SOME ROUNDABOUT PAPERS

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A SELECTION OF MODERN ESSAYS

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT is an essay? Dr. Johnson called it a loose sally of the mind; somebody else, a lyric in prose. But neither definition seems to do. There are essays that show compact and systematic treatment of subjects by no means serious; others so weightily solid as to make not the slightest suggestion of lyric.

At least we may say that the 'true essay' is something characteristically English. To a Frenchman, for example, an *essayiste* is a 'writer who, abandoning the forcible logic, the incisive wit and the brilliant colouring of the French *prosateur,* chooses to let his pen indicate all the contours of his individuality, record his changes of mental equilibrium like the needle of a seismograph, and indulge, in exchange for epigram, that elusive quality, also English, known as humour'.[1]

For myself, I think the 'true essay' must be related in some sort to the old Roman satire or *satura*. This included any poem that was neither lyrically nor dramatically intense, but which was, on the other hand, discursive and easy tempered in manner. For the *satura* originally implied no notion of attack. It was in fact, like the true essay, an *olla podrida,* or, in Thackeray's

[1] *The Essay* by Orlo Williams, pp. 15-16.

phrase, a 'roundabout paper' on men and affairs.

The 'true essay' may further be profitably distinguished, as Mr. Orlo Williams has distinguished it, from the mere 'theme', which is either a school exercise, or, in the hands of the learned, sets out to establish some definite thesis.

In England the cultivation of the essay began with Bacon and Cowley : the former using polished and well-balanced sentences to express the wisdom of his experience ; the latter mixing his simpler prose with verse, revealing the joys of his own life, or the emptiness of worldly ambitions. The eighteenth century essayists profited but little by the example of these two. The contributors to the *Tatler,* the *Spectator,* the *Rambler* and the rest made of the essay a sugared pill, a means to improve the public morals. Wit, humour, lightness of touch, self-revelation, all these ingredients are occasionally there, yet they remain, quite palpably to us at any rate, devices of moral reform. They have become indigestible to modern readers, in spite of their often wonderful brilliance of style, except in the small doses in which they were originally published.

The true essay begins with the nineteenth century, which is the age of the essay as it is the age of the lyric. The spontaneity, the freshness, the abandon of both kinds have never since been quite recaptured. Lamb, Hazlitt, De Quincey and Leigh Hunt are the foremost of a host of celebrated names. Here is discovered that magic

secret whereby the essayist, through the mirror of his own personality, can reveal through a softened light, the very sternest facts of life. Lamb in particular wields the wand as to the manner born ; the reader is hypnotized by this magician ; he sits at ease ; the writer's philosophy becomes his own.

The later writers of the same century surrendered the wizardry that lurks in the true essay. Their writings in essay form were intended for more serious purpose. They became more like the first finished drafts of treatises to come. Think of the essays of Macaulay, Newman, Froude, Ruskin, and Carlyle. Some of Macaulay's essays are in fact compendious enough to be themselves called treatises. The insistence of these writers, however, on the niceties of style had its effect on the work of essayists like Pater, R. L. Stevenson, and others who followed. Both Pater and Stevenson are particularly noted for their whole-hearted devotion to the individual phrase. The old seeming simplicity and artlessness of self-portrayal were lost in the pursuit of fineness and elegance. And, since they wrote, this 'preciousness' has received more and more attention from the writers of essays—among certain contemporary writers the only *raison d'être* of a sentence often seems to be the clever brilliance of its phrasing. The widening of the dominions, of journalism on the one hand, and of the novel on the other, is no doubt partly responsible for this event. However that may be, the fact remains that the essay to-day is but an elegant trifle. One is but generalizing, and thinks

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1

THE PRAISE OF CHIMNEY-SWEEPERS

I LIKE to meet a sweep—understand me—not a grown sweeper—old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive—but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek—such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the *peep-peep* of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aërial ascents not seldom anticipating the sunrise?

I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks—poor blots—innocent blacknesses—

I reverence these young Africans of our own growth—these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind.

When a child, what a mysterious pleasure it was to witness their operation! to see a chit no bigger than one's-self, enter, one knew not by what process, into what seemed the *fauces Averni* —to pursue him in imagination, as he went sounding on through so many dark stifling caverns, horrid shades! to shudder with the idea that

' now, surely he must be lost for ever ! '—to revive at hearing his feeble shout of discovered daylight—and then (O fulness of delight !) running out of doors, to come just in time to see the sable phenomenon emerge in safety, the brandished weapon of his art victorious like some flag waved over a conquered citadel ! I seem to remember having been told, that a bad sweep was once left in a stack with his brush, to indicate which way the wind blew. It was an awful spectacle, certainly ; not much unlike the old stage direction in *Macbeth,* where the 'Apparition of a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, rises'.

Reader, if thou meetest one of these small gentry in thy early rambles, it is good to give him a penny,—it is better to give him twopence. If it be starving weather, and to the proper troubles of his hard occupation, a pair of kibed heels (no unusual accompaniment) be superadded, the demand on thy humanity will surely rise to a tester.

There is a composition, the ground-work of which I have understood to be the sweet wood 'yclept sassafras. This wood boiled down to a kind of tea, and tempered with an infusion of milk and sugar, hath to some tastes a delicacy beyond the China luxury. I know not how thy palate may relish it ; for myself, with every deference to the judicious Mr. Read, who hath time out of mind kept open a shop (the only one he avers in London) for the vending of this ' wholesome and pleasant beverage ', on the south side of Fleet

Street, as thou approachest Bridge Street—*the only Salopian house*—I have never yet adventured to dip my own particular lip in a basin of his commended ingredients—a cautious premonition to the olfactories constantly whispering to me, that my stomach must infallibly, with all due courtesy, decline it. Yet I have seen palates, otherwise not uninstructed in dietetical elegancies, sup it up with avidity.

I know not by what particular conformation of the organ it happens, but I have always found that this composition is surprisingly gratifying to the palate of a young chimney-sweeper—whether the oily particles (sassafras is slightly oleaginous) do attenuate and soften the fuliginous concretions, which are sometimes found (in dissections) to adhere to the roof of the mouth in these unfledged practitioners; or whether Nature, sensible that she had mingled too much of bitter wood in the lot of these raw victims, caused to grow out of the earth her sassafras for a sweet lenitive—but so it is, that no possible taste or odour to the senses of a young chimney-sweeper can convey a delicate excitement comparable to this mixture. Being penniless, they will yet hang their black heads over the ascending steam, to gratify one sense if possible, seemingly no less pleased than those domestic animals—cats—when they purr over a new-found sprig of valerian. There is something more in these sympathies than philosophy can inculcate.

Now albeit Mr. Read boasteth, not without

reason, that his is the *only Salopian house;* yet be it known to thee, reader—if thou art one who keepest what are called good hours, thou art haply ignorant of the fact—he hath a race of industrious imitators, who from stalls, and under open sky, dispense the same savoury mess to humbler customers, at the dead time of the dawn, when (as extremes meet) the rake, reeling home from his midnight cups, and the hard-handed artisan leaving his bed to resume the premature labours of the day, jostle, not unfrequently to the manifest disconcerting of the former, for the honours of the pavement. It is the time when, in summer, between the expired and the not yet relumined kitchen-fires, the kennels of our fair metropolis give forth their least satisfactory odours. The rake, who wisheth to dissipate his o'ernight vapours in more grateful coffee, curses the ungenial fume, as he passeth; but the artisan stops to taste, and blesses the fragrant breakfast.

This is *saloop*—the precocious herb-woman's darling—the delight of the early gardener, who transports his smoking cabbages by break of day from Hammersmith to Covent Garden's famed piazzas—the delight, and oh! I fear, too often the envy, of the unpennied sweep. Him shouldst thou haply encounter, with his dim visage pendent over the grateful steam, regale him with a sumptuous basin (it will cost thee but three-halfpennies) and a slice of delicate bread and butter (an added half-penny)—so may thy culinary fires, eased of the o'ercharged secretions from thy worse-placed

hospitalities, curl up a lighter volume to the welkin—so may the descending soot never taint thy costly well-ingredienced soups—nor the odious cry, quick-reaching from street to street, of the *fired chimney* invite the rattling engines from ten adjacent parishes, to disturb for a casual scintillation thy peace and pocket!

I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts; the jeers and taunts of the populace; the low-bred triumph they display over the casual trip, or splashed stocking, of a gentleman. Yet can I endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness.—In the last winter but one, pacing along Cheapside with my accustomed precipitation when I walk westward, a treacherous slide brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough—yet outwardly trying to face it down, as if nothing had happened—when the roguish grin of one of these young wits encountered me. There he stood, pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed, yet twinkling through all with such a joy, snatched out of desolation, that Hogarth—— but Hogarth has got him already (how could he miss him?) in the March to Finchley, grinning at the pieman—there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremovable, as if the jest was to last for

ever—with such a maximum of glee, and minimum of mischief, in his mirth—for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it—that I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight.

I am by theory obdurate to the seductiveness of what are called a fine set of teeth. Every pair of rosy lips (the ladies must pardon me) is a casket presumably holding such jewels; but, methinks, they should take leave to 'air' them as frugally as possible. The fine lady, or fine gentleman, who show me their teeth, show me bones. Yet must I confess, that from the mouth of a true sweep a display (even to ostentation) of those white and shiny ossifications, strikes me as an agreeable anomaly in manners, and an allowable piece of foppery. It is, as when

> A sable cloud
> Turns forth her silver lining on the night.

It is like some remnant of gentry not quite extinct; a badge of better days; a hint of nobility:—and, doubtless, under the obscuring darkness and double night of their forlorn disguisement, oftentimes lurketh good blood, and gentle conditions, derived from lost ancestry, and a lapsed pedigree. The premature apprenticements of these tender victims give but too much encouragement, I fear, to clandestine and almost infantile abductions; the seeds of civility and true courtesy, so often discernible in these young grafts

(not otherwise to be accounted for) plainly hint at some forced adoptions; many noble Rachels mourning for their children, even in our days, countenance the fact; the tales of fairly spiriting may shadow a lamentable verity, and the recovery of the young Montagu be but a solitary instance of good fortune out of many irreparable and hopeless *defiliations*.

In one of the state-beds at Arundel Castle, a few years since—under a ducal canopy—(that seat of the Howards is an object of curiosity to visitors, chiefly for its beds, in which the late duke was especially a connoisseur)—encircled with curtains of delicatest crimson, with starry coronets inwoven—folded between a pair of sheets whiter and softer than the lap where Venus lulled Ascanius—was discovered by chance, after all methods of search had failed, at noonday, fast asleep, a lost chimney-sweeper. The little creature, having somehow confounded his passage among the intricacies of those lordly chimneys, by some unknown aperture had alighted upon this magnificent chamber; and, tired with his tedious explorations, was unable to resist the delicious invitement to repose, which he there saw exhibited; so creeping between the sheets very quietly, laid his black head upon the pillow, and slept like a young Howard.

Such is the account given to the visitors at the Castle.—But I cannot help seeming to perceive a confirmation of what I had just hinted at in this story. A high instinct was at work in the case,

or I am mistaken. Is it probable that a poor child of that description, with whatever weariness he might be visited, would have ventured, under such a penalty as he would be taught to expect, to uncover the sheets of a Duke's bed, and deliberately to lay himself down between them, when the rug, or the carpet, presented an obvious couch, still far above his pretensions—is this probable, I would ask, if the great power of nature, which I contend for, had not been manifested within him, prompting to the adventure? Doubtless this young nobleman (for such my mind misgives me that he must be) was allured by some memory, not amounting to full consciousness, of his condition in infancy, when he was used to be lapped by his mother, or his nurse, in just such sheets as he there found, into which he was now but creeping back as into his proper *incunabula,* and resting-place.—By no other theory than by this sentiment of a pre-existent state (as I may call it), can I explain a deed so venturous, and, indeed, upon any other system, so indecorous, in this tender, but unseasonable, sleeper.

My pleasant friend Jem White was so impressed with a belief of metamorphoses like this frequently taking place, that in some sort to reverse the wrongs of fortune in these poor changelings, he instituted an annual feast of chimney-sweepers, at which it was his pleasure to officiate as host and waiter. It was a solemn supper held in Smithfield, upon the yearly return of the fair of St. Bartholomew. Cards were issued a week before

to the master-sweeps in and about the metropolis, confining the invitation to their younger fry. Now and then an elderly stripling would get in among us, and be good-naturedly winked at; but our main body were infantry. One unfortunate wight, indeed, who, relying upon his dusky suit, had intruded himself into our party, but by tokens was providentially discovered in time to be no chimney-sweeper (all is not soot which looks so), was quoited, out of the presence with universal indignation, as not having on the wedding garment; but in general the greatest harmony prevailed. The place chosen was a convenient spot among the pens, at the north side of the fair, not so far distant as to be impervious to the agreeable hubbub of that vanity, but remote enough not to be obvious to the interruption of every gaping spectator in it. The guests assembled about seven. In those little temporary parlours three tables were spread with napery, not so fine as substantial, and at every board a comely hostess presided with her pan of hissing sausages. The nostrils of the young rogues dilated at the savour. James White, as head waiter, had charge of the first table; and myself, with our trusty companion Bigod, ordinarily ministered to the other two. There was clambering and jostling, you may be sure, who should get at the first table, for Rochester in his maddest days could not have done the humours of the scene with more spirit than my friend. After some general expression of thanks for the honour the company had done

him, his inaugural ceremony was to clasp the greasy waist of old dame Ursula (the fattest of the three), that stood frying and fretting, half-blessing, half-cursing 'the gentleman', and imprint upon her chaste lips a tender salute, whereat the universal host would set up a shout that tore the concave, while hundreds of grinning teeth startled the night with their brightness. O it was a pleasure to see the sable younkers lick in the unctuous meat, with *his* more unctuous sayings—how he would fit the tit-bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors—how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it 'must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating'—how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony,—how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking. Then we had our toasts—'the King'—'the Cloth'—which, whether they understood or not, was equally diverting and flattering; and for a crowning sentiment, which never failed, 'May the Brush supersede the Laurel!' All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon tables, and prefacing every senti-

ment with a 'Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so', which was a prodigious comfort to those young orphans; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those reeking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savouriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

> Golden lads and lasses must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust—

James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died—of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed for ever.

II

ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE LEARNED

For the more languages a man can speak
His talent has but sprung the greater leak :
And, for the industry he has spent upon't,
Must full as much some other way discount.
The Hebrew, Chaldee, and the Syriac
Do, like their letters, set men's reason back,
And turn their wits that strive to understand it
(Like those that write the characters) left-handed.
Yet he that is but able to express
No sense at all in several languages,
Will pass for learneder than he that's known
To speak the strongest reason in his own.

BUTLER

THE description of persons who have the fewest ideas of all others are mere authors and readers. It is better to be able neither to read nor write than to be able to do nothing else. A lounger who is ordinarily seen with a book in his hand is (we may be almost sure) equally without the power or inclination to attend either to what passes around him or in his own mind. Such a one may be said to carry his understanding about with him in his pocket, or to leave it at home on his library shelves. He is afraid of venturing on any train of reasoning,

or of striking out any observation that is not mechanically suggested to him by passing his eyes over certain legible characters; shrinks from the fatigue of thought, which, for want of practice, becomes, insupportable to him; and sits down contented with an endless, wearisome succession of words and half-formed images, which fill the void of the mind, and continually efface one another. Learning is, in too many cases, but a foil to common sense; a substitute for true knowledge. Books are less often made use of as 'spectacles' to look at nature with, than as blinds to keep out its strong light and shifting scenery from weak eyes and indolent dispositions. The book-worm wraps himself up in his web of verbal generalities, and sees only the glimmering shadows of things reflected from the minds of others. Nature *puts him out.* The impressions of real objects, stripped of the disguises of words and voluminous roundabout descriptions, are blows that stagger him; their variety distracts, their rapidity exhausts him; and he turns from the bustle, the noise, and glare, and whirling motion of the world about him (which he has not an eye to follow in its fantastic changes, nor an understanding to reduce to fixed principles), to the quiet monotony of the dead languages, and the less startling and more intelligible combinations of the letters of the alphabet. It is well, it is perfectly well. 'Leave me to my repose,' is the motto of the sleeping and the dead. You might as well ask the paralytic to leap from his

chair and throw away his crutch, or, without a miracle, to ' take up his bed and walk', as expect the learned reader to throw down his book and think for himself. He clings to it for his intellectual support ; and his dread of being left to himself is like the horror of a vacuum. He can only breathe a learned atmosphere, as other men breathe common air. He is a borrower of sense. He has no ideas of his own, and must live on those of other people. The habit of supplying our ideas from foreign sources ' enfeebles all internal strength of thought', as a course of dram-drinking destroys the tone of the stomach. The faculties of the mind, when not exerted, or when cramped by custom and authority, become listless, torpid, and unfit for the purposes of thought or action. Can we wonder at the langour and lassitude which is thus produced by a life of learned sloth and ignorance ; by poring over lines and syllables that excite little more idea or interest than if they were the characters of an unknown tongue, till the eye closes on vacancy, and the book drops from the feeble hand ! I would rather be a wood-cutter, or the meanest hind, that all day ' sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and at night sleeps in Elysium', than wear out my life so, 'twixt dreaming and awake. The learned author differs from the learned student in this, that the one transcribes what the other reads. The learned are mere literary drudges. If you set them upon original composition, their heads turn, they don't know where they are. The indefatigable

readers of books are like the everlasting copiers of pictures, who, when they attempt to do anything of their own, find they want an eye quick enough, a hand steady enough, and colours bright enough, to trace the living forms of nature.

Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. It is an old remark, that boys who shine at school do not make the greatest figure when they grow up and come out into the world. The things, in fact, which a boy is set to learn at school, and on which his success depends, are things which do not require the exercise either of the highest or the most useful faculties of the mind. Memory (and that of the lowest kind) is the chief faculty called into play in conning over and repeating lessons by rote in grammar, in languages, in geography, arithmetic, etc., so that he who has the most of this technical memory, with the least turn for other things, which have a stronger and more natural claim upon his childish attention, will make the most forward schoolboy. The jargon containing the definitions of the parts of speech, the rules for casting up an account, or the inflections of a Greek verb, can have no attraction to the tyro of ten years old, except as they are imposed as a task upon him by others, or from his feeling the want of sufficient relish or amusement in other things. A lad with a sickly constitution and no very active mind, who can just retain what is

pointed out to him, and has neither sagacity to distinguish nor spirit to enjoy for himself, will generally be at the head of his form. An idler at school, on the other hand, is one who has high health and spirits, who has the free use of his limbs, with all his wits about him, who feels the circulation of his blood and the motion of his heart, who is ready to laugh and cry in a breath, and who had rather chase a ball or a butterfly, feel the open air in his face, look at the fields or the sky, follow a winding path, or enter with eagerness into all the little conflicts and interests of his acquaintances and friends, than doze over a musty spelling-book, repeat barbarous distichs after his master, sit so many hours pinioned to a writing-desk, and receive his reward for the loss of time and pleasure in paltry prize-medals at Christmas and Midsummer. There is indeed a degree of stupidity which prevents children from learning the usual lessons, or ever arriving at these puny academic honours. But what passes for stupidity is much oftener a want of interest, of a sufficient motive to fix the attention and force a reluctant application to the dry and unmeaning pursuits of school-learning. The best capacities are as much above this drudgery as the dullest are beneath it. Our men of the greatest genius have not been most distinguished for their acquirements at school or at the university.

Th' enthusiast Fancy was a truant ever.

Gray and Collins were among the instances of

this wayward disposition. Such persons do not think so highly of the advantages, nor can they submit their imaginations so servilely to the trammels of strict scholastic discipline. There is a certain kind and degree of intellect in which words take root, but into which things have not power to penetrate. A mediocrity of talent, with a certain slenderness of moral constitution, is the soil that produces the most brilliant specimens of successful prize-essayists and Greek epigrammatists. It should not be forgotten that the least respectable character among modern politicians was the cleverest boy at Eton.

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known to others, and which we can only derive at second-hand from books or other artificial sources. The knowledge of that which is before us, or about us, which appeals to our experience, passions and pursuits, to the bosoms and businesses of men, is not learning. Learning is the knowledge of that which none but the learned know. He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions. It is seeing with the eyes of others, hearing with their ears, and pinning our faith on their understandings. The learned man prides himself in the

knowledge of names and dates, not of men or things. He thinks and cares nothing about his next-door neighbours, but he is deeply read in the tribes and castes of the Hindus and Calmuc Tartars. He can hardly find his way into the next street, though he is acquainted with the exact dimensions of Constantinople and Pekin. He does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool, but he can pronounce a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history. He cannot tell whether an object is black or white, round or square, and yet he is a professed master of the laws of optics and the rules of perspective. He knows as much of what he talks about as a blind man does of colours. He cannot give a satisfactory answer to the plainest question, nor is he ever in the right in any one of his opinions upon any one matter of fact that really comes before him, and yet he gives himself out for an infallible judge on all these points, of which it is impossible that he or any other person living should know anything but by conjecture. He is expert in all the dead and in most of the living languages; but he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly. A person of this class, the second Greek scholar of his day, undertook to point out several solecisms in Milton's Latin style; and in his own performance there is hardly a sentence of common English. Such was Dr. ————. Such is Dr. ————. Such was not Porson. He was an exception that confirmed the general rule,—a man that, by uniting

talents and knowledge with learning, made the distinction between them more striking and palpable.

A mere scholar, who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. 'Books do not teach the use of books.' How should he know anything of a work who knows nothing of the subject of it ? The learned pedant is conversant with books only as they are made of other books, and those again of others, without end. He parrots those who have parroted others. He can translate the same word into ten different languages, but he knows nothing of the *thing* which it means in any one of them. He stuffs his head with authorities built on authorities, with quotations quoted from quotations, while he locks up his senses, his understanding, and his heart. He is unacquainted with the maxims and manners of the world ; he is to seek in the characters of individuals. He sees no beauty in the face of nature or of art. To him ' the mighty world of eye and ear ' is hid ; and ' knowledge,' except at one entrance, ' quite shut out.' His pride takes part with his ignorance ; and his self-importance rises with the number of things of which he does not know the value, and which he therefore despises as unworthy of his notice. He knows nothing of pictures,—' of the colouring of Titian, the grace of Raphael, the purity of Domenichino, the *corregioscity* of Correggio, the learning of Poussin, the airs of Guido, the taste of the Caracci, or the grand contour of Michael Angelo,'—of all those glories of the Italian and miracles of

the Flemish school, which have filled the eyes of mankind with delight, and to the study and imitation of which thousands have in vain devoted their lives. These are to him as if they had never been, a mere dead letter, a byword; and no wonder, for he neither sees nor understands their prototypes in nature. A print of Rubens' Watering-place or Claude's Enchanted Castle may be hanging on the walls of his room for months without his once perceiving them; and if you point them out to him he will turn away from them. The language of nature, or of art (which is another nature), is one that he does not understand. He repeats indeed the names of Apelles and Phidias, because they are to be found in classic authors, and boasts of their works as prodigies, because they no longer exist; or when he sees the finest remains of Grecian art actually before him in the Elgin Marbles, takes no other interest in them than as they lead to a learned dispute, and (which is the same thing) a quarrel about the meaning of a Greek particle. He is equally ignorant of music; he 'knows no touch of it', from the strains of the all-accomplished Mozart to the shepherd's pipe upon the mountain. His ears are nailed to his books; and deadened with the sound of the Greek and Latin tongues, and the din and smithery of school-learning. Does he know anything more of poetry? He knows the number of feet in a verse, and of acts in a play; but of the soul or spirit he knows nothing. He can turn a Greek ode into English, or a

Latin epigram into Greek verse; but whether either is worth the trouble he leaves to the critics. Does he understand 'the act and practique part of life' better than 'the theorique'? No. He knows no liberal or mechanic art, no trade or occupation, no game of skill or chance. Learning 'has no skill in surgery', in agriculture, in building, in working in wood or in iron; it cannot make any instrument of labour, or use it when made; it cannot handle the plough or the spade, or the chisel or the hammer; it knows nothing of hunting or hawking, fishing or shooting, of horses or dogs, of fencing or dancing, or cudgel-playing, or bowls, or cards, or tennis, or anything else. The learned professor of all arts and sciences cannot reduce any one of them to practice, though he may contribute an account of them to an Encyclopædia. He has not the use of his hands nor of his feet; he can neither run, nor walk, nor swim; and he considers all those who actually understand and can exercise any of these arts of body or mind as vulgar and mechanical men—though to know almost any one of them in perfection requires long time and practice, with powers originally fitted, and a turn of mind particularly devoted to them. It does not require more than this to enable the learned candidate to arrive, by painful study, at a doctor's degree and a fellowship, and to eat, drink and sleep the rest of his life.

The thing is plain. All that men really understand is confined to a very small compass; to their daily affairs and experience; to what they have an

opportunity to know, and motives to study or practice. The rest is affectation and imposture. The common people have the use of their limbs; for they live by their labour or skill. They understand their own business and the characters of those they have to deal with; for it is necessary that they should. They have eloquence to express their passions, and wit at will to express their contempt and provoke laughter. Their natural use of speech is not hung up in monumental mockery, in an obsolete language; nor is their sense of what is ludicrous, or readiness at finding out allusions to express it, buried in collections of *Anas*. You will hear more good things on the outside of a stage-coach from London to Oxford than if you were to pass a twelvemonth with the undergraduates, or heads of colleges, of that famous university; and more *home* truths are to be learnt from listening to a noisy debate in an alehouse than from attending to a formal one in the House of Commons. An elderly country gentlewoman will often know more of character, and be able to illustrate it by more amusing anecdotes taken from the history of what has been said, done and gossiped in a country town for the last fifty years, than the best bluestocking of the age will be able to glean from that sort of learning which consists in an acquaintance with all the novels and satirical poems published in the same period. People in towns, indeed, are woefully deficient in a knowledge of character, which they see only *in the bust*, not as a whole-

length. People in the country not only know all that has happened to a man, but trace his virtues or vices, as they do his features, in their descent through several generations, and solve some contradiction in his behaviour by a cross in the breed half a century ago. The learned know nothing of the matter, either in town or country. Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned in all ages want. The vulgar are in the right when they judge for themselves; they are wrong when they trust to their blind guides. The celebrated nonconformist divine, Baxter, was almost stoned to death by the good women of Kidderminster, for asserting from the pulpit that 'hell was paved with infants' skulls'; but, by the force of argument, and of learned quotations from the Fathers, the reverend preacher at length prevailed over the scruples of his congregation, and over reason and humanity.

Such is the use which has been made of human learning. The labourers in this vineyard seem as if it was their object to confound all common sense, and the distinctions of good and evil, by means of traditional maxims and preconceived notions taken upon trust, and increasing in absurdity with increase of age. They pile hypothesis on hypothesis, mountain high, till it is impossible to come at the plain truth on any question. They see things, not as they are, but as they find them in books, and 'wink and shut their apprehensions up', in order that they may discover nothing to interfere with their prejudices or convince them

of their absurdity. It might be supposed that the height of human wisdom consisted in maintaining contradictions and rendering nonsense sacred. There is no dogma, however fierce or foolish, to which these persons have not set their seals, and tried to impose on the understandings of their followers as the will of Heaven, clothed with all the terrors and sanctions of religion. How little has the human understanding been directed to find out the true and useful! How much ingenuity has been thrown away in the defence of creeds and systems! How much time and talents have been wasted in theological controversy, in law, in politics, in verbal criticism, in judicial astrology, and in finding out the art of making gold! What actual benefit do we reap from the writings of a Laud or a Whitgift, or of Bishop Bull or Bishop Waterland, or Prideaux' Connections, or Beausobre, or Calmet, or St. Augustine, or Puffendorf, or Vattel, or from the more literal but equally learned and unprofitable labours of Scaliger, Cardan, and Scioppius? How many grains of sense are there in their thousand folio or quarto volumes? What would the world lose if they were committed to the flames to-morrow? Or are they not already 'gone to the vault of all the Capulets'? Yet all these were oracles in the time, and would have scoffed at you or me, at common sense and human nature, for differing with them. It is our turn to laugh now.

To conclude this subject. The most sensible people to be met with in society are men of

business and of the world, who argue from what they see and know, instead of spinning cobweb distinctions of what things ought to be. Women have often more of what is called *good sense* than men. They have fewer pretensions; are less implicated in theories; and judge of objects more from their immediate and involuntary impression on the mind, and, therefore, more truly and naturally. They cannot reason wrong; for they do not reason at all. They do not think or speak by rule; and they have in general more eloquence and wit, as well as sense, on that account. By their wit, sense and eloquence together, they generally contrive to govern their husbands. Their style, when they write to their friends (not for the booksellers), is better than that of most authors.—Uneducated people have most exuberance of invention and the greatest freedom from prejudice. Shakespeare's was evidently an uneducated mind, both in the freshness of his imagination and in the variety of his views; as Milton's was scholastic, in the texture both of his thoughts and feelings. Shakespeare had not been accustomed to write themes at school in favour of virtue or against vice. To this we owe the unaffected but healthy tone of his dramatic morality. If we wish to know the force of human genius we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning we may study his commentators.

III

DEATHS OF LITTLE CHILDREN

A GRECIAN philosopher being asked why he wept for the death of his son, since the sorrow was in vain, replied, 'I weep on that very account.' And his answer became his wisdom. It is only for sophists to pretend that we, whose eyes contain the fountains of tears, need never give way to them. It would be unwise not to do so on some occasions. Sorrow unlocks them in her balmy moods. The first bursts may be bitter and overwhelming; but the soil, on which they pour, would be the worse without them. They refresh the fever of the soul, —the dry misery, which parches the countenance into furrows, and renders us liable to our most terrible 'flesh-quakes'.

There are sorrows, it is true, so great, that to give them some of the ordinary vents is to run a hazard of being overthrown. These we must rather strengthen ourselves to resist; or bow quietly and dryly down in order to let them pass over us, as the traveller does the wind of the desert. But where we feel that tears would relieve us, it is false philosophy to deny ourselves at least that first refreshment; and it is always false consolation to tell people that because they

cannot help a thing, they are not to mind it. The true way is, to let them grapple with the unavoidable sorrow, and try to win it into gentleness by a reasonable yielding. There are griefs so gentle in their very nature, that it would be worse than false heroism to refuse them a tear. Of this kind are the deaths of infants. Particular circumstances may render it more or less advisable to indulge in grief for the loss of a little child; but in general, parents should be no more advised to repress their first tears on such an occasion, than to repress their smiles towards a child surviving, or to indulge in any other sympathy. It is an appeal to the same gentle tenderness; and such appeals are never made in vain. The end of them is an acquittal from the harsher bonds of affliction,—from the tying down of the spirit to one melancholy idea.

It is the nature of tears of this kind, however strongly they may gush forth, to run into quiet waters at last. We cannot easily, for the whole course of our lives, think with pain of any good and kind person whom we have lost. It is the divine nature of their qualities to conquer pain and death itself; to turn the memory of them into pleasure; to survive with a placid aspect in our imaginations. We are writing, at this moment, just opposite a spot which contains the grave of one inexpressibly dear to us. We see from our window the trees about it, and the church-spire. The green fields lie around. The clouds are travelling overhead, alternately taking away the

sunshine and restoring it. The vernal winds, piping of the flowery summer-time, are nevertheless calling to mind the far distant and dangerous ocean, which the heart that lies in that grave had many reasons to think of. And yet the sight of this spot does not give us pain. So far from it, it is the existence of that grave which doubles every charm of the spot; which links the pleasures of our childhood and manhood together; which puts a hushing tenderness in the winds, and a patient joy upon the landscape; which seems to unite heaven and earth, mortality and immortality, the grass of the tomb and the grass of the green field, and gives a more maternal aspect to the whole kindness of nature. It does not hinder gaiety itself. Happiness was what its tenant, through all her troubles, would have diffused. To diffuse happiness, and to enjoy it, is not only carrying on her wishes, but realizing her hopes; and gaiety, freed from its only pollutions, malignity and want of sympathy, is but a child playing about the knees of its mother.

The remembered innocence and endearments of a child stand us in stead of virtues that have died older. Children have not exercised the voluntary offices of friendship; they have not chosen to be kind and good to us; nor stood by us, from conscious will, in the hour of adversity. But they have shared their pleasures and pains with us as well as they could: the interchange of good offices between us has, of necessity, been less mingled with the troubles of the world; the

sorrow arising from their death is the only one which we can associate with their memories. These are happy thoughts that cannot die. Our loss may render them pensive ; but they will not always be painful. It is a part of the benignity of Nature, that pain does not survive like pleasure, at any time ; much less where the cause of it is an innocent one. The smile will remain reflected by memory ; as the moon reflects the light upon us, when the sun has gone into heaven.

When writers like ourselves quarrel with earthly pain (we mean writers of the same intentions, without implying, of course, anything about abilities or otherwise) they are misunderstood if they are supposed to quarrel with pains of every sort. This would be idle and effeminate. They do not pretend, indeed, that humanity might not wish, if it could, to be entirely free from pain ; for it endeavours at all times to turn pain into pleasure, or at least to set off the one with the other ; to make the former a zest, and the latter a refreshment. The most unaffected dignity of suffering does this ; and if wise, acknowledges it. The greatest benevolence towards others, the most unselfish relish of their pleasures, even at its own expense, does but look to increasing the general stock of happiness, though content, if it could, to have its identity swallowed up in that splendid contemplation. We are far from meaning that this is to be called selfishness. We are far indeed from thinking so, or of so confounding words. But neither is it to be called pain, when most un-

selfish; if disinterestedness be truly understood. The pain that is in it softens into pleasure, as the darker hue of the rainbow melts into the brighter. Yet even if a harsher line is to be drawn between the pain and pleasure of the most unselfish mind (and ill health, for instance, may draw it), we should not quarrel with it, if it contributed to the general mass of comfort, and were of a nature which general kindliness could not avoid. Made as we are, there are certain pains, without which it would be difficult to conceive certain great and overbalancing pleasures. We may conceive it possible for beings to be made entirely happy; but in our composition, something of pain seems to be a necessary ingredient, in order that the materials may turn to as fine account as possible; though our clay, in the course of ages and experience, may be refined more and more. We may get rid of the worst earth, though not of earth itself.

Now the liability to the loss of children—or rather what renders us sensible of it, the occasional loss itself,—seems to be one of these necessary bitters thrown into the cup of humanity. We do not mean that everybody must lose one of his children, in order to enjoy the rest; or that every individual loss afflicts us in the same proportion. We allude to the deaths of infants in general. These might be as few as we could render them. But if none at all ever took place, we should regard every little child as a man or woman secured; and it will easily be conceived, what a world of endearing cares and hopes this security would endanger.

The very idea of infancy would lose its continuity with us. Girls and boys would be future men and women, not present children. They would have attained their full growth in our imaginations, and might as well have been men and women at once. On the other hand, those who have lost an infant are never, as it were, without an infant child. They are the only persons who, in one sense, retain it always; and they furnish their neighbours with the same idea.[1] The other children grow up to manhood and womanhood, and suffer all the changes of mortality. This one alone is rendered an immortal child. Death has arrested it with his kindly harshness, and blessed it into an eternal image of youth and innocence.

Of such as these are the pleasantest shapes that visit our fancy and our hopes. They are the ever-smiling emblems of joy; the prettiest pages that wait upon imagination. Lastly, 'of these are the kingdom of heaven.' Wherever there is a province of that benevolent and all-accessible empire, whether on earth or elsewhere, such are the gentle spirits that must inhabit it. To such simplicity, or the resemblance of it, must they come. Such must be the ready confidence of their hearts, and creativeness of their fancy. And so ignorant must they be of the 'knowledge of good and evil', losing their discernment of that self-created trouble, by enjoying the garden before them, and not being ashamed of what is kindly and innocent.

[1] 'I sighed,' says old Captain Bolton, 'when I envied you the two bonnie children, but I sigh not now to call either the monk or the soldier mine own.'—*Monastery*, vol. iii. p, 341.

IV

MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

TO know one's own business, with quiet persistence to forward it, and to mind nothing else : that is the true way to carry on the work of life. This sounds like a truism ; yet few really acknowledge it, even in principle. It is not often that even the first step—that of knowing what one's business is—is conscientiously taken ; and it must be allowed that, with many, there are intellectual as well as moral difficulties in the way of this first step. The easiest mode of getting rid of the intellectual difficulty is for a man to ask himself what is not his business ; and many a well-disposed person may be surprised to find, on requiring a strict reply from his understanding, that he has been in the habit of considering it a virtue to waste time, thought, feeling, and other means that have been given him for the better doing of his own business, on interests which truly are no business of his at all. He may have to confess that he is constantly wasting sympathy —that mainspring of social serviceableness—upon sorrows and evils which it cannot remove or alleviate. Ills, either in his own condition or in that of others, which his conduct cannot affect, are really no business of his ; and the man who

mind his own business will do all in his power to subdue his anxieties and sorrows for his own greatest fears or misfortunes, or those of his dearest friend, if there lies no help in his own hands. Sympathy which does not mean action of some sort is not much of a virtue in any man; while in those humane persons who habitually indulge in sympathy for its own sake, it is apt to become a nauseous and vicious effeminacy.

There never was a time in which this simple and obvious duty of minding one's own business has been more generally neglected than the present. Charity—which was anciently understood to consist in first securing the true interests of self, and then attending to those of the neighbour, and thence extending, according to its opportunities, to the nation, and vanishing in the cosmopolitan circumference—tends now to begin and end in the circumference: the interests of nation, neighbour, and self being regarded as matters of meritorious sacrifice in honour of that vague abstraction, universal beneficence. The simpleton who does not love himself well enough to confer upon that individual the first blessing of self-government—the head of a family who has not mind and character enough to order his own household with justice and affection—comforts his conscience by thinking that he has at least the shoulders of an Atlas for the burthens of the world; and, flying from his refractory self and ungovernable private affairs, he takes his place, unquestioned by himself

or others, among the guides and guardians of mankind in general.

In proportion to a man's good sense will be his readiness to confess that his sphere of direct and real usefulness—which is his business—is, as a rule, extremely limited. The old-fashioned limitation of usefulness, that of neighbourhood, is a sound one. A kind act done—a five-pound note given to help a person of one's own acquaintance—may be tolerably sure of its reward: success. Whereas the probability is that ten times the amount of self-sacrifice or expense would be worse than cast away upon those who were not, in the simple sense, the 'neighbours' of the would-be benefactor.

