

A B S T R A C T.

- Introduction. With the Romantic poets had come reawakened interest in the sea, a subject long neglected. The last half century has seen love and admiration for the sea entering into the work of a large number of French poets. Five among them, in whose work its influence is essential, have been chosen as representative:- Corbière, Richepin, Verhaeren, Le Braz and Le Goffic.
- Chapter I. The diversity of temperament in those poets to whom the sea appeals, and the influence of temperament on their attitude towards the subject.
- Chapter II. The sea and the artist. The variety of aspects chosen; miniatures, intimate and detailed painting of definite scenes. The contrast between the vision of the Breton poets and Verhaeren; the suggestive and melodious expression of the mobility of the sea.
- Chapter III. The interest of contemporary poets in the sea as an influence on the character and lives of sailors; their close observation and realistic description of the sailor and his ways.
- Chapter IV. The sea as a force beside mankind, and as a link between the nations of the world; its invitation to the traveller and its encouragement to man.
- Chapter V. What the sea suggests to the thought and imagination of the poet. The ocean as a symbol of the infinite.
- Conclusion. The growing interest in the sea among poets of the last half century. Realism and intimacy in their treatment of each phase of the subject. The absence of the vague melancholy of the Romantics. The recognition of the sea as a link between centuries.
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THE SEA IN FRENCH POETRY

-- from --

1870 to the present day.

INTRODUCTION.

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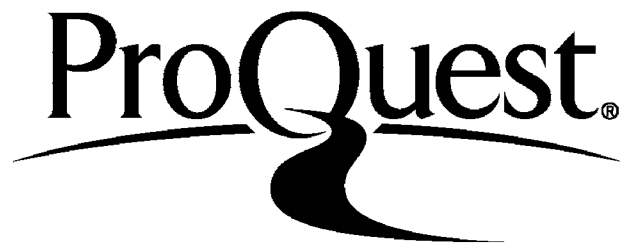
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INTRODUCTION

For us to-day, to whom a world with no sea would seem as strange as a world without trees or flowers, it is not easy to imagine a time when, for most people, the sea was merely a word standing for something distant, known only through legends of storm and strange perils. Yet so it was in France, less than a century and a half ago. With this lack of knowledge of the sea and interest in it, doubtless largely due to geographical considerations, it is natural that the subject should be late in entering modern French literature.

That eager traveller, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, was the first to look on the sea with fresh vision and to write of it with the conviction of interest and careful observation. Every detail which made the terror of a stormy sea was seen and described by a man who knew the sea. But he needed great movement, sound and colour, something concrete out of which he might paint his picture. Aboard ship, with a calm sea stretching endlessly around him, he was soon bored. A sentence in his "Voyage à l'Ile de France" gives the key to his attitude. "Il n'y a guère de vue plus triste que celle de la pleine mer. On s'impatiente bientôt d'être toujours au centre d'un cercle dont on n'atteint jamais la circonférence."

Soon, however, interest widened. Chateaubriand, "l'ami des vagues," loved and watched the waves, and his imagination transfigured the actual scene and discovered something of the wonder of the sea. The sea was the companion of his meditations, and in the beloved solitude of the great ocean, and through the plaintive sound of the waves on the shore, it drew him beyond actuality into sad and sweet reverie. In the

work of Victor Hugo, the influence of the sea is equally strong. Chateaubriand felt awe before the sea, but for Victor Hugo it was a mysterious being, sombre and menacing and yet irresistible in its appeal. As a poet, he loved its immensity, its colour and everchanging aspect, its wealth of material for his heights of imagery and his vast conceptions, while the sea charmed him, too, through his vision of its life and his feeling for it as a great symbol. Vigny, too, was drawn to the greatness and troubled movement of the sea, and to interest in scenes of seafaring.

Gradually the attitude of the public towards the sea was changing, although still comparatively few had first-hand knowledge of it. Indeed, after reading Bernardin de Saint Pierre's account of the discomforts and dangers of a voyage, only the most enthusiastic vagabond would have braved such an experience of his own free will, and the history of seafaring tells us that Bernardin did not exaggerate. But seen through the eyes of the Romantics, the sea was no longer to be despised or ignored. No longer was it to rank with the desert, for through their pages a glimpse of its beauty and strange, if formidable, charm was perceived. Moreover, political events of the Napoleonic times and a growing knowledge of the Republic on the other side of the Atlantic, whither many Frenchmen had sailed, as well as an increasing number of English and French accounts of sea travel, all combined to create interest in this new subject of the sea and seafaring, during the first half of the nineteenth century.

With this interest came the sea novel. Edouard Corbière, (father of the poet, Tristan Corbière), Victor Hugo, Eugène Sue and other novelists chose the sea as a setting for their stories. Storms and adventures abounded, were indeed indispensable, while the smuggler and the buccaneer were the

heroes. Some of these books, written by sailors, brought American and tropical seas into the scene. But sometimes the subject was simply an excuse for sensational adventures, and the writers knew as little of the sea as their public: it was really incidental. Tristan Corbière refers with scorn to the popular conception of the sailor:

"Vos marins de quinquets à l'Opéra..... comique
Sous un frac en bleu-ciel jurent 'Mille Sabords!'"
(Matelots).

Most of these sea novels were soon forgotten. But there was at least one result of the vogue. It fanned the flame of interest awakened by the Romantics, and it brought glimpses of distant seas, suggesting, although dimly, the greatness and possibilities of the sea.

Through the changes in poetic thought which succeeded the supremacy of the Romantic poets, the theme of the sea held its place. In Leconte de Lisle's "Poèmes Antiques" and "Poèmes Barbares," and later in the sonnets of Hérédia, we find tropical and northern seas in brilliant and finished picture. Although the poems of Hérédia, re-published in volume form in 1893, come within the time limit of this study, they belong in reality to an earlier phase of the subject.*

During the century which had passed between "Paul et Virginie" and 1870, the sea had lost the strangeness which belongs to a subject remote from human interest. It was peopled with ships and human beings. Its strangeness now had another cause, and came of the wonder aroused by the vague yet sure perception of the mysterious beauty and life of the sea. The sea poet of the end of the nineteenth century found, therefore, a subject not unknown, yet still

*The sea poems of Leconte de Lisle and of Hérédia are the subject of a book by J.K. Ditchy, "Le Thème de la mer chez les Parnassiens."

new, unexplored, and of growing interest. During the last fifty years, a time of change, of increasing intercourse between nations, of inventions bringing speedier and less hazardous traffic on the sea, an era of free and abundant thought linked closely to widening appreciation of natural beauty, the immense and beautiful life of the sea held a strong appeal to the imagination of the poet, of the artist and the philosopher alike. The sea is essentially a poetic subject, whether the writer chooses prose or verse for his instrument, but in succeeding pages it is proposed to consider those who have written in verse of the sea and sea-faring.

There are five of this generation who may be called representative sea poets: Tristan Corbière, Jean Richepin, Emile Verhaeren, Anatole Le Braz and Charles Le Goffic. Other contemporary poets have been arrested by the beauty of the sea, have found in it a background or a metaphor for their thought. Auguste Angellier, Jean Moréas, Henri de Régnier, André Lemoyne, Laurent Tailhade, Paul Bourget, Paul Claudel, Paul Valéry, ^{Francis Vielé-Griffin and} the Breton traveller, Auguste Dupouy are notable among many. But this study aims at considering those in whose thought the sea is a dominant influence, a constant source of inspiration, whose feeling for it is deep and lasting, and whose expression is representative of the life of sea poetry.

I.

THE SEA AND THE POET

The sea is one of the most personal of subjects. Its charm ^{is} ~~was~~ varied and as illogical as its own moods. And the poets who have found inspiration and happiness in its companionship are men of widely different personality, some with ears attuned to the gentle plaintive voice of the sea, and eyes fixed on its shining calm expanse, others listening for the deeper sounds of the ocean, and feeling its poetry most strongly in hours of storm, or brilliance.

Tristan Corbière, earliest of the poets of our period, was born in 1845 near Morlaix, and spent the greater part of his short life on the Breton coast, except for the last three years, the period of "Les Amours Jaunes," when he left ~~Ro~~ff for Paris. But his sea poems, "Les Gens de Mer," had been written before this time, while he was living among the Breton fishermen.

Corbière was the son of a family of sailors, and his love of the sea, and pride in his connection with it, date from his earliest days, when he listened with joy to his father's tales of the sea. Edouard Corbière had been for many years a sailor before he returned to write of his experiences in his sea novels, and Monsieur Martineau, in his book on Tristan Corbière, tells us that the poet thought longingly of distant seas, and would have liked to emulate the adventurous career of his father. Undoubtedly his admiration for his father's work fostered his interest in sailors and his innate passionate love of the sea.

But almost from childhood, Tristan Corbière was consumed by illness. Reserved, independent, and bitterly sensitive

as to his physical weakness and appearance, he sought consolation and companionship in the sea and the wild shore of Brittany. Living a solitary life at Rothoff, with his boat and his dog, he found in the sea his most perfect and constant friend, on whom he might lavish, without hurt to his pride, all his pent up tenderness, and before whom he was no longer "an ankou" (death) as he was called by the Rothovians, but strong with the spirit of pride and freedom from care of the true sailor. No one has felt for the sea a deeper or more exclusive love than Corbière's. Nothing mingled with it in his mind, no regret at separation from home, no apprehension of approaching danger, nor oppression before the force of the sea. On each page glows his single and intimate joy in the sea. The opening poem of "Les Gens de Mer" frankly declares the strength of his feeling:

... "Mais il fut flottant, mon berceau
Fait comme le nid de l'oiseau
Qui couve ses oeufs sur la houle;
Mon lit d'amour fut un hamac;
Et, pour tantôt, j'espère un sac
Lesté d'un bon caillou qui coule."

This feeling for the sea did not arise from ignorance of its menace for the sailor; on the contrary, in "Lettre du Mexique," "Matelots" and wherever Corbière writes of sailors, he shows a most sympathetic appreciation of their hazardous life. But his love for the sea was rather like the affection one might feel for a person whose faults are evident, but who inspires such love that they only increase it. Corbière indeed loved the sea for itself.

On the sea, Corbière found happiness. Here and here only he could be light-hearted, and buoyantly young, for he could escape from his self-consciousness, give freedom to his deepest feelings, and enjoy the sea's wild harmonies of sound and colour and movement with all his artist's soul. The sea, with the freedom of its vast solitude, inspired him with

an exhilaration which fills these sea poems with movement and energy. Here his ardent temperament was unfettered.

Corbière could not fulfil his childish ambition of voyages round the world, but he was no landsman. In his little yacht, "Le Négrier," he proved himself an excellent seaman, and the stormier the sea, the greater his delight.

"Il faisait beau quand nous mettions en panne
Vent dedans, vent dessus;
Comme on pêchait! - Va: je suis dans la panne
Où l'on ne pêche plus."
(A mon côté Le Négrier).

Monsieur Martineau quotes the remark of an old sailor who sometimes accompanied Corbière in his boat, and who spoke of "les manoeuvres folles de ce capitaine qui gouvernait droit sur la tempête." If his body was weak, his mind was full of vigour, and here in his boat he could taste all the joy of matching his strength against that of his formidable friend. For his turbulent mind, the friendly sea is the sea lashed by the winds. And it was as though he wished to compensate himself, by the ardent emotions the sea might arouse, for those which he felt were denied him by humanity. In the grey seas, the mournful wind-swept shores, he felt something fundamentally restless and rebellious, disdainful of all moderation, which was in close sympathy with his own intense and excessive temperament, as well as a grandeur which delighted his pride and imagination.

Corbière's expression of intimate tenderness for the sea, conveying the very spirit of its charm for the sailor, and his penetrating and proud vision of its greatness, are largely what make us feel the power of these poems. Others have given us vivid impressions, living pictures of the sea, or have looked with mystic eyes beyond its farthest horizons. No one has written of it with such depth of feeling as Corbière.

With all his provocation, the sea would not take him. It buffeted him with its storms, but tossed him back to land again. One feels it would have been a fitting end, and the one Corbière would have desired, to have vanished one day in a triumphant storm, with his "Négrier", in the repose and peace which the tumult brought to his mind, on the sea which he knew so closely and whose soul he felt so surely.

To Bretons the sea is part of their country, and it is natural that their writers especially should be sensitive to its charm. Corbière was succeeded by Anatole Le Braz and Charles Le Goffic in the line of Breton sea poets, though neither has so prominent a place as a poet. Le Braz, born in 1859, spent much of his childhood by the sea and later lived for many years at Quimper, before leaving Brittany to become Professor of French Literature at Columbia University. The greater part of his literary work is in prose. But he has written two books of poems, and these, especially the first, "La Chanson de la Bretagne," are penetrated by his love of the sea. He delighted to roam the shores, hearing tales of their history in the sound of the waves, or to watch the beauty of the sea as he sailed around his coast in close companionship with the fishermen and the folk of the sea.

"La mer m'a versé son breuvage,
Son lait, salé d'un sel amer;
Et j'ai grandi comme un sauvage
Sur le sein libre de la mer.....

La mer m'a chanté l'aventure
L'espace, la vie au grand air!
Je suis un oiseau de mâture
Un goéland, fils de la mer!

Et si, dans ma chanson bretonne
Un souffle passe, large et fier,
C'est qu'en moi gémit, hurle et tonne
l'âme innombrable de la mer."

(Dans la grand' hune).

Thus he writes in "La Chanson de la Bretagne," while the power of the sea in the existence and personality of the

people of the shore is constantly his theme. Much of his lore of the sea, and much of his keenest delight in it were due to his interest in those who spend their lives with it. He listened to the adventures which the unknown ocean held for them, to the hopes and fears of those who awaited the return of ships from distant seas, and to the legends of the fisherfolk which satisfied his liking for the uncertain, and the fantastic.

• Le Braz's feeling for the sea is not merely the obvious feeling of joy and fear in its fascination, natural to one who knew these shores where the sea is alternately a delight and a terror. And much as he loved the physical beauty of the sea, the attraction of its mystery, of an inner beauty and life which was a never failing source of wonder to his imagination, was equally strong. In contemplation of the sea, the aspirations and dreams of "La Chanson de la Bretagne" and the memories of "Poèmes Votifs" grew clear and beautiful. For Le Braz the sea was, above all, the friend of his dreams. And its inscrutable immensity held no terrors, for through the mystery of the sea he saw God, and his faith vanquished his fear of its greatness and left him free to enjoy the wonder of the vast spaces where his thought could rise without restraint. Hence there is a clearness, and a calm which is full of repose, in the sadness which permeates his songs, and in the delicate fantasy of his pictures.

Between Le Braz and his contemporary, Charles Le Goffic, there is much in common. Both have a deep affection for all things Breton, and a sympathetic interest in their compatriots; both are sensitive to the subtle and melancholy charm which the mystery of the sea throws over their alluring coast, both lords of that "royaume de féerie" which Renan has called the domain of his countrymen.

As in the case of Le Braz, the poems of Monsieur Le Goffic are only one part of the literary work of the writer, who is also a novelist and a critic. Yet the poet must not be overshadowed by the prose writer, and in the poems of Le Goffic the sea, with its fateful charm, is the constant accompaniment of his thought. But he turns towards it a mind more troubled, more poignantly sad, than that of Anatole Le Braz. His dreams are more sombre and less vague, his observation keener. He seeks consolation and peace in contemplation of the sea, but his joy in its companionship and beauty cannot overcome the deep and obscure emotion which disquiets his mind, and which is insistent throughout his poetry. The agitation of the sea reflects his own, but his is not the exuberant agitation of Tristan Corbière.

Le Goffic feels keenly the beauty of the sea, and paints with penetrating observation and emotion the rugged shore, the dunes and the grey seas so familiar to him. But he is also a psychologist and from the sea itself he turns to study the life of the shore, and the character of the Bretons in whose existence the sea is so great an influence and so wide a background. Sadly and yet with profound affection and sympathy, he writes of his people and the enveloping sea:

"Quand du sein de la mer profonde
Comme un alcyon dans son nid
L'Ame Bretonne vint au monde
C'était un soir, un soir d'automne
Sous un ciel bas, cerclé de fer
Et sur la pauvre Ame Bretonne
Fleurait le soir, chantait la mer."

(La Complainte de l'Ame Bretonne).

And as a Breton, he feels that this sea watches over him and enters into all his thought.

Le Goffic is a native of Lannion, where, as a child, he spent many hours watching the sea and the life of the quays. These three poets knew the sea from their earliest childhood. Therefore it was from their first recollection a part of

their life, something whose existence and whose characteristics were taken for granted. There is no shock at the first sight of an aspect of nature so different, so isolated, from all others, such as Loti describes clearly in "Le Roman d'un Enfant," and Michelet in the first pages of "La Mer"; such as comes between Victor Hugo and the sea. This early familiarity is surely a basis for the spontaneous and easy intimacy with the sea, for the recognition of a close affinity between its moods and their own, which is marked in these Breton poets. From the first, it is the sea itself which attracts them, rather than the thought of new and wonderful scenes beyond, which held so strongly the imagination of Loti.

Another poet has found inspiration in the life of the Breton shores and seas. Jean Richepin, although he was born in Algeria and knew the South, had little sympathy for its nature, and it was through the northern ocean that he felt the appeal of the sea. Monsieur Mâle says of him: "Un vrai romantique, il fut attiré parce qu'il y a de changeant, d'indéterminé, de mystérieux, dans le monde du Nord. La mer qu'il aima, ce fut la mer bretonne, les pâles soleils dans la brume, les ciels orageux, les grands vents, la houle du large et les puissantes vagues qui viennent de l'autre côté de la terre."

The attraction of these shores was doubtless increased by his acquaintance with Corbière's "Armor" and "Gens de Mer", published in 1873, thirteen years earlier than Richepin's "La Mer."

But while the Bretons, with all their love of adventure and the unknown, are deeply rooted to their own shore, Richepin felt no such tie. He was far more of a wanderer, whose restless spirit impelled him to constant change, constant search for new experience, and who brought to the

contemplation of the sea a mind as disturbed as it was vigorous. Richepin loved the sea. He loved its splendours of colour and sound, its wildness and changing aspect, the joy of dreaming in its vastness, and the vigour of seafaring and its freedom from restraint and convention. It appealed to him as an artist and as a philosopher, and he has sung its praises in beautiful verse in "Les Litanies de la Mer" and "Les Grandes Chansons." Yet we feel that some bond is lacking, some confidence, some tenderness, some purity of feeling, and Richepin remains a spectator rather than a sharer in the life of the sea. Hence he is not at ease before the greatness which he perceives and instinctively takes refuge in imagery, which, arising from lack of confidence rather than understanding, becomes a barrier between the writer and his subject, rather than a link: or he falls into rhetoric.

"Images, verbes, vers, allez, prenez l'essor
Ruez-vous dans son gouffre, assaillez son mystère.
Et tâchez d'être aussi brillants que son trésor.
Mots aux casques d'argent lourds de joaillerie,
Mots caparaçonnés de diamants et d'or."
(Litanies de la Mer).

At the beginning of "La Mer", Richepin reminds us with pride that he is no landsman:

"Et d'abord, sache bien à ma louange, ami,
Que je ne suis pas, comme on dit, marin d'eau douce,
De tanguer et rouler j'ai connu la secousse,
Sur un pont que les flots balayaient j'ai blêmi."

But few among poets of the sea have fulfilled their dreams of long and fruitful voyages, and in his opportunity for endlessly varied picture, Loti stands alone. Michelet, Victor Hugo, Verhaeren knew the sea from the shore, yet Michelet, with his imagination, and what Loti called "sa prodigieuse intuition d'artiste," penetrated from the shore farther into the secrets of the sea than many who cross and recross the ocean. The reader cannot help feeling that Richepin protests too much on the subject of his love and

knowledge of the sea.

He is indeed happier when he writes, with an art which is full of delicacy and charm, of the life of the shore, and of the greatness of the sea as he contemplates it from land. But we feel that Richepin is at his best when he is thinking of his friends the sailors, whom he knew and respected. There is depth and sincerity of feeling as well as the power always characteristic of Richepin in "Le Serment," and "Les Trois Matelots de Groix" and in his play "Le Flibustier," where he tells of the invincible fascination of the sea for those who live by it. Here he is in touch with people whose feeling for nature is not obscured by any trace of cynicism, and through his sympathy for these folk of the sea, Richepin seems to capture something of their emotion and uses the great resources of his art to express a freshness and simplicity of feeling which he lacks elsewhere.

These poets have considered the sea and the people of the sea in an atmosphere far removed from the vicissitudes and complications of trade, from the changes and excitements of modern invention, and where the shades of the past cling too heavily to be easily dispelled by the light, suggestive breezes of the future.

But while Tristan Corbière was reading with elated admiration his father's tales of the sea, there was growing up in different surroundings a boy ten years his junior, to whom vitality had an equally strong appeal, and who was to glory in the unfettered force of the sea as he watched it sweeping towards the endless line of sand dunes of his beloved Flanders. Monsieur Francis Vielé-Griffin writes of Verhaeren: "Son enfance s'écoula en pleine campagne flamande, aux bords de l'Escaut, avec ses voiles, ses navires, ses digues énormes. Saint-Amand est un pays de moulins, de

vanniers, de cordiers, de passeurs d'eau: pays de brumes, de gel, de prairies inondées, pays spongieux où parfois les grandes marées montent aux villages."

