LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

REPERUSALS AND RE-COLLECTIONS

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REPERUSALS

and

RE-COLLECTIONS

by

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

Je me trouve fort bien d'être une substance qui pense et qui lit. (MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.)

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REPERUSALS AND RE-COLLECTIONS

I

MONTAIGNE

I

There are readers—and I am one of them—whose reading is rather like a series of intoxications. We fall in love with a book; it is our book, we feel, for life; we shall not need another. We cram-throat our friends with it in the cruellest fashion; make it a Gospel, which we preach in a spirit of propaganda and indignation, putting a woe on the world for a neglect of which last week we were equally guilty.

I am not at all sorry that I have never been cured of this form of youthful susceptibility; one may after all become the victim of more inadvisable forms of folly. My infatuations have at least one advantage; they may lead to satiety, but they do not often end in disillusion. I have, of course (who hasn't?), my Bluebeard's closet of dead loves, abandoned for ever; but for the most part I find that the objects of my former adoration are quite capable of awakening my old affection. My experiences of love at first sight, being followed by love at second or third or fourth sight, I enjoy the bliss of both the constant and the inconstant lover. Indeed, these returns to old books—as I have just now returned to Montaigne's *Essays*—have often proved, in a life of desultory reading, to be among the pleasantest experiences of that pleasant scheme of existence.

Critics have pointed out how the great classics of literature absorb into themselves the admiration of successive generations, and become of greater value in the process. Time and history adds to their significance; it patines and mellows them. In something the same way the briefer history of one human life may enrich a familiar book with many associations. We remember our first acquaintance with it, the times and places when we read it again, the people we quarrelled with about it; and we see through film after film of appreciation its half-forgotten pages.

There is something reassuring, too (at least, I find it so), in these renewals of former admirations. We all endeavour, as Spinoza says, to persist in our own being; and that endeavour is, he adds, the very essence of our existence. When, therefore, we find that what delighted us once can still delight us: that though the objects of our admiration may be intermittent, yet they move in fixed orbits, and their return is certain, these reappearances will suggest that we have after all maintained something of our own integrity; that a sort of system lies beneath the apparent variability of our interests; that there is, so to speak, a continuity within ourselves, a core of meaning which has not disintegrated with the years.

And if we find, when we read again one of our classics—say Virgil for instance—that we like it better than ever, the experience may suggest an even more pleasing conjecture. Psychologists tell us that fullness of life is the goal of everything that lives, that the impulse towards completeness, towards ripeness and self-realization, is the most compelling of all motives. These discoveries in old books of new beauties and aspects of interest may persuade us, therefore, that we are not only still ourselves, but more ourselves than ever: that our spirit has not only persisted in its being, but has become more lucid in the process; that the observatory or palace it has edified for its habitation, though always falling out of repair in places, one wing collapsing after another, is yet being always rebuilt on a more consistent plan, and with bigger windows. I flatter myself therefore with the notion, that if anyone pays me a call, though I may be out for the day on some foolish errand, yet, as Montaigne says of himself, I am never really far from home.

II

For these rediscoveries of our classics, these renewals and, it may be, enhancements of appreciation, both length of years and a bad memory are of no small advantage; the old dotard Time will turn sometimes, as he totters on and hand us back some long-lost but now new-gilded treasure. *C'est un plaisir*, Madame de Sévigné wrote to her daughter of reading history, *c'est un plaisir ma belle, que de n'avoir point de mémoire*; and Montaigne also counted a bad memory for books as a piece of his happy fortune. My memory being like Montaigne's—and it is of Montaigne that I am trying to write—'so excellent in forgetting,' has just now enabled me to return with a new delight to his *Essays*; I have fallen once more, and now more than ever, under the spell of this incomparable author. I find his miscellaneous old book one of those which grows wiser the wiser we grow ourselves: of which one secret is unlocked and then another, as life and experience give us the key. Now more than ever it seems to me indeed one of the wisest, sanest, most courageous, and happiest

books in the world, and there are many things that I should like to say about it. But most of these have been said already, for Montaigne has been loved and praised for more than three hundred years. In reading these panegyrics, however, I am struck now and then by a note of apology. There are certain aspects of Montaigne which his admirers seem reluctant to face, certain things which they try to explain away.

The truth is that Montaigne was given a bad name in the seventeenth century, and has hardly yet recovered from it. His attitude of detached and disinterested curiosity, his sense of the weakness and fallibility of the human judgment, his habit of stating his opinions without affirming their truth, or expecting other people to agree with him, was extremely distasteful to the age of faith which came after him, and almost more so to the age of denial which followed on. Pascal was gravely shocked by Montaigne; Voltaire couldn't understand him. Even the nineteenth century was inclined to look upon him as a sceptic and a cynical scoffer. But present-day readers, if indeed they read Montaigne (which I doubt), will hardly be able to comprehend that point of view. The notion that Montaigne disparaged and sneered at the human race seems as absurd to us as the notion, long held, that Spinoza was an enemy of the same species. These precursors, these moderns, born in uncongenial epochs, haunt the world like portents, till at last their real contemporaries arrive to do them justice.

III

But it was not only Montaigne's scepticism which shocked the time; he did something which brought him into worse discredit. It was a strange, unheard-of, undignified thing to do, a thing that had never been done before, and indeed has never been done since with the same boldness. For Montaigne told the truth about himself, he threw off his clothes and took himself to pieces in public. He did not indeed begin with this design; the amazing simplicity and interest of it dawned gradually upon him, and grew clearer and clearer as he proceeded. For this reason a beginner in Montaigne will do well to read the later essays first, for it is in these that he carries out his purpose with the completest frankness, turning his detached, disinterested mind on his own personality, and giving a long account, not of his actions, but of his essence and being.[1] He publishes to the world an impartial register of his good and bad qualities, his virtues, his vices, his whims and absurd imaginations, his physical characteristics and the details of his hygiene and habits. 'What shameless self-exposure, what impertinent twaddle!' the seventeenth century thought, and invented the word 'egoist' to describe him. Montaigne, like Machiavelli, has added a term of reprobation to the vocabulary of Europe.

It is not only Montaigne's lack of decorum, the fact that he published things which Pepys would have hid in his deepest cipher; it is the triviality also, the want of dignity of many of his avowals that has startled Posterity, and still rather disconcerts his admirers. Why tell us that he is fond of sitting with his feet up and scratching his ears, that he has hairy legs, and is so greedy that he often bites his tongue in eating? Why should he describe his bed-clothes and night-cap, the filling and emptying of his body, and his deportment on the close-stool? There is nothing in the world we can put beside the 'bald, grizzled portrait' of himself with which Montaigne so surprisingly presents us. All subsequent autobiographies and confessions seem in comparison reticent, wanting in detail, idealized and insincere. Walt Whitman has come nearest to him, but Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* is a mere sketch compared with Montaigne's life-size picture. Montaigne was perfectly aware that he was doing a strange and unprecedented thing; that he was writing, as he says, the only book of its kind in the world. His act was no mere freak or whim; he was, as Sainte-Beuve has called him, the wisest of Frenchmen, and he did what he did in full possession of his faculties. We cannot, therefore, explain away this deliberate act as due to the garrulity of age, or accept the other excuses with which his admirers have sought to palliate it. He evidently had his reasons, and possibly they were good ones. Perhaps not only in his attitude towards truth, but in his attitude towards himself, Montaigne was a precursor. Perhaps here again he was ahead of his own time, ahead of our time also, since none of us would have the courage to imitate him. It may be that some future century will vindicate this unseemly performance; in the meanwhile it will be of interest to examine the reasons which he gives us for it. He says, in the first place, that he found this study of himself, this registering of his moods and imaginations, extremely amusing; it was an exploration of an unknown region, full of the queerest chimeras and monsters, a new art of discovery, in which he had become by practice 'the cunningest man alive.' It was profitable also, for most people enjoy their pleasures without knowing it; they glide over them, and fix and feed their minds on the miseries of life. But to observe and record one's pleasant experiences and imaginations, to associate one's mind with them, not to let them dully and unfeelingly escape us, was to make them not only more delightful but more lasting. As life grows shorter we should endeavour, he says, to make it deeper and more full. But he found moral profit also in this self-study; for how, he asked, can we correct our vices if we do not know them, how cure the diseases of our soul if we never observe their symptoms? The man who has not learned to know himself is not the master, but the slave of life: he is the 'explorer without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and when all is done, the fool of the play.'

[1] All the passages of autobiography and self-description in Montaigne's *Essays and Travels* have been collected and admirably arranged in *The Autobiography of Michel de Montaigne*, by Marvin Lowenthal (Routledge, 1935).

IV

But granted the pleasure and profit of self-knowledge, why publish this knowledge to the world? But why not? Montaigne answers: if painters can paint their own portraits without blame, why may not authors also portray themselves if they want to? He had not made a statue to put in a church or a market-place; his book was for the corner of a library, for the amusement of a friend or kinsman who might like after his death to renew acquaintance with him. How glad would he be to possess portraits like this of his ancestors! If anyone could tell him of their customs, their countenance, their usual words, 'Oh, how attentively,' he exclaims, 'would I listen to it!' This justification is one that must appeal to the modern reader, who loves among the records of the past to come on any bit of frank self-description, any account that a writer like Horace or Lamb may give of his whims and vagaries, of how life seemed to him in his time, and how the cup of experience tasted. How scanty, after all, are these revelations, how opaque and incredible the Past seems to us, and how unreal and inhuman its upholstered inhabitants! We cannot look into their minds, or if we do, we seem to find nothing there but sawdust. It is certainly curious that among all the millions of books that have been written on every conceivable subject, so few writers have really tried to describe the tissue of their thoughts and the actual taste of consciousness. And yet this is, after all, our most immediate and direct experience—the only experience of whose reality we are absolutely certain. Perhaps in the future Montaigne will find imitators, and the walls of time will be hung with a few more of these living portraits.

But Montaigne tells us that he had a serious moral purpose in his self-portrayal—that he published, not only for the public interest, but for the public good, these avowals which still seem to us a little beneath the dignity of human nature. Well, it was just because they were beneath this so-called dignity that Montaigne made them. Man, he believed, would never be happy till he had the courage to accept his human condition. It was man's too high ideal of himself, his attempt to escape from his status as a human animal, his straining after the ideal and the impossible, that got him into trouble. Super-celestial opinions and under-terrestrial manners, cruelty to himself and to others, were the inevitable result. In trying to make themselves angels, men, he said, 'transform

themselves into beasts.’ Montaigne was determined that the truth should be known; and since each individual bore on himself the stamp of the whole human condition, he would tell the truth about himself, force it on us in its most unavowable aspects, and thus compel us to see ourselves in this mirror as we really are. When, therefore, he comes to take a farewell of the world in his final essay, he prefaces this summing up of his beliefs and conclusions, this exposition of his serene and noble philosophy, with remarks which seem at first wildly irrelevant. ‘Just now I lost one of my teeth,’ he tells us; ‘I am a great lover of fish’; ‘sometimes radishes agree, sometimes they disagree with my digestion’; ‘my father hated all kinds of sauces, I love them all’; ‘I like little glasses best. I like to empty them; I like to see what I am drinking.’

Montaigne depicted himself as a man—he did not pretend to be anything else. His human fate he found, with all its drawbacks, a pleasant one; he was grateful for it, and enjoyed it, he tells us, twice as much as other people. What if its pleasures were variable and mixed and transitory? Man himself was a variable, mixed and transitory creature; he could not escape the law of his own being. ‘ ’Tis to much purpose,’ he ends in a surprising sentence, ‘to mount upon stilts, for when we are on them we must yet go on our own legs; and sit we upon the highest throne of the world, yet sit we only upon our own tail.’

1918.

II

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ IN THE COUNTRY

I

In travelling across France the train sometimes passes a formal park, through which a great avenue, opening its vista for a second, reveals the mansard roofs and the façade of some seventeenth-century château; and in the imagination of the traveller this momentary glimpse will awaken the thoughts of the most famous age of French history—the reign, so glorious in arts and arms, of the Great Monarch. To an English or American stranger there may be something pompous and cold in the vision, thus suddenly evoked, of a vanished France; he may not be easily able to imagine what the personages were really like for whom these parks were laid out and these stately houses erected. But, on the other hand, it is possible that our traveller may feel himself curiously at home in this period—more at home there, indeed, than in the democratic France of the date of his railway journey. Many of its inhabitants may seem to him like long-acquainted friends, with the very texture of whose minds he has become familiar, having learned in long days of delightful conversation the things they liked and laughed at, the problems they puzzled over, and with what fears and hopes their thoughts travelled along those avenues to the Court and the wars.

Thus to reverse the time-process, thus to be transported back into the actual life of a bygone epoch, requires a spell more potent than that of history: the chroniclers, the historians and even the memoir-writers of the *Grand Siècle* can at most enable us to see it, so to speak, from without—to look in, as through formal gates, upon that formal region. If, then, our traveller can feel himself happy and at home in such society, it must be because a more intimate access, a more personal introduction, has been his privilege: he must in fact have made the acquaintance, and have won the friendship, we may safely hazard, of the amiable and illustrious lady who stands ready with her key to open that gate to those who love her. This magical instrument, the enchanted wand which she wielded, was nothing more than the feathered quill with which Madame de Sévigné scribbled her almost countless letters to her daughter—letters which, as we read and re-read them, seem as if they had been written hardly more than a day or two ago. With almost all the figures of past epochs it is a constant effort to believe that they once actually existed, did once indubitably breathe

the air and walk in the sunshine of this earthly scene; but with Madame de Sévigné, so limpid is the sound of her voice, so lively her glance, so inextinguishable the spirit of life which sparkles and shines in her letters, that we find it hard to believe what the incredible books tell us, that she died nearly two hundred and fifty years ago.

When we best get to know her, at the beginning of her correspondence with her daughter, Madame de Sévigné was approaching the age of fifty, but her face still retained the colouring of girlhood; she enjoyed, she said, the fine blood that ran so lightly through her veins, almost believing that she had discovered some fountain of perpetual youth; for how otherwise could she account for her triumphant health? This *divine Marquise*, with her fair complexion, her blue eyes and golden hair, was a woman of high distinction, who was famous for her wit and grace and beauty. She played no insignificant part in the society of her time, and her biographers have written at greatest length of this aspect of her life—and with good reason. Indeed, the good company of the age and country in which she lived, of that second half of the seventeenth century in France, was one of the most exquisite and cultivated societies of human beings which has ever existed. Perhaps never before in the history of the world, and certainly never since, has the costly invention of aristocratic life, of leisure and ease and splendid ways of living, flowered into so great a perfection of manners and good taste, that just to think of what life has once been, of what it might be again in ideal conditions, is enough sometimes to make us feel disinherited and unhappy. Of this vanished great world which she adorned, Madame de Sévigné had a curiously conscious appreciation. Her soul rejoiced, like that of Pindar, in palaces and splendour; on the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them she gazed with eyes of admiration. She loved the fantastic vision of the gaudy show, and though perfectly aware of its vanity, she delighted in all that was magnificent in that age of magnificent pleasure and representation, its unrepentant worship of the Golden Calf, the pomp of its mercenary marriages and ostentatious funerals, the perfidious glory of the Court, and the splendour of Versailles as, new-built, it shone in contemporary eyes; the torches and gold costumes of the fêtes there, the confusion without confusion of the courtiers and music, the stately figure of the Grand Monarch, and the triumphant beauty of his mistresses, with their thousand ringlets, their lace and pearls. How diversified everything was, how gay and gallant; and surely, she said, writing before its disastrous eclipse, never had there been a star so brilliant as the King’s!

II

But interesting as is Madame de Sévigné’s account of the Court and

fashion, she herself is more delightful than any good society. The ‘fine creature,’ as her English admirer, Edward FitzGerald called her, ‘all genuine, all Truth and Daylight,’ with her ‘good sense,’ as he described it, her ‘Good Feeling, Humour, Love of Books and Country Life,’ wins at every date the love of certain readers; and indeed nowhere can the spell that she casts be more apparent than in the letters of Edward FitzGerald himself—that master of the art of reperusal, one of the charms of whose leisurely correspondence, so full of delicate criticism, is the reappearance and renewed appreciation of the books to which he constantly returned, his ‘old standards,’ as he called them. Although Madame de Sévigné became in the end perhaps his favourite companion, on whose arm, when he was old and fastidious and lazy, he best liked to saunter in the sun, she was in his life a late arrival; he was already sixty-six when, in one of his ‘lunacies,’ those plenilunar epistles which he wrote at each full moon to Fanny Kemble, he tells how Madame de Sévigné had taken the place of Montaigne in his study; and taken it worthily he added, for she herself was a lover of Montaigne, and there was a spice of his free thought and free speech in her letters. Henceforth, with the blackbirds’ voices, liquid like theirs with unpremeditated music, she would always return to Suffolk in the month of May; more than once he repeats Sainte-Beuve’s good advice to read again the whole of Madame de Sévigné; there could be no more delightful way, he agreed, of spending a fortnight of rain and leisure in the country. So great, indeed, became his devotion at last to his ‘dear old Sévigné,’ his ‘old girl,’ as he called her, that he composed as a labour of love a big dictionary of the places and persons she mentions in her letters.

III

Rien n’est bon, Madame de Sévigné wrote, *que d’avoir une belle et bonne âme: on la voit en toute chose comme au travers d’un cœur de cristal*: and this sentence might form the best motto for the many volumes of her correspondence. We see into this crystal perhaps most clearly in the long letters written during the leisure of her country days. Although her home was in Paris, she had a retreat in the midst of a forest not many miles away. Sometimes in the spring she would drive thither merely for the afternoon, to refresh her spirit with the young green of the trees and the soft rains of Livry; and often she would live for weeks or months there, especially in the autumn, finding in that forest a solitude, a melancholy and a silence which, she often felt, she loved better than anything else in the world.

But much the greater number of her country letters were written from the family estate in far-off Brittany, where long periods of her life were spent. First of all she describes the journey from Paris, partly by road and partly with

her coach on board a sailing boat and floating down the Loire; and these journeys are so vividly reflected in the magic glass she carries with her that we remember them almost as intimately as if they had been journeys of our own. Sometimes she would travel in the company of her uncle, the old Abbé, with whom she lived, sometimes with friends who were making the same journey; and she often recounts the conversations with which they filled the long, hot days of driving. Often, too, she would stop at the country houses of friends on the way; and, with her horses resting in the stables, she would pay long visits at these great châteaux, with their avenues and terraces and fountains, bored or pleased, according to the company she found in them. But sooner or later after these journeys, with all their fatigues and accidents, for her coach would sometimes upset and land her in a ditch—they were strange things, long journeys, and if one remembered them one would never travel, but God made one forget—she would arrive on her own property and drive up the avenue to her own château, where she would find awaiting her the business affairs and social duties which belonged to her position as the mistress of a large estate.

In her letters we become familiar not only with Les Rochers, but with the society of the neighbourhood—a society, as she regarded it, of tiresome and pretentious people, whom she was always trying to avoid. Some critics have blamed Madame de Sévigné for her contempt of the provincial *noblesse*, which was, they say, so superior in moral qualities to the high and fashionable society of Paris in which she lived; but Posterity can hardly reprehend with much enthusiasm the disdain to which we owe so amusing a picture-gallery of provincial bores, each of them touched off with a light and witty malice, which makes us understand why her intimates found such a delight in her company that, as one of them declared, he at least would hardly care to go on living without her, *ne sachant avec qui rire finement*. In the pretentions of her country neighbours she often found a source of mockery, and had to admit that her ‘soul of mud,’ as she described it, could not help indulging in a certain malicious pleasure in the pains and griefs which are due to wounded vanity. She was much beset by these unwelcome neighbours who would come to call so often, or even to stay in the house for long visits; but she consoled herself with the philosophic thought that bad company was after all better than good; it was so delightful to have it go! The departure of tiresome guests—what could be a greater pleasure? she would ask her daughter: *Je me ménage les délices d’un adieu charmant*, she writes of some visitors staying in the house, describing later on how exquisitely the sound of their departing coach-wheels had refreshed her blood.

But a great part of the time Madame de Sévigné was more or less alone at Les Rochers with her irresponsible and enchanting son, or with her uncle, the

old Abbé, who helped manage her affairs. One of the main occupations of this uncle and niece was the improvement of the property; each of them had a band Of workmen; the Abbé loved to build, and was always wandering out to look at the chapel he was erecting, while his niece had a passion for planting trees. She would be sometimes out early, up to her knees in dew, marking out new plantations; and each time when, after an absence, she arrived again in Brittany, she would hurry out to see her avenues, marvelling at the growth of the trees she had planted, the long shadows they cast, and their greenness, brighter than that of the trees near Paris. Was it their nature to be so green, she wondered, or was it the freshness of the Breton rains? There is indeed a charming breath of the forest in these old letters, in which we see this fine lady transformed into a kind of woodland creature, or looking like a *loup-garou*, as she said, when dressed in an old coat and an old straw hat, she planted oak-trees in the rain.

