

## OF LITERARY FORGERS

BY CHARLES WHIBLEY

THE forgery of literary documents is a trade that commends itself to certain limited talents on more than one ground: it may be pursued anywhere, and, as the newspapers say, "without detriment to previous employment." The knowledge required is neither deep nor wide; the reward is often wealth and always notoriety. The enterprise of the literary forger, moreover, is spiced with a splendid uncertainty; he is never quite sure when or how he will be found out, and since his crime is seldom visited with a heavy penalty, he may enjoy all the excitement of the uncaught criminal without fearing the boredom of a trial and the pain of a long imprisonment. True, the most ingenious forger of modern times—Vrain Lucas—was rewarded by two years of enforced inaction; but he was foolish enough to mix himself up in a scientific scandal, and did not pursue his art for its own sake. Of the rest, there is scarce one that has not been openly flattered by scholars and courted by the great. To recognise a brilliant discovery before one's fellows is to share the glory of the discoverer, and the clumsiest forgery has never failed to win the adherence of half a dozen reputable enthusiasts. In other words, the seeds of deception always fall upon some small patch of fertile ground, and he is a bad husbandman indeed who does not gather a rich harvest.

Consider, for instance, George Psalmanazar, a soldier of fortune, who could boast no humour and little learning. Yet this Frenchman not only forged books; he forged a religion, he forged a language, he forged himself. Born in the neighbourhood of Avignon, he left his native city to seek his fortune, and, finding that the door of common success opened only at the knock of industry,

he speedily resolved upon a course of what in less happy days he called "pride, folly, and stupid villainy." Tired of carrying a musket now for the Dutch, now for the Germans, he proclaimed himself a native of Formosa, got himself converted to Christianity by Mr. Innes, as fine an artist in forgery as himself, and enjoyed such a career of honoured ease as falls to the lot of few. He came to England, duly heralded, was petted by the clergy, interviewed the Archbishop of Canterbury, who could not understand his Latin, and finished at Oxford the studies which he had begun in a French monastery. It is difficult to say which got the greater glory, the pious Formosan, or the devout clergyman, who had shown him the error of his savage faith; but they both prospered exceedingly, and were wise enough to play their part with gravity and thoroughness. Psalmanazar, that no touch of realism should be wanting, lived upon raw meat, roots and herbs, and was soon used to this savage diet, though the fragrant cookery of the south should have given him a delicate palate. But while he pretended to live upon Formosan fare, he did not neglect the weightier matters. With Innes's aid, he had already sketched the language of his Eastern home, and he submitted specimens of the dialect to the scholars of England. "By means of his unhappy readiness at inventing of characters, languages, etc."—to quote his own words—he translated into pure Formosan a passage from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, and thus aroused the curiosity of the philologists. Then, that the historians also might profit by his experience, he composed a treatise upon Formosa, which, translated from the Latin, had an immediate and triumphant success. Now, Psalmanazar, having a thorough knowl-

edge of his public, was at no pains to make his treatise reasonable or consistent. Its facts, he tells us, were borrowed from Varenus's description of Japan, and the booksellers were so loudly impatient that he could only devote to its composition the leisure snatched from two months' dissipation. It was, therefore, "crude, imperfect and absurd," but it answered its purpose perfectly. It set London in a blaze of curiosity; it procured its author a convenient apartment in one of the most considerable colleges at Oxford, and made him "a great favourite with the fair sex." What more could an adventurer desire? And he won it all by a fraud which ten minutes' candid criticism might have exposed.

But if his erudition was small, his cunning was great. At Oxford he lived a life of gossip and laziness, while he was awake, and let a burning candle demonstrate his industry while he slept. He feigned a limp, that he might be thought to have contracted gout by overwork, and still escaped suspicion. In fact, had he not foolishly lent his name to an obvious imposition, called "white Formosan ware," he might have continued his chicanery without let or hindrance. Such success as he attained he owed, no doubt, to a gift of persuasion, which enabled him not only to deceive the many eminent clerics who believed what they hoped to be true, but to win the admiration of Samuel Johnson, a critic not usually tolerant of charlatans. Of course, it was Psalmanazar's affected piety which disturbed the lexicographer's judgment, who declared that he would as soon contradict a bishop as the repentant Formosan. But Johnson loved the man's company for its own sake. Of all the men he had known he sought George Psalmanazar the most. "I used to go and sit with him," said he, "at an ale-house in the city," and one would gladly give up all the specimens of the Formosan tongue if only Boswell had been present for an hour.

