

or valuable, has to be coined in France before it can pass into the general circulation of the world?

In direct contrast to the heavy, dragging German style, is the brisk, vivacious, sparkling style of the French. All the qualities which the Teutons lack—form, method, proportion, grace, refinement, the stamp of good society—the Gallic writers have in abundance; and these qualities are found not only in the masters, like Pascal, Voltaire, Cuvier, or Sand, but in the second and third-class writers, like Taine and Prevost-Paradol. Search any of the French writers from Montaigne to Renan, and you will have to hunt as long for an obscure sentence as in a German author for a clear one. Dip where you will into their pages, you find every sentence written as with a sunbeam. They state their meaning so clearly, that not only can you not mistake it, but you feel that no other proper collocation of words is conceivable. It is like casting to a statue—the metal flows into its mould, and is there fixed for ever. If, in reading a German book, you seem to be jolting over a craggy mountain road in one of their lumbering *eisenwagen*, ironically called “post-haste” chaises, in reading a French work you seem to be rolling on C springs along a velvety turf, or on a road that has just been macadamized. The only drawback to your delight is, that it spoils your taste for other writing; after sipping Château-Margaux at its most velvety age, the mouth puckers at Rhine wine or Catawba. This supremacy of the French style is so generally acknowledged, that the French have become for Europe the interpreters of other races to each other. They are the Jews of the intellectual market—the money-changers and brokers of the wealth of the world. The great merits of Sir William Hamilton were unknown to his countrymen till they were revealed by the kindly pen of

Cousin; and Sydney Smith hardly exaggerated when he said of Dumont's translation of Bentham, that the great apostle of utilitarianism was washed, dressed, and forced into clean linen by a Frenchman before he was intelligible even to English Benthamites. It is sometimes said that French literature is all style; that its writers have laboured so exclusively to make the language a perfect vehicle of wit and wisdom, that they have nothing to convey. If in a German work the meaning is entangled in the words, and “you cannot see the woods for the trees,” in the French work the words themselves are the chief object of attention. But the critic who says this is surely not familiar with Pascal, Bossuet, D'Alembert, De Staël, De Maistre, Villemain. In these, and many other writers that we might name, there is such a solidity of thought with an exquisite transparency of style, so subtle an interfusion of sound and sense, so perfect an equipoise of meaning and melody, as to satisfy alike the artistic taste of the literary connoisseur and the deeper cravings of the thinker and the scholar. The real weakness of the French to-day is their Chinese isolation and exclusiveness, their ignorance of other nations, their want of cosmopolitan breadth, and of all the other qualities which men that hug their own fire-sides—that live, as Rabelais says, all their lives in a barrel, and look out only at the bung-hole—are sure to lack. Rooted to their native soil, seeing no countries or peoples, and despising all literatures but their own, they lose the comparative standpoint, which it has been said truly, is the great conquest of our century—which has revolutionized history, and created social science and the science of language. There is a saying of Buffon's that “the style is of the man”—not, as so often quoted, “the style is the man”—which is but a