the playwright. To Christianity alone, says Vinet, belongs this pity of a unique cast which goes out to the criminal as to a fellow-Christian, and is urged upon the Christian by the sense of brotherhood which came down to him from the Crucifixion, the sense of a common sin and redemption. In that light, the state of sin is the occasion of charity. None but the religion which looks upon the state of sin as the highest misfortune that can befall man could generate such compassion.

## VII.

Turning our attention to Vinet's attitude toward those thinkers professedly writers on morals, who belong to French literature, where they are classed as "moralistes," of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we are first struck by the fact that not one of them is a divine or a Protestant, while their critic Vinet is a divine, a Protestant, and, to the French, a foreigner, though, by conformity of mind and in language, a Latin like them. That the Protestant mind should have no representative among the moralists of France admitted to the first gallery in national literature, leaves that literature incomplete, one-sided, in one most important respect. Neither Rabelais nor Calvin are moralists in the philosophical sense, though, strange to say, both wore clerical vestments, being under that dress as



the poles asunder. French moralists of acknowledged literary standing are all alike in this, that they are of Romanist nurture or atheistically inclined.

Vinet distinguishes the descriptive moralist, the political moralist, the poetic moralist, when he gives his definition of what a Christian may expect of a poet—that he be true and not interested in vice. Indeed, says Vinet, if a poet speaks with truth, he has spoken with the tongue of a Christian. All moral truth belongs to Christianity, because Christianity, transcendently true, comprehends, and is comprehensive of, all truth—or, at least, expects allegiance thereto by personal confession, or by open profession of one's belief or disbelief.

Thereby poets who have, neither in their writings, nor perhaps in their course of life, respected enough the precepts of morality, have none the less been, unaware, Christians and prophets in the pictures they have formed of man's nature: so real it is that men may render homage where it is due without realizing the truth of their witnessing. In that way many an enemy of the Christian faith has served it with the one hand while raising the other against it. In that way the book-cases of a Christian may be enlarged by the accession of many books which the author did not conceive in the Christian spirit, which he none the less illustrates, whatever his purpose.

Are right morals founded on true religion, or is the trueness of religion to be brought to the test of morals? Vinet does not hesitate. Inferior morals proclaim unfailingly religious inferiority, using the Gospel of Christ as a standard, or criterion, to discriminate by. Are morals an idea, or are they a feeling? Do moralists set up a principle or do they supply a want? On to this dilemma Vinet hinges, as it were, a remarkable description of the progress of "moral liberty" in the Anglo-Saxon world. Calvin and Knox did not claim liberty as a philosophic entity. They resisted an unjust use of power, and their disciples appropriated that freedom for themselves. They did not bring logical proofs of their right: they exercised it. Did they make of liberty, for so much, a matter of belief? Barely, but they claimed it for their creed. Slowly only was "soul-liberty" recognized to be a universal good, a generic common right, claimable in terms of religion, to be a guardian of the public and private moral life. This is the Evangelical liberalism which the Church of Rome does not grant. "*Otez la morale de la religion, rien ne reste du Christ.*"

And then Vinet animadvertes upon the small part which the freeing of the will plays in the literary productions of the essayists and other philosophic writers who rose to fame—men of great intrinsic merit—during the classical age of French literature, and gave it a distinctive stamp. One doctrine, one practice, one Church, one State. There was a dearth of public moral sense, because public life was starved out.

### VIII.

Entering the eighteenth century we draw nearer and nearer to the French Revolution. If it could give itself a voice, this century, in France, would call itself the philosophic age—*le siècle philosophique*—which is a misnomer in so far as we would have some regard for the meaning of the word. Every scribbler—and there were legions, hosts, hordes of scribblers—styled himself a philosopher. Every writer, every talker, was merely the exponent of a philosophy in which speech and writing were as unphilosophic as anything could be. Among the prejudices which that century fought religion was reputed the most hateful, and was presented at large as being the most odious:

In psychology those philosophers were “sensationalists”—that is, they reduced the mind to an aggregate of physical senses and built out of them that superior complex which we call the soul. The more sensationalist, the more philosophic; the more philosophic, the more was repudiated the doctrine of spirituality in the life of the soul.