In quiet times, and under an ordinarily good Government, politics can only be the business of a very few. . . . On the other hand, there are times when an ardent and active interest in politics may be the business of every man who has any feeling for his own dearest interests and those of his neighbour. There are political conditions, sometimes becoming chronic, which are substantially conditions of civil war and under which for a good man to shut himself up within the more congenial interests of his own immediate surroundings is a neglect of his own business. . . . Civil war can be waged by words as well as by swords; and in such conditions a man who refuses to take up the arms which are in fashion, should he be able to find or make any opportunity of wielding them with effect, is just as much a 'funk' as one who

sits still and sees his house sacked and his family insulted while he has any hope of being able to defend them. The conditions are usually easily discernible under which political action becomes every good man's duty. There can be no mistake about them, for instance, when a large and powerful party, with an envious and ignorant mob at its heels, openly treats the Decalogue as a ' foreign law ' to which it cannot be expected that the ' people ' should profess fealty. Let no just man underrate his strength or mistake his business at such a time.

> When phrases are in power
> And hearts alone have leave to bleed,
> Speak, for a good word then is a good deed.

V

THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

AMONG many signs of a growing recognition of human brotherhood not the least notable are the praiseworthy attempts of 'the peoples' to understand and, if possible, appreciate each other's recorded jokes. There is an element of the humorous in the very endeavour. It assumes, to begin with, that a joke, whether considered as a natural or, as is too often the case, a manufactured product, is necessarily a subject of international exchange. This is, from the economical point of view, a curious theory, which apparently implies that though all, or at any rate most, nations produce their own jokes some in greater, some in less quantity, but usually in an amount sufficient to supply the home market, and to render the native consumer independent of foreign supplies, it is, nevertheless, at his option to vary the quality of the consumable product to any extent by taking consignments of it from abroad. It is a mere question of the cost and difficulty of transport, which latter word, it should be noted, is etymologically almost identical with the word 'translation'. These matters arranged, and the foreign joke delivered safely to the purchaser he has nothing to do but to sit down to its

enjoyment ; and this with as absolute an assurance of relishing it, even though 'made in Germany', as the gourmet feels in opening a jar of Russian caviare. If the taste disappoints him he attributes the defect to the fault of the intermediary, and reproaches the translator as a consignee of goods would reproach a slovenly packer through whose negligent performance of his duty they had ' gone bad ' in transit. That the goods may be quite unsuited to his taste, or outside the range of his appreciation, never seems to occur to him, still less that before their consignment they may have already deteriorated, even in the country of their production.

This conception of the joke as in itself an imperishable creation, a permanent addition to the world's wealth, and fit companion of the serious work of Thucydides, as a 'possession for ever', is really very humorous, when you come to reflect upon it. It is almost as humorous, indeed, as Mr. Labouchere's theory of poetry, which he regards, as he would coal or iron, solely from the point of view of the realized product, and not at all from that of the productive energy, arguing therefrom that since the world has accumulated enough of the former the latter should now cease. ' We have,' he once wrote in comment upon some remarks of mine, ' already enough of the article ' —that is poetry—' which has come down to us from former generations, and time has taken care that only what is good and sound has reached us. Why, then, should we trouble to read any more?'

And, therefore, why trouble to write, or, at any rate, to print, any more? ' Poetry', in fact, means 'poems ' to Mr. Labouchere in precisely the same way and to the same extent as 'coal-mining' means 'coal'. You examine your stocks of both commodities, find you have enough, and cease demanding; whereupon down go profits and up come strikes in one of the two businesses, though not, curiously enough, in the order. In the same way it is quite clear that to a great many worthy people ' humour ' means the contents of a jest-book. If there are many jest-books in existence, in your own and other languages, then you are well supplied with humour, and, as far as you are concerned, there is no reason why the 'humorist' should go on producing any more. It is true that there is more of a prejudice against jocularity 'which has come down to us from former generations ' than there is against poetry of a similarly imposing length of descent, and that the 'good and sound ' joke does not in all circles enjoy the respect that is paid to seasoned and well-preserved verse. Still, there is a considerable class of consumers who are quite satisfied with it even in its original state, and, unlike the poem, it is capable of being, and constantly is, ' worked up ' again into new and attractive forms.

We need not, however, trouble ourselves about those excellent and most fortunate persons to whom the old, in all kinds, even in the humorous, is preferable to the new. Long may they live and flourish, and when they die, may the lapidary

have the brilliant inspiration of inscribing 'Affliction sore', or 'To live in hearts we leave behind', on their tombstones, while Joe Miller acts as their Virgil through the Elysian Fields. Byron, I think it is, who in a note to one of his poems describes a certain country gentleman as one who 'would have the same joint for dinner every Sunday in order that he might make the same joke upon it'. Which of us with a sense of humour would be able, if he were a weekly guest of the squire, to help sharing in this amusement, tickled not, perhaps, by the jest, but at any rate by the laughter? And who will deny that the simple souls who have but one joke, and never tire of it, do themselves contribute in no small measure to the not unkindly mirth of the world?

It is with that more sophisticated and fastidious person who craves for novelty in his funniments that I am just now concerned. For it is a serious matter, when you come to think of it, that humour should 'wear out'. Relative as our perceptions may be, they manage in other provinces of thought and feeling to keep up a respectable appearance of the absolute and the universal, of the unchangeable from age to age, and the indistinguishable as between nation and nation. The sublime, the terrible, the tender, the pathetic—there *does* seem to be some common international standard of these qualities; it *is* possible (continues our 'self-torturing sophist') to say, with a rough approximation to truth, that those written words which move a reader of one civilized nationality to awe or pity,

which stir him to delight in the imaginative contemplation of Nature, or agitate him by the vivid portrayal of human passion, will, as a rule, produce the same effect in kind upon all readers of the same average level of intelligence, to whatever race they may belong. Of course (he admits) the effect may differ widely in degree. Dutch sublimity may only moderately impress me, and Norwegian pathos may leave me comparatively cold. Yet still I recognize the fact that both the pathos and the sublimity appeal, in their several degrees, successfully to the same emotions as are swayed by Shakespeare and Milton. But with what truth can I say of some of the jests which tickled the reader of Hierocles, or of thousands of others which have no doubt shaken millions of midriffs since that Greek Joe Miller's day, that they appeal even faintly to those emotions which are swayed by Swift and Sterne, by Fielding and Dickens? So far from doing this, they 'reverse the engine', so to speak; they set the emotional machinery working in precisely the opposite direction.

It is not a mere effect of time, either; or, at least, it cannot be that alone. For age does not wither nor custom stale the beauties of serious literature. People have not yet begun to think that the prayer of Priam to Achilles is poor stuff; or that Lucretius' description of the gods and their abode is fustian; or that Dante has spoilt the story of Paolo and Francesca. The judicious critic does not propose to obelize all the lines

from ' The cloud-capped towers ' down to ' is rounded with a sleep ' inclusive ; though the manager about to produce the *The Tempest* might very likely pronounce them 'cackle', and mark them with a blue pencil as ' to be omitted in representation'. We still read *Lycidas* with pleasure, and would hardly consent to strike out even the ' No Popery ' part about the ' wolf with privy paw'. Even on lower literary levels good things of the serious description contrive to last. We still find Swift's account of the Struldbrugs passably impressive, and we do not set down Horne Tooke as a mere water-headed 'cry-baby', because the stern pathos of the closing paragraph of his enemy Johnson's Preface to the Dictionary affected him to tears. It is humour alone which will not wear : it happens only to the joke to seem exquisite to the men of one age, and imbecile to the men of another ; and this difference (concludes our despairing sceptic) must be due to something essentially perishable, something fundamentally relative, limited, occasional, about humour and its products. Who can know, then, what is its 'true inwardness', how and in what form it can be assured of survival, or whether it is destined to survive in any form at all?

These, no doubt, are melancholy—even desolating—thoughts and questions ; but I am not sure that the evocation of them will be without its salutary effects. The alarmist will get over his apprehensions as to the disappearance of humour when he has attained to a more accurate concep-

tion of what that peculiar faculty is ; and in working his way to this he will find abundant consolation for the gradual decay of its successive products, and even for the circumstance that they are not in all cases suitable subjects of international exchange.

It would be hardly safe, perhaps, to affirm with absolute confidence that any one human energy is, as such, indestructible, still less that no such energy is transformable out of recognition in the course of the World-Process. It is possible to maintain, as a pessimistic thesis, that even the poetic instinct and faculty will in course of time disappear ; that its period of greatest strength is coincident with comparatively early stages of human development, and that, like the measles and other maladies which take such masterful hold of primitive races, its power is progressively declining with the advance of civilization. At present, however, there are no signs of this ; indeed, such signs as there are altogether ' contra-indicate' it, as doctors say ; and on present appearances one would be disposed to hold that, whether our supply of the poetic product (warranted 'good and sound ') be sufficient or not, or whether, if insufficient, the contemporary producer be capable or incapable of making any real addition to it, the work of poetic production is likely to continue, and to continue at an increasing rate.

So with humour. It is possible, as a pessimistic thesis, to maintain the probability of its efface-

ment from the list of human energies ; and it must be sorrowfully admitted, especially when we study certain results of the energizing of the humorous faculty, that it seems to possess the less effective vitality of the two ; but the contingency of its future disappearance seems practically as problematical and remote. Humour, like poetry, is the habit of contemplating, and of being effected by, the facts of consciousness in a particular way. It sees the mutual relations of thoughts, things, and persons—that is to say, of thoughts to each other, of things and persons to each other, and of thoughts to things and persons—under an aspect, just as poetry does, of its own. Poetry unveils the hidden beauty, humour exposes the lurking incongruity, of these relations ; and the charm of the humorous as of the poetic product varies directly as the sum of three ingredients—first, the objective truth and force of the revelation ; secondly, its novelty and unexpectedness *as* such revelation ; and thirdly, the subjective skill with which it is effected. In the greatest humorists, as in the greatest poets, all these three contributories touch their maximum. In their case the illuminant, humorous or poetic, is the most powerful and the most commandingly directed, and the illuminated object the most delightfully surprising in its new aspect. It is their chiefest triumph to transfigure with beauty and renew with humour those common things on which the careless eye of the world has rested, unsuspecting of their secret charm, a thousand times.

But all this is only true of the greatest in either kind; and where the poet or the humorist is something less than supreme he rarely has that magical gift of handling the 'eternally common' which will assure his work of sharing the perpetuity of its material. People see this clearly enough in the case of poetry, and are apparently resigned to it. At any rate, they do not seem to distress themselves—I am not now speaking of Mr. Labouchere alone—at the reflection that the heritage of 'good and sound poetry' which has come down to us from former generations is small indeed compared to the total amount of the poetry which was regarded—and surely some of it justly—as 'good and sound' at the time of its production. In other words, they acquiesce philosophically enough in the fact that poetry—that is, some poetry—can grow old and perish, while they seem to be dismayed at the thought that humour—that is, some humour—is of the fashion that passeth away.

Of course, the actual discovery that it *is* of this fashion—at any rate when that discovery is made in the work of some dearly-loved humorist of one's youth—is indefinitely the more painful of the two. That is for the reason already referred to: namely, that humour which fails to give its intended pleasure gives positive pain—a pain which is not in the smallest degree mitigated by the literary skill with which the product is presented. Better a thousand times to be a poet of a mode outworn than a *rococo* humorist; for the

former, though banished from the common household of man, may in virtue of his style possess an eternal refuge in the temple of letters. What human heart is moved in these days by the poetry of Pope, yet what lover of the art of literature has it ceased, or will it ever cease, to delight? The rhetorical passion which leaves him cold does not offend him; the decay of its once prized 'poetic beauties' detracts no whit from his enjoyment of its grace, its elegance, its matchless skill; nay, perhaps their charm is heightened by that scent of faded flowers. But think of the difference for a devoted Dickensian who suddenly finds himself confronted with some well-known passage of the master's 'high jinks', the delight of his admirer's early youth, but now all gone flat—its humours changed into mere mechanical clowning from which all the spirit has departed! The writing is as good as ever, the movement of the scene as brisk, the technical skill of the whole, in short, as admirable as ever. But do these qualities console the disenchanted worshipper? Can he even bear to linger over the page in the hope that they may yield him consolation? No, he turns the leaf, perhaps closes the book, with a curious emotion of shame; to examine the vainly-grinning jest more closely would seem a kind of impiety. He almost feels like one who has unwittingly 'uncovered the nakedness of his father'.

Yet he is wrong to close the book, though right enough to turn the leaf; for if he has the courage to face the loss of some of his early illusions, he

will find much happy and refreshing confirmation of his early tastes. If the critic in him should be, as it is in some of us, for good or evil, not so *very* many years younger than the man, he will never have been able to accept *all* the Dickensian humour with absolute unreserve. Nay, even the comparatively uncritical youth of five-and-thirty years ago—a far less precocious period than the present—could not away with the whole of it; so that as regards some of its more exuberant mirth-making there is no illusion to destroy. Much of the rest, however, and that very often of the broadest, is still vital; it only needs that the breadth of the caricature should have some broadly human vice or foible to sustain it. There was always genius in its very exaggeration, and that genius will be found in most cases to have kept it alive. It is only, after all, the too narrowly local, the too eccentrically individual element, which has perished.

No doubt it is a blow to find—if we do find—that the humours of Pickwick have largely staled, and that we can no longer laugh as erst we laughed at the cockneyisms of Sam Weller. Yet, at least, the noble and impossible Pecksniff is still left to us almost as fresh as ever, and the fun of Todger's—that Pension Vanquer of a more genial Balzac—groweth not old. Even Mrs. Gamp, now fallen unamusing as to her more than human perversions of articulate speech, is, beneath her lifeless bizarrerie of externals, living still. We feel it when she sits down to tea with

Mrs. Prig. Her type has perished and passed away, but there is that in her—as there seems not to be in Sam Weller, a more purely stage construction—which holds of human nature and survives. The 'sick and monthly' of fifty years ago may have been folded up like a vesture and changed; but greed and cunning, vanity and unscrupulousness and gross animalism, and the semi-salacious interest of the lower order of womankind in the reproductive side of life—these are permanent human characteristics; and fused into one comic whole with the humour of unconsciousness it seems that they have power to delight us still.

Generally, therefore, we may venture, for the benefit of the too serious and desponding persons to whom I have referred, to hazard the proposition that Nature as exhibited in the human race, is not yet played out; nay, that in respect of her inexhaustible power of supplying art with perennially fresh material, she should be recognized as no less a 'rum 'un' by the present generation than by the age of Mr. Wackford Squeers. Only she cannot be expected to admit parentage of every artistic product, humorous or other, which one seeks to 'mother' upon her, and to shelter it as such for ever from the wasting hand of time. She will not do this even for a Dickens, as she has not done it even for a Sterne. She takes only from the hand of every romancer and every humorist, great or small, such children of his begetting as are clearly stamped with her own

image ; such contrasts of character, such paradoxes of thought, such incongruities of association, as are drawn from her own bosom or ordered by her own hand ; and the residue she relentlessly lets go. The loss of all that, from age to age, is certain, and may occasionally be painful ; but it is not more certain than the preservation of what Nature has ' quoted and signed ' as fit to be preserved. Hence let no one fear—as, perhaps, none do fear, save those defectively humorous persons who cling with such pathetic anxiety to the jest-book—that the written record of Humour is not as imperishable a part of man's spiritual possessions as the deposit of Poetry.

Whether it will be largely added to in the future is another question. That depends—it is less a truism than it seems to say so—on the persistence of the creative faculty as distinct from the appreciative sense of humour among civilized races. And there is not quite enough reassurance in saying that this faculty, having now become thoroughly 'organized' in the mental constitution of man, is not likely to disappear altogether. Perhaps not ; but one cannot escape a fear that it may by degrees become dormant, or fall, so to speak, ' into abeyance '—like a peerage on failure of male heirs. One cannot help observing that the exercise even of the appreciative sense of humour appears to require a certain elasticity of the emotions, which, to put it mildly, does not seem to be becoming a more common quality than it was. The young man whom one pronounces to

be destitute of a sense of humour is not always intellectually incapable of perceiving the incongruous in human life; or even the incongruous in his own person, position, and conduct. But the perception is a strictly intellectual one: it gives him no pleasure, but rather pain; the last thing we should expect of it is that it should provoke him to a laugh.

It is contended, I am aware, in some highly optimistic quarters that this proves nothing. We have become less demonstrative than our fathers, that is all; and we do not enjoy our humour any less than they did because we do not give such noisy expression to our amusement. I confess to regarding this as a very dangerous doctrine. True as it undoubtedly is that some of the most exquisite humour in the world is the most silently enjoyed, I have never myself met a thorough appreciator of this form of humour who was proof against that importunate demand which some sudden flashes of the humorous make upon one for an audible response. The power of laughter, and of hearty laughter—so far, at least, as my own experience goes—almost always accompanies a keen *emotional* sense of humour. As to the mere intellectual appreciation of it I say nothing; that power, which is, no doubt, possessed in a high degree by the Devil, is of little value to mankind. But I should doubt myself whether this emotional sense of humour—this capacity not only for perceiving the incongruous, but for *taking pleasure* in the sight—is ever accompanied by an

inability to laugh. Among that very low-typed Oriental race, the Veddahs of Ceylon, this inability is said to be absolute ; but my own inference from that, which I give for what it is worth, is that the Veddahs of Ceylon do not understand a joke.

I am not aware, however, that the point has ever been definitely settled, and since, in view of the growing seriousness of our young men, it is beginning to assume scientific importance, I suggest that steps should be taken to determine it once for all. A committee of ethnologists charged with the duty of investigating the matter might be despatched to Ceylon, where the Bishop of Colombo, himself a genuine humorist, and part author, in his pre-episcopal days, of one of the happiest academic skits ever written, would, I am sure, be glad to render them any assistance in his power. Translations of a few of the most approved works of our latest humorists might be presented to this interesting people for perusal, and the result observed and recorded. If it proved that although incapable of laughing at these pleasantries they had an intellectual appreciation of them—that is to say, that they could point out, if only geographically, as it were, the exact spot on the printed page at which the laughter they are themselves incapable of supplying is intended to ' come in '—well, in that case their state would not be much less gracious than that of many old-fashioned people among ourselves. At any rate, the result of the experiment would be full of hope for the future of a country so many of whose most

intellectual young men are in the habit of taking themselves almost as seriously as the Veddahs of Ceylon.

Meanwhile, and in the painful uncertainty of the present outlook, it is not surprising that the psychologist should come to the assistance of his fellow-citizens, and endeavour by analytic investigation of this apparently disappearing quality and by discovery of its true inwardness, to enable us to save it from extinction. If, argues he, we could only find out exactly what humour is ' in its quiddity', we could keep ourselves humorous, or at any rate bring up our children to be so. This is very good of the psychologist : it is like his kindness ; and his attempt to console and encourage us by these inquiries is the more praiseworthy because, from the popular point of view, the task is so essentially a thankless one.

There are indeed few studies which are pursued by the philosopher under such severe discouragements from simple and subtle alike. He soon finds that those who take any serious interest in the inquiry are far too intent upon the establishment of their own theories to pay any attention to his ; while as to the general public, they are precluded by an incurable levity from considering the matter with any seriousness at all. Indeed, they are apt to find something unspeakably ridiculous in the mere fact that, despite its subject, there is no more fun in it than there is in other psychological inquiries—that, in fact, the

analyst of the Humorous is not, or not at that moment, and in that capacity, a humorist. This, of course, is a preposterous injustice. It is worse than requiring the man who drives fat oxen to be himself as fat; it is to insist that he should be equally good to eat. Nothing, for instance, could have been more amusing in their irrelevance than were many of the newspaper comments on Mr. W. S. Lilly's recent investigation of this subject. Some of these dashing commentators showed evident signs of disappointment at not finding the *Theory of the Ludicrous* more amusing; others were excited to scornful mirth by its logical method and arrangement. One of them found that 'a philosopher analysing jokes is a bit of a joke himself; and I have no doubt at all that many a reader chuckled assent to the proposition. Mr. Lilly enumerated twenty-one forms of the Ludicrous, beginning with Humour and ending with Practical Joking; and at this also the critic from whom I have quoted was hugely tickled. The idea of a man gravely counting the number of different ways in which one can be made to laugh! It was too absurd! The philosopher who could do such a thing may possibly have attained to a certain cold intellectual comprehension of a joke; but he cannot have the true sympathetic appreciation of humour, or he would be unable to contemplate the incongruity of his own position with unmoved muscles.

All this is very disheartening to analysts of the ludicrous, and has prevented at least one of them

from taking a hand at the game (though it is one which he enjoys greatly) for some years past. Another discouragement which the analyst feels acutely is that his speculations are in like case with those of Dr. Primrose : they are addressed to the learned world, but the learned world takes no notice of them whatever. Perhaps the individual analyst has no right to complain, for he never notices the analysis of anyone else, or not, at least, of anyone later than Sydney Smith. We all begin with Sydney Smith and his famous dissertation in the *Edinburgh Review* article on ' Irish Bulls,' though Mr. Lilly only does so in order to dismiss the Canon's definition of humour as a ' surprising proposition' : which no doubt it does seem to be when taken in connexion with the infelicitous examples which Sydney gives. But for one who has endeavoured to pursue the analysis further, and who believes himself to have worked out the much-debated distinction between Wit and Humour in a formula, to which the only possible objection is that it seems far too symmetrical to be sound—for such an one, I say, to find that his labours have passed absolutely unnoticed by a fellow-inquirer (and how much more certainly, therefore, by an incurious and unpsychological public), there is good excuse for feeling something of the disappointment of Mr. Walter Shandy, when, master though he was of one of the finest chains of reasoning in the world, he was unable, for the life of him, to get a single link of it into the head of his wife.

No attempt, however, will here be made to subject the public to the cranial operation which would evidently have been necessary in the case of Mrs. Shandy. The analytic process referred to shall not be repeated in these pages. It will be enough to borrow one of them for a concise statement of its results.

They are embodied in the following propositions :

1. Wit and Humour, which have sometimes been treated as different results or aspects of the same mental process, are in reality the respective products of two diametrically opposed operations of the mind.
2. Wit consists in the revelation of unsuspected similarity between two otherwise dissimilar objects of thought.
3. Humour consists in the display (though not necessarily the *revelation*) of incongruity between two otherwise associable objects of thought.
4. Revelation being essential to wit, though not to humour, it follows that the element of surprise is a uniform constituent of the effect produced by the former, though not of that produced by the latter.
5. All incongruity implies dissimilarity ; but not *a converso,* dissimilarity being recognized by a purely intellectual apprehension, while incongruity exists only

between such dissimilars as cannot be united in thought without producing an *emotional* shock.

6. The 'passion of laughter' is excited by incongruity alone. Humour, therefore, in its various forms, is the sole excitant of laughter.
7. The response to wit, *as such,* is not laughter, but merely that more sedate form of pleasurable emotion which the sudden discovery of fitness brought about by human ingenuity—as in a clever mechanical invention, or the ingenious solution of a problem—is accustomed to provoke.
8. The fact that laughter is a frequent accompaniment of the response to wit is due to the fact that the objects between which wit reveals similarity are often not only dissimilar, but incongruous also, and their union in thought produces the emotional shock which is the characteristic effect of humour.

Several more propositions in the nature of corollaries to the foregoing might easily—perhaps only too easily—be added; but I refrain. The first and the last three will quite suffice, I feel sure, to provoke the vehement opposition of all those rival theorists who do not prefer to treat them with an even more vehement neglect. Space does not permit me to support them with examples, but it will be easy for anyone

who doubts their soundness, especially that of No. 8, to test it by examples. Everybody who has any intelligent appreciation of wit will at once admit that over and above the epigrams, repartees and *bons mots,* which have excited his mirth as well as admiration, he has heard in conversation, or met with in reading, an immense number of brilliant phrases, felicitous illustrations, apt comparisons, and other indubitable and indisputable specimens of wit which have afforded him keen intellectual pleasure, without, however, provoking in him the slightest inclination to laugh. If, then, he will compare these specimens with those which have the power of exciting laughter, he will find that in every instance of the latter kind the wit has brought two incongruous objects into mental association ; and has thus produced that emotional shock that results from collision between ideas which, like the sublime and the ignoble, the comic and the tragic, the poetic and the prosaic, are respectively contemplated in two different *moods* of mind. For it is the sudden descent or ascent from one of these moods that the emotions get their shock, and by a simple physiological process, which Mr. Herbert Spencer's explanation will presently be quoted to elucidate laughter ensues.

Perhaps, however, I have lingered long enough on a side of the subject in which only a very small minority are interested. The British public, with its resolute practicality, has never taken kindly to analysis. It is essentially a synthetic public. It 'drives at practice', as Mr. Matthew Arnold used

to say of somebody else; and its secret sympathies have always been with Mr. Squeers, when, after instructing his pupils in the orthography—or rather heterography—of the word 'winder', he sends him away to clean one. It is tolerably certain that if one were to write quite a thick volume on the Analysis of the Humorous, with specimens of humour (constructed as per analysis) at the end, the public would turn to the last page first, just for all the world as if the treatise were a sensation novel. Ever driving at practice, our people would hasten to examine these concrete examples of the humorous with the view of ascertaining beforehand whether a study of its abstract principles would be likely to repay them by developing the faculty in question.

Nor is there any doubt that, in secret, they suspect the soundness of any psychological reasoning on this subject which the psychologist is unable to prove by practice. The analyst, it is plain to see, is often uneasily conscious of this; and sometimes he longs to work out synthetically the demonstration of his theories. But it is when synthesis succeeds to analysis that disappointment ensues. You may work out your Theory of the Ludicrous with triumphant thoroughness; but when you pass from theory to practice, when you attempt to reintegrate your resolved ingredients and turn out a properly compounded joke, then it is that you find yourself face to face with the real difficulty. You get your two 'incongruous objects', you excogitate your 'concept', 'sub-

sume ' the former under the latter ; and you let off your little joke. And lo ! nobody laughs. Everything has been done according to rule. If you doubt it, you look up your Schopenhauer and satisfy yourself. Perhaps you re-read the famous passage justly praised by Mr. Lilly from Isaac Barrow, or you take a turn at your Sydney Smith. According to all these authorities you have been humorous ; you have scrupulously followed the instructions of the learned, and you are rewarded with the quiet conscience of the painstaking though unsuccessful artist. But the fact remains that you have failed to evoke that response from your audience without which even the most self-sufficient and stoical of jesters is rarely content. You have not made anybody laugh.

It may be that, as the world grows older, sadder, more fastidious, its humorists may learn to be content with the reward of their own consciences, and will cease to expect anybody to laugh. Perhaps, having themselves grown more philosophical, they will argue that the intrinsic merit of a joke, or even its projected power of amusing, can have little or nothing to do with anything so purely physical as that meaningless agitation of the abdominal and other muscles which we describe as laughter. True, it is a muscular convulsion of the very ancient origin, and interesting to the biologist on that account. But so also are the primitive and rudimentary forms of humour : there is, indeed, a stage in human civilization at which humour is as simple and as practical as laughter itself.

Let us, for instance, endeavour to conjure up to our imagination that scene of artless jollity—the old-fashioned country fair. Behold that circle of chubby bumpkins, each with his blowsy, apple-cheeked sweetheart at his side, and note that leathern ellipsoidal ring raised some five feet from the ground and fixed in that position midmost the village green. As Victor Hugo would ask and answer in similar circumstances :

' What is it? It is a horse-collar.'

All eyes are bent eagerly on the empty frame, and all await with tense expectancy the ' living picture ' who is about to fill it. Many others have filled it already with more or less credit, but it is in the prowess of Giles Joskin that the knowing ones believe. See ! Giles is here. Lightly, confidently, he steps up to the collar, and in another moment there appears through its aperture, framed but ill-confined within it, the 'too vast orb' of his face. There is a moment's pause, during which the spectators critically survey the champion's countenance, red and round as a foggy sun ; and then, in a moment, the ruddy disc is suddenly cloven in twain by a horizontal fissure, which lengthening laterally and broadening vertically, like the chasm which swallowed the three rebels against Moses and Aaron, touches at last the sides of its environment, and bisects, at its short axis, the leathern ellipse. It is Giles Joskin's smile : a smile which all who see it recognize as victorious ; and as the judge approaches with the prize of victory in his hand, and announces that

Giles has carried off the flitch of bacon, to be awarded to him who should grin most effectively through the horse-collar, the welkin rings with rustic guffaws.

What has happened? Psychologically and physiologically, what has happened? There is no real doubt on either point; both have been well ascertained. Explained in terms of the emotions, the laughter of the tickled yokels is the expression of the 'sudden glory' of Hobbes—that glory 'arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves as compared with the infirmities of others'. Giles Joskin's grin—nay, his mere willingness to grin for the entertainment of the village—is the 'infirmity' which excites their sudden glory. For a flitch of bacon and the barren honour of exhibiting the biggest mouth in the country-side he has publicly made an ass of himself, while we (glorious thought!) we, his neighbours, are sitting here, eminent, superior, not grinning through horse-collars ourselves, but laughing at the ugliness and despising the shamelessness of those who do.

Explained in terms of the nervo-muscular functions, the case is equally clear. 'A large amount of nervous energy,' says Mr. Herbert Spencer, 'instead of being allowed to expend itself in producing an equivalent amount of the new thoughts and emotions which were nascent' (with reference namely to Giles Joskin's chances of success) 'is suddenly checked in its flow' (that is to say, by the apparition of Gile's grin, and the

instantaneous conviction that such an incomparable *rictus* must inevitably carry off the prize). 'The excess must discharge itself in some other direction, and there results an efflux through the motor nerves to various classes of the muscles, producing the half-convulsive actions we term laughter.'

No doubt this explanation is physiologically complete. Audrey giggling behind her beefy hand; her hee-hawing swain with palms pressed upon his Sunday waistcoat; the aged hedger who has broken his 'churchwarden' between his toothless gums in the convulsions of his mirth, are all simply working off an excess of nervous energy through the muscles of the jaws, thorax and abdomen. So far all is plain sailing. Where the difficulty arises, that difficulty which so besets us in the field of practice, is in this: that a philosopher, looking on at this primitive competition, would not feel that he had any 'excess of nervous energy' to discharge. No resulting efflux pours along his motor nerves in the direction of his malar, thoracic and abdominal muscles; but, on the contrary, there is, if anything, a stimulus given to those portions of the muscular apparatus whereby we manifest a gentle depression of the spirits. And it then begins to dawn upon the philosopher that the analysis of humour can never be of much value as a basis for synthetical operations, having regard to the essentially subjective character of the ridiculous, and to the fact at that moment so importunately thrust upon him that what at one stage of the human intelligence may be found

most potently laughter-moving, will at a higher stage prove absolutely incapable of exciting to merriment.

To console himself under these reflections, it is necessary that the philosopher should have in him what all philosophers have not, a dash of the humorist also. If he has, he will find that the scene is not wanting in food for genial mirth. To take but the most obvious of its suggestions, he may treat himself to an ample draught of that 'sudden glory' whereof we have been speaking. The yokels around him are laughing at Giles Joskin, but he will be laughing at the laughter of the yokels. While they are revelling in 'the sudden conception of their own eminency as compared with the infirmity' of a man who can grin in public through a horse-collar, he will be moved to mirth by the comparison of his own eminency with the infirmity of men whom a man grinning in public through a horse-collar can amuse. But if he is a humorist of the truer and deeper sort, the scene of childish merriment will yield him more, much more, than this. The narrow, unsympathetic, contemptuous feeling of amusement, which is all that Hobbes took account of in his partially correct but wholly inadequate analysis of the 'passion of laughter', will be of the shortest possible duration. A moment later, and he will think of the infinite intellectual interval, the innumerable gradations of refinement by which these clownish antics are divided from the satire of Swift or the irony of Voltaire, and

the self-centred glory of superiority will give instant place to that strange, delightful, all-embracing sense of expansion and exaltation which suffuses our whole being when humour suddenly widens for us the horizons of the world.

And yet the broad buffooneries of the bumpkin and the subtlest strokes of the satirist are in their nature essentially one. The grin through the horse-collar is humour in the germ, and it has the pathetic interest of all rude beginnings. No doubt it is even further removed from the subtlety and finesse of the latest literary forms of humour than were the waggon and wine-less of Thespis from the splendid equipment of the modern stage. But that is only because its beginnings were immeasurably earlier in the history of human development than the birth of the drama. It may be that man began in the Stone Age to find amusement in any chance eminency over the infirmities of his fellows ; to see another cut himself accidentally with a flint knife may have been the one great joke of the Palæolithic period. For, saddening as it may be to the sentimentalist to admit, the sense of humour must undoubtedly have had not a sympathetic but an anti-pathetic origin. We may take it as certain that the ' passion of laughter ' in a Cave man was wholly and solely due to a sudden glory of superiority over some other Cave man ; exultation in the fact that he was crippled or deformed, or for some reason or other *weaker* than the laugher, and therefore, should circumstances require it, his easy prey. Naturally

it would take a good many æons to transform this attitude by a process of gradual modification to that (say) which is adopted by Sterne or an appreciative reader of Sterne towards the weaknesses of My Uncle Toby.

Very little progress had been made at any rate until after the heroic age of Greek poetry. The Homeric sense of humour, for instance, when you come to consider it, is quite in the stage of the country fair. Vulcan goes halting round the Olympian circle, cup in hand, in the absence of Ganymede, and the lively gods break forth into peals of merriment. Did ever anyone see the like? This limping, ill-favoured blacksmith, grimy from his forge, to volunteer for the part of 'understudy' to the beautiful Idæan youth! What an exquisite joke! And so the 'inextinguishable laughter' of the immortals rolls on. How *naif* again is the mirth of the Achæan chiefs when Ulysses canes Thersites on the hump with his baton for scurrility of language, and Thersites blubbers! It is evident, too, that Homer (or the Homeric Company) found matter of amusement in the personal aspect of the ill-conditioned railer. The poet dwells with relish on his squint, his hunched back, his strangely shaped and decorated skull—

'*He had a sugar-loaf head with a thin stubble of hair sprouting from its apex.*' There is quite a modern gust about this description; it almost anticipates the comic brutality with which human ugliness is treated by Smollett and humorists of

his school. As a rule, too, one may say that physical infirmities and deformities were a good joke to the Roman of the classical era. Even Horace, an essentially good-natured little man, can snigger horribly over the *luridi dentes* and *capitis nives* of the superannuated Lyce, and indeed he congratulates the young men of Rome generally on the excellent sport they must find in the contemplation of her ruined charms. The gods, he says, have prolonged her life to a raven's length of days, that our ardent youth might have the fun of seeing (*possent visere multo non sine risu*) the torch by which they once were kindled now smouldering in ashes. An 'Arry of the worst modern type would be incapable of jumping figuratively upon the most unworthy of 'Arriets in such a fashion as this.

We may say indeed that *not* to find food for mirth in the lowering misfortunes or disabling physical defects of others was distinctly exceptional with the ancients. It is with quite a shock of agreeable surprise that we find Persius speaking with contempt of a man who could taunt another on the loss of an eye—*lusco qui possit dicere, Lusce*. We are astonished at the magnanimity which could afford to neglect such an opening for pungent epigram, and feel that the poet must have been vastly in advance of his age. But in that idea of course there is a considerable mixture of egotistical self-deception. If we are to speak of mankind in the mass, and not of a certain small and highly-subtilized section of the human race,

it would be perhaps wiser for us not to give ourselves too many airs over the country bumpkins gazing hilarious on the voluntary self-humiliation of their clowning comrade. It is more than doubtful whether, for the great mass of humanity, the humorous has ever yet purged itself of this element of Aristotelian *epichairekakia,* or 'joy at one's neighbour's ills' ; whether, in other words, the multitude are even yet capable of being much amused except at the expense of their fellowman. I do not see, indeed, how anyone can fail to appreciate the secular persistence of this element in the most popular forms of appeal to the sense of humour who merely considers the part played in fiction and drama, for many ages, by the deceived husband. From Boccaccio to Molière and Congreve, and from the comedians of the seventeenth century to the *farceurs* of the late nineteenth, the assumption that the unconscious dupe of the wife and the lover is essentially a ridiculous figure has immovably held its ground. That the person and situation have also been treated tragically is true but immaterial ; it does not affect the significance of the fact that they *can* be, and for centuries have been, treated as a legitimate subject for comedy often of the most extravagant kind. Nor is it to the point that there has of late years been a much more prevalent inclination on the part of dramatists to treat the subject seriously. That unfortunately may only be a proof, not so much that our jokes have become more humane, as that a certain prominent, though not numerous,

section of us are getting too solemn to joke at all.

It is with the view, therefore, of warning the analytical humorist that the above retrospective sketch—cursory and imperfect as it is—of the history of humour has been attempted. The object of it is to remind him that, however skilled he may be in the subsumption of objects under concepts, people will only laugh at what amuses them, and that the question as to what does amuse them, has received, in different ages and among different peoples, a great variety of answers. Shakespeare, who, without being a professed and systematic analyst, stumbled occasionally upon analytic *aperçus* of no inconsiderable value, has made an often-quoted remark about the ' fortunes of a jest ' lying in the ear that hears, rather than on the tongue that utters it ; and this is a golden saying for all investigators of the psychology of humour. Our earnest pursuit of culture in these latter days has tended somewhat to obscure this truth. The humorous has been treated in too objective a spirit. It has been too easily assumed that it is a subject to be 'got up' like another ; and it has been tackled with all the conscientious solemnity of the University Extension student. The result, of course, has been disappointing. It has been found that the 'personal equation', even the 'international equation', if I may say so, counts for a good deal more than the conscientiously solemn student had supposed.

The 'international equation'. Yes, the expres-

sion though strange is correct, and has been advisedly used. It recalls me to that part of my subject to which I briefly referred at the outset of these remarks—I mean the resolute, nay, the desperate attempt which has been made of late years to 'internationalize' jokes. It seems to have occurred to some earnest caterer for earnest students that for the benefit of those who propose to 'take up' humour, it would be an excellent and highly 'educational' thing to start a *Humour of the Nations* Series, if that is its name, and the idea has been carried out with a grim and smileless perseverance which has in itself a richly humorous effect. The editor and contributors of these mournful hand-books have apparently kept their countenances; perhaps they do not see the 'joke within the joke'; there could be no more delightful joke than that they should not. But to the philosopher who is also a humorist, the reception of the whole series or at least of the volumes of it which have appeared so far, has been vastly diverting. The very first to appear was a staggerer, at any rate, to those who had not previously made the acquaintance at school of the *Scholasticus* of Hierocles. This, then, was the humour of Ancient Greece. How was it to be received? Was it possible to receive it with any warmer or more hilarious emotion than that of the reverence due to its venerable old age? Earnest students were discovered in odd corners with this perplexing Attic salt-cellar in their hands. Aristophanes, they had heard, was a great humorist,

and by studying him in translation they had been able, if not to provoke themselves to laughter, at least to find the spot at which at the Dionysia the laughter was supposed to come in. But where, O ! where, was its point of entrance in the pages of this Athenian Joe Miller?

