difference—do at least something to alleviate the miseries to which
this unhappy class is now subjected.

That the existing state of affairs is hopelessly bad, and if left alone
will go from bad to worse, must be obvious to all those who have
looked beneath the surface. The women who are the victims of the
existing system may be roughly divided into two classes, the married
women and the girls. The results are bad in both cases. It will
generally be admitted that the first duty of a mother should be to
her home and her children. The value of maintaining a high standard
in the home life of our people can hardly be overrated, for upon it
depends not only the present but also the future of our race. Yet as
things stand it is just this home life which is degraded. These poor
women have no time for the pure, tender delights of ‘motherhood,
no opportunity of attending properly to the hundred and one little
duties which cluster around the word ‘home.’ Is it to be wondered
at if under these circumstances thousands of children grow up physically,
morally, and mentally unsound, and go to swell that degraded
class into which, as the late Canon Kingsley pointed out, the weakest
as well as the worst members of the community show a perpetual
tendency to sink?

And what of the thousands of seamstresses who are unmarried,
who stand alone, who cannot, by their labour earn an honest living
sufficient to keep body and soul together? How do they subsist?
This brings us face to face with the saddest and most degrading phase
of our social problem. Working from dawn until eve under condi-
tions too often subservient to every sense of decency and comfort,
for a wage cut down ever lower and lower and by the fierce competition
against which they have to contend, hundreds are driven yearly to
expose a precarious existence by means of an immoral life. A large
proportion of the ‘unfortunate’ class are, or have been, seamstresses.

To check this hydra-headed evil, religious bodies, philanthropic
agencies, rescue committees, all are striving, but it is to be feared
with comparatively little success. All honour to their efforts, for the
motives which animate them is good. But it cannot be too clearly
pointed out that the real crux of the question is an industrial one.
Until something has been done to place the price of these poor women’s
labour upon a fair level, we cannot hope that they will be able by
honest toil to lead virtuous and self-respecting lives.

Uneque quo, Domine? Lord, how long—how long? That is the
new ‘Song of the Shirt,’ the same in its essence as that which Hood
sang half a century ago, but greater now in its intensity.

Who will hear it?

W. H. Wilkins,

The Editor of The Nineteenth Century cannot undertake
to return unaccepted MSS.
‘LA JEUNE BELGIQUE

LITERARY

Paris has of late been distraught, and is indeed still seriously exercised, by the real or imaginary hurt to French literature from the so-called Invasion des barbarus.

With one accord—since the recent effervescence concerning the fantastic cult of Walt Whitman by a band of young writers, who would not read the American poet if they could, and know him only by a few haphazard translations—the foe has been indicated in the north-east: l’ennemi, c’est le Belge!

The storm has been brewing for some time: practically, since the inauguration of the new literary movement in Belgium which began about 1880. A year or two ago it seemed as though this storm were about to pass into balmy weather, for the ear of literary Paris was charmed by the praises of M. Octave Mirbeau for a young Belgian writer, one Maurice Maeterlinck. But the inevitable revolt came. It might have been postponed, had not Maeterlinck’s dramas been enacted on the Parisian stage. The literary Parisian can stand much in the way of novelty, but he is as sensitive to dramatic proprieties as a young widow to the attitude of men. The ‘wrath of Latene’ has come forth to challenge and vanquish Belgian assurance. The Belgian national ideal is crucified in the martyred reputation of M. Maeterlinck. A year or two ago this representative Franco-Fleming was a hero in Paris. He was credited with more of the deep world-sorrow than the author of Hamlet: he had more romance than the author of Romeo and Juliet. Now he is a barbarian, a foreigner, a Teutonic dreamer, a tiresome person whose chosen tongue happens to be French, but whose mind is Flemish, whose manner is Walloon: a mediocrity, and—for there is depth beneath depth—a Belgian mediocrity!

The actual aspect of what François Coppée calls la maladie septentrionale, however, is surely indicative of a condition of temporary disturbance merely. ‘L’exotisme c’est tout-l’heure une curiosité normale et fortifiante.’

‘Après Tolstoi, Ibsen; après Ibsen, Strindberg; après Strindberg, Maeterlinck’—this is the dolorous refrain of that literary protestant, M. Pessard. The polemic indulged in by him and his more eminent

1835—‘LA JEUNE BELGIQUE’

conférences, MM. François Coppée, Lemaître, Theuriet, Barrès, and Francisco Salmeron against M. Maeterlinck is in reality directed against the restless alert, active, even revolutionary band of young writers known, more or less appropriately, by the collective designation la Jeune Belgique.

An influential band of Bellic writers exists, then? To many the information will doubtless have the attraction of novelty. We have all heard of Maurice Maeterlinck: a few know that one of the most remarkable of living realists, Georges Remarque, writes now in Flemish, now in French, but always in passionate accord with the racial and national Belgian sentiment. Of the rest, most of us know nothing. The name of the late Émile de Laveleye is familiar, but as that of a publicist or occasional critic, not as that of a man of letters in the strict use of the term.

For more than a decade, as it happens, an interesting and highly significant literary movement has evolved in Belgium. This renaissance, for such it is, is quite distinct from the slowlywaning Flemish literary revival which took on a new vitality about the time of the Franco-German conflict; and, on the other hand, from the somewhat insipid ‘French tradition,’ which has the actual or partly imaginary status of official and conservative recognition.

This movement, be it noted, arose under conditions and in circumstances practically similar to those which determined in France the foundation of the famous Parnasse of 1866. The aim of the Belgic, as of the French Parnassiens was, in the words of one of the most noteworthy, not to create a particular poetic school, but to bring about a reaction against literary ignorance, disorder, and general lack of culture (amorphaeis ambiant); to open a little private chapel, but to clear and garnish afresh ‘la grande église où régnent la religion désintéressée de l’art et le respect de la forme.’