By that time the Protestants of France, had they been allowed to live and multiply there, would have been numbered in millions, and have fully counterbalanced in public and intellectual service those pernicious writers and speakers. They would have been Latins of the second birth—regenerate Latins. The blame of Vinet rests upon those “philosophers,” just as it rests upon the theocratic Scholastics.

Place a spiritual force like that of Calvin opposite Bossuet in the seventeenth century, and another such spiritual force as Wesley against Voltaire in the eighteenth, how the whole face of French political history would have been changed, its place in Europe made incomparably greater, its inner growth enriched, and its world-power enlarged!

An abyss yawns between Bossuet and Voltaire. Protestantism would have filled it with solid rock, strewn it over with fruitful

earth, raised from it an abundant crop. If public homicide practised upon two royal heads may be slipped in as a hyphen between two incongruous events, please compare Cromwell's means of power and those used by Voltaire ! What a chasm !

Such was the effect of the forcible suppression of a third, an intermediate, civic group, a third mouthpiece of national conscience, will and wisdom, says Vinet. The Age of the Reformation had come and gone. Protestantism, fired out of its cradle, was extinct in the French mind-complex. The Reformation was a re-statement of the moral element in the essence of Christianity, that very substance, marrow and sap of any spiritual existence. The Latin mind had foregone that benefit. As a power among men of Latin blood, conformity and virtue, that benefit had retired into the Latin-French social units of Switzerland, and behold there national growth through the centuries, a work of peace, progress and concord !

Bossuet was Cromwell's contemporary. He exclaimed, in his "Funeral Oration on the Death of Henrietta of France," that it was given to Cromwell to "lead a people astray and to prevail against kings." Which was worse, we would ask Bossuet's shade : Cromwell or Voltaire ?—for kingship, first ; for religion, after ; for the greatness of a people, last ? And what a responsibility for Bossuet that we should be able to put the question ? We word the query without respect for political homicide, which, to our mind, is plain murder.

## IX.

It is with a sense of personal relief that we turn, with Vinet, from the Voltairian thought to that of Montesquieu, the really wise man, we think, of that period, in the theoretical handling of public questions. From him Vinet quotes the following characteristic passages :—

"A pious man and an atheist are alike in this, that both are ever ready to talk on the subject of religion : the one speaks of what he loves, the other of that which he fears."

As a public thinker, his aversion for atheism bears testimony to the straight workings of his mind. His distaste for atheistic doctrine was rooted in his knowledge of the true wants and actual case attaching to a human commonwealth.

Montesquieu, says Vinet, understood Christianity far better than the would-be ethical thinkers of his day, while putting

the matter in its philosophic aspect. Vinet lays particular stress on what he says on "soul-liberty":—"What does most injure a Government is the devising of a scheme or system for bringing all the citizens into conformity to one opinion in religious matters, when the circumstances are totally averse to such an exhibition of indiscreet zeal for the outer perfection of the Republic . . . . While increasing problematically the number of heads counted within the fold, the number of *men* is reduced."

"The principal source of so much misfortune among the Greeks was that they never grasped the nature of, nor drew the right limits between, the ecclesiastic and secular power. This brought about endless strayings away from the right path in public affairs. This essential distinction in authority, the one on which rests the tranquillity of a commonwealth, is grounded not only on religion, but also is founded in nature and accepted by reason. They both require that two things, which are really separate and distinct, and which can only subsist conjointly by being kept asunder, should never exist in a state of confusion."

## X.

We have to pass from Montesquieu to J. J. Rousseau and Mme. de Staël, that is from the strictly philosophic and classical, to the imaginative and romantic exponents of "morals" in French literature.