The *Humour of Ancient Greece* was followed, I believe, by that of Ancient Rome, and this again by the *Humour of Holland*. We are, or were, promised some time ago the *Humour of Scotland* and the *Humour of Japan;* but I have never seen them, and I do not know whether they are or are not of high educational value. But the genral effect of the series was very disturbing to the popular mind. It shook the public faith in the possibility of a Science of the Humorous; it spread far and wide a desolating sense of the relativity of all human jokes. For a time, too, it paralysed the energies of the psychologist, who, in the very act of 'subsuming incongruous ideas under concepts which only apply to them from one point of view', was overtaken by a sort of agnostic despair. Why bother one's head with concepts? he asked himself. Why continue to subsume when the only result will be to produce a formula which, even if it applies, as is more than doubtful, to jokes that amuse the people of the Netherlands, may utterly fail as an analysis of such pleasantries as are acceptable to the Japanese? Mr. Lilly has been the first to recover from this temporary depression, and to philosophize calmly and even hopefully on this attractive subject once more.

Perhaps he has not come across the *Humour of the Nations* Series, if that be its name.

Nothing, however, is to be gained by shutting our eyes to the disquieting outlook before us. So far from its being possible to 'internationalize' humour, we may think ourselves lucky if we can manage to preserve even a national type. The Dickensian humour it would seem, is 'off' ; the American droll, after a vogue of a good many years, is apparently ceasing to amuse ; the 'inverted aphorism' had but a short popularity, and utlimately perished in calamitous and indeed unmentionable circumstances ; and nothing seems growing up to take its place. The new generation ' knocking at the door ' rat-tats with quite portentous gravity. This is, no doubt, an improvement on the older generations, who thought it a first-rate stroke of wit to wrench off the knocker ; but their successors are surely carrying a virtue to excess. It seems a pity that they should be unable to laugh ; but the most respected and 'intellectual' among them cannot. It was the way of certain frivolous old fogies a few years ago to twit them with their supposed taste for what was then called the New Humour, but there was really no foundation for the taunt. The New Humour turned out to be simply the Old Buffoonery 'writ small', and, whoever its patrons are or were, they are not to be found among the thoughtful young men who represent the generation with its hand on the door-knocker.

Altogether we seem to be within measurable

distance of a time when nobody will be outwardly amused by the humour of anybody else ; or when no one, at any rate, will be moved or moveable to those mere muscular demonstrations of merriment which the ludicrous was wont to provoke. To 'shake the midriff', I will not say of despair, but of mere indifference, will be a feat beyond the power of the most skilled and experienced jester to perform. He will think himself lucky if, by his most successful pleasantry, he shall succeed in illuminating the countenances of his younger hearers with a wintry smile. So far have we now got from the primitive simplicity of the horse-collar and its enshrined grin. It is not, of course, that jokes will be worse than they used to be. On the contrary, if there is anything in science, they ought to be, scientifically speaking, better ; for they will be the results of a synthesis based upon and starting from an analytic process, which will be brought ever nearer and nearer to perfection. That they fail to tickle will not be due to any want of the qualities necessary to titillatory power, but simply to loss of sensibility in the patient. The feathers are right enough ; it is merely a chronic case of anæsthesis of the mental footsoles.

Of course, there will be consolations for the humorist ; there are consolations already. The spectacle—(and spectacles)—of the earnest young man gravely studying comic masterpieces, this and the *Humour of the Nations* Series (if that is its right name) are distinctly in the nature

of consolations. And on the final arrival of the time when, although jokes still continue to be made as psychological experiments, nobody any longer laughs at the jokes of anybody else, or even at his own, there is no doubt that a situation of an intensely humorous character will be created for all those—by that time it is to be feared but a dwindling minority—who are capable of appreciating it. The sense of humour, especially in the elderly, tends in these days to become continually more and more self-centred and egoistic ; they see life—especially youthful life—around them more and more completely converting itself into a comedy which they have all to themselves, at least if they may judge from the countenances of the actors, and it will be only a fitting termination to the process if one of them should find himself at last—like Campbell's *Last Man,* with a difference —alone in a world of humour of his own, enjoying the great Cosmic Joke in strict privacy amid many millions of earnest young men who do not see it, and deriving a subtle addition to his enjoyment from that very fact.

VI

THE YOUNG PEOPLE

ONE of my amusements, a mournful one I admit, upon these fine spring days, is to watch in the streets of London the young people, and to wonder if they are what I was at their age.

There is an element in human life which the philosophers have neglected, and which I am at a loss to entitle, for I think no name has been coined for it. But I am not at a loss to describe it. It is that change in the proportion of things which is much more than a mere change in perspective, or in point of view. It is that change which makes Death so recognizable and too near ; achievement necessarily imperfect, and desire necessarily mixed with calculation. It is more than that. It is a sort of seeing things from that far side of them, which was only guessed at or heard of at second hand in earlier years, but which is now palpable and part of the senses : known. All who have passed a certain age know what I mean.

This change, not so much in the aspect of things as in the texture of judgment, may mislead one when one judges youth ; and it is best to trust to one's own memory of one's own youth if one would judge the young.

There I see a boy of twenty-five looking solemn enough, and walking a little too stiffly down Cockspur Street. Does he think himself immortal, I wonder, as I did? Does the thought of oblivion appal him as it did me? That he continually suffers in his dignity, that he thinks the passers-by all watch him, and that he is in terror of any singularity in dress or gesture, I can well believe, for that is common to all youth. But does he also, as did I and those of my time, purpose great things which are quite unattainable, and think the summit of success in any art to be the natural wage of living?

Then other things occur to me. Do these young people suffer or enjoy all our old illusions? Do they think the country invincible? Do they vaguely distinguish mankind into rich and poor, and think that the former from whom they spring are provided with their well-being by some natural and fatal process, like the recurrence of day and night? Are they as full of the old taboos of what a gentleman may and may not do? I wonder !— Possibly they are. I have not seen one of them wearing a billycock hat with a tail coat, nor one of them smoking a pipe in the street. And is life divided for them to-day as it was then, into three periods : their childhood ; their much more important years at a public school (which last fill up most of their consciousness) ; their new untried occupation?

And do they still so grievously and so happily misjudge mankind? I think they must, judging by

their eyes. I think they too believe that industry earns an increasing reward, that what is best done in any trade is best recognized and best paid; that labour is a happy business; and that women are of two kinds: the young who go about to please them, the old to whom they are indifferent.

Do they drink? I suppose so. They do not show it yet. Do they gamble? I conceive they do. Are their nerves still sound? Of that there can be no doubt! See them hop on and off the motor buses and cross the streets!

And what of their attitude towards the labels? Do they take, as I did, every man much talked of for a great man? Are they diffident when they meet such men? And do they feel themselves to be in the presence of gods? I should much like to put myself into the mind of one of them, and to see if to that generation the simplest of all social lies is gospel. If it is so, I must suppose they think a Prime Minister, a Versifier, an Ambassador, a Lawyer who frequently comes up in the Press, to be some very superhuman person. And doubtless also they ascribe a sort of general quality to all much-talked-of or much-be-printed men, putting them on one little shelf apart, and all the rest of England in a ruck below.

Then this thought comes to me. What of their bewilderment? We used all to be so bewildered! Things did not fit in with the very simple and rigid scheme that was our most undoubted creed of the State. The motives of most commercial actions seemed inscrutable save to a few base

contemporaries no older than ourselves, but cads, men who would always remain what we had first known them to be, small clerks upon the make. At what age, I wonder, to this generation will come the discovery that of *these* men and of *such* material the Great are made; and will the long business of discovery come to sadden them as late as it came to their elders?

I must believe that young man walking down Cockspur Street thinks that all great poets, all great painters, all great writers, all great statesmen, are those of whom he reads, and are all possessed of unlimited means and command the world. Further, I must believe that the young man walking down Cockspur Street (he has got to Northumberland Avenue by now) lives in a static world. For him things are immovable. There are the old: fathers and mothers and uncles; the very old are there, grandfathers, nurses, provosts, survivors. Only in books does one find at that age the change of human affection, child-bearing, anxiety for money and death. All the children (he thinks) will be always children, and all the lovely women always young. And loyalty and generous regards are twin easy matters reposing natively in the soul, and as yet unbetrayed.

Well, if they are all like that, or even most of them, the young people, quite half the world is happy. Not one of that happy half remembers the Lion of Northumberland House, or the little streets there were behind the Foreign Office, or the old Strand, or Temple Bar, or what Coutts's

used to be like, or Simpson's, or Soho as yet uninvaded by the great and good Lord Shaftesbury. No one of the young can pleasantly recall the Metropolitan Board of Works.

And for them, all the new things—houses which are veils of mud on stilts of iron, advertisements that shock the night, the rush of taxi-cabs and the Yankee hotels—are the things that always were and always will be.

A year to them is twenty years of ours. The summer for them is games and leisure, the winter is the country and a horse; time is slow and stretched over long hours. They write a page that should be immortal, but will not be; or they hammer out a lyric quite undistinguishable from its models, and yet to them a poignantly original thing.

Or am I all wrong? Is the world so rapidly changing that the Young also are caught with the obsession of change? Why, then, not even half the world is happy.

VII

THE ROMANTIC IN THE RAIN

THE middle classes of modern England are quite fanatically fond of washing; and are often enthusiastic for teetotalism. I cannot, therefore, comprehend why it is that they exhibit a mysterious dislike of rain. Rain, that inspiring and delightful thing, surely combines the qualities of these two ideals with quite a curious perfection. Our philanthropists are eager to establish public baths everywhere. Rain surely is a public bath; it might almost be called mixed bathing. The appearance of persons coming fresh from this great natural lustration is not perhaps polished or dignified; but for the matter of that, few people are dignified when coming out of a bath. But the scheme of rain in itself is one of an enormous purification. It realizes the dream of some insane hygienist: it scrubs the sky. Its giant brooms and mops seem to reach the starry rafters and starless corners of the cosmos; it is a cosmic spring-cleaning.

If the Englishman is really fond of cold baths, he ought not to grumble at the English climate for being a cold bath. In these days we are constantly told that we should leave our little special possessions and join in the enjoyment of common social institutions and a common social machinery. I offer the rain as a thoroughly Socialistic institu-

tion. It disregards that degraded delicacy which has hitherto led each gentleman to take his shower-bath in private. It is a better shower-bath, because it is public and communal; and, best of all, because somebody else pulls the string.

. . . .

As for the fascination of rain for the water drinker, it is a fact the neglect of which I simply cannot comprehend. The enthusiastic water drinker must regard a rainstorm as a sort of universal banquet and debauch of his own favourite beverage. Think of the imaginative intoxication of the wine drinker if the crimson clouds sent down claret or the golden clouds hock. Paint upon primitive darkness some such scenes of apocalypse, towering and gorgeous skyscapes in which champagne falls like fire from heaven or the dark skies grow purple and tawny with the terrible colours of port. All this must the wild abstainer feel, as he rolls in the long soaking grass, kicks his ecstatic heels to heaven, and listens to the roaring rain. It is he, the water drinker, who ought to be the true bacchanal of the forests; for all the forests are drinking water. Moreover, the forests are apparently enjoying it: the trees rave and reel to and fro like drunken giants; they clash boughs as revellers clash cups; they roar undying thirst and howl the health of the world.

All around me as I write is a noise of Nature drinking: and Nature makes a noise when she is drinking, being by no means refined. If I count

it Christian mercy to give a cup of cold water to a sufferer, shall I complain of these multitudinous cups of cold water handed round to all living things; a cup of water for every shrub; a cup of water for every weed? I would be ashamed to grumble at it. As Sir Philip Sidney said, their need is greater than mine—especially for water.

. . . .

There is a wild garment that still carries nobly the name of a wild Highland clan: a clan come from those hills where rain is not so much an incident as an atmosphere. Surely every man of imagination must feel a tempestuous flame of Celtic romance spring up within him whenever he puts on a mackintosh. I could never reconcile myself to carrying an umbrella; it is a pompous Eastern business, carried over the heads of despots in the dry, hot lands. Shut up, an umbrella is an unmanageable walking-stick; open, it is an inadequate tent. For my part, I have no taste for pretending to be a walking pavilion; I think nothing of my hat, and precious little of my head. If I am to be protected against wet, it must be by some closer and more careless protection, something that I can forget altogether. It might be a Highland plaid. It might be that yet more Highland thing, a mackintosh.

And there is really something in the mackintosh of the military qualities of the Highlander. The proper cheap mackintosh has a blue and white sheen as of steel or iron; it gleams like armour. I like to think of it as the uniform of that ancient

clan in some of its old and misty raids. I like to think of all the Mackintoshes, in their mackintoshes, descending on some doomed Lowland village, their wet waterproofs flashing in the sun or moon. For indeed this is one of the real beauties of rainy weather, that while the amount of original and direct light is commonly lessened, the number of things that reflect light is unquestionably increased. There is less sunshine; but there are more shiny things, such beautifully shiny things as pools and puddles and mackintoshes. It is like moving in a world of mirrors.

. . . .

And indeed this is the last and not the least gracious of the casual works of magic wrought by rain: that while it decreases light, yet it doubles it. If it dims the sky, it brightens the earth. It gives the roads (to the sympathetic eye) something of the beauty of Venice. Shallow lakes of water reiterate every detail of earth and sky; we dwell in a double universe. Sometimes walking upon bare and lustrous pavements, wet under numerous lamps, a man seems a black blot on all that golden looking-glass and could fancy he was flying in a yellow sky. But wherever trees and towns hang head downwards in a pigmy puddle, the sense of Celestial topsy-turvydom is the same. This bright, wet, dazzling confusion of shape and shadow, of reality and reflection, will appeal strongly to any one with the transcendental instinct about this dreamy and dual life of ours. It will always give a man the strange sense of looking down at the skies.

VIII

MINISTERS OF STATE

ANY stigma, as the old saying is, will serve to beat a dogma. The unpopularity of received opinions renders it almost cowardly to disprove them, and one hates to hit a platitude when it is down. But there are instances in which the exposure of popular errors is something more than an arrogant exercise worthy to amuse the expansive leisure of Sir Thomas Browne and may even be a source of positive instruction. One remembers the case of the statesmen. There was a class of persons to whom public opinion, deluded by their solemn exterior, ascribed the most dazzling range of qualities, and acquiesced, consequently, in their assuming a complete control of public affairs. They stood about in attitudes that looked well in marble trousers on a monument; and their gifts, which consisted mainly in a knack of thinking about nothing and looking all the time as if they were thinking about something else, were invariably referred to in tones of more than obituary veneration. They acquired a dangerous monopoly of international relations in the days before the war had demonstrated quite how dangerous that monopoly was; and the solemn mystery of diplo-

macy was entrusted to their absent-minded charge. The popular error about them was extremely simple. It was universally believed in Europe, prior to the year 1914, that above their admirable (or, as their favourite authors wrote, immaculate) neckwear and behind their rather glassy stare they united in some overcrowded brain-cell the two qualities which the heroes of Mr. Seton Merriman had taught the world to respect. Strength, it was thought, and silence were the essential ingredients in the statesman's make-up. Other elements might be thrown in—Celtic fervour, Latin logic, Teutonic thoroughness. But these were mere private idiosyncrasies. The essence of statesmanship (one is thinking of the qualities which steered the world firmly into the *impasse* of August 1914) was believed to be the silent strength of the great hills—of Welsh hills sometimes, or the grey Cevennes, or the Harz, or even (if one is to be quite neutral about it) of the Matterhorn. One saw them as tight-lipped men, a little grey about the temples, who read confidential documents without a word, flung them (for greater secrecy) into bright red boxes, and snapped down the lids with a sympathetic click from a prognathous profile. They were all (how faded the vision seems) as silent as the circulation manager of a failing newspaper, as reserved as royal seats at a charity *matinée*. That, in bold outline, was the popular conception of statesmanship in its great days. And then, with the malicious suddenness of a conjurer among

rabbits, the war waved a wand over them, and they came out quite different.

One has suffered agonies of exasperation from the current doctrine that the war altered everything. It is a great saving in historical research; but those of us who trail the cloudy, if glorious, appendage of a pre-war education are reluctant to discard the entire contents of our *cerebella* in favour of the miscellaneous and divergent speculations which appear to have usurped the place of knowledge since the battle-flags were furled and the ear-drum throbs no longer with the syncopated eloquence of our national leaders in time of war. Yet there is no use in denying it: something very odd has come over the statesmen. The war seems to have affected them in much the same way as Prince Charming took the Sleeping Beauty. They came to. Their icy reserve melted like the snow in spring-time; and as they dropped suddenly out of those angular poses which had earned them the awe of generations, those frozen lips began to speak. And they have not, at the moment of writing, left off.

The orgy of self-revelation, which has set very minister in Europe babbling confidences with the easy flow of a schoolgirl in a moment of xpansion, was a progressive business. The spate did not start all at once. In the earlier stages there was a staid trickle of confessions, cast mostly in the decorous form of official publications. Great Britain started it with the pale gleam of a White Paper. Then France weighed in with a

Yellow Book. The Russians turned out something tasty in orange; Belgium was discreetly grey (so like a neutral); the Austrians went in for red; and soon all the primary colours in the spectroscope were exhausted by the original belligerents, and late-comers were driven out into the more garish creations of aniline research. The tone of these early revelations was almost uniformly sober. The utmost that was confided to the public was an impressive spectacle of a number of slightly flustered gentlemen engaged in exchanging solemn documents couched in a jargon which the usage of centuries had deprived of all meaning. It was all a little like the drivers of two converging trains upon a single line absorbed in an exchange of courtesies, of estimates of distance and weight of impact; and none of the passengers had (in the official correspondence) the indelicacy to tamper with the communication-cord. That was the first stage of the international disclosures.

The next movement was a trifle livelier. Towards the end of the war, and increasingly as the Great Peace grew in intensity, the statesmen of the Old World united in a chorus of confessions. The shrill utterance of men who had won the war united with the more guttural speech of those who had caused it, and our ears were assailed by sonorous repetitions of the same thing in different keys. It was all a little like the culminating moments of a Handel Festival. From the angle of the British listener much of it was a shade tame, because we have not yet been privileged to over-

hear any considerable body of the confessions of our own masters. For this country, almost alone in Europe and with that mysterious tolerance to which most British institutions owe their survival, continued for years after the Armistice to employ the official services of those who had conducted its affairs during the war. The results, however, becoming apparent, an ampler leisure was politely afforded to some of the more remarkable actors in which to record their experiences on the stage.

Meanwhile, the amateur of revelations subsists principally upon foreign importations. These are generally couched in that grey medium of language which is adopted by the translator, and under this drab disguise one has some difficulty in distinguishing between the utterances of Russian generals and German statesmen. The transformation is least devastating in its consequences when the author of the original is a diplomat by profession, since his professional aptitude for meaningless expressions finds an adequate equivalent in the tepid formulæ of the translator. One often fails to catch the vigorous utterance of a foreign politician in his mild English garb. But the true diplomatist is excellently reflected. There is a Prussian Excellency who opened with a revealing account of the German Emperor's excursion to Morocco in 1905. The sudden regrets of Imperial Majesty on hearing for the first time at Lisbon that the streets of Tangier were hardly adapted to driving, the horrible off-shore tossing which makes that port a bitter

memory to landsmen, the Imperial charger almost declining on the quay to permit Majesty to mount in the unaccustomed disguise of a white helmet, compose an engaging picture. And memory, as politicians say, will not willingly let die the spectacle of Kühlmann climbing in-board on a rope ladder 'covered with spray and in the full uniform of the Bamberg Uhlans'. There is a queer scene at the Mansion House during an Imperial visit, in which Sir Edward Grey, sitting at table with his German colleague, was so struck by the Emperor's peroration that 'we promised one another, shaking hands warmly, to do all in our power to act in the spirit of the Kaiser's speech.' The gesture, no doubt, is authentic ; but one cannot help thinking that the initiative must have come from his more impulsive Continental neighbour. The harvest of diplomats is often remarkably light. But one is glad to have them ; and once more, as one reads them, one falls back into admiration of the simpleminded romanticism of a generation which left statesmanship to statesmen, and lost ten millions of men in the process.

IX

ACCUMULATIONS

IN the brevity of life and the perishableness of material things the moral philosophers have always found one of their happiest themes. 'Time, which antiquates Antiquities, hath an Art to make dust of all things.' There is nothing more moving than those swelling elegiac organ notes in which they have celebrated the mortality of man and all his works. Those of us for whom the proper study of mankind is books dwell with the most poignant melancholy over the destruction of literary treasures. We think of all the pre-Platonic philosophers of whose writings only a few sentences remain. We think of Sappho's poems, all but completely blotted from our knowledge. We think of the missing fragments of the *Satyricon,* and of many other precious pages which once were and are now no more. We complain of the holes that time has picked in the records of history, bewailing the loss of innumerable vanished documents. As for buildings, pictures, statues and the accumulated evidence of whole civilizations, all destroyed as though they had never been, they do not belong to our literary province, and, if they did, would be too numerous to catalogue even summarily.

But because men have once thought and felt in a certain way it does not follow that they will for ever continue to do so. There seems every probability that our descendants, some two or three centuries hence, will wax pathetic in their complaints, not of the fragility, but the horrible persistence and indestructibility of things. They will feel themselves smothered by the intolerable accumulation of the years. The men of to-day are so deeply penetrated with the sense of the perishableness of matter that they have begun to take immense precautions to preserve everything they can. Desolated by the carelessness of our ancestors, we are making very sure that our descendants shall lack no documents when they come to write our history. All is systematically kept and catalogued. Old things are carefully patched and propped into continued existence; things now new are hoarded up and protected from decay.

To walk through the book-stores of one of the world's great libraries is an experience that cannot fail to set one thinking on the appalling indestructibility of matter. A few years ago I explored the recently dug cellars into which the overflow of the Bodleian pours in an unceasing stream. The cellars extend under the northern half of the great quadrangle in whose centre stands the Radcliffe Camera. These catacombs are two storeys deep and lined with impermeable concrete. 'The muddy damps and ropy slime' of the traditional vault are absent in this great necropolis

of letters ; huge ventilating pipes breathe blasts of a dry and heated wind, that makes the place as snug and as unsympathetic to decay as the deserts of central Asia. The books stand in metal cases constructed so as to slide in and out of position on rails. So ingenious is the arrangement of the cases that it is possible to fill two-thirds of the available space, solidly with books. Twenty years or so hence, when the existing vaults will take no more books, a new cellar can be dug on the opposite side of the Camera. And when that is full—it is only a matter of half a century from now—what then? We shrug our shoulders. After us the deluge. But let us hope that Bodley's Librarian of 1970 will have the courage to emend the last word to 'bonfire'. To the bonfire! That is the only satisfactory solution of an intolerable problem.

The deliberate preservation of things must be compensated for by their deliberate and judicious destruction. Otherwise the world will be overwhelmed by the accumulation of antique objects. Pigs and rabbits and watercress, when they were first introduced into New Zealand, threatened to lay waste the country, because there were no compensating forces of destruction to put a stop to their indefinite multiplication. In the same way, mere things, once they are set above the natural laws of decay, will end by burying us, unless we set about methodically to get rid of the nuisance. The plea that they should all be preserved—every novel by Nat Gould, every issue of the *Funny*

Wonder—as historical documents is not a sound one. Where too many documents exist it is impossible to write history at all. 'For ignorance,' in the felicitous words of Mr. Lytton Strachey, 'is the first requisite of the historian—ignorance which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art.' Nobody wants to know everything—the irrelevancies as well as the important facts—about the past; or in any case nobody ought to desire to know. Those who do, those who are eaten up by an itch for mere facts and useless information, are the wretched victims of a vice no less reprehensible than greed or drunkennes.

Hand in hand with this judicious process of destruction must go an elaborate classification of what remains. As Mr. Wells says in his large, opulent way, 'the future world-state's organization of scientific research and record compared with that of to-day will be like an ocean liner beside the dug-out canoe of some early heliolithic wanderer.' With the vast and indiscriminate multiplication of books and periodicals our organization of records tends to become ever more heliolithic. Useful information on any given subject is so widely scattered or may be hidden in such obscure places that the student is often at a loss to know what he ought to study or where. An immense international labour of bibliography and classification must be undertaken at no very distant date, if future generations of researchers

are to make the fullest use of the knowledge that has already been gained.

But this constructive labour will be tedious and insipid compared with the glorious business of destruction. Huge bonfires of paper will blaze for days and weeks together, whenever the libraries undertake their periodical purgation. The only danger, and, alas ! it is a very real danger, is that the libraries will infallibly purge themselves of the wrong books. We all know what librarians are ; and not only librarians, but critics, literary men, general public—everybody, in fact, with the exception of ourselves—we know what they are like, we know them : there never was a set of people with such bad taste ! Committees will doubtless be set up to pass judgment on books, awarding acquittals and condemnations in magisterial fashion. It will be a sort of gigantic Hawthornden competition. At that thought I find the flames of my great bonfires lose much of their imagined lustre.

X

THE CHOICE OF SUBJECTS IN POETRY

[PREFACE TO '*POEMS*', 1853]

IN two small volumes of Poems, published anonymously, one in 1849, the other in 1852, many of the Poems which compose the present volume have already appeared. The rest are now published for the first time.

I have, in the present collection, omitted the Poem from which the volume published in 1852 took its title. I have done so, not because the subject of it was a Sicilian Greek born between two and three thousand years ago, although many persons would think this a sufficient reason. Neither have I done so because I had, in my own opinion, failed in the delineation which I intended to effect. I intended to delineate the feelings of one of the last of the Greek religious philosophers, one of the family of Orpheus and Musaeus, having survived his fellows, living on into a time when the habits of Greek thought and feeling had begun fast to change, character to dwindle, the influence of the Sophists to prevail. Into the feelings of a man so situated there entered much that we are accustomed to consider as exclusively modern;

how much, the fragments of Empedocles himself which remain to us are sufficient at least to indicate. What those who are familiar only with the great monuments of early Greek genius suppose to be its exclusive characteristics, have disappeared; the calm, the cheerfulness, the disinterested objectivity have disappeared: the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves; we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of Hamlet and of Faust.

The representation of such a man's feelings must be interesting, if consistently drawn. We all naturally take pleasure, says Aristotle, in any imitation or representation whatever: this is the basis of our love of Poetry: and we take pleasure in them, he adds, because all knowledge is naturally agreeable to us; not to the philosopher only, but to mankind at large. Every representation therefore which is consistently drawn may be supposed to be interesting, inasmuch as it gratifies this natural interest in knowlegde of all kinds. What is *not* interesting, is that which does not add to our knowledge of any kind; that which is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn; a representation which is general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise, and firm.

Any accurate representation may therefore be expected to be interesting; but, if the representation be a poetical one, more than this is demanded. It is demanded, not only that it shall interest, but

also that it shall inspirit and rejoice the reader : that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight. For the Muses, as Hesiod says, were born that they might be 'a forgetfulness of evils, and a truce from cares' ; and it is not enough that the Poet should add to the knowledge of men, it is required of him also that he should add to their happiness. 'All Art', says Schiller, 'is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make men happy. The right Art is that alone, which creates the highest enjoyment.'

A poetical work, therefore, is not yet justified when it has been shown to be an accurate, and therefore interesting, representation ; it has to be shown also that it is a representation from which men can derive enjoyment. In presence of the most tragic circumstances, represented in a work of Art, the feeling of enjoyment, as is well known, may still subsist : the representation of the most utter calamity, of the liveliest anguish, is not sufficient to destroy it : the more tragic the situation, the deeper becomes the enjoyment ; and the situation is more tragic in proportion as it becomes more terrible.

What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action ; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance ; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is

inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.

To this class of situations, poetically faulty as it appears to me, that of Empedocles, as I have endeavoured to represent him, belongs; and I have therefore excluded the Poem from the present collection.

And why, it may be asked, have I entered into this explanation respecting a matter so unimportant as the admission or exclusion of the Poem in question? I have done so, because I was anxious to avow that the sole reason for its exclusion was that which has been stated above; and that it has not been excluded in deference to the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries: against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones.

'The Poet,' it is said, and by an intelligent critic, 'the Poet who would really fix the public attention must leave the exhausted past, and draw his subjects from matters of present import, and *therefore* both of interest and novelty.'

Now this view I believe to be completely false. It is worth examining, inasmuch as it is a fair sample of a class of critical dicta everywhere current at the present day, having a philosophical form and air, but no real basis in fact; and which are calculated to vitiate the judgment of readers of poetry, while they exert, so far as they are

adopted, a misleading influence on the practice of those who write it.

What are the eternal objects of Poetry, among all nations and at all times? They are actions; human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the Poet. Vainly will the latter imagine that he has everything in his own power; that he can make an intrinsically inferior action equally delightful with a more excellent one by his treatment of it: he may indeed compel us to admire his skill, but his work will possess, within itself, an incurable defect.

The Poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action; and what actions are the most excellent? Those, certainly, which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elemetary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time. These feelings are permanent and the same; that which interests them is permanent and the same also. The modernness or antiquity of an action, therefore, has nothing to do with its fitness for poetical representation; this depends upon its inherent qualities. To the elementary part of our nature, to our passions, that which is great and passionate is eternally interesting; and interesting solely in proportion to its greatness and to its passion. A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting to it than a smaller human action of to-day, even though upon the representation of this last the most consummate

skill may have been expended, and though it has the advantage of appealing by its modern language, familiar manners, and contemporary allusions, to all our transient feelings and interests. These, however, have no right to demand of a poetical work that it shall satisfy them ; their claims are to be directed elsewhere. Poetical works belong to the domain of our permanent passions : let them interest these, and the voice of all subordinate claims upon them is at once silenced.

Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido—what modern poem presents personages as interesting, even to us moderns, as these personages of an 'exhausted past'? We have the domestic epic dealing with the details of modern life which pass daily under our eyes ; we have poems representing modern personages in contact with the problems of modern life, moral, intellectual, and social ; these works have been produced by poets the most distinguished of their nation and time ; yet I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorothea, Childe Harold, Jocelyn, The Excursion,* leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the latter books of the *Iliad,* by the *Orestea,* or by the episode of Dido. And why is this? Simply because in the three latter cases the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situations more intense : and this is the true basis of the interest in a poetical work, and this alone.

It may be urged, however, that past actions may be interesting in themselves, but that they are not to be adopted by the modern Poet, because it is

impossible for him to have them clearly present to his own mind, and he cannot therefore feel them deeply, nor represent them forcibly. But this is not necessarily the case. The externals of a past action, indeed, he cannot know with the precision of a contemporary ; but his business is with its essentials. The outward man of Oedipus or of Macbeth, the houses in which they lived, the ceremonies of their courts, he cannot accurately figure to himself ; but neither do they essentially concern him. His business is with their inward man ; with their feelings and behaviour in certain tragic situations, which engage their passions as men ; these have in them nothing local and casual ; they are as accessible to the modern Poet as to a contemporary.

The date of an action, then, signifies nothing : the action itself, its selection and construction. this is what is all-important. This the Greeks understood far more clearly than we do. The radical difference between their poetical theory and ours consists, as it appears to me, in this : that, with them, the poetical character of the action in itself, and the conduct of it, was the first consideration ; with us, attention is fixed mainly on the value of the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action. They regarded the whole ; we regard the parts. With them, the action predominated over the expression of it ; with us, the expression predominates over the action. Not that they failed in expression, or were inattentive to it ; on the contrary, they

are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the *grand style* : but their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence ; because it is so simple and so well subordinated ; because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys. For what reason was the Greek tragic poet confined to so limited a range of subjects? Because there are so few actions which unite in themselves, in the highest degree, the conditions of excellence : and it was not thought that on any but an excellent subject could an excellent Poem be constructed. A few actions, therefore, eminently adapted for tragedy, maintained almost exclusive possession of the Greek tragic stage ; their significance appeared inexhaustible ; they were as permanent problems, perpetually offered to the genius of every fresh poet. This too is the reason of what appears to us moderns a certain baldness of expression in Greek tragedy ; of the triviality with which we often reproach the remarks of the Chorus, where it takes part in the dialogue : that the action itself, the situation of Orestes, or Merope, or Alcmaeon, was to stand the central point of interest, unforgotten, absorbing, principal ; that no accessories were for a moment to distract the spectator's attention from this ; that the tone of the parts was to be perpetually kept down, in order not to impair the grandiose effect of the whole. The terrible old mythic story on which the drama was founded stood, before he entered the theatre,

traced in its bare outlines upon the spectator's mind; it stood in his memory, as group of statuary, faintly seen, at the end of a long and dark vista: then came the Poet, embodying outlines, developing situations, not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in; stroke upon stroke, the drama proceeded: the light deepened upon the group; more and more it revealed itself to the riveted gaze of the spectator: until at last, when the final words were spoken, it stood before him in broad sunlight, a model of immortal beauty.

This was what a Greek critic demanded; this was what a Greek poet endeavoured to effect. It signified nothing to what time an action belonged; we do not find that the *Persae* occupied a particularly high rank among the dramas of Æschylus, because it represented a matter of contemporary interest: this was not what a cultivated Athenian required; he required that the permanent elements of his nature should be moved; and dramas of which the action, though taken from a long-distant mythic time, yet was calculated to accomplish this in a higher degree than that of the *Persae*, stood higher in his estimation accordingly. The Greeks felt, no doubt, with their exquisite sagacity of taste that an action of present times was too near them, too much mixed up with what was accidental and passing, to form a sufficiently grand, detached, and self-subsistent object for a tragic poem: such objects belonged to the domain of the comic poet, and of the lighter kinds of poetry. For the more serious kinds, for *pragmatic* poetry, to use an

excellent expression of Polybius, they were more difficult and severe in the range of subjects which they permitted. Their theory and practice alike, the admirable treatise of Aristotle, and the unrivalled works of their poets, exclaim with a thousand tongues—'All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow.'

But for all kinds of poetry alike there was one point on which they were rigidly exacting; the adaptability of the subject to the kind of poetry selected, and the careful construction of the poem.

How different a way of thinking from this is ours! We can hardly at the present day understand what Menander meant, when he told a man who inquired as to the progress of his comedy that he had finished it, not having yet written a single line, because he had constructed the action of it in his mind. A modern critic would have assured him that the merit of his piece depended on the brilliant things which arose under his pen as he went along. We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages; not for the sake of producing any total-impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself. I verily think that the majority of them do not in their hearts believe that there is such a thing as a total-impression to be derived from a poem at all, or to be demanded from a poet; they think

the term a commonplace of metaphysical criticism. They will permit the Poet to select any action he pleases, and to suffer that action to go as it will, provided he gratifies them with occasional bursts of fine writing, and with a shower of isolated thoughts and images. That is, they permit him to leave their poetical sense ungratified, provided that he gratifies their rhetorical sense and their curiosity. Of his neglecting to gratify these, there is little danger; he needs rather to be warned against the danger of attempting to gratify these alone; he needs rather to be perpetually reminded to prefer his action to everything else; so to treat this, as to permit its inherent excellences to develop themselves, without interruption from the intrusion of his personal peculiarities: most fortunate when he most entirely succeeds in effacing himself, and in enabling a noble action to subsist as it did in nature.

But the modern critic not only permits a false practice; he absolutely prescribes false aims.—'A true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history,' the Poet is told, 'is perhaps the highest thing that one can attempt in the way of poetry.'—And accordingly he attempts it. An allegory of the state of one's own mind, the highest problem of an art which imitates actions. No assuredly, it is not, it never can be so: no great poetical work has ever been produced with such an aim. *Faust* itself, in which something of the kind is attempted, wonderful passages as it contains, and in spite of the unsurpassed beauty

of the scenes which relate to Margaret, *Faust* itself, judged as a whole, and judged strictly as a poetical work, is defective : its illustrious author, the greatest poet of modern times, the greatest critic of all times, would have been the first to acknowledge it ; he only defended his work, indeed, by asserting it to be 'something incommensurable'.

The confusion of the present times is great, the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering, the number of existing works capable of attracting a young writer's attention and of becoming his models, immense : what he wants is a hand to guide him through the confusion, a voice to prescribe to him the aim which he should keep in view, and to explain to him that the value of the literary works which offer themselves to his attention is relative to their power of helping him forward on his road towards this aim. Such a guide the English writer at the present day will nowhere find. Failing this, all that can be looked for, all indeed that can be desired, is, that his attention should be fixed on excellent models ; that he may reproduce, at any rate, something of their excellence, by penetrating himself with their works and by catching their spirit, if he cannot be taught to produce what is excellent independently.