This brotherhood of a Parnasse belgique has naturally had its schisms and defections. Its latest apostate, M. Gilkin, admits this; but he adds that since 1887 (when La Parnasse de la Jeune Belgique was published) the group of new men has remained almost intact, and is proud of having maintained steadfastly the demands of the fundamental laws of French poetry without hurt to, or transformation of, those particular aspects and methods of thought and sentiment characteristic of every patriotic Belgian—the legacy of his race, of his northern climate, and of that political condition which has given his country an intermediate situation between the most powerful,
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Belgians claim that they are producing a national literature. Many influential French critics refuse to acknowledge this Belgian literary output as anything more than the transfrontier radiation of the central luminary. Other and less trustworthy students declare that, meanwhile, Belgian literature is a dependent ally (still, an ally, not lineal progeny), and that ere long it will probably become as distinctly and recognisably national as is possible for any literature expressed in a language which is its own by adoption only or through complex accident.

To one who has closely studied the whole movement in its intimate and extra-national bearings, as well as in its individual manifestations and aberrations, its particular and collective achievement in the several literary genres, there is no question as to the radical distinction between Belgian and French literature. Whether there be a great future for the first is almost entirely dependent on the concurrent political condition of Belgium. If Germany were to appropriate the country, it is almost certain that only the Flemish spirit would retain its independent vitality, and even that probably only for a generation or two. But if Belgium were absorbed by France, Brussels would almost immediately become as insignificant a literary centre as is Lyons or Bordeaux, or be, at most, not more independent of Paris than is Marseilles. Literary Belgium would be a memory within a year of the hoisting of the French tricolour from the Scheldt to Liége. Meanwhile the whole energy of 'Young Belgium' is, consciously or unconsciously, concentrated in the effort to withstand Paris.

Of course, everyone who follows the drift of continental literature knows that Belgium is, at least, above the productive level of Portugal or Greece. But, even in France, the misapprehension is too prevalent that this sudden renaissance, amid the Flemish and Walloon 'barbarians,' concurs with the advent of Maurice Maeterlinck.

The author of *La Princesse Maleine* is a man of genius. His, no doubt, is the most interesting literary personality among the many more or less interesting personalities of 'Young Belgium.' But he is not (pace M. Octave Mirbeau) a Belgic Shakespeare; he is not, in his dramatic method, the absolute innovator he has been represented to be; and he is not the chief poet, or even one of the leading poets, of his country. In a word, he is one of a group, and is himself, as a literary force, as directly the outcome of circumstances as the group to which he adheres is the natural result of the causes which induced a Belgian renaissance.

No doubt, an adequate account of this renaissance would have to comprise the Flemish as well as the Walloon and Gallic aims and accomplishment. It is impracticable, naturally, to attempt even an outline of such an account in the present article. We must consider Belgic literature 'd'expression française' posterior to its inoculation with its most fortunate strain, that which the critics call le flandrinisme.

We all know the national motto of Belgium: 'Union is strength.' The ablest writers of the Franco-Flemish Netherlands recognised its aptness. There was no room for a national Flemish literature, nor yet could the Franco-Belgians hold their own against Gallic influences without alliance, and, indeed, practical identification with the patriotic sons of Flanders. Fusion had already gone far; the new movement had begun, when, in 1881, Henri Conscience, at the end of his notable speech before the Royal Academy of Belgium, on the 'Histoire et Tendances de la Littérature Flamande,' concluded with these significant, often quoted, and, to a Belgian, inspiring words—

Flamands, Wallons,
Ce ne sont là que des prénoms:
Belgo est notre nom de famille!

This was a note often sounded, but not listened to, throughout the country, from the Dutch Schelde to the French Meuse, till Henri Conscience uttered it with an earnestness which, coming from him, carried conviction. So far back as five and forty years ago the Flemish poet Nolet de Brauwre urged the same plea: 'Let us all put our lutes into one accord, and dedicate our music to our native land—the native land of each of us, whether Walloon or Fleming!'

No movement of vital importance is ever made. It must grow. The men must be in evidence before they congregate in a league, as there must be natural leaders in a mob or an army before manifold causes bring the needed men to the front. Thus was it with 'la jeune Belgique' of the *Parnasse* of 1887, the 'Young Belgium' which looks to Henri Conscience and Picard with reverence, but whose aims are inspired, whose minds are influenced, whose language is coloured, by a passionate modernity which has little heed for what is of the past in point of manner and selection. The designation had been bandied about a good deal—had indeed been used as the name of a periodical—but was not of national import till the publication, in 1887, of *La Parnasse des Poètes Belges*, the *pronunciamento* by the band of writers who had definitively adopted the signal appellation 'la jeune Belgique' and the implied motto *Poe Art*.

The movement as we now know it, may be said to begin—in so far as any complicated literary development can be said to begin in any one year, or through the propulsion of any one writer—with a significant little volume of verse published in 1876: M. Théodore Hannon's *Vingt-quatre Chansons de Sonnets*. This is where we first hear definitely the new note. It is the note of *Parnassian* modernity—a note of revolt, of a revolt as distinct from the cheap
cynicism of the Byronic school as from the purely intellectual pessimism which has long been the vogue in Germany: of a reversion to the old monkish doctrine that we are all, men and women, thoroughly given over to the Devil, and that no good thing can come out of modern life (with a paradoxical harping upon its carnal delights which savours of sympathetic enjoyment rather than of repudiation); and of conviction that not to be neurotic is to be outside the pale of endurable existence, and that to be a contented bourgeois is to be three damned.

With this modern note there is always aspiration: too often, however, we find the aspiration, here among these young Belgians as elsewhere, somewhat passé, not to say got up for the occasion. Not quite infrequently, I admit, I have been reminded of a sentence of Mr. Richard Whiteing's in his witty and charming romance *The Island: the Adventures of a Person of Quality*: "The great mark of all progressive nations is that struggle of each man to make some other do his dirty work for him, which is commonly known as aspiration for the higher life."