What has been the contribution of Protestant Latinity to general literature? We put the question as one to be answered by Vinet, an ethical and literary critic of evangelical persuasion.

His whole task is confined to two personalities—one, a vagabond in the world of letters, J. J. Rousseau, died 1778; and a woman, Madame de Staël, who died in 1817. These two names carry us over two generations, or three even: those which prepared and then either endured or carried out the French Revolution; that which lived through the first Napoleonic Empire; two critical ages, one following closely upon the other, and doing each its allotted work in a direction totally opposed to the other, whether in statecraft, social philosophy, or general aspirations.

With Vinet we must begin by throwing Rousseau overboard as a private individual. He has to be reckoned with entirely as a public writer. The private life of Mme. de Staël is quite presentable; that of Rousseau has to be cast aside and overlooked

altogether; his constructive imagination and his heart are utterly incongruous. The Protestants of his generation disgorged him as a man of no character, morals or credit; they regarded him as a quite abnormal product. Yet he was no unnatural product of the Genevan atmosphere, which he hardly breathed at all in his conscious days. Psycho-Analysis would probably find in him complex hereditaments accruing from a long and continuous tale of self-repression and compression among his forebears, a kind of resorption ending in a discharge of promiscuous putrid matter accumulated at last in *one* man.

So, like Vinet, we take up Rousseau as a Protestant public writer, an eccentric Genevan contributor to a general didactic philosophy. In that field his authority, righteous and wrongful, has kept growing immensely since Vinet considered him from the standpoint of an evangelical Christian. A lot of excellent public work has proceeded from his impressive teaching, from his attitude of protest against the social perversity of his day. That his experience of social life and of social ills was acquired in France, when he was in daily contact, under the *ancien régime*, with Church, Society and State; that the French overthrowers thereof claimed him as their prophet, apostle and inspirer; that he still thrills the Latin mind; that his influence is acknowledged outside the Latin world; that his place in the very first rank of literature is nowhere disputed—make of this man, who had no character, a great character in history.

Perhaps the only point concerning him on which Roman and Protestant discipline agree was his mistrust of the public playhouse. Here Vinet finds an opportunity for contrasting the English dramatic art at its height with the French Stage. He says the Stage does not set up a doctrine, like the Pulpit or the Chair. It clothes an idea with flesh, braces it up with bone and muscle. Any professed philosopher must view with interest such impersonations when they are the work of psychic genius. And so may any serious-minded spectator. The interest of *Macbeth*, for instance, lies in the perceived fatefulness of crime; it takes possession, step by step, of the human soul, from the germ laid there by an evil thought, on to the horrors of the final catastrophe.

Vinet notices, with regard to comedy, when an amorous plot—and what plot!—is generally the staple of the play, that Rousseau inveighs loudly against the part cast for women. As a rule, woman is portrayed in her wickedness, or merely held up

to scorn and thrown over to masculine outrage ; and there is the woman-actress, false enough to her sex, to play the derisive part. What about the respect to which every human society should bind itself toward woman ? The dignity of woman is inseparable from reserve and modesty. And who of us would have for his daughter or sister a woman who held herself, her sex, and her function so cheap ? Young people are misled, particularly young women.

The chief advance made by original Christianity is that it raised the status of women. Why should literature be exempt from this, be irresponsible, or be held irresponsible ? And what is a bad novel, if not the Stage brought into the home ? Should the gratuitous portraiture of the failures and errors of the sex be a sure refuge for immorality ?

And here Vinet, with Rousseau, means both sexes, because that which degrades the one degrades also the other. Indeed, the public office of the imaginative art is to be poetical. Yet Rousseau, in many respects, was ignoble.