There is a story that he liked to look out over the wide expanse of country and sea from the belfry of his village. We can easily picture the boy climbing the tower, at first for sheer fun, and then, as he watched the ships moving slowly along, and the sails of the windmills as they turned, feeling already hopeful wonder at the vast and living world. Verhaeren himself recalls the dreams of his childhood:

"Je me souviens du village près l'Escaut,
D'où l'on voyait les grands bateaux
Passer, ainsi qu'un rêve empanaché de vent
Et merveilleux de voiles
Le soir, en cortège, sous les étoiles."
(Les Tendresses premières).

Nor, in his later knowledge of the busy, involved traffic of the ports, and the steamers which had so greatly increased it and changed its aspect, did his picture of the tall ship going forth with bright sails set full to the wind fade from his mind, and in his visions the symbolic vessel which bears the explorer and the thought of the ages is still the ship of his childhood memory.

Already, too, as he watched the sea, he liked to dream of the unknown shores beyond the horizon and their mythological life.

"Depuis qu'enfant j'imaginai les grèves bleues
Où l'Ourse et le Centaure et le Lion des cieux
Venaient boire, le soir
Là-bas, très loin, à l'autre bout du monde;...."

The ardent, exuberant nature of Verhaeren exulted in the life of the sea, was stirred by its immensity, and loved it as an abundant source of energy. He has a sheer physical feeling of renewed vitality with communion with the sea. "Sur les Grèves" (Les Forces Tumultueuses) expresses this enthusiastic joy in the sea which makes him cry:

"Et c'est fête dans tout mon être.
 L'ardeur de l'univers
 Me rajeunit et me pénètre.

 Je sens
 Mon corps renouvelé vibrer de joie entière
 D'être trempé vivant et sain
 Dans ce brassin
 De formidable et sauvage matière."

If, in Corbière and in Loti, there glows the spirit of generations of seafaring ancestors, some old Viking surely lives still in Verhaeren's pure and intense joy in the sea, in this compelling and instinctive feeling, which is apart from all reason. But through his ^{intuition} ~~intention~~, and through the vivid impression of the physical charm of the sea, the ideas of the thinker were evolved. And Verhaeren's love of the sea and of its life, instead of separating the poet from his fellow beings, and concentrating him on his own personality, as in the case of Loti, inspired him with eager interest ^{relations} ~~in the~~ between Nature and the aspirations of mankind. Thus was the delight of the artist fused with the contemplative joy of the philosopher who saw in the infinite power and movement of the sea a symbol of the life of the universe, and a force to share in the progress of man. And for Verhaeren's active and hopeful temperament, the final attraction of the sea lay in its mystery, in its invitation to the seeker after deeper knowledge. He faced its greatness confidently, and joyfully, yet it remained a formidable greatness, for the very nature of his love for the sea debarred him from the friendly and personal intimacy of Corbière.

In these writers are indicated the diversity of the personalities which have influenced the poet's vision of the sea. From the impulsive, reticent passion of Corbière to the calm and gentle dreams of Le Braz, all find encouragement and joy in the luminous and changeful sea, and all are united by their love of it.

II.
ASPECTS OF SEA AND SHORE AND
THEIR AESTHETIC EXPRESSION.

In all those in whose work the sea has a place, and whatever the trend of the reverie it inspired, the origin of that reverie lies in the feelings of love or fear, wonder or sadness, awakened in the poet by the physical aspect of the sea, and in the subtle transformations of the spirit which come with beauty. Whatever his general ideas, the writer has at some moment been first and wholly attracted by the aesthetic charm of the sea, and in prose or verse has painted the scene which impressed him. For Loti, the balance and flow of the prose sentence was a fitting instrument, since his perception of the sea consisted in an infinite series of complete and static pictures. For Corbière and for Verhaeren, whose imagination seized it as an unending, resounding movement, the more deeply marked rhythm of poetry was the essential medium.

The poet is not necessarily attracted simply by the beauty of the sea, though always by some manifestation of its greatness. (It is interesting to note that all these writers turned towards the great seas of the North, and the Mediterranean has yet to have an eminent place in French sea poetry.) Perhaps it is the sounds of the sea or the dark heavy tones preceding the storm, which send a movement of emotion through the spectator. And once this anticipatory shiver has broken his indifference, there is no escape from the spell.

There must be, in any imaginative writer, three elements. He observes: his imagination gives life to his vision, and he feels: and finally his sense of language enables him to express what he feels ^{and thinks.} The vastness, the evanescence of

colour, sound and movement of the sea, and its intangible force, give peculiar opportunity to the fusion of these qualities, through which the poet may draw the imagination of the reader to meet his own.

All the senses combine to make him feel the poetry of the sea. Monsieur Vigié-Lecocq has written of the attraction of the sea: "Et la poésie de la mer comme celle de la forêt s'adresse à tous les sens: elle est la voix de la vague qui gémit ou s'exaspère dans son ardeur à baigner le rivage ou sa mélancolie de le fuir: elle est sa couleur d'azur profond, son parfum âpre, sa douleur saline qui brûle aux lèvres, sa grâce à fuir, gouttelettes fugaces, la caresse des doigts."

Tristan Corbière loved its graceful and stormy beauty. He writes of the open sea and the shore in sincere and independent verse. His poetry, blocking the picture in bold, suggestive strokes, concise in the extreme, often abrupt, riddled with sailors' slang, abounding in irregular, broken lines, which sometimes we must confess to finding obscure, is in complete contrast, in form as in spirit, to the majestic, resounding verse of the Romantics, and to the smooth and finished outlines of the Parnassiens. "La langue même du poète, gonflée de sève et traînant l'âcre odeur des algues et des goémons, nourrie de termes techniques et d'emprunts audacieux, à l'argot, est la seule adéquate au sujet. Elle est rude et heurtée comme les vagues en fureur; elle est expressive et forte comme l'âpre figure et le verbe énergique des hommes qu'elle exalte." Thus wrote M. Léon Bocquet of Corbière in "Les Destinées Mauvaises."

To readers of our own day, accustomed to the diversity of form and language of the last fifty years, the language of Corbière is no shock, but in the pre-symbolist ears of his contemporaries, it was merely bizarre, and it is not

astonishing that he paid the penalty of his originality by several years of oblivion, until he was revealed by Verlaine in "Poètes Maudits."

He writes of his favourite white-flecked sea as he loved to sail on it in his yacht:

"..... La mer jolie est belle
Et les brisans sont blancs....
Penché, trempe ton aile
Avec les goélands!....

Et cingle encor de ton fin mâ-t-de-flèche
Le ciel qui court au loin.
Va; qu'en glissant, l'algue profonde lèche
Ton ventre de marsouin!"

(A mon côté Le Négrier).

The lilting rhythm gives the tone of lightness and affectionate joy of such moments when he is close to the sea. Grace and vividness are in the picture of the little yacht dipping and rising with the ease of a seagull. And what a simple, yet clear impression of swift flight the second verse gives! Each word has its part in suggesting the scene, its breadth and movement. The expression of the last line is indeed far from beautiful and poetic. Phrases which are, in themselves, frankly ugly, are not infrequent in Corbière's poems. In many cases they are so spontaneous and expressive that they deepen the atmosphere of the poem, and the unity of the picture. But sometimes, as here, they seem unnecessary and not even realistic, and we wonder at such lines in the work of a poet alive to shades of expression. They are perhaps a trace of the super-sensitiveness which caused him, in a sort of bravado, to vilify the things which he most loved; or to emphasize their less pleasing aspects.

From the open sea, he turns to the shore, to give us a picture of Rojoff, ardent and lightly ironical, with a hint of fantasy:

"Trou de flibustiers, vieux nid
A corsaire! - dans la tourmente,
Dors ton bon somme de granit
Sur tes caves que le flot haute....
Ronfle à la mer, ronfle à la brise;

Tu corne dans la brume grise.
Ton pied marin dans les brisants....
- Dors: tu peux fermer ton Oeil borgne
Ouvert sur le large, et qui lorgne
Les Anglais, depuis trois cents ans.

- Dors, vieille coque bien ancrée
Les margats et les cormorans,
Tes grands peêtes d'ouragans,
Viendront chanter à la marée...."

The melody is deeper here. There is a gentle, caressing note as Corbière writes of the old town, so long watchful, sleeping in peace, amid all the activity of sea and winds: then quick excitement as he evokes the riotous, busy life of the old buccaneers' haven, with perhaps a tinge of regret at its passing: finally, with affectionate pride, the poet turns to the old cannon, still looking seaward, but sleeping too, and covered with "maigre jonc-marin en fleur," eloquent of peace after stormy days.

The imagery is full of colour, broad and emphatic as usual with Corbière. How apt are the epithets, such as "vieille coque bien ancrée" for the sailors' town, while each line is full of suggestion, making a vivid picture.

But although Corbière far more frequently suggests in swift and well marked outline, than describes, he can paint a scene in all its detail. There is such a picture in "Le Bossu Bitord."

"Le soleil est noyé. - C'est le soir. - Dans le
port
Le navire, bercé sur ses câbles, s'endort
Seul; et le clapotis bas de l'eau morte et
lourde
Chuchote un gros baiser sous sa carène sourde.
Parmi les yeux du brai flottant qui luit en
plaque,
Le ciel miroité semble une immense flaque.
Le long des quais déserts où grouillait un chaos
S'étend le calme plat....
Quelques vagues échos

Quelque novice seul, resté mélancolique
 Se chante son pays avec une musique -
 De loin en loin répond le jappement hazard,
 Intermittent, d'un chien de bord qui fait le
quart
 Oublié sur le pont....

Tout le monde est à terre."

These lines show how great an artist is Corbière in feeling and expressing the essence of a scene and not merely its superficial aspect, and so intensely that each word seems to compel the reader towards his vision. The picture is precise. The tone is subdued, the lines slow and measured, in harmony with the subject. Corbière is simple and direct in the extreme, with his invariable conciseness, yet with no shade of abruptness. Every line contains a wealth of meaning. Here, in place of "la vague de plume" whereon sped his 'Négrier', we find "l'eau morte et lourde." The slight, monotonous movement of the ship, the low, clearly perceived sounds, the patches and bars of faint light and the dark heaviness of the scene, accentuated by the intrusion of isolated sounds from without, the voice of the solitary sailor and of the dog in his loneliness, make a picture which is perfectly finished, and proportioned with quiet and delicate harmony. The mournful solitude of the sombre, deserted harbour could not be expressed with surer instinct nor with finer reality, and there is something arrestingly grave in the tone which is a fitting prelude to the tale of "Le Bossu Bitord."

There is an example here ("le ci-el") of Corbière's habit of counting two syllables for the usual one, and the reverse process, a characteristic which shocked his contemporaries, fastidious as to rules of prosody, but which simply indicates his imperative desire for suppleness, vigour and freedom of expression.

So long and finished a description is rare in Corbière's

work. He is a master of his own deliberately irregular, emphatic style, as he is in sensitive appreciation of the values of words. One has only to read his verse aloud to feel the essential unity of the rhythm, and he attunes it to every mood. His energetic language can express other feelings than his exuberance before the great movement of the sea: he expresses the pride and dignity of his feeling for seafaring in verse equally instinct with dignity:

"Vous m'avez confié le petit. - Il est mort,
Et plus d'un camarade avec, pauvre cher être,
L'équipage..... y en a plus. Il reviendra peut-être
Quelques-uns de nous. - C'est le sort...."
(Lettre du Mexique).

The short phrases, so full of meaning, the pauses and breaks, the extreme simplicity and restraint, are quietly intense, and eloquent in their expression of a certain sad finality.

While Corbière is at all times sensitive to the charm of the sea, its lighter aspects have least power to move him, and he mentions them rarely and briefly:

"Le temps était si beau, la mer était si belle,
Qu'on dirait qu'y en avait pas."
(Le Novice en partance).

It is hours of stress and storm which bring him a host of deep and lasting impressions. He loves the freedom, the greatness and tumult of the open sea. He writes of StRo^{ff} and the shore in days of storm, and with few exceptions his poems sing of the ocean in its darker moods. "La Fin," "La Goutte," "Le Naufrageur," "Le Phare," - all have their setting in a stormy sea. These are the seas whose poetry Corbière's nature feels most intimately, and whose rude grandeur and beautiful, menacing voice he expresses with brief and vivid clearness:

"La nuit, quand fait la rafale
La chair de poule au flot pâle
Hululant dans le roc noir...."
(Le Douanier).

Such are the glimpses which Corbière gives us of his most treasured moments. These sea poems are all glowing with life; through their strange rhythm come often strains of haunting, lingering melody, fleeting but clear echoes of far away music, the involuntary expression of something deep in the being of the poet. And intensity of feeling, power and spontaneity of expression, marked, yet harmonious and flexible rhythm, are the qualities which most strongly impress the reader of "Les Gens de Mer."

In contrast with the robust poetry of Corbière, with his almost defiant love of the sea, is the delicate, plaintive charm of Anatole Le Braz's verse. Le Braz knew the sea in many aspects. He writes of the ocean and of the shore, both in prose and verse. But he is especially happy in the modulation and rhythm of the song. In Le Braz's delight in the physical beauty of the sea there is something of the vagueness of the mystic. He feels the great expanse of the ocean, he appreciates the atmosphere of a scene, but the dreams which it inspires seem to cast a haze which obscures his perception of actual details. He lacks the precision of Corbière, nor does he weigh finely the values of colour and form. Le Braz gives us no such picture as that quoted from "Le Bossu Biterd." But verse, and especially song, can be independent of definite outline and substance to a degree impossible in prose, and Le Braz's songs are alive with the beauty and grace of the sea. One of the most beautiful is "La Chanson du Vent de Mer."

"O vent de mer, ô roi des vents
Toi qui fais, quand tu te déchaines,
Crier l'angoisse des vivants
Dans le vaste sanglot des chênes,

Souffle, souffle, grand souffle amer,
O roi des vents, ô vent de mer!.....

The very rush of the wind is in the rhythm of this song,

its wide and sustained sweep, its great and mysterious symphony of sound. Le Braz is peculiarly sensitive to sound, and he constantly tells of the various notes which he hears in the voice of the sea, stressing simply, but clearly, the harmony which he feels between them and the movement of the waves. In "le mystérieux chant d'orgues," as he calls the voice of the sea, lies a great part of its appeal for him, and it is, above all, through his expression of its sounds that he conveys an impression of the greatness of the ocean. Of all the moods in which Le Braz knows the sea, it is only when it is silent that he is ill at ease; then its mystery and greatness weigh upon him, and seem ominous and unnatural.

He writes of the sea in storm, with appreciation of its medley of sound and movement, and more than his fellow Bretons, he feels the influence of its beauty in its brighter aspects. He gives us pictures of the sea when it is blue and smiling, when he enjoys its lightness, untroubled by sombre premonitions; and then we find glimpses of the shore in characteristic imagery:

"Comme des tresses d'or, sur le dos blond des grèves,
Roulent des goémons, cheveux errants des mers."
(L'Ame des Matelots).

Or he sings of the sea in spring, shedding its grace and splendour over all nature, and flowing gaily towards the ancient shores of Brittany, as in "Terre d'Armor." Le Braz's pictures convey the grace and smooth, shining beauty of the sea, its pure, fresh colour and daintiness, rather than brilliance and surging force. He paints, too, the charm of a quiet, kindly sea in the evening, writing of such moments in calm, flowing verse, reflecting his pleasant emotion:

"Et, sur le ciel mourant, l'aile brune des voiles
S'éployait, et la mer chantait, et, sur les eaux
Les barques ondulaient ainsi que des berceaux...

La mer chantait son chant, et les choses muettes
Écoutaient....."

(La Chanson du Rocher qui marche.)

His imagination loves the harmony of such a peaceful scene, with its subdued shades, its gentle, monotonous movement, and the melody of the sea, seeming to charm all else to silence. The expression of a quiet, soothing quality in the scene and of a soft dimness in outline and tone, is characteristic of the poet.

Despite the charm of the sea in its brightness, Le Braz returns always to its darker tones, and listens most intently to its low, plaintive note. He writes of the wrecks which the mysterious sea sends back to the shore, empty and covered with seaweed (Les Epaves) and of the coming and going of the Iceland fishermen.

"Berceuse d'Armorique" is typical, in form and in sentiment, of his songs of the sea:

"Dors, petit enfant, dans ton lit bien clos:
Dieu prenne en pitié les bons matelots!
(Refrain):

Chante ta chanson, chante, bonne vieille!
La lune se lève et la mer s'éveille.

Quand tu seras mousse, hélas! C'est le vent
Qui te bercera dans ton lit mouvant.

Déjà dans ton âme a chanté la mer
Son chant doux aux fils, aux mères amer

Au Pays du Froid, ton père a sombré
Tu naissais alors, je n'ai pas pleuré.

Au Pays du Froid, la houle des fiords
Chante sa berceuse en berçant les morts.

Dors, petit enfant, dans ton lit bien clos,
Car tu t'en iras comme ils s'en vont tous!

Tes yeux ont déjà la couleur des flots.
Dieu prenne en pitié les bons matelots!

Car c'est pour les flots que nous enfantons
Tous meurent marins, qui sont nés Bretons."

The slow, monotonous rhythm, the low, wavering melody of

the tone, are full of emotion. And slight as are the indications, they are sufficient to evoke a series of impressions, of the pictures passing through the mind of the old Breton woman, as she listens to the sea, and watches the moonlight grow stronger, and thinks, with sad resignation, to its toll, of the vast, mysterious sea. The poet willingly uses the significant name "Pays du Froid" by which his countrymen know Iceland. The suggestions of the sound of the sea, at once menacing and inviting, insistent in its sweet and bitter tale, of the deep and mysterious light shining over it, of the great movement of the sea as a big shadow behind the calm movement of the cradle, make a wide and beautiful picture. It is eloquent of Le Braz's feeling for the beauty of the sea, and, above all, for its vastness and strangeness, and of the gentle melancholy which permeates his vision.

In the charm of the sea, the poet himself seems to rest peacefully, undisturbed by its vagaries. There is nothing abrupt in his pictures, nothing immoderate or impulsive. The poems inspired by the sea are calm in their expression, clear and simple in their harmony, never resounding nor pretentious, soothing rather than provocative. Here we are far from the emphasis and exuberance of Corbière, but there is grace, spontaneity and imagination and the impression of a quiet sincerity of feeling.

The same rude coast of Brittany has another painter in the poet of "L'Amour Breton" and "Le Bois Dormant." These are not all poems of the sea. But its presence envelopes the book and accompanies the thought of the writer, who thus emphatically describes his country:

"C'est un pays battu des vents, mordu des lames."
(Le Bandeau Noir).

Monsieur Le Goffic, while he loves the sea at all times, has a particular affection for it in an aspect which is

generally found least attractive, and which has received scant attention from artists of the sea. He is the poet of a grey sea, of a desolate shore in the sombre tones of an autumn or winter evening. Then it is that he feels its vitality most gently potent: then he sees in it a beauty greater and more sympathetic than that of the sunlit ocean or the spectacular grandeur of the storm. This sea is the setting of his love songs.

"Fraîche et riieuse et virginale,
Vous m'apparûtes à Coatmer,
Blanche dans la pourpre automnale
Du soleil couchant sur la mer.

Et la mer chantait à voix tendre,
Et des terrasses du ciel gris
Le soir penchait ses yeux de cendre
Sur les palus endoloris....."

(Romances sans paroles).

Perfect in their simplicity, these lines do more than describe; they make us feel the quiet, dark beauty of the scene, the tense and subtle fascination of the gentle sound and soft glowing light enveloping the wide expanse, with its rigorous contrast implied in the word "endoloris," so strongly suggestive of melancholy. Each expressive image is beautiful in itself and in harmony with the whole. There is at once something delicate and firm in the picture. Only the emotion of a man to whom the sea is more than a symphony of colour and sound and a joy to the senses, who feels its spirit profoundly, could inspire such penetrating vision, and such power of expression.

This is no isolated instance of Le Goffic's expression of the charm of this aspect. He dwells on it, too, in his more recent poems (those published in "La Revue des Deux Mondes") in "Nostalgie," "La Sirène Morte," and in "Sur les Bancs de Flandre," where he writes of evening over the open sea:

"Le soir qui descend sur la mer
Comme un lent baiser triste."

Pictures of such moments convey the impression of a certain softly irradiating warmth. But Le Goffic feels with equal intensity the atmosphere of mournful shores, shrouded in cold mist, fringing a seemingly impassible sea. The tale of "L'île des Sept-Sommeils" has its scene on these shores, and the poet gives us his impression of the vague but invincible melancholy of the unrelieved expanse:

"Oh! quelle tristesse indéfinissable!
Les flots sont partis avec le jusant
Sous son pâle et doux suaire de sable
Oh! comme la grève est triste à présent!"

In its quiet insistence, the rhythm is even and smoothly flowing, a contrast in its restraint to Corbière's tumultuous and marked emphasis.

We would not suggest that the appeal of the sea for Le Goffic is limited to these dark moods. Simple, quiet scenes, free from swift or vast movement and from brightness, are those which inspire him most deeply. He rarely mentions the sea in storm, obviously feeling trouble, unrelieved by any exultation, in its loud, insistent clamour, and the complication of its turmoil.

But he writes with pleasant recollection of the beauty of sea and shore in the pure light of early morning:

"O les dunes que l'aube argenté!
Les genêts fleuris qu'un par un
Frôle leur aile diligente!"

Et là-bas, couchés dans l'embrun
Sous leur fourrure d'algues lisses
Les lourds rochers de granit brun!

C'est l'heure pleine de délices,
L'heure où s'épanche en larmes d'or
La rosée au fond des calices:

Et c'est l'heure, plus douce encor
Où le premier flot monte et lèche
Vos pieds blancs, grèves de l'Armor.