But the modern note in its wider and finer sense is also to be discerned among the Belgian authors even of the elder generation. We find it markedly in Charles de Coster, for instance: an eminent writer with whose death in 1879 the old régime gave place to the new, though not rudely or abruptly, as all Belgium had, in more or less degree, been wrought preparedly by the genuine power and new spirit in *Légendes Flamandes* (1857), *Contes Brabançons* (1861), and particularly in his now famous *chef-d'œuvre*, *La Légende d'Ullenspiegel* (1868). This note is likewise audible, it goes almost without saying, in the work of Henri Conscience. But with these exceptions the Belgium phalanx, before 1880, was not a formidable one. No one now reads Desmoulins or Baillet, Gillieron or Nizet, or even Maurice Duhamel. So slightly were the new men recognised, that in 1880 an eminent critic spoke of Charles Potvin as 'our best living poet.'—Potvin, an able and conscientious littérateur, but certainly no master of words either in prose or verse. Even then certain writers had struck an unmistakable note. Even then the strong spirits of the elder and younger generation were knocking loudly at the door; and Edmond Picard, Georges Eekhoud, Max Waller, Camille Lemonnier, Georges Rodenbach, Emile Verhaeren, Charles Van Lerberghe, Fernand Severin, and others of scarce less note, had actually crossed the threshold.

'Young Belgium' was fortunate in the friends it won or who voluntarily welcomed it with gladly proffered aid. To two men in particular the writers of to-day owe a deep debt—to the veteran Edmond Picard, for his own able work in some degree, still more for his critical proclamations collectively entitled *Pro Arté*; and, above all, for his incessant heed and ready advice, for that sympathy and helpfulness which have won for him the appellation 'the Belgian Mecenas';

and to the late Maurice Warlomont ('Max Waller'), the generally recognised founder of *La Jeune Belgique* as we know it to-day, a man of singular charm, ability, and influence.

Even in Brussels (in the words of a satirical critic), one might, in 1883, have heard of the existence of the league of *Les Jeanes*. The movement was then in full swing, the wave bearing on its crest, among others, Picard, and Max Waller, Lemonnier, and Verhaeren, and Eekhoud. With the foundation of the now rare periodical *La Pléiade,* and its more robust confrère *La Jeune Belgique*, this movement had at last become a recognised factor. Of course absolute solidarity was not to be expected. In 1886, Camille Lemonnier went to Paris, there to begin a brilliant career with *Happeg-Chat*, the *Corsair* of Belgium, as it has been called. There, moreover, were already domiciled Georges Rodenbach (a Franco-Flemish poet and novelist of genuine talent, lost in Paris journalism), the well-known J. K. Haymans, Léopold Stapparau, and G. Vautier. Other and more serious schisms or departures took place, but the essential solidarity of the movement, more particularly in poetic literature, became evident by the highly significant and important *Parnasse de la Jeune Belgique*, published, as already stated, in 1889. Thereafter it was no longer seemly even for the most adverse critics to deny that Belgium had at last produced a literature to which it might make a fair claim as distinctively its own.

To return to the beginning of the movement. Since what Belgian historians call their romantic epoch, the generation younger than that just on the wave at the time of the Franco-Prussian war knew only five native authors of whom it could be proud—Charles de Coster, Henri Conscience, Camille Lemonnier, Octave Pirmaz, and André Van Hasselt. Of these only the third was in 'war paint' towards the end of the seventh decade of the century.

To found and carry on, in the front of organised opposition and countenamly, official snubs, irresponsible enmity, and, for a time, the profound public apathy, a periodical entitled *La Jeune Belgique*, with a programme obnoxious to the great majority of possible readers, and a staff composed of writers either wholly unfamiliar or known mainly by disrepute, was a creditable as well as a hazardous undertaking. To Max Waller, as Maurice Warlomont to the last preferred to be designated, this high credit is due. At his call to arms he was joined at once by such brilliant lieutenants as Eekhoud, Albert Giraud, Emile Verhaeren, Iwan Gilkin; later by almost every poet and romantist who has made any reputation whatever. To colourless verse, to effete or anemic prose, this phalanx, recruited and led by

*Not to be confused with *La Pléiade* published in Paris; though in that still rare periodical, I may add, Maeterlinck (then content to sign his Flemish baptismal name, Moors), and I believe also Van Lerberghe, Grégoire Le Roy, and perhaps Michael Mikhael, made each his début in literature.
Max Waller, responded, says a necrologist of M. Warlomont—"par
des vers puissants et des proses pleines d'exubérance, de santé et
de vie.'

Max Waller will always hold a high place in the history of modern
Belgian literature. But he will hold it as a pioneer. In a sense he
is a captain of a new departure; as Dryden was in England, as
Chateaubriand was in France, as Goethe was in Germany. But he was
neither a Goethe, nor a Chateaubriand, nor a Dryden. Meanwhile it is
natural his countrymen should be kindly in their praise of his work.
What he has left will not, however, survive, save for the student.
When the personal tradition of the man is no longer extant he will have
ceased to be remembered by Dumas, Lydie, de Lysy, or Grétry
Friedemanns, or even by his earlier and most notable prose book La
Vie Bête, and possibly not even by his charming volume of verse,
Aires de Flûte, or Flûte à Sixe as it came to be called.

That was a kindly assertion that the verse and prose of the
younger men was full of exuberance, of health, and of life. Obviously,
however, there are differences of opinion as to the true definition or
the proper significance of these abstractions.

The two most 'Parnassien of the Parnassians' are Théodore
Hannon and Ivan Gilkin. Both, moreover, are fond of extolling
exuberance (joy), health (joyous living), and life (more or less unconvenational experience). One of them, indeed, wrote the eulogy of
Max Waller's 'phalanx.' Let us glance at the poetry of these
young Davids.