IV

That love of wild nature which we regard as a modern passion, that blending of mood and landscape which so deeply colours our modern consciousness, is generally supposed—and supposed with much truth—to date from the time when sunsets and lakes and woods and mountains first mirrored themselves with such rich colours in Rousseau's romantic eyes. But Rousseau had his predecessors: there were lovers of nature before his birth, and among them Madame de Sévigné, with her passion for trees, must be counted; for although, like her contemporaries, she was unaware of the beauty of lakes and moors and mountains, and although her woods were not the dark forests in which Chateaubriand entombed his inexplicable despair, but arranged plantations, with mottoes here and there, and dry and pleasant walks and labyrinths, and artificial echoes; yet her delight in the solitude, the mystery, the *sainte horreur*, as she called it, of these woods, her passion for wandering at night in their recesses, were moods of *romantisme avant la lettre*, as the French call it. Nor have any romantic writers of a later period noted with greater sensitiveness the changing aspects of forest scenery. Her trees were by no means the faded, bluish, conventionalised trees of the paintings of her time; they were authentic beeches, oaks, hornbeams, each with a colour and character of its own. She describes the frosty stillness of her winter days among them, with the faint sunlight that made the distance misty; their leafless beauty in March, with the confused noise of the birds which foretold the spring; and when the swelling buds of hornbeams, of beech and then of oak, as they changed, one after the other, the reddish hue of their buds to the green of early leaves, she would study the whole process with an exactitude of

observation which made her feel capable of making, if need be, a Spring herself. Then comes the triumph of May with the nightingales; then the coolness of the woods in torrid weather, the sweetness of the summer nights among them, with their soft and gracious air, the beauty of the sunsets at the ends of the great avenues, or the enchantment of the moon, silvering the shadowy spaces of their long perspectives. *Nous avions entendu un cor dans le fond de cette forêt*—we rub our eyes: can this haunting sentence have been penned, so long before Alfred de Vigny's birth, by a lady of fashion in the bewigged reign of Louis the Fourteenth?

A foreigner who might attempt to define for himself the charm of these seventeenth-century letters, although he might not be able to analyse into its elements this liquid and harmonious French, flowing on through volume after volume with the inexhaustible vivacity of a fountain of clear water,[2] could not but note the felicity of the many translucent phrases which mirror with such limpidity the woodland lights and shadows, as they coloured Madame de Sévigné's meditations and tinged her varying moods, while she paced those avenues, day after day, and season after season. Heaven only knew, she said, what thoughts she didn't think in that Breton forest: there were pleasant memories and hopes and day-dreams; and there was a great spectacle of contemporary history, which she watched from her woods, and over which she moralized with unfailing interest. She liked great events, great changes of fortune pleased her; and there were certain strokes of Providence which, although they took her breath away, delighted her with their suddenness and grandeur.

But the general conclusion of all her thoughts was a sad one; almost all her meditations led to a melancholy moral. Kings, and the lovely mistresses of kings, princes and courtiers, as she thought of them in her forest, all seemed to her examples of human misery and weakness. They lived in the midst of pleasure, but one moment of happiness they never tasted. To her, as to her great contemporary, Bossuet, *le vide et le néant* beneath all human glory was only too apparent. The man the world saw, she wrote her daughter, was not the man; not one of the great actors playing their parts on the world's great stage, not one of them was really happy. And she herself? For her, too, there were in the forest abysses of meditation which she tried to hurry past without regarding. Her humour was by no means a melancholy one; she was easily amused, and could accommodate herself, she said, to almost anything that happened; and all that was essentially cruel in human conditions, the mockery of hope, the swift passing of time—the very shadows of the great trees she had planted reminding her how she, too, was growing old—even the nearness of hideous and degrading old age, and of death, which she feared and hated—all

this she could bear without repining; it was the common lot. But thus to be growing old far from the person she loved with so strange a passion—this was a thought to which neither religion nor philosophy could reconcile her; nothing could cure the poor lady's tears.

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[2] Unluckily for most readers the usual text of Madame de Sévigné's letters is the text which was expurgated and somewhat retouched by her eighteenth-century editor. The discovery of first one, and then of an even better set of almost contemporary copies of the letters to her daughter has enabled the editors of the edition in *les grands écrivains de la France* to restore much of the idiomatic vivacity of her style. And a good deal, too, of her Montaigne-like frankness as, for instance, when towards the end of her life she went to visit, at Les Rochers, her son (now ranged and married to a pious wife), and when, for want of other diversion, she joined with them in their habit of taking purges. Charles did it often; his wife purged herself to keep him company, and the old lady did it too. *C'est une débauche*, she wrote to her sophisticated daughter, *nous n'avons que cela à faire*.

V

Madame de Sévigné's letters to the daughter she loved with this vehemence have so much the character of love-letters that many readers have been repelled from them by the monotony which seems inseparable from effusions of this kind. There is, indeed, in all extreme affection a monotony of unreason which disconcerts us: the elixir of love is most serviceable for literature after it has been decanted into the crystal chalice of a lyric, or cooled in the ornamented jars of a sonnet-sequence; and impetuous love-letters, fervid with the ebullitions of unmoderated feeling, are apt to pall upon the unenamoured reader. Even Edward FitzGerald confesses that he had been kept aloof from Madame de Sévigné for many years by 'that eternal daughter of hers'; and others of her admirers cannot but be wearied at times by her praises of Madame de Grignan's perfections, and her lamentations over the absence and distance between them, her 'sad account of fore-bemoaned moans,' especially since posterity has enviously, and perhaps unjustly, agreed to regard this Countess as an unamiable prig, not at all worthy of inspiring so generous and ardent a passion. That consummate Sévignist, Horace Walpole, who loved,

as FitzGerald loved, the mother, would rage with Walpolian fury against what he called ‘the eccentric and sophisticated reveries of her sublime and ill-humoured daughter;’ but there are more modern students who have come to regard this shy, proud, beautiful, sophisticated Countess as one of the finer intelligences of her time, who, besides her philosophic interests, had a great palace and a hundred guests to attend to, and must have been embarrassed by such an excess of maternal devotion. And yet we must remember that this fine excess has after all a beauty and a certain pathos of its own, and without it Madame de Sévigné would never have written these letters, in which she made use of all her resources to amuse and entertain, not only her daughter, but by great good luck, posterity as well—gathering the pick, as she said, of all the baskets, the flower of her wit and thoughts and eyes and pen. And moreover, unlike most lovers, she was aware of her own folly, and tried to moderate its vehemence and vary its expression in a hundred humorous and graceful ways. Still it was her song, as inevitable and natural to her as that of the nightingale; and she repeats its phrases over and over with the musical reiteration of that woodland chorister. *Ah! la jolie chose qu’une feuille qui chante!* she wrote of the nightingale in a phrase which has become famous; and as she reiterates her longing for the being whose image was her inseparable companion, her voice echoes from the formal forests of seventeenth-century France with something of the beauty of that bereaved parent’s musical lament. For the thought of Madame de Grignan was the centre and depth of all her meditations; she was her ‘all-the-world’; around that thought everything else slid and vanished. Should ever, by some miracle, that image desert her, it would leave her, she said, like a wax figure, hollow and empty and with nothing within. So all day long, and day after day, her imagination, out-distancing the swift couriers who were carrying her letters to the south, would wing its way across the breadth of France to the terraces and triumphant view of that great castle in Provence, where, amid an uproar of music and guests and servants, and a perpetual storm of wind, the lovely, philosophic Countess lived and reigned. Ah, for a coach and horses, the mother would sigh, that would gallop thither like the wind; and what a bore it was to be so little of a spirit that one couldn’t take a single step without one’s body!

Madame de Grignan piqued herself upon her mastery of the modern and fashionable philosophy of Descartes; her mother belonged, as FitzGerald noted, to the older, more human and homely school of Montaigne; and curiously enough she remains, with Montaigne, one of the human beings of the past with whom posterity is most intimately acquainted—being, indeed, much more living to us than most of the living people whom we see about us. Writing long ago those hasty epistles to which she attached not the slightest

importance, and letting her pen gallop at its will with the reins upon the neck, as pen and ink and her thought were all in flight together, she would jot down, not only the trivial details of her daily life, but her meditations, as they occurred to her, on the cruel lapse of Time, which was bearing her away, with all she loved, so swiftly. Yet in her very complaints of his invincible power she was, though she had no notion of it, splendidly triumphing over this old enemy. And indeed Time himself, busied as always with his work of obliteration, has for once proved to be a chivalrous opponent, turning away his scythe to preserve the slightest records of Madame de Sévigné's moods and fancies.

Many writers have longed for durable renown, labouring with no success to win an immortality in the thoughts of succeeding ages; but this gift of Fame was vouchsafed to Madame de Sévigné in answer to no request of hers. That easy, graceful, smiling defeat of Oblivion, that effortless and unconscious victory over Death, which is the ultimate interest of her writing, was the outcome of a genius she never knew she possessed; nor had she, indeed, the slightest notion that, in a life in which so little happened, she was weaving out of even the slightest threads a bright, delicate, enduring tissue which the rust of time has not tarnished. 'Everything you touch turns to gold,' one of her cousins wrote her, and indeed she may be said to have dipped in her ink-pot, for her daughter's sake, day after day and year after year, that 'golden quill' which Shakespeare wished for, in order that he might make his friend outlive all gilded monuments.

It does, by the way, no credit to the all-for-love gallants of our sweet-hearting world, that in the records of these two out-of-the-way devotions—that of a poet for his friend and of a mother for her daughter—we should find what are perhaps the most touching and beautiful expressions of the affection of one human being for another—that so far from the beaten path of love these two shrines should glow with the brightest candles.

VI

The collocation of these two names—that of an elderly French Marquise and of an English actor-manager, may seem somewhat fantastic, but there is another likeness which puts them in relation to each other. The brightness shed by each was not focused on one spot alone, but falls, as the sunlight falls, upon a whole open-air world of animated beings. Madame de Sévigné, as one of her English admirers has described her,[3] was the sun of a whole system, which still lives for us in her light with a kind of reflected immortality. Many groups of seventeenth-century people revolve about her, and spring into vividness as their orbits draw them near to that centre. They seem actually to come into the

room where she is writing; we see their faces, hear their voices; they snatch her letters from her, and scribble messages in the corners.

Many of these friends of hers are people of whom we read in history; but the pages of history turn pale when she recounts their triumphs and disasters. We are actually present, day after day, at the trial of the great minister Fouquet; we walk chatting for hours in the woods with de Retz, just before that unscrupulous, splendid, disgraced Cardinal makes his illustrious retreat from the world to pay his enormous debts and write his scandalous memoirs. Other great Ministers of State we visit in the exile of their splendid country houses, and we flutter now and then unharmed into the illustrious Court in which they have singed their wings. More interesting to posterity is that quiet, retired house near the Luxembourg, which Madame de Sévigné visited almost daily, and where she found the Duke de la Rochefoucauld and Madame de la Fayette reclining in their invalid chairs, giving in turn recitals of their miseries and gossiping and hobnobbing year after year together. Circling about these famous figures are minor constellations of great ladies and aristocratic widows, of fashionable abbés, and of neighbours, charming or absurd, in the country.

With the family group of which Madame de Sévigné was the sun and centre, we become even more intimately acquainted; her uncle, the *Bien Bon*, the good, dull, amiable old Abbé, who lived with her and managed her fortune, the spendthrift son who did his best to dissipate it, and who, with his grotesque taste in love, and his exquisite taste in literature, is one of the most enchanting of all the inhabitants of the people who live on in books. Almost equally charming are her two Coulanges cousins, of whom Lytton Strachey has delightfully written—the little fat *gaudeamus*, as she called him, the hero of feasts and songs and revels, and that fluttering leaf, his fashionable, affectionate, unfaithful, epigrammatic wife. Still another cousin, the formidable but affectionate scoundrel Bussy-Rabutin, sends from under the cloud of his deserved disgrace (he had treated even his loved and loving cousin, like everybody else, in an outrageous fashion) a stream of witty and ill-tempered letters; and with his sardonic comments on Madame de Sévigné and friends and family, he touches in those shadows which give the needed chiaroscuro to the picture.

Although the central figure of this correspondence is somewhat dimmed by excess of light in which she shines, the whole world of Grignans which her daughter drew into that system by her marriage with the head of this great family, peoples this world with almost too many vehement, aristocratic, showy figures: we suffer almost an indigestion of Grignans: learn almost too much about their vast pretensions and their money troubles and their intrigues in

their castles and their episcopal or archiepiscopal palaces. The whole cumulative effect of following for a quarter of a century the fates of all these people is like that of reading an immense, leisurely, true novel, written with a Tolstoyan or Proustian amplitude, which allows space for an immense copiousness of detail and for infinite digressions. And yet, as with Tolstoy and with Proust, all is slowly changing beneath the unimaginable lapse of time, until suddenly the unimaginable happens; the shears of destiny snap together, the sun goes out, the curtain of darkness falls.

Madame de Sévigné didn't at all like the thought of death, but she liked still less the thought of drinking to the dregs the cup of life. How much more agreeable it would be, she often reflected, to leave an undisfigured image of oneself behind one; and how kind and wise (if one could only reconcile it with Christian doctrine) was the custom of those countries where children, out of true affection for their parents, spared them the humiliations of decrepitude and old age. In one of her last letters, with a brief phrase worthy of a Shakespearean hero before his death, '*J'ai fait mon rôle*,' she says: she was seventy years old, she had played her part, she was ready to be off.

1924.

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[3] Lytton Strachey, who must be numbered with Horace Walpole, Edward FitzGerald and Anne Thackeray Ritchie among the most erudite of the English admirers of this lady.

III

PILGRIMAGES

I

Age, I find, fosters the finer feelings; and as mine have grown with the years more romantic, and, if you like (I don't dislike it myself), more sentimental, I have fallen into the way of making sentimental journeys every now and then to the homes of one or another of the authors whose books I like to read again. Like the old pilgrims, I feel that I acquire a kind of merit by walking on the soil which hallowed feet have trod. The sight of the places where they lived moves me almost as much as reading their biographies or works—moves me at least in a different fashion. A finer air seems to envelop the homes of these fine writers; there is a fairer colouring in the sky above them. I gaze on their roofs and chimneys and the trees about these houses with a kind of double vision; they stand there in the light of to-day, but I see them imaged also in memory and imagination, as they float reflected on the still waters of the past. Strange, as another sentimental pilgrim, Henry James, has expressed it, strange and special the effect of the empty places we stand and wonder in to-day for the sake of these vanished people; 'the irresistible reconstruction, to the all but baffled vision, of irrevocable presences and aspects, the conscious, shining, mocking void, sad somehow with excess of serenity.' Something of the effect he describes I have experienced at the Golden Grove in Wales, in which Jeremy Taylor preached his golden sermons; in the rectory garden at Bemerton, where George Herbert butterfly-netted his butterfly conceits, and in the nearby soil of Sidney's Arcadia out of which, like a blue flower, the word *romantic* grew. And then again in Italy, in the shadow of the white castle of Lerici, from which little port Shelley sailed on his last blue voyage; and also in the hill town of Recanati near Loreto, where one day, from the windows of the Leopardi Palace, I looked on that view of sea and mountains which I had so often seen before in the desolation and perfection of Leopardi's verse.

II

Of all the shores visited by literary pilgrims none is more rich in memorable shrines than the northern shore of the Lake of Geneva. Here is Coppet, where Madame de Staël talked for ever, and where her mother,

Madame Necker, still sits, it is said, in mummied state. Then there is Voltaire's Ferney, and farther east the home at Lausanne of Gibbon, that other 'lord of irony' as Byron called him. But as we approach the farther end of fair Leman in the company of Childe Harold, and the mountains rise to more romantic heights, and the outrageously romantic Castle of Chillon floats before us, the climate changes; from the light ironic air of the eighteenth century we move into the richer clear-obscure, the dark or rainbow-tinted mists of the other hemisphere of that age of two faces. Hither, to this lakeside, as to the holiest strand in Europe, pilgrims full of soul were drawn in thousands to visit the scenes of that once sacred volume, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*—'that overflowing,' as Shelley described it, 'of sublimest genius and more than human sensibility.' Here were the slopes of Clarens, where Julie and Saint-Preux and Lord Edward Bomston sighed and sorrowed, or passed those long *matinées à l'anglaise* of sensibility and silence. And here was the sacred grove of Julie's *bosquet*, the scene of the tenderest and most famous kiss in literature; and in full view across the lake were the rocks of Meillerie, whence Saint-Preux gazed through his telescope at that lost Paradise; and here also could be visited the Castle of Chillon of which Byron later sang, and from which Julie made her mortal and memorable plunge. The glow of love, Byron tells us, filled the skies above this region, 'of love in its most splendid and sublime capacity, and of our participation in its good and glory.' No wonder that Shelley, when he visited Lausanne with Byron, scorned to pluck a reliquary sprig of Gibbon's acacia, for fear of outraging the greater and more sacred name of Rousseau.

Even from the unsentimental Stendhal we can learn how deep and tender were the feelings of those who, drunk as they were from their reading of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, drew near these sacred scenes. As on his first journey to Italy he approached them, suddenly, he tells us, the sound of church-bells, descending from the mountain, mingled with his thoughts of Clarens and gave him a moment of divine felicity which was of itself enough, he said, to render life worth living, and which, he wrote long after, was the nearest approach to perfect happiness, to *le bonheur parfait*, that he had ever known.

Hazlitt tells us too that the happiest years of his life were those he spent in reading and re-reading *Julie*; nor could he ever forget that divine moment when, sitting 'on a sunny bank in a field in which the green blades of corn waved in the fitful northern breeze,' his tears mingled with the drops of morning dew on those loved pages, and he became, as never before, conscious of what he described in Shakespeare's phrase as his 'glassy essence.'

Alas! we might sit in a field for ever with *Julie* open before us, but we

couldn't read it; nor, as we motor along the side of that tearful lake (over whose waters Byron made a pilgrim's voyage with Shelley, and round whose shores Rousseau said his heart would never cease to wander), can we, by any effort of the historical imagination, recover those faded ecstasies. The invocation of Childe Harold,

Clarens, sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep Love!

can awaken no echo—or at most an ironic echo—in our modern bosoms. Our insensibility is almost equal to what Gibbon described as the 'holy apathy' of St. Bernard, who walked all day by the lake-side and never saw the lake. (Whether or not it was the picture-postcard obviousness of that landscape which made the Saint avert his eyes, contemporary manuscripts do not tell us.)

III

But let the Sentimental Pilgrim not lose heart; there are 'sweet especial' places among these mountains where it is still possible to experience suitable emotions. Let him drive across the frontier of Switzerland into France, and there, by the shores of a less immodest lake, a happier feast of proper feelings may be his. Such at least was my experience when, one propitious day in April, I visited the spot at Annecy where Rousseau met Madame de Warens, and that young vagabond of genius first gazed into the tender eyes of this enchanting lady, and listened to the music of her voice—the spot which ought, he said, to be surrounded by a balustrade of gold, and which should be approached by pilgrims only on their knees. Although I did not proceed through the streets of Annecy in this fashion, yet, when—some how none of the inhabitants seemed to know of it—I did find the gilded balustrade which has actually been put there, I blessed with a gush of genuine feeling my pious predecessors who had in this pretty fashion carried out his wish.

In all Rousseau's many didactic, polemical and quite unreadable writings, there shine out a few pages of pure gold. The earlier chapters of the *Confessions*, the *Fifth Promenade*, and the letters to Malsherbes are written by this master of impassioned recollection in a style so musical, so magical and moving, that the experiences he recounts become our own; we are transported, as Ruskin said he was transported, into his body, and, as we read, his soul is ours. And to visit Les Charmettes in its lovely little vale, hid in the mountains above Chambéry, is to enrich one's mood with a wealth of fine feelings on which I find it hard to set too high a value. We cannot but believe that this pair of lovers are still living there, and only absent for the day; and the *pervenche*, the blue periwinkle, which Rousseau remembered after more than thirty years,

still blooms for us shyly in the hedge.

Jean-Jacques was, of course, a little scoundrel, and Madame de Warens a spy and swindler; and to all that he tells us of his relations with this enchanting wanton, this mother and mistress-friend of his (too much he tells for some nice-minded readers), literary research has cold-bloodedly added details of an even more disconcerting nature, exposing a side to this affair so seamy that it deserves to rank beyond that love-affair of Hazlitt's with Sarah Walker, the story of which was, Hazlitt admitted, somewhat 'discordant to honest ears.'

But there is no such blur upon the pictures framed and glazed and hung up in my memory of two other sacred places I have visited in France. Both of these were experiences also of an almost uncanny evocation. When I motored out from Bordeaux to the château of Montaigne and climbed, in his tower, which stands apart, up into his circular library, I almost felt myself in the actual presence of the essayist; almost seemed to see him pacing up and down, or pausing now and then to make a note of some conceit or humour, or to gaze with ironic eyes through the window at the home of his wife and family just across the courtyard—and yet in thought—so many immeasurable miles away.

Montaigne was an affable ghost to call on; but when I went to see Madame de Sévigné in her Breton home, though the visit was one of the most enchanting visits I have ever paid, yet it was, to tell the truth, a little frightening also. Her château of Les Rochers with its woodland walks and formal gardens, with her room and writing-table and the bright yellow bedspread embroidered by her daughter, is so precisely as it was when she lived there, that I felt for a queer moment of hallucination more of a ghost than the ghost I had come to visit—a revenant out of a rowdy present into the more stately epoch which has somehow been exempted from flighty time by the pen of this unassuming, courteous, good-humoured great lady, who happens to be the best of all letter-writers, and indeed—so I think of her now after another reading of her correspondence—the finest writer of all the women of the world.

1935.

IV

SAINTE-BEUVE

I

The theory of literary criticism is often discussed in a somewhat high priori fashion; it is, however, possible, and it may be of profit, to approach the subject in a more concrete way by fixing our attention on some actual critic, on his methods, his achievement, and the ideal by which he has been guided. And when that critic is almost the inventor of modern criticism, and remains its acknowledged master, such a consideration cannot be devoid of interest.