Le brise du large est si fraîche!
Il fait si doux, si bon, là-bas,
Où les courlis sont à la pêche!"
(Papillons de mer).

There is spontaneous exuberance in the poet's exclamation of delight at this scene, and eager appreciation of every detail of this hour "pleine de délices." His glance passes from shore to sea, noting the harmonious contrasts in colour and texture, the gentle movement of the incoming waves, as they bring the breath of the sea to add to the freshness and grace which he makes us feel, above all, in this picture.

How different is the tone from the grave, subdued imagery of "Romance sans paroles." Here there is a lighter peace, inspiring rather than soothing. As in the other poem, there is a beautiful picture in almost every line, painted as befits the subject in words light and dainty, in rhythm as in suggestion. In this picture he is perhaps nearer than in any other to frank, unclouded and joyous enthusiasm in the physical beauty of the sea; but it is a transient mood, soon to be troubled by foreboding, as he reflects on the swiftly changing sea.

Although he knows the ocean, Monsieur Le Goffic is foremost an artist of the shore, giving us pictures of the beaches, the rocks and the dunes whence he looks seaward to the wide horizon, rather than glimpses of the immensity of the ocean. He has the conviction and precision of the poet who is also a keen observer, not only of a clear-cut picture, such as the one just quoted, but in his perception of a hazy, formless scene. In appreciating how deeply he feels the spirit animating such a scene, we must not forget that he conveys his feeling, and the atmosphere of haze, through his own sure perception of the harmonies of light and shade, of wavering movement and sound, which result in this atmosphere. And both his emotion and his observation combine to inspire the choice of words which shall express it most beautifully

and most clearly.

Like Le Braz, Monsieur Le Goffic has stood apart from the form of his contemporaries, the symbolists. Yet, coloured deeply by his personal feeling, and a revelation of the intensity of his temperament, his poems are far from the impersonal descriptions of the Parnassiens. They stimulate the imagination of the reader, and draw him near to the poet, through a picture clear and finished and illumined by his emotion and vitality, through the intimacy of a low, sustained melody, with a note of sadness. In his almost invariably short poems, his verse is extremely simple in its pure and delicate imagery, even and flowing in its rhythm, and eloquent with a restrained and serious power which well expresses the depth of his feeling for his dark Breton seas.

From Le Goffic we turn to the other poet of these seas. Jean Richepin, in his days, and nights, in contemplation of the great solitude of the ocean, in hours spent among the life of the shore, knew the sea in all its diversity of phases, which he watched with discriminating eyes keenly alive to beauty, and painted with infinite and varied art, and the verve and richness of language of which he was a master. First in "La Mer" in 1886 and two years later in his play, "Le Flibustier," he wrote of the sea.

Monsieur Emile Mâle, in his Discours de Réception at the academy, where he succeeded Richepin, spoke sympathetically of "La Mer."

"Il a navigué sur l'Océan, le long des côtes de France, et il a accompagné les pêcheurs normands dans la Manche. Parfois, il a fait le quart, les yeux fixés sur l'étoile polaire, 'la sainte étoile du Nord,' comme il l'appelle. Mais il a surtout passé de longues heures sur le rivage, en contemplation devant la mer..... Ces mille impressions,

il les a fixées dans des vers qui sont peut-être les plus pittoresques qu'il ait écrits. L'art en est extraordinairement varié. Parfois il est attentif au petit détail comme un miniaturiste, minutieux comme un émailleur. Il dessine avec le pinceau d'un artiste japonais la volute d'une vague suspendue dont l'écume s'envole dans le vent. Il nous montre un creux de rocher rempli d'eau de mer, avec ses crevettes, ses algues, ses poissons, ses coquillages sur le sable d'or, et l'on croirait voir un de ces plats où Bernard Palissy nous fait apparaître le fonds d'un ruisseau à travers l'eau transparente; mais soudain il peint une fresque large et tumultueuse dans la manière de Jules Romain, une tempête qui devient une bataille de géants....."

The invocation of the greatness and life of the sea in "Les Litanies de la Mer," in verse which recalls the ^bold, surging imagery of Victor Hugo, is followed by a series of short poems whose subjects are the cliffs and the beaches, the sea birds, the song of the waves and the winds, a patch of sky, the shore in moments of calm or of turmoil. Pure, clear colour, firm and finished outline, miniatures painted in fine and delicate detail. These characteristics of "Le Parnasse" are in "La Mer." It is perhaps a result of this perfection of finish that, even when he is writing of the open sea, Richepin's descriptions do not give us an impression of the vast, the limitless expanse of the sea. His picture may be big, bold in conception and execution, but it has a definite scope. We have not the feeling of endlessness that Loti's pictures of the ocean convey so strongly.

"Oceano Nox" gives us a moment on a quiet, calm sea:

"Dans le silence
Le bateau dort
Et bord sur bord
Il se balance.

Seul à l'avant
Un petit mousse
D'une voix douce
Siffle le vent.

Au couchant pâle
Et violet
Flotte un reflet
Dernier d'opale.

Sur les flots verts
Par la soirée
Rose et moirée
Déjà couverts."

The picture is delicately outlined. The faint measured movement of the boat, the last lights of the sunset on the darkening sea, the voice of the boy breaking the silence, are blended to give an impression of peaceful beauty. Richepin sees the last clear colours of the day while Le Goffic, by the evening sea, watches for the dim, soft shades of twilight. But the most notable change is in the tone. Its calm impersonality is in strong contrast to the poems of either of the three poets already considered. The essence of Le Goffic's pictures is the mood of the sea, the spirit which animates its aspect. Here there is no indication that sea and sky are more to Richepin than an attractive canvas, whereon colours and forms are beautifully arranged.

In the bright and changing colours of the sea, Richepin sees a living and bountiful garden:

"C'est un jardin tout grand ouvert
Au gazon toujours frais et vert,
Le jardin de la mer fleurie...."
(Floréal).

A comparison between the sea and a brightly coloured garden, faintly suggested, might express its variety of colour and life, but when it is insisted on, as here or in "Le Jardin Vivant," it seems artificial; the sea disappears completely from the picture. In several of these poems, we feel this tinge of artificiality, and it is increased by a certain hard brilliance of expression.

But this is forgotten when we read of the poet's impressions of his watch on deck in such beautifully suggestive lines as the following:

"La mer pleure une cantilène
Sur d'invisibles violons."
(A la dérive).

Richepin skilfully adapts his rhythm to the subject of his poem. The lines of "Brume de Midi," with their pauses and long phrases, are full of heavy languor, and with the bright, blinding colours, most expressive of the open sea in the calm of a hot noon.

"Ton silence vaut tes chansons, belle Sirène.
Tout s'est tu. L'air et l'eau sont d'un azur
profond.
Les regards aveuglés de lumière s'en vont
De l'or roux du soleil à l'or blanc de l'arène."

Among the many aspects of the sea appreciated by Richepin, there is one which he avoids. It is the grey sea and sombre shore beloved of Charles Le Goffic. A clear-cut scene, the brilliance of a sunlit sea, the darker brilliance of night, or the wide majesty of the storm, the great waves with their suggestion of vastness and endless voyage, in these dwell the appeal of the sea for Richepin.

So far we have been concerned with his impressions of the sea and shore, apart from human life. But in another part of "La Mer" (Les Gas), he writes of the sea peopled by sailors, and here he leaves the shelter of the shore and a placid sea, for the stormy greatness of the ocean. And here he is a different Richepin, with nothing dispassionate in his pictures, as he thinks of his friends, the sailors, in stern battle with the storm, matching their courage and intelligence against its force, or spending joyous hours on this same sea.

His fine poem, "Les Trois Matelots de Groix," contains a beautiful picture of a storm. Looking seaward, the poet sees a man rowing, alone in his boat. The sailor is singing,

and the strains of the old fishermen's song, which gives the title, come clearly across the water. And as he listens, and watches the waves, the song grows real to the poet. The three fishermen are coming gaily homeward in their little boat, on a fair sea; but soon the north wind blows: the storm rises and swiftly comes upon them:

"Maintenant, c'est compris: le grain nous fait la chasse,
Il faut, sans qu'il nous prenne en biais, filer devant
Sur un tout petit bout de toile dans le vent.
Le ciel se grée en nuit, d'une nuit sans chandelle;
Et sur ce grand mur noir passent à tire-d'aile
Des nuages blafards, déchiquetés aux flancs,
Où le bec des éclairs ouvre des accrocs blancs.
L'averse tombe en fouet aux lanières étroites.
La mer est comme un champ de lames toutes droites."

Vivid and intense is the picture which follows the grimly simple statement at the beginning, with all it implies to the man who knows the sea. Richepin is sensitive to every element which makes the terrible beauty and excitement of the storm, the ragged, menacing clouds in the sudden vast blackness, and the flashes of lightning showing the tiny vessel in the heart of this swift and heavy conflict, while, through it all, the cutting rain falls stiff and straight above the sea. Especially beautiful is the imagery of the last two lines.

The sailor, the man who has fled before the wind with "un tout petit bout de toile," guides the vision of the artist. The language has all the richness and forceful clearness which Richepin commands, and here it is a restrained force, lit up with the glow of true emotion and sympathy. It is simple. There is nothing fantastic, but pure and sharp reality in every word. The lines have a grave and solemn music in their rhythm, mingled with clear, sharp harmonies. The tone of the poem is high in its simple dignity, with the spontaneous gesture of the artist whose whole being inspires his expression.

The storm has spent its force, and the boat still sails homewards, but now in sadness, bearing two instead of three fishermen. Yet as the picture fades, it is succeeded by one calm and confident. The poet turns once more to the lonely seaman going serenely on his way, and still singing as he rows. And the theme ends on a low and peaceful note.

"Le Serment" is written in a similar tone, in slighter, less sweeping pictures, full of soft, haunting melody, as they tell of the boy who tried to banish the sea from his thoughts:

"Mais les échos du large en leur haleine éparse
Apportaient au sommeil de l'enfant qui rêvait
Tous les bruits de la mer chantant à son chevet."

How full of imagination, how dreamily suggestive are these lines, and how their long, breathless, whispering rhythm echoes the sentiment and expresses the harmonious unity of the scattered sounds.

The last part of "La Mer," "Les Grandes Chansons," again celebrates the life of the ocean in wide and eloquent verse. Here, too, we find lines full of freshness. "Le Sel" begins with a novel description of the sea breeze blowing over the pools of salt water, and the pinewoods:

"La brise en un seul baume unit les deux senteurs
Si bien que l'air qui vient alors des pins chanteurs
Semble sur des bouquets et sur des cassolettes
Avoir bu longuement l'âme des violettes
Souffle délicieux, printemps fleuri sans fleurs,
Fait de l'eau croupissante et des arbres en pleurs."

Frank and dainty expression of the poet's delight in a smiling and kindly nature. The sounds, scents and colours of sea and shore have a never failing charm for him, and his expression of that charm has all the life that subtle and exquisite imagery can bring. There is no trace of plaintiveness in Richepin's work, nor of the misty sadness which emanates from the Breton poets. Jules Lemaitre, writing of Richepin in "Les Contemporains," while praising his power of

language - "il a la sonorité, la plénitude, la couleur fraîche, le dessin précis, une langue excellente," - criticizes him thus: "Point de tendresse, point de larmes dans l'oeuvre de Monsieur Richepin." This judgment is surely unjust to the writer of "Les Trois Matelots de Groix" and "Le Serment." Yet, in his other sea poems, and with all our admiration for the pure colour and varied music of these poems, which sing of the ocean in so many moods, we miss the personal note of Corbière and Le Goffic, the tenderness for the sea itself, and the presence of emotion other than that of the artist.

From the remote and lonely shores, the old fishing towns of Brittany, and the ancient haunts of buccaneers, we turn with Verhaeren to the dunes of Flanders, and its busy ports, animated by a more cosmopolitan, if not more vigorous, life and in the centre of sea-going traffic. But his sea is as stormy, and his coast as bare and wild, as those of the Bretons.

We think of Verhaeren first, perhaps, as the poet of the ports, less because he was concerned with the aspect of the port itself than because he so constantly writes of the coming and going of ships, of ocean-going vessels setting forth from the harbour, or returning from foreign seas, and the activity which attends them. But he also watches the sea from the beaches, and, especially in "La Guirlande des Dunes," gives us many pictures descriptive of sea and shore, pictures precise in observation as they are abundant in imagery.

Mr. E. Mansell Jones writes of Verhaeren: "Sight was probably the most powerful, the most acutely developed of his senses," and of "his unique insistence upon the pictorial aspect of things, his acute appreciation of colour and

contour, of bold contrasts or subtle gradations of light and shade." For this visualist, the wide and varied beauty of the ocean had infinite attraction. But even more than his appreciation of colour and form do we notice his love of movement, a feeling which he shares with Corbière. Few of his sea poems omit some mention of the movement of waves, and currents and clouds, and frequently he is insistent on this endless, limitless movement:

"Les flots qui voyagent comme les vents
Les flots légers, les flots vivants..."
(Le Port. Les Villes Tentaculaires).

"...Et les vagues qui continuent autour
du monde,
Immensément et sans repos,
Sous la clarté miroitante et profonde,
Le rythme ailé de ces ciseaux."
(L'Eté dans les Dunes. Guirlande
des Dunes).

"Les flots âpres et fous roulent là-bas
au loin."
(Les Fenêtres et les Bateaux. Guir-
lande des Dunes).

And when he writes of the winds, he notices especially their effect on the appearance of the sea. He is, however, by no means insensible to the variety of sounds of the sea borne on those winds, as we shall see later.

"Les Plages," the poem which closes "La Guirlande des Dunes," gives us a general description of his Flanders coast:

"Plages vides, avec toujours les mêmes flots
Poussant les mêmes cris et les mêmes sanglots
De l'un à l'autre bout des rivages de Flandre;
Dunes d'oyats aigus, monts de sable et de cendre,
Pays hostile et dur, et féroce souvent,
Pays de lutte et de fer, pays de vent,
Pays d'épreuve et d'angoisse, pays de rage,....."

In these emphatic lines, Verhaeren evokes the wide and uninviting expanse of grim, bare shore, the endless line of waves with their mournful sound, the endless bordering line of pale, sad coloured dunes, by sharp, unsoftened epithets, a succession of stern, fierce adjectives and insistent repetition. But just as for Corbière, the sea in storm is "la

mer jolie," Verhaeren glories in this "pays de lutte," and he exults in this wild life with equal pride.

How different is his vision from Le Goffic's in a similar scene! None of the Breton poets gives us quite this impression of unredeemed, hostile ^{bleakness} ~~blackness~~ so marked in Verhaeren's picture. Between their eyes and their shores, even in the darkest days, there is a haze, and it is rose-coloured.

The shore at such hours, grey, bare and stormy, is often in Verhaeren's thoughts: "L'Hiver dans les Dunes," "Temps Gris," "Un toit là-bas," "Le Péril," - to cite some examples, show us how frequently the North sea coast was for him "pays de rage." Yet this is only one of many moods which delight him: he writes of a gentle, smiling sea with joyous abandon, and complete surrender to its charm:

"Le vent futile et pur n'est que baisers:
Et les écumes
Qui doucement échouent
Contre les proues,
Ne sont que plumes:
Il fait dimanche sur la mer!"
(Vers la Mer. Visages de la vie).

What could be lighter or sunnier than this glimpse of the sea, with its gentle caress, its inviting brightness, so quaintly and aptly summed up in the last line? And the poet's smile is unclouded by memories of more sombre scenes. The language reflects his feeling. Verhaeren turns his back on his masses of imagery, to paint his picture in dainty words and lilting rhythms, in a smoothly whispered line, followed by short ones, equally smooth and gentle in sound, but light in intonation; and ending with the gaily emphatic exclamation. It is surely such moments which inspire him with charming fantasies, such as the following, when he sees the brightness of the ship rivalling that of the sea:

"Le vaisseau clair
 Avait des mâts et des agrès si fins
 Et des drapeaux si bellement incarnadins,
 Qu'on eût dit un jardin
 Qui s'en allait en mer."
 (Sur la Mer. Forces Tumultueuses).

Whether Verhaeren writes of the sea in fierce and stubborn mood, or whether it is gay and friendly, his pictures paint an ocean pulsating with life: it may be the loud and quarrelsome life of the storm, or the glow and gentle movement of a quieter sea. Serenity there is in these pictures, but the sea brings no vision of repose to Verhaeren. Is he, then, blind to the ocean in moments of complete and unmistakable calm? No, for he does write of such a sea in "Midi" (Guirlande des Dunes):

"Et midi luit comme un glaive:
 La mer lasse ne peigne plus
 Ses flots bouffants et chevelus
 Au long des grèves.

Le silence est total et la torpeur
 Est si vide qu'elle fait peur,
 En vain s'étend le ciel sur le temps et
 l'espace,
 Aucune image, aucun oiseau ne passe....."

But he feels no repose in this calm. The torpor of this weary sea is ominous, restless, as full of oppression as the calm before a storm. The thought of a lifeless sea is unbearable, and his eager greeting of a spirit, ardent and restless as his own, in the sea, is striking in Verhaeren.

The shore may be bare in the bleakness of winter, or in the heat of noon, but a summer day brings forth its hidden life, and of this, too, Verhaeren writes (in "L'Eté dans les Dunes"): the reeds and flowers of the dunes, rabbits, swallows, whole families and all varieties of sea birds, even the insects on the sand, all belong to "La Guirlande des Dunes." All delight in shore and sea. Nor does he forget the sea at night, when green and yellow lights shine seawards, in warning movement, and the sand and fringe of waves gleam

pallidly. There is a clear, but pale, mysterious atmosphere in the setting of this poem ("Le Ramasseur d'Epaves"):

"L'ombre qui sous la lune
Tombait, longue et pâle, des dunes
Longeait la grève et dentelait la mer..."

The aspects of the shore are infinite to Verhaeren. Then, from waves and dunes, he turns to contemplate the ships growing bigger on the horizon. "Sur la Mer," at the end of "Les Forces Tumultueuses," perhaps the finest of Verhaeren's sea poems, opens with a picture of such a ship as he loved:

"Larges voiles au vent, ainsi que des louanges,
La proue ardente et fière et les haubans vermeils,
Le haut navire apparaissait, comme un archange
Vibrant d'ailes qui marcherait, dans le soleil.

La neige et l'or étincelaient sur sa carène;
Il étonnait le jour naissant, quand il glissait,
Sur le calme de l'eau prismatique et sereine;
Les mirages, suivant son vol, se déplaçaient...."

Proud and stately is his ship, bright with pure and gleaming colour, majestic in its movement. And he writes of it in poetry as majestic, broad and intense in its suggestive imagery, full of energy in its flashes of colour. Such a picture is worthy of his vision of the ocean. For, landsman though he is, Verhaeren is the poet of the ocean. The fascination of the ports, with their vessels and their cargoes, lay in dreams of voyages, and of strange, distant harbours. He writes:

"Je ne puis voir la mer sans rêver de voyages."

And as he watched from the beaches, his thought was constantly of the wide moving expanse of the sea, the eternal coming of waves from unknown horizons. Verhaeren loved immensity and marvelled at it. And the greatness of the sea is always with him, so that each ripple, each flash of light or shade, each wave in its sound, arouses in him the vision of a similar, greater gesture, infinitely wide and deep. Thus he never writes of the sea without bringing before us its

immensity. When he is most attentive to detail, or when his subject is a limited scene, a cottage of the dunes, or a group of fishermen on the shore, the greatness of the sea looms up and envelops the picture. Through its life, and through the vastness of that life, the sea appealed to him and each aspect of its beauty strengthened this appeal. No poet since Victor Hugo has celebrated so ardently the greatness of the sea.

The language in which he has expressed his impression is in accordance with it. Monsieur A. Meckel wrote: "J'admire en Verhaeren un magique trouveur d'images, d'images héroïques, ardentes...." He called him also "le poète du paroxysme," and wrote: "Le poète du paroxysme ne s'arrête presque jamais à combiner des plans par étages savamment gradués, à modeler les courbes d'un groupe sculptural. Pourtant, c'est par ses plans heurtés, les saillies de couleur, les images, qu'il captive surtout! Comme le poète de la suggestion et des paroles simples, il demande au lecteur d'achever par son émotion la vision qu'il a créée."

In expressing the greatness and varying moods of the sea, his love of imagery, of emphatic and unexpected, changing rhythms, of vivid and ardent suggestion, had full scope. His wealth of imagery, was not, however, strewn haphazard. The passages quoted earlier show how he attuned his language to his subject. The sustained, heavy toned lines of "Les Plages," broken by the epithets which he hurls as though in response to the challenge of the sea, are in contrast to the delicate outline and melodious intonation of "Vers la Mer," while both differ from the noble and sonorous lines, the rich and colourful picture of the ship in "Sur la Mer." So spontaneous, so eager is he, so complete is his surrender to the impression of the moment, that the reader takes the irregu-

larity of his verse, the unexpected lapses from smoothness, the occasional oddly balanced phrases, and harshness of sound, as a natural part of the picture. And there is one characteristic invariable in his poems: a note of tense, almost breathless excitement, as though they were the outcome of a force impelling him to pour out his exuberant exultation before this ocean which aroused such love and wonder.

Among the variety of impressions which the sea has aroused in the poets of the last fifty years, there are some which stand out. Their conception of the beauty of the sea is wide; strange and bleak aspects have their share in inspiring wonder and admiration, while the sea in storm is less prominent than in the pictures of earlier poets. Lonely shores are still most frequently the scene, but with Verhaeren have come pictures of ships and ports.