M. Hannon followed his Vingt-quatre Coups de Sonnette with his
remarkable Rêmes de Joie. This collection of verse won for him at a later date such designations as 'the Belgian Laforgue,' 'the
Belgian Rimbaud,' and 'the Belgian Verlaine.' But M. Hannon
is not a supreme artist in words, nor has he either the poignant
personal note of the poet of Les Illuminations or the marked individuality of the author of Moralités Légendaires. A nicer estimate
would be one that ranked him a brilliant apprentice to the great poet of
Les Fleurs du Mal. Baudelaire, indeed, is the paramount influence in
the moulding of the collective poetic genius of Young Belgium. Even
in one point where some of our not too widely-read younger critics
attribute novelty to the productions of certain of the newer French
and Spanish poets, to the Dutch 'sensitists,' and to one or two English
imitators—the use of colour-words to convey particular emotions or
conditions—even here the new note, clear and mellow, was sounded by
Baudelaire. This impeccable artist, who so invariably adopted 'des
adjectifs avec préméditation,' has anticipated René Ghil and a host of
others in, for instance, these lines, at once so lovely and so significant:

Il est des parfums frais comme des chênes d'enfance,
Doux comme les hautespois, verts comme les prairies.
Les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent.
according to him, with a fanfare triomphale du corneet peu à peu l'orchestre cutier s'allume et sortent du beau fracas de ces timbales et de ces cuivres, l'harmonie qui s'élanço, chantant les vertus libérentes du glorieux parfum.' This hath a sound of nonsense. The masterpiece in question opens thus—

**Opponax! nom très bizarre,**

*Et parfum plus bizarre encore?*

**Opponax, le son du cor**

*Est pâle auprès de ta fanfare!*

The whole poem—as *Les Litanies de l'Absinthe,* and others of the kind—is an exposition of Baudelaire's text, *Les parfums,* les couleurs, et les sons se répondent. The reader will find it, if he will—in company with eight or nine companion pieces—in the *Parnasse de la Jeune Belgique.* He can there enjoy its *abracadabrant arôme* to the full. *D'autres morceaux suivent, d'une maladie vraiment réjouissante, entr'âges,* le *Maquillage,* cet extraordinaire houzannah, célébrant le charme dont l'atelier des épidermes fame. But as a matter of fact one has soon too much of this 'charme,' whether 'dolent' or 'abracadabrant' (whatever that may mean). There are lines which even M. Huysmans qualifies as of 'une corruption troublante.'

The most famous thing in the book, however—a couplet that spread throughout Belgium and France with the venomous rapidity of cholera-morbis—occurs as the conclusion of a poem called *Grisaille*:

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**Amour, Amour, on t’a bien dit**

*Un contact coûteux d’épidermes.*

Probably the cynicism of depravity has never gone beyond this. Whoever M. Hannon's *Muse Consolatrice* may be, she is certainly worthy of his lines to 'une vierge Byzantine'—

*Ceste elle est plus originale*  

_Que virgineale.*

It is true that in this poet's best work there is an exquisite art. *Chinoiserie* has a grace and remote charm that makes it worthy of comparison with the masterpieces in *Emaux et Camees.* But from first to last the *Rêves de Joie* are obtrusively salacious. They may be, like the body of the lady in 'Majoreurs,' 'soutenant comme un sommet,' but—well, there are sommets and somnachts. It is to be feared that M. Hannon, though not, I hope, one of his drear company of *hateurs de phosphore* or even a practical devotee of that absinthe whose praises he sings so ecstatically, has imbibed a pernicious draught from that intoxicating stream whereby stands Woman with one hand pointing to (vide *Les Illuminations*) the flaming volcans, and with the other to arctic caverns.

If, as some have fancied, each of us (though for the present let us confine ourselves to saying 'each poet') has a 'double' somewhere in the wide world, M. Ivan Gilkin might be taken to be the counterpart of the author of *The City of Dreadful Night.* His pessimism is not less profound. But he is a fin de siècle Belgian, and James Thomson was only a British poet who found dissipation too like unto masked tragedy to treat of it save with a deep if dramatically disguised horror. M. Ivan Gilkin is, of all the *dédales,* French or Belgian, the most sombre in his imaginings. Even in his titles he is more suggestive of Poe than of a singer of the joy of life. His first and in some respects his most remarkable book is called *La Damnation de l'Artiste:* his second *Ténèbres.* These young poets are either very conscious of the rare quality of their work, or are profoundly suspicious of the reluctance of their countrymen to part with their francs for 'the immortal beauty of the flawless line;' for M. Ivan Gilkin deserts the usual 3 francs 50 centimes for the impressive 15 francs; M. Emile Verhaeren asks 12 francs for his *Flambeau Noir* or his *Dédales,* and M. Grégoire Le Roy expects the more modest sum of 10 francs for his exposition of how *Mon cœur pleure d'autrefois.*

M. Gilkin might have chosen the following sentence from Guy de Maupassant's *L'Endormie* as the motto of his books: *J'ai senti l'infantile trompeuse de la vie, comme personne plus que moi ne l'aurait.* It is regrettable that his vision is often so perverted, his sentiment so morbid, his style so gloomy and despairing and generally *ténébreux* so obvious; for with all his shortcomings he is a poet of genuine power and even (on his restricted highest level) of distinction. He is too much addicted—in the ironical words of M. Brunetiâtre in his article on *Le Symbolisme Contemporain* (in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for April 1891)—to the instrumentation of a rhythmic polymorphie, allied d'un verbe endolatoire. But he has a high sense of style, and, while himself possessor of a style, occasionally attains style, *Il se passionne pour la passion.* He is in love with Beauty. He vibrates to the joy of life—

*O bonté de la vie! O santé du soleil!*

*Come unto me,* he cries in his ecstasy, *come unto me, all ye who are young and thirst for beautiful life,* and I will lead you by sweet ways over the breaths of lovers' kisses': *Laissez venir . . . laissez venir à moi les beaux adolescents,* it is strange after this, or after such a solemn adoration as this verse from his strange and impressive *Litanies*—

*Surnaturelle, calme et puissante Beauté,*

*Fontaine de santé, miroir d'étrangers, écoutez-moi!*

—to find our minister of Apollo stoop to such obscure vision and dull satiet of belief as in the following (and it must be admitted equally typical) sonnet-octave—:
Dans le royaume des entités, les êtres éternels,
L'évocation de leur beauté, leur divinité, leur essor.