Yet, expert as he was in adapting his slender means to a great end, Psalmana-

zar was no sooner detected than he lost all pride in his exploits. The *Memoirs*, published after his death, are a long and wearisome apology for the only enterprise which he was capable of conducting to success. Throughout this lachrymose performance the note of hypocrisy is loud and clear. Psalmanazar was a forger from his cradle, and had he not called himself a Formosan he would have masqueraded as an Irishman—he did for a while—or a Hottentot. But whether or not this candid confession of "youthful follies" and "shameful imposture" be a mere forgery like the rest, we admire him least in the guise of a penitent, which becomes him not half so well as the taste for raw meat, the leg lamed by study, and the candle which burned all night in his room at Oxford. In defence of William Ireland, the nearest rival to Psalmanazar, it may be said that he never stooped to so nonsensical an apology. Detection did not diminish his pride, and his confession is as cynical as his forgery. He was, as it were, dedicated to the craft from his childhood, and Chatterton was at once his hero and his example. In his scrapbook, which still exists, snippets relating to the author of Thomas Rowley's poems are piously treasured, and he himself has described a visit reverentially paid to the shrine of Chatterton at Bristol. While he was delighted at the tumult of applause which greeted the exhibition of his famous relics and manuscripts, his delight burned just as brightly when all men knew him for an impostor as when royalty itself chattered of his valuable discovery. The shout of laughter which greeted Kemble's delivery of the famous line, "And when this solemn mockery is o'er," saddened the author, but did not shake his vanity. No vile penitence for him! He would not whine, like the wretched Psalmanazar, in sorrow at a misspent youth. He did but confess the forgery, when deception was no longer possible, and bragged of his conquests, as well he might. Great scholars had signed a profession of faith; the ingenious Mr. Boswell, after a tumbler of

warm brandy-and-water, had declared, "Well, I shall now die contented since I have lived to witness the present day," and knelt down "to kiss the invaluable relics of our bard." Such was the forger's triumph, and he recorded it with satisfaction. But nothing reveals the arrogant character of William Ireland so clearly as the indignation which he felt and expressed at Malone's ruthless criticism. It was Malone who pilloried him without pity, inviting the world to pelt him with what missiles they chose, and he retorted with a lofty indictment of Malone's scholarship. He made no pretence that his documents were genuine, but he would not admit the grounds of condemnation. It is truly a noble spectacle: the detected forger proudly contemptuous of friends and foes alike. Those who accepted his documents were no better than fools; those who rejected them were poisoned by the venom of jealousy. In brief, Ireland played the game at all points with perfect skill. His forgeries were just bad enough to escape the sanguine eye of the people, and he presented them in such a manner as may justly be styled heroic.

The other forgers who displayed their talent in England during the last century had neither Ireland's skill nor Ireland's luck. Of course the gentleman who persuaded Moxon to publish and Robert Browning to introduce the sham letters of Shelley enjoyed his little jest; and it is certain that Simonides's great attainments fitted him to deceive the great librarians. But even Simonides met with a sharp rebuff at the Bodleian when he showed a masterpiece to Mr. Coxe with the question, "To what period does that belong?" and was told offhand, "To the middle of the nineteenth century." For the rest, George Gordon Byron was a clumsy botcher, and the clerk who, ten years since, forged letters of Burns and Scott to gratify the patriotism of Scottish-Americans, deserved no more than he got—a term of imprisonment. Yet, if the art has languished in England since the time of Ireland, the France of the nineteenth

century may boast a literary forger of admirable skill and unexampled success. That the name of Vrain Lucas should be forgotten already is an untoward accident of fate, for he completely mystified the Academicians of France and set the professors of Europe by the ears. Moreover, he may be taken as a model of his kind. He possessed all the qualities, good and bad, which go to the making of a successful forger—facile half-knowledge, industry, courage, optimism. Above all, he had the tact to find a victim perfectly suited to his talent, whom he humoured with remarkable address, and he has left such a record of artistic achievement as is still unrivalled.