With Sainte-Beuve's writings we are all more or less acquainted: his collected works have their ample shelves in almost every library; we often take up again one or another of his volumes; and more often, without knowing it, we are reading with his eyes and participating in his discriminations. But with the broad outlines of his work, the general conception or theory of criticism which gives shape to his whole achievement, we are less familiar. Sainte-Beuve was indeed the professed enemy of all systems; and to confront his subtle, irritable and not unmalicious ghost with anything so crude as a demand for a theory, would seem to be offering it almost a show of violence. But Sainte-Beuve was himself a relentless cross-examiner of the illustrious dead, and must not complain if he in turn is made the subject of a post-mortem enquiry. And if we try to force this Protean critic, this most sagacious (as Anatole France described him) and complicated spirit which an old civilization has ever produced—if we try to force Sainte-Beuve to reveal his secret, he must admit, for he has himself confessed it, that he has at least a method—a method which has grown out of his practice and had been confirmed by a long series of applications. But as for his theory of criticism, he will still probably refuse, as all his life he refused, to give it definite expression: he has perhaps hinted at it, he will tell us, in certain footnotes and digressions; if we are to find it, we must look for it in these places; or, rather, we had best deduce it, if we can, from the whole body of his work.

What hints then of his ideal has he given in these notes, and what impression of it is left upon us by the reperusals of his essays? The literary critic, he seems to suggest (for so we read his meaning), although often concerned with contemporary writers, will yet find, like the historian, his main subject-matter in the past, in that survey of former ages which each generation

inherits and hands on to the succeeding generation. This great inheritance, he tells us, is in constant danger. Not only does the mere passage of time deface and dim it, turning old epochs into half-obliterated sphinxes, but there are permanent impulses in human nature which are the cause of still further deformation. We look at the characters of history with eyes blood-shot with the passions of contemporary conflicts, and are mostly interested in them as allies or enemies in our own battles. Then also the impulse of hero-worship leads us often to a kind of indiscriminate whitewashing; and this idealization, this bestowal of posthumous purity on the personages we admire, induces in each new generation a strong desire to throw down their plaster-casts and smash them; an impulse which is reinforced by the love of paradox, of making heroes and villains take each others' places, if only for a change. Then on top of all this is that propensity to caricature which tempts clever writers, who love satire so much more than they love the truth, to transform into objects of derision the venerated Great. To the young it seems (as someone has said) that it is funny to be dead—as of course in a way it is. Still more distorting, and, in Sainte-Beuve's opinion, the cause of even greater obscuration is all the modern enormity of rationalization and theory, which interposes a kind of philosophical opacity between ourselves and former times.

Against all these obstructive and obscuring forces the critic and historian must make a valiant struggle. They must both endeavour, not only to preserve, but to render more ample and profound this retrospective vision; for Time is not only the great Devourer, he is also the great Discoverer: new facts are continually coming to light, new documents are published; past events as they recede appear in truer proportions, new relations establish themselves, and new vistas open. In that great enrichment of retrospection which is characteristic of the age we live in, that immense and modern extension of the collective memory of the human race, the roles of the critic and historian grow year by year more important. But these roles are different, and their points of view are not the same.

II

The facts which the historian unearths have all their value; they are all evidences of the doings and thoughts of bygone ages; but they do not otherwise necessarily enrich the permanent possessions of the human spirit. The special function of the critic is to sift from this ever-accumulating mass of information all that is of eternal efficacy and capable of perpetual renovation, all those perceptions of beauty, those harmonies and happy moods, whose expression in words is what we call literature—that useless ornament and flower, as Sainte-Beuve described it, that delicate superfluity of life, which is

the most precious and least perishable of all things on this perishable earth. For the purpose of this discrimination the first and most essential requirement of the critic, Sainte-Beuve insists, is a gift, an endowment, a special sense, which the historian does not need, and which indeed would often gravely embarrass him in his task. This endowment is that unreasoned, prompt and felicitous response, that 'trembling, delicate and snail-horn perception of beauty' (as Keats phrased it), which we call by the modern name of Taste. It is quite possible, Sainte-Beuve says, to have judgment without taste; judgment is deliberate and can give its reasons; taste enjoys and suffers; it is a form of direct and sensuous perception, acting by laws which are subtle and mysterious and sacred. This *esprit de finesse*, as Pascal defined it, is not founded on abstract considerations, but rests upon such a multitude of perceptions that we can give no logical explanation of them. Taste is, indeed, but the most subtle of the senses, and so strictly analogous to the palate that no one in Sainte-Beuve's opinion could be a consummate critic who was insensitive to the subtle flavours of foods and wines—flavours which seem almost nothing in themselves, and yet make all the difference.

And yet taste, mere taste, he said, was not enough to make an accomplished critic. Taste by itself was too feeble, too subject to discouragement, too nearly allied to distaste, and too much the slave of fashion, to be safely trusted. What a poor record had taste to show for itself through the ages! What masterpieces had it not rejected, in what contortions and conceits and Ossianic admirations had it not delighted, what false beauties had it not imputed to Homer, how poorly it had thought of Dante, how inadequate had been for centuries its appreciation of Shakespeare's greatness!

The first impression of a work of literature, the sudden, swift, irresponsible perusal, this uncritical, delighted enjoyment, was, Sainte-Beuve believed, of the utmost importance to the critic, and he should revel in it, falling blindly in love with his subject, adoring and embracing it, and letting himself go in the partisanship of his prompt enthusiasm: this was the foundation of everything. But it was no more than the foundation. It was only when he had recollected his emotion, modified it by doubt and disenchantment, reweighed a masterpiece in the scales with others, and tested it by many touchstones, that he could ripen that naïve experience into a judgment of equity and intelligence. *Le grand goût, le goût véritable* must be informed and modified by a trained appreciation of all kinds of excellence, by a knowledge of the literatures of foreign nations and past ages, and above and beyond all by a knowledge of the literature of antiquity. 'The old and elegant humanity of Greece,' that first high and delicate image of incomparable perfection, must be the critic's final standard of comparison; in the most modern landscape the peaks of Helicon

and Parnassus must be seen, however far away and faintly blue, on the horizon; the acropolis of Athens must gleam at the end of the ultimate perspective.

The critic then should be a scholar as well as a voluptuary; he should be human, and the experiences of both youth and age should help to mellow and perfect him. He must be of his generation and participate in its enthusiasms, for Sainte-Beuve had but a poor opinion of the cautious youth who keeps himself immune from contemporary infection, and would have agreed with Coleridge when he said that the possession in youth of anything like perfect taste was an almost certain proof of the absence of genuine talent. But the youth of promise must recover from these fevers; he must belong to some one group or country, but must free himself from the prejudices of party and of patriotism; and must emancipate himself also from any too positive ethical or religious or philosophic beliefs. He will do well to experience all these things, for how else can he understand them? But he owes no allegiance to anything but to Truth; all other fidelities he must disregard when that is in question, and the English word TRUTH was engraved as a motto on Sainte-Beuve's seal. The critic must be prepared to encounter, as he himself frequently encountered, the charge of disloyalty to his friends and country, of infidelity to his own past; and he must not be dismayed, as Sainte-Beuve was not dismayed, by these ill-sounding imputations.

III

And finally there was that last and immense emancipation—the emancipation, like that of Montaigne, from over-certainty, from the temptation to explain too much, to reduce the infinite and deep complexity of things to the working of a few easily comprehended laws. Literary criticism is almost always ephemeral, for not only does it involve itself in contemporary conflicts, and lose all interest when these have ended, but it is only too liable to fall a willing prey to contemporary Science. The latest scientific theories (as we see to-day with the Freudian and other fashionable hypotheses) offer such alluring explanations of literary phenomena that the temptation is almost irresistible to build upon them critical constructions which soon collapse when their foundations are undermined by deeper knowledge. While Sainte-Beuve was for half his life more or less involved in the boiling Charybdis of party conflict, he always steered his bark with a most wary eye on the Scylla of modern Science; and it was due to this caution, as much as to anything else, that he was able to pass without shipwreck through that strait to lasting fame.

It has been said of Sainte-Beuve that he would have liked to put up as a warning on the confines of criticism, 'scientists and philosophers will be

prosecuted.' He by no means denied indeed the value of historical, philosophical and scientific study within their proper limits. To place a writer in his age, to study the current thought of his time to whose influences he was subject, and the sources upon which he drew—all this, he believed, had produced an immense advance in criticism; and no one was a more complete master of these modern methods. But the work of a great spirit was not the necessary product of known conditions; it was only the second-rate work, or the second-rate element in great work, which could be explained in this manner. External influences and conditions do really serve Genius; they provoke it, they call it forth, but they do not create it; the essential originality of a writer, the finer extract of his soul which is worth preserving, the particle in him of divine fire, is something which escapes, and must perhaps always escape, our analysis, and will probably never surrender itself to science. In the man of genius there is always something of the sorcerer; the critic could surround and invest him, could study his environment and narrow his circle; the magic circle, however, still remained, and within it the magician still performed his miracles.

But these miracles in the world of art, like the miracles of creation in the world of nature, though they could not be explained, yet could be observed and noted and described and classified; and this, in Sainte-Beuve's opinion, was the most important task of the critic. He often compares himself to the naturalist who observes and classifies and describes the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, without attempting to account for their existence; and he made it his business to note and to portray, as accurately and as luminously as possible, the various and enduring achievements of literary talent. His manner of accomplishing this portrayal, of disengaging the essential quality in the work of any writer, was to concentrate not so much on the work of art itself, as on the artist who produced it, whose circumstances and character he describes, and of whose life he gives a vivid summary. He was, he often tells us, merely a painter of moral portraits; and in a famous essay, where, contrary to his usual custom, he writes explicitly of his method, he declares that for him the work of literature is not distinct or separable from its author; *tel arbre, tel fruit*; we can only learn to know the fruit by studying the tree which it grows upon.

IV

When Milton described a good book as the 'precious life-blood of a master-spirit,' he expressed in this famous phrase the attitude towards literature of those critics to whom, as to Sainte-Beuve, books are above all spiritual documents and revelations of the personalities of their authors. Now while it is true that a masterpiece is almost always the creation of a master-

spirit, and that where the work of such a master is at its best, the greatness of his spirit is most greatly manifest, yet many books can be found whose merits seem to bear little relation to the character and merits of those who wrote them. An eminent French writer, when he was once asked who was the greatest of French poets, replied: 'Victor Hugo, *malheureusement*!'; for he felt that Victor Hugo was not a figure which his country had much reason to be proud of. Nor can we in England regard Swinburne as a 'master-spirit' in any Miltonic sense; while in Sterne and Richardson we possess writers whose works we admire, for the men who wrote them we feel something like contempt.

There are in fact two kinds of literary criticism, criticism which is above all psychological and moral, and which explains an author's work as the essence and distillation of his life and character; and there is purely aesthetic criticism, which fixes its attention on the work of literature itself, on the writer's talent and his achievement as an artist. It cannot be said that Sainte-Beuve altogether neglected this kind of technical criticism; he could, when he chose, apply the most subtle methods of aesthetic analysis and discrimination; the touchstones and crucibles and delicate scales were in his laboratory for his use when he wanted them. But his interest was mainly historical, psychological and 'moral' in the liberal French, rather than in the narrow English meaning of that word; he was, as he said himself, an *amateur d'âmes*; a good book was for him the transfigured life of its author—the 'purest essence,' as Carlyle described it 'of a human soul.' The analysis of moral qualities and their effect on life, the noting of sayings and gestures which reveal temperament and character, all the reflections he could glean from contemporary mirrors, the reconstruction of social backgrounds in their time and place, and those sure and swift summaries of history which lead to dominating points of view and open out vast perspectives—all these resources of psychological and historical criticism he makes use of to place before our eyes the figures he portrays—figures so vivid that they seem to breathe and speak before us, bathed though they be in the atmosphere of another age. These are his pigments; he applies them delicately, touch after touch to his canvas, and they all contribute to the ultimate impression.

Sainte-Beuve had, moreover, one gift which was all his own, and which gives to his canvases a beauty and a kind of pathos not unlike that of some of Van Dyck's portraits; his power of forming relations of friendship with the illustrious shades, with the *ombres illustres* of his evocation, whose life of the spirit had only begun perhaps when their mortal life was over—his intimacy with these immortal dead enables him to depict them with the essential radiance of their meaning bright upon their faces. He liked to imagine these authors as actually in his presence, listening to him as he revealed them to

themselves, telling them of qualities in their writings of which they had had no notion, and consoling them for the sorrows of their lives with the glory of their posthumous reputations. And with what chivalrous accents would he address those objects of his special interest; those witty and wise women of old worlds, whose letters or memoirs have been preserved, or who have left, as it were by chance, the impression of their grace on a few careless pages!

Sainte-Beuve, who 'knew everything,' was perhaps aware of the limitations of the psychological kind of criticism which concerns itself with a writer's life rather than with his talent as an artist. But among the things he knew was the fact, of which he was perfectly aware, that he too was an artist; that he possessed a talent and had elaborated a technique which suited that talent to perfection, and that his achievement was the justification of his method. This achievement is indeed so impressive and has so greatly influenced subsequent writers, that his very success as a critic has been said to have injured criticism—he has led it astray, it has been urged, into biography from the aesthetic considerations which should be its main concern. This criticism of Sainte-Beuve is not unjust; he had, like other writers, his faults which derive their origin from the very qualities we admire.

V

Sainte-Beuve's career divides itself into two main periods: that of his romantic, religious youth and early manhood, and the period of the middle-aged and elderly critic, the pure intelligence, the Montaigne, as he has been called, of the nineteenth century, who had divested himself of all passions except the passion of an immense and universal curiosity. Neo-Catholic writers have attempted of late to revive in France an interest in the young and sentimental Sainte-Beuve; but the polemical and propagandist writings, the ponderous, and what we might call Quarterly-Review essays, of this grave, earnest and somewhat tearful young man have, for the most part, perished with the occasions that gave them birth. The Sainte-Beuve who remains is the disillusioned and yet by no means disenchanted Sainte-Beuve of the later period, the great portrait-painter of the *Lundis* and of the books on Chateaubriand and Port-Royal—for these two works are also immense collections of portraits.

Of this elderly Sainte-Beuve, of this great portraitist at his easel, we possess more than one sketch drawn by the secretaries and pupils who helped him in his workshop. They describe, not without a touch of caricature, this little, old, fat, formidable critic, who, in his rustic dress, with his big, round, ruddy cheeks beneath the dome of his great forehead, had something of the appearance of a provincial priest, a country *curé*, sensual and fond of good

living, and whose smile of mingled malice and good-nature was appropriate to the bishop, as they call him, of the diocese of atheists. We see him at work in the upstairs bedroom of his little hut or home in a quiet corner of Paris, seated, amid the disorder of books and papers on the floor, at a table covered with an immense accumulation of materials, correcting and arranging the notes for his weekly article, questioning the spirit he has evoked and whose portrait he is painting, admiring it and pleading for it, and still haunted by it when, with his task finished for the day, he walks out in the company of his secretary after dark along the Boulevards or through the Place St. Sulpice. And if, as they pace along, the secretary seems to show any lack of interest, or is rash enough to make an objection, we see Sainte-Beuve stopping to face him in sudden exasperation, brandishing his old umbrella at him, and after shouting 'I see, my dear Sir, that you want to keep me from writing my article; my subject hasn't the good fortune, it appears, to meet with your approval'; and turning on his heel he walks off alone to bed. The next morning, however, the secretary finds Sainte-Beuve—the last night's quarrel quite forgotten—seated at his table and working away at his subject with the alacrity and cheerfulness of a man performing the precise task, fulfilling the very office, for which he was born and for which nature had designed him.

Dante has described how, as he stood with Beatrice in the sphere of Mercury, apparitions drew near him like the fish in a fish-pool who gather together where food is cast into the water. These were the harmonious and shining spirits of those who had lived for renown before they were translated into Paradise: they seemed to grow more luminous with joy as they approached the poet who might enhance that fame on earth to which few of the souls whom Dante met, whether in Heaven or Hell, proved themselves indifferent. So amid the greatly contrasted surroundings of Sainte-Beuve's bedroom, or of his walks by night through the streets of Paris, we can perhaps, without too great an effort of the imagination, picture the souls that gathered round this very different explorer of their shadowy kingdom, since they were aware that he above all others could, by restoring the lustre of their faded or distorted reputations, renew their fame among its living.

VI

What precisely is the value to us of this great picture-gallery which Sainte-Beuve has left behind him; for what reasons, and in hope of what advantage, do we seek admission to its portals? The backward of the past is full of names; its skies are faintly illuminated by figures who were once men and women like ourselves, but who have now been placed, as it were, among the constellations and endowed with a shadowy immortality. The classical appellations of these

consecrated celebrities, their aspects, and their influences, are supposed to be more or less familiar to us; we are sometimes wearied or exasperated by them; but every now and then we feel an impulse to demand of one or another: 'Who are you really? What sort of a person were you when you lived on earth, and for what reason have you been endowed with this posthumous existence? What is the debt we owe you; what was it that you added to the charm and interest of life—what new perception of beauty, what chime of words, what graceful way of living, what truth about nature or ourselves? What is there that we can still learn from you that we should read your books and study your lives, and make friends with you and not forget you?' It is still Sainte-Beuve, more than any one else, who can fit definite images to these legendary names, clothe these shadowy figures in flesh and blood, and enable us to value their achievement and comprehend their meaning.

Although Sainte-Beuve's three or four hundred portraits are mostly the portraits of French figures, yet we find in his sixty volumes—in that great ocean of good reading—much about classical and English writers, and about the literatures of Germany and Italy and Spain. But the civilization of France has been for centuries, and is still, the central and dominating civilization of Europe; the rest of us still dwell intellectually, and even more so artistically, not very far from the Parisian suburbs. Sainte-Beuve's portraits of French characters, and especially those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are therefore of enduring interest to us. His supreme triumph is to be found in his great portrait gallery of Louis XIV's reign, whose Court, with its Royal mistresses, its princes and princesses, prelates, soldiers, men of letters, and great ladies, is presented to us in many aspects and illuminations—gay and fashionable in Madame de Sévigné's letters, sombrely reflected in the sermons of the great Court preachers, sinister in the lightning flashes of Saint-Simon's vision, or seen far away, an evil garden of enchantment, through the grated windows of Port-Royal or La Trappe. From however remote a journey Sainte-Beuve would ever return to Versailles and its great staircase, that Jacob's ladder which led to the terrestrial heaven of the Great Epoch—those palace-steps which, on his death-bed, the aged Bossuet was still climbing in imagination, and which Racine haunted; dying, perhaps, because he was forbidden to mount their luminous degrees.

VII

If Sainte-Beuve's great historical panorama is his most enduring achievement, the part he played as a critic of contemporary literature had, in his lifetime, almost more importance. The critic's discernment, his perspicacity, and his perfected taste, if they possessed any real value, should,

he believed, be capable of a modern application. To estimate the achievements of dead authors was, he said, easy enough; but to attain to a clear vision of one's own contemporaries, to be able, as we put it, to see the trees out of the very depths of the forest, to be just to the living, to discern the limits and predict the future of authors who had not yet said their final word, to forestall public opinion and guide its judgment, and, if need be, to disenchant it of its fashionable follies—to welcome the new, without discarding the old tradition—this, he said, required genius; it was the supreme test of the critic, and a test from which he did not shrink.

In estimating his success in this most difficult of critical tasks (he loved it, however, for its very difficulty) we must leave out of account all the proclamations and manifestoes which, in his romantic youth, he issued in favour of the romantic poets, and which, though they greatly helped to establish the fame of these poets, were, as he himself declared afterwards, propaganda and not criticism. We must make allowance also for those blind-spots which are found in the most perspicacious mortals, and for the animosities in which Sainte-Beuve too frequently indulged. Although Stendhal was his friend, he shared the contemporary blindness to the merit of Stendhal's novels; Balzac was his enemy, and he never really recognised, nor wished to recognize, his genius. But with regard to many of his contemporaries he was both just and enthusiastic; the estimate which he formed of their works on their first publication expresses what is now more or less the received judgment.

Even more remarkable as a proof of the alertness of his mind is the fact that several of the writers of the generation younger than his own who attained permanent success, were discovered, or at least made known to the wider public, by his articles. He found readers for Flaubert and the De Goncourts, he praised Taine and Renan; with a spirit ever youthful, and ever desirous of new knowledge, he was the first to salute and to establish in public estimation this new school of realism and religious freedom. Having attained in his final years the position of a supreme oracle of taste, he left at his death a great void behind him—a void that has never since been really filled. Readers felt that they had no longer an almost infallible counsellor to tell them what to read; authors, that there was no one now to appreciate their honest efforts, and crown them with unquestionable praise.

But many of Sainte-Beuve's judgments on the work of his contemporaries have been subjected since his death to a severe and sometimes contemptuous revision. His neglect of Baudelaire, his grudging praise of Flaubert, with his enthusiasm for George Sand's sentimental novels, are instanced as proofs of his blindness to contemporary merit. The truth is that no critic, however expert,

can anticipate the verdict of Posterity, whose tastes and standards must inevitably differ from his own. And taste among the elect in France has undergone, since Sainte-Beuve's time, a kind of revolution. The aesthetic criticism, which he neglected, has come into its own, a criticism which concerns itself with technical, formal and not moral considerations, and regards an artist's achievement as the product of a gift which may have as little connection with his character as a gift for mathematics—may seem, indeed, the contradiction and very antithesis of that character. The poet may be a wretched creature, a *poète maudit*, who leads a life as sordid as that of Villon or Baudelaire or Verlaine, or as absurd as that of Swinburne; his verse may be, in Rossetti's phrase, the 'jet of soulless air-flung fountains,' but to critics of this school such considerations are irrelevant; nothing matters but the beauty with which these fountains flash before their eyes.