Mais la vie est fugitive, elle seule persiste,
La gloire est éphémère, la gloire est la mort.

La mort eut raison, la mort est le triomphe,
L'amour est vain, la vie est un songe, un rêve.

En vain, en vain, en vain, en vain,
On cherche la vérité, on cherche la lumière.

Alas! can it be that the wanderer by the halcyon
royaume en fleur des bois, the ecstatic poet from whose lips we heard
'Ô bûcher de la vie! O sancte du Soleil!' can see nothing in humanity
but irreconcilable evil, must view each face of man or woman as 'un
profil d'animal,' and can find no more generous category for his fellows
than that comprising the dog, the goat, the pig, the hyena, and the
jackal! Which is the Ivan Gilkin: the poet of life and beauty, or the
poet of decay and corruption? One, purely, must be sincere; the
other insincere, or perversely wanted to accept mirage for reality.
For this gloom of his is no lovely melancholy, that shadow of life, of
joy, of beauty. It is a vision of the corruptible seen across missmas.
But the author of Ténèbres is of the uplands by grace of his best gift:
why should he make himself one with the next and the blindworm?
M. Gilkin is fairly well represented in the Parnasse de la Jeune
Belgique. Even in these few poems the reader will encounter many
of those sonorous lines which give this young poet an almost Marlowe-
like distinction—

La nuit, sur le zénith, débout comme un bûcher,
Luminosément roule une lune coupée
Dans le silence noir et la terreur de l'ai,
Est-ce l'âme sonnant la trompette de fer?
Gueulant sur la cite se clameur rasque et morne?

From first to last there is unmistakably something of 'le gout
de terroir flamand.' It is no French poet
Of the clear glow divine,
The flawless splint line,
but the countryman of Van Lerberghe and Maeterlinck, who cries in
his dolorous 'Rêve de rêve malheureux'—

En toi, l'âme de l'âme, enfant des âmes Dédivés,
L'Horreur fascinatrice et la Bizarre.

It is regrettable, however, that the anthology in question does not
include some of the finer poems, as, for example, 'Israel' (from
La Damnation de l'Artiste), 'mid the high amber and ebony
palaces of heaven.'

To neither M. Hannon nor M. Gilkin, I am afraid, could their
most enthusiastic eulogists apply what an indignant French apostle
exclaimed on behalf of a 'martyr's' work, 'Il n'y a pas là de quoi faire
rougir une épicière, ou pâtrir un gardeme,' Truth to tell, much of

this maladroit handling of salacious themes is altogether remote
from a purely artistic passion for the beautiful in any guise.
Too often it is mere vulgarity. In a sense the most regrettable thing is
not the vulgarity, but the authors' ignorance that they are
degenerated from Paganism and are standing in the mire. Good for both
the poets just named, and for so many other of their confrères,
would be a breath of that 'délégénial'—in the words of Ernestine Ramiro—
'cet élégénial, qui chasse, comme un vent irrésistible, les scories des
impressions vulgaires.'

M. Ivan Gilkin, however, was hardly one of the inaugurators of the
new movement. Before 1880 Rodenbach had published his
(surely mediocre) Triestes and other volumes, Eekhoud his sole
collection of verse, Myrtres et Cyprès, and other books. Strangely
enough to those who are not au courant with everything concerning
'La Jeune Belgique,' neither is represented in the Parnasse. The
omission of the author of La Jeunesse Blanche and Le Rêve du
Silence is certainly a mistake. These books have a remote dreamy
beauty, constantly reminiscent of and inspired by the old dead cities
of Flanders—reflecting, as the unruffled waters of those deserted
towns,

Des ruisseaux, des tours, et de longs poulpiers.

As a novelist, also, Georges Rodenbach is worthy of note. His
Art en Eiel is as unlike conventional French fiction as his most exquit
Flemish compatriot could wish. But, both as poet and novelist, he
is hopelessly adrift in the maelstrom of Paris journalism. As for
the exclusion of Georges Eekhoud, that may be on account of the
eminent novelist's not being considered as a poet at all. From
this opinion no unbiased critic could differ. Eekhoud, the Mau-
passant of the Low Countries, the literary historian, looms gigantic
in the van of the Belgian renaissance—Eekhoud, the author of
Myrtres et Cyprès, &c., is indignant. The gulf is as wide as
that which divides Mr. Lecky the historian from Mr. Lecky the
writer in verse. But I remember at least one light and dexterous
poem ('Xaviola'), of an easy grace and the happiest innocence
though I can recall only a stanza—one that hummed in my ears for
days after I first read it:

Si l'onde de l'eau est légère,
Excusez-moi, très-cher frère,
Jennette, pardonnez-moi:
On doit sous la Réserve,
Les mots ont changé, je pense:
On ne lit mieux la saine loi,
Mon cher frère, excusez-moi.

