

PARISIAN LITERARY NOTES.

THE town of Mâcon, where Lamartine was born in October, 1790, will in a few days celebrate his centenary. Many may recall Turner's lovely painting of the "Vintage at Mâcon," where poetry replaces fact and where nature is suggested, not copied. It symbolizes Lamartine's life, which rested on poetical embellishments rather than on actuality. After his father had been released from imprisonment under the Terror, he and his son retired to Milly, a hamlet near Mâcon. Here the family resided, free and happy; Lamartine lived in the eyes and on the smiles of his mother, who taught him the rudiments of education, while in the surroundings he found emotion, love and dreams. His first books were "Paul and Virginia," "Telemachus," "Tasso and the Bible."

A local abbot, who figures in his "Jocelyn," when not occupied with sport, taught Alphonse Lamartine latin; later he was sent to schools and colleges, where he made no way. He quit schooling definitely in his sixteenth year and withdrew to Milly, to devour Tasso, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and above all, Ossian. Lamartine's family was old royalist, so Alphonse took service in the bodyguard when Louis XVIII. was restored in 1814; but he lodged all the same in a garret on the Quai d'Orsay. Disliking garrison life, he immigrated to Savoy in 1816, and at Aix les Bains made the acquaintance of a Creole lady; she became the "Elvire" of his "Méditations," the "Julie" of his "Raphael," and the "lady" of his "Lac," that gem of his poems—an elegy on the Lac du Bourget in the valley of the Aix. The poem revealed his genius and stamped his renown by its perfection, its profundity and clearness and easily-grasped imagery.

Villemain observed that literature leads to everything—provided you quit it. It obtained a secretaryship for Lamartine to the French embassy at Naples, the second country of his heart. He had made the acquaintance of a young English lady, Miss Birch, who, in addition to beauty, had money. They were married in Geneva in 1823; she died in 1863. They had only one child, Julia, who died of consumption at Beyrout. The demon of politics having seized Lamartine, he contested and lost an election. It was then he heard "voices," whisper to him, "Go cry on the mountain where Christ wept; go sleep under the palm where Jacob slept." The voices were the ruin of his life. Of extravagant tastes, Lamartine fitted out a ship in 1832 to convey himself, wife and child to the East. He voyaged like a Pasha or an Emir. Leaving his wife and his daughter, who was sinking from consumption, at Beyrout, he started alone for Jerusalem. He visited the eccentric Queen of Tadmor—Lady Esther Stanhope—then sunk in poverty and eccentricity. Elected a deputy in his absence and chagrined by his daughter's death, he returned to France.

Here commences the political rocket-like career of Lamartine. Although more occupied with his writings than with politics, he appeared for the first time in the Tribune, January 4, 1834. He detested Louis Philippe and Orleanism. He was now in the evangelical stage of politics; he laid down, or re-stated, that "all men ought to be equal before the State, as Christ had consecrated their equality before God." Respecting Governments, they "should consider their mission and not their existence." It was in his speech of January 10, 1839, that he uttered the often-quoted phrase: "France is a nation that gets weary." As protectorates are at present the fashion, Lamartine fifty years ago demanded a general and collective protectorate to take charge of disintegrating Turkey; Russia was to have Constantinople; France, Syria; and England, Egypt. This was not the United States of Europe that Victor Hugo proclaimed with Jericho blasts.

In 1842, Lamartine demanded the addition to the electoral role, of intellectual citizens, the plan known as the *adjonction des capacités*. Premier Guizot resisted, and Lamartine retorted that the genius and policy of Guizot was limited to sitting still. Lamartine's "Girondins" quickly appeared and cracked up the revolutionary souvenirs of the masses. He predicted before the assembly that Louis-Philippe would succumb under a new form of revolution—"the revolution of contempt." It was realized in the closing days of February, 1848. Louis-Philippe decamped, when Lamartine proposed the Republic to be sanctioned by the sovereignty of the people. It was on February 25, 1848, that marked the zenith of his career.

The armed and heated insurgents surrounded the Hôtel de Ville, displaying the red flag, and calling upon the Provisional Government to adopt it as the national colours; Lamartine went straight for the centre of the multitude, and, facing muskets levelled at him, said: "I and my colleagues prefer to die rather than sign the decree you present for re-establishing the red flag—a flag that has never made more than the tour of the Champ de Mars, trailed in the blood of the people in 1791 and 1793—while the tricolour has made the tour of the world, with the name, the glory and the liberty of the country." Never were electric words more omnipotent. The multitude was conquered. This, too, is the more extraordinary, as, George Sand relates, only a very few persons near the speaker could hear them.