Foremost among these models for the English writer stands Shakespeare : a name the greatest perhaps of all poetical names ; a name never to be mentioned without reverence. I will venture, however, to express a doubt, whether the influence

of his works, excellent and fruitful for the readers of poetry, for the great majority, has been of unmixed advantage to the writers of it. Shakespeare indeed chose excellent subjects; the world could afford no better than Macbeth, or Romeo and Juliet, or Othello: he had no theory respecting the necessity of choosing subjects of present import, or the paramount interest attaching to allegories of the state of one's own mind; like all great poets, he knew well what constituted a poetical action; like them, wherever he found such an action, he took it; like them, too, he found his best in past times. But to these general characteristics of all great poets, he added a special one of his own; a gift, namely, of happy, abundant, and ingenious expression, eminent and unrivalled: so eminent as irresistibly to strike the attention first in him, and even to throw into comparative shade his other excellences as a poet. Here has been the mischief. These other excellences were his fundamental excellences *as a poet*; what distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur, says Goethe, is *Architectonicè* in the highest sense; that power of execution, which creates, forms, and constitutes: not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration. But these attractive accessories of a practical work being more easily seized than the spirit of the whole, and these accessories being possessed by Shakespeare in an unequalled degree, a young writer having recourse to Shakespeare as his model runs great risk of being vanquished and

absorbed by them, and, in consequence, of reproducing, according to the measure of his power, these, and these alone. Of this preponderating quality of Shakespeare's genius, accordingly, almost the whole of modern English poetry has, it appears to me, felt the influence. To the exclusive attention on the part of his imitators to this it is in a great degree owing, that of the majority of modern poetical work the details alone are valuable, the composition worthless. In reading them one is perpetually reminded of that terrible sentence on a modern French poet—*il dit tout ce qu'il veut, mais malheureusement il n'a rien à dire.*

Let me give an instance of what I mean. I will take it from the works of the very chief among those who seem to have been formed in the school of Shakespeare: of one whose exquisite genius and pathetic death render him for ever interesting. I will take the poem of *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil,* by Keats. I choose this rather than the *Endymion,* because the latter work (which a modern critic has classed with the *Faerie Queene*!), although undoubtedly there blows through it the breath of genius, is yet as a whole so utterly incoherent, as not strictly to merit the name of a poem at all. The poem of *Isabella,* then, is a perfect treasure-house of graceful and felicitous words and images: almost in every stanza there occurs one of those vivid and picturesque turns of expression, by which the object is made to flash upon the eye of the mind, and which thrill

the reader with a sudden delight. This one short poem contains, perhaps, a greater number of happy single expressions which one could quote than all the extant tragedies of Sophocles. But the action, the story? The action in itself is an excellent one ; but so feebly is it conceived by the Poet, so loosely constructed, that the effect produced by it, in and for itself, is absolutely null. Let the reader, after he has finished the poem of Keats, turn to the same story in the *Decameron* : he will then feel how pregnant and interesting the same action has become in the hands of a great artist, who above all things delineates his object ; who subordinates expression to that which it is designed to express.

I have said that the imitators of Shakespeare, fixing their attention on his wonderful gift of expression, have directed their imitation to this, neglecting his other excellences. These excellences, the fundamental excellences of poetical art, Shakespeare no doubt possessed them—possessed many of them in a splendid degree ; but it may perhaps be doubted whether even he himself did not sometimes give scope to his faculty of expression to the prejudice of a higher poetical duty. For we must never forget that Shakespeare is the great poet he is from his skill in discerning and firmly conceiving an excellent action, from his power of intensely feeling a situation, of intimately associating himself with a character ; not from his gift of expression, which rather even leads him astray, degenerating sometimes into a fondness

for curiosity of expression, into an irritability of fancy, which seems to make it impossible for him to say a thing plainly, even when the press of the action demands the very directest language, or its level character the very simplest. Mr. Hallam, than whom it is impossible to find a saner and more judicious critic, has had the courage (for at the present day it needs courage) to remark, how extremely and faultily difficult Shakespeare's language often is. It is so: you may find main scenes in some of his greatest tragedies, *King Lear* for instance, where the language is so artificial, so curiously tortured, and so difficult, that every speech has to be read two or three times before its meaning can be comprehended. This overcuriousness of expression is indeed but the excessive employment of a wonderful gift—of the power of saying a thing in a happier way than any other man; nevertheless, it is carried so far that one understands what M. Guizot meant, when he said that Shakespeare appears in his language to have tried all styles except that of simplicity. He has not the severe and scrupulous self-restraint of the ancients, partly, no doubt, because he had a far less cultivated and exacting audience: he has indeed a far wider range than they had, a far richer fertility of thought; in this respect he rises above them: in his strong conception of his subject, in the genuine way in which he is penetrated with it, he resembles them, and is unlike the moderns: but in the accurate limitation of it, the conscientious rejection of

superfluities, the simple and rigorous development of it from the first line of his work to the last, he falls below them, and comes nearer to the moderns. In his chief works, besides what he has of his own, he has the elementary soundness of the ancients; he has their important action and their large and broad manner: but he has not their purity of method. He is therefore a less safe model; for what he has of his own is personal, and inseparable from his own rich nature; it may be imitated and exaggerated, it cannot be learned or applied as an art; he is above all suggestive; more valuable, therefore, to young writers as men than as artists. But clearness of arrangement, rigour of development, simplicity of style—these may to a certain extent be learned: and these may, I am convinced, be learned best from the ancients, who, although infinitely less suggestive than Shakespeare, are thus, to the artist, more instructive.

What then, it will be asked, are the ancients to be our sole models? the ancients with their comparatively narrow range of experience, and their widely different circumstances? Not, certainly, that which is narrow in the ancients, nor that in which we can no longer sympathize. An action like the action of the *Antigone* of Sophocles, which turns upon the conflict between the heroine's duty to her brother's corpse and that to the laws of her country, is no longer one in which it is possible that we should feel a deep interest. I am speaking too, it will be remembered, not of the best sources

of intellectual stimulus for the general reader, but of the best models of instruction for the individual writer. This last may certainly learn of the ancients, better than anywhere else, three things which it is vitally important for him to know :— the all-importance of the choice of a subject ; the necessity of accurate construction ; and the subordinate character of expression. He will learn from them how unspeakably superior is the effect of the one moral impression left by a great action treated as a whole, to the effect produced by the most striking single thought or by the happiest image. As he penetrates into the spirit of the great classical works, as he becomes gradually aware of their intense significance, their noble simplicity, and their calm pathos, he will be convinced that it is this effect, unity and profoundness of moral impression, at which the ancient Poets aimed ; that it is this which constitutes the grandeur of their works, and which makes them immortal. He will desire to direct his own efforts towards producing the same effect. Above all, he will deliver himself from the jargon of modern criticism, and escape the danger of producing poetical works conceived in the spirit of the passing time, and which partake of its transitoriness.

The present age makes great claims upon us : we owe it service, it will not be satisfied without our admiration. I know not how it is, but their commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who constantly practise it, a

steadying and composing effect upon their judgement, not of literary works only, but of men and events in general. They are like persons who have had a very weighty and impressive experience; they are more truly than others under the empire of facts, and more independent of the language current among those with whom they live. They wish neither to applaud nor to revile their age: they wish to know what it is, what it can give them, and whether this is what they want. What they want, they know very well; they want to educe and cultivate what is best and noblest in themselves: they know, too, that this is no easy task— χαλεπὸν, as Pittacus said, χαλεπὸν ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι—and they ask themselves sincerely whether their age and its literature can assist them in the attempt. If they are endeavouring to practise any art, they remember the plain and simple proceedings of the old artists, who attained their grand results by penetrating themselves with some noble and significant action, not by inflating themselves with a belief in the pre-eminent importance and greatness of their own times. They do not talk of their mission, nor of interpreting their age, nor of the coming Poet; all this, they know, is the mere delirium of vanity; their business is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure which they are capable of feeling. If asked to afford this by means of subjects drawn from the age itself, they ask what special fitness the present age has for supplying them: they are told that it is an era of progress, an age com-

missioned to carry out the great ideas of industrial development and social amelioration. They reply that with all this they can do nothing; that the elements they need for the exercise of their art are great actions, calculated powerfully and delightfully to affect what is permanent in the human soul; that so far as the present age can supply such actions, they will gladly make use of them; but that an age wanting in moral grandeur can with difficulty supply such, and an age of spiritual discomfort with difficulty be powerfully and delightfully affected by them.

A host of voices will indignantly rejoin that the present age is inferior to the past neither in moral grandeur nor in spiritual health. He who possesses the discipline I speak of will content himself with remembering the judgments passed upon the present age, in this respect, by the two men, the one of strongest head, the other of widest culture, whom it has produced; by Goethe and by Niebuhr. It will be sufficient for him that he knows the opinions held by these two great men respecting the present age and its literature; and that he feels assured in his own mind that their aims and demands upon life were such as he would wish, at any rate, his own to be; and their judgement as to what is impeding and disabling such as he may safely follow. He will not, however, maintain a hostile attitude towards the false pretensions of his age; he will content himself with not being overwhelmed by them. He will esteem himself fortunate if he can succeed in banishing

from his mind all feelings of contradiction, and irritation, and impatience; in order to delight himself with the contemplation of some noble action of a heroic time, and to enable others, through his representation of it, to delight in it also.

I am far indeed from making any claim, for myself, that I possess this discipline; or for the following Poems, that they breathe its spirit. But I say, that in the sincere endeavour to learn and practise, amid the bewildering confusion of our times, what is sound and true in poetical art, I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing, among the ancients. They, at any rate, knew what they wanted in Art, and we do not. It is this uncertainty which is disheartening, and not hostile criticism. How often have I felt this when reading words of disparagement or of cavil: that it is the uncertainty as to what is really to be aimed at which makes our difficulty, not the dissatisfaction of the critic, who himself suffers from the same uncertainty. *Non me tua fervida terrent Dicta; Dii me terrent, et Jupiter hostis.*

Two kinds of *dilettanti,* says Goethe, there are in poetry: he who neglects the indispensable mechanical part, and thinks he has done enough if he shows spirituality and feeling; and he who seeks to arrive at poetry merely by mechanism, in which he can acquire an artisan's readiness, and is without soul and matter. And he adds, that the first does most harm to Art, and the last to himself. If we must be *dilettanti*: if it is impossible for us,

under the circumstances amidst which we live, to think clearly, to feel nobly, and to delineate firmly : if we cannot attain to the mastery of the great artists—let us, at least, have so much respect for our Art as to prefer it to ourselves : let us not bewilder our successors : let us transmit to them the practice of Poetry, with its boundaries and wholesome regulative laws, under which excellent works may again, perhaps, at some future time, be produced, not yet fallen into oblivion through our neglect, not yet condemned and cancelled by the influence of their eternal enemy, Caprice.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE SECOND EDITION (1854)

I have allowed the Preface to the former edition of these Poems to stand almost without change, because I still believe it to be, in the main, true. I must not, however, be supposed insensible to the force of much that has been alleged against portions of it, or unaware that it contains many things incompletely stated, many things which need limitation. It leaves, too, untouched the question, how far, and in what manner, the opinions there expressed respecting the choice of subjects apply to lyric poetry ; that region of the poetical field which is chiefly cultivated at present. But neither have I time now to supply these deficiencies, nor is this proper place for attempting it : on one or two points alone I wish to offer, in the briefest possible way, some explanation.

An objection has been ably urged to the classing together, as subjects equally belonging to a past time, Oedipus and Macbeth. And it is no doubt true that to Shakespeare, standing on the verge of the Middle Ages, the epoch of Macbeth was more familiar than that of Oedipus. But I was speaking of actions as they presented themselves to us moderns: and it will hardly be said that the European mind, since Voltaire, has much more affinity with the times of Macbeth than with those of Oedipus. As moderns, it seems to me, we have no longer any direct affinity with the circumstances and feelings of either; as individuals, we are attracted towards this or that personage, we have a capacity for imagining him, irrespective of his times, solely according to a law of personal sympathy; and those subjects for which we feel this personal attraction most strongly, we may hope to treat successfully. Alcestis or Joan of Arc, Charlemagne or Agamemnon—one of these is not really nearer to us now than another; each can be made present only by an act of poetic imagination: but this man's imagination has an affinity for one of them, and that man's for another.

It has been said that I wish to limit the Poet in his choice of subjects to the period of Greek and Roman antiquity: but it is not so: I only counsel him to choose for his subjects great actions, without regarding to what time they belong. Nor do I deny that the poetic faculty can and does manifest itself in treating the most trifling action, the most hopeless subject. But it is a pity that power

should be wasted; and that the Poet should be compelled to impart interest and force to his subject, instead of receiving them from it, and thereby doubling his impressiveness. There is, it has been excellently said, an immortal strength in the stories of great actions: the most gifted poet, then, may well be glad to supplement with it that mortal weakness, which, in presence of the vast spectacle of life and the world, he must for ever feel to be his individual portion.

Again, with respect to the study of the classical writers of antiquity: it has been said that we should emulate rather than imitate them. I make no objection: all I say is, let us study them. They can help to cure us of what is, it seems to me, the great vice of our intellect, manifesting itself in our incredible vagaries in literature, in art, in religion, in morals; namely, that it is *fantastic,* and wants *sanity*. Sanity—that is the great virtue of the ancient literature: the want of that is the great defect of the modern, in spite of all its variety and power. It is impossible to read carefully the great ancients, without losing something of our caprice and eccentricity; and to emulate them we must at least read them.

XI

THE SUPERNATURAL IN FICTION

IT is a truism that the supernatural in fiction should, as a general rule, be left in the vague. In the creepiest tale I ever read, the horror lay in this—*there was no ghost!* You may describe a ghost with all the most hideous features that fancy can suggest—saucer eyes, red staring hair, a forked tail, and what you please—but the reader only laughs. It is wiser to make as if you were going to describe the spectre, and then break off, exclaiming, 'But no! No pen can describe, no memory, thank Heaven, can recall, the horror of that hour!' So writers, as a rule, prefer to leave their terror (usually styled 'The Thing') entirely in the dark, and to the frightened fancy of the student. Thus, on the whole, the treatment of the supernaturally terrible in fiction is achieved in two ways, either by actual description, or by adroit suggestion, the author saying, like cabmen, 'I leave it to yourself, sir.' There are dangers in both methods; the description, if attempted, is usually overdone and incredible: the suggestion is apt to prepare us too anxiously for something that never becomes real, and to leave us disappointed.

Examples of both methods may be selected from

poetry and prose. The examples in verse are rare enough ; the first and best that occurs in the way of suggestion is, of course, the mysterious lady in *Christabel*.

> She was most beautiful to see,
> Like a lady of a far countrèe.

Who was she? What did she want? Whence did she come? What was the horror she revealed to the night in the bower of Christabel?

> Then drawing in her breath aloud
> Like one that shuddered, she unbound
> The cincture from beneath her breast.
> Her silken robe and inner vest
> Dropt to her feet, and full in view
> Behold her bosom and half her side—
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!
> O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

And then what do her words mean?

> Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,
> This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow.

What was it—the 'sight to dream of, not to tell'?

Coleridge never did tell, and, though he and Mr. Gilman said he knew, Wordsworth thought he did not know. He raised a spirit that he had not the spell to lay. In the Paradise of Poets has he discovered the secret? We only know that

the mischief, whatever it may have been, was wrought.

> O sorrow and shame! Can this be she—
> The lady who knelt at the old oak tree?
>
> . . . .
>
> A star hath set, a star hath risen,
> O Geraldine, since arms of thine
> Have been the lovely lady's prison.
> O Geraldine, one hour was thine.[1]

If Coleridge knew, why did he never tell? And yet he maintains that 'in the very first conception of the tale, I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness no less than with the liveliness of a vision,' and he expected to finish the three remaining parts within the year. The year was 1816, the poem was begun in 1797, and finished, as far as it goes, in 1800. If Coleridge ever knew what he meant, he had time to forget. The chances are that his indolence, or his forgetfulness, was the making of *Christabel,* which remains a masterpiece of supernatural suggestion.

For description it suffices to read the *Ancient Mariner.* These marvels, truly, are *speciosa miracula,* and, unlike Southey, we believe as we read. 'You have selected a passage fertile in unmeaning miracles,' Lamb wrote to Southey (1798), 'but have passed by fifty passages as miraculous as the miracles they celebrate', Lamb appears to have been almost alone in appreciating this masterpiece of supernatural description.

[1] Cannot the reader guess? I am afraid that I can!

Coleridge himself shrank from his own wonders, and wanted to call the piece *A Poet's Reverie*. 'It is as bad as Bottom the weaver's declaration that he is not a lion, but only the scenical representation of a lion. What new idea is gained by this title but one subversive of all credit—which the tale should force upon us—of its truth?' Lamb himself was forced, by the temper of the time, to declare that he 'disliked all the miraculous part of it', as if it were not *all* miraculous! Wordsworth wanted the Mariner 'to have a character and a profession', perhaps would have liked him to be a gardener, or a butler, with 'an excellent character!' In fact, the love of the supernatural was then at so low an ebb that a certain Mr. Marshall 'went to sleep while the *Ancient Mariner* was reading', and the book was mainly bought by sea-faring men, deceived by the title, and supposing that the *Ancient Mariner* was a nautical treatise.

In verse, then, Coleridge succeeds with the supernatural, both by way of description in detail, and of suggestion. If you wish to see a failure, try the ghost, the moral but not affable ghost, in Wordsworth's *Laodamia*. It is blasphemy to ask the question, but is the ghost in *Hamlet* quite a success? Do we not see and hear a little too much of him? Macbeth's airy and viewless dagger is really much more successful by way of suggestion. The stage makes a ghost visible and familiar, and this is one great danger of the supernatural in art. It is apt to insist on being

too conspicuous. Did the ghost of Dairus, in *Æschylus,* frighten the Athenians? Probably they smiled at the imperial spectre. There is more discretion in Caesar's ghost—

> I think it is the weakness of mine eyes
> That shapes this monstrous apparition,

says Brutus, and he lays no very great stress on the brief visit of the appearance. For want of this discretion, Alexandre Dumas's ghosts, as in *The Corsican Brothers,* are failures. They make themselves too common and too cheap, like the Spectre in Mrs. Oliphant's novel, *The Wizard's Son.* This, indeed, is the crux of the whole adventure. If you paint your ghost with too heavy a hand, you raise laughter, not fear. If you touch him too lightly, you raise unsatisfied curiosity, not fear. It may be easy to shudder, but it is difficult to teach shuddering.

In prose, a good example of the over vague is Miriam's mysterious visitor—the shadow of the catacombs—in *Transformation; or, The Marble Faun.* Hawthorne should have told us more or less; to be sure his contemporaries knew what he meant, knew who Miriam and the Spectre were. The dweller in the catacombs now powerfully excites curiosity, and when that curiosity is unsatisfied, we feel aggrieved, vexed, and suspect that Hawthorne himself was puzzled, and knew no more than his readers. He has not—as in other tales he has—managed to throw the right atmosphere about this being. He is vague in the

wrong way, whereas George Sand, in *Les Dames Vertes,* is vague in the right way. We are left in *Les Dames Vertes* with that kind of curiosity which persons really engaged in the adventure might have felt, not with the irritation of having a secret kept from us, as in *Transformations.*

In *Wandering Willie's Tale* (in *Redgauntlet*), the right atmosphere is found, the right note is struck. All is vividly real, and yet, if you close the book, all melts into a dream again. Scott was almost equally successful with a described horror in *The Tapestried Chamber.* The idea is the commonplace of haunted houses, the apparition is described as minutely as a burglar might have been ; and yet we do not mock, but shudder as we read. Then, on the other side—the side of anticipation—take the scene outside the closed door of the vanished Dr. Jekyll, in Mr. Stevenson's well-known apologue :

They are waiting on the threshold of the chamber whence the doctor has disappeared—the chamber tenanted by what? A voice comes from the room. ' Sir,' said Poole, looking Mr. Utterson in the eyes, ' was that my master's voice?'

A friend, a man of affairs, and a person never accused of being fanciful, told me that he read through the book to that point in a lonely Highland chateau, at night, and that he did not think it well to finish the story till next morning, but rushed to bed. So the passage seems ' well-found' and successful by dint of suggestion. On the other side, perhaps, only Scotsmen brought up in

country places, familiar from childhood with the terrors of Cameronian myth, and from childhood apt to haunt the lonely churchyards, never stirred since the year of the great Plague choked the soil with the dead, perhaps, *they* only know how much shudder may be found in Mr. Stevenson's *Thrawn Janet*. The back smouldering heat in the hills and glens that are commonly so fresh, the aspect of the Man, the Tempter of the Brethren, we know them, and we have enough of the old blood in us to be thrilled by that masterpiece of the described supernatural. It may be only a local success it may not much affect the English reader, but it is of sure appeal to the Lowland Scot. The ancestral Covenanter within us awakens, and is terrified by his ancient fears.

Perhaps it may die out in a positive age—this power of learning to shudder. To us it descends from very long ago, from the far-off forefathers who dreaded the dark, and who, half starved and all untaught, saw spirits everywhere, and scarce discerned waking experience from dreams. When we are all perfect positivist philosophers, when a thousand generations of nurses that never heard of ghosts have educated the thousand and first generation of children, then the supernatural may fade out of fiction. But has it not grown and increased since Wordsworth wanted the *Ancient Mariner* to have 'a profession and a character', since Southey called that poem a Dutch piece of work, since Lamb had to pretend to dislike its 'miracles'? Why, as science becomes more cock-

sure, have men and women become more and more fond of old follies, and more pleased with the stirring of ancient dread within their veins?

As the visible world is measured, mapped, tested, weighed, we seem to hope more and more that a world of invisible romance may not be far from us, or, at least, we care more and more to follow fancy into these airy regions, *et inania regna*. The supernatural has not ceased to tempt romancers, like Alexandre Dumas, usually to their destruction; more rarely, as in Mrs. Oliphant's *Beleagured City*, to such success as they do not find in the world of daily occupation. The ordinary shilling tales of 'hypnotism' and mesmerism are vulgar trash enough, and yet I can believe that an impossible romance, if the right man wrote it in the right mood, might still win us from the newspapers, and the stories of shabby love, and cheap remorses, and commonplace failures.

But it needs Heaven-sent moments for this skill.

XII

THE TRANSMISSION OF DR. JOHNSON'S PERSONALITY

TO talk about Dr. Johnson has become a confirmed habit of the British race. Four years after Johnson's death, Boswell, writing to Bishop Percy, said, 'I dined at Mr. Malone's on Wednesday with Mr. W. G. Hamilton, Mr. Flood, Mr. Windham, and Mr. Courtenay, and Mr. Hamilton observed very well what a proof it was of Johnson's merit that we had been talking of him all afternoon.' That was a hundred and ten years ago. We have been talking of him ever since. But what does this perpetual interest in Dr. Johnson prove? Why, nothing whatever, except that he was interesting. But this is a great deal; indeed, it is the whole matter for a man, a woman, or a book. When you come to think of it, it is our sole demand. Just now authors, an interesting class, are displaying a great deal of uneasiness about their goods: whether they are to be in one volume or in three, how the profits (if any) are to be divided, what their books should be about, and how far the laws of decency should be observed in their construction. All this is very wearisome to the reader, who does not care whether a book be

as long as *Clarissa Harlowe,* or as short as *The Luck of Roaring Camp,* provided only and always that it is interesting. And this is why Johnson is supreme, and why we go on talking about him long after we have exhausted the subject of our next-door neighbour.

Not many years ago, at our own annual gathering on the 13th of December, two of our guests were called upon (the practice is inhospitable) to say something. One was an Irish patriot, who had languished in jail during a now ancient *règime,* who on demanding from the chaplain to be provided with some book which was not the Bible, a collection of writings with which he was already, so he assured the chaplain, well acquainted, was supplied with Boswell, a book, it so chanced, he had never before read. He straightway, so he told us, forgot both his own and his country's woes. 'How happily the days of Thalaba went by,' and now, in the retrospect of life, his prison days wear the hues of enjoyment and delight. He has since ceased to be a patriot, but he remains a Boswellian.

The other guest was no less or more than the gigantic Bonner, the Australian cricketer. He told us that until that evening he had never heard of Dr. Johnson. Thereupon somebody, I hope it was the patriot, and not a member of the club, was thoughtless enough to titter audibly. 'Yes,' added Bonner, in heightened tones, and drawing himself proudly up, 'and what is more, I come from a great country, where you might ride a

horse sixty miles a day for three months, and never meet anybody who had. But,' so he proceeded, 'I have heard of him now, and can only say that were I not Bonner the cricketer, I would be Samuel Johnson.' He sat down amidst applause, and the sorrowful conviction straightway seized hold of me that could the Doctor have obtained permission to revisit Fleet Street, his earthly heaven, that night, and had he come in amongst us, he would certainly have preferred both the compliment and the conversation of the cricketer to those of the critics he would have found at the table.

This, at all events, is what I mean by being interesting.

But how does it come about that we can all at this distance of time be so infatuated about a man who was not a great philosopher or poet, but only a miscellaneous writer? The answer must be, Johnson's is a transmitted personality.

To transmit personality is the secret of literature, as surely as the transmission of force is the mainspring of the universe. It is also the secret of religion.

To ask how it is done is to break your heart. Genius can do it sometimes, but what cannot genius do? Talent fails oftener than it succeeds. Mere sincerity of purpose is no good at all, unless accompanied by the rare gift of personal expression. A rascal like Benvenuto Cellini, or Casanova, an oddity like Borrow, is more likely to possess this gift than a saint; and this is why it is so

much to be regretted that we have fewer biographies of avowed rogues than of professed saints. But I will not pursue this branch of the subject further.

Johnson's, I repeat, is a transmitted personality. We know more about him than we do about anybody else in the wide world. Chronologically speaking, he might have been one of the four great-grandfathers of most of us. But what do any of you know about that *partie carrée* of your ancestors? What were their habits and customs? Did the wear tye-wigs or bob-wigs? What were their opinions? Can you tell me a single joke they ever made? Who were their intimate friends? What was their favourite dish? They lived and died. The truth is, we inhabit a world which has been emptied of our predecessors. Perhaps it is as well; it leaves the more room for us to occupy the stage during the short time we remain upon it.

But though we cannot acquire the secret; though we cannot deliberately learn how to transmit personality from one century to another, either our own personality or anybody else's still, we may track the path and ask by what ways may personality be transmitted.

Dr. Johnson's case is in the main that of a personality transmitted to us by means of a great biography. He comes down to us through Boswell. To praise Boswell is superfluous. His method was studied, but at the same time original. He had always floating through his fuddled brain

a great ideal of portraiture. Johnson himself, though he does not seem to have had any confidence in his disciple, preferring to appoint the unclubable Hawkins his literary executor, nevertheless furnished Boswell with hints and valuable directions; but the credit is all Boswell's, whose one aim was to make his man live. To do this he was prepared, like a true artist, to sacrifice everything. The proprieties did not exist for him. Then, what a free hand he had. Johnson left neither wife nor child. I don't suppose Black Frank, Johnson's servant and residuary legatee, ever read a line of the *Biography*. There was no daughter married to a country squire to put her pen through the fact that Johnson's father kept a bookstall. There was no grandson in the Church to water down the witticisms that have reverberated through the world. Boswell was tendered plenty of bad advice. He coarsely rejected it. Miss Hannah More besought his tenderness 'for our virtuous and most revered departed friend, I beg you will mitigate some of his asperities.' To which Boswell replied that he would not cut off his claws nor make a tiger a cat to please anybody.

The excellent Bishop Percy humbly requested Boswell that his (the Bishop's) name might be suppressed in the pages of the forthcoming *Biography*. To him Boswell—'As to suppressing your lordship's name, I will do anything to oblige your lordship but that very thing. I owe to the authenticity of my work to introduce as many names of

eminent persons as I can. Believe me, my lord, you are not the only Bishop in the number of great men with which my pages are graced. *I am resolute as to this matter'*.

This sets me thinking of the many delightful pages of the great *Biography* in which the name of Percy occurs, in circumstances to which one can understand a Bishop objecting. So absurd a creature is man, particularly what Carlyle used to call shovel-hatted man.

How easily might the greatest of our biographies have been whittled away to nothing—to the dull ineptitudes with which we are all familiar, but for the glorious intrepidity of Boswell, who, if he did not practise the whole duty of man, at least performed the whole duty of a biographer.

As a means of transmitting personality memoirs rank high. Here we have Miss Burney's *Memoirs* to help us, and richly do they repay study, and Mrs. Thrale's marvellous collection of anecdotes, sparkling with womanly malice. Less deserving of notice are the volumes of Miss Anna Seward's correspondence, edited by Sir Walter Scott, who did not choose for their motto, as he fairly might have done, Sir Toby Belch's famous observation to that superlative fool Sir Andrew Aguecheek, 'Let there be gall enough in thy ink though thou write with a goose-pen—no matter.'

But whether we read the *Biography* or the *Memoirs,* it cannot escape our notice that Johnson's personality has been transmitted to us chiefly by a record of his *talk*.

It is a perilous foundation on which to build reputation, for it rests upon the frail testimony of human memory and human accuracy. How comes it that we are all well persuaded that Boswell and the rest of the recorders did not invent Johnson's talk, but that it has come down to us bearing his veritable image and superscription? It is sometimes lightly said that had we records of other men's talk it would be as good as Johnson's. It is Boswells who are the real want. This I deny.

To be a great table-talker—and be it borne in mind a good deal of what is sometimes called table-talk is not table-talk at all, but extracts from commonplace books and carefully doctored notes—you must have *first* a *marked* and *constant* character, and, *second,* the gift of characteristic expression, so as to stamp all your utterances, however varied, however flatly contradictory one with another, with certain recognizable and ever-present marks or notes. The great Duke of Wellington possessed these qualifications and consequently, though his conversation, as recorded by Lord Stanhope and others, is painfully restricted in its range of subject, and his character is lacking in charm, it is always interesting and sometimes remarkable. All the stories about Wellington are characteristic, and so are all the stories about Johnson. They all fit in with our conception of the character of the man about whom they are told, and thus strengthen and confirm that unity of impression which is essential

if personality is to be transmitted down the ages.

The last story of Johnson I stumbled across is in a little book called *A Book for a Rainy Day,* written by an old gentleman called Smith, the author of a well-known life of Nollekens, the sculptor, a biography written with a vein of causticity some have attributed to the fact that the biographer was not also a legatee. Boswell, thank Heaven, was above such considerations. He was not so much as mentioned in his great friend's will. The hated Hawkins was preferred to him; Hawkins, who wrote the authorised *Life of Johnson,* in which Boswell's name is only mentioned once, in a foot-note. But to return to Mr. Smith. In this book of his he records: 'I once saw Johnson follow a sturdy thief who had stolen his handkerchief in Grosvenor Square, seize him by the collar with both hands, and shake him violently, after which he quickly let him loose, and then with his open hand gave him so powerful a smack on the face as to send him off the pavement staggering.'

Now, in this anecdote of undoubted authenticity Johnson said nothing whatever, he fired off no epigram, thundered no abuse, and yet the story is as characteristic as his famous encounter with the Thames bargee.

You must have the character first and the talk comes afterwards. It is the old story; anybody can write like Shakespeare, if he has the mind.

But still, for this talk Johnson possessed great qualities. Vast and varied was his information on all kinds of subjects. He knew not only books, but a great deal about trades and manufactures, ways of existence, customs of business. He had been in all sorts of societies; kept every kind of company. He had fought the battle of life in a hand-to-hand encounter; had slept in garrets; had done hack work for booksellers; in short, had lived on fourpence half penny a day. By the side of Johnson, Burke's knowledge of men and things was bookish and notional. He had a great range of fact. Next, he had a strong mind operating upon and in love with life. He never lost his curiosity in his fellow-men.

Then he had, when stirred by contact with his friends, or inflamed by the desire of contradiction, an amazingly ready wit and a magnificent vocabulary always ready for active service in the field. Add to this, extraordinary, and at times an almost divine tenderness, a deep-rooted affectionateness of disposition, united to a positively brutal aversion to any kind of exaggeration, particularly of feelings, and you get a combination rarely to be met with.

Another point must not be forgotten—ample leisure. The Dr. Johnson we know is the *post-pension* Doctor. Never, surely, before or since did three hundred pounds a year of public money yield (thanks mainly to Boswell) such a perpetual harvest for the public good. Not only did it keep the Doctor himself and provide a home for

Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Desmoulins and Miss Carmichael and Mr. Levett, but it has kept us all going ever since. Dr. Johnson after his pension, which he characteristically wished was twice as large, so that the newspaper dogs might make twice as much noise about it, was a thoroughly lazy fellow, who hated solitude with the terrible hatred of inherited melancholia. He loved to talk, and he hated to be alone. He said, 'John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do.'

But of course Wesley—a bright and glorious figure of the last century, to whom justice will some day be done when he gets from under the huge human organization which has so long lain heavily on the top of him—Wesley had on his eager mind and tender conscience the conversion of England, whose dark places he knew; he could not stop all night exchanging intellectual hardihood with Johnson. Burke, too, had his plaguey politics, to keep Lord John Cavendish up to the proper pitch of an uncongenial enthusiasm, and all sorts of entanglements and even lawsuits of his own; Thurlow had the woolsack; Reynolds, his endless canvases and lady sitters; Gibbon, his history; Beauclerk, his assignations. One by one these eminent men would get up and steal away, but Johnson remained behind.

To sum this up, I say, it is to his character,

plus his mental endowments, as exhibited by his talk, as recorded by Boswell and others, that the great world of Englishmen owe their Johnson. Such sayings as 'Hervey was a vicious man, but he was very kind to me ; if you call a dog Hervey I should love him', throb through the centuries and excite in the mind a devotion akin to, but different from, religious feeling. The difference is occasioned by the entire absence of the note of sanctity. Johnson was a good man and a pious man, and a great observer of days ; but despite his bow to an archbishop, he never was in the way of becoming a saint. He lived fearfully, and after a fashion prayerfully, but without assurance or exaltation.

Another mode of transmission of personality is by letters. To be able to say what you mean in a letter is a useful accomplishment, but to say what you mean in such a way as at the same time to say what you are, is immortality. To publish a man's letters after his death is nowadays a familiar outrage ; they often make interesting volumes, seldom permanent additions to our literature. Lord Beaconsfield's letters to his sister are better than most, but of the letter writers of our own day Mrs. Carlyle stands proudly first—her stupendous lord being perhaps a bad second. Johnson's letters deserve more praise than they have received. To win that praise they only require a little more attention. Dr. Birkbeck Hill has collected them in two stately volumes, and they form an excellent appendix to his great edition of

the *Life*. They are in every style, from the monumental to the utterly frivolous, but they are always delightful and ever characteristic. Their friendliness—an excellent quality in a letter—is perhaps their most prominent feature. It is hardly ever absent. Next to their friendliness comes their playfulness; gaiety, indeed, there is none. At heart our beloved Doctor was full of gloom, but though he was never gay, he was frequently playful, and his letters abound with an innocent and touching mirth and an always affectionate fun. Some of his letters, those, for example, to Miss Porter after his mother's death, are, I verily believe, as moving as any ever written by man. They reveal, too, a thoughtfulness and a noble generosity it would be impossible to surpass. I beseech you to read Dr. Johnson's letters; they are full of literature, and with what is better than literature, life and character and comradeship. Had we nothing of Johnson but his letters, we should know him and love him.

Of his friend Sir Joshua's two most famous pictures I need not speak. One of them is the best known portrait in our English world. It has more than a trace of the vile melancholy the sitter inherited from his father, a melancholy which I fear turned some hours of every one of his days into blank dismay and wretchedness.

At last, by a route not I hope wearisomely circuitous, we reach Johnson's own books, his miscellanous writings, his twelve volumes octavo, and the famous *Dictionary*.

It is sometimes lightly said, 'Oh, nobody reads Johnson,' just as it is said, 'Nobody reads Richardson, nobody reads Sterne, nobody reads Byron'! It is all nonsense; there is always somebody reading Johnson, there is always somebody weeping over Richardson, there is always somebody sniggering over Sterne and chuckling over Byron. It is no disrespect to subsequent writers of prose or poetry to say that none of their productions do or ever can supply the place of the *Lives of the Poets,* of *Clarrisa,* of the elder Shandy and his brother Toby, or of *Don Juan.* Genius is never crowded out.

But I am willing enough to admit that Johnson was more than a writer of prose, more than a biographer of poets; he was himself a poet, and his poetry, as much as his prose, nay, more than his prose, because of its concentration, conveys to us the same dominating personality that bursts from the pages of Boswell like the Genii from the bottle in the Arabian story.

Of poetic freedom he had barely any. He knew but one way of writing poetry, namely, to chain together as much sound sense and sombre feeling as he could squeeze into the fetters of rhyming couplets, and then to clash those fetters loudly in your ear. This proceeding he called versification. It is simple, it is monotonous, but in the hands of Johnson it sometimes does not fall far short of the moral sublime. *London* and the *Vanity of Human Wishes* have never failed to excite the almost passionate admiration of succeeding poets.

Ballantyne tells us how Scott avowed he had more pleasure in reading *London* and the *Vanity of Human Wishes* than any other poetical compositions he could mention, and adds, 'I think I never saw his countenance more indicative of high admiration than while reciting them aloud.'

Byron loved them; they never failed to move Tennyson to cries of approval. There is, indeed, that about them, imitations, and often close imitations, of Juvenal though they be, which stamps them great. They contain lines which he could easily have bettered, verbosities a child can point out; but the effect they produce, on learned and simple, on old and young, is one and the same. We still hear the voice of Johnson, as surely as if he had declaimed the verses into a phonograph.

When you turn to them you are surprised to find how well you know them, what a hold they have got upon the English mind, how full of quotations they are, how immovably fixed in the glorious structure of English verse. Poor Sprat has perished despite his splendid tomb in the Abbey. Johnson has only a cracked stone and a worn-out inscription (for the Hercules in St. Paul's is unrecognizable), but he dwells where he would wish to dwell—in the loving memory of men. Johnson has in sober verity come down to us.

XIII

A GOSSIP ON ROMANCE

IN anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. The words, if the book be eloquent, should run thenceforward in our ears like the noise of breakers, and the story, if it be a story, repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye. It was for this last pleasure that we read so closely, and loved our books so dearly, in the bright, troubled period of boyhood. Eloquence and thought, character and conversation, were but obstacles to brush aside as we dug blithely after a certain sort of incident, like a pig for truffles. For my part, I liked a story to begin with an old wayside inn where, 'towards the close of the year 17—,' several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls. A friend of mine preferred the Malabar coast in a storm, with a ship beating to windward, and a scowling fellow of Herculean proportions striding along the beach; he, to be sure, was a pirate. This was further afield than my home-keeping

fancy loved to travel, and designed altogether for a larger canvas than the tales that I affected. Give me a highwayman and I was full to the brim ; a Jacobite would do, but the highwayman was my favourite dish. I can still hear that merry clatter of the hoofs along the moonlit lane ; night and the coming of day are still related in my mind with the doings of John Rann or Jerry Abershaw ; and the words 'post-chaise,' the 'great North Road,' 'ostler,' and 'nag' still sound in my ears like poetry. One and all, at least, and each with his particular fancy, we read story-books in childhood, not for eloquence or character or thought, but for some quality of the brute incident. That quality was not mere bloodshed or wonder. Although each of these was welcome in its place, the charm for the sake of which we read depended on something different from either. My elders used to read novels aloud ; and I can still remember four different passages which I heard, before I was ten, with the same keen and lasting pleasure. One I discovered long afterwards to be the admirable opening of *What will he Do with It* : it was no wonder I was pleased with that. The other three still remain unidentified. One is a little vague ; it was about a dark, tall house at night, and people groping on the stairs by the light that escaped from the open door of a sick-room. In another, a lover left a ball, and went walking in a cool dewy park, whence he could watch the lighted windows and the figures of the dancers as they moved. This was the most

sentimental impression I think I had yet received, for a child is somewhat deaf to the sentimental. In the last, a poet, who had been tragically wrangling with his wife, walked forth to the sea-beach on a tempestuous night and witnessed the horrors of a wreck.[1] Different as they are, all these early favourites have a common note—they have all a touch of the romantic.