Vrain—Denis Lucas—or, as he was commonly known, Vrain Lucas—was born at Lannery, in the department of the Eure-et-Loir, some three years after the battle of Waterloo. Like many another great man, he was of narrow circumstances and humble parentage. His father followed the ungrateful trade of a day labourer in the fields; and there is reason to believe that the son, unmindful of the distinction which awaited him, also handled the spade. But the country could not long hold captive so fine a spirit, and Vrain Lucas soon left home to seek his fortune in the great world which lay outside Lannery. At first his poverty compelled him to take menial service in a gentleman's family; but this was a mere incident in a life of adventure, and had no other influence upon our hero than to give his manners the polish which made him famous. Far more congenial was an employment which he found in a notary's office at Châteaudun, where he was presently promoted to be clerk in the law court. Many a useful hint did he gather from the parchments which he conned or copied here; but what was of greater import to the future, he devoted his scanty leisure to a serious course of study. While his colleagues sunned themselves on the boulevard, sipped absinthe, or rattled the dominoes on the marble table of a café, he read in the public library or composed poems, which

gave him the same sort of reputation at Châteaudun as Lucien de Rubempré enjoyed at Angoulême. Though his education had been sadly neglected, he had an unmistakable taste for polite letters, and when once he had found encouragement he wasted no time in the idle pursuit of vain fiction or vainer journalism. Historical research was his passion, and day after day his slim figure, bent with study, might be seen fitting among the shelves of the public library. The *History of the Academy*, the *Library of Authors Who Have Written History*—such were the tomes which engrossed his leisure; and so highly was he esteemed, that when he left Châteaudun, a librarian wrote upon his *registre de prêt* these words: "The industrious M. Lucas is going to live in Paris. He deserves to succeed. A young man from Lanrenay, self-educated." And succeed he did, far beyond the expectation of the sympathetic librarian.

In 1851, then, Vrain Lucas arrived in Paris, with no baggage save a bundle of poems, and an ambition fixed upon antiquarian pursuits. He was not precisely a youth—he had passed his thirty-third birthday. But precocity is no virtue; and as that fruit is sweetest which ripens slowly, so the finest talents come late to efflorescence. His poems, as their titles—"La Guirlande de Flore" and "Ce que j'aime à voir"—suggest, were too classic for the taste of the time. He could not hope to challenge the supremacy of Victor Hugo. Moreover, as the librarian confessed, he was self-educated. No kindly monk had taught him the rudiments of Latin and Greek, as they taught the youthful Psalmanazar, whose quick precocity and quicker extinction make him a striking contrast to his ingenious compatriot. Like Shakespeare, Vrain Lucas had no Greek and little Latin:

On ne m'a, grâce au destin,  
Appris ni grec, ni latin.

Thus he wrote in his elegant verse; and this ignorance of the classic tongues, as will presently be seen, profoundly in-

fluenced his art. At the outset he knew not what to do in Paris; he had neither friends to aid him nor such genius as could be readily turned into gold. His one resource was to take what work offered itself; and by great good luck he found employment in the *cabinet généalogique* of a certain Letellier. Here at last was proper scope for the antiquarian zeal which burned within him. For Letellier was ready at a moment's notice to invent a pedigree or sketch a coat-of-arms. His office was a factory of false titles and forged documents; old parchments, curious inks, fantastic names and phrases were his stock-in-trade; and Vrain Lucas learned under his tutelage many a secret contrivance which he afterward turned to good account. Above all, he plumbed the depths of human vanity. He saw with what ease a man may be deceived who wishes to believe in falsehood, and he acquired a keen insight into the credulous character upon which a literary forger must work. So while he performed the duties of Letellier's tout he practised himself in the subtle arts of deception, and was able, when the time came, to gull M. Chasles as he chose.

Meanwhile, though Paris and the office of Letellier gave him every opportunity for the historical research which he loved, he was not content. He was not satisfied even with a ready access to all the biographical dictionaries and encyclopædias of what was then called the *Bibliothèque Impériale*. Vain as his victims, he sighed for the wealth and notoriety which seldom come to the humble inventor of pedigrees. His election, as a corresponding member, to the *Société Archéologique du Département d'Eure-et-Loir* was a momentary triumph, and so well cultivated was his faculty of persuasion that soon afterward he was appointed head of a provincial library. But none knew better than Vrain Lucas what he could and could not do. He dared not attempt to catalogue a library on the very scanty Latin that was his, and, rather than expose himself to failure, he remained in

Paris, living among old books, old manuscripts, and autographs of all ages.