It is not in verse, however, but in the prose of Kees Dooreh, Ker-
meees, Nouvelles Kermees, La Nouvelle Carthage, Le Cycle Pato-
buleaire, that one must study this powerful though gloomy writer.
The contours of Belgium are a small but really noteworthy body. After Eckhoud, let me recommend to these readers who may be unacquainted with the Belgian writers, Louis Delattré's Contes de mon Village, and Eugène Demolder's Contes d'Yperdame. The latter is a model of its kind. Mention should also be made of the Contes à Marjolaine and Les Charmes of Georges Garnir, that 'Wallon Wallonais'; Albert Giraud's Le Scribe, &c., and Henry Maublè's Quelqu'un d'aimable d'hui and singularly charming Miette.

There are many others, but these seem to me particularly representative. Among the several writers of that species of conte, or allegory, or fancy, now generally called 'Proses-lyriques'—a genre cultivated among the young Belgian poets and romantics with singular success—I must mention especially M. Arnold Goffin. Excellent and suggestive as are Delaivre Moris, Journal d'André, and Maxime, this most able writer is seen at his highest artistic attainment in the charming contes of his recently published Le Fen Reisonnable. In point of art, no living Frenchman has, in this particular genre, excelled this writer, unless in the just published Mine of Marcel Schob.

The alphabetical arrangement of the contributors' names in the 'Contents' of La Parnasse de la Jeune Belgique gives this sequence: Émile Van Aperenbourg, Paul Berlier, André Fontaines, Georges Garnir, Ivan Gillin, Valère Gille, Octave Gillon, Albert Giraud, Théodore Hannon, Paul Lamber, C. Van Lerberghe, Grégoire Le Roy, Maurice Maeterlinck, Léon Montembeaux, Fernand Severin, Lucien Solvay, Hélène Swartsh, and Max Waller. This list is, as any student of Belgian literature will recognize at a glance, far from being adequately representative. Not only do we miss Rodenbach, but that Cyril Tourneur of the movement, Auguste Jenart; Fernand Baudoux, also, with his Rhymes vives; Jean Develle, author of Les Horizons Hauts; Maurice Desobmiaux, Robert Chantrilles, Paul Dalao, Arthur Dupont, author of L'Envol des Rêves; Max Eklamp, the promising young poet of Dominical and the quaintly entitled Salutations, dont d'Angélotiques; Riiberé du Cunha, with his Préludes, with their Portuguese savoir; Gustave Kalm, whose Palais Nomades and Chansons d'Ament are among the best-known books of the minor poets in France; the somewhat mythical Comte de Lautréamont, author of the most 'grovelly' book of the century, the happily rare Chants de Mallovan (though, indeed, Mallovan itself comprises nothing in verse); Charles Sjükje, with his promising L'Appel des Voix; Pierre Loisy, author of Astoré; Albert Mockel, whose Chantable un peu naives attracted much attention; Paul Gérardy, author of Les Chansons Naives—besides many other writers of note or promise whose names I do not recall at the moment. Yes; here are two other strange omissions; though, in the instance of Henri de Regnier, I may be mistaken in attributing to him Wallon nationality—De Regnier and the late Maurice Dormal. This young poet of

But in the Parnasse list there are two names of supreme importance in the history of the Belgian renaissance, though neither of commanding rank in metrical composition: Charles Van Lerberghe and Maurice Maeterlinck. To these should be added the lesser but still noteworthy name of a third exponent of the drama intime, Auguste Jenart: a writer whose neglect by his fellows and the Belgian public has always to me been a source of surprise.

It is disappointing to find in the poetry of two such potent literary
temperaments so little of the same distinctive quality as is readily discernable in the respective dramatic work of either. It need scarce detain us at present. I must add that I know too little of M. Van Lerberghe’s uncollected verse to attempt to judge it adequately. He betrays a marked rapprochement to Rossetti, and to a certain extent to Poe. Most of M. Van Lerberghe’s published metrical work, I assume, may be read in the Paraaske. It is graceful and has an individual charm in such poems as ‘La Devine’ and ‘Un Bois Dormant’; while in ‘Solyane’ there is an echo of that manly impressive style which characterises his dramatic masterpiece. Maeterlinck is perhaps more natively the poet. He shows himself an unmistakable and, as yet, very limited poet in Sorres Chaudes; he displays promise as a conteur in his extremely clever if fantastically archaic ‘Massacre des Innocents,’ ‘Onirologie,’ &c.; and he has won a place as a critical writer by his scholarly monograph on Rubroechck l’Admirable and his occasional studies of contemporary literature. But as it is an imaginative writer in muffled prose wrought in the dramatic form that he is a new-comer of distinction, of genius, and is a literary force which has to be reckoned with. As he is represented in the Paraaske by about a third of his unique volume of verse, and presumably by pieces chosen by himself, he may be said to be fairly represented. Unlikely masters are suggested in these poems: poets so distinct as Walt Whitman and Edgar Poe. Without his beloved ‘cygnes’ and his exclamatory marks Maeterlinck would be heavily handicapped. ‘Swans’ are now as commonplace (though apparently as inevitable) in Belgian verse as the breeze in the trees in our albums and annuals fifty years ago. It would be absolutely safe to say that no Belgian volume of poetry has appeared without ‘cygnes,’ ‘mesonges,’ ‘deirs fauves,’ ‘mon âme pâle,’ and ‘femmes lascivieuses’ (or other expressive épithet). ‘O’ is a deadly pitfall for all ‘Young Belgians,’ and exclamatory marks should be looked at by them with the same meaing disapproval (if secret longing) as our Academical painters (of course) the labouring photographer. In one of these poems of Sorres Chaudes alone, consisting as it does of forty-one lines, I have counted no fewer than twenty-nine terminal exclamatory marks. In the same poem, three lines begin with ‘Oh,’ six with ‘À,’ and nineteen with ‘Et.’ This is not art, but artifice: that is, the mechanical substitute for art. Those repetitive phrasings which Maeterlinck uses with such effect (though sometimes disenchantingly) in La Princesse Malicieuse, Les Aventures, L’Intimés, Les Sept Princesse, and Villain et Malandrin are also much affected by him in these poems—sometimes, as in ‘Ennu,’ by monotonous insistence upon a single word, or noun and epithet: in this instance, ‘poum blanc.’ It is impossible to read these hot-house blooms of poetry without wishing for the author that ‘wind Euryclydon’ for which, he tells us in the opening of

1893. ‘LA JEUNE BELGIQUE’ 431

‘Aîne,’ he holds himself ready. For, truly, his soul is too much in the shade: ‘Mon âme!... Ô mon âme vraiment trop à l’abîme!’