Of Rousseau compared with Voltaire, Vinet says that his social work would have been constructive. He was an intensely earnest spokesman. Born among the Geneva artisans, he belonged to the people. Rising above the labouring masses, he bore along with him most distinctly the imprint, the stigma of primitive humanity ; his scriptural eloquence was as a storm-wind blowing from a cave round the heads of men.

There was something peculiarly apt in this, because the next exponent of his doctrine was to be a woman springing up from the upper and educated class in the same Protestant quarter of Europe as produced Rousseau from its lower social strata.

## XI.

Our opportunity is most valuable in our learning from Mme. de Staël what place might be allotted to woman as an exponent of ethical philosophy in its application through literature to the moral progress of nations, nations whose historical progress, like that of France, has been marred, or has been made incomplete, by the absence of Protestant culture.

Mme. de Staël, writing in the light of Protestantism, drew the attention of that too much self-contained nation, at a time when its native moral force was very near exhaustion, to the mainsprings of collective moral activity in England and Germany.

By Mme. de Staël the Protestant mind of England and that of Lutheran Germany were interpreted in Latin parlance and celebrated in the finest strains of the French language.

This interpretation found such general acceptance and was of such persuasiveness and eloquence that serious improvements were brought to the unilateral culture which had been unbroken for three hundred years and had come to shipwreck on the rock of a revolution; culminating in a military dictatorship which closed the gates of Paris against her, the prophetic liberalism, but could not stifle her voice echoing in from beyond the border.

At last the true architect seemed to be at work on the future cultural unity of Europe, in the liberal sense of the word Culture.

As much as Rousseau and Voltaire were irresponsible personalities, so much was Mme. de Staël endowed with a stern manlike sense of social responsibility. According to Vinet, Protestantism does develop in the layman, in the common man, a sense of responsibility to God, to his fellow-men and to himself, a blend of the utmost utility to orderly progress throughout the world.

By discrimination, and as by a nice adjustment of contraries, Vinet passes from Rousseau to Mme. de Staël in criticism just as the sceptre of royalty passed from the one to the other in the French world of letters.

The association of the three aforementioned obligations was with her as inherent a hereditament as they were dissociated, inconsistent in, and contemned by, the contemporary schools of practical thought. She expressed this union in sentences which cannot be translated with the same shortness, terseness, and force of conviction in English:—“ *Il faut que les hommes déifient la morale elle-même, quand ils refusent de connaître un Dieu pour son auteur.*” Or else: “ *On ne trouve que dans le bien un espace suffisant pour la pensée.*” Or else: “ *Le bien est la patrie de la pensée.*”

Here is Vinet, commenting upon those aphorisms by which ethics and philosophy are made one, when he says: To disregard, to push aside, righteousness when in search of truth is to give up truth, since truth cannot be parted from the right. Without truth righteousness is untrue. Righteousness is primary truth, supreme truth, the truth of truths.

When one reads through the works of Mme. de Staël in the chronological order, one sees her getting nearer and nearer to

Evangelical Christianity. Ethics, says Vinet, are contained in dogma, and dogma is contained in ethics. Gospel dogmas are supernatural facts, in which the corresponding moral idea, or teaching, finds expression. Thus, in the Gospel, everything is ethical, including the dogmatic teaching.

These are many reasons wherefor intellectually and critically inclined women should make themselves acquainted with the character of Mme. de Staël. At the beginning of the nineteenth century she is the true harbinger of what Anglo-Saxon women were to lay claim to, namely, a raising of their station in intellectual and social respects to the level on which stand good men, though one may fear that, ethically, even these have not yet attained to the elevated passions that Mme. de Staël bore witness to in her life, work and ethical strife, with all the strength of her Protestant thoroughness and native ardour.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN, in moving a vote of thanks to Professor Roget, remarked that the meeting could not but be conscious of a distinct obligation to the Honorary Secretary who, in the absence of the lecturer, had read the paper to excellent purpose. From first to last the treatment of Latin Culture by Professor Roget bears an impress of distinction. The writer had shown himself to be thoroughly at home with his subject, and one could not but feel that in every section he had more to say—more pertinent facts at command, more searching judgments to advance. A Swiss in sentiment, Professor Roget shows himself to be an Englishman in his thorough appreciation of the British point of view. In conclusion, the Chairman indicated the paper as one which he was sure would well repay a second perusal.