Drama is the poetry of conduct, romance the poetry of circumstance. The pleasure that we take in life is of two sorts—the active and the passive. Now we are conscious of a great command over our destiny; anon we are lifted up by circumstance, as by a breaking wave, and dashed we know not how into the future. Now we are pleased by our conduct, anon merely pleased by our surroundings. It would be hard to say which of these modes of satisfaction is the more effective, but the latter is surely the more constant. Conduct is three parts of life, they say; but I think they put it high. There is a vast deal in life and letters both which is not immoral, but simply non-moral; which either does not regard the human will at all, or deals with it in obvious and healthy relations; where the interest turns, not upon what a man shall choose to do, but on how he manages to do it; not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of

[1] Since traced by many obliging correspondents to the gallery of Charles Kingsley.

arms or the diplomacy of life. With such material as this it is impossible to build a play, for the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, and is a standing proof of the dissemination of the human conscience. But it is impossible to build, upon this ground, the most joyous of verses, and the most lively, beautiful, and buoyant tales.

One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbour puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in this vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. It is thus that tracts of young fir, and low rocks that reach into deep soundings, particularly torture and delight me. Something must have happened in such places, and perhaps ages back, to members of my race; and when I was a child I tried in vain to invent appropriate games for them, as I still try, just as vainly, to fit them with the proper story. Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. Other spots again seem to abide their destiny, suggestive and impenetrable, 'miching

mallecho.' The inn at Burford Bridge, with its arbours and green garden and silent, eddying river—though it is known already as the place where Keats wrote some of his *Endymion* and Nelson parted from his Emma—still seems to wait the coming of the appropriate legend. Within these ivied walls, behind these old green shutters, some further business smoulders, waiting for its hour. The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry makes a similar call upon my fancy. There it stands, apart from the town, beside the pier, in a climate of its own, half inland, half marine—in front, the ferry bubbling with the tide and the guardship swinging to her anchor; behind, the old garden with the trees. Americans seek it already for the sake of Lovel and Oldbuck, who dined there at the beginning of the *Antiquary*. But you need not tell me—that is not all; there is some story, unrecorded or not yet complete, which must express the meaning of that inn more fully. So it is with names and faces; so it is with incidents that are idle and inconclusive in themselves, and yet seem like the beginning of some quaint romance, which the all-careless author leaves untold. How many of these romances have we not seen determined at their birth; how many people have met us with a look of meaning in their eye, and sunk at once into trivial acquaintances; to how many places have we not drawn near, with express intimations—'here my destiny awaits me'—and we have but dined there and passed on! I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford

in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling had me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man or the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford.[1]

Now, this is one of the natural appetites with which any lively literature has to count. The desire for knowledge, I had almost added the desire for meat, is not more deeply seated than this demand for fit and striking incident. The dullest of clowns tells, or tries to tell, himself a story, as the feeblest of children uses invention in his play; and even as the imaginative grown person, joining in the game, at once enriches it with many delightful circumstances, the great creative writer shows us the realization and the apotheosis of the day-dreams of common men. His stories may be nourished with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the day-dream. The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing should follow; and not only the

[1] Since the above was written I have tried to launch the boat with my own hands in *Kidnapped*. Some day, perhaps, I may try a rattle at the shutters.

characters talk aptly and think naturally, but all the circumstances in a tale answer one to another like notes in music. The threads of a story come from time to time together and make a picture in the web; the characters fall from time to time into some attitude to each other or to nature, which stamps the story home like an illustration. Crusoe recoiling from the footprint, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears, these are each culminating moments in the legend, and each has been printed on the mind's eye for ever. Other things we may forget; we may forget the words, although they are beautiful; we may forget the author's comment, although perhaps it was ingenious and true; but these epoch-making scenes, which put the last mark of truth upon a story and fill up, at one blow, our capacity for sympathetic pleasure, we so adopt into the very bosom of our mind that neither time nor tide can efface or weaken the impression. This, then, is the plastic part of literature: to embody character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye. This is the highest and hardest thing to do in words; the thing which, once accomplished, equally delights the schoolboy and the sage, and makes, in his own right, the quality of epics. Compared with this, all other purposes in literature, except the purely lyrical or the purely philosophic, are bastard in nature, facile of execution, and feeble in result. It is one thing to write

about the inn at Burford, or to describe scenery with the word-painters; it is quite another to seize on the heart of the suggestion and make a country famous with a legend. It is one thing to remark and to dissect, with the most cutting logic, the complications of life, and of the human spirit; it is quite another to give them body and blood in the story of Ajax or of Hamlet. The first is literature, but the second is something besides, for it is likewise art.

English people of the present day[1] are apt, I know not why, to look somewhat down on incident, and reserve their admiration for the clink of teaspoons and the accents of the curate. It is thought clever to write a novel with no story at all, or at least with a very dull one. Reduced even to the lowest terms, a certain interest can be communicated by the art of narrative; a sense of human kinship stirred; and a kind of monotonous fitness, comparable to the words and air of *Sandy's Mull,* preserved among the infinitesimal occurrences recorded. Some people work, in this manner, with even a strong touch. Mr. Trollope's inimitable clergymen naturally arise to the mind in this connexion. But even Mr. Trollope does not confine himself to chronicling small beer. Mr. Crawley's collision with the Bishop's wife, Mr. Melnotte dallying in the deserted banquet-room, are typical incidents, epically conceived, fitly embodying a crisis. Or again look at Thackeray. If Rawdon Crawley's blow were not delivered,

[1] 1882.

Vantity Fair would cease to be a work of art. That scene is the chief ganglion of the tale; and the discharge of energy from Rawdon's fist is the reward and consolation of the reader. The end of *Esmond* is a yet wider excursion from the author's customary fields; the scene at Castlewood is pure Dumas; the great and wily English borrower has here borrowed from the great, unblushing French thief; as usual, he has borrowed admirably well, and the breaking of the sword rounds off the best of all his books with a manly, martial note. But perhaps nothing can more strongly illustrate the necessity for marking incident than to compare the living fame of *Robinson Crusoe* with the discredit of *Clarissa Harlowe*. *Clarissa* is a book of a far more startling import, worked out, on a great canvas, with inimitable courage and unflagging art. It contains wit, character, passion, plot, conversations full of spirit and insight, letters sparkling with unstrained humanity; and if the death of the heroine be somewhat frigid and artificial, the last days of the hero strike the only note of what we now call Byronism, between the Elizabethans and Byron himself. And yet a little story of a shipwrecked sailor, with not a tenth part of the style nor a thousandth part of the wisdom, exploring none of the arcana of humanity and deprived of the perennial interest of love, goes on from edition to edition, ever young, while *Clarissa* lies upon the shelves unread. A friend of mine, a Welsh blacksmith, was twenty-five years old and could neither read nor write, when he heard a

chapter of *Robinson* read aloud in a farm kitchen. Up to that moment he had sat content, huddled in his ignorance, but he left that farm another man. There were day-dreams, it appeared, divine day-dreams, written and printed and bound, and to be bought for money and enjoyed at pleasure. Down he sat that day, painfully learned to read Welsh, and returned to borrow the book. It had been lost, nor could he find another copy but one that was in English. Down he sat once more, learned English, and at length, and with entire delight, read *Robinson*. It is like the story of a love-chase. If he had heard a letter from *Clarissa*, would he have been fired with the same chivalrous ardour? I wonder. Yet *Clarissa* has every quality that can be shown in prose, one alone excepted—pictorial or picture-making romance. While *Robinson* depends, for the most part and with the overwhelming majority of its readers, on the charm of circumstance.

In the highest achievements of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law. Situation is animated with passion, passion clothed upon with situation. Neither exists for itself, but each inheres indissolubly with the other. This is high art; and not only the highest art possible in words, but the highest art of all, since it combines the greatest mass and diversity of the elements of truth and pleasure. Such are epics, and the few prose tales that have the epic weight. But as from a school

of works, aping the creative, incident and romance are ruthlessly discarded, so may character and drama be omitted or subordinated to romance. There is one book, for example, more generally loved than Shakespeare, that captivates in childhood, and still delights in age—I mean the *Arabian Nights*—where you shall look in vain for moral or for intellectual interest. No human face or voice greets us among that wooden crowd of kings and genies, sorcerers and beggarmen. Adventure, on the most naked terms, furnishes forth the entertainment and is found enough. Dumas approaches perhaps nearest of any modern to these Arabian authors in the purely material charm of some of his romances. The early part of *Monte Cristo*, down to the finding of the treasure, is a piece of perfect story-telling; the man never breathed who shared these moving incidents without a tremor; and yet Faria is a thing of packthread and Dantès little more than a name. The sequel is one long-drawn error, gloomy, bloody, unnatural and dull; but as for these early chapters, I do not believe there is another volume extant where you can breathe the same unmingled atmosphere of romance. It is very thin and light, to be sure, as on a high mountain; but it is brisk and clear and sunny in proportion. I saw the other day, with envy, an old and a very clever lady setting forth on a second or third voyage into *Monte Cristo*. Here are stories which powerfully affect the reader, which can be reperused at any age, and where the characters are no more than puppets. The bony

fist of the showman visibly propels them; their springs are an open secret; their faces are of wood, their bellies filled with bran; and yet we thrillingly partake of their adventures. And the point may be illustrated still further. The last interview between Lucy and Richard Feveril is pure drama; more than that, it is the strongest scene, since Shakespeare, in the English tongue. Their first meeting by the river, on the other hand, is pure romance; it has nothing to do with character; it might happen to any other boy or maiden, and be none the less delightful for the change. And yet I think he would be a bold man who should choose between these passages. Thus, in the same book, we may have two scenes, each capital in its order: in the one, human passion, deep calling unto deep, shall utter its genuine voice; in the second, according circumstances, like instruments in tune, shall build up a trivial but desirable incident, such as we love to prefigure for ourselves; and in the end, in spite of the critics, we may hesitate to give the preference to either. The one may ask more genius—I do not say it does; but at least the other dwells as clearly in the memory.

True romantic art, again, makes a romance of all things. It reaches into the highest abstraction of the ideal; it does not refuse the most pedestrian realism. *Robinson Crusoe* is as realistic as it is romantic; both qualities are pushed to an extreme, and neither suffers. Nor does romance depend upon the material importance of the incidents. To

deal with strong and deadly elements, banditti, pirates, war and murder, is to conjure with great names, and in the event of failure, to double the disgrace. The arrival of Haydn and Consuelo at the Canon's villa is a very trifling incident; yet we may read a dozen boisterous stories from beginning to end, and not receive so fresh and stirring an impression of adventure. It was the scene of Crusoe at the wreck, if I remember rightly, that so bewitched my blacksmith. Nor is the fact surprising. Every single article the castaway recovers from the hulk is 'a joy for ever' to the man who reads of them. They are the things that should be found, and the bare enumeration stirs the blood. I found a glimmer of the same interest the other day in a new book, *The Sailor's Sweetheart,* by Mr. Clark Russell. The whole business of the brig *Morning Star* is very rightly felt and spiritedly written; but the clothes, the books and the money satisfy the reader's mind like things to eat. We are dealing here with the old cut-and-dry, legitimate interest of treasure trove. But even treasure trove can be made dull. There are few people who have not groaned under the plethora of goods that fell to the lot of the *Swiss Family Robinson,* that dreary family. They found article after article, creature after creature, from milk kine to pieces of ordnance, a whole consignment; but no informing taste had presided over the selection, there was no smack of relish in the invoice; and these riches left the fancy cold. The box of goods in Verne's *Mysterious Island* is

another case in point : there was no gusto and no glamour about that ; it might have come from a shop. But the two hundred and seventy-eight Australian sovereigns on board the *Morning Star* fell upon me like a surprise that I had expected ; whole vistas of secondary stories, besides the one in hand, radiated forth from that discovery, as they radiate from a striking particular in life ; and I was made for the moment as happy as a reader has the right to be.

To come at all at the nature of this quality of romance, we must bear in mind the peculiarity of our attitude to any art. No art produces illusion ; in the theatre we never forget that we are in the theatre ; and while we read a story, we sit wavering between two minds, now merely clapping our hands at the merit of the performance, now condescending to take an active part in fancy with the characters. This last is the triumph of romantic story-telling : when the reader consciously plays at being the hero, the scene is a good scene. Now in character-studies the pleasure that we take is critical ; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy with courage, suffering or virtue. But the characters are still themselves, they are not us ; the more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as a spectator. I cannot identify myself with Rawdon Crawley or with Eugène de Rastignac, for I have scarce a hope or fear in common with them. It

is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only, do we say we have been reading a romance. It is not only pleasurable things that we imagine in our day-dreams; there are lights in which we are willing to contemplate even the idea of our own death; ways in which it seems as if it would amuse us to be cheated, wounded or calumniated. It is thus possible to construct a story, even of tragic import, in which every incident, detail and trick of circumstance shall be welcome to the reader's thoughts. Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life; and when the game so chimes with his fancy that he can join in it with all his heart, when it pleases him with every turn, when he loves to recall it and dwells upon its recollection with entire delight, fiction is called romance.

Walter Scott is out and away the king of the romantics. *The Lady of the Lake* has no indisputable claim to be a poem beyond the inherent fitness and desirability of the tale. It is just such a story as a man would make up for himself, walking, in the best health and temper, through just such scenes as it is laid in. Hence it is that

a charm dwells undefinable among these slovenly verses, as the unseen cuckoo fills the mountains with his note ; hence, even after we have flung the book aside, the scenery and adventures remain present to the mind, a new and green possession, not unworthy of that beautiful name, *The Lady of the Lake,* or that direct, romantic opening—one of the most spirited and poetical in literature—'The stag at eve had drunk his fill.' The same strength and the same weaknesses adorn and disfigure the novels. In that ill-written, ragged book, *The Pirate,* the figure of Cleveland—cast up by the sea on the resounding foreland of Dunrossness—moving, with the blood on his hands and the Spanish words on his tongue, among the simple islanders—singing a serenade under the window of his Shetland mistress—is conceived in the very highest manner of romantic invention. The words of his song, 'Through groves of palm,' sung in such a scene and by such a lover, clench, as in a nutshell, the emphatic contrast upon which the tale is built. In *Guy Mannering,* again, every incident is delightful to the imagination ; and the scene when Harry Bertram lands at Ellangowan is a model instance of romantic method.

' "I remember the tune well," he says, "though I cannot guess what should at present so strongly recall it to my memory." He took his flageolet from his pocket and played a simple melody. Apparently the tune awoke the corresponding associations of a damsel. . . . She immediately took up the song—

Are these the links of Forth, she said,
Or are they the crooks of Dee,
Or the bonny woods of Warroch Head
That I so fain would see?

'"By heaven!" said Bertram, "it is the very ballad."'

On this quotation two remarks fall to be made. First, as an instance of modern feeling for romance, this famous touch of the flageolet and the old song is selected by Miss Braddon for omission. Miss Braddon's idea of a story, like Mrs. Todgers's idea of a wooden leg, were something strange to have expounded. As a matter of personal experience, Meg's appearance to old Mr. Bertram on the road, the ruins of Derncleugh, the scene of the flageolet, and the Dominie's recognition of Harry, are the four strong notes that continue to ring in the mind after the book is laid aside. The second point is still more curious. The reader will observe a mark of excision in the passage as quoted by me. Well, here is how it runs in the original: 'A damsel, who, close behind a fine spring about half-way down the descent and which had once supplied the castle with water, was engaged in bleaching linen.' A man who gave in such copy would be discharged from the staff of a daily paper. Scott has forgotten to prepare the reader for the presence of the 'damsel'; he has forgotten to mention the spring and its relation to the ruin; and now, face to face with his omission, instead of trying back and starting fair, crams all this matter, tail foremost,

into a single shambling sentence. It is not merely bad English, or bad style; it is abominably bad narrative besides.

Certainly the contrast is remarkable; and it is one that throws a light upon the subject of this paper. For here we have a man of the finest creative instinct touching with perfect certainty and charm the romantic junctures of his story; and we find him utterly careless, almost, it would seem, incapable, in the technical matter of style, and not only frequently weak, but frequently wrong in points of drama. In character parts, indeed, and particularly in the Scots, he was delicate, strong and truthful; but the trite, obliterated features of too many of his heroes have already wearied two generations of readers. At times his characters will speak with something far beyond propriety —with a true heroic note; but on the next page they will be wading wearily forward with an ungrammatical and undramatic rigmarole of words. The man who could conceive and write the character of Elspeth of the Craigburn-foot, as Scott has conceived and written it, had not only splendid romantic, but splendid tragic gifts. How comes it, then, that he should so often fob us off with languid, inarticulate twaddle?

It seems to me that the explanation is to be found in the very quality of his surprising merits. As his books are play to the reader, so were they play to him. He conjured up the romantic with delight, but he had hardly patience to describe it. He was a great day-dreamer, a seer of fit and

beautiful and humorous visions, but hardly a great artist ; hardly, in the manful sense, an artist at all. He pleased himself, and so he pleases us. Of the pleasures of his art he tasted fully ; but of its toils and vigils and distresses never man knew less. A great romantic—an idle child.

XIV

ON HISTORY

HISTORY, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents. But, in fact, the two hostile elements of which it consists have never been known to form a perfect amalgamation; and at length, in our own time, they have been completely and professedly separated. Good histories, in the proper sense of the word, we have not. But we have good historical romances, and good historical essays. The imagination and the reason, if we may use a legal metaphor, have made partition of a province of literature of which they were formerly seised *per my et per tout*; and now they hold their respective portions in severalty, instead of holding the whole in common.

To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners,

and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist. On the other hand, to extract the philosophy of history, to direct our judgment of events and men, to trace the connexion of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom, has become the business of a distinct class of writers.

Of the two kinds of composition into which history has been thus divided, the one may be compared to a map, the other to a painted landscape. The picture, though it places the country before us, does not enable us to ascertain with accuracy the dimensions, the distances, and the angles. The map is not a work of imitative art. It presents no scene to the imagination; but it gives us exact information as to the bearings of the various points, and is a more useful companion to the traveller or the general than the painted landscape could be, though it were the grandest that ever Rosa peopled with outlaws, or the sweetest over which Claude ever poured the mellow effulgence of a setting sun.

It is remarkable that the practice of separating the two ingredients of which history is composed has become prevalent on the Continent as well as in this country. Italy has already produced a historical novel, of high merit and of still higher

promise. In France, the practice has been carried to a length somewhat whimsical. M. Sismondi publishes a grave and stately history of the Merovingian Kings, very valuable, and a little tedious. He then sends forth as a companion to it a novel, in which he attempts to give a lively representation of characters and manners. This course, as it seems to us, has all the disadvantages of a division of labour, and none of its advantages. We understand the expediency of keeping the functions of cook and coachman distinct. The dinner will be better dressed, and the horses better managed. But where the two situations are united, as in the Maître Jacques of Molière, we do not see that the matter is much mended by the solemn form with which the pluralist passes from one of his employments to the other.

We manage these things better in England. Sir Walter Scott gives us a novel; Mr. Hallam a critical and argumentative history. Both are occupied with the same matter. But the former looks at it with the eye of a sculptor. His intention is to give an express and lively image of its external form. The latter is an anatomist. His task is to dissect the subject to its inmost recesses and to lay bare before us all the springs of motion and all the causes of decay.

Mr. Hallam is, on the whole, far better qualified than any other writer of our time for the office which he has undertaken. He has great industry and great acuteness. His knowledge is extensive, various, and profound. His mind is equally

distinguished by the amplitude of its grasp, and by the delicacy of its tact. His speculations have none of that vagueness which is the common fault of political philosophy. On the contrary, they are strikingly practical, and teach us not only the general rule, but the mode of applying it to solve particular cases. In this respect they often remind us of the *Discourses* of Machiavelli.

The style is sometimes open to the charge of harshness. We have also here and there remarked a little of that unpleasant trick, which Gibbon brought into fashion, the trick, we mean, of telling a story by implication and allusion. Mr. Hallam, however, has an excuse which Gibbon had not. His work is designed for readers who are already acquainted with the ordinary books on English history, and who can therefore unriddle these little enigmas without difficulty. The manner of the book is, on the whole, not unworthy of the matter. The language, even where most faulty, is weighty and massive, and indicates strong sense in every line. It often rises to an eloquence, not florid or impassioned, but high, grave and sober; such as would become a state paper, or a judgment delivered by a great magistrate, a Somers or a D'Aguesseau.

In this respect the character of Mr. Hallam's mind corresponds strikingly with that of his style. His work is eminently judicial. Its whole spirit is that of the bench, not that of the bar. He sums up with a calm, steady impartiality, turning neither to the right nor to the left, glossing over

nothing, exaggerating nothing, while the advocates on both sides are alternately biting their lips to hear their conflicting misstatements and sophisms exposed. On a general survey, we do not scruple to pronounce the *Constitutional History* the most impartial book that we ever read. We think it the more incumbent on us to bear this testimony strongly at first setting out, because, in the course of our remarks, we shall think it right to dwell principally on those parts of it from which we dissent.

There is one peculiarity about Mr. Hallam which, while it adds to the value of his writings, will, we fear, take away something from their popularity. He is less of a worshipper than any historian whom we can call to mind. Every political sect has its esoteric and its exoteric school, its abstract doctrines for the initiated, its visible symbols, its imposing forms, its mythological fables for the vulgar. It assists the devotion of those who are unable to raise themselves to the contemplation of pure truth by all the devices of Pagan or Papal superstition. It has its altars and its deified heroes, its relics and pilgrimages, its canonized martyrs and confessors, its festivals and its legendary miracles. Our pious ancestors, we are told, deserted the High Altar of Canterbury, to lay all their oblations on the shrine of St. Thomas. In the same manner the great and comfortable doctrines of the Tory creed, those particularly which relate to restrictions on worship and on trade, are adored by squires and rectors in

Pitt Clubs, under the name of a minister who was as bad a representative of the system which has been christened after him as Becket of the spirit of the Gospel. On the other hand, the cause for which Hampden bled on the field and Sydney on the scaffold is enthusiastically toasted by many an honest radical who would be puzzled to explain the difference between Ship-money and the Habeas Corpus Act. It may be added that, as in religion, so in politics, few even of those who are enlightened enough to comprehend the meaning latent under the emblems of their faith can resist the contagion of the popular superstition. Often, when they flatter themselves that they are merely feigning a compliance with the prejudices of the vulgar, they are themselves under the influence of those very prejudices. It probably was not altogether on grounds of expediency that Socrates taught his followers to honour the gods whom the state honoured, and bequeathed a cock to Esculapius with his dying breath. So there is often a portion of willing credulity and enthusiasm in the veneration which the most discerning men pay to their political idols. From the very nature of man it must be so. The faculty by which we inseparably associate ideas which have often been presented to us in conjunction is not under the absolute control of the will. It may be quickened into morbid activity. It may be reasoned into sluggishness. But in a certain degree it will always exist. The almost absolute mastery which Mr. Hallam has

obtained over feelings of this class is perfectly astonishing to us, and will, we believe, be not only astonishing but offensive to many of his readers. It must particularly disgust those people who, in their speculations on politics are not reasoners but fanciers; whose opinions, even when sincere, are not produced, according to the ordinary law of intellectual births, by induction or inference, but are equivocally generated by the heat of fervid tempers out of the overflowing of tumid imaginations. A man of this class is always in extremes. He cannot be a friend to liberty without calling for a community of goods, or a friend to order without taking under his protection the foulest excesses of tyranny. His admiration oscillates between the most worthless of rebels and the most worthless of oppressors, between Marten, the disgrace of the High Court of Justice, and Laud, the disgrace of the Star Chamber. He can forgive anything but temperance and impartiality. He has a certain sympathy with the violence of his opponents, as well as with that of his associates. In every furious partisan he sees either his present self, or his former self the pensioner that is, or the Jacobin that has been. But he is unable to comprehend a writer who, steadily attached to principles, is indifferent about names and badges, and who judges of characters with equable severity, not altogether untinctured with cynicism, but free from the slightest touch of passion, party spirit, or caprice.

We should probably like Mr. Hallam's book more if, instead of pointing out with strict fidelity the bright points and the dark spots of both parties, he had exerted himself to whitewash the one and to blacken the other. But we should certainly prize it far less. Eulogy and invective may be had for the asking. But for cold rigid justice, the one weight and the one measure, we know not where else we can look.

XV

THE GORDON RIOTS

When the rude rabble's watch-word was—destroy,
And blazing London seem'd a second Troy.

COWPER'S *Table Talk*, 1781.

LORD GEORGE GORDON is one of those ambiguous historical personages who, for a brief period, flash into sudden significance, and then, having contrived to do incalculable harm, fade away again as suddenly. Their intentions may have been good, though their methods were mistaken; but as individuals they lie so much on the border line that it is difficult to determine whether they are more sane than mad—more fanatic than lunatic. The difficulty of discriminating is not diminished by the absence of biographical data; and as regards Lord George's early life, the recorded facts are only moderately enlightening. He was the third son of the third Duke of Gordon, and was born in London in December 1751. Like Pope's Molly Lepel, he received a military commission when scarcely out of his cradle; but he ultimately entered the Navy from Eton as a midshipman. He served on the American station, rising to be a lieutenant in March 1772. Then, being disappointed of a ship

by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich, he quitted the Service. Having thus declined to become a Howe or a Hawke, he is next heard of as a candidate for Inverness-shire. This he contested with General Fraser (eldest son of Hogarth's Lord Lovat), who, finding his rival's faculty for speaking Gaelic and giving balls with attractive Highland partners made him a too formidable antagonist, judged it prudent to purchase for him, from Lord Melbourne, the seat of Ludgershall in Wiltshire, for which he was returned in 1774. Concerning his senatorial career, little is related except that he made himself conspicuous, if not notorious, for his impartiality in attacking both the Ins and the Outs, and for his denunciations of the Roman Catholics. Finally, in June 1780 his name is inseparably connected with the 'No Popery' Riots.

The story of the five days' disturbances, which practically paralysed London and almost amounted to a temporary Reign of Terror, requires no long introduction. In 1778, when the toleration which the different governments of Europe were extending to their peaceable Roman Catholic subjects was gradually beginning to obtain in England, Sir George Savile, one of the most open-minded and upright of philanthropists—in whom some critics have recognized the lineaments of Goldsmith's 'Mr. Burchell'—introduced a Bill to relieve Roman Catholics in this country from certain civil disabilities and penalties to which they were liable under an Act of Wil-

liam of Orange. That monarch, it was said, had never really approved it; and from lapse of time and altered conditions it had become not only unnecessary but unjust. Those whom Savile's measure immediately concerned, welcomed it warmly; and the Bill was carried in both Houses without a division. Then came the question of extending its provisions to Scotland. But here, at once, difficulties arose with the Presbyterians. The provincial synods hastened to form adverse Protestant associations; and the agitation thus created was assiduously fanned by sermons, pamphlets and newspaper paragraphs. As a result, at Edinburgh and Glasgow serious riots took place, in which Mass-houses were burned, and much Roman Catholic property was destroyed. So sinister and determined was the opposition, that the authorities decided to hold their hands; and as far as Scotland was concerned, legislation was abandoned.

In England, however, where, for some time, a 'No Popery' movement had been simmering in the public press, these proceedings in Scotland naturally produced a reaction. A London 'Protestant Association' was at once set on foot, and Lord George Gordon, who had been at the head of a similar body in north Britain, was elected president. He attended the initial deliberations regularly; and on Monday, 29 May, assembled by advertisement an extraordinary meeting in Coachmakers' Hall, Foster Lane, Cheapside, to consider the best method of presenting a petition to

Parliament for the repeal of Savile's Act. Taking for his pretext the success of resistance in north Britain, he delivered a 'long inflammatory harangue'. In consequence, a unanimous resolution was passed, that, on the following Friday, the entire Protestant Association, distinguished by blue knots or ribbons, should meet in St. George's-Fields (a waste space on the Surrey side of the Thames, where the whirligig of Time has now erected a Roman Catholic Cathedral) and accompany its president to the House of Commons. Upon this, Lord George announced that if less than twenty thousand of his fellow citizens attended, he would not present the petition; and he further suggested that, for the better preservation of order, they should group themselves in different divisions.

On 2 June, the day fixed, these arrangements were carried out, with an exactitude which reflects considerable credit on the executive of the Protestant Association. Starting from St. George's-Fields at noon, one party, led by Gordon himself, and preceded by the petition—a huge roll of parchment said to contain a hundred and twenty thousand signatures—crossed the river at Westminster. Another section made its way by Blackfriars; a third by London Bridge. About half-past two, the whole body had simultaneously reached Palace Yard, an event which they signalized by a 'general shout'. Up to this time their progress had been quiet and decorous; but it soon became evident that their ranks had been

largely recruited on the road by many undesirable sympathizers of the lowest class, and that the motley cohort which accompanied Gordon to the very entrance of the Commons, and surged after him into the Lobby, must have included not a few spurious 'blue cockades', whose proclivities were plainly rather to lawless action than passive protest. These last speedily began to hustle and maltreat the Members as they arrived, particularly if they happened to be Peers, constraining them to cry 'No Popery'—to assume the Protestant badge—to promise to support the repeal of the Act. They even attempted to force the doors of the House, all the approaches to which they effectually blockaded. In Parliament Street, the Archbishop of York was hissed and hooted. The Lord President of the Council, old Lord Bathurst, was violently assaulted and kicked; Lord Mansfield (*clarum et venerabile nomen*!), who had been instrumental in acquitting a Popish priest, not only had the glasses and panels of his coach beaten in, but narrowly escaped with his life. The hat of Lord North, the Premier, was seized, cut to pieces and the fragments sold to the spectators;[1] the Duke of Nothumberland was robbed of his watch; the Bishop of Lichfield's gown was torn to tatters; and the Bishop of Lincoln, a brother of the unpopular Lord Chancellor Thurlow—his carriage-wheels having been wrenched off—was only saved in a half-fainting condition by seeking shelter in a neighbouring house,

[1] Angelo's *Reminiscences*, 1830, ii, 146.

whence he departed in disguise over the adjoining roofs. Other high dignitaries and politicians fared no better. Lord Townshend, then Master-General of the Ordnance, and Lord Hillsborough, a Secretary of State, having been grossly insulted, lost those 'honours of their heads', their silk bags, and entered the House with their hair hanging loose; while Lord Stormont, another Secretary of State, whose equipage was literally battered to pieces, after remaining helpless for nearly half an hour in the hands of the rabble, was at last extricated by the courageous intervention of a friendly bystander. Lord Boston was so long detained by his assailants that, at one time, it was proposed by his brother Peers to sally out in a body to his assistance. Similar outrages were suffered by Lord Willoughby de Broke, Lord St. John, and Lord Dudley, while Welbore Ellis, the Treasurer of the Navy, got free with the utmost hazard by taking sanctuary at the Westminster Guildhall, the windows of which were forthwith smashed, the doors demolished, and the Justice and constables ejected.

Inside the House—as soon as opportunity offered, for the state of things outside naturally engrossed considerable attention—Lord George, in due form, presented his petition, demanding its immediate consideration. During the heated debate that took place he repeatedly came to the top of the gallery-stairs to acquaint his supporters in the Lobby with the course taken by the discussion, and to denounce to them those—North

and Burke among others—who opposed his motion. By several of the members these ill-advised utterances were warmly resented. Walpole's friend, General Conway, publicly rebuked the reckless orator, whom others threatened with personal violence; and Colonel Murray,[1] his relative, appearing suddenly at his side, declared, in a voice audible to those below, that he would run his sword into Lord George's body the instant any of his Lordship's 'rascally adherents' presumed to enter the House. Eventually the Commons, courageously declining to be overawed by numbers—and the postulated twenty had now grown to about sixty thousand—adjourned consideration of the petition to Tuesday, 6 June. The dissatisfied concourse were therefore left to console themselves with their leader's optimistic assurance that he had no doubt King George the Third, being a gracious monarch, 'would send to his Ministers to repeal the Act when he saw the confusion it created'.[2] In the meantime Lord North had contrived to summon the Guards. But it was nearly nine before they made their appearance, and the vast assembly which had kept the two Houses besieged for many hours of a stifling June day, gradually dispersed. Yet, though the majority broke up in Westminster, there were

[1] In the *Annual Register* and *Barnaby Rudge* this name is given as Gordon. But in Walpole's *Letters*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and *Notes and Queries* it is Murray—i.e. Colonel James Murray of Strowan, Member for Perthshire, and uncle to the Duke of Athol.

[2] Erskine's *Speeches*, 1810, i. 63.

many of them still deliberately bent on mischief; and these—following the Scottish precedent—forthwith repaired to the Romish chapels of the Bavarian and Sardinian Ministers in Golden Square and Lincoln's Inn Fields, which—to use their own word—they 'gutted', and burned, carrying away silver lamps, vestments, and appointments. Tardily, as before, the troops arrived, and some thirteen of the rioters were lodged in the Savoy.

With the scenes that ensued, it will be best to deal in the time-table fashion adopted by Dr. Johnson to Mrs. Thrale. On Saturday, the 3rd, the rioters remained quiet; but on the afternoon of Sunday, the 4th, they assembled in force to attack the chapels and dwellings of the Roman Catholics in and about Moorfields. Altars, pulpits, pews, and furniture were ruthlessly broken up, nothing being left but bare walls. On Monday, the 5th, kept as the King's birthday, the mob paraded as far as Lord George's house in Welbeck Street, taking with them their spoils and trophies, which they burned in the then-adjacent fields. They afterwards made their way to Wapping and Smithfield, intent on similar depredations; but directing their efforts more especially against those who had given evidence with respect to the prisoners taken on the previous Friday. Sir George Savile, the introducer of the Act of 1778, was also singled out for retribution. He had been wary enough to remove his plate; but his historic house on the north side of Leicester Square was

completely stripped, its contents set fire to in the inclosure, and its iron railings converted into weapons of offence.

On the same day, in spite of the fact that the now contrite Protestant Association issued a handbill, signed by its President, deprecating 'all unconstitutional Proceedings', the Guards, who took three of the aforementioned prisoners from Bow Street to Newgate, were on their return pelted by the populace. On Tuesday, the 6th, the two Houses, the Tower and St. James's Palace were all in charge of the troops; but Lord Sandwich, driving to Westminster, was nevertheless assaulted. His coach was wrecked, he himself was cut about the face, and the Light Horse had the greatest difficulty in protecting him from further ill usage. In the evening a punitive party of the rioters demolished the house in St. Martin's Street of Justice Hyde, who had led the soldiers to Palace Yard. Between six and seven another party set out, by way of Long Acre and Holborn, for Newgate, bent on releasing their captured comrades. On the refusal of Boswell's friend, Mr. Akerman, the head keeper, to deliver them up without authority, they at once attacked and burned his house, subsequently piling his blazing furniture against the door of the prison, which, like the house, was speedily in flames, and the prisoners, some three hundred in number, including four under immediate sentence of death, were set at liberty, of course swelling the ranks of the malcontents. Other outrages followed these.

Justice Cox's house in Great Queen Street was burned; as also that in Bow Street of Sir John Fielding. At Clerkenwell Green the so-called New Prison was broken open, and the prisoners turned out; after which a more desperate gang attacked Lord Mansfield's famous mansion in the corner of Bloomsbury Square. Beginning by breaking the doors and windows, they went on to fling the contents of the rooms into the street, where large fires were ready lighted to receive them. They then burned the valuable library, some thousand volumes, including 'many capital manuscripts, mortgages, papers, and other deeds'. Priceless pictures[1] and sumptuous wearing apparel were also consigned to the flames, and the choice vintages of the cellars 'plentifully bestowed' on the populace. The Guards arriving, the Riot Act was read; and there was some half-hearted firing on the part of the soldiers. Nothing, however, could check the fury of the rabble, who literally pulled the building down, burning even the out-houses and stables, so that, in a short time, the whole was entirely consumed. Lord and Lady Mansfield had fortunately made their exit by a back door before the rioters got in. Not satisfied with what they had done, however, a party of miscreants set out to destroy his Lordship's country seat at Caen Wood, Hampstead. But

[1] Malone thought these included Pope's solitary effort at portraiture in oil. But this must have been safe at Caen Wood; for Pope's copy of Kneller's Betterton was exhibited at the National Portrait Exhibition in 1867 by the Earl of Mansfield (No. 61).

here, happily, they were forestalled, the house being protected by the Militia.

Lord Mansfield's household goods were still blazing fiercely at one o'clock on the morning of Wednesday 7 June—the blackest day in the record. In the forenoon the mob had the 'infernal humanity' to give notice that they intended to burn the Fleet, the King's Bench and other buildings, specifying in particular the premises of Mr. Thomas Langdale, a well-known Roman Catholic distiller in Holborn, next to Barnard's Inn. This plan of campaign was carried out so punctually that at nightfall some six-and-thirty fires are said to have been visible from London Bridge, burning simultaneously in different quarters of the city. At Mr. Langdale's the scene was 'horrible beyond description'. His vaults were stored with vast quantities of unrectified spirit which ran from the started casks in torrents down the street; and, when ignited, added to the fury of the flames. Numbers of rioters and onlookers drank greedily of the liquor; and were either suffocated at once or burned to death in a state of stupor. Others were buried in the ruins of the falling houses. But by this time the palsied authorities, galvanized into decision by the timely firmness of George the Third, had recovered from their deplorable lethargy. Detachments of Regulars and Militia came pouring into the Metropolis at many points. Gradually the field of action was contracted; and the insurgents were effectually checked. Attempts on the Pay Office

at Whitehall, and the Bank of England[1] (where Alderman Wilkes and Gibbon's friend, Col. Holroyd, afterwards Lord Sheffield, led the defending forces) were successfully repulsed; and by Thursday, the 8th, though the shops continued shut, and business remained at a standstill, it was plain that the protracted misrule had reached its close, and there was no longer anything to fear. Seventy-two private houses and four public jails had been destroyed.[2] Two hundred and eighty-five of the rioters are said to have been killed outright by the military; one hundred and seventy-three were wounded; fifty-nine were capitally convicted, and twenty-one of these were afterwards executed. But of those who died from intoxication or other causes, the number was never accurately ascertained. A large number of the escaped prisoners—it should be added—were speedily retaken, and placed once more in confinement.