Although this emphasis on technical considerations, this clear differentiation between the talent and character of a writer, has proved to be of the greatest value, yet criticism can never completely separate the one from the other. The definition of great literature as the echo of a great soul has still in the last analysis its justification; and even the *poètes maudits*, by their mastery of art, if not of life, showed that they too were in their way master-spirits; their religious devotion to their craft being a kind—and for the artist, the most essential kind—of greatness.

To seek, therefore, as Sainte-Beuve sought, for the man behind the book, is by no means an impertinent or idle undertaking. Our experience in reading a great writer is almost always after all that of contact with a unique and great experiencing nature; though we might not agree without reservation to what that most common-sense of all critics, Leslie Stephen, defined as the fundamental doctrine of all sound criticism. 'Any teaching' (so he formulated this doctrine), 'which attempts to separate the poet from the man as though his excellence were to be measured by a radically different set of tests, is to my mind either erroneous or trifling and superficial,—although, as I say, we may not agree with this dictum, yet to what commanding viewpoints criticism such as Sainte-Beuve's leads us, how wide and various and animated are the landscapes he spreads before our eyes! Great vistas of history and civilization open; all is bathed in the light of luminous ideas, and when we read once more the human and humane volumes of his collected essays, in what good company we find ourselves again! The best company in the world, for the world's finest spirits are almost all collected there.

VIII

Sainte-Beuve's style was always adequate for his purpose, but he did not

become a really great master of French prose until his later years. His life of laborious poverty was in the main a noble one, though it was involved in many bitter quarrels, and had its unseemly, not to say sordid, private aspects. His character was brave and disinterested, but not without flaws and unamiable failings. He brooded long over injuries, and sometimes slyly avenged them; he envied and could not easily forgive the astonishing successes of those romantic poets whose cause in his youth he enthusiastically espoused. The terrible notes on Victor Hugo and Lamartine which have recently been published, though they may be true—and Sainte-Beuve believed that the truth is always terrible—reveal unpleasant depths of bitterness and hate. He had dreamed of a success like theirs; he, too, had aspired to the triumph in the Capitol and the shining laurel; and it was only when he had failed, or thought he had failed, as a poet and novel-writer, that he devoted himself to criticism; it was, he said, but his second string, his inglorious harbour after shipwreck; what he considered the pale, the shadowy and ephemeral fame of the critic was all that he could hope for. But time is avenging the slights he suffered; while the flashing meteors of the Romantic Movement are beginning to lose their lustre ray by ray, Sainte-Beuve's star seems to grow brighter every year. The arrows from his second string have hit, it would appear, the shining mark; his humble port of refuge has become the capital of an enduring kingdom.

We are apt to think too meanly of books about books, to undervalue the importance of the literary critic. If the memory of great heroes must perish without poets to record their deeds, *carent quia vate sacro*, these sacred poets in their turn stand in need of critics to fix and immortalize their fame. 'The unerring sentence of Time,' as Gibbon called it, that appreciation of quality, which is man's most flawless achievement and perhaps the greatest glory of his otherwise discreditable history, is no necessary product of the passing years, but the result of an infinite number of perusals, of enthusiastic, solicitous and delicate discriminations. We read the old masterpieces of our literature through the admirations of many readers who are now forgotten.

They rule us from their urns.

Criticism, Anatole France has said, is the latest in birth of literary forms, and may end by absorbing all the others. It fits in very well with a highly civilized society which is rich in memories and long traditions; and to human beings full of curiosity and learned and polished, it is particularly appropriate. For it to prosper, it pre-supposes more cultivation than any other kind of writing, and an epoch also of absolute intellectual freedom. Its creators were Montaigne, Saint-Évremond, Bayle and Montesquieu—and nourished as it is, both by philosophy and history, such criticism is taking the place for us of

Theology; and if one seeks its St. Thomas Aquinas and universal doctor, in whom, Anatole France asks, but in Sainte-Beuve can we find him?

The critic, however, is generally disparaged as an artist who has failed, and Sainte-Beuve accepted the definition. But if such a failure can change a writer, as it changed Sainte-Beuve, from a second-rate poet and novelist into a supreme critical historian and recreator of the past, ought we not rather to welcome this frustration? Should we not pray for some such felicitous miscarriage in our own country, which might transform one of our producers of modern verse or fiction—for we need never fear any falling off in the output of these commodities—into a writer who could perform for us the service that Sainte-Beuve performed for France, perfecting our civilization by putting us in full, self-conscious possession of our inheritance, and building for us a picture-gallery whose great, lighted halls and corridors should be hung with portraits of all the remarkable spirits of our race?

1926.

V

GERTRUDE JEKYLL

I

I first met Miss Gertrude Jekyll many years ago, when I had a house in Sussex, beyond Haslemere, just over the Surrey borders. I was taken to see her by James Britten, an old friend of hers, a little, elderly, snuffy botanist with many friends and interests, who was, among other things, an official in the Botanical Department of the British Museum, and Secretary of the Catholic Truth Society. Britten was not only a botanist, but a garden expert as well; he often came to stay with me, and we often took the local train to Godalming, and walked up from the station to Munstead Wood to visit Miss Jekyll and her garden. I was present, therefore, at many of their confabulations, and more than one of their experts' quarrels; for experts love to dispute over nice points of taste and pedantry, and these occasional altercations add just that spice of acrimony to their regard for each other which keeps it from becoming flat. Britten was an irascible, fault-finding little man, and Miss Jekyll had no exaggerated disinclination for a scrimmage now and then. Their friendship, as with most of Britten's friendships, was a kind of cat-and-dog relationship; Britten being in this case the cat, and Miss Jekyll the big, good-natured dog, who was, however, not incapable of growling when a growl was called for.

I would, on these visits, accompany the pair as they walked about the gardens, and listen with interest and some alarm to Britten's fault-finding; for even in Miss Jekyll's gardens, with all his admiration for them, Britten could be relied upon to find some fault or other. Now and then the two would stop to argue before a plant or flower; the cat would begin to spit, the dog would growl, and then they would walk on in the friendliest way together, and I soon learnt, as I followed their footsteps, that there was no danger, and—shall I say?—no awful hope of a real scrap between them.

Miss Jekyll was most kind to the young person I was then; she gave me wise gardening advice, and plants for me to plant in the garden I was making. She was much persecuted in those days by people who wanted to see the domain which she had made famous: pushers would push their way in, I believe, in the most shameless fashion; and anyone who had the privilege of admission, would often be entreated by outsiders to be taken to visit a place of which they had heard so much. I had the good sense not to yield to these

solicitations save only on one occasion, when an Oxford acquaintance overcame my reluctance by declaring that he had a veritable passion for gardening; that he had been trained in garden-craft by a mother who was famous at it, and that a visit to Munstead Wood would be a privilege, an initiation which he would prize beyond almost anything in the world, and from which he would derive, he felt, the finishing touches to his knowledge of the art. Miss Jekyll would be pleased, I thought, to meet so young, but so accomplished, a fellow-craftsman, so I wrote asking if I might bring him. The permission was accorded; Miss Jekyll received us kindly; we began to inspect the gardens, when the doomed young man, anxious, I suppose, to make an original remark, asked Miss Jekyll if you could change flowers to any colour you liked by putting aniline dyes about their roots. Miss Jekyll paused, looking at him with amazed consideration: 'You might try it,' she replied. But, after another pause which had seemed to me to last for ever, 'I don't think,' she added, 'if I were you, I would.'

During the rest of our perambulation Miss Jekyll seemed lost in thought; her silences were formidable silences (for Miss Jekyll was a formidable person), and I felt inclined to pray that the earth might open and swallow up that rash inquirer and myself. To feel that our friends are ashamed of us is not pleasant; but to feel ashamed of a friend is the experience, more mortifying to our self-respect, which I tasted during that visit to our deeply brooding hostess.

The homes and haunts of experts in any subject, their libraries, workrooms, studios, gardens, are full of hidden pitfalls for ignorant outsiders; it is never safe to trust one's safest friends to behave themselves in such new surroundings; one fool question may precipitate them into abysses of ignominy and silence from which their introducer must extract them as decently as he can, and hurry them away. Never again did I take a stranger to Munstead Wood. If I was fortunate enough to be allowed an entrance there, I was also wise enough to use that key for myself alone.

II

After some years I left my Sussex house and garden and went to live near Oxford; the trains that took me to and fro from London no longer paused at the friendly little Godalming station. I was engaged in other pursuits; and the busy, besieged Miss Jekyll was more than ever occupied by her gardening experiments, her gardening books, and her ever-increasing activities.

So through the years we went on with our chosen jobs; each day had its task, its routine. Miss Jekyll had received that luckiest of fairy-gifts, a calling, an industry, something that she loved to do; and I, too, had my own special

interests. We saw each other very rarely: sometimes would not meet for years on end. And yet Miss Jekyll was not infrequently in my thoughts, and I knew that she had not forgotten me. A delicate, enduring thread never snapped in all those years, and indeed could not snap, between us. For besides gardening we had in common another interest, another fad or hobby, in which old Britten had also participated, and which had thrown out its tendrils on the occasion of our earliest acquaintance.

To share with one or two people, with perhaps a little group of people, a hobby or special and intense interest, to know all about something of which others know and care nothing—door-knockers, perhaps, jade, or shoe-buckles, fifteenth-century editions of the Bible, or monastic tiles—to collect the finest specimens, to boast of them to fellow-collectors; to dispute and quarrel over them with the subtlest shades of depreciation and discrimination—this is the sort of thing that forms a bond between people which is capable of outlasting many other ties. It will chafe them sometimes, but they cannot break it—they cannot get on without each other. Delicate hoops of steel grapple their souls together; and the fewer there are who share their interest, the more they love to correspond and perhaps to meet. They are often far apart in age, place and social standing; great abysses, moral, political or religious, may yawn between them; they may most strongly disapprove of, and even dislike, each other, but when they gather in a little group to discuss their special subject all other considerations seem of no importance—all seem, indeed, as that great nobleman in *The Young Visiters*, the Earl of Clincham, said to Mr. Salteena, ‘as piffle before the wind.’ Language being never adequate to describe all the relationships of people to each other, I have invented the word *milver* to describe those who share a fad in common. I find it both a useful and a pretty word; it fills a gap in my vocabulary, and provides, moreover, an echo for the word *silver*, which is otherwise without a rhyme.

The botanist James Britten, who, as I have mentioned, first took me to see Miss Jekyll, was present at many of these milvers’ conclaves, of which he was often a provocative, but always an invaluable member. His accurate and expert knowledge of many subjects, of music, of typography, of metre, and other matters, was indeed extraordinary; if you had a special interest, you were apt to find that he knew more about it than you did, and he didn’t in the least mind making you aware of his superior knowledge. He had, however, not only knowledge, but something which is much rarer, a sense of quality, a taste for perfection. The tribe of those with a taste that way is a scanty one, since most people, though they like perfection well enough, and are often quite enthusiastic about it when they are told that they ought to be so, really prefer what is fashionable and therefore second-rate. Their importances are what

important people think important; but for this sort of thing Britten had no taste at all: he probably did not even know of its existence. He was completely ignorant of the world of fashion; absolutely devoid of any ambition; and when, owing both to his seniority and his eminence of the world of botany, the Trustees of the British Museum wished to appoint him the head of his department, and the Archbishop of Canterbury (who was one of the Trustees), suggested that he should accept this important position, he turned down the offer without hesitation. It must be given, he told the Archbishop, to the next after him in succession, to whom, as a married man with a family, the larger salary would be welcome; he himself was an old bachelor, and his income was sufficient for his needs. This refusal the Archbishop was said to have described as an example of magnanimity such as he had never before met with in all his long experience; but what I think influenced Britten most of all was the thought of the Top-hat such a position would compel him to wear on ceremonial occasions. He much preferred his old hat and the freedom of his free and mocking tongue, and the opportunities his leisure gave him to indulge in the refinements of squabbles with his fellow-faddists.

There are in the world people who get on, and others who look on—generally with amusement, and not always without a touch of malice. The world rewards the getters-on with its wealth and honours, and does so rightly, for they do its work and keep it going. They are the deserving people; but the lookers-on are more congenial, as old Britten was, to persons with a taste for ironic observation—for the company of people who have no axes of their own to grind—even for scallawags and mockers.

III

Along with our gardening interests, Britten and Gertrude Jekyll and I were word-fanciers as well; the roots of vocables as well as of plants, their flowerings in idioms, in odd or pretty phrases were full of interest for us. We all three belonged to that tiny sect of word-collectors whom Walter Pater, who was at that time my Lord of Taste, described as ‘lovers of words for their own sake, to whom nothing about them is unimportant.’ I was an assiduous reader of dictionaries; on English dialects Britten was an expert; Gertrude Jekyll knew a lot about them also, and our discussions on these subjects were often full of delight and disagreement.

By the time I had gone to live near Oxford I had begun to write about the treasury of words and phrases which I had made. I was more or less acquainted with a number of writers, but I knew that hardly one of them took the slightest interest in the histories of the words they used, or would ever look at what I said about them. But Britten had made me acquainted with Robert Bridges as

well as with Gertrude Jekyll; and since Britten was dead by then, it was mainly with these two in mind that I wrote my papers. It is in my experience an advantage for an author to have two or three fastidious readers whom he can imagine sniffing at his pages without disdain. I happened to live near Bridges, and often saw him; he it was, indeed, who, by the cracking of his formidable whip, made me write these pamphlets for the little Society he had founded for this kind of research. I sent copies of them to Miss Jekyll, and always received in answer a prompt and cordial note of appreciation and thanks from her.

So, as I say, the years went by. It sometimes happens that our friendships with people will mature through the periods in which we never see each other; and when, after a large lapse of time, I found myself living again in the old neighbourhood, and went one day over to Munstead House, where Miss Jekyll's brother, Sir Herbert Jekyll, lived, and was told that his sister, then grown very old and, indeed, almost on the threshold of her ninetieth year, and quite unable to receive most visitors, would nevertheless be glad to see me in her home nearby, I was delighted, of course, to avail myself of this privilege.

Across the road from Munstead House, a high, solid, fence-like barrier shuts in and secludes Miss Jekyll's wood and house and gardens. But in this barrier there is a little door, carefully locked; a secret key hangs on a secret nail which one can find by reaching over and groping for it. I was initiated into this mystery, I was shown the key, allowed to open the gate (under strict injunctions to lock it after me), and so found admittance into the great wood across the road. Walking along shadowy paths, I came at last on a glade of lawn, and saw Miss Jekyll's house before me. All was hushed in silence; there was not a soul about; the house stood there in its hidden glade like the abode of some admirable, august, and time-honoured ogress, who inspired awe, but was as good as gold, and dwelt in the midst of the gardens she had charmed into existence by her own white magic. It was like something one reads of in old romances—the locked gate and secret key, the walk through the wood to the beautiful house which its venerable inhabitant had built for herself so long ago, and over which brooded the silence and solitude of her extreme old age, among the ancient, contemporary trees she had planted.

I stood still for a moment gazing at it. Yes, something in an old romance, I repeated to myself; but that phrase did not exhaust the significance of the impression. Some memory haunted me, some almost metaphysical perplexity; and before long I recollected how, walking with Miss Jekyll many years ago past the house she had built exactly to her taste, and amid the gardens she had created, I had asked her if she did really enjoy it all. 'It's difficult,' I said, 'to possess one's own possessions; in everything that I make or I write I see the

faults and imperfections; they irritate, they annoy me.' 'I know what you mean,' Miss Jekyll answered: 'when I come out here I see what's wrong; I get cross about it—it's my own fault sometimes, sometimes the gardeners'. But,' she added, 'now and then when I am thinking of something else I come round the corner suddenly on the house and garden; I catch it unawares. It seems to me all right; and then I enjoy it—I enjoy it very much I can tell you.'

Thus long ago, on this very spot, what is to me—what has always been—the great perplexity of our human predicament, had presented itself to Miss Jekyll and myself; and she had suggested the key to what, in our mortal condition, is its only possible solution. For are we not all fated to pursue ideals which seem eternally to elude us; which, as Mr. Santayana puts it, 'fly before us and tempt us on, and then turn and mock us from another quarter?' Can we ever escape the jarring contrast between what Ought-to-Be, what Might-Be, and what actually Is? Our poor dwarfish, misshapen achievement, is it ever what we intended? And yet, as our philosopher points out wisely, this pursuit of the Ideal is what alone gives a meaning to existence; it is the desire that keeps us alive; we should be dead without it. And after all, the lovely Might-Have-Been will sometimes become the Actual for a moment—the Ideal will become real, will flash on us in its strangeness and beauty; we catch it, as Miss Jekyll, coming round the corner, sometimes caught it—there it is before us, 'with its feet on earth,' as Henry James has phrased it, 'and its great wings trembling.' These moments of realization do not happen often, nor do they last for long; yet they dwell a long time with us and enrich our life, and to the extent of their intensity, they turn it from a fatal process into a liberal art.

IV

When, after this pause of meditation, I knocked on the door and was admitted into the silent house, I found myself in the presence of the Gertrude Jekyll I had known of old. She seemed more feeble in body, of course, but her mind was still alert; her eyes still twinkled behind her heavy glasses, the sound of her deep chuckle was quite as rich as ever.

Almost with no preliminaries (for her time was precious, and it tired her to talk for long) we began, just as if we had parted only a day or two before, to talk about our special subject. She had prepared for my expected visit a little collection of words, carefully noted down on slips of paper—odd words, dialect terms and idioms, and queer usages of interest. She had her own strong views on these subjects, and held firmly to them, and soon we found ourselves, as in the old days of old Britten, in lively contradiction with each other. Such was her vivacity that I am afraid that I sometimes quite forgot her great age and supposed weakness. Weakness! Miss Jekyll was as ready as ever for a

scrap, and it was impossible, or almost impossible, when she held to a view strongly, to make her give way an inch. Once, however, as I remember, I did get the better of her. We were talking of the differentiation of words, that curious process by which two words, with at first the same significance, come to acquire different meanings, so that we choose one for one use, and another for another, although we may be perfectly unconscious of the subtle logic which guides our choice. I gave as an instance the distinction between *drive* and *ride*. We *drive*, or take a *drive*, I explained, in a vehicle whose course is under our control, or supposed to be so, if it belongs to friends; we *ride*, or take a *ride*, in something which we do not control, like a stage-coach or bus or tram, or a cart whose driver gives us a lift on the road. This was now, I said, the modern usage; but Miss Jekyll, who was not enamoured of modern usages, wouldn't have it at any price. *Ride*, she declared with emphasis, was only used for riding on something with four legs, like a horse, or something analogous, like a bicycle. That was the correct meaning of the word, she declared, making it plain that she thought I ought to know it, and if I didn't, she was prepared to 'larn' me.

'But, Miss Jekyll,' I retorted, 'if you go on a bus, don't you take a ride on it?'

'But I never go on a bus!' she triumphed.

'But if you were given a lift by a farmer on the road?'

'I should call it a lift; a lift, certainly, not a ride.'

'But suppose, Miss Jekyll, that you wanted to go home from a hayfield on a loaded hay-cart? Wouldn't you ask if you could have a *ride* on the cart? Wouldn't you *have* to say *ride*—not *drive*?'

Miss Jekyll looked disconcerted. 'Well,' she said at last, 'no, I shouldn't call it a drive. No, certainly not a *drive*.'

'Would you ask for a *lift*, then?'

'No, I shouldn't call it a *lift*.'

'Now, Miss Jekyll,' I insisted (for the spirit of pedantry, a spirit that spares neither age nor sex, had taken possession of me), 'now, honestly, what would you ask for?' Miss Jekyll seemed almost to sweat blood at this question.

'I should ask—well I should ask—if you will insist on knowing—I suppose I should ask for a *ride* on the hay-cart. But,' she added, with what was almost a wicked wink from behind her spectacles, 'but then, you know, I should be speaking to quite uneducated people.'

This wasn't fair; she knew it wasn't fair, and her wink betrayed her.

The next time I went to Munstead, and took the key and opened the little door, I found Miss Jekyll fully armed for the encounter. Again she brought out a list of words and, by treating me as an authority, she lulled me into a false sense of security. Then mildly, almost deferentially, she said: 'There is one word whose derivation I want you to tell me.'

'What is it?' I incautiously asked.

'It is the word,' she said, '*epergne*. You know what an *epergne* is, a big centre dish for the dinner-table, with branches. But why is it called *epergne*? What is the word derived from?'

'It's a French word,' I answered.

'No it isn't,' she snapped. 'There's no such word in French. They call it a *surtout*. I thought that you could explain it for me.'

She knew, I suspect, that I couldn't explain *epergne,* as no one knows its source and derivation.

'You can't explain *epergne*!' she exclaimed with vigour, almost as if it were an *epergne* itself she was hurling at me. Then she grunted with delight, and her discomfiture on the hay-cart was avenged and forgotten. But the *epergne* she didn't forget; I think she would often chuckle over the way she had flattened me out with that massive ornament; and once, when I met her old friend Sir Edwin Lutyens, he told me how much she had enjoyed repeating to him the story of her triumph.