(The vote was accorded with acclamation.)

Miss HAMILTON LAW: Does anyone think that the reason for much we have been hearing of, in connection with Latin Culture, is that the Latin mind has never yet fully got the answer to Pilate's question, "What is truth?"

Anyone who has been much in foreign society cannot but have been struck with the difference between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon minds. The former seems lacking in truthfulness, the conversation



is often coarse and lacking in purity of tone. In fact, the general moral standard is lower in the former than in the latter. Without Truth as a foundation Righteousness cannot be built up.

Isaiah writes : " Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth " (Isa. lix, 14, 15).

Mr. WILLIAM C. EDWARDS said : Vinet was one of God's choicest gifts to Switzerland. He was a man that had begun at the beginning. He had realized that he was a fallen man—a sinner, and he had come as a *repentant* sinner to Christ and known the joys of conversion : he had received the witness of the Spirit : he had the blessed consciousness of the indwelling of God in his heart.

When reading Vinet, one is reminded of the Apostle Paul (Eph. iii, 4). Vinet understood something of his (Paul's) knowledge of " the mystery of Christ." I cannot do better than, with your permission, read a few translations from Vinet's writings.

Concerning the fall of Adam, Vinet writes :—

" In the person of Adam, humanity committed a crime that each of its members repeats and confirms, so to speak, as far as in him lies.

" This crime is that of denying God. But no. It is something still worse ; it consists in saying, ' There is a God, but I will act as though there were none.' Now this crime is fundamental, the parent of all crimes, and just in the same way that man, had he not committed it, would have committed no other ; so, having committed it, he is capable of all others, for all spring from this one source.

" This doctrine of the fall of man, who is there that will receive it ? No one, and yet every one. It irritates human pride, but it finds an echo in the human conscience, and conscience will finally prove stronger than pride."

Hear what he feels concerning conversion :—

" Everything is mysterious, nothing is magical, in the process of conversion ; the laws of our nature are observed therein, and we do not for a moment cease to be men.

" God could, with a single word, create new heavens, even within the limits of the old ; but the secret and obscure birth into the true life of a single human soul is a more important event than the creation of a new universe in the deserts of space—if space have deserts.

" God might, with one breath of his mouth, sweep bare the

firmament, annihilate those planets, and those suns amongst which the globe on which the human race agitates itself, is but a grain of sand on the shore of the ocean, or a drop of water in that ocean ; but *this fearful catastrophe would be but a vulgar accident compared with the final destruction of one of those souls that God has made capable of contemplating, understanding, and adoring him.*"

Here is another striking passage :—

" A religion is neither a law nor a doctrine ; it is a fact that unites the heart and will of man to the Author of his being.

" The manner in which we acquire the accent of a language is a striking illustration of what we call synthesis. Religion is learnt in the same way. It is characteristic of true religion, as of all true systems, *that each truth contains the whole truth, and each detail, rigidly followed up, entails the whole system.*"

Gospel Liberty is thus described :—

" The more complete the dependence to which religion submits the individual, the higher as to all other relations the independence it confers. *All religion is liberty ; by giving us to one master, it frees us from the rest.*"

His experiences of " assurance " :—

" What is commonly called assurance ought rather to be called the consciousness of salvation, for one has this sentiment of salvation, as one has with regard to moral life, the sentiment of wishing to do right or of having loved ; and with regard to bodily life, the sentiment of being well, being alive.

That which is called assurance of salvation instead of consciousness of salvation, is God in the heart ; is that communion of will and of mind between God and man which man cannot evoke."