Many of these poems show an acute perception of the details of shore and sea, as well as of the sea in its less striking aspects. A patch of shore, a single wave, its sound as it strikes a rock, the flowers and the birds of the shore, enter these pictures, especially those of Richepin and of Le Goffic. This unassuming, more intimate life of the sea has its charm for the artist, and we have miniatures as well as wide and sweeping pictures.

Above all, and more particularly in the work of Corbière and of Verhaeren, the mobility of the sea is expressed. We feel that there is no substance in these pictures, nothing static. They are glimpses, swift flashes of vision which have snatched a moment in the eternal, moving life of the sea. But the flash is vivid: it seizes clearly the colour, and the music, the spirit of the fleeting mood, and its lingering echo, faint and suggestive. And it is for the reader to hear that echo, through which he may share the

poet's vision of the beauty of the sea. Many forms frame these impressions. From the gentle and delicate melody of Le Braz, with its flowing cadence, from the graver note of Le Goffic in his equally simple and regular verse, we turn to the fine and clear-cut, more plastic art of Richepin, and his finished eloquence, or to the strange wild harmonies of Tristan Corbière. There is no rigidity in expression and we feel spontaneity on every side. Eagerness, spontaneity, wide and clear perception and appreciation of the life of the sea, this is perhaps most characteristic of all these sea poems.

III.

THE SEA AND SAILORS

A strong element in the appeal of the sea to these poets is their interest in its influence on the lives and characters of those who live on it. It is worthy of note that Corbière called his sea poems "Les Gens de Mer." The sailor entered French literature through the pages of the Romantics, a vague, pathetic figure, doomed to a life of hardship and struggle on an unknown, treacherous sea, which yet bewitched him strangely. He was a general concept, rather than a real human being, and as distant as his own sea from ordinary life. This figure was succeeded by the adventurous, wild and reckless hero of the sea novel, farther still from reality, and Edouard Corbière alone wrote of him with knowledge and understanding.

But now, in the later part of the nineteenth century, the sailor comes into his own. Those who have written of the sea in prose and in poetry show a more than cursory knowledge of the sailor, and what is still greater, a genuine sympathy. While they do not minimise the hardships of his calling (less pronounced, indeed, than in the time of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre), they write with understanding of the attractions and joys of his life, and of his character. Next to their own love of the sea, the greatest link between these writers is perhaps their interest in the people of the sea.

Most of the sailors in French literature are Bretons. And in the characters through which poets of the sea have portrayed their countrymen, these sailors, whose life on the sea, or on a secluded coast, subject to the power of nature, keeps them true to the essential characteristics of their

race, it is interesting to see how variously writers are impressed by the closeness of their bond with the sea. Some lay stress on the fascination of the sea for the dreamy, imaginative side, others for the physically energetic and active side, of the restless and adventurous Breton nature. Together these elements are fused into a distinct personality.

Tristan Corbière followed in his father's footsteps. His sailor is very human. As we read "Matelots" or "La Fin", we feel that these seamen are real individual beings, whom Corbière has known and talked with in old Roscoff, and of whose virtues and vices he tells with blunt sincerity. Monsieur Le Goffic writes, in his preface to "Les Amours Jaunes": "Corbière est le premier de nos poètes qui les ait compris (les marins) qui les ait fait penser et parler comme ils pensent et comme ils parlent, et c'est de lui que date leur entrée dans la poésie."

Corbière could make these sailors live because he loved them, and because he felt drawn to them by a strong bond of fellowship. Sincerity, simplicity, gruff camaraderie and kindness, unassuming disregard of danger, cheerful acceptance of the hardships of their life, patient strength and energy, hidden tenderness for their homes and families, and, above all, for the sea, which they love with an intense pride, bringing with it an equally intense contempt for the landsman (and especially for the landsman who thinks he knows something of the sea): these are among the outstanding characteristics of Corbière's sailors. Small wonder that he writes of them with affectionate understanding!

But ashore, says Corbière, the sailor cannot fairly be judged, for he is ill at ease and constrained, with no safe outlet for his restless energy, diffident before the problems of the landsmen, unreasoning, easily swayed, often

brutal in his strong impulses.

".... On ne les connaît pas, ces gens à rudes noeuds.
Ils ont le mal de mer sur vos planchers à boeufs;
A terre, - oiseaux palmés - ils sont gauches et veules.
Ils sont mal culottés comme leur brûle-gueules.
Quand le roulis leur manque, -- ils se sentent rouler.."
(Matelots).

Full of happiness at returning to his home, looking forward with childlike glee to a good time ashore, yet he is ready to set out again on his beloved sea with a sad smile and an "Adieu-vat!"

And once aboard his ship, gay and free and confident in her and the sea, whose hardships and dangers are straightforward, he can act with calm and speedy decision, foresight and intelligence. "La Goutte" tells of the sailor's unassuming bravery, of the Lascar who, with cool and skilful daring, ventures among the tangled and broken rigging, while the storm beats over him, to free the sails and save the life of the ship:

"D'un bond de singe il saute, de la lisse
Sur le beaupré noyé, dans les agrès pendants.
- Bravo! -
Nous regardions, la mort entre les
dents."

He disappears a moment overboard, to be swept back again, returning as coolly as he ventured:

" - Accoste, tout le monde! Et toi, Lascar,
écoute:
Nous te devons la vie... - Après? - Pour ça?...
La goutte!
Mais c'était pas pour ça, n'allez pas croire,
au moins."

These sailors do not waste words. And the incident is unrecorded by the captain in his log.

The sailor passes through storms and calm with philosophic content, a jest on his lips, accepting whatever fate the sea may bring with untroubled mind and strong will. The gale strikes his ship: he fights the sea, calmly content if he wins, and if he loses:

of the greatness and wonder of the sea. But there is no note of gentleness here. The power of the sea is grim and dark, and the sailor glories in it, - but with how bitter a smile, and still more bitter disdain for the landsman, who seems so small beside this great power. He is no longer the diffident, impulsive, childlike being of his days on shore, but a man imbued with a hard, terrible dignity.

One may admire "La Fin" as the greatest of Corbière's sea poems; yet we confess to a preference for the more subdued beauty of "Lettre du Mexique." Here there is deep tenderness, love and pride in the sea, without the biting indignation of the other poem.

A seaman is writing to the parents of a young companion who has died. Embarrassed by his unaccustomed task, moved with sorrow for those who have lost their son, with love for his comrade, yet never losing his faithful love of the sea, nor his calm acceptance of fate, his simple thoughts flow with poignant sincerity; and his attempts at detail, at consolation, return finally to their starting point, the essence of his creed:

"Rien n'est beau comme ça - Matelot - pour un homme."
Had Corbière written nothing else about sailors, here is evidence enough of his sympathetic emotion and understanding, untinged, this time, by any bitterness. And this old seaman, with his simple, halting phrases, his inexpressible sense of the poetry of the sea, and its beauty, is a real person, beside whom the creations of Chateaubriand and of Victor Hugo fade into insignificance.

Corbière does not, like most writers, tell us whether his sailors are fishermen or merchant sailors, nor where they sailed nor whence they came. These facts were of no importance, for all were equally men of the sea. But he

writes of the sailor at all ages: of the "mousse," eager to follow his father, of the young "novice" boarding his ship with carefree mind, and the captain; he is interested in the familiar figure of the coastguard and writes of him with jesting affection:

"Ange-gardien culotté par les brises,
Pénate des falaises grises.
Vieux oiseaux salé du bon Dieu
Qui flânes dans la tempête,
Sans auréole à la tête,
Sans aile à ton habit bleu!
Je t'aime, modeste amphibie."
(Le Douanier).

He makes this "pénate des falaises grises" seem indeed a most essential part of the life of the shore. Corbière is an artist in the creating of apt and vivid epithets, which come to life so spontaneously that "creating" seems scarcely the fitting word.

Nor does he forget the old sailor who, from his peaceful quay, watches the sea and the ships. He sees him dreaming regretfully, and knowing that his homesickness for the sea will never die, dreaming not of a fair voyage and of beautiful distant shores, but of the time when he too knew the terror and excitement of the storm, and of all the gales he has won through. The life of the sea is his life.

"Vous, matelots, rêvez, en faisant vos cent pas
Comme dans les grands quarts..... Paisible rêverie
De carcasse qui geint, de mât craqué qui crie -
- Aux pompes!.... Non... fini! - Les beaux jours
ont passé.
- Adieu mon beau navire au trois mâts pavoisé!"
(Matelots).

Yet with all his insistence on the delight of the sailor in the sea and his fine ship, Corbière has no illusions as to the hardships of his life, his strenuous, often unpleasant work, calling for all the sailor's dogged patience, and bringing little material reward, but often danger and illness in its track. Nor is the man who lives this life, penetrated with the strong influences of the sea, an angel

of goodness and piety. He is a man of quick and eager passion, although he can be gentle and sensitive too, as we have seen in "Lettre du Mexique." But, content with little, taking bad weather with good, happy in his confident joy in the sea without wondering overmuch at its charm, he is in his way a philosopher worthy of respect. Ashore, he revives only pleasant memories of the sea, while his misfortunes serve as a jest.

"Ça? Rien: une fontaise, un pruneau dans la main,
Ça sert de baromètre, et vous verrez demain...."
(Matelots).

Corbière assuredly does respect him, more perhaps than he respects anyone else.

Governed in all things by feelings rather than by reason, the sailor's emotions are strong and simple. Beside his love of the sea is his love for his mother and his fiancée:

"Ils ont toujours, pour leur bonne femme de mère
Une larme d'enfant, ces héros de misère:
Pour leur Douce-Jolie, une larme d'amour!"
(Matelots).

And his pride is sad as he goes away, for he knows that "la mer est jalouse."

There is something which compels our liking in this restless, adventurous personality, with his audacity and determination, his blunt, straightforward ways, his generosity, his eager affection, his easy vigour and the simple pride with which he faces his hard and dangerous calling. The sea, which fills his life, gives him something wide in his outlook; and even in his faults, he is frank.

Renan wrote of his fellow Bretons: "L'élément poétique essentiel de la vie du Celte, c'est l'aventure, c'est à dire, la poursuite de l'inconnu, une course sans fin après l'objet fuyant du désir.... En face de la mer, ils veulent savoir ce qui se trouve au delà; ils rêvent de la terre de promesse." (Essai sur la poésie des races celtiques).

While Corbière brings out the practical, energetic side of the seaman and his determination strengthened by the sea, it is evident, too, that the sea has a strong hold on his imagination. He is not merely physically adventurous. But the fascination of the unknown immensity is hidden; the sailor does not formulate it in his mind, nor attempt to explain it.

The sailor of Anatole Le Braz is a contrast. As they sail their ships or work on the shore, these people of the sea are conscious of a dreamy wonder, a captivating feeling through which their familiar sea is alive with strange fascination. Here is Le Braz's picture of the coastguard:

"Un douanier, de garde au bord de l'eau, sifflotte
Un air mélancolique, une chanson d'ennui
Et comme émue à cet appel, l'âme vieillotte
L'âme des temps fânés s'éveille autour de lui.

Et l'humble gabelou, sentinelle des grèves
D'un mal délicieux se sent le coeur troublé,
Il a vu se lever le vol des anciens rêves,
Et leur aile subtile en passant l'a frôlé..."
(Tréguër).

How different is this "sentinelle des grèves" from Corbière's "pénate des falaises grises." Corbière's whole poem evokes a dreamer too, a man who finds philosophy in his loving contemplation of the sea. But his are not the plaintive, fantastic dreams suggested here, and, above all, he is perfectly unconscious of himself in such a light.

Their fellowship with the sea brings sadness to Le Braz's sailors. Yet while their happiness in it is always grave and pensive, accentuating the underlying, innate melancholy of their race, it is far from being an oppressive melancholy. The charm of the sea is full of sorrow, but not disturbingly so. Moreover it is softened by another quality which lives in the dreams of the sailor as he watches the sea. This is hope, a vague but invincible hope, which veils memories of loss and disappointment, and which draws

wrote in one of his stories: "Il se dégageait de ces primitifs symboles une poésie étrange, capiteuse, qui exaltait le conteur lui-même." And the eloquent story-teller among these sailors is held in high respect. Le Braz writes frequently of the Iceland fishermen, and his interest is great in the legends which fill their minds in the silence of the Northern seas. "Les Epaves" tells of the ships and sailors of the ocean:

"L'océan vaste, avec lenteur
Les promenait sur son épaule
Des soleils lourds de l'équateur
Aux frissonnantes nuits du pôle.

Et le soir, les marins assis,
Balancés dans les vergues noires,
Se racontaient de longs récits
Vieux refrains et vieilles histoires."

Many of their stories were connected with death, and with religious belief. The trust of these sailors in their religion is profound and unhesitating. Living in close touch with perhaps the most mysterious aspect of nature, they are used to the unexplainable and their whole mental life is guided by faith rather than by conscious reasoning. And, as we might expect, they have a peculiar reverence for all the outward signs and observances of their faith. Piety and trustfulness ^{are} characteristic of these men of the sea.

"Et les pêcheurs brûlés par l'âpre vent d'hiver
Tout frissonnants encor des longues nuits d'Islande
S'inclinent, à côté des pâtres de la lande...."
(En Mai).

"Les gars d'Islande aux barbes vierges
Les hommes enfants....."
(A Paimpol).

When these set out for the summer, their priests include in their blessing "les perdus," those who may never return to their Breton homes. Unlike Corbière's, the sailor of Le Braz's poems and stories has a horror of death at sea. He imagines the spirits of the drowned wandering restlessly and unhappily. He wishes to die in his country, to have

the rites of his religion, and if this is impossible, at least to be buried ashore, so that his family may have some tangible link with his memory. Le Braz's picture of the sailor's death at sea has dignity even in his horror of it:

"La mort, et quelle mort! Le trépas anonyme,
Un cri d'horreur suivi d'un grand silence fier,
Puis, la descente solennelle dans l'âbîme,
Puis, plus rien que du vent, plus rien que de la mer."
(Ceux de la Vienne).

It is "le trépas anonyme" which is so terrible to him.

Beside their love of adventure and of the ocean, these sailors have, like those of Loti, an intense and perhaps still greater love of their own shore, and a sympathy for their countrymen. Far as his hopes and desires may lead him, restless as is his temperament, the sailor's thought returns always to his own home. The feeling with which he returns or contemplates return is far more than the natural anticipation accompanying sight of land after a long voyage. All the delight and enchantment of the sea and of far lands cannot destroy the attachment of this "pèlerin nostalgique." And so the old sailors watch the sea contentedly enough from the shore, reviving pleasant memories, and hearing friendly messages in the cry of the birds flying shorewards.

"Les vieux marins, dont l'oeil s'allume
Sitôt que passe votre cri
Content, qu'en un flocon d'écume
Votre corps fut pétri."
(Les Mouettes).

Their love of the sea is unabated since, as "mousses", they set forth eagerly; in imagination they still embark on it, and perhaps no less joyously.

We feel that Le Braz, in his liking for the sailor, has somewhat idealized him. This sailor is indeed a pleasing personality. He is bold, resolute and gentle in his activity silent, but feeling deeply, kindly and modest, loyal to the traditions of his race which he reveres, proud of his sea, but

without any contempt for the landsman. Above all, Le Braz insists on the power of his imagination, rather than that of will or physical energy. This is what the sailor's life on the sea most encourages; through his imagination especially comes his content and serious happiness. The attraction of the sea seems to bring out the finest and deepest elements of this personality. But his virtues tend to weigh him down and to blend him into a vague, composite figure in place of the individual, human sailors of "Les Gens de Mer."

Monsieur Le Goffic has written far more fully of the sailor and his life in his prose work than in his poems, and here has shown himself as keenly appreciative of human as of natural forces, and actively interested in his countrymen. But if glimpses of the sea and sailors are brief in his poems, they are inspired by infinite sympathy and wide and penetrating vision. He writes of the same group of men as Le Braz, fishermen, "Islandais," and there is much in common in the picture of the two poets.

Le Goffic's sailor is fully susceptible to the magic and vitality of his dark wild sea, to the charm with which it repays his efforts and renews his hopes. Reserved in his expression, he feels deeply the poetry of the sea, less perhaps the appeal of its width and freedom than of its mystery, its beautiful, inscrutable force. "Couchant Mystique" reveals this side of his nature:

"On entendait chanter d'invisibles psallettes
La mer montait. Des feux luisait sur les coteaux
A l'horizon, baigné de vapeurs violettes
Le soir d'automne ouvrait ses yeux sacerdotaux.

Et raidis par l'extase à l'avant des bateaux,
Lougres au vol oblique et fines goélettes,
Les hommes d'Enez-Vaur regardaient sur Men-Thos
Flamboyer dans le ciel d'étranges bandelettes.

Leur bordages craquaient; leurs filets étaient
vides;
Et, ployés tout le jour au bord des eaux livides,
Ils n'en avaient levé que de vains goémons.

Mais le soir frémissait sur leurs têtes heureuses
Ils regardaient le ciel, la lumière et les monts,
Et sans parler, joignaient leurs mains sur leurs
vareuses."

The sea is uncertain in its gifts, and the fishing boats return empty of gain. Yet the sea reserves another reward for the fishermen, which brings forgetfulness of material cares. In the tense ecstasy which penetrates them as they feel the strange and marvellous beauty of their sea and shore, they are perfectly happy. And such moments leave them silent, in the power of waves of emotion stirred by this revelation of the wonder of the sea.

Yet beside the joy of their imaginative nature in the sea, there is in their minds a deep melancholy, a feeling of bitter revolt against the compelling force of the sea, against the grim power which calls for all their qualities of patient and determined vigour. Below their surface calm, below fleeting moments of gaiety, there are depths of passion and melancholy, as though, through generations of life spent on a stormy sea, these Bretons have absorbed its essence into their nature. Their ^lhightest hour, their festivity is haunted by feelings of unrest.

"Mais vienne Pâque ou Noël,
Les Bretons et les Bretonnes
Se retrouvent près des tonnes
D'eau-de-vie et d'hydromel.

La tristesse de la race
S'éteint alors dans leurs yeux;
Ainsi les plus tristes lieux
Ont leur sourire et leur grâce.

Mais ce n'est pas la gaieté
Aérienne et sans voiles
Qui chante et danse aux étoiles
Dans les belles nuits d'été.

C'est une gaieté farouche,
Un rire plein de frissons,
Ferment des âpres boissons
Qui leur ont brûlé la bouche.

Plaignez-les de vivre encor;
Ce sont des enfants barbares
Ah! les dieux furent avares
Pour les derniers-nés d'Armor! (Là-Bas).

What affectionate and penetrating sadness inspires these lines! They bring out the strong emotions, the wild, almost desperate gaiety which covers the tumult of conflicting feelings of the Breton sailor. His is no peaceful, gentle sadness. In him melancholy is as deep as the sense of beauty and love of adventure, and all are intensified by restlessness and tenacity.

Like Corbière's sailor, this intense, extreme personality finds his finest strength when he is close to the sympathetic tumult of the sea, or soothed by its wide peace. In action, with the need for dogged boldness, he is hopeful and full of resource; on the open sea he is happy.

"Les mêmes vents gonflaient mes voiles
Du même souffle âpre ou joyeux
Et la paix blanche des étoiles
Coulait pareille dans mes yeux..."

(Matelots).

But in his ardour as he reaches land, with its alluring novelty, his weakness is without restraint. The same poem tells of the sordid ports:

"On voit au Havre, dans les bouges
Du triste quartier Saint-François
Des matelots aux faces rouges
Qui sont couchés les bras en croix."

Yet he loves his home intensely. Le Goffic insists, like Le Braz, on his strong feeling for all the traditions of his people, and on his deep respect for everything to do with his religion. So small and helpless seems the strongest intelligence, the surest boat, in comparison with the power of the sea, that these men, while exerting all their own strength, willingly accept a higher power than man and trust in a supernatural force which, if it will, can defeat the immense forces of nature. And armed with this assurance, they set out in sombre calm.

"C'étaient trois matelots de Groix
Ils étaient partis tous les trois
Pêcher la sole.

Les pauvres garçons n'avaient pas
Plus de sextant que de compas
Et de boussole."

(Les trois Matelots de Groix).

All equipped, prepared for hardship, knowing the danger of the sea, its chances and disappointments, they love it naturally and simply, through all their conflicting feelings.

Le Goffic himself sums up their nature and its link with the sea in "L'Âme Bretonne," when, comparing the sailor of his own time with those of earlier days, he writes: "Avec la même sensibilité, la même imagination rêveuse, la même nostalgie incurable, sur le même fond de mer agitée, changeante et triste, symbole des orages de leur âme."

Of Jean Richepin's interest in the sailor, mention has already been made. He too writes of the Breton, and more particularly of the fisherman. Turning from the three Breton poets, the reader is struck by a difference in the attitude of Richepin towards the sailor. There is a note almost of surprise as he considers the life and feelings of the people of the sea, and the definite observation of the man who comes upon something new, whereas the others, who have known sailors as long as they have known the sea, take them and their ways for granted, for their acquaintance has grown so slowly that its stages are imperceptible. In the same way Corbière writes of the sailor in his own sailors' language, using it naturally as his by right, and the only one adequate to the subject. Richepin notices the peculiarities of the sailor's talk, unfamiliar to him, and admires its freedom and aptness.