I have said that Miss Jekyll did not like our modern ways of speech: I think, indeed, that her plain, old, aristocratic face was firmly set against all new fashions and innovations; that if they were ever forced upon her attention an immense Disapproval would be the expression which would settle on her features. One felt with her that one was in the presence of another and now vanished generation, with standards of its own, discriminations, exclusions, niceties of speech and behaviour, which would be almost incomprehensible to young people now. I know little of the records and traditions of the Jekyll family, nor did Miss Jekyll or her brother, Sir Herbert, ever mention them to me. A fine old succession of county people, 'quality-folk' as they are called in rustic speech, living with a solid pride of their own in their old parks and houses, I imagined them. From the biographies of local Worthies, from family portraits and, above all, from all the old-fashioned novels of English country life, of which I had read so many, I pictured for myself a background of this kind for my old friend's portrait. And yet this background, as I see the portrait

now, is a mere dim perspective in the full effect which her figure produces upon me. The background may have been there; I feel sure that it was there, and Miss Jekyll was, I dare say, proud of its existence. It gave a certain distinction to her staunch old figure; but her much more real and rare distinction was her talent, and her long life assiduously devoted to its cultivation. She had made herself the mistress of a beautiful art, a beautiful humane profession; she had carried her craft, her 'mystery,' to a more exquisite perfection, and had enriched in her own way the world with a new ideal of beauty. She was an old, erudite, accomplished and famous expert; the world had acknowledged her pre-eminence, and applauded her achievement. And what distinction, armorial or other, is comparable to that? The true background for her almost queenly portrait (for she was really a kind of virgin queen in her own dominion) was the landscape of the gardens she had brought to perfection, with their borders and vistas and many-coloured flowers. And was not that background actually shining there in the vast region that lay behind her house?

In that list of honourable spinsters, which contains the names of so many valiant and accomplished women, who have obeyed a call and followed a vocation and rendered services to the world more enduring than those of their married sisters, whose lot they may have (how mistakenly!) envied sometimes —among the maiden names of these maiden ladies, the name of Gertrude Jekyll is sure to live, if only in the designation of some lovely garden plant or flower.

And is this, after all, a kind of fame that is worthy of no consideration? In the predicament with which our civilization now finds itself confronted—the problem, namely, how to find healthy, happy leisure for all the working millions who are now being liberated by machines from their day-long toils, may not the work of pioneers in gardening, like Gertrude Jekyll, have helped to one of the most valuable and enduring of solutions? If the cultivation of cabbages and potatoes can bring profit and happiness to the humblest worker, what are we to say of the noble gardening art which has been perfected in recent times by discoverers and inventors like William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll? It has become a disinterested art like music, but much more popular than music. It bestows a beauty in which millions can take delight; and, like music also, it provides satisfaction for the pride, the vanity and display of our fallen nature. If, then, some at least of the out-of-work classes can, in their enforced leisure, be led back to gardening and to sinning again in Paradise, Gertrude Jekyll will be remembered as one of the leaders of that felicitous return.

V

But when I went to see Miss Jekyll in her extreme old age, it was not of her profession that she wanted to talk. She knew all about gardening: there was nothing I could say to her on that subject; and once, when I did mention it, she gazed at me through her spectacles with an almost stony look: a veil of fatigue, of boredom with all the garden-chatter of the world, seemed to dim her face. And then, exercising the privilege of old age to dismiss peremptorily any subject concerning which her interlocutor had nothing of interest to tell her, 'Now, there's the word *tiller*,' she impatiently began, peering dimly at her notes; 'they use it about here to describe the shoots or suckers that grow from the stump of a tree they've cut down; is it the same word as the tiller of a boat, or is it a different word? You don't know? Do, please, look it up, will you, and send me a postcard.' I made a note of the word, and, after consulting the *Oxford Dictionary*, I sent her its little, and not uninteresting, history; how *tiller*, for the name of a plant or shoot or sucker, is an old word, which was brought by our Teutonic ancestors to England, and is found in an Anglo-Saxon translation of the verse in Genesis describing God's creation of the earth and heavens and every 'tiller' of the field; how, although it must have lived on in speech, it is not found again in writing for more than six hundred years, when it shoots up in Evelyn's *Sylva* with its modern meaning; how it survives now only in dialect, having wilted away out of our arid standard English. But the name *tiller* for the tiller of a boat was, I wrote her, derived from quite another source, and had reached us from the shores of the Mediterranean, from the Latin *tela*, a web, or, rather, from the medieval Latin *telarium*, meaning a weaver's beam; we had borrowed *telar* in the fourteenth century as a name in archery for the stock of a cross-bow; its nautical use as the tiller of a boat (corresponding to the helm of a ship) was found two hundred years later, the word, though borrowed from the French, not being a nautical term in French, since the French use *barre du gouvernail* for our word *tiller*.

Such was the dry, but sweet fodder on which we fed our hobby-horse, and which Miss Jekyll would welcome to the last with undiminished joy. It pleased her to know that an old Anglo-Saxon Biblical word like 'tiller' 'tillered' as fresh as ever in the dialect speech of her Surrey neighbours.

The next time I went to see Miss Jekyll she had prepared for my visit a little menu of words from polite sources, 'quality' words which came to her, I suppose, from that background of which I have spoken. These were terms and idioms peculiar to the class for which, to distinguish from the classes below or above it, she revived or re-created the old word 'armigerous,' meaning entitled to bear arms—a word which we often see in old churches, on tombs or tablets

dedicated to the memory of So-and-so, *armiger*—some ‘gentleman’ in the old sense, or squire.

‘That’s my class, the class I belong to,’ she mentioned, just as a cat might say ‘I am a cat,’ or a dog remark that he belonged to the dog species; ‘and,’ she went on, ‘armigerous people have certain expressions of their own. They don’t, for instance, say *overcoat*—that’s an Americanism—but *great-coat*; they *have* tea or coffee or sugar, they never *take* them; they never take anything into their bodies but pills and medicines, and these they don’t talk about; armigerous men never say *vest*, they say *waistcoat*, but expect their tailors to use *vest* in speaking to them or in sending in their bills. It would be an impertinence,’ she added, ‘for a tailor to use the word “waistcoat” to an armigerous person. So, too, an armigerous person staying in a country house would not say: “May I ask your butler, your footman, your groom, to perform such and such a service,” but would say “may I ask your servant.” Then there were usages, too, that would mark our armigerous gentlemen, who could alone, in the strictest usage, be called “Esquire”; he would never go, still less take a lady, to the dress-circle in a theatre, but always to the stalls; and his wife would never use an egg-cup to keep in position the pastry of a pie if she was entertaining guests. I might,’ Miss Jekyll admitted, ‘have an egg-cup in a pie if I was eating it alone, but not if you were lunching with me.’

‘Now, Miss Jekyll,’ I said, as I soon took my leave (for I was afraid of tiring her with too much talk), ‘now that you have told me of these nice discriminations, what would you advise a non-armigerous person to say or do? Would you advise me to keep to the usages of my own condition?’

We stood at the open door; Miss Jekyll looked at me with her plain, but splendid face—the face, I described it to myself, of some ancient, incredibly aristocratic rhinoceros gazing gravely out from amid a tangle of river reeds; and her friendliness seemed to be struggling with an unregenerate impulse derived from the first of lady-gardeners; she snorted, she almost winked, and then she chuckled. ‘Well, I think if I were you—yes,’ she went on after another pause of serious consideration in which she eyed me from head to foot, ‘yes, I think, if you insist upon an answer, yes—you had better stick to the ways of your own class.’

With this parting shot, which the old Amazon delivered from her bow with undiminished vigour at the age of eighty-eight, Miss Jekyll laughed her jolly laugh, in which I could not help joining as I took my leave.

‘Go and have a look at the gardens, if you like,’ she added, ‘and there’s a big patch of blue mecanopsis behind the tool-shed you might like to see. I’m sorry I can’t come and show it to you. Good-bye, and come to see me again

soon.’

As I wandered off into the gardens behind her house, with their pergolas and long vistas, their glades and shut-in spaces full of flowers, I was sorry that their maker was too far advanced in age to conduct me, as before with old Britten, along the paths and borders. And now that her many years have reached their peaceful termination, I am still more sorry to think that I shall never again cross the road at Munstead, reach over for that key, open that little door, and walk along those woodland paths to engage in a spirited word-encounter with Miss Jekyll.

1933.

VI

ON RE-READING PATER

I

In noting the effect of Ronsard's poetry upon the hero of his unfinished novel, *Gaston de Latour*, Pater has described the enthusiasm of the enthusiastic youth of every age in their discovery of a delightful modernity, of a new-invented art which can transmute the life of their day into a literature full of expressiveness and beauty. Pater's own work had something of this effect upon a few at least of his own more youthful contemporaries. There they also saw the day as they knew it transmuted into a kind of precious tissue—the tissue of those essays which they would find now and then new-printed in the bookshops, and would take home and open with a joy that was all the greater from their knowledge that these writings were regarded by moralists with the gravest disapprobation.

Anyone who might now for the first time read Pater's sincere and scholarly volumes would find it difficult to understand the indignation they aroused when they first appeared; it would seem to him as incomprehensible as the scandal which was caused at about the same time by the exhibition of Whistler's pictures, with their quiet beauty. But if the outraged moral feeling which is so often awakened by any sincere novelty in art is hard to recapture, almost as incapable of revival is the ecstasy with which the chosen few welcome these innovations and new dawns. Even those who were fired in their youth by an ardent admiration for Pater's writings may almost shrink from opening again the dark green bindings of those comely volumes, which were so precious to them once. Their delight in them had been so excessive that they may think it wiser to preserve untarnished the bright memory of this infatuation; to keep these illuminated missals[4] closed, for fear that their poetry and religion may have faded with the years. For it was much more than a mere literary pleasure which they had found there; it was above all what the generous youth of every age welcomes with a graver enthusiasm—the discovery of a gospel, of a new way of living. Pater became for them the shepherd, as it were, and bishop of their souls; he gave them an inner standard of distinction, selection, refusal; imposed upon them almost a religious attitude, instructing them to sift out of the crudity of their young experience all that seemed beautiful and significant and strange, and to treasure above all

things these savings of fine gold. Through the vision thus presented to them they had seen the familiar world with an unwonted light upon it, a world in which the beautiful had become strange, and there might be beauty in all strangeness. To have their eyes unsealed in this surprising manner had been a kind of mystical initiation; it had endowed them with a sense of fastidious aloofness, of being chosen among the elect, of worshipping, as in white garments, the soul of visible beauty in a sanctuary hidden from the world.

Such a fanaticism of appreciation middle-aged or elderly readers cannot hope to experience again. But it is an error of judgment, and a wrong done, as it were, to our past, to neglect the books which were sacred to our youth because they can no longer give us what they once gave. The memory, even though an ironic memory, of an early infatuation has its charm and pathos, and it is quite possible, moreover, that we shall find that our enthusiasm was not misplaced; that what once so uncritically delighted is capable of providing us with a more reasoned pleasure, and even that we can discover in those objects of our adoration qualities and excellences which we had not been able to appreciate before.

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[4] The phrase ‘illuminated missals’ has been the subject of criticism, since it is supposed (and generally rightly supposed) that the word ‘missal’ is incorrectly used for books of devotion in general, and not confined, as it should be, to books containing the service of the Mass for the year. But a still more exquisite pedantry may justify the phrase, since illuminated Mass books are after all not uncommon, and Ruskin writes of ‘missal-painting’ and Browning of a ‘missal-marge’ filled with flowers.

II

An experience of this kind will await those early admirers of Pater’s works who return to them after a long neglect. They will be reassured to find how well his writing has stood the test of time, how indeed, like a vintage of the finer sort, it has matured and grown choicer with the years. It often happens that the memory of something we have read acquires little by little an added beauty; we rewrite it for ourselves, and the original, if we return to it, seems curiously flat and disappointing. But Pater’s books provide no such disillusion; the remembered passages will be found more choicely worded than in our recollection of them; the little vignettes more delicately painted. Even the

mannerisms and affectations which aroused the disgust of those who did not like his style, and caused misgivings sometimes in those who did, will seem of little importance now. They are there if we care to look for them; but we notice them now as little more than not unpleasing idiosyncrasies, or at the worst, as defects incidental to the almost over-scrupulous attention which he gave to every sentence he wrote. Pater was confessedly a euphonist; he had set out to do what no one in England had ever done so deliberately before, to follow Flaubert's example and create for himself his own prose style, a style which should aim at conscious effects of beauty and be composed with infinite and fastidious care. The dangers of this kind of writing are many, and Pater's imitators have made them fairly obvious. If his own 'fine writing' has almost entirely escaped these dangers, if indeed it has seemed to become finer with the years, this is because his style was created and adapted to express, with the most scholarly exactness, thought of the rarest quality, and to render with punctilious sincerity a beautiful and intense vision which was very personal to himself. It was the value of this thought and the beauty of this vision which rendered legitimate the elaborate style in which alone they could find expression; while the style itself, with its enduring qualities, has preserved, as only style can preserve, that meaning and beauty fresh and untouched by time.

If it was, for certain readers, an ecstasy to read the *Renaissance* for the first time, and *Marius the Epicurean* and the *Imaginary Portraits*, their reperusal in maturer years will provide a more assured and enduring pleasure. And if, with the discrimination of maturer years, we ask ourselves what is the precise quality of that pleasure, what it is that Pater gives us and that we cannot find elsewhere; if we seek for a definition of his essence, for the 'formula,' to use his own expression, which will help us to understand the dominating character of his work, we may do well to borrow a phrase which he himself used of Plato, when he said that Plato had 'a sort of sensuous love of the unseen.' For Pater, too, was a lover of the unseen; the high abstractions of philosophy, the ideals of ethics and religion were his constant study; but being by nature an artist, and richly endowed with that impressibility to objects of sense which distinguishes the artist from the thinker, his love for ideas was a sensuous love; it was in their plastic and visible embodiments that they revealed what seemed to him their true significance. Those portions of his work which most perfectly render his vision consist therefore in the presentation of ideas, of certain phases of thought, perceived not in the abstract, but in their concrete manifestations in the past—the Dorian ethical ideal, for instance, as moulding in every detail the grave old town of Sparta, the ancient piety of Numa as expressed in archaic forms of Latin ritual, the spirit of early Christianity as it had transformed the house near Rome of a noble convert, the medieval

conception of life as embodied in the architecture of a French cathedral.

But what awakened his most passionate attention was the vision of an idea incorporated, as it were, in a living person, some metaphysical principle, 'itself without hands or feet,' taking possession of, and becoming dominant in, a man of unusual gifts, moulding his lineaments, and finding expression in his discourse, his manners, and every particularity of his way of life. Pater was, therefore, like Sainte-Beuve, above all a portrait painter; and it is the attempt to portray some ideal and expressive figure of the past which most arouses his imagination and gives the finest brilliance to his style. The greater number of these portraits—as his love for philosophy would lead us to expect—are portraits of the masters or the disciples of abstract thought: Plato, and the Italian platonist, Pico della Mirandola, Aristippus, and his imagined disciple, the young and tragic Flavian, the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne the Pyrrhonist, and that most perfectly achieved of all his masterpieces, Sebastian van Storck, the follower, the victim, of Spinoza's sublime doctrine. Beings of religious import, the gods as embodiments of religious conceptions, make their appearance also in his pages: Demeter or Dionysus in the full significance of what was their essential meaning to the Greeks, or Greek divinities imaginatively transported to other times and northern regions; Apollo in Picardy, or Dionysus causing a strange unrest in a town of medieval France. Modes of appreciation and phases of taste he also depicts in representative figures: the dawn of the age of Goethe in Duke Carl of Rosenmold, the new feeling for antiquity in the German critic Winckelmann, fresh modes of artistic apprehension in Apuleius, Ronsard, Leonardo, Giorgione, Watteau.

III

Although Pater was, like Sainte-Beuve, a portrait painter, his method was very different from that of the French writer, and his portraits are masterpieces of quite another school. Sainte-Beuve's aim was the truth, the truth apart from his private tastes and preferences; he tried to make every shade of appreciation his own, to compass all modes of being; he interested himself not only in men of letters, but in men of action and affairs, in soldiers, statesmen and great prelates. Pater's vision was narrower and more intense; he was jealous and fastidious about the nutriment of his spirit, and rejected everything that made no appeal to his imagination. The title *Imaginary Portraits*, which he adopted for the most personal of his books, is full of significance, for his portraits, even of persons who have really existed, and who have their place in history, are all in a sense imaginative creations, and of their aspects he depicts those alone which are of interest to him. Most of them are figures of a special type,

meditative personalities, abstracted from life even when in the midst of it, and silvered over, as he sees them, with the pale cast of thought. Even men of more active and commanding character he observes as they stand motionless in some pause of reverie or meditation, in the suspense of some silent questioning, demur, or disbelief. His representations of these grave, speculative figures, these almost dream-like apparitions, are made vivid by touch after touch of delicately coloured phrases; the mood, the dominating thought, glimmering with a central light upon the expressive lineaments, and diffusing itself in fainter illuminations and shadows over every detail of their visionary background.

It is almost impossible to write of Pater's literary art without the use of terms borrowed from the art of painting. He seems to have looked at everything with a painter's eye, and even his descriptions of natural beauty are presented as a painter might depict them. All the arts are sisters; each works in its own material and with its own methods at their common task of enriching man's life with beauty. If they are sometimes accused of misleading one another, or of trespassing on each other's domains, and if literature in especial is charged with leading painting and music astray, she at least has derived from her association with her simpler-minded and more sensuous companions nothing but an added beauty of musical expression, a greater choiceness and perfection of form and colour. How great can be the value to a writer of this enrichment from another art, what he can borrow, for instance, from the painter's eye and palette, is beautifully apparent in the work of Pater, who is, perhaps, of all authors, the one who has most completely appropriated the painter's vision with the special and peculiar technique. The enduring lustre of his work, what remains after the glow of its novelty has faded, and shines out with a finer radiance on its reperusal, is largely, therefore, its pictorial quality: the quiet tones of the atmosphere, the cool greys and blues of the colouring, which give his canvases, like those of Vermeer of Delft, such a rare and almost unbelievable distinction.

IV

If Pater's ideal figures derive also much of their beauty, as well as their intellectual significance, from the unseen thought within, which has moulded and made expressive every feature, the painter himself of these portraits was formed and dominated by a philosophy, an ethical ideal, which, though he afterwards partially abandoned it, yet deeply tinged his modes of apprehension, and gave a special character to his life and work. This Epicurean or rather this Cyrenaic philosophy, taught him to live as much as possible in the present moment, the 'Ideal Now,' and above all, in those moments of

intense spiritual experience in which the beauty and meaning of life seem to be revealed to us, in those flashes of inner illumination, or of delight in the visible world around us, those ‘kindlings like the morning,’ which Wordsworth, otherwise no follower of Aristippus, regarded as being of almost religious importance. The faith in the significance of these momentary revelations, which inspired Wordsworth in his contemplation of Nature, was extended by Pater, who was deeply Wordsworthian in spirit, to the world of human beings and human achievements. Marius the Epicurean—and Marius is in many ways a portrait of Pater himself—was visited now and then, he writes, by ‘visions, almost beatific, of ideal personalities in life and art’; and this phrase well describes what was certainly his own experience. To him the unseen revealed itself most vividly, not in perceptions of the beauty of inanimate Nature, but in visions of ideal persons, as he saw them in their lives, or in the works of art in which their spirit had found its complete expression. His best writing is in its essence, therefore, the record of those moments in which he perceived certain figures and certain works of art that were of the most intense significance to him. It is a record, as I have said, of deliberately personal and what we call subjective impressions; and, above all, when he describes a work of art—the Mona Lisa is the most famous example—he cares to give us only what was his own experience as, in some choice moment of aroused attention, he mused upon its beauty.

His art-criticism is therefore not in the least technical in character, and his appreciation of paintings is what is now called ‘literary’ appreciation; he regards them as pictorial images of the mind and soul of man, as the representation of what is most impassioned and ideal in human thoughts and moods and ways of feeling. To writers on art of the most modern school, preoccupied as they are with the problems of pure form, this way of looking at pictures is very much out of fashion. Whether it will remain so always, whether the poetic effects and spiritual values which are undoubtedly to be found in pictures, and which their painters undoubtedly attempted to embody in them, will always be regarded as an extraneous element, of no aesthetic importance or interest, is a question which the future must decide. It is difficult, however, to believe that Pater’s best writings on art, his essays, say, on Botticelli and on the School of Giorgione, will ever lose, for lovers of Italian pictures, their exquisite interpretative value, or be superseded by dissertations on the geometry of form. One element at least of his art-criticism is almost certain to live on as a permanent contribution to our imaginative life. His sense of the importance, in any achieved culture, of the appreciation of beauty, as being one of the deepest and most sacred of human experiences, was so intensely felt and so exquisitely and sincerely expressed, that it can never

become out of date and be forgotten. No one has ever rendered, and no one will, perhaps, ever render with a more potent magic, that ‘thrill of exaltation,’ as Mr. Santayana has described in ‘that suggestion of an ideal world, which we feel in the presence of any true beauty.’

To Pater in his later years the Cyrenaic philosophy which he had so boldly expressed in his famous *Epilogue*, and which, with the serious and profound sensuousness of his teaching, had so shocked his Victorian contemporaries—this philosophy of youth, as he called it, this exclusive attention to impressions received in moments of impassioned vision, came to seem too narrow, too cramping, too costly as a way of life. But with him, as with Wordsworth, the artist found in these revelations the material which gives an enduring value to his work. And the emphasis which he laid upon the deep significance of these moments, the habit he taught of devout attention to them, was the secret of the spell which he cast upon those who in their youth yielded themselves to his influence. This was the doctrine, the discipline they so religiously accepted. And if Pater’s former disciples have also come to feel in maturer years, like their master, that this cult of exquisite impressions—the maintenance of this ecstasy—is inadequate as a definition of success in life, yet they cannot look back upon that shrine of their former worship without a sort of piety, nor re-read those sacred books and not be touched by some regret for the beautiful, impracticable religion of their youth. And it may, perhaps, be said that all of them, however much they may have been battered and beaten upon in their subsequent careers, still retain in spirit the mark of their early initiation—some glaze of the soul from the contact of that flame, some traces of delicate gilding not quite rubbed away.

1926.

VII

ALTAMURA

Nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
Edita doctrina sapientum templa serena.