In the first half of the last century there must have been not a few who, as children, remembered, with Raimbach the engraver, the roar of

[1] In attacking the Bank of England the rioters were led by a brewer's boy on a powerful dray-horse, which was caparisoned with fetters taken from Newgate. Dickens has remembered this in Chap. 67 of *Barnaby Rudge*, where such a charger is ridden by Hugh of the Maypole. Another instance of his minute study of his material is to be found in the death of the blind man, Stagg, in Chap. 69, who is killed by the soldiers, and runs full forty yards after he is hit. This is plainly suggested by a passage in the *Annual Register* 1780, p. 261, describing the destruction of the toll-gates at Blackfriars. 'One man, who was shot, ran thirty or forty yards before he dropped.'

[2] *Annual Register*, 1780, p. 281.

the rioters rushing through the streets and calling to all good citizens to illuminate—nay, there must have been those living who, like Walpole's printer Kirgate, had actually seen dead bodies lying by empty casks in Holborn. Many trustworthy eye-witnesses have left their impressions of this terrible time; and most of the contemporary memoir writers refer to one or other of the incidents which came under their especial notice. Walpole, Gibbon, Burke, Johnson, Susan Burney, Crabbe, Wraxall, Angelo—all contribute their quota, confirmatory or otherwise, to the body of evidence. To Walpole, the arch-priest of the *nouvelles à la main,* who scribbles off daily letters to Mann and Mason and Lady Ossory on the reigning theme, one naturally turns first, though much of what he has to say is the merest hand-to-mouth gossip (including, of course, Selwyn's latest 'mot' thereon) which to-morrow will contradict, and it is safer to trust to what he has actually seen than to those 'first reports' he has heard. Personally he had 'disliked and condemned the repeal of the Popish statutes', but he was equally averse from reformation by massacre; and for him Lord George is a 'lunatic', an 'archincendiary', the 'ruffian apostle that preached up the storm', etc. He confirms generally the occurrences in Palace Yard, decorating them, of course, in his own inimitable way; and he also makes mention more than once of the intervention of Colonel Murray. Lord Mansfield (of whom he disapproved) he describes as 'quivering on the woolsack like an aspen', which, seeing that he was

a septuagenarian who had been in imminent danger, was not unnatural. Of the burning of the Chapels on the same day, Walpole writes to Lady Ossory on 3 June: 'The mob forced the Sardinian Minister's chapel in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and gutted it. He saved nothing but two chalices; lost the silver lamps, etc., and the benches being tossed into the street, were food for a bonfire, with the blazing brands of which they set fire to the inside of the chapel, nor, till the Guards arrived, would suffer the engines to play. My Cousin, T[homas] Walpole, fetched poor Madam Cordon,[1] who was ill, and guarded her in his house till three in the morning, when all was quiet.'

The Chapel of St. Anselm and St. Cecilia was the oldest Roman Catholic place of worship in London, which was probably why it was selected for destruction by the wirepullers of the mob. As a connoisseur, Walpole should have regretted the loss of its bautiful altar-piece by the Chevalier Casali, alleged to have cost £2,500. To Count Haslang, the Bavarian envoy, he is unsympathetic: 'Old Haslang's Chapel was broken open and plundered; and, as he is a prince of smugglers as well as Bavarian Minister, great quantities of run tea and contraband goods were found in his house. This one cannot lament; and still less, as the old wretch has for these forty years usurped a hired house, and, though the proprietor for many years

[1] The Sardinian Minister was the Marquis de Cordon.

has offered to remit his arrears of rent, he will neither quit the house nor pay for it.'[1]

Of the depredations of Sunday, Walpole says little, as he had returned to Strawberry Hill to avoid the official Birthday (Monday the 5th), and for the next occurrences we must go to a fresh witness, Fanny Burney's lively sister, Susan, then resident with her family in Sir Isaac Newton's old house, No. 1, St. Martin's Street, Leicester Square, the Observatory of which afforded exceptional opportunities for surveying the scenes in their immediate neighbourhood.[2] From this coign of vantage they saw the whole of Leicester Square lighted up by Sir George Savile's burning property. 'They [the mob] had piled up the furniture in the midst of the Square, and had forced Sir George's servant to bring them a candle to set fire to it. They would doubtless

[1] to Sir Horace Mann, 5 June, 1780

[2] ise,' once No. 1, and latterly No. 35, St. Martin's Street, the resi ence from 1710 to 1725 of Sir Isaac Newton; and from 1774, at many years subsequently, of Dr. Charles Burney, the musician, s now pulled down. The 'Observatory,' to which Susan Burney fers, existed in 1778, since Fanny Burney tells us expressly that father went to the expense of practically reconstructing it aft the hurricane of that year. Parts of her first novel, *Evelina*, were written in this 'square turret'. It is consolatory to learn from a letter of Mr. Hugh Phillips to the *Times* of 4 December 1913, that this historic dwelling has not fallen a prey to the housewrecker; and that it has been removed 'in sections carefully packed and numbered', to Hitchin, where its re-erection is contemplated. That this may come to pass is devoutly to be wished, if only to justify Lord Macaulay's too-sanguine prediction in the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1843, that the building would 'continue to be well known as long as our island retains any trace of civilisation'. Meanwhile a useful memorial of it exists in Miss Constance Hill's pleasant volume entitled *The House in St. Martin's Street* 1907, to which we are indebted for our extracts from Susan Burney's unpublished Diary.

have set the house itself on fire [also] had not the Horse and Foot Guards prevented [their doing so].' This was early on Monday, the 5th. Next day came the retributory burning of Justice Hyde's, which was in St. Martin's Street itself.[1] 'From our windows we saw them throw chairs, tables, clothes, in short everything the house contained, into the street, and as there was too much furniture for *one* fire, they made several. I counted six of these fires, which reached from the bottom of the street up to the crossing which separates Orange and Blue Cross Streets. Such a scene I never before beheld! As it grew dusk, the wretches who were involved in smoke and covered with dust, with the flames glaring upon them. . . . seemed like so many infernals. . . .

One thing was remarkable and convinced me that the mob was secretly directed by somebody above themselves:—they brought an engine with them, and while they pulled Hyde's house to pieces and threw everything they found into the flames, they ordered the engine to play on the neighbouring houses to prevent their catching fire.'[2]

Early that morning Mrs. Burney, Susan's step-mother, had seen Burke pass through St. Martin's

[1] *The Gentleman's Magazine* says Hyde's house was in Lisle Street. But Lisle Street lies north of Leicester Square; and Susan Burney places the house towards the bottom of 'our street', i.e. St. Martin's Street on the southern side. Lisle Street has, however, its memories of these troublous days, since Francis Wheatley's great picture of the Riots, being too large to be removed, was destroyed here at a fire in the house of James Heath, who engraved it for Boydell (Edward's *Anecdotes of Painters*, 1808, p. 269).

[2] *The House in St. Martin's Street*, 1907, p. 257.

Street, beset by a crowd who wished to extort from him a promise that he would vote for the repeal of the Act. 'My mother . . . heard him say: "I beseech you, gentlemen; gentlemen, I beg——".' Finally he was obliged to draw his sword in order to free himself from their importunities. He was lucky to escape. He had been denounced with North by Lord George at Westminster, as opposing the repeal; and if his house in Charles Street, St. James's Square, had not been stoutly garrisoned by sixteen soldiers, it would probably have shared the fate of that of Sir George Savile.

One of the diarist's entries illustrates the difficulties of the military. An Ensign and thirty Foot Guards marched into the street, and after a few words to the rioters from the officer, marched out again, 'the mob shouting and clapping the soldiers on their backs as they passed.' The soldiers were as unwilling to use force as the magistrates were to send for the soldiers; and Walpole mentions a brother-in-law of Lord George, who had 'to conceal himself' because he had given orders to fire at Bloomsbury Square. Such a state of things Johnson had foreseen four years before when he said: 'the characteristic of our own government at present is imbecility. The magistrate dare not call the guards for fear of being hanged. The guards will not come, for fear of being given up to the blind rage of popular juries.'[1]

[1]Hill's *Boswell's Johnson*, 1887, iii, p. 46.

At night-time the watchers from the St. Martin's Street Observatory saw the flames ascending from Sir John Fielding's house and office in Bow Street; from Newgate; and from Lord Mansfield's. Concerning this last, there is not much to add, save that Parson Warner, Selwyn's chaplain and Thackeray's Sampson, found, or professed to have found, a page of Virgil from the famous library—the 'letter'd store' of which Cowper wrote—fluttering in the enclosure. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*—was the legend on this fugitive fragment. Many similar relics, charred and stained, were for a long time preserved in Caen Wood; but 'silver-tongued Murray' is said to have regretted most of all the loss of his manuscript of a speech on the privilege of Parliament which he considered contained all the law and the eloquence he possessed. To this, possibly, Cowper intended to refer in the neat copy of verses he sent to William Unwin:

> And MURRAY sighs o'er Pope and Swift,
> And many a treasure more,
> The well-judg'd purchase and the gift
> That grac'd his letter'd store.
>
> *Their* pages mangled, burnt, and torn,
> The loss was *his alone*;
> But ages yet to come shall mourn
> The burning of *his own*.

Sir John Fielding had also to lament the destruction of his furniture, effects, and 'writings'—a lament with which posterity may fairly sympathize, as they probably included some of the

rare letters and MSS. of the great novelist who was his half-brother and predecessor. But if details are scanty as to Bow Street and Bloomsbury Square, they are abundant concerning the burning of Newgate. George Crabbe, the poet, who, with three pounds in his pocket, had come to London in the previous April to seek his fortune, was still seeking it when, wandering aimlessly homeward to his lodging near the Royal Exchange, he turned out of Ludgate Hill at about half-past seven on Tuesday evening (the 6th) to discover the mob already occupied in firing Mr. Akerman's house: 'As I was standing near the spot [he writes in his journal to Miss Elmy, the Mira of his affections], there approached another body of men, I suppose 500, and Lord George Gordon in a coach, drawn by the mob towards Alderman Bull's [the seconder of his motion in the House of Commons], bowing as he passed along. He is a lively looking young man in appearance, and nothing more, though just now *the reigning hero.*[1] *By eight o'clock, Akerman's house was in flames. I went close to it, and never saw anything so dreadful. The prison* was, as I said, a remarkably strong building; but, determined to force it, they broke the gates with crows and other instruments, and climbed up the outside of the cell part, which joins the two great wings of the building, where the felons were confined; and I stood where I plainly saw their operations. They broke the

[1] This was on the 6th when he left the House of Commons.

roof, tore away the rafters, and having got ladders they descended. . . . Flames all around them, and a body of soldiers expected, they defied and laughed at all opposition. The prisoners escaped. I stood and saw about twelve women and eight men ascend from their confinement to the open air, and they were conducted through the streets in their chains . . . . You have no conception of the frenzy of the multitude. This being done, and Akerman's house now a mere shell of brick-work, they kept a store of flame there for other purposes. It became red hot, and the doors and windows appeared like the entrances to so many volcanoes. With some difficulty they then fired the debtor's prison—broke the doors—and they, too, all made their escape. Tired of the scene, I went home. . . .'[1]

At eleven o'clock he returned to find Newgate 'open to all', for the incendiaries had transferred their operations to Bloomsbury Square. Another spectator of the attack upon Newgate was Henry Angelo, the fencing-master, who, hiring for six-pence a garret-window opposite, had a full view of the whole—the first onslaught with pick-axes and sledge hammers, the breaking open of the debtor's-door, the subsequent rising of smoke from different points, and 'a new species of jail delivery'. 'The captives marched out with all the honours of war, accompanied by a musical band of rattling fetters,' which Angelo presently heard

[1] Crabbe's *Works*, 1834, i, p. 83.

being knocked off in the neighbouring houses.[1] Next day (the 7th) Dr. Johnson who, at Bolt Court, was not far off, visited the ruins: 'On Wednesday [he writes to Mrs. Thrale] I walked with Dr. Scot [afterwards Lord Stowell] to look at Newgate, and found it in ruins, with the fire yet glowing. As I went by, the Protestants were plundering the Sessions-house at the Old Bailey. There were not, I believe, a hundred; but they did their work at leisure, in full security without sentinels, without trepidation, as men lawfully employed, in full day. Such is the cowardice of a commercial place.'[2]

And then he goes on to enumerate the incidents of 'Black Wednesday', when one might watch, as Walpole watched from the roof of Gloucester House in Upper Grosvenor Street, 'the glare of conflagration fill the sky', and listen hourly to fresh tidings of new enormities at Blackfriars and Holborn.

With the 7th came the King's Proclamation, and the belated issue of General Orders authorizing the military to 'use force for dispersing the illegal and tumultuous assemblies of the people'. Wraxall, who, though he mixes up his dates, seems to have witnessed the burning of Lord Mansfield's house, the 'sublime sight' of the King's Bench in flames, and the terrible scenes at Langdale's distilleries, says at this point: 'From the instant that the three Bridges over the Thames

[1] Angelo's *Reminiscences*, 1830, ii, p. 147-8.
[2] Hill's *Johnson's Letters*, 1892, ii, p. 169.

were occupied by regular troops, the danger was at an end. This awful convulsion, which, on Wednesday, the *seventh* of June, seemed to menace the destruction of everything; was so completely quelled, and so suddenly extinguished, that on the *eighth,* hardly a spark survived of the popular effervescence. Some few persons in the Borough of Southwark,[1] attempted to repeat the outrages of Wednesday; but they were easily and immediately quelled by the military force. Never was a contrast exhibited more striking, than between those two evenings, in the same city![2] The patrols of Cavalry, stationed in the Squares and great streets throughout the West End of the Town, gave London the aspect of a Garrison; while the Camp which was immediately afterwards formed in St. James's Park, afforded a picturesque landscape; both sides of the Canal, from the Queen's House (i.e. Buckingham House) down to the vicinity of the Horse Guards, being covered with tents and troops.'[3]

[1] *Thrale's Brewery* in Deadman's Place, Southwark, was naturally visited. But here, on the first occasion, 'the clamorous crowd is hush'd by mugs of rum.' Judiciously exhibiting some £50 worth of meat and drink, Mr. Perkins, the Superintendent, contrived to send them away. When they returned they were confronted by soldiers (Hill's *Boswell's Life of Johnson,* 1887, iii. p. 435).

[2] This is confirmed by Mr. Urban's chronicler: 'The writer of this paragraph, whose residence is at a small but equal distance from three dreadful fires which at the same period were blazing on the Wednesday night, when he was surrounded by hundreds of families who were distractedly employed in removing their children and their valuables, sat down to his literary amusements on Thursday night as uninterruptedly as if he had resided on Salisbury Plain. Not a human voice was to be heard!' (*Gentleman's Magazine,* August 1780, p. 369).

[3] Wraxall's *Historical Memoirs of my own Time,* 1904, p. 207.

'This audacious tumult is prefectly quelled,' wrote Gibbon to his stepmother on the 10th. On the 27th he writes again: 'The measures of Government have been seasonable and vigorous [!]; and even opposition has been forced to confess, that the military force was applied and regulated with the utmost propriety. Our danger is at an end, but our disgrace will be lasting, and the month of June 1780, will ever be marked by a dark and diabolical fanaticism, which I had supposed to be extinct, but which actually subsists in Great Britain, perhaps beyond any other country in Europe.'[1]

Meanwhile, on 9 June, the President of the London Protestant Association, to whose illstarred plan for placing his Petition before Parliament these deplorable scenes were the calamitous sequel, had been arrested at his house in Welbeck Street, examined by a Committee at the War Office, and escorted to the Tower in charge of an exceptionally strong military guard. He had—it was alleged by his friends—taken no active part in the riots; he had even gone fruitlessly to Buckingham House to offer King George his assistance in checking them, and it was afterwards testified by Sir James Lowther, in whose carriage Lord George had left the House of Commons on the 6th, that he had earnestly entreated the mob to go home and be quiet. Whilst confined in the Tower, he was well supplied with books; and is reported to have devoted himself, among other

[1] Gibbon's *Corr.* 1896, i, p. 382.

things, to the study of the ten folio volumes of the State Trials. According to Malone[1] he applied for 'a Protestant clergyman, a Popish priest, a Presbyterian preacher, and an Anabaptist to be sent to him: but his wishes were not complied with. He then requested to have a fiddler, which was readily granted.' But he was certainly visited, with Lord Stormont's permission, by John Wesley, who, on 19 December, spent an hour with him, conversing about Popery and religion. Wesley found him well acquainted with the Bible; and was agreeably surprised to note that he did not complain of any person or thing.[2] After being imprisoned for eight months, on 5 February 1781 he was tried in the court of King's Bench on a charge of High Treason. His senior counsel was Lloyd (afterwards Lord) Kenyon; the junior, Thomas, later Lord Erskine, then a young man of thirty-one. Lord Mansfield, the aged Lord Chief Justice, presided. The Crown brought witnesses to show that the riots had been the preconcerted results of the demonstration connected with the presentation of the petition; and that Gordon, as the prime mover of that demonstration, was guilty of treason, or—to speak precisely—of what was then legally known as *constructive* treason, that is, something 'equivalent to treason, though not intended or realized as such'. In this connexion, special stress was laid on the fact that he had signed a

[1] Charlemont *Corr.*, Hist. MSS. Comm., 1891, i, p. 374.
[2] *Wesley's Journal*, 1901, iv, p. 185.

protection by which a house in Long Acre was saved from destruction. But Kenyon's merciless cross-examination of the witnesses, particularly of one William Hay, made havoc of some of the evidence for the prosecution, while Erskine, in a concluding speech occupying some sixty octavo pages of print, and marked by extraordinary forensic ability, addressed the jury on behalf of the prisoner. His main contention was that those petitioners of 2 June, who belonged to the Protestant Association, had been orderly and peaceable in their intentions ; that his client had neither part nor lot in the excesses that ensued—excesses that were 'at the very worst, unforeseen, undesigned, unabetted and deeply regretted consequences'; and that, in the meaning of the statute, Gordon was in no wise guilty. These arguments, admirably marshalled and supported, must have had their weight with the jury, who, at a quarter after five o'clock on the morning of 6 February, returned a verdict of 'Not Guilty'—a verdict which, according to Erskine's editor, James Ridgway, was 'repeated from mouth to mouth to the uttermost extremities of London, by the multitudes which filled the streets'. Dr. Johnson's comment on the finding as recorded by Boswell, is characteristic : 'He said he was glad Lord George Gordon had escaped, rather than that a precedent should be established for hanging a man for *constructive treason*.'[1]

'Escaped'—it will be observed—is Johnson's

[1] Hill's *Boswell's Johnson*, 1887, iv, p. 87.

word; and there can be no question that Gordon owed much to the able advocacy of Erskine, who, by the way, besides being a compatriot of his own age, had also begun life as a midshipman. But the precise amount of Lord George's responsibility for the riots is extremely difficult to establish.[1] By his contemporary apologists it is urged that his notification of 29 May had the misfortune to attract in the train of the guileless Protestant Association a host of disreputable auxiliaries, 'thieves, pick-pockets, house-breakers' and the like, to whom the 'No Popery' cry meant nothing but a call to disorder; and who were, in fact, an unsolicited and unwelcome contingent from that large, dangerous, and powerful body, the Mob, which, eight and twenty years before, Henry Fielding had ironically termed the real Fourth Estate. They feared, he said, two orders of men only; the justices of the peace and the soldiery—both of which preservers of public tranquillity had, in the occurrences of June 1780, owing to the inactivity of the authorities, for some time left them a free hand. Beginning, for form's sake, with the burning of Popish chapels, impunity had rapidly hurried them on to the destruction of private property, the demolition of public institutions, and to spoliation generally. All this

[1] Dr. F. A. Wendeborn, Pastor of the German Church on Ludgate-Hill, and a witness of the riots, says: 'Lord George Gordon himself, I am convinced, when he began to assemble the mob, never dreamt that matters would be carried to such a height.' He also held that 'no premeditated plan was previously formed by the rioters' (*View of England towards the Close of the XVIIIth Century*, 1791, ii, p. 454).

may be true. At the same time it is impossible to hold with the *Gentleman's Magazine,* that the Protestant Association of Coachmakers' Hall were merely 'a set of well-meaning men (*who could not have been aware of the consequences*)[1] met for the defence of the established religion'. The 'consequences' in Scotland had been riots and the burning of Popish chapels; and these were precisely the consequences in England, aggravated by special social conditions, and assuredly not modified by the stimulating speeches and reckless rhetoric of Gordon himself, who must have been simplicity personified if he did not know th preaching constitutional restraint to an excitat audience is the idlest of injunctions. To kindl dangerously combustible material is clearly a serious crime, which cannot be condoned on the flimsy pretence that you did not afterwards feed the fire. Yet it was mainly on this latter plea that Gordon was acquitted.

By the historians he has been treated no better than by Horace Walpole. He is a 'crack-brained member of parliament', a 'half-crazy fanatic', and so forth. John Forster, who was a Commissioner of Lunacy, regarded him as a madman; and thought those pages of *Barnaby Rudge* in which he appeared were the feeblest parts of the book. Dickens, on the contrary, found redeeming points in his 'Protestant hero'. He must, he contended, 'have been at heart a kind man, and a lover of the despised and rejected, after his own fashion.'

[1] The italics are the writer's.

He lived upon a small income, and always within it; was known to relieve the necessities of many people. . . . He always spoke on the people's side, and tried against his muddled brains to expose the profligacy of both parties. He never got anything by his madness, and never sought it'.[1] To this may be added that he was certainly fearless; that he must have possessed considerable persuasive powers as a platform speaker, and that, having gone through the rude discipline of the six years' probation of bad air, bad food, nd bad manners, which characterized the orlop :k of a Georgian man-of-war, he could scarcely , ,e emerged without some experimental knowge of humanity in the rough.

Unfortunately, the remaining incidents of his career enforce rather than extenuate the debatable aspect of his personality. In 1784 we find him girt with a Highland broadsword, donning a Dutch uniform, and inciting the British seaman, with whom, as an ex-lieutenant, he had naturally a certain authority, to take up arms for the Dutch against the Emperor Joseph. Two years later he is championing the cause of another 'friend of mankind', Carlyle's 'Sicilian jail-bird', Cagliostro; and libelling Marie Antoinette for 'publicly persecuting' that egregious impostor. Then he is accused of libelling British justice, in a bogus 'Prisoners' Petition' against transportation, addressed to, but composed by, himself. For these latter exploits, in 1787–8, he was tried and

[1] Forster's *Life of Dickens*, ii. Ch. ix.

eventually sentenced to five years' confinement in Newgate. Already he had become a convert to Judaism—gaberdine and long beard included. In Newgate he lived on the whole not unagreeably, occupying apartments on the Master's side; playing the bagpipes; entertaining friends and admirers daily; giving fortnightly balls, and, between whiles, vainly petitioning the French National Assembly to intervene for his release. At the expiration of his sentence, failing to find securities for his good behaviour, he remained in custody, dying at length of jail-fever on the 1st of November 1793 in his forty-second year. 'The Convention have lost a good friend,' was Horace Walpole's comment. His last act was to sing the revolutionary 'Carillon National' of 'Ça ira'. Being refused Jewish burial he was privately interred in the graveyard of St James's Chapel in the Hampstead Road. No stone marks the spot.

XVI

EDMUND BURKE

THE two most pathetic figures in political history are two of the greatest men who have adorned it, Demosthenes and Burke. Both, animated by the purest motives, patriots to the innermost fibre, with no thought, with no aim but for the public good, wore out their lives in leading forlorn hopes and in fighting losing battles. Both were prophets with the curse of Cassandra upon them, to be found wise after the event, to be believed when all was lost. Who can read the *Philippics* and *Olynthiacs,* who can read the *Speeches on American Taxation* and on *Conciliation with America,* without indignant astonishment at the stupidity and supineness of those whom such irresistible logic could not convince, such overpowering eloquence arouse? But Demosthenes saw Athens at the feet of a Macedonian despot, and Burke saw England dismembered of America and at war with half the world. Of the superhuman efforts made by the great Athenian to retrieve the disasters in which the neglect of his warnings had involved his countrymen, there was not one which was not thwarted either by a cruel fortune or by the perfidy and levity of those whom he was striving in their

own despite to save. Burke's failures and baffled virtues resulted in less tragical issues it is true, but they must have been equally mortifying and grievous. To frame measures and propose schemes the nobleness and luminous wisdom of which posterity was to discover, and to see them ignored or defeated by corrupt and selfish factions and by his own timid colleagues; to address to empty benches masterpieces of political wisdom eloquent with an eloquence the like of which mankind had never heard since Cicero; to be the one man who solved correctly almost every political problem of his time, only to find himself denounced as a visionary and fanatic—such was Burke's experience of public life. On the losing side in every important action of his life, he was on the losing side to the last, perishing miserably amid the ruins of his party and the wreck of his hopes. If the closing scene in the life of Demosthenes is more awfully impressive, it is scarcely more pathetic than the scene on which the curtain fell at Beaconsfield. History has done justice to Demosthenes, it has not done justice to Burke. The Whigs have never forgiven him for creating a schism in the party, and have availed themselves of his grave errors with regard to certain aspects of the Revolution to represent him, if they wish to speak tenderly of him, as a madman; if they wish to speak harshly, as an apostate. But he was neither a madman nor an apostate. He was a very wise and a very honest man. Assuming as he did that the Revolution on the Continent was a

precedent for a similar revolution in England and that what was at stake was nothing less than the whole fabric of our social and political system, he was perfectly justified in taking—it was imperative on him as a patriot to take—the course he did. Once taken and the fire kindled in him, the rest followed. He never deserted his party ; his party deserted him.

Of all the charges which have been brought against Burke the most baseless is the charge of inconsistency. Lord Brougham has said that it would be difficult to select one leading principle or prevailing sentiment in Burke's later writings to which something extremely adverse may not be found in his former. It may be at once conceded that on a superficial view of Burke's attitude towards the constitutional struggle of which Wilkes was the centre, towards the American Revolution, and towards economical reform, and of his attitude towards the Revolution in France and the revolutionary party in England, there seems much to justify the charge. It would be very easy to marshal an array of sentiments and opinions drawn from the *Thougths on the . . . . Present Discontents,* the American speeches, and the speech on economical reform against an array of sentiments and opinions culled from the *Reflections* and the *Letters on a Regicide Peace,* and ask triumphantly in what way they can be reconciled. It would be easy to point out that in 1772 he supported a Bill for granting the Dissenters privileges from which they were

excluded by the Test Act, and that in 1790 he opposed a Bill granting them those privileges. But if we look a little carefully into them we shall find that these seeming inconsistencies are easily reconciled, that Burke's political creed in 1796 was precisely what it was in 1771, that it had changed in no article whatever. What had changed were circumstances, and the change in Burke was no change in principles and tenets but in the part he was forced to play—the attitude he was compelled to assume for the conservation of those tenets and principles.

A short sketch of his career[1] till the breaking out of the Revolution will help us to understand how much of a piece that part of his life and conduct which those who taunt him with apostasy deplore and execrate, and excuse only on the ground that he had become half-insane, was with that part of it to which they point with pride and gratitude. Few men have entered public life so admirably equipped for its duties and so peculiarly predisposed, both by circumstances and training, to approach it in a large and liberal spirit. With his father a Protestant, his mother a Roman Catholic, and his first teacher a Quaker, he was not only entirely free from religious prejudices but, what was more important, had had it early brought home to him that truth, and fruitful truth, has many sides. These early surroundings certainly go far to account for one of Burke's most striking

[1] He was born at Dublin probably in 1729, but even the year of his birth is uncertain.

characteristics—his flexible and hospitable mind. The variety of his studies at Trinity College, Dublin, and the ardour with which he pursued them we all know—how at one time he devoted himself to mathematics and had his *furor mathematicus*; then betook himself to logic, till the *furor logicus* yielded to a passionate devotion to history; the *furor historicus* yielded in its turn to the *furor poeticus*. Leaving Trinity College with immense stores of the most varied acquirements, having indeed surveyed, within the measure of a youth's capacity, almost the whole area of learning, he betook himself to London. There his literary occupations—among them the political survey of Europe in the *Annual Register*, and a *History of the American Settlement*, as well as his duties and opportunities while in the service of William Gerard Hamilton—were of invaluable service to him in his political education. In the year 1765 he was, by the influence of Lord Verney, returned to Parliament for the borough of Wendover. The party to which he attached himself and in the cause of which he laboured so long as it retained its identity was the party led by the Marquis of Rockingham. It was a party distinguished by its integrity, its disinterestedness, its moderation, and its consistency during a time of almost unexampled political profligacy and incompetence. It was the party which retained in their purity the principles of that great Whig party which had brought about the Revolution of 1688: with those principles it never paltered. It

upheld them while the subserviency of a selfish faction to an obstinate and tyrannical king and the feuds and dissensions of what should have constituted the opposition to this tyranny imperilled our liberties, lost us America, and brought us to the lowest point of national depression. It upheld them when a third power, called into being by the natural course of progress and into importance through being made the counters with which these factions played their game—namely, what is now known as the democracy—was threatening to turn the scale to the opposite extreme. The Ark of the Covenant of this party was the Constitution of 1688, their aim the maintenance of a due equipoise between the principles represented by monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. But we must guard carefully against attaching to democracy the sense it bears now. The 'people' were then, politically speaking, non-existent and were absolutely unrepresented having no share at all in the direction of affairs ; in fact, the democracy in our sense of the term was an unknown quantity in the Constitution of 1688. The democratic element was represented by the Commons, and the Commons were, as political agents, the nominees either of the Crown or of the aristocracy and great landed classes, or members of these last bodies. It would be a great mistake to associate Burke at any period of his career with democratic ideas. The only parliamentary reform he and his party ever contemplated was to readjust the balance in the Commons between the representatives of the

aristocracy and the representatives of the Crown—a balance which was then overwhelmingly preponderant on the Crown's side—and to infuse, but very cautiously, an element representing the interests of the great mercantile classes. His Ark of the Covenant was, let me repeat, the Constitution of 1688. That was his ideal : on the preservation of that depended, in his belief, the safety, the prosperity, the glory of the English nation.

This places us in the very centre of Burke's political ideals, explains his motives of action, and enables us to reconcile his policy and position between 1790 and 1796 with his policy and position between 1765 and 1789. As the Constitution which he so nobly describes had been the result of compromise, of a cautious and sober adjustment of the principles of prescription to the principles of progress ; as it combined the results of purified experiment with the results of a spirit of reverent conservatism, so it became ideally, as he himself has said, a sort of Bible to him. And a Bible in a double sense—a Bible which he believed contained the gospel of England's political salvation, and a Bible out of which he derived the teaching which guided his actions and moulded and coloured the whole of his public conduct and policy. If we look at all the chief events with which he was associated before the breaking out of the Revolution and note the part he played in them, we observe the same prudent moderation, the same spirit of compromise. Thus, with regard to the American Revolution, he upheld the imperial

authority and maintained the right of England to tax, but deprecated the exercise of that right on the ground of inexpediency. Thus he was wholly in favour of relaxing the commercial and legislative restriction on the Anglo-Irish, and even lost his seat in supporting a Bill in favour of alleviation; but though he tried to educate his party on the Irish question, he never pressed the matter further. Thus he at first supported Clarkson in his crusade against the slave-trade, but abandoned the attempt for fear of injuring his party by alienating the West Indian interest. Then he opposed Parliamentary reform on the ground that it would lessen the power of those orders in the State who had the greatest stake in the country. Thus in 1790 he refused the Dissenters the relief he had been willing to give them in 1772 because the time was not propitious to such indulgence. The same moderation marked his scheme for economical reform. He resisted all attempts which involved radical changes in any essential part of the Constitution. 'I heave,' he said, 'the lead every inch of the way I make.' In his notes on the Amendment to the Address, 1774, he has a typical passage:

> Nothing is more beautiful in the theory of Parliaments than that principle of renovation and union, of permanency and change that are happily mixed in their constitution; that in all our changes we are never wholly old or wholly new; that there are enough of the old to preserve unbroken the traditional chain

of the maxims and policies of our ancestors and the law and custom of Parliament, and enough of the new to invigorate us and bring us to our true character by being taken from the mass of the people : and the whole, though mostly composed of the old members, have, notwithstanding, a new character and may have the advantage of change without the imputation of inconstancy.

He says in another place :

> The old building stands well enough, though part Gothic, part Grecian and part Chinese, until an attempt is made to square it into uniformity. Then indeed it may come down upon our heads all together in much conformity of ruin : and great will be the fall thereof.[1]

But he has no objection to modification, and he would have the fabric elastic, for a State without the means of change is without the means of its conservation. His political philosophy is penetrated with the same spirit : it is of the essence of compromise : its criteria are the possible, the expedient, the becoming : it is not concerned with abstract principles except in their bounded application to facts and circumstances.[1]

> Circumstances (he writes) give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or obnoxious to mankind.[2]

[1] *Observations on the Present State of the Nation.*
[2] *Reflections on the French Revolution.*

As Mr. Payne has observed, what a German metaphysical theologian at the end of the last century, after many wearisome attempts to square religion with abstract principles, observed of Christianity, *Das Christenthun ist keine Philosophie,* may be exactly applied to Burke's conception of politics, *Die Politik ist keine Philosophie.* It is purely empirical, not a matter of rules and ideas but of observation and practice : it is a computing principle : what it has to deal with are differences of good, are compromises sometimes between good and evil, sometimes between evil and evil—for it works 'standing on earth, not rapt above the pole'. Hence his defence of party in answer to the rhodomontade of Bolingbroke, and his constant insistence on the necessity of fidelity to party interests at almost any cost, except when issues of important moment to the welfare of mankind are imperilled.

> I can see (said his friend Dr. Johnson) that a man may do right to stick to a party ; that is to say, he is a Whig or he is a Tory, and he thinks that one of those parties upon the whole the best and that to make it prevail it must be generally supported, though in particulars it may be wrong. He takes its faggot of principles in which there are fewer rotten sticks than in the other, though some rotten sticks to be sure, and they cannot well be separated.[1]

This was exactly Burke's view, and in Rocking-

[1] Boswell's *Tour to the Hebrides.*

ham's party, in its faggot principles and aims, there were certainly far fewer rotten sticks than in the faggot of any other party in Burke's time. It is not, he contended, a question whether monarchy, whether oligarchy, whether democracy, are in themselves desirable, but whether in their purity or their combination they are fitted to the needs of a particular community. Thus he argued of the revolution that if a great change were to be made in human affairs the minds of men would be fitted to it : the general opinions and feelings would draw that way ; and that those who persisted in opposing this mighty current in human affairs would appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself than the mere designs of men. The late Lord Coleridge once said to a friend of mine, an enthusiastic young barrister, 'You cannot greatly help justice till you have ceased greatly to care for her.' This was putting it a little cynically, but it exactly indicates Burke's conception of the relation of abstract ideals to the possibility of what can be realized. He had as little confidence as Bishop Butler in the perfectibility either of man or of the world. Facts are facts, and they must be confronted. He had no sympathy with the democracy and yet he wrote :

> In all disputes between them (the people) and their rulers, the presumption is at least upon a par in favour of the people . . . The people have no interest in disorder.[1]

[1] *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents.*

So with respect to the American colonists he said :

> The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable ; but whether it is not your interest to make them happy.[1]

And again :

> I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people.[2]

In temper and constitution Burke was one of the noblest men who ever lived, a patriot as pure as Hampden and Washington, a philanthropist as ardent as Howard and Clarkson, as passionate a lover of liberty, justice and light, as passionate a hater of all that impeded them, as any man who has ever been in the van of aspiring humanity, as his career between 1765 and 1789 shows, and shows conclusively. But his sagacity and practical wisdom, his knowledge of human nature and of the conditions and laws under which life moves and men work, kept all this from wasting itself either in Quixotic action or in Quixotic speech. 'I pitched,' he said, referring to the outset of his political life, 'my ideas of liberty low that they might stick to me and that I might stick to them to the end of my life.' No man was ever more free from Utopian delusions. No man ever so shy of drawing bills on hope for experience to discount. What had actually been achievable and what was demonstrably possible bounded the horizon of his

[1] *Speech on Conciliation with America.*
[2] Ibid.

political sympathies and of his political aspirations. It is in such passages as the peroration of his speech on conciliation with America that his greatness is seen. Here burst into flame and blaze—for they could serve occasion—the patriotism, the philanthropy, the love of justice, liberty and light which ever glowed an intense but suppressed fire within him. Here pure reason, plain sense, and simple facts, penetrated with passion and clad in glorious apparel, seem like the raptures of the poet.

The Revolution found Burke in the vigour of his genius and of his intellectual powers, but depressed, harassed, and broken by four-and-twenty years of almost superhuman labours. He had failed in everything except in bringing Warren Hastings to trial. He had seen America torn from England, Government a chaos of factions, his party wrecked, its remnant hurried into follies and crimes which had first disgraced and then proscribed it. And now the last and saddest chapter in his troubled life was to open.

In May 1789 met the States-General. In July of the same year the Bastille was taken. Then followed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Decree of the Fourth of August, and the irruption of the mob into the palace of Versailles.

These events drew from Burke in November 1790 his *Reflections,* though the work was directly called forth on account of an address given by a Dr. Richard Price, a Nonconformist minister, to the Revolutionary Society. Contrary to the

view taken by Price, Burke fiercely attacked the revolution in these *Reflections* and in his subsequent writings, viz. *Thoughts on French Affairs and a Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* in which he prophesied the course things were certain to take :

> The shifting tides of fear and hope, the flight and the pursuit, the peril and escape, the alternate famine and feasts of the savage and the thief, after a time render all course of slow, steady, progressive, unvaried occupation, and the prospect only of a limited mediocrity at the end of long labour, to the last degree tame, languid, and insipid. . . . They will assassinate the King when his name will no longer be necessary to their designs. . . . They will probably first assassinate the Queen.[1]

Meanwhile he had set the kingdom on fire, having previously broken with Fox and Sheridan and split the Whig party in two. Then came out in answer to the numerous attacks on him *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,* 1791, in which he demonstrates that it is not he who has changed, but they : that he remains true to the old flag—that of the true Whigs—while they have gone off into mad democrats and incendiaries to break up and ruin the noble English Constitution, the Ark of the Old Covenant. The Whigs of this day, he concludes by saying, have before them in this appeal their constitutional ancestors : they have the doctors of the modern school. They will

[1] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly.*

choose for themselves. The Author of the *Reflections* has chosen for himself. The *Conduct of the Minority* written two years later, is a defence of his own conduct, and an arraignment of that of Fox and his friends. Meanwhile the revolution had been proceeding just as Burke had prophesied, horror on horror accumulating. The King had been executed, war had been declared between England and France, the Armed Coalition was melting away. England and Austria were left alone. France was in the hands of the Directory and everywhere triumphant. Fox and his party had of course, opposed the war with France from the beginning; Pitt never loved it and was now anxious for peace with the Directory. So in 1796 Pitt opened negotiations for peace with France.