His real chance came when he met M. Chasles, the celebrated mathematician, for in M. Chasles he found precisely the victim which his ingenuity demanded. Now, M. Chasles, though he was a distinguished member of the Académie des Sciences, and had been honoured by our own Royal Society, was a man of simple faith and exquisite trustfulness. Moreover, he was a zealous collector of autographs and old books, and he accepted with enthusiasm whatever was brought him by Vrain Lucas. The few real treasures that he possessed he gladly sold, in order to buy the most impudent forgeries ever devised by the wit of man. His confidence in Vrain Lucas was unshakable. "We are of the same country," he said pathetically, "and I thought him incapable of deceiving me." Such is always the attitude of the pigeon who soon grows to love the friendly rook. Nor was Vrain Lucas the man to lose the most brilliant opportunity which ever came to a literary forger. His materials were ready to his hand; he had not served his apprenticeship in Letellier's workshop for nothing; and his knowledge was not so deep as to destroy his faith in that which his own hand created. So he fabricated letters from the great men of all ages, and sold them as fast as he could turn them out to the trusting mathematician. The story told of their origin was ingenious and convincing: they came, said he, from the famous cabinet of the Chevalier Blondeau de Charnage, whose collection, made in the middle of the eighteenth century, was still remembered by scholars. At the Revolution the cabinet was purchased by M. le Comte de Boisjournain, who during the Terror emigrated to America and took his treasures with him. The adventures of these precious papers, however, did not end with their arrival in America. On their homeward voyage they suffered shipwreck, and were one and all stained by salt water. Their present possessor, whom Vrain Lucas always called with air of

mystery *le vieux monsieur*, loved them like his life, and they were wrung out of him one by one by the stress of poverty. Whatever money was paid for the priceless letters was, of course, handed over to *le vieux monsieur*, and the forger kept no more for his pains than twenty-five per cent. It is but natural, then, that sometimes he was hard up, and asked the confiding M. Chasles for a small sum, which should come to him alone. Nor was *le vieux monsieur* too easy to manage. Now and again he was tortured by remorse that priceless relics should be lost to his family, and his remorse was acuter when a fire-eating relative, called in the secret correspondence *le vieux militaire*, angrily protested that they should be repurchased. It was the prettiest comedy to all concerned, save M. Chasles, who in his anxiety was more than once inclined to have the forger arrested, not because he had been swindled, but because he feared that these valuable papers should be sold and sent out of France, whose chief ornament they were.

Thus, in the course of a few years, Vrain Lucas sold to M. Chasles 27,472 forgeries for the comfortable price of 150,000 francs. To give the names of the correspondents would be to exhaust the roll of fame. They belonged to all countries and all ages. The letters of Sappho, Thales, Virgil, Julius Cæsar, Zeno, St. Luke, Lazarus, Montaigne, Rabelais, the Cid, Molière, Newton, Galileo, Pascal, Louis XIV., and countless others jostled each other in the ample chests of M. le Comte de Boisjournain. The impartiality of Vrain Lucas was unique; he neglected nobody who had a place in the *Biographie Universelle*, and when he professed a doubt as to a signature which he had devised himself, he would ask M. Chasles, with an ingenuous smile, to consult that repertory of useful knowledge. But whether they came from Greece or Italy or from modern France, they were all written upon paper of the same age and the same quality, pleasantly stained by time or travel, and water-marked with a *fleur-*

*de-lis*. Of this paper the forger was very sparing. The great correspondents wrote always upon half sheets and curbed their eloquence. But not only was the paper uniform; the letters, one and all, were written in French. And here, I think, Vrain Lucas showed his real grandeur. Latin and Greek had been denied him at school, and so he cheerfully made the best of it. Having precisely gauged the credulity of his victim, he harmonised his means to his end like a true artist. He made one concession to antiquity: the letters of Sappho and Julius Cæsar, to name but two, are written in what he thought was old French, and in a bold handwriting which evidently betokened age. Besides, if the paper were suspicious, if the language would have made any other than M. Chasles roar with laughter, the ink was impeccable. How it was made remains the secret of Vrain Lucas, but true it is that it resisted all the tests which commonly expose the ink of modern fabrication, and won over many an expert to the forger's side.