I

A traveller who made his way, some years ago, among remote Italian mountains, and visited the monastery of Altamura, has described the worship which he witnessed there of Wealth and Disillusion, and the ceremonial invocation of the Spirit of Delight.

He did not know, however, nor is it generally known, that these are not mere disconnected ceremonies, but part of a year-long ritual, a Religion (if we may call it so) interpreting and rendering holy all human experience; a Rule of Faith with pomps and festivals and fasts, asceticisms and sacred feasts, in which every month has its special worship, and each day its Saint.

The worship of Life! life in its beauty and essence—so I suppose the Altamurans might define their cult: the devout contemplation of those eternal forms, those types of perfection and ideal modes of being which life can reveal, though it cannot, save perhaps in brief moments, ever really attain to them.

The year of Altamura begins in March: begins soberly with a review of the ancient and natural sentiments of the human heart, and of the more obvious goals of moral effort. The God of the Deists is now worshipped, *l'éternel Géomètre*, Benevolent Creator of Broad Church Theology; and the Saints of this month are the Moralists and Wise Men, Solomon and Solon, the Proverb Makers, the Gnomic Poets. In the sermons, or in the morning and evening hymns, are embodied those old moralities and maxims which the spectacle of human life has suggested to reflecting minds, in all ages. That life is short, and happiness uncertain; that Death comes alike to monarchs' towers and to peasants' cots, the worshippers are reminded; and they are urged to consider that true knowledge is to know one's own ignorance, that contentment is better than riches, and a mind at peace with itself worth more than the applause of Senates.

Platitudes! a chance listener might disdainfully conclude. But the

Altamurans have always found a certain truth in truisms; and now, dizzied by the high speculations with which they have wound up the religious year, and turning with something like terror from the metaphysical mysteries into which their thoughts have plunged, they come back with a natural yearning to the beaten paths and the well-worn sentiments of the familiar Planet.

In April, with thoughts now at home once more on earth, they begin the sacred cycle of life: begin with the worship of Youth and Dawn. The dawn of life, the awakening of thought, the early Renaissance, and above all Greece, that delicate vision which haunts the world now growing old—all these are worshipped; and the Saints of the month are the young men, loved of the gods, whom age never touched—Keats and Mozart, Giorgione, Marlowe. It is for them that the altars are crowned with flowers; and green-robed choirs, under the fading stars of April mornings, sing in their honour the songs of Blake and Herrick, and heap offerings of praise and wonder about those shrines.

The spirit of the April worship has been one of love for the earth as it is seen faintly under the star of morning; the month of May is sacred to human passion, the sun-lit love of youth and maid, the adoration of young and beautiful beings for each other. All the renowned lovers are adored as Saints, and their lives and legends studied—Sappho, Catullus, Romeo and Juliet, Héloïse and Abelard—and in rose-red cloaks, and crowned with roses, the worshippers visit one after one their woodland altars. Nor are the heroic examples of antique friendship forgotten, David and Jonathan, Orestes and Pylades, Theseus and Pirithous and the rest.

The religion of the Altamurans, though for the most part one of ceremony, is not without its personal exercises; and, whilst in the month of Youth, the believers meditate on their earliest sensations of the morning earth, so, in May, as they pace in solitude their groves and cloisters, they are directed to recall, one by one, the faces and voices which they once loved.

From this enchantment they are woken by the advent of the month that follows, the month of Action. And now, as the young man’s mind turns from love to thoughts of struggle and ambition, so the Altamurans begin to worship force and success, in their ideal or historical manifestations; the God of Israel, the great men of Action; all those who have been lords and masters of life, who have subdued to their own will the forces of nature, or other men. Especially in this month are the great conquerors commemorated, Cæsar and Alexander; and those Asiatic emperors who, setting out with their armies to vanquish the antique world, trample and glitter across the oldest pages of history.

They would, however, entirely mistake the teaching of Altamura who

might suppose that because men of action or patriots and philanthropists are, in their season, worshipped, that therefore they are held as examples which should, in life, be imitated. Very different is their rule. Believing as the Altamurans do in that life of contemplation,

> By whose grace the elect enjoy their sacred aloofness
> From Life's meagre affairs,

they find in men of action not models of conduct, but embodiments of the forces to which they pay their homage—sacred victims, chosen to make vivid to the world the working of some divine energy, but in themselves almost as ignorant of their own meaning as the peasant who ploughs his master's soil or garners in his harvest.

After Action, Power, Conquest, in July follows the worship of the gifts with which the world rewards its conquerors, Rank and Pomp and Riches. All through the month of July hymns in praise of Gold are sung by choirs in the twilight of the great rococo chapel—Gold, red gold, the crown of desire, the divine potion, making men as Gods.

July, too, is the month of Beautiful Ladies—not the flower-like maidens young men adore, but the queens of arts and years, who dwelt in palaces, languidly listening to the adulations of kings and princes. Helen, Thais, Phryne, Lesbia, the Queen of Egypt, Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Magdalen, Lucrezia Borgia, Catarina Sforza, Isabella d'Este are now remembered; their altars and statues are heaped with flowers; and songs, once penned by princes and Court poets, are sung in their honour.

There is always a certain stateliness in the way of life at Altamura, a grandeur congruous with the great halls, colonnades and terraces of this monastic palace. But in July the tables are loaded with plate of gold, and at midnight the blaze of illumination from a hundred windows shines out across the plains.

And only in this month is the law relaxed which so rigidly excludes the world from Altamura: profane feet are, of course, never allowed in the inner cloisters, but in the lodges certain great ladies are allowed to sojourn, and entertainment is made for visiting monarchs.

But how soon the human heart, in the lassitude of palaces, grows weary of the splendour of Courts! '*O ubi campi!*' how the cry for green fields and fountains is heard again and again in the history of monarchies and dominations! 'Ah, what a life were this!' as the weary English king exclaims in Shakespeare:

‘Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroider’d canopy
To kings?’

Diocletian, giving up the empire of the world to cultivate his garden at Salona; those great rustics of antiquity, the Roman nobles, leaving the smoke and stir of Rome; the country life of Marie Antoinette; Madame de Sévigné planting oaks in the rains of Brittany; Pius II, who loved nothing better than to dine in the meadows near Siena; Queen Elizabeth, who would so often wish herself a milkmaid all through the month of May—all these are remembered in August at Altamura; and in the still days of sun and harvest, groups in the beech groves, or beside the fountains, robed in golden yellow, spend pastoral hours, reading Spenser and Theocritus and Virgil.

II

The religious year has at the end of August run half its course: the impulses and activities of man, his loves and ambitions and longings, have been commemorated in their various manifestations; and now, with the shortening days and declining sun, there comes a sort of detachment from the world of sense; and the Soul, tending towards complete self-consciousness, begins to ask itself the meaning of existence, and tries to find satisfaction in theories of life or conduct, in art, or in systems of morals and metaphysics. But first of all comes the human, natural regret; the mood when the grace of life is felt so vividly, just because at the same moment is felt its fatal shortness. September, therefore, is the month of Elegy: the month sacred to the Anthology, to Horace, to Virgil, to the younger Milton, to Watteau and to Walter Pater. The vestments of this month are pale and blue, and the services are musical with the sweet natural sadness of things, the regret that roses must fade and lilies perish, that youth must depart and death must come to all.

Eheu fugaces! they sing the Odes of Horace, mourning, in musical numbers, their short span of life,

‘*Immortalia ne speres, monet annus et almum*
Quae rapit hora diem.’

‘*Pulvis et umbra sumus!*’ the sense of their transitoriness adding a pensive pleasure to the days and hours as they run.

What, however, in the calm September sun is a mere sentiment, becomes more real with October’s winds and frosts, and the sense of winter not far off.

And with clearer knowledge of the shortness of life, comes the great resolve to drain its cup before death comes. The Altamurans give October, therefore, to the worship of Pagan pleasure—not the young joy of fresh heart and senses, but the mature acceptance of what life has to give, or the clutching at joys that vanish. The saints of this month are the great Epicureans; Epicurus himself, and his followers, Horace, Mæcenas, Hadrian, the great Hohenstaufen, Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Goethe.

> ‘Crown we our heads with roses then,
> And ’noint with Tyrian balm,’

they sing; joining in the chorus of wise men who, since the beginning of the world, have counselled the gathering of roses before they fade.

> ‘Is’t not fine to dance and sing
> When the bells of death do ring?
> Is’t not fine to swim in wine,
> And turn upon the toe,
> And sing hey nonny no!
> When the winds blow and the seas flow
> Hey nonny no!’

The shrill cry mingles with the shriek of the late October gales, with the beating of rain on the chapel windows.

As in some religions great suffering is esteemed, so the Altamurans feel in regard to great enjoyment: that it conveys a kind of sanctity. And therefore among October’s saints are remembered all those who are famed for magnificence in their pleasures, the great *gaudenti* of the world, Sardanapalus, Semiramis, Polycrates, Lucullus, Nero, Faustina, Theodora, the Pompadour and all the pagan, pleasure-loving Popes.

> ‘Like to a moving vintage down they came,
> Crown’d with green leaves, and faces all on flame;
> All madly dancing through the pleasant valley’:

a traveller quotes, happening by chance on one of the festivals, with its cars and crowns and corybantic cymbals, of this month’s Bacchic worship and pedantic inebriety.

Brief, however, as life may be, the pleasures of life are still more fleeting; and in November the Altamurans, following the course of human experience, turn from the poor earth and its joys, to those forces that make for the mockery

and derision of human hopes, and the destruction of human existence. The decay of religions and civilizations, the prosperity of the wicked, and all the sinister aspects of creation—ill-boding stars, eclipses, wars, plagues earthquakes and inundations—in the contemplation of these, devout Satanists raise themselves above Good and Evil, and enhance the sense of their own being by glorying in the forces that must destroy it.

The Saints of this month are the great Pessimists, and Cynics and Suicides, the heathen Gods which were Devils, Moloch, Hammon, Chemosh, Typhon, Peor and the Baalim.

Three months now remain; months in which the Altamurans study the human soul in its search for salvation, for refuge, for satisfaction—if satisfaction there be of infinite desire. It is only possible, however, to mention in the briefest of words the Saviours who are worshipped and the schemes of Salvation which are studied, in these last months. December is the month of Pity, of the sense of human brotherhood and sorrow for the weak. January is given to Art; and in the dark days of winter, when this world is blackened with frost, the Altamurans conjure up that other all-golden world, which man has constructed out of, and above, the infamy of his existence; that world of temples and palaces against still skies, of landscapes and splendid cities, where magnificent human persons sit clothed in splendour, listening to music or to noble verses.

The last month of all is given to Religion and Metaphysics, to all the grandiose schemes of Being that men have constructed. The sacred circle thus ends in the starry spaces, in Thoughts that travel beyond Space and Time.

III

And thus the years go by at Altamura. Freed from the love of the world and the fear of death, its inhabitants derive a richer sense of self-conscious existence from the contemplation in temporal things of their eternal meanings; from the reperusal of their sacred books and the worship of those great forces, and persons and works of art, in which the spirit of Life has been most splendidly manifested. From their mountain throne they see spread before them all ages and epochs, and the echo of contemporary trouble comes but faintly to their ears. Ancient Athens and Rome are nearer to them than modern cities; and, although at stated times they start on pilgrimages to visit the places and works of art which they consider sacred, what chiefly connects the Altamurans with the life about them is a hope that, by devout enjoyment, the burden of the world’s joylessness can in some degree be lightened.

Men have invented various ways of spending the time allotted to them.

May it not be that the high Platonic way of Altamura is not the least wise of these? For temporal creatures to dwell in the contemplation of eternal essences, to behold Beauty with the eye of the mind and to feed on the shadows of perfection; is that, as Diotoma asked of Socrates, an ignoble life?

1898.

VIII

MICHAEL FIELD

I

It is a curious experience to find that one has lived through an important literary epoch and never known it. When I now read about the decadent nineties, the impropriety of that epoch, its enthusiasm for style and form, and the baleful countenance it gave to Art for the sake of Art, I wonder a little, for I remember those years which led on to the war in South Africa as a period of imperialism and of Kipling's glory; a decade throughout which a strong east wind of Philistinism blew over England, without any noticeable remission or shifting to the south. I can recall no evidence of popular enthusiasm for Art, no encouragement given to the cultivation, however guiltless, of literary form. I was at Oxford in the nineties, but I think I can say (and what undergraduate could say it now?) that I made the acquaintance of only one poet during my sojourn there. Afterwards, it is true, I did meet three of four writers who cultivated letters in a disinterested spirit—some of them refugees, like myself, from the still bleaker climate of America. But it was in considerable isolation that we led our existence; unknown disciples of Flaubert and Walter Pater, we wrapped our cloaks about us, we tended the lamps of our humble sanctuaries, and grew middle-aged on our meagre incomes, without any kind of encouragement from the world. Between our pens and our purses there was but the most remote relation; no editors welcomed our contributions, no publishers our books; if we printed, we printed at our own expense; nor had we the slightest prevision of the sunshine of enthusiasm for letters which was to illumine the world before we left it.

Such a recondite cult, such an unrewarded devotion to the labour of the file, would no doubt be laughed at now; our poets, with their liberal incomes and their early laurels, our already famous undergraduates, who expound their opinions in the papers, would look indeed with contempt upon a way of life so unencouraged, so unremunerated, so obscure. My purpose is not to recommend what was not an altogether exhilarating existence, although it had its secret joys. A chill of discouragement would fall each time more heavily upon us, when, over the parapets of our ivory towers, we dropped our little, laboured masterpieces, one after the other, into abysses of silence that seemed to have no bottom. Whether the present warm atmosphere of laudation is more

favourable to enduring achievement; whether it is the broad, popular way, or the high, difficult path among the rocks, which leads to excellence, is a question not for me, but for Posterity to answer; my purpose is at present to recall, however faintly, the figure of one of the most obscure and frustrated pilgrims of that lonely path, the strange poet, Michael Field. I say strange, for Michael Field was not only a double personality—'a double-headed nightingale,' as an American critic elegantly phrased it—but also because the literary figure dimly known at the time, and now still more dimly remembered by that masculine appellation, was composed in private of two maiden ladies, an aunt and niece, Miss Katherine Harris Bradley and Miss Edith Emma Cooper.

II

These ladies came from Birmingham, and were endowed with a modest but sufficient income derived from a tobacco factory in that city. They were united by the closest bond of a passionate adoration for each other, and by a common enthusiasm for high and passionate verse. They have told the world how, 'indifferent to heaven and hell,' they early dedicated their lives to poetry and love:

> 'It was deep April, and the morn
> Shakespeare was born;
> The world was on us, pressing sore;
> My Love and I took hands and swore,
> Against the world, to be
> Poets and lovers ever more';

and the history of that never-violated vow is the history of their life. Its external circumstances can be briefly told. From the suburbs of Birmingham they went to live near Bristol, where they prepared themselves for their high career by classical and other studies, and where they wrote their first play, *Callirrhoē*. This play, on its publication in 1884, made a considerable stir in literary circles, and was highly praised by Robert Browning. Although the cup of success was soon dashed from their lips, they never forgot that intoxicating flavour; it proved, as early success so often proves, a poisoned draught; and the dismal fate of their future publications was made all the more bitter for them by the memory of the sweet praise which had once been theirs. To suppose, however, that they were in the least daunted by lack of recognition would be to mis-estimate the vast ambition and intrepid spirit of these ladies.

Steadily, year after year, for almost thirty years, they went on writing

tragedies in verse; they published in fact, at their own expense, twenty-eight dramas, full of grandiose passions, dreadful deeds of lust and horror, incest and assassination, hells of jealousy and great empires tottering to their fall. These sombre and fiery volumes, with eight volumes of fiery lyrics, fell all of them, one after the other, into oblivion; the British public took no notice of them, the literary journals gave them scanty consideration; only once, when they gave the world some paraphrases of Sappho's verse, their attempt to breathe once more the air of Lesbos was answered by a few brickbats, flung at them by the Press in a somewhat perfunctory manner. And yet with what pride would these maiden ladies have stepped forth to glory amid the blare of trumpets! This was denied them; and being convinced, as they became convinced, that they were the victims of a conspiracy, they published most of their later books without that name which they believed was boycotted by a public obdurate in its guilt. But when anonymity failed to break the baleful spell, the deepening gloom of non-appreciation only served to enhance their belief in their immortality; the name, so neglected now, would eventually, they were convinced, be blazoned in the very firmament of reputation. Posterity would pay in passionate requital the praise their contemporaries had denied; and pilgrims, in ages to come, would visit with reverent steps the suburban shrines where they had once resided.

When I first made their acquaintance this shrine was at Reigate, where they lived, within easy reach of London, with Miss Bradley's brother-in-law and Miss Cooper's father, in a modern and comfortable villa-residence called 'Durdans.' In 1897 this elderly, retired merchant, Mr. Cooper, disappeared in the Alps; and Michael Field, after commemorating that tragedy in a sombre sonnet-sequence, and after attempting to move heaven and earth to revenge what they chose to regard as a mysterious political assassination, changed their residence to a little house on the river at Richmond, where they spent the rest of their life. This transportation Miss Bradley described in her characteristic style of letter-writing—she was a writer of amazing letters:

> 'It was suggested that we should be drawn by pards to Richmond in a golden chariot. The pards was a detail not carried out; but of Thee, O Bacchus, and of Thy ritual, the open landau piled high with Chow and Field and Michael, doves and manuscripts and sacred plants!—all that is US was there.'

III

The quiet of their old-maidenly life at Richmond was in striking contrast to the seething passions and awful events of the dramas they went on

undauntedly publishing; but in 1907 an appalling event did actually befall them. It is difficult to describe this calamity in terms which will convey any impression of its crushing nature, for it was, externally considered, nothing more than the death of the dog Chow, mentioned in the above-quoted letter. The death of this beloved animal (celebrated in another sombre sonnet-sequence) was a loss from which these now elderly ladies never really recovered, and which, Mr. Sturge Moore tells us, was largely the cause of their abandonment of the cult of Bacchus, which filled their early lives, for the refuge, into which they betook themselves, of the Roman Catholic Church, for whose doctrines they abandoned that Cyrenaic, Paterian cult of their earlier years. Of this attitude to life we find an expression in the lines addressed to the baby whom, as their godson, they had sponsored at the font:

> Whoever will be good, sweet boy, be clever;
> Dream noble deeds, not do them all day long,
> So making life—a moment—or for ever—
> One golden Song.

In moments of exaltation they had been heard to express a Dionysiac desire to dance like Maenads, and tear, in their intoxication, young kids limb from limb. But I have good reason to believe that the potations of these uninebriated ladies never exceeded occasional sips of some vintage with a noble name; and there is a legend that once, when they were being driven across Paris by a drunken cabman, their rejoicing in the progress of their Bacchic car became a horrible nightmare when a passer-by was crushed beneath their wheels. After their great bereavement at the death of Chow they put aside, however, their corybantic cymbals, the torches and the fawn-skins, and spent their last years in the exercise of orthodox devotion and the composition of religious verse.

In 1913 Miss Cooper died of cancer, being devotedly nursed by her aunt, Miss Bradley, who was herself stricken with the same malady, but who heroically concealed it from her companion, and only broke down at the latter's funeral (how well I remember that bleak funeral!) to die herself from the same cause not long after.

IV

These ladies had not many acquaintances; there were, however, a few friends who would be now and then summoned to Richmond, where they held, like royalties in exile, their imaginary Court. Though I was not one of the inner circle, I too was sometimes summoned, and my occasional pilgrimages to this Court remain now as memories of exaltations and initiations of a kind that I

shall never know again. No, never again on this flat earth shall I step out into a transfigured dusk, closing behind me in a quiet suburban lane the great portal of a pagan Temple, of an insolent Tower of Ivory, a royal Palace of the mind!

The strangeness of these visits was weirdly heightened by what seemed at first their commonplace character. One received a politely worded invitation to afternoon tea, or to high-tea in the evening; one went by train or bus to Richmond; one rang the suburban bell, and found in the little house an aunt and niece of pleasantly old-fashioned primness; Miss Bradley being a slight, ruddy, vivacious, grey-haired lady full of small talk and mild gossip, and Miss Cooper a rather shy, gentle spinster of fragile health and little conversation. One felt at first as if one might almost be taking tea in Cranford; but this was the maddest of illusions. Never in Cranford was heard talk like their talk when once inspiration fell upon them. Miss Bradley would begin to speak of the soul of their sacred dog, or of a flower—a white periwinkle, perhaps, which had blossomed in their little, their immense garden—or of a precious adjective; I remember her enthusiasm for the phrase, 'the eagle-hurried Ganymede,' which they had found in an old copy of Poole's *Parnassus* that I had lent them, and which, mosaicked into one of their tragedies, made them happy for a week. Their passion for words would indeed sometimes lead them on into wild extravagances of diction; a word like *strumpet* was the sort of word which they would find it difficult to resist; and they would adorn their pages now and then with Latinisms of noble sound, but, to them, obscure signification—words like *crapulence*, *defloration*, *construpation*, *libidinousness*, *priapean*, which my sister, Mrs. Berenson, who was often their adviser, now and then induced them, to their extreme reluctance, to delete. Once indeed they gave as a title to a book of religious meditations a term which, owing to its second meaning familiar in the police-courts (though not to them), was the cause of considerable amusement to their less pure-minded friends.