The Love of God inspires him in the following passage :—

" The Love of God is at once the culmination and the annihilation of the me. A lively sense of happiness, an indefinite power of renunciation, combine to form its essential character. To obey God is the supreme duty, but the supreme felicity as well. To love is at once to give all and to have all ; we give our hearts, but the reward of that gift lies in the gift itself ; and the sacrifice of the me, in this mysterious state of the soul, is itself the delight of the me.

" Everything for God and nothing for me ; such is the motto of love.

“ Everything for God, provided God be mine. Does he who loves God deceive himself? Is he not in the truth? *And if Christianity alone gives power to love him, must not Christianity be exclusively true?* ”

Lieut.-Colonel G. MACKINLAY wrote: I have had the pleasure of meeting Professor Roget, a good many years ago, in Switzerland, and found him a skilled mountaineer and a most agreeable companion. Some months later he came to England and gave lectures on the Swiss military system, and he was most helpful in inciting us to expand our small regular army to what it became during the Great War—a nation in arms.

He has also given us here in the Victoria Institute valuable lectures on the subjects in which we are interested. This last lecture is one of his best, and it traces the remarkable European progress from the darkness, intolerance, and oppression of the Middle Ages to the freedom—intellectual, political and religious—of more modern times.

We owe much to Geneva and to the Swiss in leading the way in freedom of thought in the critical times under consideration. Geneva furnished a safe home in those days for oppressed French Christians, and Switzerland resembled England in benefiting from the arrival of persecuted Huguenots. But even in Switzerland it was not all peace, and we notice how Vinet had the courage of his convictions, and resigned various professorships sooner than resign his religious convictions. We notice (pp. 94, 95) Vinet compares the tendencies of English and of French literature, and his findings should fill us with thankfulness, as the verdict of an honest and capable onlooker.

Union of churches is much to the front at the present time; the paper before us may well make us pause before giving way to any sacrifice of principle in order to obtain outward uniformity. Let us remember how much we owe to former spiritual leaders like Calvin, Knox, and Wesley (*see* pp. 100, 101, 102) before we fall into dull and lifeless uniformity. Let us consider the United States, England, and Switzerland: in all of them material progress is evidently due to the “soul-liberty” (p. 104) of which Vinet speaks.

Vinet and Roget wisely trace the progress of woman, fully declared in the New Testament, but only gradually recognized in the waves of freedom which have gradually swept over Europe after the dark

ages (p. 106). Vinet states wisely that both man and woman progress together, and conversely what degrades the one degrades the other. Vinet also well says that Protestantism develops (p. 107) a sense of human responsibility to God and to our fellow-man.

This is a thoughtful and most useful lecture at this time when changes of startling rapidity come upon us ; we do well to consider our ways, and carefully choose the right and reject the wrong, and we warmly thank Professor Roget for his wisely planned and instructive paper.

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS wrote : Many of us have hardly realized, that side by side with a French literature which had rejected the purifying and liberalizing influence of the Bible, and was rushing into a blank atheism, Protestant Switzerland kept alive a true flame of moral discernment. The poverty of strictly French literature on its religious side serves to show what we English and our German cousins owe to the Bible.

We learn from Professor Roget's paper what France might have been in her literature, had she not put aside the Protestant Spirit with its Bible. It also warns us what English literature may become if our youth should cease to be brought up on the Bible. On the one hand the politician would keep it out to propitiate the Papist and the blind sectarian, while the so-called "modern" teacher would sap its moral power by resolving it into myth.

Having regard to certain words of criticism expressed in reference to the Latin mind, the CHAIRMAN observed that, were Professor Roget present, he would doubtless direct attention to the fact that his subject was not Latin *Christian* Culture, but Latin Culture ; and this is made evident by the manner in which he brings in Racine and Rousseau with other non-Christian writers, and shows to what an extent, in their work, they were led to occupy a point of view largely in harmony with Christian ethics.