The style of the letters is simple and impartial. There was no nonsense about Vrain Lucas; he had no more ambition to mimic the manner than to reproduce the handwriting of his august correspondents. He was quite content if the writer of a masterpiece was contemporary with its recipient, and what was good enough for him was obviously good enough for M. Chasles. A specimen will best illustrate his method, and no better specimen can be chosen than the following letter, addressed by Sappho to Phaon: "Sappho à son tres amé Phaon Salut. Très chier amé pres de ces bords charmans où la veue admire en s'égarrant une immense estendue, où la pleine des mers et la vouste des cieux semblent dans la lointaing se confondre, non loin d'icelle rive est un lit de verture qu'ombrage un orme épais et qu'une onde pure arrose," and the rest. Wherever you turn in this astounding correspondence, you find the same exquisite commonness of thought, the same superb absurdity of language. After Sappho comes Thales

with a letter to the "très illustre et très redouté prince Ambigat, roy des Gaules," in which the "très puissant prince" is informed that water is "le principe de toutes choses." In like manner Archimedes salutes his beloved Hiero, Alexander Rex offers a few words of comfort to his "très amé Aristote," Vercingetorix grants a safe-conduct to "Troque Pompee." More amazing still, "Magdeleine" sends greeting "à son très amé Lazare," whom she addresses as her brother, which proves that Vrain Lucas knew the *Biographie Universelle* better than the Bible. "Mon très amé frère," writes Magdeleine, "ce que me mandez de Petrus de nostre doux Jesus me fait esperer que bien tot le verrons icy et me dispose l'y bien recevoir, nostre seur Marthe sen rejouit aussy. Sa santé est fort chancelante et je crains son trespas," and so on. Grotesque as it is, it was sufficient at once to delight the heart of M. Chasles and to fill the pocket of Vrain Lucas.

Still more curious is the praise of France, which is the excuse for most of these astounding letters. M. Chasles had a strenuous love of his country, and Vrain Lucas played on his patriotism as on a pipe. Greek and Roman, Egyptian and Hebrew agree in hymning the glory of France, and, oddly enough, they all display a guilty knowledge of the vast correspondence brought to light by Vrain Lucas. When Aristotle writes to Alexander, it is to request that he may visit Gaul, and there study the science of the Druids. Alexander affably replies that he could not be better employed. Cleopatra, in addressing "son très amé Jules Cesar impereur," declares that when "nostre fils Cesarion" is old enough to bear the voyage, she will send him to Marseilles, that he may receive his education at the centre of the universe. Not even Lazarus, quaintly styled by himself "Lazare le ressuscité," can escape this passion for Gaul, and in writing to his "très amé Petrus" he professes his agreement with Cæsar and Cicero, who assert that "the Druids indulge in human sacrifice." All this, of course, was highly

flattering to M. Chasles's national pride, and doubtless he took pleasure also in the opinion of Charlemagne (confided to his "très docte et très amé Alcuin") that the Celtic tongue was the mother of all languages. Such was the supreme cleverness of Vrain Lucas: he discovered previously what his client wanted, and found it for him. No difficulty baffled his research. For instance, the letters of Charles Quint are no less rare than those of Rabelais, yet M. Chasles possessed a considerable correspondence which had passed between these two distinguished men. Again, La Bruyère put pen to paper as seldom as might be; the united collections of the world can only discover a poor score of his letters; yet Vrain Lucas obtained from *le vieux monsieur* no less than seven hundred and thirty-nine specimens of La Bruyère's penmanship!