Gradually, while Miss Bradley talked of words and chanted fine phrases, the silent and sibylline Miss Cooper would be roused from her dreamy lethargy; and as their voices rose and mingled in a kind of chant, the two quietly attired ladies would seem to undergo the most extraordinary transformations; would resume the aspect and airs of the disinherited princesses, the tragic Muses, the priestesses of Apollo, the Pythonesses upon their tripods, the Bacchic Maenads, they really were, and even—for there were no limits to their imagination, and they were by no means all compact of kindness—of the Sorceresses they sometimes seemed, Weird Sisters, who were about to mount their broomsticks with shrieks of malevolent laughter, and fly up the chimney or out of the window on some unimaginable errand.

These were precious experiences, and like all precious things, they had to be paid for: the price was sometimes high. A summons to Richmond was a royal command; the excuse of other engagements was not tolerated for a moment; an invitation refused, or any fancied want of sympathy in their often imaginary woes, was followed by instant and contumelious excommunication. ‘Out of our lives you go!’ they would fulminate in awful letters; and at their great bereavement, although we exhausted ourselves in agonies of commiseration for the death of Chow, and my sister sat up till four o’clock in the morning to compose a letter which might adequately express her grief, we were all cast off, as she was, for cold-hearted worldlings, and the great palace-doors of the little Richmond villa were barred against us. It was only after years that I, at least, was allowed to enter them again.

I had, indeed, incurred before this bereavement a sentence of several years of exile under circumstances that now it shames me to recall. It happened one summer, when I was living in Sussex with my parents, that my kind sister took a cottage near us, and lent it to Michael Field, making it acceptable to their aesthetic sensibilities by gathering, without my permission, in her liberal way, a few of my more precious possessions, which, when I was told of their temporary destination, I was glad, of course, to lend. There was, however, among them a picture which Charles Conder had painted for me on silk as an illustration of Campion’s lines:

> When thou must home to shades of underground.
> And there arrived, a new admired guest,
> The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
> White Iope, blithe Helen and the rest;

and Michael Field, finding that the forms and movements of these figures expressed in a way they felt unique the inspiration of their life, decided that it belonged to them; and when they left the cottage they took it with them and hung it in their Richmond home. They perpetrated this appropriation in pious obedience to that law of possession, which, inscribed in Heaven, if not on earth, decrees that objects of beauty belong to those who love them most. But I was young at the time; my notions of private property were crudely legalistic, and I told my sister that I must have the picture back. Michael Field performed this act of restitution in a spirit of outraged indignation and accompanied it with a withdrawal of their friendship. Too late I realized the justice of their sentence, and felt ashamed of my illiberal demand. Still more deep was my remorse that, after I had been at last partially forgiven for this meanness, I had

not assumed at their canine bereavement a crocodilean aspect of even more unmitigated woe; that indeed through all the chequered years of this incomparable acquaintance I had not proved myself a more obsequious courtier of these bewitched Princesses, these inspired, autocratic, incredible old maids.

VI

Deep in the male bosom, from before the dawn of history, there has persisted an almost religious awe of the unsullied chastity of the other sex. In the new moon—in the curved bow of the maiden huntress—this adoration was enskied, as in the constellation Virgo; to the spinster goddess, Pallas Athene, her chastity of life added an incomparable glory, which made the Parthenon illustrious, and the temple at Troy of that Deity, whence the Greeks stole the Palladium upon which depended the safety of the city. A second Palladium was carried by Aeneas (such was the legend) to Italy, and there, guarded by Vestals vowed to chastity, it was enshrined in a second temple to safeguard the inviolability of Rome. How with Christianity this cult of virginity grew more transcendent is one of the most important features of the Catholic faith. The roll of saints and martyrs is enriched with innumerable maiden names; and from the earliest Middle Ages pilgrims flocked to that shrine where were preserved the venerated bones of St. Ursula and her 11,000 companions, who died a glorious death in defence of their chastity against the Huns. Nor in England at least did the admiration of this unspotted way of life become obsolete at the Reformation. The reign of a spinster made the age of Queen Elizabeth into a kind of romance, which, in Virginia and West Virginia, has placed two romantic names on the map of the United States.

Indeed, this ancient cult may be said to still survive among us; an œcumenical council made it even more illustrious by a nineteenth-century decree; and in the literature of this Protestant country the names of Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickenson have been given exceptional honours, and inscribed, so to speak, over the portals of special shrines.

Those who read the works of Michael Field are not many, but I believe that, as time goes on, they may grow in number; and this belief of mine was confirmed when I read, not long ago, Mr. Sturge Moore's *Selection* from their poems. Like the world in general, and like, I am afraid, most of their few acquaintances, I did not, while they were living, read their books. The inexorable and unremitting output of their tragedies in verse (that deadest, to my mind, of all modern forms of art), the impossibility of giving them sufficient praise, made me—made I am afraid most of us—adopt the cowardly

expedient of not reading them at all. But now, looking through this volume of selections and opening their unopened books of verses on my shelves, I rub my eyes at the beauty of their lyrics, I almost wipe away a drop or two from those hardened orbs when I think that I never gave—what I could, had I known it, so gladly and so honestly have given—a meed of appreciation which might perhaps have pleased those difficult ladies. I can now only proffer it in vain propitiation to their scornful shades.

VII

A certain intensity of lyric feeling and splendour of diction is what, as I now read it, seems to give the best work of Michael Field a beautiful distinction:

> I love him—Fountains of sweet marge,
> ’Tis as when night-stocks blow!
> Follow me not, ye stars, for I must go
> As one that fares alone, and in the large
> Soft darkness scent my woe.

Mr. Sturge Moore did not include these magical lines in his rather meagre selection, nor those in which Michael Field celebrated that touching beauty of the beautiful Miss Kinsella which glows in so many of Conder’s pictures, and forms the subject of Whistler’s last great portrait. Our poets saw her once in passing, and wrote the following lines which show that they felt, in her loveliness, the presage of her too-early death:

‘CAMELLIAS

> And one of them—how lovely in her mode!—
> One of them had the magic power to die;
> Slid from the stem where she abode
> With mournful violence: her petals lie,
> Broke on the sudden from their mass, and all
> The action stately as a funeral.’

The following lines on Old Age should also, I think, have been included:

> Among the hills I trace the path that I must wend;
> I watch, not bidding him farewell, the sun descend.
> Sweet and of their nature vacant are the days I spend—
> Quiet as a plough laid by at the furrow’s end.

Perhaps the most interesting of these verses are the little poems in which, as in translucent amber, they have embalmed some little incident of their quiet lives.

Thus, for instance, they walk in the winter woods:

> The woods are still that were so gay at primrose-springing,
> Through the dry woods the brown field-fares are winging,
> And I alone of love, of love am singing.
> I sing of love to the haggard palmer-worm,
> Of love ’mid the crumpled oak-leaves that once were firm,
> Laughing, I sing of love at the summer’s term,
>
> —Of love, on a path where the snake’s cast skin is lying,
> Blue feathers on the floor, and no cuckoo flying;
> I sing to the echo of my own voice crying.

On going out from their house at night they hear the whine of the beloved Chow within:

> A cry—my knowledge of the heart it wrings
> Has held me many years from liberty,
> From Anet, and from Blois; and, as I live,
> The motion of that tender vocative
> Shall stay my foot from all those dreamèd things,
> And all the diverse kingdoms over sea.

Or Miss Bradley, leaving her niece and going to London for the afternoon, writes what is surely the prettiest poem on shopping in our language, *A Miracle*:

How gladly I would give
My life to her who would not care to live
If I should die!
Death, when thou passest by,
Take us together, so I sigh,
Praying and sighing through the London streets
While my heart beats
To do some miracle, when suddenly
At curve of Regent Circus I espy,
Set ’mid a jeweller’s trays of spangle-glitter,
A tiny metal insect-pin, a fly.
This utter trifle for my love I buy,
And, thinking of it on her breast,
My heart has rest.

A poet, so these ladies defined him, was:

A work of some strange passion,
Life has conceived apart from Time’s harsh drill,
A thing it hides and cherishes to fashion
At odd bright moments to its secret will!
Holy and foolish, ever set apart,
He waits the leisure of his God’s free heart.

Such a poet, they passionately believed, was Michael Field, whose fame would triumph over time. Can it be possible that they were right after all; that their fine passion, and their verse, so lovely in its mode, will be remembered when the names of those who would sometimes smile among themselves at their vast pretensions have been all forgotten?

1924.

IX

ENGLISH APHORISTS

I

Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning* draws a distinction between two ways of writing, writing in what he calls ‘Method,’ and writing in Aphorisms. By method he means formal discourse, comprehensive surveys and chains of reasoning, and all the arts of order and arrangement which give their shape to a scientific treatise or literary composition. Writing in aphorisms, or disconnected sentences, is, on the other hand, a ‘broken’ way of stating truth; and yet it has, Bacon adds, many advantages. Being the presentation of knowledge ‘in growth,’ aphorisms provoke further inquiry; and they are a test, moreover, of the value of the thought of those who write them; for discarding, as such writers must, all comment and illustration and elucidation, they have only the ‘pith and heart’ of observation to rely on; aphorisms devoid of this are ridiculous: only those who are ‘sound and grounded’ can compose them.

The method of writing in aphorisms which Bacon thus describes is a very ancient form of expression: it was familiar to the Greeks; many sentences attributed to various Greek sages and philosophers have come down to us, and classical literature is full of apophthegms and wise sayings. But the history of the aphorism goes much farther back, for it was in this form that the wisdom of the Egyptians found expression, and in old papyri are preserved a number of almost dateless saws and maxims. In the Wisdom Books of the Bible, in Ecclesiastes, in the Proverbs of Solomon, in Ecclesiasticus, we possess large collections of them; and they are found in most of the modern literatures of Europe, in Italian, in Spanish, in German. It is in France, however, that this way of writing has been most carefully cultivated, and has come to be regarded as one of the minor arts of literature—as a delicate form worthy of special interest and attention. This is due in the first place to the fame of a famous little book, the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld, in which the aphorism was given its consummate stamp and polish, and the perfection to which it could attain was made brilliantly apparent. It was indeed this little book, whose distillation of bitter experience, and whose elegant concision, make it immortal, which really established such collections of aphorisms as a definite literary form, and set as it were the fashion of publishing them in little books, though no one has ever surpassed, or indeed ever equalled, the first volume. Its

name, however, *Maximes*, was not, as Schopenhauer pointed out, a happy one, since La Rochefoucauld's sayings are not really either maxims or reflections, but rather flashes of intuition, sudden insights into human nature, for which a correcter name would be found in the French word *aperçus*, which has no exact equivalent in English or in any other language. *Discoveries* is, perhaps, the term which would best render its meaning in our language. Then on this masterpiece followed that astonishing book, Pascal's *Pensées*, which, though it contains much else, is full of profound and brilliant aphorisms; and the tradition thus established by these writers, and carried on by La Bruyère, by Vauvenargues, by Rivarol and Chamfort and Joubert, has enriched the literature of France with whole constellations of glittering thoughts and phrases.

II

It is generally supposed that we possess but a meagre store of aphorisms in English; that our language is unsuited to this mode of expression, and that few of our writers have handled it with much success. Thus Lord Morley, the only one of our critics who has written at length on the subject, has said: 'The obvious truth is that in this department our literature is particularly weak, while French literature is particularly strong in it. With the exception of Bacon, we possess no writer of apophthegms of the first order.' This is a sweeping statement; but when we note that in his list of English aphorists Lord Morley ignores almost all our authors who have achieved success in this way of writing; that he says nothing of Halifax or Chesterfield or Blake or Hazlitt or Emerson, and hardly mentions the name of our greatest master of sententious precepts and wise sayings; and when we find that Dean Inge, in an essay on the subject, also overlooks these writers, we cannot but question the justice of this generally accepted opinion, and suspect that the sense of our poverty in this department of literature is due, not so much to a real indigence, as to an unwareness of the stores which we actually possess. To examine these stores with a closer attention, to collect and put together some of their finer specimens, will be, therefore, no unprofitable task. In our voyage of discovery in these unexplored waters we may find a great richness of forgotten treasures —treasures, I cannot but think, equal or almost equal to those of any other country; and on our English seas we shall undoubtedly witness the sporting and blowing of one great leviathan, one whale of unequalled proportions.

Before we start out, however, it will be well to define for ourselves the precise object of our search. What exactly is the aphorism, by what marks shall we know it when we find it, of what substance is it composed, and what is the form of its composition? What are the advantages and what the drawbacks and

limitations of this way of expression? The word ‘aphorism,’ meaning literally a definition or distinction, is of medical origin; it was first used of the Aphorisms of Hippocrates, the father of medicine as he is called. Brief, detached, disconnected sentences, are often made use of in the early stages of a science like medicine, where the acquired knowledge, being the disconnected record of empirical facts, cannot be treated or set forth in any systematic fashion. Hippocrates begins his collection of medical aphorisms with one of the most famous of all famous sayings: ‘Art is long, life is short’; but already, before his date, Heraclitus had made use of this form of statement to express truths about life of a wide import—‘Character is destiny,’ for instance; ‘We cannot step twice into the same river’; ‘The waking have one and the same world, but the sleeping have each a world of their own.’ The word ‘aphorism’ has come to denote any brief, sententious statement, ‘any principle or precept expressed in a few words,’ as the *Oxford Dictionary* defines it, ‘a short pithy statement containing a truth of general import.’ It is distinguished from the axiom, which is the statement of a self-evident truth, and also from the theorem, which is a demonstrable proposition in science and mathematics. The theorem that ‘the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles,’ though the embodiment of a general truth, is not an aphorism, for the aphorism concerns itself with life and human nature, and its truths are incapable of exact demonstration. The epigram, on the other hand, though concerned with life like the aphorism, and possessing its terse and pointed form, is lacking in general import; it is not the statement of a general truth. Other words with much the same signification as aphorism, are ‘maxim,’ ‘apophthegm,’ ‘saying’; and although these have sometimes been distinguished from each other—the ‘maxim’ being defined as containing not only a general truth, but also advice and admonition, and the apophthegm or saying as an aphorism or maxim expressed in speech—yet these distinctions of the rhetoricians are not of much importance, and have seldom been observed in the current usage of the words. ‘Sentence’ and ‘gnome’ are old names for the aphorism which have fallen out of use.

Among the aphorisms which are most familiar to us are the legal maxims which are supposed to embody certain fundamental principles of law: ‘The public welfare is the highest good,’ for instance, ‘The King can do no wrong,’ ‘An Englishman’s house is his castle,’ ‘Ignorance of the law excuses no one’—maxims like these have been given an authority in common law equal to that of legal enactments, and judicial decisions have been often based upon them. Aphorisms about life in general are, like these axioms of jurisprudence, brief, detached, isolated observations; and like the maxim, ‘The King can do no wrong,’ they are often very partial statements of the truth. They are

generally printed without any very definite order or arrangement—they are collections of scraps and fragments of truth. Books like these are unsuitable for prolonged reading: what is sometimes our feeling towards them was expressed by Edward FitzGerald, when he prefaced a collection of this kind with the remark: ‘Few books are duller than books of Aphorisms.’ And yet such books are not without their fascination; we throw them down, but take them up again; they are unreadable, and yet we read them; and since so many collections of aphorisms have survived through the ages and have been constantly reprinted, it is plain that this way of presenting truth must have certain merits and advantages of its own.

III

Experience is always seeking for special literary forms in which its various aspects can find their most adequate expression; and there are many of these aspects which are best rendered in a fragmentary fashion, because they are themselves fragments of experience, gleams and flashes of light, rather than the steady glow of a larger illumination. The disconnected impressions which we derive from life form a kind of knowledge ‘in growth,’ as Bacon called it; an over-early and peremptory attempt to digest this knowledge into a system tends, as he suggests, to falsify and distort it. Collections of disconnected truths, or half-truths, about human nature never lose their value, while the ambitious schemes which the philosophers build upon them soon collapse and are forgotten. Life, as Dr. Johnson said, ‘is not the object of science; we see a little, very little’; and the great psychological investigation of himself, which is man’s most fascinating pursuit upon this planet, is still in that early stage when its observations are empirical and scattered. Such observations still find their most unhampered expression in those terse sentences and sayings which are the embodiment of wise principles of conduct, of central truths about the world and life and human nature. Aphorisms are no flights of fancy, no fruits culled from the Hesperian gardens of the imagination; they are products of the familiar earth, and smack of the world we live in. They cover the whole field of practical experience, from the lowest maxims of shopkeeping prudence to the highest rules of conduct; and our knowledge of ourselves and others, of the human heart and its springs of action, of love and hate and envy and ambition, of the characters and manners of mankind, of all the weaknesses and follies and absurdities of human nature, is embodied and stored up in this immense accumulation of wise observations. It is from these, rather than from any systematic treatises on human nature, we can learn with most profit what stuff we are made of, and what are the causes of success or failure in the great experiment of living.

This gnomic wisdom, it has been said, and truly said, is the salt of literature, and those books, at least in prose, are most wholesome which are most saturated with it. Many historians and essayists have enriched their works with an abundance of aphoristic sayings; we find them in the speeches of Thucydides, in Plutarch's Lives, in the writings of Tacitus and Seneca, in the essays of Montaigne and Emerson. Though they belong more to the element of prose than that of poetry, the poets have not neglected them; they abound in the Greek drama, in the plays of Shakespeare; and the verse of Pope and his school consists largely of rhymed aphorisms and maxims.

The impulse to embody observation in durable phrases, in the happy rhythm and run of memorable words—this impulse, which has produced so large a store of proverbs in every language, is evidently a strong impulse in human nature: the aphorism is its flowering after it has been transplanted into the soil of cultivated minds. An aphorism has been defined as a proverb coined in a private mint, and the definition is a happy one; for the aphorism, like the proverb, is the result of observation, and however private and superior the mint, the coins it strikes must, to find acceptance, be made of current metal. In other words, the aphorist must draw for the most part on common experience; a main part of his task is to say in a more striking form, in Pope's familiar words—

What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed.

He is a dealer, therefore, in commonplaces, and unless he is very careful his truths will turn into truisms—and what for him is the worst fate of all—into moral truisms on his hands. We are all sick, as Emerson says, when what should be the greatest truths flat out into shallow truisms. Against the aphorist we are prejudiced as a sententious bore; if in addition he becomes a hortatory and didactic one, with what eagerness shall we not stop our ears to his admonitions! He can only win our tolerance by making us believe that he is not attempting to improve us. This need to maintain at all costs the appearance of a veracious observer tends, however, of itself to compromise the aphorist's veracity, or to limit him at least to certain aspects of the truth. In his dread of slipping into the seas of tepid platitude which surround him on every side, he is apt to cling, almost in desperation, to the sharpest rocks of bleak reality. The more pungent and caustic his sayings, the more we like them; they are the hornets and wasps, and not the butterflies of reflection; or if they are butterflies, they are like them, gross feeders, and nourish themselves on the less ideal aspects of existence. A malicious thought, a *cattivo pensiero*, as the Italians call it, we are apt to find—such is our fallen nature—more amusing than a charitable one.

Men have embodied in hymns their heavenly hopes and aspirations, and in lyrics their illusions and enchanted joys; but disenchantment, the ever-accumulating stores of wise disillusion and worldly wisdom, are the aspects of life which, it would seem, the aphorism is best fitted to express. Famous aphorists are not, therefore, often found among the panegyrists of human nature; and although some of them have now and then attempted to speak with angels' voices (and to embody some spiritual or poetic truth in an illustrious phrase is, perhaps, their greatest triumph), yet the attempt is a perilous one, and requires a genius like Blake's or Emerson's to avoid disaster. We have only to compare the attitude of the poets with that of the aphorists towards a subject like Love—what Shelley and what Dr. Johnson, for instance, say about it—to be struck by the difference in their respective points of view. Aphorisms are apt, indeed, to be somewhat fulsome if they are too sweetly flavoured; such sentences offend our taste as a cynical lyric would offend it, or an atheistic hymn; we turn from them with a kind of literary nausea to welcome as an antidote the most outrageous paradox.

And yet paradox is another pitfall for the aphorist, another dangerous lion in his path. No brief statement can indeed be absolutely true; 'almost every wise saying,' it has been wisely said, 'has an opposite one, equally wise, to balance it.' An aphorism can present at best but one aspect of the truth, and sometimes, by reversing it, attention is called to some more subtle aspect —'Punctuality is the thief of time,' for instance, or Oscar Wilde's dictum that 'It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances,' or again the paradox of Mr. Chesterton, that lord of paradoxes, 'Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing badly.' But paradoxes, however much they may amuse us at the moment, have seldom weight enough to give them enduring value. To be true, as Mr. F. H. Bradley has said, an aphorism must fix the impression of a genuine experience. Wise sayings have to be made of sterling metal; they must embody a feeling more profound than the mere fun of turning the world's judgments upside down. We soon tire of the glitter, the polished brass of these false coins of thought.

IV

It is not only, however, the danger of platitude which has given the aphorism a cynical twist and a bitter flavour. The necessity of this form of expression, the need to be brief and sharp and pointed, tends to limit it to the portrayal of the obliquities and follies of human nature, which are striking and easy to depict, while its more luminous aspects are diffused and vague, and less capable of brief notation. The greatest aphorists, the most accomplished masters of this form, have been sardonic observers of their fellow human

beings; and it was the most famous of them all, La Rochefoucauld, who brought into striking relief the least edifying aspects of man's nature, his all-devouring egotism and the littleness and meanness of his moral character. Pascal added to this picture a truly appalling indictment of the imbecility and impotence of the mind of man, and the general disgrace of his mortal condition. The humane and optimistic thinkers of the eighteenth century found this sinister portrait a revolting one; they were horrified to see their own faces reflected in so black a mirror. They attempted, therefore, to turn against these maligners of humanity their own weapons. Voltaire edited an edition of Pascal's *Pensées* with terse and witty comments, and his friend the Marquis de Vauvenargues tried to restore by aphorisms what La Rochefoucauld's aphorisms had so seriously damaged—man's belief in the nobility of his own nature. Vauvenargues' spirit was a lofty one; Lord Morley is no doubt right when he tells us that he and other thinkers of his kind have chosen the nobler part. His famous saying: 'Great thoughts come from the heart,' may be truer, as it is certainly more uplifting, than a maxim of La Rochefoucauld which unmasks our selfishness and vanity; it has, however, one drawback—it is not nearly so good an aphorism. The Marquis is the nobler soul, but the Duke—and the point is not without importance—is more finely aware of what the aphorism is best fitted to express, and of the way it can find its most perfect expression.