The real distinction of the contemporary literary movement in Belgium lies in the drama intime. This particular form of imaginative literature has been given new life and significance by M. Maeterlinck—Maeterlinck inspired by Charles Van Lerberghe. It has already had a strong influence on recent French literature, though naturally the Belgian origin of this influence is not recognised readily in France. ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’

Broadly, the Belgian movement culminates in this new form—relatively new, that is to say. It is a form strangely seductive if obviously perilous, and one that has, probably, a remarkable future—coming, as it has done, at a time when our most eager spirits are solicitous of a wider scope in expression, for a further opening up of alluring ways through the ever-blossoming wilderness of art. It may well be that Maeterlinck’s highest service will prove to be that of a pioneer—as Chateaubriand’s highest service has not been by Paul et Virginie, but by his Etudes de Nature, having therewith directed into new and fresh channels of delight the stream which threatened to stagnate in the shallows of an insincere nature-convention. For, highly suggestive, profoundly interesting, and even fascinating as his best work is, he does not ‘loom forth, the master.’

‘C’est l’opérette de la décadence, après le drame de Baudelaire,’ wrote E. Picard of the début of ‘Young Belgium.’ Baudelaire is, in truth, even yet the tutelary god of ‘la jeune Belgique.’ In the perusal of the writings of the league one almost inevitably comes to identify the great French poet with the nation among whom he sojourned awhile in anything but unalloyed joy—as the Germans, in that Bavarian Wallach by the Danube, have included Shakespeare among their effigies of Teutonic celebrities. There are critics who believe that Maurice Maeterlinck will out the artist master from his sovereignty—somewhat forgetful, meanwhile, of the fact that the relationship is not closer between these two men than between a sculptor and a painter working differently under a common bond. That able Belgian critic M. Albert Arnaud, believes Maeterlinck to be ‘among the giants.’ For myself I can regard him only as a worthy forerunner of a greater than himself. Yet—he is young, he is still in time to unlearn as well as to learn, he enjoys what is—for him—a fortunate environment, he has had fit training; he has a strain, perhaps very much more than a strain, of genius. With his supreme advantage he may yet appear to his countrymen, to the world, as

I may state here that M. Paul Lacombe, of Brussels, has at present in the press a new volume of verse by Maurice Maeterlinck, to be entitled La Queneville et la Rose.
he now does to such critics as M. Arnaud in Belgium and M. Mirbeau in France.

It is strange that the imaginative writer who first showed Maunderlinck the method and allure of that peculiar dramatic form with which the younger man is identified, should be so little known. Strange, too, that he should be so austerely reticent, for Charles Van Lerberghe has published no book since Les Plaisirers, that epoch-marking drame intime, brief as it is. Here for the first time we encounter that dramatic method which has so impressed readers of Maunderlinck's dramas and episodes. Van Lerberghe does not appear to have followed any other writer in his own country or abroad. Possibly he has taken a hint from Calderon. There are in that writer's plays dramatic interludes of an extraordinary intensity. It is not improbable that the Flemish poet, a curious student of foreign literature, should have noted the aptitude of this specific form of composition for the expression of a certain quality of imaginative thought or emotion not so adequately to be rendered in verse or even in highly rarefied prose-narrative.

The short dramatic episode entitled Les Plaisirers occupies itself with a single incident: the death of an old peasant-woman, by night, in a lonely cottage in a remote district, with no companion save her giddy grandchild. Almost from the outset the reader guesses what the nocturnal voices indicate. The use of the dramatist is almost childishly simple, if its process of development be regarded in detail. The impressiveness lies greatly in the cumulative effect. A night of storm, the rain lashing at the windows, the appalling darkness without, the wan candle-glow within, a terrified and bewildered child, a dying and delirious old woman, an ominous oft-repeated knocking at the door, a hoarse voice without, changeful but always menacing, mocking or muttering an obscene and horrible message: this interwrought, again and again represented, austerely tragic byplay—from one point of view, merely the material for tragedy—is a profoundly impressive work of art. It is perhaps all the more so from the fact that it relies to some extent upon certain venerable and even outworn conventionalities. The midnight hour, storm, mysterious sounds, the howl of a dog: we are familiar with all these 'properties.' They do not now move us. Sheridan, Le Fanu or Fitzjames O'Brien, or R. L. Stevenson, can create for us an inward terror far beyond the half simulated creep with which we read the conventional bogey-story. That Charles Van Lerberghe should so impress us by the simplest, and most familiar stage-tricks points to his genuine artistry, to his essential masterhood. The literary conjurer would fail decease us by sleight of hand; the literary artist persuades us by sleight of mind.

Van Lerberghe is neither romanticist nor realist, as these vague and often identical terms are understood abroad. He works realisti-
1893

‘LA JEUNE BELGIQUE’

Like to remain, merely a distinguished performer in l’opérette de la décadence?

