depth of romantic feeling unsuspected beneath her reserved demeanour, is secretly in love with the same young priest. With characteristic absence of coquetry and calculation, never having received encouragement from the priest, she presents him with a note in which she declares that she loves him. Before he is able to read the billet, and without a suspicion of its nature, he is called away. The girl falls into an agony of doubt as to the success of this step, and dread of the natural consequences of such a proceeding, viz., a serious lecture from the confessor upon her precocious iniquity in making such a declaration to a priest. While thus soliloquizing, her companion enters, and with very natural egotism makes her a *confidante* of the attachment that subsists between the priest and herself, and of their plan of elopement. She even elicits a promise from her unfortunate friend that she will assist them in escaping together from the convent. Left alone once more, Maria is found by the confessor, who has read her note, and now gives her a lecture upon the heinousness of her offence, in loving a priest sworn to celibacy and in tempting him to break his vows. She listens quietly, and then informs him that she is acquainted with his scheme of eloping with Francisca. She further adds, that instead of betraying them, as he fears, she will assist them. He leaves her with protestations of gratitude. She forthwith procures a glass of lemonade into which she empties a vial of prussic acid and prepares to poison herself. As she is deliberating, her friend and rival, Francisca, enters, and seeing the lemonade, asks if she may drink some of it. Maria yields to an impulse of rage and revenge and allows her to raise the glass to her lips. Instantly, however, her better nature prevails and she trys to stop Francisca. But it is too late. Francesca falls down in the agonies of death, and Maria, in her remorse, rushes off to drown herself in the convent well.

From a bare sketch of the plot it is impossible to imagine the power with which the drama is presented. The characters stand out from their surroundings as types and examples of human passion and error, absolutely faithful to life and of tragic significance really awful. A remarkable feature of this little play is its freedom from extravagant scenic effect, or, to quote the contemptuous words of Mérimée himself in a later essay, "*Ce que, dans notre jargon romantique, nous appelions alors la couleur locale.*" It is a mark of his literary tact that he refrained from diverting attention from the permanent significance of the play by insisting upon accessory national interest.

On the other hand, we find him making use of local colour to the fullest extent in "Carmen," a tale of much later date. In this respect he again shows his consummate artistic instinct. The story of Carmen, familiar to many in an altered form through Bizet's opera of the same name, depends entirely for its interest upon comprehension of the character of Carmen, the heroine. She is a Spanish gipsy, and a full description of her environment and that of Don José is essential in order to understand the attraction she exercised upon Don José, and the obstinacy with which she chose to die rather than submit to even the slightest restraint in her freedom of action. The device of supposing the story to be related by Don José assists to an immense extent in the picturesqueness of the tale.

"Carmen," to my mind, is Mérimée's best achievement among the tales. "Colomba" is longer than any of his stories, as it is so much larger in bulk it necessarily is more full in plot and incident. But the characters in "Carmen," though slighter, are no less distinctly marked than those in "Colomba," and the latter tale is wanting in the perfect equality of excellence that characterizes "Carmen," and in the steady progress to the inevitable end. The happy conclusion to "Colomba" is in fact a surprise which Mérimée but seldom accords to his readers. All his important tales except this one end in tragical fashion. Sainte-Beuve in his criticism upon "Colomba" makes a happy comparison of the fortunes of Orson with those of Orestes, and in more essential respects Mérimée may be considered as a belated comrade of those most romantic of Classics, the Greek tragedians. There runs through all his works a sombre feeling of the inexorable fate that shapes the destinies of men. This seems to be the dominant thought in his mind. The school girl in the convent, the gipsy in the Sierras, the Parisian dandy, the Lithuanian noble—all these alike are the victims of Atropos, at the very moment of apparent triumph over the visible obstacles of human life. It is this characteristic, this sense of the invisible, that separates Mérimée from the realists, to whom he has a superficial resemblance He has all their contempt for the unnatural and non-existent; indeed, some of his dicta upon imaginative literature are too severe from his very devotion to the actual. Here is his mature judgment on Rabelais—"*Rabebais avait fait la Satire de l'église, de la cour, et de la société tout entière, à la faveur d'un conte à dormir debout.*" In another essay, so early as 1826, he says, "*En tous pays les vers sont ennemis du naturel.*" In a country and epoch when poetry monopolized the most serious efforts of literary men, it is no wonder that with this stong prejudice he disclaimed any connection with the triumphant party of the Romantics.

But, just as the conventional falseness of classicality and the exaggerated sentiment of Hugo and his followers had no attractions for him, so would he have abhorred the hardness and absence of feeling that characterize the Realists. Human nature in all its vagaries claimed his allegiance, but it was human nature with its attractions enhanced by the extraordinary.

It is a curious trait in his character that superstition and its extravagances should have had so strong an attraction for him, as is evident from the important functions they perform in his writings. He was an *esprit fort* of most pronounced type, and yet no man is more fond of the supernatural and legendary element in literature. One of his most powerful stories, "Lokis," is a grisly adaptation of a Slavonic legend, in which the supernatural lurks behind the apparently natural explanation, and refuses to be explained away. From Pouchkine, the Russian poet, he translates a ghost-story of unmistakable ghostliness, and in "La Vénus d'Illes" he even clothes in modern dress the Greek story of a statue wedded by a ring. But his usual bias for the tragic manifests itself here by making him alter the happy conclusion of the Greek story, and substitute an ending charged with the tragical emotions of pity and terror. No doubt it was his artistic instinct which led him to introduce so interesting an ingredient into his tales, but on other grounds the whole subject evidently excited his curiosity. Among a nnmber of dissertations upon his special study, Roman and Mediæval history, very learned and rather dry, occurs an essay upon Mormonism, in which the rise and progress of that curious religion is treated in a spirit, if not of sympathy, at any rate of respectful interest. This is his only contribution to modern history, and may be commended to anyone who desires to read an account, in concise and attractive form, of this latest misdevelopment of the religious instinct in man.

Most of the praise lately bestowed on Mérimée has for its theme the purity of his style. But this is not the greatest boon which he has conferred upon us. He declined to expend his powers in one-sided devotion to any small section of mankind. He has no pet "subject" to dissect, no theory of human life to propound and illustrate. Provided that a story is interesting, it is worth his while to tell it. And his stories are always intrinsically interesting, just as his mode of narration is always consummately artistic. This is a duty of the story-teller which has fallen into contempt with those who profess allegiance to Art alone. They should bear in mind that a character or a phase of life may be made attractive by careful treatment, but that the number of readers who can be made to feel this attraction is as nothing in comparison with the multitude that is won by a fascinating story. Mérimée's knowledge of human nature was far-reaching, his range of subjects was wide, and his public is correspondingly extensive. All honour to the man who writes for the world instead of for a clique, and grateful thanks to the author who endows the world with—*stories.*

H. H. LANGTON.