But at last the tardy foot of retribution overtook the ingenious author. M. Chasles could no longer control his pride; he could no longer forbear to trumpet his triumph abroad. On July 6, 1867, the learned mathematician communicated to the Académie des Sciences two letters addressed by Rotrou to Richelieu, proposing the foundation of an academy in Paris such as Clémence Isaure had established at Toulouse, and dated some thirty years earlier than the birth of that institution. Paris was still agog with interest in a rewritten chapter of history, when (a week later) M. Chasles laid before the same Academy two letters from Blaise Pascal to Robert Boyle, and four notes, signed "Pascal," which proved conclusively that Pascal had forestalled Newton's great discovery. The pride of France was aflame in a moment. Once more, it was said, perfidious Albion had filched the honour which belonged to another. M. Chasles woke up to find himself a national hero, and the lightest word spoken in contempt of his documents was accepted as a plain proof of treachery. MM. Duhamel and Fougère, who threw doubt upon the letters of Pascal, were denounced as enemies of their

fatherland; and every objection which pedantry could raise was instantly controverted by new letters drawn from the endless store of *le vieux monsieur*. During the anxious weeks which followed, Vrain Lucas worked with unceasing energy. A set of letters which passed between the aged Pascal and the boy Newton convinced some waverers, and Galileo, suddenly introduced (with a sheaf of documents) into the discussion, proved a welcome diversion. But meanwhile Sir David Brewster and other men of science on our side of the Channel denounced the letters as clumsy forgeries. M. Chasles answered them by a new sheaf of letters from Pascal, Kepler, anybody, and thought the matter settled. Why, indeed, should he trouble to confute a mob of Britons, impervious to argument, when their pride was wounded? The discussion endured for two years, until in 1869 the Académie, through its perpetual secretary, declared that M. Chasles had proved his point, and that the letters were genuine. It was decided that no impostor could imitate "the noble simplicity" of Louis XIV., whose opinion of Galileo was held sacred. Had the letters been forged, said the Abbé Moigno, the forger must have been a demi-god. Paris was jubilant, M. Thiers embraced the Academician in the name of patriotism, and patriots cheered Blaise Pascal in the streets with an enthusiasm which would have delighted that master of irony. Truly the love of country has been responsible for many follies, but never for a greater folly than that which put poor, well-meaning M. Chasles upon a pinnacle of glory.

Then came ruin. On April 12, 1869—a belated All Fools' Day—M. Chasles received the formal approval of France. A week later, M. Breton, an official of the Observatory, discovered sixteen of the forged letters from Pascal and one of Galileo's in M. Saverien's *Histoire des Philosophes Modernes* (1761). M. Chasles was unabashed; he declared that M. Saverien had stolen his originals without acknowledgment,

and promptly produced a letter from Montesquieu to Saverien recommending him to Madame de Pompadour, who, as is known, possessed a vast collection of autographs. At every fresh step taken by M. Breton and his friends, Vrain Lucas was ready with a fresh letter. The innocent M. Chasles told him what he desired to prove, and the forger instantly obliged his patron. How long this see-saw of proof and counter-proof would have lasted is uncertain; but after two months of idle discussion Le Verrier summed up the case with pitiless logic. He tore the fabric of M. Chasles's patriotism to shreds, and at last that amiable philosopher was forced to confess that he had been duped. But even in the act of confession he still expressed a wavering belief in the man who had befooled him. "La collection s'étend," said he, with a pensive naïveté, "aux premiers temps, et même au-delà." *Même au-delà* is a charming revelation of implicit trust, and one almost regrets that it was ever disturbed. Justice, however, claimed her victim, and Vrain Denis Lucas was duly arraigned. To prove his guilt was easy enough: he had defrauded the poor old mathematician of some six thousand pounds, and the most interesting problem offered for solution was, what did he do with the money? He was a man of simplicity and refinement; the most diligent inquiry revealed no more than the good order and regularity of his life. He lived quietly in the Rue St. Georges with an amiable mistress. He received no company, and sought none, save that of M. Chasles. When he was well off, he dined at the Café Riche, for he was of those who prefer a cutlet with elegance to a Gargantuan feast ill-served. If for the moment he lacked money, he was content with a *crêmerie*. Examined by the magistrate, he preserved a dignified reticence where his private life was touched, but he justified his public actions with eloquence and ingenuity.