Lamartine knew that words could not govern; that the sword must be called in to uphold order. The Assembly on June 24, 1848, conferred the dictatorship on General Cavaignac. That was the *hic jacet* for Lamartine's political career, for which it was said that he possessed neither the requisite virtues nor vices. More future-sighted than Poet and Politician Hugo, Lamartine warned

the nation against voting for Prince Louis Napoleon as President of the Republic; he admitted that multitudes had their moments of aberration—Bou langer to wit, and there were "some names that draw the masses as a red rag attracts unreasoning animals."

Lamartine wrote: "I know that time is faithful to genius." He has a street called after him in Paris, and a statue at Passy, where he is seated in meditation with his Athenian greyhound at his feet, for he liked dogs, as did Sir Walter Scott. Lamartine was a compound of Rousseau nature-worship, of Madame de Staël sentimentalism, and of Byron pessimism. The "Lac" is his best poem. "Jocelyn," better known than his other effusions to English readers, fatigues by its diffuseness. Cuvier, when wearied and depressed, found a relief and a stimulus in the "Harmonies," that Sainte-Beuve ranks as Lamartine's masterpiece. His "Travels in the East" are splendid verbiage, where the author draws his facts and exactitude from his inner consciousness. The "Girondins" is a magnificent improvisation, the climax of his ideal talent; however, it is neither literary nor historical, but political and pamphletical. His miscellaneous writings are of the hack character; belong to the sweating system of literature; he wrote to combat want.

After his voyage in the East he resided in the Rue de l'Université; his house was an oriental palace in point of luxury. Then he rapidly rolled down to the borderland of indigence, till Emile Ollivier in 1867 negotiated with Napoleon III. a donation of 500,000 frs. for the ex-statesman that saved France from anarchy in February, 1848, and the aged, worn-out *litterateur*. The municipality presented Lamartine with a free villa at Passy, where he died, March 1, 1869. The villa is still unlet; a fatal shadow seems to drape the mansion. Excepting a larger dose of vanity than his fellow-creatures possessed and a stronger leaning to pose, than mortals in general have, Lamartine was a kind and affable man. He was unpractical and unfrugal, but remember he was a poet. As a politician he was out of place in the social upheavings of 1848. He never in his life read a blue-book, a treatise on political economy, or a constitutional history, or a Grotius or a Puffendorf. But he adored Ossian, Bernard de St. Pierre, Madame de Staël, the mediævalism of Walter Scott and the romanticism of Châteaubriand. And it is on kindred pabulum that too many of the governing classes of France are nourished.

TO CERTAIN NATURE POETS.

FRIENDS—such I call ye, for it is not meet
To hail ye brethren in the tuneful art,
Since I but falter, though of earnest heart—
Friends, I have thought, reading your measures sweet,
Your verses, though they be with charm replete,
Were bettered did they some high thought impart,
Or in man's conscience plunge a sudden dart.—
Why offer roses when the world craves wheat?

Who paints a picture hath ill-done his task
If he show not the soul in that he paints.
Why give to mere description studious days
While what the eye beholds is but a mask
Through which some grand, neglected Truth doth gaze,
To hear whose cheering voice man's spirit faints!
Montreal. ARTHUR WEIR.

THE PASSION PLAY AT OBERAMMERGAU.

(Concluded.)

TWO tableaux, "The manna from heaven" and "The grapes from the promised land," are given as typical of the Last Supper. They are splendid. Hundreds of people in Eastern costume, little children in the foreground, and noticeable among them Moses and Aaron, while they catch the falling manna. For the second picture the fruit is changed a little; in the front are the two men bearing on a pole a huge cluster of grapes.

"The scene of the Last Supper" is taken from Leonardo da Vinci's famous picture. Through three narrow windows behind is seen the evening landscape; the Saviour and His disciples come in and seat themselves. He tells them how He has desired to eat this Passover with them before He suffers, and that now the time is come when He must leave them. Judas, as before, is sitting moodily apart. Christ is deeply sorrowful, and the others, noticing it, are evidently questioning among themselves as to the cause. The whole scene is solemn, and is extremely sad. Without any especial cause in themselves the disciples are overshadowed by their Master's mien, in sympathy with Him, and oppressed by forebodings raised by His words. John, sitting next to Him, keeps his eyes on Him while He speaks, with an expression of loving fidelity. Christ then rises, asks the host, who waits on them, for a basin and towel, and begins washing the disciples' feet. Peter, at first, objects, but the Lord explains it to him and he submits. In all, the Bible words are used. When the others see what is being done they take off their sandals, and the Saviour goes to each in turn, who puts his foot in the basin; the host pours water on it, and the Lord washes and dries it with the towel. Even in the action of drying the foot, there is something which belongs peculiarly to Him, it so gently and so carefully done. When all is finished Christ tells them that He has done this as an example to them, that they should do so also to the brethren.