"Les mathurins ont une langue
Ou le verbe n'est pas prison
L'image y scintille à sa foison
Or vierge dans sa rude gangue."

(Parler Mathurin).

One theme is outstanding in all that Richepin has written about the sea and its influence on the sailor, both in "La

Mer" and "Le Flibustier." It is the irresistible attraction the sea holds for them, their unwavering affection for it, and their joyous pride in their calling. This was the impression created through his friendship with seamen, and it is one which came with sympathy and understanding.

From the boy to the old sailor on the quay, the charm of the sea, unreasoning, illogical, held them surely. "Le Serment" is a simple story, as simply told, of an old grandmother who has lost father, husband and sons in the sea. She hates it passionately and is determined to keep her only grandson from "l'ennemie atroce," this siren with fatal lure for the sailor. So she takes the boy to the shore of the stormy, menacing sea:

"Regarde!
 C'est celle-là qui prend les hommes, les
maris,
 Les pères, les fils, tout!.....
 C'est une gueuse, c'est une sorcière. Un
jour
 Elle t'appellera pour lui faire l'amour."

In presence of the sea she bids him swear never to become a sailor. And the boy swears. But soon the sea does indeed call him. It sounds play on his imagination, and he dreams that through them his father and his uncles are speaking to him, telling him of their pride in the sea, of the joys of a sailor's life, of its hopes and its peace. The voice is gentle and inviting:

"Crois-tu donc, après tout, qu'on soit si malheureux
 De mourir dans les flots, ayant vécu sur eux?
 Non, non. Et puis, vois-tu, ses instants de folie
 N'empêchent pas la mer d'être la mer jolie
 Pays d'aventure et de la liberté.....
 La soif qu'on y prend, seule, elle la désaltère."

Again, we hear of the charm of the unknown sea, with its wealth of possibility, for the imagination of these men. More and more insistent becomes the call of the sea, and the boy, chained by his oath, goes sadly to watch it from the shore.

"Amoureux de la mer, il pleurait en secret."

Finally, he grows certain that he will not have the strength to keep his promise, and he tells his dying grandmother of his feeling. She, at first grieved and horrified, ends by resigning herself, even admitting bitterly and sadly his right to the sailor's life.

The feeling is that of Corbière's seaman. Yet there is a difference, for the boy, in his loyalty, gives most unwilling heed to the voice which so stirs his imagination and fills his whole being with craving for the sea. Nor is there the bitter contempt of Corbière for the landsman. We have the other side of the picture too, something of the feeling of Victor Hugo, hatred for the enemy who takes so great a toll.

The same spirit animates "Le Flibustier." The scene of the play is Saint Malo. Here there lives, within sight and hearing of the sea, an old sailor, François Legoëz, to whom the sea is still as much his life as when he sailed on it. He awaits with confident expectancy the return of his grandson, Pierre, who had set out eleven years earlier on a buccanering ship. Finally Pierre does come home, but he is no longer a sailor. He has made his fortune from gold mines in Mexico, and wishes to take his family back with him. The old seaman cannot at first believe that his grandson has deserted his beloved sea, still less that he is happy in the despised existence of the landsman. When he can no longer doubt the sad fact, all his love of the sea comes out in his answer to Pierre:

"Les fleuves! Oui, je sais. Ça coule à la dérive.
Sans doute, c'est de l'eau; de l'eau qui marche; mais
Elle s'en va toujours et ne revient jamais.
Ce n'est pas comme ici. La marée est fidèle.
Elle a beau s'en aller au diable, on est sûr d'elle.
Au revoir! Au revoir! dit-elle en se sauvant.
Car elle parle. Car c'est quelqu'un de vivant.

Et tout ce qu'elle crie, et tout ce qu'elle chante,
 La mer, selon qu'elle est d'humeur douce ou méchante
 Et tous les souvenirs des amis d'autrefois,
 Dont la voix de ses flots a l'air d'être la voix!
 Et les beaux jours vécus sur elle à pleines voiles!
 Et les nuits où l'on croit cingler vers les étoiles!
 Ah! mon Pierre, mon gas, tout ça, ce n'est donc rien?
 Maudit soit le pays qui t'a rendu terrien!
 Il peut être plein d'or; je n'en ai pas envie.
 Certes, je n'irai pas y terminer ma vie.
 Pour moi, tout vent qui vient de terre est mauvais vent.
 Un vrai marin, ça meurt sur la mer, ou devant.

Tu veux nous rendre heureux; et je t'en remercie
 Seulement..... Enfin, quoi! La chose est éclaircie.
 Pardon si je t'ai fait de la peine, mon gas;
 Mais ne plus voir la mer.... jamais, je ne peux pas."
 (Le Flibustier, Act III, Sc. 1).

The old sailor, looking back on his years of seafaring, hears many voices in the sound of the returning tide, just like the boy in "Le Serment," in whom it arouses such eager aspirations. To his ready imagination the ocean is a great being who calls, and holds him in firm but tender sway. How clearly is the joy of the sea evoked, and for Richepin's sailor it is happiness complete and undisturbed. Stormy days and calm alike leave cherished memories; here is the pride of the sailor as his boat scuds before the wind, his joy in the wide immensity of the sea, his sure consciousness of the wonder of his great companion, his gentle scorn of rivers and of the interests of land, which seem so small in comparison with his. Richepin's sailor has not the stinging contempt of Corbière for the landsman, but a gentle pity, as for one less fortunate than himself.

There is no question in Richepin's poems of legendary tales woven round the life of the sea, round its incomprehensible fascination. His sailor feels no need to frame in such concrete form the appeal of the sea. Nor is there conflict or reservation in his mind as he yields to it. He lives in the joy of the active present. And, as with Corbière, there is no question of the sea strengthening the religious faith of the sailor. The sea is his religion, and

all his faith is in it.

Richepin finds much to admire in the character of these men of the sea. He praises their friendliness to each other and their calm tenacity and determination. When the storm comes upon "Les Trois Matelots de Groix", they fight it with every ounce of strength and with undaunted hope. He praises, too, their philosophic content. "Un Morutier" tells of his talk with an Iceland fisherman, who speaks quite simply and casually of his hard and uncertain calling, of lonely, menacing seas. Yet in this life he is perfectly happy, disregarding its many hardships as of no account:

"Vas-y gaiement! Si bien qu'en attendant mon tour
Je fais le pour du contre, et prends le contre en pour."

For Richepin does not see merely the romantic side of the life of sea and shore. Beside its independence and freedom, he sees the misery and poverty abounding in the ports, the sailor and his family bound to unremitting and scantily rewarded labour. "Les pauvres bougres," and "Les haleurs" bring out this aspect without disguise. And the ocean demands full payment for its joys, claiming all the sailor's strength of will and body.

"Ah! ce métier de chien, de galérien
On l'aime, on l'aime tant, d'une amour si têtue."

There is no doubt that the sea brings simple and unclouded happiness to these men, beside which hardships and dangers are disregarded. The power of the sea is friendly to them as it has been to their ancestors. And the feeling of Richepin's sailor is summed up in the concluding lines of "Les Trois Matelots de Groix":

"La mer qui fait tout ça ne le fait pas exprès
Puis, la mer avant tout, et les autres après!"

Before leaving the Breton sailors, we cannot omit some mention of their own song maker, Yann Nibor, "Barde des

Matelots," as he was called.* Son of an Iceland fisherman, himself a sailor in the fleet, he wrote and sang and acted songs about his comrades. Monsieur Le Goffic wrote of him in "L'Ame Bretonne": "Le chant naît en même temps que le vers, et le geste accompagne le chant, et toute la machine vibre à l'unisson." "Ceux qui n'ont pas entendu Yann Nibor interpréter ses chansons ne connaîtront que la partie inférieure du poète."

"La Chanson des Cols Bleus" does indeed contain charming melodies, songs expressing the feeling of the sailor, of the "mousse" setting out proudly and eagerly, of the young sailor happy at sea among his comrades, proud of his ship, but full of dreams, with his thoughts constantly on his long distant home, then of the old sailor thinking of "la flotte qu'on r'grette." "Nuits d'Escadre" and "Nuits Tropicales" tell of the sailor's watch in peaceful nights, in the dimly felt magic of the sea, when his vague feeling of well-being revives happy memories, and he murmurs old songs.

"J'allais bien souvent
Chanter au gaillard d'avant
De joyeux refrains
Appris pendant mon enfance
De joyeux refrains
Connus des plus vieux marins..."

Among the best of these songs is "Le Bon Petit Matelot," the dirge of a sailor for his friend, in which he recalls their life together, as boys playing by the sea, as "mousses," as carefree young sailors, until one day his comrade fell from the mast.... An impression of deep and impotent sadness penetrates the simple lines, in the haunting idea of death, with its reminder of an unknown fate. And the rhythm is most expressive of mournfulness.

Most sea poets refer to the sailor's fondness for song.

*His songs may be compared to those of his compatriot, Théodore Botrel.

Yann Nibor's work makes us realize how much this music means to him. These songs have in almost every case a marked rhythm and a refrain; they are dreamy and serious in tone, with no veil to their emotion. How different from the joyous, rollicking swing of the English sea-chanty!

Through the diversity of aspects in which these poets of the sea have seen the Bretons whose life it rules, one character stands out, and he is the Breton unchanged since the unknown sea drew his ancestors, Jacques Cartier and his fellow explorers, to great discoveries, through these same qualities of intense imagination, and restless, determined activity.

Renar wrote of the Breton: "L'infinie délicatesse de sentiment qui caractérise la race celtique est étroitement liée à son besoin de concentration. Les natures peu expansives sont presque toujours celles qui sentent avec le plus de profondeur; car plus le sentiment est profond, moins il tend à s'exprimer. De là cette charmante pudeur, ce quelquechose de voilé, de sobre, d'exquis.... (Essai sur la poésie des races celtiques).

In various ways each poet has brought out how favourable is the life of the sea to this personality. In his long silent hours of fishing, in his silent, watchful contemplation of the changing movement of the sea, the sailor appreciates its shades of beauty; his innate mysticism grows strong, his emotional life is developed, beneath his outward reserve and tenacity, equally strengthened by contact with the sea. With one accord, writers have noticed the sincerity of these men of the sea, their generosity, and a certain clearness of vision which comes of their long contact with the greatness of the sea, while their faults are equally frank: quick and unreasoning anger, imprudence, brutality sometimes, and, in

some cases, a lack of balance and proportion.

But their life on the sea, with its dangers and demand for enduring and calm activity, is calculated to develop their tenacity of will. The sea, in appearance so hard for the sailor in many ways, is kind to these men for whom its appeal is so intense, as they and their poets have understood.

In the seamen of Verhaeren, we find the men of the Flemish coast. He does, indeed, watch the cosmopolitan, busy life of the big ports, the ships and their merchandise, and follow in imagination the fortunes of these vessels as they sail round the world. But all their complement of navigators and engineers is swiftly merged into the poet's symbolic figure as part of a big gesture. When he considers the sea and the individual sailor, he writes of the seamen of the Flemish coast and especially the fishermen. These were the sailors whom he knew and who belong to "La Guirlande des Dunes"; for, in his vision of the united life of the universe, Verhaeren did not lose his interest in his countrymen as individuals. When he lived in the country, the peasants were his friends, and he looked on the life of the villages of his coast with equal sympathy.

Verhaeren, ever appreciative of energy, was naturally struck by the conflict of the sailor's life, not a conflict between different elements in his nature under the influence of the sea, but a daily and endless struggle between the sailor's endurance and intelligence and the incessant attacks of the sea. It is a stern conflict, with none of the exuberance of Corbière's tales of battle with the ocean. Heavy, bitter and long drawn out is the struggle, numbing feelings and body alike. And when the sailor at last wins through, weary and full of care, to gain his short respite ashore, the menacing sounds of waves and winds pursue him

still, echoing through his dunes, and shrouding his home in foreboding:

"Derrière un mur de brume
Ils sont partis, les pêcheurs roux;
Ils s'acharnent, mais Dieu sait où
Parmi des monts de tempête et d'écume.

Avec leur âme, avec leur corps,
Avec leurs yeux brûlés de sel,
Avec leurs doigts mordus de gel,
Ils travaillent contre la mort.

Ils s'appellent et ne s'entendent pas.
L'ouest, le nord, toute la mer fait rage.
Le mât
Crie et tremble de haut en bas,
Comme une bête en un naufrage.

Le bateau meurt et se disjoint,
Et se creuse une fosse en la vague profonde;
Et les phares lointains apparaissent plus
loin
que s'ils régnaient au bout du monde..."
(Le Péril).

No other contemporary poet has painted the grimness and fury of the storm with quite such blunt and unsoftened realism. There is a respectful wonder as he thinks of these men who face such hours as a commonplace in their lives. And then the poet, with his clear vision of immensity, his picture of the unequal contest, has a luminous flash of pity, a moment of infinite tenderness, as he cries:

"O vous, l'immensité des eaux,
Ayez pitié des vieux bateaux
Et de leurs flancs meurtris,
Et de leur bois pourri,
Et de leurs mâts: roseaux!"
(Vents de tempête).

Verhaeren brings out constantly the trials and hardship of the sailor's life. "Un toit là-bas," "Les Maisons des Dunes," "L'Hiver dans les Dunes," tell of the atmosphere of poverty which envelops his home, bare and soaked in the smell of seaweed and the sea. We hear of the fisherman's unremitting work and of the uncertain reward of his efforts:

"Ainsi peinent les vieux pêcheurs,
Contents de rien, heureux de peu."

And as he considers these aspects of the life of the sea, the

their strength. Verhaeren refers frequently to one gesture, and always with reference to the joy of the sailor as he feels himself wielding his power against the power of the waves. It is the gesture of the helmsman.

"L'homme qui maintenait à contre-vent la barre
Sentait vibrer tout le navire entre ses mains."
(Le Navire. Rythmes Souverains).

And as he sets out towards the wide horizon, the exhilaration of the sea fills his being with invincible strength and happiness. While the Breton wanders at ease in abstractions, this Fleming clings to something concrete. With his sense of adventure comes his love of his ship. The sight of an old ship on the sand, empty and battered, brings thoughts of its life to the poet:

"Son mousse et ses marins l'aimaient d'amour tenace;
Il était la maison ailée où leur audace
Luttait, parmi les vents rageurs et les courants."
(Un Bateau de Flandre).

Their ship was a companion, bearing with its crew the attacks of the sea, sharing their satisfaction in conquest. Its sailors loved it too because it was for them a piece of their country. Yet for these seamen the sea is so familiar, that it is a continuation of their own shore.

"Mais pour ceux-ci, ceux de Flandre, la mer
N'est que leur blond pays qui se prolonge."
(La côte Flamande).

Their silent love of the sea is sure and deep-rooted. If they cannot understand nor formulate its appeal, they feel an imperative need to adventure on it; and this need overcomes the ties which bind them to a landsman's life.

"Ceux des Fermes" tells of one who, destined, like his father, to farm his land behind the shore, watches the sea in silence, until one day, without warning, he sails away. His friends long wonder as to his fate, while vague unaccustomed thoughts awaken in their minds. At last comes news of his wanderings, to the quiet home.

accorded to those who support an obviously perilous life and one which cuts them off from the amenities of civilisation. In the work of Le Goffic and Richepin, of Le Braz and Verhaeren, greater knowledge is accompanied by greater respect, with understanding of the appeal of the life of the sea. And respect is joined to liking. For if with Corbière alone we feel that there is no barrier to intimacy, yet there is no one of these poets whose feeling for the sea has not drawn him into friendliness with these sailors who share that feeling. Through friendship with them, his own feeling is widened and intensified. It is not, moreover, the men of the Fleet or the crews of great vessels who are the heroes of these poems, but the sailors of the fishing boat, or the small merchant vessel, sailors in the literal sense of the word, and the coastguards, those who enter fully and independently into the life of the sea, and with whom the writer had opportunities for close acquaintance. The poets of whom we write have shown us these sailors as human beings, and their existence as a natural aspect of man's activity, while they have kept the glamour of its romance and hidden possibilities.

THE SEA AND MAN

To the man who loves the sea there comes, as he watches it and listens to it, an indefinable excitement, and in this emotion the poet's imagination creates strange and exuberant dreams. In its constantly changing voice and movement and colour, and in the regular flow of its tides, the sea speaks insistently of life. And whether he considers a lonely shore, or the movement of a port, or the ships passing across the horizon, or whether his thoughts reach the shores beyond the wide spaces of the ocean, his dreams lead him to the question of the relations between the life of the sea and the life of man.

In sadness and in terror before the sea, primitive men called it "the desert" or "the night"; in eagerness and pride, their descendants set forth on it in search of conquest, glorying in the wealth of its opportunity. To-day our greater familiarity with the sea, wider range of observation and our deeper consciousness of its charm are reflected in the modern poet's expression of the emotions dimly felt since men first sailed from shore to shore.

Flaubert wrote in "Par les champs et par les grèves":

"Derrière vous est toute l'Europe, toute l'Asie: devant vous, c'est la mer, et toute la mer.... Rapide comme le vent, la pensée peut courir, et s'étalant, divaguant, se perdant, elle ne rencontre que des flots....."

And his imagination hastened to people this vastness with ships and human life.

As he contemplates the sea, the only aspect of nature whereon the hand of man has left no trace of his passage, the poet might well feel cut off from humanity, far from all thought of the doings and aspirations of mankind. Yet it is

at such moments when he is in close communion with the sea, under the spell of its beauty and greatness, and when he is free from the individual preoccupations of every-day life, that, forgetful of himself, he is most conscious of his fellowship with mankind, and most sensitive to its griefs and hopes; then his vision places the solidarity of human force beside the greatness of the sea, and his sympathy with man, and his love of the sea, lead him to deeper consciousness of the harmonies of creation.

In the attitude of Tristan Corbière alone among poets of the sea do we feel that there is no barrier, no hesitation between the writer and the sea. He gives himself up to its power without reservation. Something secret and sensitive within him seems to vibrate to the life of the sea as though he is himself of it. And so he writes of it as a great living companion for man, variable, jealous, vigorous and gentle, but always satisfying, whose activity inspires and co-operates with the activity of man, its force is great, but not overwhelming; its personality is attuned to his. The power of the sea is to be loved and respected, not feared. To the adventurous spirit and to the lover of beauty, it brings freedom and delight, happiness to the visionary and to all the charm of expectation and surprise. It gives man scope for his intelligence, his strength and his imagination and brings him repose in the thought of its eternal life. Corbière's poems are full of pride in the imagination, the strength and independence of man which enable him to welcome and use the power of the sea.

In "Paria," a poem of "Raccrocs," where he twists his early simple eagerness for travel into a spirit of intense and miserable bitterness, he writes that his country is throughout the world, and that he is tormented by homesickness

for all the lands which he has never seen. And doubtless the feeling which prompts these lines has, at other times, a gentler spirit. For Corbière's outlook is wide. He thinks of other countries, other peoples, beside his own. And he sees the life of the sea levelling artificial distinctions. Barriers of language, of education and habit, of race and even of temperament fall under the influence of mutual interest in seafaring. Original characteristics are not lost, but others common to all are developed; above all, love of the sea brings tolerance of the ways of others who share this feeling. He describes a cosmopolitan scene in a port, a scene darkly fantastic, but which Corbière makes simple and natural and not unattractive.

"Une porte s'ouvrit. C'est la salle allumée...
- Des Anglais, jouissant comme de vrais pendus,
Se cuvent, pleins de tout et de béatitude;
- Des Yankees longs, et roide-soûls par habitude,
Assis en deux, et tour à tour tirant au mur
Leur jet de jus de chique, au but, et toujours sûr;
- Des Hollandais salés, lardés de couperose;
- De blonds Norwégiens, hercules de chlorose;
- Des Espagnols avec leurs figures en os;
- Des baleiniers huileux comme des cachalots;
- D'honnêtes caboteurs bien carrés d'envergures,
Colfatés de goudron sur toutes les coutures;
- Des nègres blancs, avec des mulâtres lippus
- Des chinois, le chignon roulé sous un gibus
Vêtus d'un frac flambant neuf et d'un parapluie;
- Des chauffeurs venus là pour essuyer leur suie;
- Des Allemands chantant l'amour en Orphéon,
Leur patrie et leur chope - avec accordéon;
- Un noble Italien jouant avec un mousse
Qui roule deux gros yeux sous sa tignasse rousse;
Des grecs plats; des Bretons à tête biscornue;
- L'escouade d'un vaisseau russe, en grande tenue;
- Des Gascons adorés pour leur galant bagoût
Et quelques renégats - écume du ragoût."
(Le Bossu Bitord).

All these are thrown together in seafaring; and all meet in amicable enjoyment. The sea welcomes them without distinction. Corbière refers more than once to the renegade, ashore seemingly worthless, with no redeeming quality, who yet feels the charm of the sea and finds in it refuge and satisfaction.

But if the sea is friendly to man, if it holds great gifts, these are only for the man who will give much in return, who brings complete confidence and affection, unchanged through all the moods and vagaries of the ocean, to whom the sea is a country where he may find refuge from the cares and complications of life ashore, among companions to whom he is bound by their mutual happiness in the life of the sea, who is filled at once with the spirit of content and adventure. Corbière thinks always of the man who regards the sea as an end in itself, not as a means, not merely as a beautiful spectacle, nor as a mirror to reflect his thoughts. Of the sea as an element in the life of the world he is silent, as though disdainful to connect it in any way with the landman who has no sympathy for the life of the ocean, and for whom its aspect is simply redoubtable or perhaps attractive in its surface beauty. To Corbière the sea is neither a barrier nor an aid in the development of civilization and the intercourse of nations. It is a great eternal force, indifferent to human endeavour, save in those in whose affections it holds first place, and to whom it brings a peace and freedom which they alone can appreciate.