In face of the jury he once more beat the drum of patriotism. "Whatever is said or done," said he, "my conscience is

calm. I have the conviction that I never did any man a wrong. If to reach my end I did not act with perfect discretion, if I sometimes followed a tortuous path, if I used a trick to strike the attention and to arouse the curiosity of the public, it was merely to recall certain historical facts which are easily forgotten or unknown even to the learned. . . . I blended instruction with amusement. . . . M. Chasles had never before been listened to so patiently. . . . Yes, whatever happens, I shall always be conscious that I acted, if not with discretion, at least with uprightness and patriotism." There is a directness in this oration worthy a hero of old Rome; but the jury was unmoved, caring, it is evident, no more for science than for patriotism. The forger was condemned to two years' imprisonment, and it was only after his condemnation that the worst piece of luck befell him. He was sentenced in February, 1870; five months later war was declared against Germany, and Paris was packed with soldiers eagerly shouting "À Berlin!" Thus in a moment he lost the hope of glory. His marvellous achievements were forgotten in the misery which settled upon Paris when the outburst of military enthusiasm was spent. M. de Goncourt complained that one of his masterpieces missed the chance of a triumphant success by the declaration of war; but poor Vrain Lucas suffered more deeply than the author of *Charles Demailly* from the German invasion. Though his ingenious forgeries brought him a comfortable income, he could not be content without notoriety, and he forfeited all chance of immediate fame by a foolish turn of the political wheel. But the war is now docketed in the pigeon-holes of history, and it is time to remember those who have distinguished themselves in the arts of peace. Not while patriotism beats in the breast of a single Frenchman should the humble antiquarian be forgotten, who, for the glory of France, persuaded Sappho to address Phaon in the French tongue, and who restored to Blaise Pascal, their true discoverer, the laws of gravity.

Vrain Lucas was, like all of his kind, half-educated. His natural wits travelled faster than his knowledge, and no course of painful research had dulled his fancy. Too facile to be critical, he allowed himself such freedoms as would be impossible for a schoolboy; yet he never lost faith in himself, he never shook the confidence of his dupe. But one gift he shared with others of his kind—a gift higher and rarer than mere erudition—eloquent persuasiveness. His manners, one is sure, were irresistible, and even had poor M. Chasles attempted to resist, it would have been useless. For successful forgery is a species of hypnotism. As the Indian juggler persuades the spectators that he disappears

at the end of a rope flung into the air, or that he brandishes a sword red with an infant's blood, so the forger induces his willing victim to believe that a letter written yesterday in ill-spelt French is the true Greek of Sappho. M. Chasles was, during the eight years of fraud, completely hypnotised. He believed what he hoped and what he was told. Yet it should be remembered that a forgery only succeeds when the credulity of the victim keeps pace with the forger's skill. The victim, in truth, is of the rarer clay, and assuredly the world will match Vrain Lucas a dozen times before it again encounters so simple, credulous, and kindly an old gentleman as M. Michel Chasles.

## THE FABIANS

BY GEORGE MIDDLETON

THE Fabian Society has made its great impression upon social conditions in England because it had dominant personalities motivated by a serious purpose. Setting out courageously with only a few members, the Society has, in thirty years, lived to see its name indelibly stamped upon legislation and itself to be hailed as one of the most potent educational forces of the decades. A casual observer may easily think it merely an organisation of radical men and women gifted with a keen sense of publicity and a faculty of stirring up unfavourable comment from the established order. But a reading of Mr. Pease's *History of the Fabian Society*\* will soon disillusionise him. In fact, its genial former Secretary has gathered together such a record of endeavour and accomplishment that one feels the Fabians were and still are one of the most healthy forces in the Empire. It was their intention to form an association "whose ultimate aim shall be the recon-

struction of Society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities." How much they have accomplished toward that defiant task may be deduced from the last chapter of this absorbingly interesting record. The spell of Marxism was definitely broken; English socialism was taken from that intellectual bondage. We must bear in mind, too, that the Fabians very early stated that their intention was not revolution but evolution, and it was through their efforts that the German's "fantastic creed" was lessened in its destructive effect before their more constructive effort of legislation *via* education. The Fabians have never become crystallised into an orthodoxy because no one was ever the authorised spokesman of the faith. Freedom of thought was their collateral intention and one senses that the percolating value of new ideas, even when formal converts were not made, has been their greatest contribution. The mere record of the *Fabian Essays* as well as the hundreds of pamphlets is sufficient testimony of this.

But quite aside from the history of

\*The History of the Fabian Society. By Edward R. Pease. New York: Dutton and Company.