Then comes "The Institution of the Lord's Supper," just as it is written in the Bible, it is done, and there could not be a more solemn awe over them if they were receiving the Communion in church. Christ raises the bread and asks a blessing, breaks it and goes to each with the words: "This is My body," putting a morsel in the mouth of each, and the same with the wine. He seats Himself and says sorrowfully: "Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray me." "Lord," ask several together, "one of the twelve?" And the Lord answers: "It shall be one who dippeth his hand with Me in the dish." They look at each other in consternation. "Is it I?" "Is it I?" they ask. John sinks his head on the Saviour's breast. Even Judas ventures: "Is it I?" and Christ answers: "Thou hast said." "Lord, who is it?" asks John. And the Lord answers: "It is he to whom I shall give the sop, after I have dipped it." He dips a piece of bread in wine and gives it to Judas, saying: "What thou doest do quickly." Judas rises and hastily leaves the room (I see that some of the Gospels give this incident before the Supper. It is strange that St. John does not seem to record the Last Supper at all). Jesus seeing their sorrow comforts them with almost divine kindness, telling them that "where He is, they shall be also," that "In His kingdom they shall sit on twelve thrones judging Israel." This turns the thoughts of some into a different channel. They think still of an earthly kingdom, and discuss which shall be greatest. With beautiful mildness He reproaches them with the Scriptural passage: "Let him who is greatest among you serve the others." He gives thanks and comes round to the front of the table, followed by the others; then stands a moment as if in prayer, His face full of sadness, but He remembers their sorrow, and addresses to them the beautiful words: "Let not your hearts be troubled," only beginning with, "Dearest children, why are you so sorrowful?" and comforting them thus He passes out.

Of all the scenes in the play this seems the most real and it is most feelingly acted. There is no need in this to bring in anything otherwise than as it probably was. No need of scenery, which cannot help looking theatrical as trees represented always must look. There is nothing of that kind to break the spell, and no stage-grouping of the figures. The natural emotions are given full play, the simple room, the long table, the faint, far view through the deep, narrow windows; one can fancy the soft air blowing through them, all as it might have been at that time, and perfectly natural. The disciples, too, one can hardly say they are acting, so natural is their puzzled anxiety at His sad words, which they cannot understand. Even that little turn of worldliness in discussing their positions in His kingdom—for not even at the Ascension did some of them understand that the kingdom was not of this world. It was then they asked Him: "Lord wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6.) But most of all the Divine Redeemer's forgetfulness of His own crushing grief, when He turns repeatedly to comfort them, as well for the time when they should be scattered like sheep, as for the present, addressing them tenderly as "kinder."

A suspicion of the real intention of the priests in wanting him to betray his Lord did not at first enter into the mind of the Judas of the Passion Play, whether it did into that of the real Judas or not. He even tries in those fine soliloquies, which he speaks, to convince himself that he does not deserve the name of traitor. He relies on Christ's miraculous power which he has so often seen used, and argues to himself that there is no harm in taking this opportune means of making a provision for himself, which to him seems so sadly needed.

The tableau now is "The selling of Joseph." In the scene in which Judas sells his Master the High Council is again represented. They are waiting the coming of Judas, who has insisted on having his money in advance, and are congratulating each other on their success. Judas comes, and the money is counted out; he tries each piece on the table and puts it in his purse. The manner of the betrayal is decided upon and the Council disperses.

The tableaux, "Toiling Adam" and "The Treachery of Joab to Amasa," came before "The Garden of Gethsemane." The latter is very fine, taken from II. Samuel xx. 9; The two leaders meet in the middle of the stage, which represents a rocky place. The soldiers are grouped behind their respective masters, and seem to have no suspicion of what is about to take place. Amasa has advanced frankly to embrace Joab. He looks Joab straight in the face and his arms are laid unhesitatingly on Joab's shoulders. But Joab bends to one side and is just about to pierce him with a dagger as he kisses him. The scene in Gethsemane is wonderfully done, but that and the crucifixion they cannot make real. It follows the Bible in every detail and is, above all, very reverent, but one feels it is not what the real scene was at all; perhaps it is as well that it is not. The part of our Lord in this scene has been criticized as too passively done. I thought that part as near perfection as it could be; any acting in it would be extremely painful. The way the intense agony is seen through the quiet, gentle manner is what I like to think was really so, far rather than any other way of expressing it.

The three short prayers are taken from St. Mark's Gospel, the part afterwards, of the betrayal, from St. John. When He appears at the end of the garden He turns and says to the disciples: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." It is most touching, and yet it is simply the way the words are said, and the manner; they