Le Braz and Le Goffic are much alike in their attitude to this question of the relations between the sea and mankind. Familiar all their lives with a seafaring population, they both regard the sea as a natural and essential influence in human life: it is as great a field for man's activity of mind and body as the land. It is life-giving in many ways. Arousing man's pride, his self-respect and energy, the sea inspires him to adventure, to seek a wider outlook, and new opportunity. Then, in the tumult of thought and emotion which it has developed, its companionship is sympathetic, helping man to heights of thought and resolution. Le Goffic

especially sees in it a being whose life reflects that of man, with a close affinity between its joys and suffering and his own. The agitation and dark moods, and unceasing restlessness of the seas he knows best are very close to "Les Bretons au coeur amer" and "Les Bretonnes au coeur tendre," of his poems. He writes in "Novembre":

"J'ai senti que mon mal n'était pas à moi seul
Et que la bande avec ses peurs crépusculaires
Et qu'avec ses sanglots profonds et ses colères
La mer, et que la nuit et la brume et le vent
Tout cela s'agitait, souffrait, était vivant,
Et roulait, sous la nue immobile et sans flamme
Une peine pareille à la vôtre, mon âme."

Thus the sea brings peace and calm to the man in distress, not through the calm serenity which Jean Richepin sees in it, but through its own troubled life, its indefinable sadness so closely in harmony with man's own feeling. In this he is strengthened and consoled, and the beauty of the sea is not simply a joy to his senses, but a solace and encouragement. It is characteristic of the two poets that while it is Le Braz who hears the sea telling of wide horizons, inciting man to new fields of thought and action, it is Le Goffic who thinks of its sympathetic and sustaining strength in the hour when his energy flags. A more material aspect is not forgotten, though neither poet lays stress on it. It is the sea combining with the rest of nature to supply man's needs, bountiful if uncertain in its gifts, and to the people of the bare lands of Western Brittany a most fertile part of their heritage.

Monsieur Le Goffic writes of the sea in a new light, as a great friendly companion to children, always fresh in its attraction. Although there are few children who do not delight in the sea and the shore with pure and disinterested love, they are rarely mentioned in poems of the sea. But the beautiful poem, "Le Cimetière où tu dormiras," tells us of

the place close to the shore where lies a child who has known and loved the sea, and found in it a wondrous fairy-land. To her the tides come still with friendly gesture, bearing the dreamy, intimate voice of the sea, and through all the moods of the ocean, it will sing its ancient and endless tale to the child, for the sea is still her friend and comrade.

But both Le Braz and Le Goffic see another side to the life of the sea, kindly and inspiring as it is to man in many ways. Contemplation of the sea can bring him many thoughts of sadness. Reminding him of the mystery of his fate, it suggests separation and loss, while its changeless life seems to gaze with confident power on the changes of each generation of human life. Its swiftly varying moods are ominous signs for man's hopes. The sea can be treacherous, the hopes which it arouses unfulfilled, and leading often to sorrow and death. But the waves soon cover all trace of its treachery and the song of the sea destroys remembrance of it, so that it remains for man the force which Le Braz calls:

"La trompeuse éternelle en qui l'on croit toujours."

Yet despite the evil fate which the sea may reserve for one man, or for one crew, its claims are accepted with sorrow, but without lasting resentment, for behind them all, the sea sung by these Breton poets remains great and gentle, a being not to be hated nor feared by man, since he feels the conviction that its life is not greater than his own, and that its power is for the service of humanity.

A traveller, knowing men of divers manners and activity, and interested in them all, an artist of wide and fine perceptions, charmed by the living beauty of the sea, Jean Richepin is greatly attracted by the question of the meeting of human nature and nature as expressed in the sea. His vision of the

sea as a great whole beside mankind is the central conception of "La Mer." It is his starting point in "Les Litanies de la Mer"; its influence is woven through the book, and to the same subject he returns in "Les Grandes Chansons" at the end.

"Des chansons de marins.... ~~alterent~~ ^{alternant} avec un grand poème cosmogonique ou l'eau, comme chez les vieux philosophes ioniens, apparaît comme le principe de toute chose." Thus writes Monsieur Mâle.

Richepin does not strikingly bring before us in his pictures the great expanse and physical immensity of the ocean (as does Loti), but his poems do evoke the immense life which animates the sea, and whose intensity can be as marked in a limited scene as in one of boundless extent. As he contemplated the changing moods of the sea and the alternately peaceful and stormy life of his fishermen friends, his imagination creates a great personality in the ocean, with emotions, virtues and vices, watching the life of mankind, sometimes a raging and terrible force, sometimes gentle and gracious, but always fascinating in its freshness and caprice.

Richepin's first thought is of the ancient, never resting life of the sea. Older than the man, its tides have flowed unchanged through all the vicissitudes of his history, and are to know its ending. Thus the sea accompanies man's progress, enveloping his existence, knowing all his secrets, but not storing them up, and remaining throughout a vast mirror reflecting with undisturbed serenity, impartiality and precision all the changes of this life, and of all life on land.

"Toi qui connus le globe encor sans habitants,
Et qui le reverras sans un animalcule,
Depouillé de ses bois, les membres grelottants...
O mer qui reflétas l'aube des premiers jours
Et qui dois refléter le dernier crépuscule."
(Litanies de la Mer.)


He sees the continuous movement of the ocean, each wave shining for an instant and then swept under its successor, reflecting every moment of man's activity. His cold and ~~serene~~^{serene} contemplation of this endless life, as it watches each continent, leads him to thoughts of the future and we find an idea already suggested by Victor Hugo in "Les Contemplations" and which was to be fundamental in Verhaeren's conception of the sea: instead of a barrier between races and countries as it had been considered, he looks on the ocean as a bridge between them:

"Arche de l'alliance aux promesses fécondes
C'est par toi que plus tard les races se fondront,
Les mondes séparés ne seront plus deux mondes."

Towards man as an individual, Richepin regards the sea as a personality full of friendliness, beneath its impassible surface, and readily yielding its gifts at his need. To the man who will listen to it, the sea is a faithful source of strength, a spacious and secret land of dreams, wherein he may wander at will.

"Baume énergique et sûr, en qui se retrempe
Le corps reprend sa sève et l'esprit sa noblesse.....
Rien qu'à humer l'embrun dont s'argente ta marge
O mer, rien qu'à courir parmi tes goémons.
Notre sang ressuscite et bat le pas de charge."
(Litanies de la Mer).

In these lines there is a rare note of personal enthusiasm, and we feel the memory of a particular moment cutting through the tissue of generality.

The fresh and beautiful life of the sea penetrates man, renewing his physical strength, calling forth his capacity and inspiring him to eager and resolute action: mingling with his thoughts, it makes them wide and ardent. "Consolatrice des affligés," Richepin calls the sea. Its ceaseless flow and voice bring peace and calm reflection. In its repose and serenity, disappointments and difficulties are forgotten, and to Richepin as to Swinburne () "The Triumph

of Life") has come the conception of the sea as maternal in its care for man.

"Cette mer impassible, elle connaît l'émou;
Elle plaint, et console, et guérit, maternelle."
(Post Scriptum)

Therefore Richepin sees men turning naturally towards the sea and, while they know that it is also a syren jealous of those whom it loves, happy in its spell, and triumphant in their death. For although the sea has its hardships and its terrors, bringing destruction, yet in "La Mer" these are lost in its great qualities as a giver of life. If, in its anger, it breaks man's existence, it is taking to itself the life it had sustained, and which it will continue to sustain in succeeding generations until the sea and life end together.

"Tueuse de ton fils, que ton fils innocente,
Car, lui donnant le jour, le lui prendre est
ton droit,
Puits d'existence et puits de mort,
Vierge-puissante!"
(Litanies de la Mer).

Above all, Richepin regards the sea as a bountiful source of life, both spiritually and materially, as a great personality in itself and yet not distinct from the life of man, for between them there is this indestructible bond recognized by man. The sea is no blind and passive force, as Leconte de Lisle had seen it, but actively encouraging in its influence on mankind. And man accepts with calm its formidable strength, for with it is bound up his own. It is with this feeling that Richepin's fisherman sings undismayed as he turns towards the open sea. This is the theme to which we constantly return, and with "La Gloire de l'Eau" the book closes on the same note.

"Oui, chantons la mer chérie
Chantons tous notre patrie,
Notre nid, notre grenier."

Richepin's outlook is close to that of Michelet in "La Mer." But Michelet's book is brimming over with sympathetic

emotion. With Richepin we are struck at the outset by the dispassionate clearness with which he considers humanity and the sea. His poetry is full of power, and not merely the power of forceful and beautiful expression, but of imagination. And the emotion which enters into that imagination is interest and enthusiasm, appreciation of beauty and life; he has the excitement of the creator as his vision grows great and clear. But it flashes with a cold brilliance, save in rare moments, for it is objective and in no way related to the sympathetic human emotion of Michelet. Except when he discards his general terms to write of the individual sailor, Richepin's attitude is closely akin to the sharp impassibility of Leconte de Lisle.

Richepin has indeed a strong and independent spirit. But so has Corbière: the force of the sea neither oppresses nor overwhelms either poet. But Corbière has nothing of the detachment so conspicuous in Richepin, whose reason is never subservient to his feeling. We feel that his impassive attitude is not merely on the surface, that despite the undoubted attraction which the sea holds for him as artist, poet and philosopher, he has not the absorbing and intense love of it which is characteristic of the other poets of the last half century. It is, moreover, when he is considering mankind as a whole beside the sea as a whole that the nature of his attitude is most apparent.

Among all contemporary poets, Verhaeren stands out in his appreciation of the sea as it affected man. It has been said that our imagination creates habits for itself, and has decided sympathies and antipathies. In Verhaeren, his intense imagination and his exultation in the beauty of nature are at the service of his confident love of his fellow-men and his vision of an ideal future for the life of the world.

In man the qualities which he esteemed most highly were energy, tenacity, eagerness and breadth of vision; and in the sea he loved its ceaseless movement and wide life, which he found sympathetic to these qualities.

In its immense and endless opportunities for discovery, in its fascination which drew men onward towards the unknown, he saw the sea, a link between nations and between the ages, an eternal source of energy, combining with the resources of the earth to help mankind in his progress to greater wisdom and unity. Both man and the sea had their part in a great symphony of existence, the sea stimulating and aiding man to develop his strength and intelligence, his will and imagination, so that he might in his turn use and direct its force. Terrifying and often cruel though this force might be to the individual, yet it was beneficent and strengthening to the aspirations of humanity.

As he watched the unwearyingly repeated movement of the waves sweeping towards the shore, as though big with purpose, Verhaeren saw the sea bringing all its life, all its power, towards the earth, towards the towns wherein was centred the activity of man. And on its waves came ships bearing the produce of man's work to the ports of the world, so that, linked by the sea, the mind of the North met the mind of the South; from the fusion of their ideas and of their labour, new aspirations and bigger ideas came into being, to struggle forward to achievement. This is the theme of "Le Port" (Les Villes Tentaculaires).

"Toute la mer va vers la ville.....
Pour que la ville en feu l'absorbe et le respire
Lui rapporte le monde en ses navires.
Les orientes et les midis tanquent vers elle
Et les Nordes blancs et la folie universelle
Et tous nombres dont le désir prévoit la somme,
Et tout ce qui s'invente et tout ce que les hommes
Tirent de leurs cerveaux puissants et volcaniques
Tend vers elle, cingle vers elle et vers ses luttes.."

Here is revealed the fascination for Verhaeren of ports and cargoes, with their exciting suggestion of the activity of strange and distant lands and other ports.

In the material expansion of the world, the sea was a great highway for increasing intercourse between nations. The ships crossed the world with their merchandise, and there is something lofty and heroic in Verhaeren's conception of the work of those whose trade it is to exchange the produce and ideas of the world, as in his conception of the work of cities. He saw the various tasks of the men on each shore, and of those who cross the sea bearing their work, all contributing to one vast gesture significant of the united strength of humanity.

"Avec des blocs de fer ou des cailloux de plomb,
Avec leur cargaison de bois couchée en long,.....
Avec l'espoir dans l'aventure et dans le gain,
Hardis et clairs, ils embarquent l'âme du monde...."
(La Conquête. Forces Tumultueuses).

And these ships bore not merely merchandise, but many travellers, diverse in their activity, carrying their strength and their aspirations to all corners of the horizon. Through their conquests came wider knowledge, new realisation of the greatness of the world and its possibilities, and above all consciousness of the unity of the world in which Verhaeren had such faith. He thinks of the tracks of their vessels, their network of routes on the ocean, as the nerves of a great hand, serving the will of man's brain. The image is vividly expressive of Verhaeren's vision of human activity spanning and using the great expanse of the sea.

But there is a higher aspect in the poet's vision of the opportunities of the sea, above this concrete, material link between the sea and man. Verhaeren writes of the sea in its eternal invitation to the seeker after beauty and truth. In "Sur La Mer" at the beginning of "Les Forces Tumultueuses,"

he tells of the fine vessel setting out, full of hope and joy, to seek Jesus across the sea, according to the old Flemish legend. Many adventures await the ship, and a great voyage, but their desire eludes them, and the ship and its crew return disappointed, weary and discouraged. But the desire for the ideal is still alive, only now they hand it on to the youngest among them, who set out again in their stead, with new hope and confidence. For the sea, friendly and mysterious, withholding its secrets, yields the greatest gift of all, for it makes ~~men~~^{men} untiring in ~~his~~^{their} search for truth and beauty, communicating to them its infinite strength, so that their hope is always renewed.

"Et dès la nuit venue, avec des cris de fête,
Ils s'en furent dans la tempête,
Tout en sachant que l'orage géant
Les pousserait vers d'autres océans
Sans cesse en proie à des rages altières,
Et qu'il faudrait quand même, encor,
Toujours, en rapporter des désirs d'or
Et des victoires de lumière."

(Sur la Mer).

Each wave of the sea seems to Verhaeren alive, struggling towards the earth, friendly or violent, but always attracted towards the land, and yet with its individual life merged in the movement of the whole sea, so that the unwearying energy of the sea seems to reflect the energy of the earth, where each man's activity was at once personal and universal, and as continuously in movement as the sea. Mr. Mansell Jones writes of Verhaeren's feeling towards the sea: "Her recurrent movements are obviously the most perfect concrete image of that life of flux and change which was for Verhaeren the essence of reality."

Movement forward to unknown horizons: this is the theme which he sings with confident ardour, and through it, as he watches the sea, his actual picture grows into a mystical vision of the future:

"La mer est belle et claire et pleine de voyages
Et les flammes des horizons, comme des dents,
Mordent le désir fou, dans chaque coeur ardent:
L'Inconnu est seul roi des volontés sauvages...."

In such characteristic lines the poet writes in "Le Voyage" (*Forces Tumultueuses*) of the imperative appeal of the ocean to the imagination of man, and of the response which the sound and sight of its clear immensity draw forth through the force within him, impelling him to conquest, conquest in the world of thought or of actuality. Here is the joy of the explorer as he travels over unknown seas, finding new life, new light, and returning to his fellow men, with his treasures for mankind. Then the poet thinks of the hardships which accompany the anticipation of the explorer, of slow accomplishment, of long silent days when he is alone with his hope. But the poem ends on the same note as "Sur la Mer," with Verhaeren's insistence on the stubborn and unquenchable will for achievement fostered in man by the unflagging and mysterious strength of the sea.

"Dites, agoniser là-bas, mais néanmoins,
Avec son seul orgueil têt, comme témoin,
Vivre pour s'en aller.....
.....
Et rencontrer, malgré les volontés adverses
Quand même, un jour, ce chemin qui traverse,
De part en part, le coeur glacé de l'infini.
Je ne puis voir la mer sans rêver de voyages."

Verhaeren has a luminous precision in his vision of the sea and man, of the unity of their forces, and a quality of deep, serene certainty as he contemplates the sea whose life means so much to him. For Verhaeren's intensely personal feeling glows through the impetuous enthusiasm of his poems. How joyfully he turns to the ocean, and sees the ships along its highways, his imagination concentrated on his idealistic picture. Yet with all Verhaeren's idealism, and wilful submerging of the baser side of nature, human and otherwise, there is a certain practical strain in his poetry, in which he

differs from the French sea poets.

"Les Forces Tumultueuses" was published in 1902. As we think of the steady and ever widening increase of sea traffic in quantity and in scope, which the twentieth century has seen, we see in Verhaeren's vision of the ocean as a network of paths for intercourse between nations, a reflection of the foremost tendencies of his time.

It has frequently been said that Verhaeren resembles Victor Hugo. Their love of immensity, of contrast, of surging movement, to which the sea gives such complete satisfaction, and their command of rich and varied imagery, are obvious characteristics in common. They have more, for both are drawn to this question of the sea and man. Each deeply interested in his fellow-men, each filled with exuberant emotion by the life of the sea, felt and compared the two forces. But Verhaeren appreciated the subject even more intensely than the French poet, and his sympathy and singleness of vision are never obscured by love of words, of imagery, as we feel is sometimes the case with Victor Hugo. And their conclusions are poles apart.

Victor Hugo had seen in the sea a cruel, inimical being. Its "voix désespérées" and its "chants lugubres" brought tales of constant and bitter struggle. The joy and inspiration which he personally found in the life of the sea were mingled with horror as he thought of the part which it played in the life of man. The sea, if not a barrier between nations, was at least a grim and dangerous pathway across the world: it was a symbol of all the difficulties lying before man in his search for peace and happiness. Even in "Les Contemplations," the sea remains a force to be feared.

In Verhaeren's conception there is no suggestion of the sea as a force hostile to man. It is rather a formidable

instrument at the service of man's strength, an elementary force stimulating him by its freedom and its suggestion of opportunity. Angry in its power, wild, terrifying as the sea may be, man yet recognizes that behind all this, it brings its power towards him and for him, that he may turn to it to renew his enthusiasm, his confidence and his joy in life. Hence the unapprehensive and confident vision of the poet as he contemplates his bleak and stormy coast, or the unknown greatness of the ocean.

There are causes other than difference in temperament to bring about a change in outlook in the two poets. Over half a century lies between them, and they are years of progress in knowledge of the sea. Verhaeren and his contemporaries are of a generation among whom first-hand knowledge of the sea and shore is increasing, to whom the thought of extensive sea travel is familiar. The idea of the sea as a power remote from man is dying. Verhaeren, although he is more definite, and farther reaching than other poets, is not alone in his trend of thought. In the poems of the last fifty years the sea is a great and sometimes cruel power, but one essentially friendly to man, and subservient to his will and his intelligence. It is closely connected with his existence and progress. The sea has individual life, but it is always sympathetic to man's thoughts, emotions and activity. Moreover, both man and the sea are parts of a great whole, with personal life, but also with common life as elements in a great universal nature.

THE SEA AS AN EMBLEM

The scientist, contemplating nature, observes and reasons, and strives to illustrate by his observation a general idea.

The poet sees and feels. His imagination illumines and transforms his sensations into one conception of life. And from the emotion which he feels before the sea, with its wavering brightness and shadow, its moving, resounding and boundless immensity, so full of charm for his artistic perceptions, are born many thoughts and dreams, which fill the poet's mind and blend his pictures into one great vision.

Montégut wrote: "La poésie véritable de la mer est dans les impressions qu'elle nous laisse, et dans les rêveries où elle nous plonge: on peut dire que le meilleur de cette poésie est dans l'âme du poète." But the spirit of his dream animates his expression of all the familiar sights and sounds of sea and shore, alive in each turn of phrase and each insistent or elusive rhythm.

Thoughts of the sea and its part in man's life lead us often to wonder at the mystery of the sea, to speculation as to its meaning and to comparison with other elements of nature. The wide and limitless horizon of the sea is an obvious symbol of the infinite, pleasing to some, but disquieting to others, even among those who love the sea. Human thought seems too weak to cope with the mystery of this great sea, and yet it attracts the poet, awakening, as he wonders, a pleased consciousness of something vast within himself which grows of his companionship with this infinity.

So profound and spontaneous is the intimacy between Tristan Corbière and the sea that he does not question or

wonder at the sympathy which links him to it, and which is the spirit of his sea poems. His is an imaginative rather than a reflective nature, and the sea brings him dreams rather than a definite train of thought. Corbière loved the actual sensations which the sea gave him, but he loved too the dreams with which it inspired him as he sped towards the horizon in his little vessel, or lay watching his rocky coast and thinking of its history and of those men of the past who had sailed these stretches of water.

"Plus nous n'irons à la molle dérive
Nous rouler en rêvant....."

Thus writes Corbière as he looks back on what were perhaps his happiest days. His dreams are varied and often stormy as the sea itself. In "Le Naufrageur" or "La Fin", for example, there is an unrestrained, unsoftened wildness which divides him in thought as in expression from the fantasies of Le Braz and Le Goffic. His dreams went far afield in time and space, though the range of his actual voyages was limited. In visions of long peaceful solitudes of the sailor's watch, and of endless stretches of the great waves he loved, he dwells on its immensity, which for him represented pure, noble force joined to a caressing gentleness. He dreams of the life of the sailor as he rounds the dangerous Cape Horn or speeds towards tropical shores. Although he is less definite in his expression of wonder at the mystery of the sea, less speculative with regard to the unknown, than his fellow Breton poets, Corbière is pleasantly conscious of the strange life of the ocean and of the mystery of which the ever retreating horizon is so clear a symbol. The waves, echoing still with memories of former days, sing of the buccaneers and the explorers of its great past, those who set forth from his "trou de flibustiers," and whose memory he reveres:

" - Où sont les noms de tes amants?
- La mer et la gloire étaient folles! -
- Noms de lascars! noms de géants!"