It was to oppose that peace that Burke wrote, and write in fire, the *Letters on a Regicide Peace,* those scathing Philippics against what he called the pusillanimity and madness of England in attempting to establish friendly relations with a country which was aggressively republican and revolutionary. Identifying France with lawlessness and anarchy, with the principles of all that was base and brutal, with all that was inimical to civil order and private decency; denouncing her as the enemy of the human race, as a common and insufferable nuisance stinking in the nostrils of Europe, as the blood-reeking, offal-loaded lair of robbers, pariahs, and assassins, he conjured his countrymen, as they valued the Constitution,

as they valued the existence of their national life and Church, Throne, State, as they valued social order, honour, religion, reason, decency, to have no peace with France, not to condescend to recognize its existence as a political unit, to expunge it from the roll of nations, to obliterate it from the map. In no works extant are there more magnificent passages of sustained and fiery eloquence, invective more terrific, sarcasm more blasting, more jewels of rhetoric and felicitous expression, nay, and making all allowance for intemperance and extravagance, heat and fury, more jewels of crystallized wisdom.

They were a voice from Burke's deathbed. They were written when he was reeling under the blow that broke him, the death of his son, when disease and anxiety and sorrow had bowed and broken him.

A miserable triumph over miserable adversaries closes the scene. It was known that Burke was on the verge of actual beggary, and Pitt procured for him a pension without bringing the matter before Parliament. The Duke of Bedford and Lord Lauderdale, seeing in this a weapon for attacking Pitt, opposed the pension in the House of Lords. The head of the house of Bedford was not quite the proper person to oppose a grant from the Crown, and in the *Letter to a Noble Lord,* so justly described by Lord Morley as the most splendid repartee in the English language, Burke expresses his surprise that objection to his pension should have come from that particular quarter.

For the pension was surely not altogether given without some equivalent, and was after all only a small one. But

> The Duke of Bedford is the Leviathan among all the creatures of the Crown. He tumbles about his unwieldy bulk: he plays and frolics in the ocean of the royal bounty. Huge as he is and whilst 'he lies floating many a rood', he is still a creature. His ribs, his fins, his whalebone, his blubber, the very spiracles through which he spouts a torrent of brine against his origin, and covers me all over with the spray—everything of him and about him is from the throne. Is it for *him* to question the dispensation of the royal favour?

Sadly the old man pointed out how more than an equivalent might have been paid for the royal bounty:

> Had it pleased God to continue to me the hopes of succession, I should have been, according to my mediocrity, and the mediocrity of the age I live in, a sort of founder of a family; I should have left a son, who, in all the points in which personal merit can be viewed, in science, in erudition, in genius, in taste, in honour, in generosity, in humanity, in every liberal sentiment, and every liberal accomplishment, would not have shown himself inferior to the Duke of Bedford, or to any of those whom he traces in his line.

Pathetic indeed, pathetic beyond expression that it should have been in the midst of feuds like

these—in the midst of gloom and storm like this —with no ray of the glory that was beyond even faintly perceptible to him, that the great soul of this man who had laboured for England and for mankind, always in righteousness and sincerity, for five-and-thirty years was to take its flight. We now know that Burke with reference to the Revolution was a false prophet, that if he discerned clearly the immediate consequences he did not discern the ultimate consequences of that stupendous convulsion : he miscalculated on all sides : he miscalculated even ludicrously the power of France and of those whom principles allied with her : he confounded what was accidental with what was essential : he did not perceive the solidity, steadiness, and good sense which underlay the superficial tumult and agitation in England. But let us not underrate the value of his anti-revolutionary writings. If we have outgrown much which he regarded with superstitious reverence, if the glamour, with which in his eyes sentiment invested monarchy and aristocracy, is now dimming and fading : if we are pressing to other goals than had defined themselves to him, if experiment and experience have justified us in feeling confidence where he doubted and mistrusted, we should do well to remember and find guidance in many of his characteristic precepts and warnings—that if we look forward to posterity we should not forget to look backward to our ancestors, that prescription and tradition should neither be contemptuously ignored nor rudely violated, that what has grown

up historically can only perish historically, that the application of abstract rights and principles to an organization so composite and artificial as political society and its economy is the most difficult and delicate of problems, that the only sure test of political wisdom is expediency—expediency not in the narrow and selfish, but in the highest and most comprehensive sense of the term.

XVII

SYRACUSE

SYRACUSE, like old Nestor, 'a mine of memories', is a city that has woefully declined from its pristine magnificence. Bountifully endowed by Nature with a fine harbour and a coast-line so beautiful that its glory of white limestone, fringed by an ultramarine sea, seems like some radiant vision of deathless Hellas, it is now but a tithe of its ancient self—a melancholy, fragile, evanescent relic of a wonderful past. 'Your land is left unto you desolate'—so might a Hebrew prophet denounce its present insignificance, as he surveyed the long lines of ruined site on Achradina and Neapolis, and beheld the only city that exists cooped up in the narrow island of Ortygia. How many cities or suburbs did its walls once contain? There were Ortygia, the inner city, a white pearl set in a turquoise sea, and the wonderful series of terraces and porticoes and market-places which so moved Cicero's admiration in his oration against the rapacious proconsul Verres, rising tier above tier up the northern and north-western slopes; Achradina lay on the extreme east; then came Tyche and Epipolæ on the west; and the densely populated Neapolis and the quarter dedicated to Apollo

Temenites lying immediately north of the Great Harbour. Syracuse was not only the capital town of Sicily, and by far the most famous in the island, but under some of its tyrants—Gelon, Hiero, Dionysius—it exercised sway even over the cities of Magna Græcia, and threw out its own colonies in Acræ, Casmenæ, Henna and Camarina. It was a proud and fierce Dorian State, originally founded by Corinthians in the eighth century B.C. and always oscillating between its democratic and its oligarchic rule. When matters were peaceful and no foreign enemy was hovering on the seascape, the people claimed and maintained their rights. But if Phœnicians or Carthaginians or Romans brought their fearful menace on a city so full of Greek treasure, Demos put itself under the protection of a single ruler, who became a tyrant, whether beneficent or despotic chance or circumstance might decide. Some of he tyrants bore hateful names—Thrasybulus, Dion, Agathocles; some were as refined and literary in their tastes as the great Italian despots. Think of the galaxy of Greek authors who visited Syracuse as honoured guests. Under Hiero I came Æschylus, Pindar, Simonides, Bacchylides; Plato seems to have honoured Dionysius II, while a hundred years later Syracuse gave birth not only to the wonderful mathematician and engineer, Archimedes (who for so long baffled the Roman invader), but to the silver-tongued Theocritus, in whom the Greek muse had one of the latest of her incarnations—the father and inventor of bucolic poetry. Even

to those who have only a cursory acquaintance with this famous Greek colony, it is obvious that Timoleon is a favourite hero. The reason is plain. Timoleon in the fourth century B.C. was the enemy of tyrants, and the second founder (with fresh colonists from Greece) of the Syracusan Republic.

I sit overlooking Ortygia, jutting out with its crowded buildings, a diminished city, sole heritage of a mighty name; I hear the tinkling of innumerable goats driven out to pasture; perhaps from the heights above you come some echoes of that oaten pipe whereon Thyrsis and Corydon, Daphins, and Menalcas played such unforgettable music; and if I am lucky, the vast pile of Ætna rises, a veritable dream-mountain, fleecy, romantic, impossible, far away on the northern horizon. But when my eyes rest on the Greek Harbour or on the crags of Epipolæ, something clutches at my heart-strings, and my pulses beat with the tumultuous memory of a great tragedy. For here was the scene of that awful catastrophe in which the pride and glory of Athens went down to a nameless and unhonoured grave, and the most cultivated people of the world, on whose lips flowered the charm of Euripides, the dignity of Æschylus, and the rhythmic splendour of Homeric verse, were hurled into foul stone-quarries to work out their wretched fate as slaves and captives of the victorious Syracusans. *Vitrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni,* and in this matter we, to whom Thucydides has appealed, are all Catos. There can be no doubt on which side our sympa-

thies lie. We are quite aware that Athens came in the vainglory of her heart to conquer all Sicily, despite the grave warnings of Pericles that she should eschew foreign enterprise so long as the Peloponnesian War lay on her hands. We know how little the inhabitants of that violet-crowned city realized what such an expedition meant—how difficult it was to fight from so far distant a base, how unlikely it was that much help could come from Sicilian towns, Dorian as most of them were, and sympathetic rather with Sparta and Corinth than with the Ionic invaders. Yet the audicity was so splendid, the prize was so dazzling, the victory was so nearly won! When the Athenians had finished their wall of circumvallation from the heights across the plain to the harbour, when Plemmyrium was in their hands and their fleet blockaded the town from the sea—then, if it had not been for that fatal gap in their lines from Fort Labdalum on the northern heights to Trogilus, the little interval of uncompleted wall through which Gylippus forced his way into the beleagured city, Athens would have held Syracuse at her mercy, and the triumph would have been hers. It was not to be, and some Atê must have blinded Nikias' eyes, and made him dilatory and supine. Poor Nikias! Perhaps we blame him too much, as we read the sombre eloquence of Grote's masterly diatribe against the Athenian general. Nikias was ill, suffering, as he told his countrymen at home, of an exceedingly painful malady. He

begged to be recalled and relieved of a command for which he did not feel himself qualified. The Athenians believed in him, and would not accept his resignation, and Thucydides, too, seems to have believed in him, for he utters no word of censure. Indeed, he gives him a noble tribute for his high character and his great piety. Yet it is difficult not to be angry, as we read the melancholy record of opportunities missed and lucky moments thrown away—sternly indignant with the man, entirely respectable and righteous overmuch, who, holding in his hands the great name of Athens, wantonly sacrificed it to his pious horror of an eclipse of the moon.

There lies before me the blue expanse of the harbour, and, as I watch, I can almost repeople the busy scene. In answer to Nikias' appeal for assistance, the second fleet of Athens, under the command of Demosthenes, has crossed the sea, swung past Catania, and is now—to the astonishment and consternation of Syracuse—making its way into the bay. They make a brave show, these stately Athenian triremes, as in perfect trim, every oarsman bending to his task in obedience to the *keleustês* (the man who gave them the time), they proudly row in past Plemmyrium and Ortygia, as though the whole place belonged to them. Think what it must have meant to the soldiers of Nikias to see their comrades coming to their succour! Consider what gloomy thoughts must have crossed the mind of Gylippus as he observed this fresh evidence of the indomitable spirit of

Athens! But Demosthenes, a competent and spirited commander, was under no illusions, as soon as he had time to grasp the situation of affairs. Things had been going badly for Nikias while the second fleet had been traversing the sea. He had lost Plemmyrium—above all, he had lost his hold on the high ground at Epipolæ. Gylippus and the Syracusans had driven a counter-wall past the unfinished Athenian wall, so that there was no longer any fear of a close blockade of the city. Nikias himself was penned in his camp close by the harbour, where the miasma from the plain was playing havoc with his army. There was only one thing to be done, and Demosthenes grasped it at once. Epipolæ must be stormed at all hazards, and the Athenians established once more on the high ground. You stand on the ruins of the Fort Euryelus—which Dionysius constructed in fear of the Carthaginians, and which the Roman general Marcellus stormed two hundred years later—and you strive to picture that desperate night battle. It was bright moonlight, Thucydides tells us, when the heads of the Athenian columns climbed the heights. At first all went well. The Syracusan cross-wall was stormed, its defenders driven back. Then came a pause, a Syracusan rally, a momentary disorder in the Athenian ranks. The moonlight cast perplexing shadows; friend could not be distinguished from enemy; the Athenian newcomers did not know the ground. So the disaster began, a crushing disaster, which drove the army of Demosthenes

in hopeless confusion down the slopes and back again to the fatal camp by the harbour. Once again the invaders were within an ace of victory; once more an unkind fate doomed them to ruin.

Alas, alas! who shall tell of those dreadful battle scenes which were enacted on the blue expanse of the harbour itself? It was a sea-fight now, or rather a series of sea-fights. For there was no land to fight for, save the narrow strip which served the Athenians as a camp. All their hopes rested on their fleet, which was numerically superior to anything which the Syracusans could send against them, but from special circumstances had by no means the incontestable mastery which ought to belong to a sea-bred race. Half of their ships had become unseaworthy, because there had been no chance of pulling them ashore and refitting them, and, worst of all, there was no room in the harbour for those skilful evolutions in which Ionian mariners excelled. Eurymedon tried one of the accustomed manœuvres in one of the fights which followed, and promptly ran ashore and was disabled. The Athenians wanted sea-room and it was that which the comparatively narrow limits of the harbour denied. In the final battle there were 194 ships of war engaged, each of them manned with some 200 men, and as you look down on the harbour from Achradina you see that its circuit is not more than five miles—a small area for evolution, and better adapted for a straightforward, hard-hitting, prow to prow contest, such as that which actually ensued. And this is a game which

uncultivated force can play, and in which nautical art and skill are manifestly inferior. But think what a wonderful sight this final battle must have been for those on the shore! The banks of Ortygia were lined with spectators, and all up the slopes of Achradina and Neapolis were ranged the eager friends of the Syracusan fleet, while only the narrow frontage of the camp yielded sympathetic sightseers for Athens. In the clear Sicilian air every incident could be marked, every cry could be heard, every pæan of victory echoed by a hundred throats, every wail of despair answered by sobs of anguish on the shore. Was there ever a more picturesque spectacle before or since? Or, for the Athenians at all events, an issue more charged with tragedy? For the god of battles had decided that Syracuse should triumph, and that the star of Athens should go down in blackest night. Oh, the pity o'it, the pity o'it, Iago! And the appalling scenes which followed—the attempted retreat of the Athenians by land, the vain efforts, the relentless pursuit, the surrender of Nikias following on the disaster that had already overtaken Demosthenes! And then the shameful decree which put the two Athenian Generals to death as though they had been common malefactors! And the miserable death-in-life of the prisoners in the Latomiæ, save when one or two gained release by their ability to sing Euripides' songs in a strange land, softening their captors' hard hearts by the deathless story of Alcestis dying for her husband Admêtus!

To-day the sky is blue; the sea is bluer still. The sun shines with a glory denied to us dwellers in a northern clime. The cicalas are chirping, the bees are humming, the lizards sun themselves on the wall. Afar off some countryman of Theocritus is playing on the pipe. But the passion of that ancient tragedy drags at the heart, and fills the eyes with tears.

NOTES

I. THE PRAISE OF CHIMNEY-SWEEPERS

P.1. **Charles Lamb:** (1775–1834), known to his contemporaries by his pen-name, Elia, was an essayist of very rare gifts. His *Essays of Elia* is possibly the finest collection of its kind in the world.

The chief attraction of these *Essays* lies in the peculiar charm and eccentricity of Elia. The ease and confidence with which he writes on any subject—serious, gay, or insignificant—establish between him and his readers a bond of sympathy at once unique and unbreakable.

Lamb loved life, and he loved literature. His essays record his services to and impressions of both. It is the mood of the moment that determines what his essay is going to be. It may be a logical and analytical study of contemporary drama, or it may be a fanciful discourse on Ears, or it may be a pathetic—and at times intensely melancholy—study of the personal aspects of life. Sometimes it is an exquisite mingling of all these according to the 'humour' that possesses him at the moment.

His chief peculiarity as an essayist lies in this unrestrained abandon to a mood, a fleeting thought or caprice.

His style is as exquisite, a blend of rare elements, as his humour. It ranges from the delicately poetic and melodious prose of *Dream Children* to the rather digressive, archaic, and abrupt periods of the essay here selected. But whatever its technical perfection, (or its lack thereof), his genius is always adequate to the occasion, and ever sufficient to reveal the author's inner meaning to us, either with a copious wealth of images, or with the directness of a well-aimed blow.

understand me: the secret of Elia's charm lies perhaps in the frankness with which he takes his readers into his confidence. And he was the first to discover fully the literary effect of such frankness.

nigritude: blackness.

liker: an old fashioned comparative. Such archaisms, imparting to it something like the flavour of old wine, play an important part in Elia's style.

I have a kindly yearning: mark the literary trick by which the sentence is left incomplete.

almost clergy imps: forcefully compared to miniature clergymen—because of their black dress.

cloth: dress of their trade; usually used of the dress of clergymen, and thence for clergy generally.

fauces Averni: the jaws of hell.

P.2. **I seem to remember:** even if he does not remember, even if he was never told—any witness is good enough for Lamb to cite to his reader, or to help establish Lamb's bona fides in his eyes. Yet our author can delight in pulling his reader's leg.

proper: in its Elizabethan sense of peculiar to: belonging to.

kibed heels: sore or painful with chilblains.

tester: slang for 'a sixpenny bit'.

'yclept: called; a fossil surviving from Middle English.

I know not how thy palate may relish it: the student will note the entanglements of the sentence that follows. But such 'horrors' are by no means uncommon in our friend Elia when he is taking his ease. It is the easy chat of a full heart.

P.3. **Salopian house:** a place where salop is sold; salop being the decoction here mentioned.

a cautious premonition to the olfactories: in everyday English, a warning of a bad smell. Mark throughout this and the following paragraphs a slightly but intentionally stilted style.

bitter wood: wormwood, a medicinal plant. It is commonly used metaphorically for misfortune.

lenitive : a poultice to ease pain. Here it means soothing substance.

valerian : a plant with a very strong odour.

P.4. **for the honours of the pavement :** when London streets were veritable pools of water and mud, the honors of the pavement were sometimes claimed at the point of the sword.

kennels : gutters.

precocious : early at her trade, not, as usually now, prematurely developed.

piazzas : erroneously used for covered walks round a square, or piazza proper. The reference is to the colonnades of London's fruit and flower market.

Him shouldst thou haply encounter : another monster of the sentence world ; but how delightful in its parody of the heroic style !

P.5. **scintillation :** in ordinary prose a 'spark'.

splashed stocking : because trousers were yet unevolved.

Hogarth : See note on p. 256.

March to Finchley : Hogarth's picture represents soldiers marching ; among the spectators is a sweep.

there he stood : and there goes Lamb once again carried away by his delight in parentheses.

P.6. **ossifications :** like so many other words in this essay, a deliberate latinism.

A sable cloud : a slight misquotation from Milton's *Comus*. Lamb and Hazlitt had an incurable habit of quoting—and they hardly bothered to see if their quotations were correct.

apprenticements, like *defiliations*, etc., are mere word-coinages to suit Lamb's purposes.

P.7. **Montagu,** son of the well-known literary Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. He ran away from school, turned a chimney sweep, but was later recognized and brought home after having been given up for lost.

defiliations : losses of sons.

Arundel castle : the Sussex seat of the Duke of Norfolk, the head of the Howard family.

Venus lulled Ascanius: Ascanius was the son of Aeneas, one of the heroes of Troy. Venus, the goddess of beauty, was his grandmother.

invitement: Compare *apprenticement.*

P.8. **incunabula:** Latin again, the swaddling-clothes of a baby. The word is now used of books printed before A.D. 1500.

Jem White: the author of a daring but humorous forgery known as the *Original Letters of Sir John Falstaff.* Some people think Lamb may have had a hand in it. It was intended as a practical joke, not as a deception.

fair of St. Bartholomew: held at Smithfield Market on September 3, in memory of St. Bartholomew. It was abolished in 1845.

P.9. **infantry:** a pun on *infants* and *infantry.*

quoited: a deliberate Shakespearianism; thrown out, expelled.

wedding garment: clothes of a sweep.

that vanity: Lamb refers to Bunyan's phrase 'Vanity Fair' in *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

Bigod: Lamb's cloak of mystery for his friend John Fenwick.

Rochester: the Earl of; the dissolute but witty boon companion of Charles II.

Ursula: in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair.*

P.10. **whereat the universal host:** a parody of Milton, *Paradise Lost,* I, 541.

May the Brush supersede the Laurel: may the brush of the sweep be held in higher honour than the laurel wreath of the poet.

P.11. **Golden lads and lasses must:** an adaptation of the famous song in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline.*

II. ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE LEARNED

P.12. **William Hazlitt:** (1778–1830), critic, painter, and essayist, was a man of very versatile genius. A keen student of life and art, he enjoyed both with a rare gusto. Nothing in either was without meaning and charm to him.

His writings vary in subject from the delights of prize-fights and country walks to solemn themes of political philosophy and literature.

The secret of Hazlitt's success is a forceful personality. Independent in outlook and judgment, he developed into a fearless champion of lost causes. The more people differed from him, the more he was convinced of the righteousness of the cause of popular freedom. His prejudices were so firmly rooted in him that often he showed an absurd lack of sympathy.

But that was only in relation to contemporary thought and achievement. In dealing with the past his touch is sure, his sympathies most catholic. Both in his essays and lectures, he has left behind a body of deep-founded literary criticism of the first importance for all students of English.

His prose style is simple but effective. His flashes of epigram are frequent, and his occasional outbursts of eloquence are inspired by true feeling. The substantial part of his prose is the clear logical, solid stuff of every day life. But it is not to be understood that he lacks the grace and beauty of imagination; rather, he knows the value of subordinating imagination and wit to the sterner demands of truth.

Quite as ardent a lover of the past as Lamb, he avoids all eccentricity and affectation. Yet he lacks equally Lamb's extreme sensitiveness and sweetness of temper.

Such a one may be said to carry: compare Stevenson's *Apology for Idlers*. R.L.S. was a great admirer of Hazlitt, and his essays have frequent echoes of Hazlitt's thought and manner.

P.13. **but a foil to common sense:** such is often the case with schoolmasters and pedants.

fantastic: fanciful or capricious.

P.14. **Take up his bed and walk:** St. Matthew ix. 6.

Enfeebles all internal strength of thought: Goldsmith, the Traveller.

custom and authority: note the doublets; thought or action; langour and lassitude; sloth and ignorance; lines

and syllables; idea or interest; and more throughout this essay.

sweats in the eye of Phœbus: Henry V. Act iv, Scene 1.

P.15. **Any one who has passed:** an example of Hazlitt's pointed sentence.

jargon: originally, the talk of birds, hence the technical dialect of a profession; also, the meaningless technicalities in which we sometimes indulge.

P.16. **An idler at school, etc.** Mark the length of this sentence; yet how clear and straightforward in expression it is.

Gray and Collins: two remarkable poets of the generation that preceded the romantic revival. They anticipated the new spirit.

P.17. **in which words take root:** people who juggle with words but never get near the true idea.

least respectable character: refers to George Canning.

Learning is the knowledge of that, etc. Hazlitt's epigram-making is based on the accurate statement of truth, and not on mere verbal felicity. See below also.

P.18. **Porson,** Richard (1756–1808): A famous Greek scholar, professor at Cambridge University.

P.19. **the mighty world of eye and ear:** from Wordsworth.

the colouring of Titian, etc: Sterne *Tristram Shandy*.

P.20. **study and imitation:** Hazlitt had himself spent several years of his youth in Paris in these pursuits.

Elgin Marbles: the famous collection of Greek statuary brought to England by Lord Elgin, now in the British Museum.

His ears are nailed to his books: we think of the appalling ignorance of thousands of young graduates of our universities The principal cause of this ignorance seems to be indicated here: they have no power of observation and no interest in anything except their examinations.

din and smithery: see note on *custom and authority*, above.

P.22. **Anas**: collections of learned memoirs.

a twelvemonth: one of several examples in which old collective nouns have survived, and are used in the singular—particularly in measures of time, distance, or weight.

blue-stocking: a contemptuous name for women who affect learning—a coinage of the eighteenth century when women were beginning to make their influence felt in literature and politics. About 1750 women began to meet at the house of Lady Montagu to discuss literature rather than play the more usual games at cards.

P.23. **Baxter**: Richard (1615–91).

vineyard: the first vowel is short, and the word pronounced *vinyerd*.

P.24. **fierce or foolish**: terrors and sanctions, true and useful, etc. Here is another outbreak of doublets.

the Capulets: in allusion to the feud between the Montagues and Capulets in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

P.25. **They cannot reason wrong, etc.** A typical example of sentence structure in Hazlitt.

Mark the effective close of the essay.

III. DEATHS OF LITTLE CHILDREN

P.26. **Leigh Hunt**: (1784–1859), poet and essayist, was much better known and appreciated in his own day than he is in ours. The brilliance of his contemporaries, who, with very few exceptions, were his intimate friends, has since eclipsed his fame.

Leigh Hunt fought a life-long struggle against poverty; his work was thus produced without much forethought, and in little time. It bears the marks of hurry; of looseness both of thought and structure.

But Leigh Hunt had an original and fresh way of looking at life. His seriousness was not tinged with melancholy; his romanticism at its best was free from unkindness. Therefore his essays always make a very pleasant gentlemanly sort of reading. He carries on the tradition of Addison's *Spectator*, without its classical orderliness, but

with a similar observant shrewdness and trenchant wit and philosophy.

His best work is his *Autobiography*; his most useful contribution to letters his friendship for Keats, Shelley and Lamb. He certainly deserves to be much better known and read than he is.

A Grecian philosopher: in its opening and development, and even in style, this essay is a typical example of the fashion that Addison's essays had set. For more than a century journalism in England took the form of essays on topics, social, political and literary, in which the public of the day was interested. The treatment, as here, had the appearance of being learned, without making much demand on the scholarship of the reader. It set out to instruct, and yet contrived to be anecdotal, and entertaining, without being chatty and flippant. All this is so different from the light essay of to-day that a student will be well-advised to make a comparative study of the two kinds. For example, it may be noted that an earlier generation of essayists put their faith in a long introduction before starting on the principle theme. To-day the essayist makes a direct plunge into his subject, and works all his irrelevant details and digressions cleverly into the body of his essay.

It is only for sophists to pretend: the Stoic philosopher believed in keeping an equable temper. A man like Brutus prided himself on the fact that neither joy nor sorrow could move him, outwardly at all events.

would be the worse without them: Compare the rather hackneyed song from Tennyson's *Princess*, 'She must weep or she will die'.

fleshquakes: trembling of the body, from Ben Jonson's *The New Inne*.

P.28. **in stead of:** distinguish from *instead of*. *Stead* lit. means 'place'.

P.29. **as the moon reflects the light upon us:** mark Leigh Hunt's frequent introduction of poetic images.

The most unaffected dignity of suffering, etc. Mark the balance and distribution of parts in this and

the following two sentences. This is Hunt's style at its best.

Towards the close of this essay the treatment becomes very logical, the logical emerging from the emotional: an expression of feeling ending in intellectual conviction.

P.31. **'of these are the kingdom of heaven':** quoted from the New Testament. Cf. Luke, xviii. 16.

IV. MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

P.32. **Coventry Patmore:** (1823-96). Poet, essayist, and critic, was a well-known literary figure towards the end of the last century. His peculiar, and somewhat erratic genius won many admirers who did not even understand the significance of his work. Something of a mystic, he yet retains the hard and solid logic of the reasoner.

His prose style is firm in its texture. It has a marked tendency to be epigrammatic; the opening of most of his essays suggests the personal scrap-book in which his curious reading and original thoughts would be mingled.

'He writes scornfully'; he certainly never cared for the reception his work might have. Unlike most other essayists of the age, he does not take the reader into his confidence. In this respect he is not of the class to which belong Goldsmith, Lamb and Stevenson.

It is to be regretted that Patmore is not read more to-day, for there is much fine writing and solid thinking in his work.

P.33. **Sympathy which does not mean action, etc.** Compare Coleridge, *Reflections on having left a place of retirement.*

Charity, etc. Compare the well-known saying, 'Charity begins at home'.

P.34. **Civil war can be waged by words, etc.** This sentence is a typical example of Patmore's style—compact, balanced, tending towards the epigrammatic.

funk: colloquial English for *fear, panic.*

P.35. **Decalogue:** the 'Ten Commandments' of the Old Testament. See Exodus, xx.

fealty: an old feudal word: a tenant's loyalty to his liege lord.

V. THE FUTURE OF HUMOUR

P.36. **H. D. Traill**: (1842–1900), journalist, biographer, and historian. He studied for the medical profession, obtained a first class in the Natural Sciences Schools at Oxford, and settled down to a clerkship in the Education Office. But his official duties were light, and he had enough leisure to cultivate his natural taste for literature. He became very soon a much sought after leader writer for the London newspapers—he was for many years the leader writer of *The Daily Telegraph*. But, though a journalist by profession, he was an essayist by temper. His best work was done when he wrote to please himself, not when he wrote under a sense of responsibility. Professor Saintsbury quotes Thackeray's phrase about Warrington, in regard to Traill's work, noting 'the sense, the satire and the scholarship' of it.

His literary studies, such as the one selected here, constitute his best work. They provide ample scope for his humour, incisive satirical wit, and above all for his great critical insight.

'the peoples': the essayist indulges in a gentle satire against 'the people', 'economics', 'psychology' and 'science' as some of the principal offenders against humour. The subtle fineness of his wit and expression is worthy of note.

economical point of view: note with what daring and effect the metaphor is prolonged.

P.37. **'made in Germany'**: the quick development of German industries before the war made German goods a byword for cheap and mass production.

gourmet: one who is fond of eating; a judge of delicacies of the table.

caviare: a rare Russian fish, a great delicacy; cf. 'caviare to the general'—*Hamlet*.

Thucydides: the famous Greek historian who lived in the fifth century B.C.

possession for ever: on the analogy of Keats's 'a thing of beauty is a joy for ever'.

Labouchere: (1831–1912), an English politician of French ancestry. He founded *Truth*, and actively advocated the Liberal cause.

P.38. **lapidary:** a fanciful term for stone mason.

P.39. **Joe Miller:** Joseph Miller, (1684–1738): a Drury Lane comedian. A book called *Joe Miller's Jests* was published in 1739 under his name.

Virgil: who acted as guide in Dante's great epic.

sophisticated: intellectualized; not taking things in a simple, natural manner.

funniments: makings of fun.

P.40. **Hierocles:** a philosopher of the fifth century A.D. He was a Neoplatonist who lived in Alexandria. He wrote a commentary on the *Golden Verses* of Pythagoras, but it is extremely doubtful if the collection of jests attributed to him here and elsewhere was really written by him.

shaken millions of midriffs: a fanciful way of saying that many people have been made to laugh.

The writer's argument is that though most feelings (such as terror, tenderness, pathos) are common to, and comprehensible by, most nations, humour is quite different. For a joke that is not understood brings depression through misunderstanding.

Swift, Sterne, Fielding, Dickens: English writers known for their humour.

fustian: bombast.

obelise: to mark with an obelus, to show that it is obsolete or spurious.

P.41. **Lycidas:** look up the reference to 'No Popery' in Milton's famous elegy.

Struldbrugs: strange creatures in Dean Swift's famous *Gulliver's Travels*.

Horne Tooke: the assumed name of John Horne (1736–1812), an English politician and philologist.

P.42. **thesis:** a proposition to be maintained, particularly in a written paper.

P.43. **Humour, like poetry, etc.** This and the following sentences reveal the serious purpose of the writer, and his grasp of the subject.

chiefest: a double superlative; but commonly in use.

P.45. **high jinks:** colloquial for 'good spirits'.

P.46. **Sam Weller:** Mr. Pickwick's valet in *The Pickwick Papers*.

Pecksniff, Mrs. Todgers, Mrs. Gamp: all well-known characters of Dickens.

Balzac: (1799–1850), the 'French Dickens'.

bizarrerie: grotesqueness; quaintness. A French noun not so extensively used as the adjective *bizarre*.

P.47. **Mrs. Prig:** the inseparable companion of Mrs. Gamp. They were both of them nurses by profession (Dickens: *Martin Chuzzlewit*).

sick and monthly: qualifying the word nurse understood.

rum 'un: slang for an 'odd fellow'; a 'queer customer'.

Wackford Squeers: The cruel and ignorant schoolmaster of Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire (Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby*).

P.49. **possessed by the Devil:** in allusion, to sardonic humour.

P.50. **Veddahs of Ceylon:** are probably the aborigines of that island.

I am not aware, however, etc. With a mischievous twinkle in his eye, the essayist assumes a mock heroic tone of great seriousness. All through the paragraph he is nothing but ironical.

P.51. **quiddity:** the old philosophic 'whatness': the quintessence of a thing.

P.53. **Dr. Primrose:** the Vicar of Wakefield in Goldsmith's novel of that name.

Sydney Smith: (1771–1845), clergyman, wit and essayist.

Irish Bulls: expressions containing contradiction in terms or a ludicrous inconsistency.

Wit and Humour: Charles Lamb and his contemporaries were at pains to distinguish one from the other.

Walter Shandy: brother of Uncle Toby (in Sterne's famous *Tristram Shandy*). An old, conceited, captious gentleman.

P.54. **cranial:** of the cranium or head (archaic).

They are embodied in the following propositions: intentional mystification. Note the learned and philosophical, partly meaningless and confusing, jargon employed in this analysis of humour.

P.56. **Mr. Herbert Spencer:** (1820–1903), English philosopher and utilitarian.

P.57. **winder:** vulgar for *window*.

incongruous objects, concept, subsume: terms dragged in as part of the mock heroic business.

P.58. **Schopenhauer:** (1788–1860), German philosopher and ethical thinker. He was the first to expound philosophically a pessimistic view of life.

Isaac Barrow: (1630–77), Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, and chaplain to Charles II.

P.59. **ellipsoidal:** the unusual varying of elliptical.

Giles Joskin: a name coined for the occasion.

the sides of its environment: the whole of this passage is a delightful parody of mathematical jargon.

P.60. **Hobbes.** An English speculative writer.

flitch of bacon: given as a prize. Compare the celebrated 'flitch of Dunmow', which is awarded at Dunmow in England, to any couple who can prove that they have not quarrelled for a year and a day preceding.

Explained in terms of nervo-muscular, etc. Once again a parody of the psychologist who would explain away humour. Mark such terms as *nascent*, *the excess must discharge itself*, and their ridiculousness as applied to Giles Joskin and his audience.

P.61. **rictus:** the gape of a person's mouth.

Audrey: a character in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The name here stands for any common country girl.

hee-hawing: meaning stupid and intended to convey the sound of a donkey's hee-haw.

'churchwarden': a clay pipe with a long stem.

P.62. **Voltaire**: (*1694–1778*), a French writer and one of the most celebrated of international men of letters. His satire is particularly biting. He helped the cause of the French Revolution by his masterly and irrefutable condemnation of the tyranny of the ruling classes. Voltaire was only an assumed name—though very few people know that his real name was Arouet.

P.63. **Thespis**: flourished about 600 B.C., the reputed founder of Greek tragedy.

P.64. **My Uncle Toby**: uncle of Tristram Shandy the nominal hero of Sterne's novel.

the Homeric Company: another gibe at the pedant clamouring for historical research, analysis and preciosity. Some people believe that the *Iliad* is not the work of any one poet, that 'Homer' in fact implies a number of poets, whose work is collected for us in that epic.

P.65. **Horace**: (65–8 B.C.); Roman lyrical and satirical poet. His so-called *Ars Poetica* was for long one of the chief poetical 'guides' of Europe.

luridi dentes: grisly, ghastly teeth.

capitis nives: white hair.

possent visere multo non, etc: might behold with great merriment.

'Arry, 'Arriet: members of the ordinary rough-mannered crowd (who have not learnt to pronounce their aitches).

Persius: (A. D. 34–64), a Roman satirist.

Lusco qui possit dicere, Lusce: 'Who can say to a half blind man "You one-eyed creature!"'

P.66. **the deceived husband**: i.e. deceived by his unfaithful wife.

Boccaccio: (1313–75), an Italian poet and story-teller, author of the *Decameron*—the European *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

Moliere: (1622–73) a great French writer of comedies.

Congreve: (1670–1729), an English comic dramatist. His plays, of the so-called 'artificial' kind, deal principally with social types.

P.67. **apercus :** sudden glimpses.

University Extension : lectures are arranged to spread the knowledge of literature and science among those who have been unable to go to a university. The earnest young man ambitious of knowledge is here indicated.

'personal equation' : the margin of error due to an astronomer's individual slowness in noting phenomena. In all astronomical calculations allowance is made for these differences between one observer and another. With what *solemnity* our author applies the metaphor here !

P.68. **salt-cellar :** cotaining the 'Attic salt' or savour of old Greece.

Aristophanes : the greatest of the Greek comic poets. He was born about the middle of the fifth century B.C.

P.69. **Humour of Scotland :** of a very 'dry' flavour. The Scottish word is 'pawky'.

P.70. **off :** no longer in vogue.

P.71. **it is merely a chronic case of, etc.** Which again is merely a way of saying a very simple thing.

(and spectacles) : appropriate to the earnest young man who is too earnest (and too short-sighted) to see a joke.

if that is its right name : the reader will note the significance of such asides.

VI. THE YOUNG PEOPLE

P.73. **Hilaire Belloc :** (b. 1870), poet, essayist, historian politician, and journalist. Mr. Belloc fulfils all these different rôles with success because he has an inexhaustible fund of life and knowledge of its ways, obtained in diverse circumstances. Halt-French by birth, he was educated at the University of Oxford : starting as historian and traveller, he has settled down to be a poet and essayist and novelist. He was Member of Parliament from 1906–10.

Mr. Belloc wields a very virile and at times aggressive pen. Now witty and satirical, he can also grow sentimental and strangely pathetic. In fact there are few living

writers who can write well in such diverse moods as Mr. Belloc.

P.74. **a boy of twenty-five:** an intentional thrust at 'the young people' of to-day.

Does he think himself immortal: compare Hazlitt's essay on the *Fear of Death.* He believes young people cannot imagine death as a reality.

taboos: things or acts banned or prohibited by custom or convention. Among the Polynesians a taboo is a person or thing set apart as sacred or accursed.

billycock hat, or bowler: a hard black felt hat, round in shape, with a small brim. The 'correct' hat to wear with a tail coat is a top hat.

smoking a pipe in the street: now a very common sight.