There are many who believe that the author of La Princesse Maleine—still more, that the author of L’ Intrus and Les Aveugles—would attain to that high mastery which makes a writer a voice for all men, and not merely an arresting echo for his own hour, his own time, among his own people. His début was significant, remarkable. In France he is now looked upon as passé. There is something barometrical in the reputations of popular idols. A little ago, no comparative epithet was too extreme in praise of the young Belgian provincial whom M. Octave Mirbeau mentioned as equal in certain respects to Shakespeare. Now he is practically told to go about his business: he is not wanted at Paris. In Belgium itself he was unknown save to an elect few till the Figaro, in August 1890, blew loud the trumpet of fame. Then the good folk in Brussels, and Liège, and Antwerp, rubbed their eyes, and rejoiced that at last their merits (as embodied in M. Maeterlinck) were recognised by those jealous Parisians. To-day the same words, hearing the outcry of François Sarcey and François Coppée and Maurice Barrès and the rest, are looking a weakness at ‘that young man in Ghent.’ Well, there is still time for Maurice Maeterlinck to confound both friends and foes.

Meanwhile we cannot estimate him otherwise than by his actual achievement. Has the author of Les Sept Princesses and Pélée et Mélanande fulfilled, or at any rate sustained, the promise shown by the author of L’ Intrus and Les Aveugles?

I have already, in an essay on Maeterlinck’s earlier work,* told how this writer made his début in an obscure Paris periodical—drawn attention to the note very important fact that he was written about authoritatively by Georges Rodenbach and Albert Arnautoff some time before M. Octave Mirbeau “discovered” him, as, in this country, he was discussed and admired before Mr. William Archer, by his timely and serviceable article, enacted the part of an English Mirbeau—and given an account of his literary derivations, and of his performances in verse prose-narrative, and dramatic composition. At the close of that article I alluded to a then unpublished five-act drama, named Pélée et Mélanande, which M. Maeterlinck was understood to have completed. Will this forthcoming drama, I asked, be a new departure for the author, and a triumph? If not, and if it closely on the lines of La Princesse Maleine and Les Sept Princesses, it is more likely to be the dramatist’s Sédan.

Well, Pélée et Mélanande has appeared. It was extravagantly praised by some, as vehemently attacked or disallowed by others. In this alone were good augury for its worth. But it has no staying power. It is like a bell with a haunting echo, but a bell that can be struck only once, the metal not having been wrought strongly

* In the Academy, March 19, 1893.
enough to withstand more than a single concession. In fact, the drama—except to a very few thoroughgoing admirers—would be already a thing of the past, 'a fair sleeper poppy-crowned,' were it not for the recent clamour in Paris alluded to at the opening of this paper.

It was absurd to enact Pélée et Mélanande on the Parisian (or any other) stage. Masterlinck is not a dramatist of 'the boards.'

No, I do not think his latest production is Masterlinck's Sedan. All the same it is, at best, 'a faithful failure'—this or a disaster, as one conceives it. I believe he will give us better work; work as distinctive as his two masterpieces, L'Intruse and Les Aveugles, but with a wider range, a sympathy more general, an insight and apprehension and technical accomplishment more masterly still.

For M. Masterlinck, however, as for all, there is the rock ahead of a misleading conception of originality. The originality which lies in the formative vision is that which is of paramount value, not that which is preoccupied with novelty of presentation. In the words of M. Téodor de Wyzewa in a recent suggestive article in the Mercure de France:—

Cette décroissance de l'originalité intérieure, et ce souci croissant de l'originalité extérieure, est les deux faits qui résument toute l'histoire de l'art contemporain, aussi bien à l'étranger que chez nous.

If for M. Masterlinck himself the warning be not called for, certainly for most of les jeunes in Belgium and France there is need to remember, to take to heart the scornful words of a great literary artist admired of them all:—

Dors ! L'impure labeur est la relié du monde,
Et nous avons perdu le chemin de Paris.

It is not the least of M. Masterlinck's honours that he is worthy to be ranged under the banner of Leconte de Lisle.

But what we have to bear in mind meanwhile is that a new method is coming into literature, and that the way has been shown by the Jeune Belgique pioneers. Maurice Masterlinck is one of those pioneers, and one deserving of special note. True, his trust in certain treasured formulas may prove fatal to him. But he will unlearn. He is something more than a stalking-horse for 'Young Belgium;' for it is not in the accidents of his dramatic expression that he is the original writer, but in that quality of insight which is his own, that phrasing, that atmosphere.

WILLIAM SHARP.

THE MALAY PENINSULA

Or all the countries which are passed by the annual procession of travellers round the world, a band probably far in excess of those who made the 'grand tour' of Europe a century ago, perhaps the least known is the Malay Peninsula. The conscientious globe-trotter may land at Penang and obtain an impression of a Chinese settlement thus early on his voyage; he can in the course of the oppressively hot day's journey through the Straits view through his glass with a languid interest the picturesque little town which gives them their name, and in the evening or the morning, according to the time of the steamer's arrival, he will admire the beauty of the fine harbour of Singapore, and, if energetic, complete his local education by a drive to its beautiful Botanical Garden, and through the well-laid-out grounds attached to Government House. It is probable that he will be satisfied with these efforts and mentally register the Straits as 'done.' Singapore, Malacca and the Island of Penang do, indeed, make up, with two other insignificant provinces (Wellesley and the Dindings), between the two first named, the whole of the Crown colony known as the Straits Settlements. Its present importance is derived from the position of Singapore—as the gateway to the Further East, the emporium of a large trade, and an indispensable link in the defences of the Empire. The area and population of the whole colony, especially to one who visited it, as I did, fresh from the experience of assisting in the administration of India with its hundreds of millions of inhabitants, unimportant, the former being something under 1,500 square miles, and the latter a little over half a million.

The Malay Peninsula, the country intervening between Penang and Singapore, whose hilly outline defiles before the vision of the weared traveller during the toilsome hot day's steaming between these ports, is neither identical with nor comprised in the Straits Settlements—which only appear on the map as isolated patches of red situated at considerable distances from one another along the coast-line. The vast area behind them, extending from the borders of Burmah and Siam on the north to Singapore on the south, is occupied by several distinct States, all nominally under their native chiefs, but of which the principal have come directly or indirectly under British influence and control. It is with these latter, their condition