The jealous, variable sea stores their secrets, weaving their charm and their poetry into its great mysterious song. And although the sea is well known to Corbière, it has always for him the surprise and joy of its depths of secret life.

Sometimes the tales of the sea were strange and fantastic. Such is the song of "Le Naufrageur" dreaming of his terrible trade:

"J'ai vu dans mes yeux, dans mon rêve,
La Notre-Dame des Brisans
Qui jetait à ses pauvres gens
Un gros navire sur leur greve."

And the breakers roll in sinister procession and with ominous sound towards the shore, arousing sensations of delight in the wrecker. The sea has its dark and baleful moods. Then follows a suggestion of the old superstitions of this fateful coast:

"Mon père était un vieux saltin,
Ma mère une vieille margate - "

The atmosphere of the poem is charged with dark and mysterious forces. Corbière saw something grim and wild in the secrets of the sea, which made it all the more inviting to him, and felt something brusque in its appeal, harmonising well with the wide, bare grandeur of the coast to whose life he linked the sea so closely.

As he contemplates the stormy sea he loved, and sees in imagination tiny ships in mid ocean fighting its monstrous force, the thoughts of Corbière naturally turn to the sea and death. His conception of it is full of proud dignity. He does not, like Loti, look on it as darkness closing over the joy of life, nor like Le Braz and Le Goffic does he see the purpose of God behind the mysterious life of the ocean.

Death, as he sees it, is full of life, and the greatness of the sea speaks to him of eternity. To Corbière, the man who has loved the sea simply changes the nature of his companionship with it at his death and becomes a part of the sea, living still in each wave. His individual life disappears from human knowledge, but only to be merged in that of the sea wherein his existence continues eternally.

"Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange."

And so death is like a wave through which he must plunge to reach a new stage of life. There is struggle against this change, instinctively, and with a vivid consciousness of all the joys and desires of his present life. Yet when the sea at last has its way, there is peace and dignity in the death it brings.

"Eux, allons donc: Entiers! enlevés par la lame!
Ou perdus dans un grain -
Un grain, - est-ce la mort, ça? La basse voilure
Battant à travers l'eau! - Ça se dit encombrer -
Un coup de mer plombé, puis la haute mâture
Fouettant les flots ras - et ça se dit sombrer -
Vieux fantôme eventé, la Mort change de face:
La Mer!"
(La Fin).

"Ame-de-mer en peine est le vieux matelot
Attendant, échoué - quoi: la mort?
- Non, le flot."
(Matelots).

There is peace, confidence and triumph in Corbière's mind as he thinks of death and the sea. Sadness and sympathy are there too, but rather for those whose lot it is to watch the sea and mourn the loss of husband or father than for the sailor himself.

Whether the dreams inspired by the sea create visions of the past, of his ancestor and namesake Tristan and his companions, or of the turmoil of winds and waves wherein his sailor friends prove their strength, they always bear witness to the mysterious emotion with which the sea fills him, an

emotion beyond explanation, but which irradiates his poems. Corbière is acutely realistic, often brutally so, as he writes of the sea and seamen, and yet this emotion throws a light of idealism over his whole conception. His thoughts of the sea are wide and generous, instinct with proud life, and even in his scorn of the landsman, free from morbidity. He is at ease before the greatness of the sea, because he has perfect trust in it and perfect sympathy with its life.

Before these poems, so stormy, so penetrated with proud melancholy, so keen in their moments of bitter irony, it seems rash to suggest that there is lightness in Corbière's conception of the sea. And yet this impression persists. Other French poets, even in their happiest moods, have taken the sea, and themselves, with unbroken solemnity. Verhaeren indeed has flashes when he is charmed into forgetfulness of all else by the sudden exhilaration of the sea, yet something tense and portentous holds him even then. But Corbière has many moments of free and eager gaiety, when he is with the sea alone; there is light-hearted breeziness in his tone as he contemplates his "mer jolie" in "A mon côté le Négrier"; there is bantering affection as he proudly apostrophizes old Roscoff. He meets the sea in storm with an appreciative laugh, and with the stored-up capacity for delight of an ardent nature. The awe of the majesty of the sea, so conspicuous in its poets, seems to have been omitted from Corbière's composition, or lost in his intense fellowship with the ocean. But these are fleeting glimpses of lightness for Corbière is not self-centred in his love of the sea. His tender understanding of his fellow Bretons and sailors, with his profound feeling for the sea itself, reveals a generous nature, full of ardent aspirations, in whose impulsive and sensitive mind bitterness and eccentricity were implanted by

illness, disappointment and despair. And the intensity of this nature gives power to the expression of the artist and makes us esteem Corbière as a great sea poet. No man was ever in more perfect harmony with his subject.

Corbière is perhaps a poet whom we like even more than we respect him. And for this poet, constrained by sharp reserve to shelter behind a semblance of mocking carelessness, revealing his feeling unrestrained only in his eager and imaginative love of the sea, an English reader has perhaps especial sympathy.

"Je mène au jardin des grands rêves."

Thus sings the sea to the little Breton in Le Braz's "Chanson de la Bretagne," and it was a garden wherein the poet wandered happily. More than the actual surface beauty of the sea, more than the life of the shore, he loved the wide expanse, the endlessness of the ocean, with its freedom and mystery.

"Les beaux voyages chimériques
Que j'ai fait couché sur le dos
Vers d'éclatantes américaines
De merveilleux Eldorados!"

(Les Mouettes).

To him the music of the sea brought strange tales of the mysterious solitudes of the ocean, often sad, often full of hopeful adventure, always enigmatic, for to Le Braz the ocean was a symbol of all the unknown which lies beyond man's perception.

"La mer sourit
De son mystérieux sourire."

But Le Braz has a profound faith in God. And behind this smile, behind all the turmoil and the storms which demand so many lives, he sees a force greater than the sea, God watching over the life of the world, speaking through the vast expanse of the sea, and in its great orchestra of sound, to those who will listen to his voice.

"O vent de mer, ô roi des vents,
Fais-nous planer dans ton domaine,
Sur l'infini des flots mouvants
Plus haut que l'espérance humaine!...

O vent de mer, ô roi des vents,
On dit que c'est Dieu, quand tu passes,
Qui parle aux âmes des fervents,
Dans l'immensité des espaces!"
(Chanson du vent de mer).

Such were the thoughts with which came his happiness in the great spaces of the sea and which kept his consciousness of the greatness and strangeness of the sea free from apprehension and full of hope. Thus Le Braz loved the sea in its loneliest aspects, where he could feel "les saines ivresses du large" drawing him to wide vision, destroying doubt and disappointment and bringing in their stead resolution and hope. Here was a delightful field for adventure of the imagination, with ceaseless invitation in its suggestive and continual changes, and in the life constant through them all. And this immensity and mystery of the sea, so much more real to Le Braz than the actual details of the scene before his eyes, was never oppressive, never disturbing, for the more deeply he felt it, the nearer he came to God, who lived for him in this mysterious life.

This is the keynote of the poet's attitude towards the sea. In this conception lies surely the source of the calm and peaceful tone of his poems, and the confidence with which he turns to the sea. Plaintive as are his songs, there is no bitterness, no harshness in them.

Le Braz's hopeful and confident love of the mysterious life of the sea filled him with sympathetic liking for the fairy legends which his compatriots wove round the sea's inexplicable charm. He understood the consciousness of a great unknown life which lay behind these stories, and shared with these people of the sea their love of the fanciful and the fantastic. And so he lends a willing ear to tales which

bid him listen for strange, unearthly music rising through the depths of the sea, and the figures of the past who haunt a moonlit shore are as real to him as the rocks and gleaming beaches themselves. For all these myths flow into one great whole, into a song in praise of the greatness and wonder of the ocean.

Le Braz's keen and marvelling appreciation of the great expanse of the sea and its mysterious life reminds us of Loti. But all Loti's deep love of the sea could not dispel his uneasiness before this symbol of the infinite of which he was so clearly aware, and he sought peace in the physical beauty of the sea and in the thought of its stability. Like Loti, like all the Breton poets, Le Braz thinks often of death as he contemplates the ocean. It absorbs him when he watches the departure of the fishing boats for "Le Pays du Froid."

".... Comme une forêt de squelettes
Les mâts entrechoquent leurs os -
C'est le départ des goélettes
Pour le cimetière des eaux...."
(A Paimpol).

He thinks of it as he listens to the waves on the shore, for even as it sings of adventure and hope to the little Breton, the sea sings too of death.

"Chant de mer, chant de mort."

But although the suggestion of death creeps so often into these songs of the sea, it does not lie heavily over them, so naturally and calmly is it accepted. Sadness and foreboding come in the sounds of the sea but there is none of the dread and fear which make the menace of the sailor's death so insistently terrible in "Pêcheur d'Islande." The gentle tone of the "Berceuse" quoted earlier is characteristic of Le Braz. And again it is through his faith in a power greater than the sea, in a purpose behind the storm,

that he regards the death it brings with equanimity, even in his melancholy.

From the companionship of the sea, and in the exaltation it brought the poet, had come his songs of Brittany. It is not then astonishing that in "Poèmes Votifs," written towards the end of his life (they were published after his death in 1926), poems still in honour of his native land, we should find him turning towards the sea as he looks back along the past. There is a grave note here, and a rhythm more measured than that of the lilting song.

"Prelude" tells us of the poet listening to the rising tide:

"Nous percevions le chant des eaux intarissables,
Mais si diminué, si lointain, si perdu,
Qu'en arrivant à nous, il s'était presque tu
Et nous aussi, nous nous taisions l'âme oppressée
Nous ne savions de quelle anxieuse pensée,
Lourde de désir vague et de pressentiment,
On eût dit qu'au-dessus de nous le firmament,
Frémissant de la même inexprimable attente
Écoutait s'approcher avec la mer montante
Quelque chose d'étrange et de surnaturel..."

The far-away sound, so faint as it reaches him, is yet powerful in its effect on the poet, exciting waves of hidden thought and a tense expectancy, in its reminder of the mysterious life of the sea coming so surely towards him. The voice of the sea has now a deeper, graver note for the poet.

Then he hears the sound of a bell, and his Breton legends come back to him. He sees the fabulous city of Is, with gardens and palaces hidden beneath the waves. And as the vision grows clear, he sees in it the city of his memories, buried under the passage of many days. But now through the sea these memories of vanished dreams and joys come once more to life.

"Tout le passé ressuscitait à nos regards:
Et nous sentions en nous sourdre la nostalgie
De tant de rêves chers naufragés sur les bords
Attantide de l'âme, île des printemps morts."

With quiet eagerness the poet looks seaward in search of his memories, to find these "Poèmes Votifs."

As he evokes his memories, Le Braz turns often towards the sea in the evening, delighting in the glory of the setting sun, and finding a symbolic majesty in the scene, as the light fades away into the darkness of the ocean, whence comes a solemn hymn. In "Thréne" and again in "Anniversaire", we find him lingering by the sea in the last light of sunset, seeing, as he watches the sails in the dusk, the last trace of dreams fading into the past.

"Attardons-nous, ô mon amie, au bord des grèves,
Bleuissantes déjà de l'ombre du passé.
Ces voiles qui s'en vont là-bas furent vos rêves
Saluons-les d'un cœur noblement apaisé."

The darkening sea is still the friend of his dreams. It blends with his thought without a jarring note, bringing peace and calm to the mind of the poet, sympathetic to his imagination, as when its sounds thrilled him with their suggestion of voyages and unknown shores. For Le Braz's love of the mystery of the sea remains, deeper and calmer, and he dreams of what lies beyond the horizon, happy in this enigmatic world, incomprehensible, and yet so accessible to his feelings, and symbolic of his faith.

Quoting the familiar phrase of Amiel - "un paysage quelconque est un état de l'âme" - Le Goffic imagines a scene which is a concrete expression of his own emotion. And he chooses the desolate, shadowy coast, so familiar a background in his poems and stories.

"C'est un paysage
Presque sans couleurs
Et comme en veuvage
Sous le ciel en pleurs.

Rien de romantique
Ni burgs, ni donjons
Du sable, une crique,
L'infini des joncs,
Et la mer." (Nostalgie).

Nothing bright, nothing romantic, nothing grandiose. With its vagueness of colour and contour, and its sombre atmosphere, this is the scene whose qualities are most sympathetic to Le Goffic. Le Braz's dreams travel far, across the sea beyond his actual range of vision; Le Goffic, although he chooses a wide and open scene, is more attentive to the significant details of the sea and shore close to him, and feels its companionship more intimately as he contemplates a particular horizon. For to him, as to Le Braz and to Corbière, the sea is a companion. But in this friendly being, Le Goffic welcomes different qualities, different aspects, and he does not find it always at his service.

He brings to the sea a grave and troubled mind. The light beauty and freshness of a smiling sea have no power over him, to inspire buoyant and carefree dreams, as in Le Braz. This sea is not the friend in whom he may confide. On such a bright and gentle sea he watches the butterflies flitting from the shore and likens them to his dreams. Alike they seek the freedom of the open sea, but he looks forward and sees them in sad plight as the sea changes swiftly; and he concludes with foreboding:

"J'ai peur pour vous, j'ai peur pour eux."
(Papillons de Mer).

Artist as he is, he feels the beauty of the hour, but his uneasiness grows bigger before it. There is no peace for him in this sea. Nor is he at ease with Corbière's favourite stormy seas. Such hours bring no exultation. Their menace is insistent and their spectacular beauty distasteful to this lover of quiet and simplicity. But the grey dark sea of his choice he loves with intensity. In it he feels a beautiful, sensitive life. Mournful and depressed, instead of angry and boisterous, there emanates from it a force as great as that of the storm, only now that force

is sympathetic and strengthening to the troubled mind which will accept its help. The sad and gentle voice of the sea soothes his own speculative sadness. On it his fancy roams freely, undisturbed by brilliance or by storm. Now he can exult in the greatness and freedom of the ocean, while his dreams, sombre indeed, in accordance with the hour, fly with trust and hope renewed towards the unknown horizon.

As strongly as Le Braz, Monsieur Le Goffic has the fondness of his race for fairy tales and for all that hints at the marvellous. A far less imaginative mind than his might feel magic in the seas which he chooses for his subject. For him the sounds of winds and waves mingle in strange melody, and the shadowy sea is mysteriously alive.

"... un soir plein de cris, d'ombre et de mystère
Sur les rochers nus de Saint-Jean-du-Doigt..."
(Bouquet).

In such hours, the sea, standing for all that is vast and incomprehensible, seems through the darkness to reveal a glimpse of its obscure life. Then the lonely seas become the haunt of strange personages, the scene of inexplicable happenings, tales through which the poet expresses his deep sense of the mystery of the sea.

"Noël à bord" is such a story. It tells of a crew sailing homeward at Christmas. Fog surrounds their ship; rocks loom up around them as they creep forward on a vaguely menacing sea.

"Et soudain le brouillard disparut, et la mer
Fut pleine de clartés de cierges.
Il en naissait, il en surgissait de partout!
Comme on voit sur les blés les abeilles en acôt
Leurs feux pâles dansaient à la pointe des lames.
Ils rayaient l'ombre avec des vols brusques
d'oiseaux,
Et, tandis que leurs bonds se croisaient sur les
eaux
On entendait grossir la prière des âmes....."

And the awe-struck sailors see the souls of the drowned, figures clothed in seaweed, coming across the sea, and passing

close beside the ship. Many of these stories are connected with death and the practices of religion. There are others, such as "Le Mary Morgane," "Marivône," "L'Ile des Sept Sommeils," wherein we hear of fairies who roam the sad and desolate shores.

These tales are shrouded in invincible sadness. The souls of the drowned in "Noel à bord" wander restlessly and mournfully through the sea; the fairies of "L'Ile des Sept Sommeils" shiver at the desolation of this bare and wind-swept coast, and feel pity for its people. Marivône, the girl waiting for her lover on the shore, looks hopefully seaward, until she is old, but when the ship returns at last, it brings her lover dead. And we feel again how aptly the poet has chosen his grey, sad shore. For the sea does not banish his grave disquieting thoughts. It brings him sympathy and solace, it cures his bitterness, but its mood attunes itself to his, as he contemplates the sea with wonder, and with deep and serious content in its presence and in its tireless life.

Le Goffic turns rarely to a port, or a populous shore, with lights and endless human activity, matching the movement of the tides. The life which he appreciates in the sea has nothing in common with such manifestations of energy, and he must have solitude to feel the charm and greatness of the sea.

Then it is that to him, as to his fellow Bretons, the sea brings thoughts of death. In the winter sea he hears a continuous dirge, and the beating of the waves are lamentations which echo long and sadly in his heart. Then he is conscious of the vast and lonely expanse of the ocean, where the mournful sounds travel wide and far, until they fall in low monotony upon the friendly, desolate shore.

Despite its sadness, the poet writes with affection of such a sea and shore.

"De l'est à l'ouest, la mer est là qui vous enferme
Dans un cercle éternel de sourds gémissements:
Mais sa plainte, où des glas sanglotent par moments,
Nostalgiques appels des cités soumarines,
Dont l'écho retentit au fond de nos poitrines
Et fait pleurer en nous des morts mystérieux,
Sa plainte, sous le vide exaspérant des cieux
Peut s'enfler: de tiédeur et d'ombre enveloppée
Elle expire à vos bords en vague mélodée....."
(Run Rouz).

The thought of death attracts him, and yet he considers it, unwillingly, with a mournful awe, not calmly like Le Braz and Corbière. He does not hear peace in the tale of death brought by the sea, nor does he feel it, like Corbière, the apex of human existence. To Monsieur Le Goffic the death concealed in the waves is as troubled as the soul of the sea itself, and his mind is drawn to wonder at its secrets with vague, disquieting sorrow. He is far more sensitive to actual, concrete facts than Le Braz. He pictures vividly the terrors of the sea and the conflicting feelings of those who face its storms.

Yet we feel that beneath his mournfulness, he looks upon the mysterious greatness and unknown fate which the sea may hide with an equanimity which, like that of Le Braz, has its source in a deep religious faith. He has confidence in a greater being behind the vast sea.

"Comme au temps où son geste enchaînait la rafale,
Nos yeux, si l'au Delà s'ouvrait à leur regard,
Verraient, sur le tillac de la barque amirale
Jésus assis au banc de quart."
(Pleine Nuit).

The ocean is the symbol of the unknown, but on this ocean he sees God as man's guide. And so the poet can, without apprehension, love his dark, mysterious sea and find a strange confidence mingling with his sorrow at its endless lament, while its saddest tales inspire hope and strength.

Each drawn to share in some way the life of the sea, these poets of whom we have written have turned towards it simply and naturally, expressing the influence of its companionship almost unconsciously, knowing surely that they love the sea, and yet vague in that realisation. But Jean Richepin's "La Mer" leaves the reader with the strong impression that the poet, as he watches the sea, is fully aware, perhaps not quite happily aware, of his feeling for it, and of the limitations of its power over him. The artist in him yields with graceful ease to its varied beauty; the thinker looks with appreciation on this wide expanse at his feet, before he sets out on it with deliberate intent. Yet wonder is swiftly added to delight and curiosity as he contemplates this symbol of unquiet greatness:

"Tout ce qu'on entend, ce qu'on voit, ce qu'on rêve
Devant cet infini qui change incessamment."

Thus he writes, with anticipation, in the preface to "La Mer." And here is plainly a reason why Richepin loves the stormy, misty, changeable Northern shores more than the tideless, sunnier Mediterranean, for before the powerful expanse of the Atlantic he feels especially the appeal of the infinite life of the sea. As he watches it from his ship or from the quiet shore, he seeks the spirit of this splendour and beauty, and its insoluble mystery is a never failing source of reverie, of grave, calm speculation, as he tells in "Litanies de la Mer." The incessant movement of the surface, sometimes angry, sometimes smiling, above the changeless and impenetrable life below, especially attracts him, and suggests the changes and turmoil of all existence, turmoil wearying in its apparent aimlessness. And then, following the course of the waves driven forward by the winds, only to fall under the crest of their successors, he feels that, like these waves, nations are driven forward in

sudden ardent impulse, to explore wider realms, that human thought too is thrust onward towards an alluring unknown, driven in eager attack against the fast shut door of mystery. Yet as the waves of the sea rise swiftly and eagerly from their calm to taste the surging joy of the storm before they are overpowered, so our thoughts are always gladly expectant of the impulse which will bring them new inspiration, heedless of the check which they well know awaits them. Thus the waves of thought are as incessant in their movement as those of the sea, each with its allotted hour of life.

*.... Et de même notre pensée
O flots et peuples vagabonds
Comme vous veut être lancée
Pour tenter d'impossibles bonds
Nous savons bien que sur la terre
Sans avoir conquis le mystère
Eparpillés nous retombons;
Nous aimons quand même, n'importe,
Le souffle fou qui nous emporte
Au mystère murant sa porte
Devant nos galops furibonds.

Et toujours, et quoi qu'il arrive,
O vous, nomades émigrants
O vous, flots qui battez le rive,
O vous, mes songes délirants
Toujours nous guettons dans la rue
L'éclair annonçant la venue
De la grande haleine inconnue
Qui met notre chaos en rangs
Qui nous jette comme une armée
Hors de la paix accoutumée
Qui change en feu notre fumée
Qui change nos lacs en torrents."
(Le Souffle).