P.75. **labels:** catchwords; the sentence means 'do they accept without thinking current opinions about men and things?'

P.76. **at what age, I wonder, etc.** 'When will they be able to profit by experience, and to know that true greatness lies in doing little things well?'

the young man walking down Cockspur Street: an imaginary young man in the heart of the West End of London.

natively: innately. Here the word is used in its literal sense.

Foreign Office, old Strand, etc. Parts of London enumerated with delight by a man who has roamed about her streets.

P.77. **Simpson's:** a famous restaurant in the Strand.

are veils of mud on stilts of iron: the modern reinforced concrete type of building may well be so called. Mark Belloc's felicity of expression.

We might note in conclusion the tone of hesitation and questioning in which the author speaks out his thoughts. His seriousness of purpose is one mark of the 'humour' of Belloc—his earnestness even in moments of flippancy.

advertisements that shock the night: refers, of course, to electric signs.

NOTES

VII. THE ROMANTIC IN THE RAIN

P.78. **G. K. Chesterton:** (b. 1874), one of the greatest of living English writers. He started life as an art critic for reviews and journals, but soon discovered his real bent for literature. We have several critical works of the highest merit from his pen: the best known are his studies of Dickens and of Browning.

This essay is a characteristic example of the style and humour for which G.K.C. is so well known. His is an odd whimsical humour, turning the world upside down and expressing itself in a style abounding with paradoxes. But beneath these outward symbols of thought there lies hidden a profound philosophy derived from a study of modern life by one of our keenest minds.

His style is simple yet elusive. His delight in paradoxical statement is not only a mannerism, but at times an obsession. However, there are few writers of modern English quite so vigorous or pointed in style, or half so provocative in thought.

Rain surely is a public bath: here is another example of the series of insignificant ideas rendered significant by the writer's peculiar attitude of mind. In the personal essay the idea is not so important as the mind that ruminates it. The student should realize how difficult it is to keep up this glorification of the trivial.

Its giant brooms, etc. Note the writer's ever active imagination.

P.79. **pulls the string:** releases the water by pulling down a tap or valve.

bacchanal: riotous drinking and dancing in honour of Bacchus the god of wine and merriment.

P.80. **Sir Philip Sidney:** (1554–86); the ideal hero of Elizabethan literature and manners. A perfect example of the soldier, courtier, gentleman and poet. Every schoolboy knows the story of how, when he lay dying at the field of Zutphen, he offered a cup of water to a common soldier with the words *his need is greater than mine.*

P.81. **all the Mackintoshes,** etc., Note the pun.

that while the amount of original and direct light, etc. Note how quietly the whimsical slides into the philosophic.

But wherever trees and towns: mark the construction of these sentences; the alliteration of words both obvious and subdued, and the reflective close of the essay.

VIII. MINISTERS OF STATE

P.82. **Philip Guedalla:** (b. 1889), biographer, historian, and wit, and an influential man of letters. His peculiar forte is the short essay. He belongs to a group of brilliant young writers of to-day who are determining the future of English prose. His work is remarkable for a perfect blend of sound scholarship and easy wit. His style is a characteristic example of good modern English of the fluent and graceful type. The student would do well to study his periods carefully.

Any stigma, as the old saying is: of course, there is no such saying. This is a punning adaptation of 'Any stick will do to beat a dog.'

Watch the delightful play of fancy throughout this essay. See how it helps to turn commonplaces into witty and original observations. It is the triumph of the 'light' manner of writing—so fatal for the beginner who attempts to imitate it.

Sir Thomas Browne: (1605–82), in the words of Lowell, 'our most imaginative mind since Shakespeare'. His favourite theme is ever the mystery of death. His best known work is the *Religio Medici*, though parts of *Hydrotaphia* (*Urn Burial*) are of superior workmanship and contain passages of even more melodious prose. A physician by profession he used all his leisure in the pursuit of letters.

obituary, etc. See the re-iterated use of adjectives in this and the following sentences, in imitation (and mockery) of the current critical jargon. Cp. *Celtic fervour, Latin logic and Teutonic thoroughness.*

P.83. **neutral :** that is, if none of the allies or the belligerents, as they were called, is to be favoured.

a sympathetic click from a prognathous profile : see note on *obituary*, etc. above.

P.84. **trail the cloudy . . . . ;** an adaptation of Wordsworth's line about youth 'training clouds of glory '.

cerebella : the little or hinder brain ; pl. of cerebellum.

White Paper, Yellow Book : mark the quiet irony with which he ridicules governmental etiquette in these matters.

P.85. **more guttural speech :** i.e. of the Germans.

Handel : (1685–1759) a German musical composer whose fame became international.

P.86. **ampler leisure was politely afforded :** in most countries of Europe there was a popular reaction against the governments that had caused or continued the Great War.

IX. ACCUMULATIONS

P.88. **Aldous Huxley** (b. 1894), a writer whose work reflects modern French influence. He is a deft and witty satirist, hating all conventionalism, social or literary. Nonchalant in manner, his work is nevertheless seriously undertaken.

His best writings have been done in fiction. Imaginative and observant, he has travelled all over the world collecting 'copy' for his very miscellaneous writings. But his work is by no means mere journalism. See introductory remarks on Philip Guedalla, who belongs to the same group among the writers of to-day.

elegiac : a word rich in associations. An elegy has come to mean a song of lamentation.

the proper study of mankind is books : an adaptation of the well-known line from Pope's *Essay on Man* : 'The proper study of mankind is man.'

Sappho : the greatest poetess of antiquity. She

flourished in the sixth century B.C. Only two of her odes are extant in full. Her work is distinguished by depth of feeling, passion, and grace.

The true essay often grows out of a passing and insignificant thought or fancy. This one has been built up in the same way.

'Satyricon': the Latin romance of Petronius Arbiter (first century).

P.89. **wax:** an archaic word, 'grow.'

appalling indestructibility: note the use of adjectives by Huxley. What do you think of *appalling* as an epithet for *indestructibility?* Would you have used or expected such an epithet?

Bodleian: the famous library at Oxford.

Radcliffe Camera: a reading room attached to the Bodleian.

catacombs: originally the Roman tombs underground. They ran in the form of underground galleries with recesses for burial. (The final *b* is silent.)

P.90. **Nat Gould:** a modern writer of sensational racing stories.

Funny Wonder: a typical name for a comic paper.

P.91. **Lytton Strachey:** (b. 1880), a well-known writer of careful historical biographies.

Mr. Wells: H.G., (b. 1866), a popular man of letters. His gifts of imagination and observation are remarkable. A socialist in faith, he foresees a splendid future for mankind. Some of his work is of the very highest excellence both in conception and execution. But like most of his contemporaries he has fallen a victim to the defects inseparable from over-production.

P.92. **The only danger:** the danger is a very real one. The tastes not only of individuals but of generations of men differ so widely.

Hawthornden competition: a bequest in the form of a literary prize awarded each year.

lose much of their imagined lustre: so that destruction of the 'accumulated' literatures of the world will not perhaps be such an unmixed blessing.

NOTES

X. THE CHOICE OF SUBJECTS IN POETRY

P.93. **Matthew Arnold:** (1822–88), critic and man of letters. A son of the famous headmaster of Rugby, he inherited his father's love of the classics, and of classical training. In the intervals of a busy life as Inspector of Schools, he made substantial contributions to Victorian poetry and criticism. As a critic his work is remarkable for its judicious restraint and good taste formed on the rigid discipline of the classics.

The essay here selected reflects his subjection to this discipline, though his prose style, perhaps, lacks the closely-knit texture which we might expect from a life-long student of Latin and Greek. But this essay is an example of Arnold's style at its best.

Sicilian Greek: there was an extensive colony of the Greeks in Sicily. Even under the Roman Empire these Greeks wielded great influence in politics and letters.

Orpheus: the legendary Greek musician whose magical notes made even trees and stones dance.

Musaeus: a legendary poet of Attica; not to be confused with a Greek grammarian of that name. The latter is the author of a famous poem on Hero and Leander.

the Sophists: a class of wandering teachers of philosophy and rhetoric in Greece. Later applied to faulty reasoners.

P.94. **Empedocles:** see Arnold's dramatic poem *Empedocles on Etna*. He was one of the most romantic figures of antiquity, known equally for his philosophy, poetry, and statesmanship; flourished about 490–430 B.C.

the dialogue of the mind with itself: an expressive periphrase for *introspection*.

philosopher: he is a lover of wisdom, especially in relation to the ultimate reality of things.

P.95. **Hesiod:** a celebrated Greek poet of obscure authenticity. In the opinion of some critics the poems attributed to Hesiod are not the work of one poet but represent a distinct school of poetic thought in contrast to

the Homeric or Ionic. Hesiod's best known poem is *Theogony* from which the story of the origin of the Muses is here quoted.

that the Poet should add to the knowledge of men: such however was the impression Arnold's criticisms habitually gave. His description of poetry as 'criticism of life' has been the origin of a fruitful controversy and of much useless jargon. Modern criticism has discarded the position here outlined, has discarded, in fact, the Victorian attitude towards the fine arts. The following quotations from Clutton Brock show the tendencies of literary criticism to-day:

> In fact, men have valued art, ever since there has been any art, for its own sake; yet always they have cast about for irrelevant reasons, why they should value it: and even now though we have discovered that it is to be valued for its own sake, we are puzzled by that discovery, and still often fail to think of art in terms of itself.

And again:

> If a work of art is good to me, its goodness is not moral, but simply aesthetic, something perceived immediately and for its own sake, without relation to any kind of conduct.

Schiller: (1759–1805), one of the greatest of German men of letters. He was a poet, dramatist, and historian. His contributions to aesthetic philosophy have been monumental. He was an intimate friend of another great writer, Goethe; they influenced each other's work to a degree not yet fully recognized.

tragic circumstances: the tragic exists only in art. In actual life it is merely pathetic, painful, or sentimental. This is really the very crux of the matter, and no student should take it for granted without serious reflection.

P.97. **this depends upon its inherent qualities:** what is the value, then, of the so-called local colour; of the environment in which this inherently great action takes place? Does environment colour its movement or not?

In these pages Matthew Arnold makes certain general statements in a more or less dogmatic manner. The student is warned against accepting them unquestioningly.

P.98. **Hermann and Dorothea:** an idyllic poem by the German poet, Goethe. It was published in 1797.

Childe Harold: by the English poet, Byron. Its publication was extended over several years.

Jocelyn: a poem by Lamartine, the French lyrical poet (1790–1869).

The Excursion: by William Wordsworth.

Orestea: a trilogy (three plays on a more or less continued theme) by the Greek dramatist Æschylus.

the episode of Dido: from the *Odyssey*—an account of the wanderings of the Greek hero Odysseus, Ulysses.

Oedipus, Orestes, Merope, Agamemnon, are all well-known figures in Greek classical tragedy. See Arnold's own play, *Merope*, written in imitation of Sophocles.

P.99. **radical:** look up your dictionary for the etymology of this word; you will then enjoy the full significance of *radical difference*.

With them, the action predominated, etc. In the 18th century, and through most of the 19th century, 'expression' was assiduously cultivated by the poets. Differences between one school of poetry and another arose out of varying allegiance to different modes of poetical expression. Wordsworth's revolt was mainly a matter of poetic diction. Pope, in the 18th century, and Tennyson, in the Victorian age, owed their great vogue to their felicity of expression according to the requirements of the age. Since Tennyson's time there has been a revolt against the predominance of expression. Browning's work even in Tennyson's day, was antipathetic to the dominion of mere 'form'.

P.100. **the grand style:** a favourite catchword in Arnold's criticism. By this he meant a poetic style adequate enough to express the great action of which he speaks earlier in this essay.

their significance appeared inexhaustible: there was also another reason for this devotion to the old themes: they centred round the religious beliefs and practices of the Greek people.

P.101. **Persae:** celebrated the victory of the Greeks over the Persians at Salamis.

Æschylus: one of the greatest Greek tragedians, flourished fifth century B.C.

pragmatic: a term generally used in philosophic discussions: characterized by a matter-of-fact treatment of things: poetry that would be judged solely by its practical leaning upon human interests.

P.102. **Polybius**: (204–125 B.C.), a celebrated Greek historian.

admirable treatise of Aristotle: his *Poetics*; the part that has come down to us treats of tragedy.

everything else will follow: most modern critics are agreed that expression is inevitable. It does not follow or precede the original poetic or artistic concept, it lives with it. Do you agree?

Menander: (342–291 B.C.), a well-known Athenian comic poet. His plays have survived only in fragments.

P.103. **which imitates action:** according to Plato, chiefly.

Faust: the best known dramatic poem of Goethe. Margaret is the heroine of the poem.

P.105. **Architectonicè:** built constructively; by skilful systematization of knowledge and the like.

P.106. **composition:** the bringing together and harmonizing of parts.

il dit tout, etc. 'He says all he desires; but unfortunately he has nothing to say.'

Keats: John (1795–1821), one of the greatest of the so-called 'romantic' poets of the 19th century.

The Faerie Queen: by Spencer. Arnold, as shown by the exclamation mark, evidently considers this poem as far superior to any of Keats's works.

P.107. **The action in itself is an excellent one, etc.** But it may be argued that the poet did not intend to present the action; only the emotions involved in it. Is his poem any the less great because he achieves one thing rather than another? Is the excellence of *action* inherently superior to that of any other element in a poem?

P.108. **Mr. Hallam**: Henry Hallam, (1777–1859); historian and literary critic.

than whom: note the peculiar idiom that sanctions this common construction.

curiously: what is the usual sense in which this word is used? Is it used here in that sense?

M. Guizot: French historian (1787–1874).

P.109. **In his chief works, etc.** What would be your comment on the structure of this sentence?

suggestive: this word is being constantly used in the criticism of poetry. What does it imply?

Sophocles: the celebrated Greek dramatist.

P.110. **the all-importance of the choice of a subject, etc.** This sentence sums up Matthew Arnold's critical creed.

P.111. **Pittacus**: (about 650–570 B.C.); the quotation means: It is a difficult thing to abide by the good.

inflating: in other words, by filling themselves with mere gas.

P.112. **Niebuhr**: (1776–1836), German philologist, critic and historian.

P.113. **Non me tua fervida terrent Dicta, etc.** 'Your burning (angry) words do not terrify me: it is God that terrifies me, and the hostile Jupiter.' [Latin]

dilettanti: a dilettante is one who toys with a subject; one who does not care about close study.

XI. THE SUPERNATURAL IN FICTION

P.117. **Andrew Lang**: (1844–1912), was one of the brightest and busiest of London's journalists. He wrote poetry of great excellence, indulged in controversy on the religion and life of primitive man, making solid contributions on the subject, and did much literary critical work of a very high order. He was a rare combination of a sound classical scholar and an imaginative writer—translating Theocritus or Homer with the same ease and elegance with which he wrote *A Book of Fairy Tales*. 'Lang,' says Sir Edmund Gosse, 'was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity,

invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake.'

In all this diversity of achievement may, however, be discerned a unity—the unity of a spirit that ever fastened itself on the romantic, to the subordination, and even exclusion, of other elements.

In point of style he has a knack of felicitous, almost *extempore*, expression that is inimitable. His diction belongs to the older generation of romantic writers, and his wit is Byronic in its fury, and incisiveness.

like cabmen: when asked what the fare is.

P.118. **Christabel:** a fragmentary poem in two parts by Coleridge. The first is much the better of the two. The whole poem makes delightful reading and a student of this essay should not grudge himself the half hour of joy it would give him to read it.

Mr. Gilman: James Gil(l)man wrote a *Life of Coleridge*, in which he 'explained' the story of Christabel. For Wordsworth's opinion, see the *Reminiscences of The Hon. Mr. Justice Coleridge*, Grosart, iii, 42.

P.119. **the Ancient Mariner:** Coleridge's famous contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

speciosa miracula: credible miracles.

Southey: Robert; (1774–1843), the least inspired of the romantic school of poets; author of a *Life of Nelson*, his best work.

P.120. **Laodamia:** a classical poem.

P.121. **the ghost of Darius in 'Aeschylus':** in his *Persae* (The Persians).

Caesar: from Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*.

Alexandre Dumas: see note p. 252.

Mrs. Oliphant: (1828–97), a second-rate but prolific writer. She wrote mainly fiction and biography.

Hawthorne: Nathaniel; (1804–64), American novelist and short story teller. His work is remarkable for the ease with which he combines the requirements of art with didactic purpose.

P.122. **George Sand:** the pen-name of a famous French novelist, and playwright. Her real name was

Baroness Dudevant (1804–76). Towards the end of her life she took an active part in politics as an adherent of extreme republicanism.

Wandering Willie's Tale: one of the finest short stories ever written; by Sir Walter Scott.

Dr. Jekyll: *and Mr. Hyde*, a remarkable tale of a man who led a dual existence.

Mr. Stevenson: Robert Louis; the title 'Mr.' is dropped gradually as a writer gains recognition, particularly after his death.

P.123. **positivist philosophers:** believing in positivism, a non-deistic belief in the ultimate triumph of humanity based on the recognition of positive facts, and observable phenomena. The system was first formulated in Europe by Auguste Comte.

P.124. **et inania regna:** 'and vacant kingdoms'.

XII. THE TRANSMISSION OF DR. JOHNSON'S PERSONALITY

P.125. **Augustine Birrell:** (b. 1850), essayist, critic, and politician. A man of very versatile talents, celebrated for his shrewd wit, charming essays, and eloquent parliamentary speaking. He is a recognized authority on Dr. Johnson of whom he has made a special study. He has great political ideals and has acted as Minister of Education, then as Secretary for Ireland.

He writes a very varied style, the prevailing notes of which are refinement and scholarly ease. His diction is dignified yet colloquial, chaste yet familiar in idiom.

P.126. **Clarissa Harlowe:** a long drawn out eighteenth century novel by Samuel Richardson.

The Luck of Roaring Camp: a well-known story of Bret Harte, an American short story writer.

our own annual gathering: refers to the literary meeting at which this paper was read.

'**How happily the days of Thalaba went by:** from a descriptive poem by Southey.

P.127. **Benvenuto Cellini:** (1500–71), a famous Italian sculptor, and worker in gold and silver, whose fascinating autobiography you should certainly read.

Casanova: (1725–98), a daring Italian adventurer, who was condemned several times to varying terms of imprisonment, escaped from prison, and for twenty years wandered through Europe making the acquaintance of the greatest men and women and living on terms of familiarity with them.

Borrow: George; (1803–81), author of *The Bible in Spain* and several novels of gypsy life.

P 128. **partie carrèe:** Fr., lit. a square party; a pleasure party consisting of two men, and two women. (Pronounce *partee karray.*)

P.129. **unclubable Hawkins:** Sir John Hawkins, (1719–89), besides a life of Dr. Johnson, wrote *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music.*

Miss Hannah More: (1745–1833), an English religious writer. She has left behind a large body of instructional books for children.

Bishop Percy: the well-known seventeenth century collector of ballads.

P.130. **shovel-hatted:** wearing the peculiar broad-brimmed hat worn by Anglican Bishops.

Miss Burney: (1752–1840), see note p. 257.

Mrs. Thrale: Johnson was greatly attached to the Thrales. But after her husband's death in 1781, Mrs. Thrale grew weary of Dr. Johnson. Johnson often rebuked her for 'laxity of narration', and Boswell frequently protests against the wrong and distorted impression conveyed by her *Anecdotes* here alluded to.

Miss Anna Seward: (1747–1809), she was called 'the swan of Lichfield'.

Sir Toby Belch, and **Sir Andrew Aguecheek:** the riotous knights in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night.*

P.131. **Duke of Wellington:** the Iron Duke of Waterloo fame.

P.133. **notional:** merely speculative; not based on experiment or demonstration.

P.134. **John Wesley:** (1703-91), the famous founder of Methodism.

Burke, Thurlow, Reynolds, etc.: Celebrities of the age. All of them belonged to the club over which the great Doctor presided with such dignity.

P.136. **Sir Joshua:** Sir Joshua Reynolds, (1723–93), a famous portrait painter.

XIII. A GOSSIP ON ROMANCE

P.139. **Robert Louis Stevenson:** (1850–1894), one of the most lovable of essayists, found his calling after several experiments. Intended for his family profession of civil engineering, he qualified for the Scottish bar, and settled down to the uncertain life of a man of letters. But from the very first there was no mistaking his individuality, or the fineness of his style.

He won, and has retained, his readers through an unfailing sweetness of temper, and an uncommonly shrewd wit. Wandering all over England, Europe, and part of the West Indies in pursuit of health, he chronicles the trifling incidents of travel with rare genius. What he says is not important in itself. But it is made precious by the light that shines through it—the light and charm of a sweet, winsome, unworldly personality.

Stevenson is a master of the fine phrase. He studied carefully and assiduously the individual word. The grand and the massive in style are not within his reach; but the delicate, the musical—as with the tinkling of silver bells—and the picturesque, are habitual with him. Occasionally he achieves an epigram destined to live for ever; and he never fails to be expressive and interesting.

rapt: literally, snatched away. Do you think the writer knew this when he chose this word?

bright, troubled period of boyhood: childhood exercised a great fascination on R. L. S. In his own imaginative, sweet self, ever anxious to treat life as a plaything, he found many points of sympathy with children.

His collection of poems, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, is a perfect expression of a child's world of make-believe. In his essays too there are numerous references to child life.

P.140. **affected:** liked. (What is the more usual sense of the word? Distinguish from *effected.*)

Jacobite: (Scottish) adherents of James II and his son, the Pretender.

What will he Do with It: A novel by Lytton (1803–75)—not one of his best.

P.141. **Drama is the poetry of conduct:** Mark Stevenson's tendency to make epigram.

dashed we know not how into the future: quite often Stevenson halts in his argument or narrative to express a passing philosophic or moral maxim suggested by it. This generally marks a turning point in the essay.

P.142. **buoyant:** to appreciate the use of this word, look up its origin and development in your dictionary.

genius: tutelary spirit of a person, etc. The more usual sense is one derived from it.

miching mallecho: from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, iii, 2.

P.143. **Antiquary:** a novel by Scott.

P.144. **apotheosis:** fruition; crown.

Kidnapped: a tale of adventure by Stevenson.

P.145. **Crusoe,** Robinson.

Achilles: the warrior hero of Homer's *Iliad.*

Ulysses: the wise man of the *Iliad*, and the adventurous restless spirit that dominates the *Odyssey.*

Christian: in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

P.146. **The first is literature.** Many people would refuse to call any process of dissection, etc. by the name of literature. They would reserve it for 'the story of Ajax or of Hamlet'.

P.147. **ganglion:** centre of force, or interest. (Look it up in your dictionary.)

Esmond: an historical novel by Thackeray; one of the best that he wrote.

Dumas: Alexandre, the famous French romancer: author of *The Three Musketeers*, and *Monte Cristo.*

P.149. **the bony fist of the showman:** the mechanism of the story.

P.150. **Feveril:** *The Ordeal of Richard Feveril*, by George Meredith.

P.151. **Haydn and Consuelo:** from *Consuelo*, a novel by George Sand.

Clark Russell: (1844–1911), an English novelist whose boyhood was spent on the sea.

Verne: Julius, the 'H. G. Wells' of the last century; a writer of highly imaginative scientific stories foreshadowing many of the achievements of to-day.

P.152. **whole vistas of secondary stories:** this is something of what is meant by the suggestive in art.

Eugene de Rastignac: type of the dandy, a character of Balzac. See his novel *Le Père Goriot*.

It is not character but incident, etc.: note the epigrammatic expression. Would you say this is always true?

P.153. **Then we forget the characters:** an attempt at a definition of 'romance'.

romantics: the more usual word being *romancer*. *Romantic* generally refers to the adherents of the *romantic*, as opposed to the *classical*, school of art.

P.155. **Miss Braddon:** (1837–1907), a prolific but second-rate novelist.

Mrs. Todgers: see Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

P.157. The last sentence reflects Stevenson's own attitude to writing: he was meticulous in polishing and recasting and discarding in order to obtain the exact word and effect.

XIV. HISTORY

P.158. **Thomas Babington Macaulay:** (1800–59), statesman, historian, and man of letters, was one of the most celebrated men of his day. Possessed of extraordinary gifts and industry, he produced poetry and prose of great merit. There is nothing from his pen that is of an absolutely first-rate excellence; but his work never falls below

a fairly high level, which he achieved with great determination and application.

The essays from which this extract 'On History' is taken were produced in the intervals of a busy political life. It was the author's habit to dash off an essay of a morning. When one considers the stupendous length which most of his essays reach, this seems to be a prodigious feat indeed.

His prose should be studied as a model of orderliness; there is always a persistent, and predesigned march towards a goal. Its elements are obvious; its artifices clear; and its weakness a certain tendency to be mechanical. On the whole its chief merit is perhaps an unmistakeable *adequacy* of expression. A beginner in the study of English may very profitably analyse the strength and weakness of Macaulay's style—the choice of words for their sense and sound; the length and balance of sentences to achieve a preconceived design in the paragraph; and, finally, the length and rhetoric of individual paragraphs as an all important factor in the art of exposition of a subject.

Macaulay is one of the few writers who can make a judicious use of their scholarship. Like Milton and Scott, he can use a string of familiar and unfamiliar names in history and mythology to give dignity and rhythm to his periods. Like the historians of antiquity he can use his historical material to point a religious moral, or to achieve a grand pictorial effect.

History is . . . poetry and philosophy: a good deal of speculation—even controversial and acrimonious at times—was rife in the nineteenth century with regard to the nature of history. Macaulay maintained the view here expressed: his *History of England* is nine-tenths poetry and a mere one-tenth philosophy. Buckle took the opposite view, that history is a science; and his view has been accepted more and more. But Carlyle had nothing but comtempt for such an opinion. He felt history to be a grand biography written by the heroes of a nation. He would and did surcharge history with drama.

seised: put in possession of. This word is an old variant of *seized*.

per my et per tout: by the moiety and by the whole. [Anglo-Norman]

in severalty: a legal phrase.

P.159. **Rosa**: Salvator, (1615–73), an Italian painter famous for his paintings based on the wild scenery of southern Italy. He was also a notable satirist.

Claude: Gallée, (1600–82), a landscape painter of Lorraine. His best work is now scattered all over the world, being much in demand. *Morning*, *Noon*, *Evening* and *Twilight*, now in Leningrad, are his masterpieces.

the mellow effulgence: Macaulay is thinking probably of his *Twilight*. This poetic imagery, and the reference to Rosa and Claude are characteristic of Macaulay. See introductory note above.

P.160. **We manage these things, etc.** Note the structure of sentences in this paragraph, and in the next.

P.161. **In this respect the character of Mr. Hallam's mind, etc.** See the rising length of sentences as the thought progresses. He is arguing now and not making a bare statement of facts, as in the two paragraphs referred to above.

that of the bench not that of the bar; that of a judge not that of a barrister.

P.162. **sophisms:** false arguments intended to deceive. Look up your dictionary for the interesting history of this word.

Contrast the length of this paragraph with those that precede and follow it. What is the aim of the writer? Has he succeeded?

esoteric and exoteric: used of doctrines in philosophy. *Esoteric*, private, confidential; *exoteric*, public, open to the uninitiated.

It has its altars, etc. Note the balancing of phrases in these sentences: many of them are merely rhetorical.

St. Thomas: Thomas à Becket, murdered at the instance of Henry II.

on trade: compare the *Protection* and *Free-Trade* controversy.

P.163. **Hampden:** John, (1594–1643), of Civil War fame.

Socrates: the most celebrated of Greek philosophers, of whose personality and work we learn in Plato. Socrates wrote no book, but under his influence and guidance grew up students who founded schools of Greek philosophy. His teaching may be summed up in two maxims: Know thyself; and, Virtue is knowledge, Ignorance sin.

a cock to Esculapius: the Greek God of healing.

P.164. **It must particularly disgust:** note the structure of this sentence, and the epithets selected.

Marten: (1602–80), a man of disreputable character. He sat as a judge in the trial of Charles I.

Laud: (1573–1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, who tried to Romanize the Anglican Church. He was put to death on a charge of high treason which was not, however, proved against him.

XV. THE GORDON RIOTS

P.166. **Austin Dobson:** (1840–1921), English poet, essayist, and biographer. Son of a civil engineer, he was educated for the family calling, but sat for the Home Civil Service examination and became a clerk in the Board of Trade. In spite of heavy work at the desk he did not give up his early and favourite studies. Later he wrote extensively in prose and verse.

In poetry he imitated with great technical perfection and naturalness many of the French lyrical forms. His poems show freshness, spontaneity, and sprightly humour. At times they breathe true bathos, or genuine satire.

But his work will go down to posterity as that of a historian of the lighter literature of the 18th century. He is the most delightful chronicler of the age of Fielding, Pope, and Johnson. He is an accurate but none the less sympathetic biographer. He took up the work of digging up old records and manuscripts with conscientious industry, but the literary critic was not lost in the research student. As will be evident from the following essay, he can present

the results of dry-as-dust research with imaginative ease and lightness of touch.

more sane than mad: more fanatic than lunatic. The first half of the phrase is an intelligible contrast; the second half a harsh juxtaposition of qualities not essentially exclusive; for a man may be an insane fanatic, such as perhaps Lord Gordon was.

Pope's Molly Lepel: Alexander Pope, (1688–1744), the greatest of the poets of the 18th century classical school, was in his day an unquestioned authority on matters literary.

received a military commission when scarcely out of his cradle: at one time in the army, commissions were paid for, and promotion was to a large extent by seniority.

P.167. **Hogarth:** William, (1697–1764), a celebrated English painter and engraver. He is known for the faithfulness with which he captured the humorous aspects of life and character. One of his best known pictures is 'Marriage à la Mode'. He has left us a number of portraits of himself, the best of which is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Goldsmith: Oliver, (1728–74), a notable figure in Dr. Johnson's famous literary circle. He is known for his good nature reflected in the sweet humanity of all his writings—essays, plays, novels and poetry.

Mr. Burchell: the assumed name under which Sir William Thornhill acts the good angel in Goldsmith's famous novel *The Vicar of Wakefield.*

P.168. **Presbyterians:** the name under which certain Puritans, chiefly in the north of England and Scotland, were (and are still) known. They were so called because the government of their church was under a council of presbyters or elders.

sinister: look up your dictionary for this very interesting word.

P.170. **motley cohort:** a very good example of the mixed nature of the English language, and of its uniform texture woven out of diversely coloured threads. *Motley* historically means the parti-coloured dress of the professional fool. *Cohort* was originally a division of the Roman

Army. And yet such is the omnivorous adaptability of the English language that there is nothing incongruous in the phrase as it stands; on the contrary there is something peculiarly excellent in it.

cockades: rosettes worn in hats as badges of office, or the like.

Lord Mansfield: (1705–93), William Murray, first Earl of Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice of England.

clarum et venerabile nomen: 'illustrious and venerable name,' [Latin].

P.171. **those honours of their heads:** at this time the upper classes wore wigs.

taking sanctuary: the phrase is reminiscent of the times when civil laws did not apply to lands and buildings under the control of the church. Sometimes dangerous criminals took 'sanctuary' in a church, and escaped the punishment awarded by civil courts.

P.173. **Mrs. Thrale:** see note p. 249.

P.174. **Newgate:** the famous prison. Dobson's account of Gordon's life in the prison gives us a true picture of the life of well-to-do prisoners in Newgate in the 18th century.

P.178. **nouvelles a la main:** lit. news at hand.

mot: a witty saying; a joke.

makes mention: note the idiom. Not *makes a* mention. This idiom is now slightly old fashioned, the common usage being *mentions*.

P.179. **run tea:** that is to say, smuggled. The smugglers' phrase was 'to run a cargo'.

P.180. **Fanny Burney:** Madame D'Arblay (1752–1840). An English novelist, and miscellaneous writer. She is known as a faithful portrayer of contemporary life.

coign of vantage: one of the many expressive phrases from Shakespeare that have become a part of the English language.

P.183. **Thackeray:** William Makepeace, (1811–63), with Charles Dickens, the maker of Victorian fiction. Social satire and relentless exposition of human motives are his characteristics. He has also left behind an inimitable

literary study in his lectures on *The Humorists of the Eighteenth Century.*

Sunt lacrimae rerum: lit. 'There are the tears of things.' [Latin].

the great novelist: Henry Fielding, (1707–54), author of *Tom Jones* and several other novels. He was also a noted playwright.

P.184. **crows:** that is, crow-bars.

P.193. **orlop:** the lowest deck of a ship with three or more decks.

Cagliostro: (*count de*), Giuseppe Balsamo, (1743–1795), an Italian adventurer.

P.194. **gaberdine and long beard:** the marks of a Jew.

No stone marks the spot: what a fitting summary of Gordon's stormy life!

XVI. EDMUND BURKE

P.195: **J. Churton Collins:** (1848–1908), an essayist and a lifelong student of the classics, made his mark as a critic of great weight and penetration. Towards the end of his life he took up a professorship of literature at the University of Birmingham. His studies of the 18th century are particularly noteworthy.

His style is well written analysis. It is severe, rather rhetorical, akin to Macaulay's but with unobtrusive balance. But Collins refrains from the unnecessary elaboration and pompousness of Macaulay's manner. His fondness for structural unity and development is as great as Matthew Arnold's.

forlorn hopes: storming parties of volunteers selected to try a last chance of success. Therefore, any desperate enterprise.

Cassandra: a Greek prophetess who was cursed that she always had to tell the truth, but be never believed. It was after the event that people found out the truth of her prophecies.

Philippics: Olynthiacs: the first are the orations delivered by Demosthenes against Philip of Macedon;

three orations delivered by him to induce the Athenians to help Olynthus against Philip are known as Olynthiacs.

American Taxation, etc. Burke's famous speeches before the War of American Independence.

P.196. **Cicero:** the great Roman politician, orator and writer of prose. His prose style was regarded as a model by all ambitious writers in the Middle Ages.

Beaconsfield: where Burke lay dying. He lies buried in the little church of Beaconsfield.

P.197. **He never deserted his party, etc.** See the effective close of the paragraph.

P.198. **What had changed were circumstances:** more than one writer has, since Burke's death, supported this view.

P.199. **furor,** craze; enthusiastic admiration.

Hamilton: (1729–96), an English politician. The 'single-speech Hamilton' of popular history.

P.200. **The Ark of the Covenant:** see the Old Testament, Exodus, xxv. 10 ff.

P.201. **prescription:** a legal term which Burke again and again applied to the determination of political rights. Rights by prescription are those which have been enjoyed from times immemorial. In many cases they are not defined by law, but they exist and are recognized by it.

P.202. **I heave the lead . . . :** that is, to proceed cautiously as a seaman navigating by heaving the lead frequently to find a channel.

P.204. **Das Christenthum ist keine Philosophie:** 'Christianity is not a philosophy'.

empirical: as opposed to scientific.

Bolingbroke: (1678–1751), English statesman and political writer. His best known work is *The Idea of a Patriot King.*

P.205. **Bishop Butler:** (1692–1752), of Bristol, and then of Durham. His best known work is *The Analogy of Religion.* The saying here alluded to is: 'Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?'

P.206. **Quixotic:** foolishly idealistic; in a manner characteristic of Don Quixote.

Utopian: of the land of political perfection; in reference to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, a treatise dealing with an ideal state.

No man ever so shy, etc. Put this in simple prose.

peroration: the rhetorical close of a speech.

P.207. **States-General:** the name by which the legislative assemblies of France were known before the Revolution.

Bastille: the prison in Paris taken by the Revolutionaries.

P.209. **Identifying France with lawlessness, etc.** Mark the ceaseless roll of the sentences.

P.210. **Lord Morley:** (1838–1917), a Liberal politician and man of letters of our own times. While Secretary of State for India (1905–1910), he introduced certain political reforms in this country.

P.211. **he lies floating many a rood:** from Milton's description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Book I.

P.212. **If we have outgrown, etc.** A typical sentence illustrative of Collins' style.

XVII. SYRACUSE

P.214. **W. L. Courtney:** (1850–1928), editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, was an essayist with a variety of interests—philosophy and ethics, literary criticism and history. The passage quoted here is taken from *Rosemary's Letter Book*, an interesting compromise between the novel and the essay form. You will appreciate it better with a classical atlas at your elbow for ready reference.

For his style, it is in the half-didactic, half-imaginative manner of an earlier generation that he seems to excel. Deeply read in classical philosophy and history, his work is remarkable for careful elegance and rich allusiveness.

Nestor: the old man in Homer's *Iliad*; the councillor of the Greeks before Troy. He was the oldest chief among them.

ultramarine : lying beyond the sea.

Hellas : another and more poetic name for Greece.

Apollo Temenites : Temenites, a suburb of Syracuse, afterwards known as Neapolis, or the New City. For a short and clear account of Syracuse, see Smith's *Smaller Classical Dictionary.*

P.215. **Dorian :** of Doris, a district of ancient Greece. Things Dorian were characterized by a severe and solemn simplicity.

oligarchic : oligarchy is rule by the chosen few.

bucolic : natural; pastoral.

P.216. **Thyrsis, etc.** Names of shepherds and shepherdesses in pastoral poetry. For more than two centuries such pastoral affectations were popular in European poetry. See the translations of *Theocritus, Bion and Moschus* in the Golden Treasury Series (Macmillan).

Victrix causa deis placiut, etc., 'The victorious cause pleased the gods, but the vanquished one Cato.' [From Lucan, a Roman poet.]

Cato : (95–46 B. C.), a Roman patriot and Stoic philosopher.

P.217. **Pericles :** (495 ?–429 B. C.), a celebrated Athenian statesman and orator.

Atê : in Greek mythology, goddess of re , deeds.

Grote : George, (1794–1871), an English h. orian, author of a standard *History of Greece.*

P.218. **triremes :** Greek warships with three banks of oars; whence the name. [Lat. *remus*, oar.]

P.219. **miasma :** the foul air which was for long supposed to cause malarial fever.

P.221. **Oh, the pity o'it, etc.** The heart-rending cry of Othello when he has been 'convinced' by Iago that Desdemona is unchaste and unfaithful to him.

Admêtus : In Greek mythology a king of Thessaly, delivered from death by the voluntary sacrifice of his wife Alcestis. She is the heroine of a play of that name by Euripides.

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