But how calmly Richepin considers the waves and the picture which they so clearly represent. There is nothing here of the elation of Verhaeren at the very thought of such powerful and co-ordinated movement. Nor does Richepin find any clear and hopeful purpose in it. In his vision of the ardour, and the energy with which the waves, the thoughts, coalesce and bound forward, he never loses sight of the end of their eager flight, when they fall, their force exhausted. He sees no lasting result of this ardour, and of the impetus

which thrust them forth; he has no tenderness for the hopeful dreams.

Yet sometimes, under the spell of the mysterious beauty of the sea, he himself weaves joyous and rose-coloured dreams, and then, despite the unwilling scepticism which clings to him, he rejoices in the magic of the sea.

"Les rêves de l'infini, c'est toi qui les suggères;
Rose mystique, rose idéale; et mon coeur
A bien pu blasphémer leurs splendeurs mensongères
O rose, malgré tout ton mystère me touche....."
(Litanies de la Mer).

But Richepin is always conscious of the conflicting emotions, of the doubts which disturb his vision. For Richepin does not look towards the horizon with confidence, the confidence of Corbière in the eternal life of the sea itself, of Le Braz and Le Goffic in the purpose of God behind the sea, of Verhaeren in humanity. And so he cannot find perfect happiness in it; he has not, and he knows that he has not, the love and affection which burns in each line of Corbière's sea poems, and which glows with quiet certainty in the minds of Le Braz and Le Goffic as they face the greatness of the sea. Richepin loves the stormy beauty of the sea, its varied yet constant life, does indeed feel the power and attraction of its mystery; yet, in the very fervour with which he expresses his joy, there is a haunting and intrusive note of uncertainty. Thus it is that, despite the admiration aroused by the beautiful rhythms, and the delicate and varied imagery, of his verse, despite respect for the energy, and the wide and deep range of his thought, the reader is not carried away by it. Richepin's eloquence can awake no responsive emotion. Only the poems about sailors, where, forgetful of himself, he writes with clear and sympathetic vision of their feeling for the sea, are exceptions.

While he considers the movement of the sea, its song

accompanies his reverie, and Richepin imagines that, in its endless sound, the sea would tell its secrets, the secret of its unrest, to the shore and to the man who will wonder at the meaning of its melody, with sympathetic mind. But though he listens long and eagerly, the voice of the sea grows more mysterious as he hears it clearly, and remains beyond the bounds of thought or intuition. (Le Secret). At length, as the poet listens still to the monotonous sound, he has another fancy, and asks whether the sea has perhaps no secrets save that of man's life, whether its voice is simply the echo of the world's lament in its sorrow and struggle, while the sea itself, with its strange and melancholy charm, is but the bitter tears of the earth.

"... Peut-être toi-même, ô triste mer
Mer au goût de larme âcre et salée
Es-tu de la terre inconsolée
Le pleur amer....."

(Larmes).

In the fresh beauty of the sea, of which he never wearies, in its life which moves him, almost despite himself, to wonder, Richepin finds sadness. He feels that the link which binds the soul of man to the soul of the sea is one of beauty, but also of sorrow. For him the joy brought by the sea is never quite free from sadness, from vague underlying foreboding. Richepin cannot welcome the sea as a symbol of mystery with serenity, trustful in its inner beauty. And he returns willingly to thoughts of its seaweeds and flowers, the rocks and the animals in their crevices, concrete signs of the life in the sea. Of sea poets, Richepin is the only one who approaches the province of the naturalist, to reflect on the teeming life hidden in the sea. In the fishes and the vegetation of the ocean, he sees a realm as wide and varied as that supported by the land. Beneath the stormy and treacherous surface which brings him uneasy reminders of

its menacing strength and untold, fateful possibilities, he sees a busy world finding a kindly home in the mysterious depths, for the sea does not reserve its gifts for man. And again the poet marvels at the all-embracing greatness of the ocean:

"O mer, à la fois rage et douceur
Qui saura jamais ton âme entière?
Ce qui peut être pour nous un cimetière
Est pour le margat un nid berceur."
(Le Margat).

Thus the sea combines with the land to foster the life of the universe. It does not represent an isolated force, useless to the earth. Yet it remains a force apart. Watching the sea beating incessantly against the cliffs, falling back to renew its attack, Richepin sees the two forces in rivalry, in constant and aimless struggle. His thoughts turn frequently to this grim contest. "Bataille de Nuit," for example, is a vision of a battle between the elements. In the darkness, winds, waves and rocks are animated with sudden monstrous life and throughout the night they do battle, with the clamour and the ferocity of human armies, with:

"Le tambour des galets, la trompette des conques."

And next day, as he scans the shore, strewn with seaweed and boulders, the poet sees the débris of all this paraphernalia of war, and reads a story of grim battle. From the shelter of such fantasies, he willingly regards the greatness and mystery of the sea. When he thinks of it as a fairylike garden, too, he finds charm and delight in the unknown sea. In this lighter mood the waves flow towards him with tales of alluring brightness beyond the horizon, of beauty undreamed of, inviting the traveller:

"Sur la mer aux flots toujours féériques
Partez en bateau, même en radeau.
Ça y trouve encor des Amériques
On y trouve encor l'Eldorado!" (Les Iles roses).

Forgetful now of the watchful life of the sea, his imagination dwells on wide vistas of smiling beauty, on new and unspoilt dreamlands.

But whatever his mood, Richepin always regards the sea in its shadow and mystery, its joy and brilliance, not as a succession of pictures, not merely as a field for his dreams, but as a noble and mighty part of a nature who has ^{her} ~~known~~ life. In close touch with that of man, yet it is not a reflection of him, but worthy of consideration in itself.

This is a new attitude with regard to nature, and one of whose novelty Richepin himself is aware. He expresses it definitely at the end of his book, in "La Gloire de l'Eau":

"Aussi nous, les rimeurs de demain, nous pensons
Que La Nature a sa figure personnelle,
Qu'il ne faut pas toujours nous admirer en elle
Et qu'à la contempler sans nous voir au travers
On peut trouver profit et plaisir et beaux vers."

He is not absorbed by its life, never overwhelmed by it, and also never in true sympathy with it. We have referred to the lack of spontaneity which comes with his attitude. Yet we cannot but respect the vigour and wide compass of his thought, as he celebrates the greatness and majesty of the ocean in "Les Litanies de la Mer."

Verhaeren, exulting in the eternal freshness which he found in the sea, looking with joyous vision towards its wide horizon, writes of it with rapturous serenity. Verhaeren loved the sea, intensely and instinctively, in itself, and apart from any conscious motive, but his imagination and his thought probed eagerly into the infinite greatness which he found in it. He rejoiced in the ocean as a very source of life, eternal and abundant, deep and mysterious as befitted its greatness, but unlimited in its potential gifts for the universe and in its response to the

man who would seek it. For, so much a part of all his thought is Verhaeren's interest in humanity, that his whole conception of the sea is bound up with man, and both with his simple conception of the universe as a whole.

The sea is to him, writes Stephan Zweig, "the symbol of constant strength in eternal unrest."

As he watches the sea beating against the rocks on the shore, and the cliffs withstanding and breaking the movement of the waves, and the sea filling the atmosphere with its freshness, Verhaeren sees in all this restless, conflicting activity, the emblem of a bigger movement, of the activity of the world. He is moved to joy at the sight of this wealth of force, this energy and co-operation, for he has veneration for energy in any form, and a deep conviction in its essential usefulness, however wanting in result it may appear; while his joy is renewed with the growth of his vision of the eternally moving life of the world.

"Tout se confond, tout se détruit, tout se féconde
On voit un siècle dans un instant."
(Sur les Grèves: Les Forces
Tumultueuses).

Thus he cries as he looks on the shore. The order of the verbs is significant. Richepin, in a similar scene, saw most clearly the waves of the sea and of human thought falling back exhausted from the attack, but Verhaeren glories in the impulse which inspires their movement, as in the intensity of the struggle, and sees the ardour of the waves, even in the moment of their destruction, not wasted, but strengthening their successors, so that each wave lives on in the next. Thus, in the waves of the sea, and in waves of activity in all life, the hope and will for progress, the belief in the possibility of achievement mean the carrying on of life.

To this perpetual source of vitality, whose contact

brought joy and encouragement to his youth, he sees man returning again when he has used the force it gave, having gained through it a host of new experiences, and given his share to the knowledge and aspirations of the universe. He returns, with greater wisdom and appreciation of its fresh and endless life.

"Et maintenant, c'est sur tes bords, ô mer suprême
Où tout se renouvelle, où tout se reproduit
Après s'être disjoint, après s'être détruit,
Que je reviens pour qu'on y sème
Cet univers, qui fut moi-même."

(Vers la Mer).

There is here, as in several of Verhaeren's sea poems, a suggestion of the actual physical nature of its appeal for him.

The sea is above all eloquent to Verhaeren of the continuity of existence. When he was thinking of the traffic on the expanse of the sea, he saw it as a link between nations. Now, as he contemplates its immense life, confident in the unity and strength of humanity, and in the permanence of the thought of each age, he looks with wonder on the sea, as an eternal link between the centuries as between the countries of the world. Verhaeren is filled with veneration for the explorers of the past, for all those who went blindly in quest of their dreams. But while he looks seaward to a vision of the glories of the past, another vision of unbounded scope grows round it, adding with exuberant hopefulness future glories to those already won.

In "Sur la Mer," the closing poem of "Les Forces Tumultueuses," and one of the most beautiful of his sea poems, Verhaeren evokes, in sustained and luminous image, the history of the great ship whose origin is lost in the mists of time and who has journeyed throughout the centuries, in proud and marvellous voyage, bearing the thought and the beauty and the deeds of each new age from end to end of the
world.

"Et le futur des temps et le passé du monde
Passaient, devant les yeux, quand on narrait son sort."

And always the coming of the ship brought new hope and new
vistas of life to those who looked eagerly across the sea.

"Ainsi de siècle en siècle, au cours fougueux des âges,
Il emplissait d'espoir les horizons amers,
Changeant ses pavillons, changeant ses équipages,
Mais éternel dans son voyage autour des mers..."

Thus with the life of the sea flowed on the life of man's
thought, the movement and strength of the one reflected in
the other, and through storm and calm the ship carried on the
ideas and aspirations of one age to the fulfilment of the
next. Each tentative step, each new-born achievement,
found a permanent place in its cargo.

"Il vogue ayant a bord les prémices fragiles
Ce que seront la vie et son éclair, demain,
Ce qu'on a pris non plus au fond des Evangiles,
Mais dans l'instinct mieux défini de l'être humain,

Ce qu'est l'ordre futur et la bonté logique,
Et la nécessité claire, force de tous,
Ce qu'élabore et veut l'humanité tragique
Est oscillant déjà dans l'or de ses remous."

And Verhaeren welcomes the ship, which the sea, in its wis-
dom and sympathy, bears proudly on her way, for he is secure
in the knowledge of the cargo, the tale of struggles,
defeats and conquering aspirations, which the present sends
on towards the future. This poem has in it the deep and
mysterious exaltation through which we feel that here is a
great poet. Simple in conception and free from digression,
it has serenity in its tone, with nothing of the abrupt
excitement frequently characteristic of Verhaeren. It has
the tense quiet and smoothness of something deep and sure.
The poet is expressing a vision well known to him, but in-
creasingly beautiful in its familiarity. For as he looks
on the sea and on the ships disappearing over the horizon,
he contemplates the deeds of the past and the promises of
the future with wonderment: in this vision of the sea he

finds an embodiment of one of his greatest beliefs: belief in unity.

"Verhaeren est le poète héroïque de l'énergie," wrote M. Albert Mockel. Energy is indeed the watchword of his sea poems, but it is invariably energy drawn into one single purpose. The sea as a great united force, the sea bringing balance and unity to the earth: this is what he feels as he stands before its fascinating movement. There is answering turmoil in the poet's mind in face of this concentration of strength, but oppression is succeeded by exhilaration in its vast and united freedom, and in the ordered rhythm of its movement.

"La mer soudaine, ardente et libre,
Qui tient la terre en équilibre."
(Le Port: Villes Tentaculaires).

With all his appreciation of the expanse of the sea, Verhaeren is always aware, as he contemplates it, of the lands bounding that expanse, of the sea as a balance to the earth, its strength drawn infallibly to fulfilment of its part in a united universe.

The mystery of the sea is full of attraction for Verhaeren. The waves themselves are symbolic of ideas, of thoughts which arise, wide and clear, in his mind. In the splendour and peace of an evening sea, of the sunset, with its atmosphere of mystery, he thinks with quick desire and deep love of the immensity and beauty of the ocean. Then with the confident waves, his thoughts sweep in wide and peaceful freedom across the sea.

"Dites, la mer nue et pure, comme une idée
Qui envahit le soir, mon âme émeraude!"

"Et qu'elles sont claires et apaisées
Les pensées:
Et comme, en immenses ondes mentales
Elles s'étaient
Sur les abîmes d'or des mers horizontales!"
(L'Eau: Les Visages de la Vie)

The physical attraction of the sea is fused with that of its mysterious nature to exalt the poet. Here the pure beauty which charmed and excited his senses poured its life into his thoughts, sad or joyous, and drew him to feel with exulting wonder that he had a part in the harmonious and invigorating life of the sea. The luminous splendour of the sunset is reflected in the glow which irradiates the poet, and which leaves a close intimacy between him and the sea. This intimacy is a delight to the poet, inciting his thought to freedom, bringing him excitement and serenity, and inspiring him always to renewed and confident activity.

Verhaeren is a realist; his pictures of the sea and shores he knew amply bear witness to this quality. But beside his realism lives a mysticism as intense, and in his love of the sea the two are reconciled. For his sensitive imagination, happy in immensity, magnified and transformed, the scenes he clearly saw, and which always kept their freshness, the work of the ports or the bare and stormy aspects of the shore, into a wide and mystical exaltation. Dreams of the sea beyond actual vision, sign of the great mystery perceived but beyond understanding, and the halo of the mysterious companionship of the sea, surrounded his actual clear pictures, blending all into his one great and confident vision of unity and life. Verhaeren looked with wonder towards the expanse of the sea, but it was a wonder filled with happy calm, free from apprehension, for he trusted in the strength of universal life and in its progress and continuity.

The sea poems of the last half century show us that, while their writers feel the poetry of the external beauty of the sea, they are attracted also, in some cases still more strongly, by something which they perceive through that

beauty: the life which is the spirit of it. M. Jean Dornis, writing of the poet and nature, says: "Cette Nature vivante, on l'aime en elle-même et pour elle-même, non plus comme un cadre où se déroulent les songes, mais comme un être à côté d'un être." Of the poet of to-day, as he contemplates the sea with marvelling affection, this is certainly the case. He is pleasantly and proudly aware of the power of the sea beside his own. He feels a close affinity between its moods and his, feels that through his companionship with the sea he can express himself. The barriers of apprehension and of remoteness which had before stood between the poet and the greatness of the sea are fast disappearing. He turns towards its great and mysterious life with eager acceptance of the freedom which it offers to his dreams and to his thoughts, finding in it not a power to bewilder and retard, but one in wonderment of whom comes renewed and confident activity, peace, and excitement, giving energy to aspirations and ideals. He watches with joy the harmonious life of the sea, and its lack of finality, seeing in it a sign of infinite opportunity for himself.

The happiness of the poet in the wide and endless life of the sea makes him feel that it is close to him, that he is linked to this continuous and rhythmical movement, to this mysterious force, while he is in no way subservient to it, but giving himself up to joy in its greatness with a free and unspoilt mind. These poets have loved the sea with intensity, moved to exaltation by it and finding in the ocean a symbol and a revelation of the truth of their beliefs; and therefore they are content before their perception of its mystery, happy in its deep and vital beauty.

C O N C L U S I O N

Remy de Gourmont wrote of the sea in French literature:-
"Si l'on demandait quelle est la plus originale création du
XIX^e siècle, il faudrait peut-être répondre: c'est la mer."

The year 1870 found interest in the sea already awakened,
the poetry of the Romantics bridging the gulf of neglect
between the Arthurian legends ^{Tristan and Eliduc,} and "Paul et Virginie." Yet
the poets of the end of the century had no small share in
this creation, in sustaining and widening the influence of
the sea in French poetry.

The Romantics, attracted by the very remoteness of the
sea, by its suggestion of infinity, gazed with melancholy
happiness on the sweeping greatness, and the beauty of this
far away force, with vision wide and clear within its limi-
tations; yet they were too absorbed in contemplation of the
great whole, too overcome with vague exaltation, to look, or
desire to look, closely at the beauty and wonder of each
wave and each flash of colour and movement. The Parnassiens
look seawards with more careful scrutiny, appreciative of
the sea as a subject for picture, but they show no personal
feeling, no sympathetic emotion. But their successors,
poets of a generation more familiar with the vastness of the
ocean, and of the world, and above all distinguished by a
new trend of vision, a new attitude of mind, not blurred by
vague melancholy, yet seeking in nature something more than
a clear and constant image, find in the free and ever chang-
ing movement of the sea an aesthetic force most sympathetic
to their eagerness and passion and to their love of mystery.
They regain the personal exaltation of the Romantics, but
without its vagueness and exaggeration, and with intimate

and reticent emotion.

Realism and intimacy: these are the watchwords of the sea poetry of the last half century. The poems of Tristan Corbière are the signal of a break through an attitude which had become rigid and conventional.

Each aspect of the poems we are considering reveals this intimate and realistic outlook on the sea. Descriptions and pictures of sea and shore are not wider in the scope of their subject than those of Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo or Lesconte de Lisle, but they are more precise, and infinitely varied. We have the sea wild and menacing, sunny, quiet and silent, restless, triumphant or capricious... General impressions of the sea are accompanied by pictures of definite and particular scenes. We have miniatures, painting finely and closely the delicate grace and subtle beauty of the sea, as well as widely sketched seascapes. No detail - the seaweed on the shore, the fringe of reeds, the curve of a wave, the saltiness which penetrates the whole - is too small or too fleeting to have its place in the poet's expression of the outward signs which lead him to feel the soul of the sea. The less spectacular aspects of the ocean, as well as storms or the brilliance of clear days and nights, have their influence on the poet. Each element which makes the wide and vast vitality of the sea is observed and felt, and expressed with sympathy.

Moreover the sea awakens in the poet a desire to know its life closely, to sail on it, to explore it. And this desire is accompanied by his observant and friendly interest in those whose business it is to travel the ocean, merchant seamen and fishermen alike.

These impressions of the sea, and this sympathetic understanding of the sailor are but the outcome of the poet's

deep love for the life of the sea and his trust in it, and of the intimacy between his whole being and the soul which he sees inspiring the grandeur and beauty of the sea. He feels that it is sympathetic to him as an individual, that there are secret and incomprehensible but sure harmonies between him and the sea, through which its greatness penetrates him and encourages him to heights of thought and action. He sees it removing barriers of doubt and fear and misunderstanding, so that his dreams and thought may travel clearly across its expanse; he sees the mystery of the sea bound closely to his hopes, his joy and sorrow. Thus the greatness of the sea is no longer remote or overwhelming to the poet, nor does he find it insensible to his emotion.

And as he thinks of mankind and of the universe, the poet of to-day sees the sea in a light unknown to his predecessors. Richepin and Verhaeren especially write of its appointed part in the life of the world, of the beauty of the ocean as a unifying force, as a great element, together with man, in the existence of the universe, of the sea maternal and strengthening in its activity, of the ocean as a link between all generations of men. But this definite and confident attitude, this intimacy has in no way lessened the wonder of its poets, who contemplate it with all the freshness of feeling of those whom it first inspired.

A reader accustomed to the tone of English sea poetry, of Swinburne, of Coleridge and of Keats, of Shakespeare himself, so often lightly joyous in their welcome to the sea, carefree and impulsive in their ardour and exultation and in their flights of imagination, is struck by a different note in the French poets of to-day, as in their predecessors. The English poets turn to the sea with easy, instinctive gesture, born of the consciousness of ancient companionship,

of the knowledge that the sea has been a source of joy and inspiration to poets of their race ever since the days of Caedmon. They have more than a trace of a proprietary attitude in their love of the sea. The French poets are more sombre, more gravely thoughtful in their contemplation of the sea: and this is so, even in their moments of closest and happiest intimacy; Le Braz, with his serious, pensive dreams, Le Goffic, seeking solace in the dark and troubled sea, Richepin, looking with grave and observant delight at the beauty and freshness of the sea. Only in Tristan Corbière do we feel at times a different note.

In actual life, the place of the sea grows yearly greater; Verhaeren's vision of a network of paths across the ocean more fully realised, its terrors less extreme, while its force remains as great. But the ocean is great and its mystery deep enough, to grow more wonderful with closer knowledge. Those of the twentieth century who grow up to conceptions of distance, of time and of speed unknown to their fathers, find the sea not less wonderful, nor less varied in its attraction, while it is more accessible to their enthusiasm.

In French literature the sea is still a recent conquest. But since the time of Tristan Corbière, its place has grown steadily greater. We have chosen five representative poets in whom the influence of the sea is essential, but to their names, and to those mentioned in the Introduction, many more might be added, for among the poets of our own time they are indeed few who have not felt and expressed the charm of the sea.

Its influence may not continue to grow wider, as it has done during the past century, but it has won an affection not to be lost, for as Remy de Gourmont said:-

"Ceux qui l'ont aimée une fois l'aimeront toujours."

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