Human nature has suffered of late, however, many disgraces, and the noble view of man has fallen somewhat out of fashion. Much more fully aware, as we are, of our humble status in the universe, of our nearer kinship to the apes than to the angels, and of the gruesome history of our species on this planet, we do not find ourselves greatly shocked by this old-fashioned cynicism; nor can students of psycho-analysis share the indignation of those Victorian critics who declared that such thoughts 'tarnish the brightness of the soul; they degrade the heart.' Yet aphorisms like La Rochefoucauld's, although they may not shock us—so far since his date has mankind fallen—are by no means to the taste of all modern readers. There are many who feel with Lord Morley—though not perhaps for Lord Morley's reasons—that the truths which aphorisms are apt to embody are not truths upon which they very much care to dwell. This wisdom of the world they find unimaginative and earthy; it has for them a musty taste; if they are to feast on essences, they prefer to sip the honey-dew of the poets and the milk of Paradise.

But for those who prefer a drier vintage, for whom the spectacle of life as it is, stripped of its illusions, possesses an inexhaustible fascination, for such students of human nature there will always be a great attraction in these profound X-rays of observation, which reveal the bones beneath the flesh;

these acute and penetrating phrases which puncture man's pretensions and bring him disenflated to the earth. They find such correctives medicinal as well, like that infusion of myrrh into the festival goblet, which, as one of our old divines tells us, renders the wine of life bitter, but makes it wholesome. Those who dispense it, however, are apt to be regarded as ill-conditioned cynics, and may even suffer the fate of Sigier of Brabant, who, as Dante tells us, 'syllogized unpalatable truths' at Paris, till, on a visit to Rome, he was assassinated by the thinkers of the Papal Court, who held, no doubt, nobler views.

Aphorisms have also a practical value of another kind. We frequently fall into error and folly, Dr. Johnson tells us, 'not because the true principles of action are not known, but because, for a time, they are not remembered.' To compress, therefore, the great and obvious rules of life into brief sentences which are not easily forgotten is, as he said, to confer a real benefit upon us.

Although aphorisms are generally an embodiment of common experience, their authors need by no means always confine themselves to the pointed expression of what other people clearly think and feel. The minds of all of us are haunted by thoughts which have not yet found expression, and it is often the happy fortune of the aphorist to drag from its obscurity some such dim intuition, or confused bit of experience; to clothe it in words and bring it into daylight for our delighted recognition. These thoughts are, as Dr. Johnson said in his famous definition of wit, both natural and new; they are not obvious, but when they are put before us we acknowledge their justice; we have not found them ourselves, but we wonder how we could have missed them. It is an even greater triumph for the aphorist when, in a flash of insight, he can perceive, and having perceived, can express some thought or feeling, that, however little it may do us credit, has been lying buried within our hearts, some experience of which we have never been aware before. It is not only in the regions of self-love that, as La Rochefoucauld said, there are many lands which still await their explorers; after an investigation which has lasted for thousands of years, there are many aspects of man's moral nature of which he is still ignorant, many recesses of his heart which have never yet been sounded; and the explorer of these regions, the diver into these depths, will often find much of rare value to reward him.

The human mind, a philosopher has told us, 'always celebrates a little triumph whenever it can formulate a truth'; and the measure of that triumph will depend upon the importance of the truth thus embodied in a formula of words. If we ask, therefore, what the aphorism is in its quintessence, and what is the quality which gives it importance and enduring value, we have only to

read the sayings of some great master of life, some Pascal or Goethe, whose intuitions seem to penetrate to the very core of human experience, and whose words remain in our minds as sparks, in the poet's phrase, 'of inextinguishable thought.'

V

To polish commonplaces and give them a new lustre: to express in a few words the obvious principles of conduct, and to give to clear thoughts an even clearer expression: to illuminate dimmer impressions and bring their faint rays to a focus: to delve beneath the surface of consciousness to new veins of precious ore, to name and discover and bring to light latent and unnamed experience; and finally to embody the central truths of life in the breadth and terseness of memorable phrases—all these are the opportunities of the aphorist; and to take advantage of these opportunities, he must be a thinker, an accurate observer, a profound moralist, a psychologist, and an artist as well. Above all an artist! So great are the difficulties of his task, so numerous are the pitfalls which beset him, so repellent the pompous attitude which his tedious, stilted and oracular mode of expression forces upon him, that it is only by the greatest care that he can escape these perils; and Lord Morley's admonition to the would-be aphorist—'beware of cultivating this delicate art'—is no doubt a sound one. For the aphorist's pills, if we are to swallow them, must be gilded pills; his coins, if they are to be added to the currency of thought, must be minted of precious metal; many grains must be sifted from the sands of life to compose them, many thoughts and observations melted and fused together to give them weight. Each aphorism should contain, as Hazlitt said, the essence or groundwork of a separate essay; it should be the concentration or residuum of much meditation, and it must glitter with the finest sheen; for 'weight,' as one of our masters of this art has expressed it—'weight without lustre is lead.'

A famous French aphorist, whose life, he said, was spent in chasing these butterflies of thought, and who was cursed, he also tells us, with the ambition to put a whole book into a page, a whole page into a phrase, and that phrase into a word, has revealed to us some of the secrets of this difficult art, which his compatriots have brought to such perfection. 'A finished and perfect thought,' Joubert writes, 'what time it takes, how rare it is, and what an immense delight!' Such a thought embodied in a few memorable words was enough of itself to make illustrious the name of its maker. Sharpness, clearness, fitness, are required for its expression, and transparency is its beauty. 'I polish not my phrase,' Joubert said, 'but my idea; I linger till the drop of light I need forms and falls from my pen.' And yet the transparency of these drops of light was not of itself enough, the sufficient word did not

suffice; an aphorism was something more than the clear statement of a truth; it must possess style as well. Perfection in phrasing is, indeed, what mainly distinguishes aphorisms from platitudes, which weary us, indeed, if they possess no other quality than that of Truth, in which most of us take after all but a languid interest.[5]

Joubert distinguishes between two kinds of style, two ways of writing: there is the pictorial style, rich in light and shadow and full of images, with which the author paints, as it were, upon the page; and there is the sculptor's style, which cuts deep and gives relief and outline to the subject. This austere, almost colourless style, full of economies and rejections, is the style appropriate for these engraved medallions, these finely minted coins of thought. And finally—and this is their supreme perfection—aphorisms should bear, like coins, the personal image, delicate and delicately cut, of the lord of thought from whose mint they issue. The thought, in other words, should be stamped with the hall-mark of the mind that thinks it. The individual quality of his temper, his imagination, the tamber of his voice, must mark his sayings as his own; we ought to feel that they are his, that he, and only he, could have said them.

Such, then, at their best are these scintillations of thought, these minute and shining masterpieces of expression. We are startled at first by their novelty; we catch our breath and gaze for a moment blankly at them. Then, as we ponder their meaning and recall our past, their truth, as well as their lucid perfection, delights us. Like shooting stars, they seem to leave a shining track behind them; like flashes of lightning they reveal the familiar world in a sudden, strange illumination; the accompanying din alarms us, till, from far ranges of experience, echoes return in long reverberations to confirm them.

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[5] The importance of phrasing in an aphorism may be illustrated by a saying attributed to the Duke of Wellington. 'When it is time to turn over, it is time to turn out,' which is supposed to have been originally the rather flat remark, 'When one begins to turn in bed, it is time to get up.' Again his famous exclamation at the crisis at the Battle of Waterloo, 'Up, Guards, and at 'em!' he declared to be one that he had never made; what he must have said and probably he had, he wrote to Croker, was, 'Stand up, Guards!' and then have given the order to attack.

VI

In one of his note-books Coleridge wrote: ‘I should like to know whether or how far the delight I feel, and have always felt, in adages and aphorisms of universal or very extensive application is a general or common feeling with men, or a peculiarity of my own mind.’ The delight of our great English critic has apparently not been shared by his countrymen, since, as I have said, our rich store of aphorisms has been so slightly regarded. It is difficult for me, and will be difficult, I believe, for anyone who may read this essay, to regard as anything but preposterous Lord Morley’s statement that ‘with the exception of Bacon, we possess no writer of apophthegms of the first order.’ Bacon, however, if by no means the greatest, is at least the earliest of our English aphorists. He not only collected in his *Apophthegms* a large number of other people’s sayings, and wrote many Latin maxims, but he embodied as well in his essays many saws and aphoristic sentences. His essays have been called a mosaic of aphorisms, and many sentences of this kind are to be found in his *Advancement of Learning*. In these aphorisms of Bacon we already find two characteristics which mark the English as contrasted with the French aphorism. The French aphorism is often the expression of the bitterest pessimism. Many of the sayings of La Rochefoucauld, of Pascal, and above all of Chamfort, seem to be written with sulphuric acid and to scorch the page on which we read them. Vitriolic sayings of this kind are, however, rare in English, and are replaced by a kind of practical and prosaic wordliness which is almost more distasteful than the profoundest disillusion. Bacon’s maxims are very often concerned with the means of personal success in courts and politics—good advice, as Blake said of them, ‘for Satan’s kingdom,’ and they smack of what Bacon himself called the wisdom of rats and foxes. He is concerned with the externals of character and conduct, rather than with an analysis of the inner motives of human nature; and in his preoccupation with worldly success, he has been followed by many other English aphorists, from Halifax and Chesterfield to the prudential saws and shopkeeping maxims of Benjamin Franklin. We find also now and then in Bacon’s sayings another and contrasted quality, which Sainte-Beuve, in his essay on Chesterfield, noted as a characteristic of English aphorists—an element of imagination and poetry in their wit. Although for the most part dry and sententious, Bacon’s phrases flash like jewels now and then. His sentences, however, being written before La Rochefoucauld had found for the aphorism its perfect form—before it had become the custom to polish phrases and print them by themselves—are as a rule somewhat heavy, and lack the conciseness and finish of aphorisms at their best. They possess, however, a merit which (as I have said) is one of the greatest merits in this way of writing, they are authentically his own.

I do not know whether I can infect any reader with my taste (which I am proud to share with Coleridge) for these coins of aphoristic thought—these penny and often golden pieces, stamped as they are with the image of the Master of Thought from whose mint they issue. The search for them through old books, old letters, old volumes of Table-Talk, I find a fascinating one; I enjoy it as the archæologist delights, as he digs in the soil of ancient cities, to discover coins engraved with the busts of the princes of antiquity, each with his own expression—the strength and energy of Alexander the Great, the ferocity of Mithridates, the assured power of Augustus, the philosophic calm of Antoninus, or the truculence of Nero. Since this numismatic interest is always accompanied by an almost irresistible impulse on the part of the collector to display his treasure-trove, I shall, therefore, at least for my own satisfaction (and what is the fun of writing if one doesn't write for one's own amusement?), exhibit a few specimens from my collection without any further apology to those who take no interest in my hobby—after all, they can skip my quotations if they like.

Bacon being, as I say, the earliest of our English aphorists, I shall begin with a few of the sayings which bear the characteristic stamp of his mind:

> Wives are young Men's Mistresses; Companions for middle Age; and old Men's Nurses.
>
> Men fear Death as Children fear to go in the Dark.
>
> Children sweeten labours; but they make Misfortunes more bitter; they increase the Cares of Life; but they mitigate the Remembrance of Death.
>
> Reading maketh a full Man; Conference a ready Man; and Writing an exact Man.
>
> Certainly Great Persons had need to borrow other Men's Opinions, to think themselves happy.
>
> It is a miserable state of Mind, to have few things to desire, and many things to fear: and yet that commonly is the case of Kings.
>
> A Mixture of a Lie doth ever add Pleasure.
>
> There is no excellent Beauty, that hath not some strangeness in the Proportion.
>
> Revenge is a kind of Wild Justice.
>
> A Crowd is not Company; and faces are but a Gallery of

Pictures; and talk but a tinkling Cymbal, where there is no Love.

The Gardens of the Muses keep the privilege of the Golden Age; they ever flourish and are in league with Time.

The next English aphorist after Bacon is another great lawyer, John Selden, whose *Table Talk* is well known for its sound good sense, its homely English wit and humour. It is also, like Bacon's *Essays*, a treasure-house of worldly wisdom, and presents a vivid picture of the habits and thought and modes of expression of a learned, hard-headed, liberal-minded, but rather scornful English lawyer. He is fond of illustrating his thoughts by homely anecdotes: 'Old friends are best,' he says, 'King James used to call for his old shoes; they were easiest for his feet'; and he reports the same monarch as saying to a fly: 'Have I three Kingdoms, and thou must needs fly in my eye?' For the Church he seems to have had small respect; 'The Clergy,' he says, 'would have us believe them against our own reason, as the woman would have had her husband against his own eyes, when he took her with another man—what! will you believe your own eyes before your own sweet wife?' The best way, he adds, for a preacher to be cried up was for him to preach Damnation, 'for we love a man who damns us, and we run after him to save us.' The preaching tone of voice was as important as the whining of a lover; for if a lover should make love in an ordinary voice, his mistress wouldn't listen to him; and if a man should cry 'Fire!' or 'Murder!' in the tone of conversation, no one would come out to help him. On the whole he seems to have preferred the old to the Protestant religion, since, as he says: 'There was never a merry world since the fairies left dancing and the parson left conjuring.' 'Money makes a man laugh'; 'Syllables govern the world'; 'Ceremony keeps up all things'; are among his brief sayings; and of all people in the world, women had, he said, the greatest reason to put a high value on ceremony for, 'where they not used with Ceremony, with compliments and addresses, with legs, and kissing of hands, they were the pitifullest creatures in the world.' Selden, more than any English aphorist, expresses that contempt for women which is characteristic of this class of writers who, since they have almost all been men, have naturally, as Dr. Johnson said, put the blame on women for making the world miserable. Marriage, Selden says, is a desperate thing, and Æsop's frogs were extremely wise, for though they wanted water, they wouldn't jump into the well because they knew they could never get out of it again. It is right, this legal authority tells us, that a man who will have a wife should meet her bills, 'for he that will keep a Monkey, 'tis fit he should pay for the glasses she breaks.'

Misogyny could hardly be carried further; but aphorisms of this unamiable class are not numerous in English; and Mrs. Poyser, our great female aphorist

of fiction, answered these masculine libels on her sex with pungent adequacy when she remarked: ‘I’m not denyin’ the women are foolish; God Almighty made ’em to match the men!’

Selden did not write his aphorisms; they are sayings noted down by his secretary from his talk. Conversation is indeed one of the main sources of the aphorist; and it is generally when minds clash in talk together that these sparks are struck out—that these witty sayings find their perfected expression. Many collections of sayings have been made from the table-talk of famous persons, of Luther, of Goethe, of Dr. Johnson, and Coleridge; and more than one Greek or Chinese sage has by one single remark achieved immortal fame. La Rochefoucauld’s maxims were polished in Madame de Sablé’s *salon*. Some of Pascal’s also originated there; Rivarol and Chamfort were famous talkers; and Joubert’s *Pensées* were largely suggested by his conversations with Fontanes and Chateaubriand, and come to us clarified by these brilliant minds and filtered through them. The wealth indeed of aphorisms in French, and their shining quality, is largely due to the supremacy in talk of that social nation, and their deliberate cultivation of the arts of human intercourse. The great flood of delightful talk which has flowed for so many centuries through the *salons* and palaces of France has left behind it on the shores of time a bright sediment of imperishable sayings—of shining pebbles and iridescent shells rounded and polished by those waves.

VII

Our next great English aphorist, George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, was one of the most famous conversationalists of his age. Lord Halifax, who was born in 1633, was a great statesman, in whom was embodied that moderation, that political good sense which is John Bull’s most admirable characteristic; but in whom, as his editor Sir Walter Raleigh has said, we enjoy the rare delight of finding John Bull a wit. Lord Halifax’s wit, which alarmed his contemporaries and seemed to them a fault of character, may have injured his influence in practical affairs, but we cannot but be grateful for it, as it gives a brilliant quality to his writings, and again and again it flashes out in his aphorisms. These aphorisms, which were written between 1690 and 1695 (after La Rochefoucauld had started the fashion for this way of writing), but which were not published till long after Halifax’s death, form the most notable collection of aphorisms which we possess in English, our nearest parallel to the French collections of this kind. Into his maxims—there are more than six hundred of them—Halifax distilled the essence of his thought and observation, his profound experience of politics and life. In the political maxims, in all he says of kings and ministers, of parliaments and mobs and parties, he tells us, as

his editor has pointed out, many things which other politicians know, but never say; and taking us behind the scenes, he shows us the wires which move the bedizened puppets that play their parts upon that illustrious scene.

'State-business,' he tells us, 'is a cruel Trade; Good nature is a Bungler in it.' 'It is the Fools and Knaves that make the Wheels of the World turn. *They* are *the World*; those few who have Sense or Honesty sneak up and down single, but never go in Herds.' 'The Government of the World is a great thing,' we are assured by one who played a notable part in it; but, he adds, 'a very coarse one, too, compared with the Fineness of Speculative Knowledge.'

To his Political Aphorisms Halifax added a large number of 'Moral Thoughts and Reflections' treating without illusion, but without malice, the stock subjects of the moral aphorist, Man and his passions, his youth and age, his knavery and self-deception and folly.

Halifax, like other authors who possess the aphoristic turn of thought and expression, often enriches with aphorisms his essays and other compositions. His *Advice to a Daughter*, written before her marriage for his daughter Elizabeth, who afterwards became the mother of another famous aphorist, the Earl of Chesterfield, is full of wise and disillusioned sentences, which picture life as it is, and offer no great hopes of happiness. Lady Elizabeth's husband, he seems to suggest, will very likely be a spendthrift, a libertine or a drunkard; but the best she can do is to turn a blind eye to his failings, rejoicing indeed that he is not without them, 'for a Husband without Faults is a dangerous Observer.' As to her children, she was to have as strict a guard on herself among them, as if she were among her enemies: a wise remark, as Sir Walter Raleigh says, but not one, he adds, which makes home seem a cheerful place.

The more one reads Halifax's writings, the more one is impressed by their interest and importance. His *Character of Charles II* is a masterpiece of portraiture, equal to anything in Saint-Simon's memoirs; his *Character of a Trimmer* is full of the profoundest political wisdom, and the aphorisms scattered throughout his essays are, with his separately printed *Thoughts and Reflections*, among the best in our own or any language. They are sometimes poetic in their expression and enriched by shining images: 'There is a Smell in our Native Earth, better than all the Perfumes of the East'; 'Esteem to Virtue is like a cherishing Air to Plants and Flowers, which maketh them blow and prosper'; our frailties 'pull our Rage by the Sleeve, and whisper Gentleness to us in our Censures'—in phrases like these we find that imaginative quality which Sainte-Beuve noted as characteristically English.

It is, however, their subtlety of thought, their profundity of observation, more than their phrasing, which impresses most the reader of Halifax's

Thoughts and Reflections. We note certain sayings which strike us at the first perusal; and when we read the book again, others, and still others begin to gleam on the page like little wells in whose depths some truth grows more and more apparent.

The man that despiseth slander deserves it.

Nothing hath an uglier Look to us than Reason, when it is not of our side.

A fool hath no dialogue within himself.

A busy fool is fitter to be shut up than a downright madman.

Could we know what men are apt to remember, we might know what they are apt to do.

The Memory and Conscience never did, nor ever will agree about forgiving injuries.

A wise man, in trusting another, must not rely upon his Promise against his Nature.

He who thinks his Place below him, will certainly be below his Place.

They who are of opinion that Money will do everything, may very well be suspected to do everything for Money.

Many Men *swallow* the being cheated, but no man could ever endure to chew it.

An old man concludeth from his knowing Mankind, that they know him, too, and that maketh him very wary.

Old men have in some degree their Reprisals upon younger, by making nicer Observations upon them.

All are apt to shrink from those who lean upon them.

When a man is very kind or very angry, there is no sure guard but silence upon that Subject.

All good sense hath something of the clown in it.

By the time Men are fit for Company, they see the objections to it.

Pride is as loud a beggar as want, and a great deal more Saucy.

If Knaves had not foolish memories, they would never trust one another so often as they do.

Wise Venturing is the most commendable part of human Prudence.

It is best for great Men to shoot over, and for lesser Men to shoot short.

Other of Halifax's aphorisms are more obvious truths, and owe the merit they possess to their imagery or to the neatness of their phrasing, as, to take a few examples:

Love is presently out of Breath when it is to go up Hill, from the Children to the Parents.

Hope is generally a wrong Guide, though it is very good company by the way.

All that the world can give without Liberty hath no taste.

The more we deserve jests, the less we bear them.

Love is a passion that hath friends in the garrison.

Most Men's anger about Religion is as if two Men should quarrel for a Lady they neither of them care for.

Again we find in Halifax's writings sentences which are less aphoristic in their form, but which are of value for the stamp of his mind upon them, and the worth and weight of pregnant thought.

The most useful part of Wisdom is for a Man to give a good guess, what others think of him. It is a dangerous thing to guess partially, and a melancholy thing to guess right.

There are hardly two Creatures of a more differing Species than the same Man, when he is pretending to a Place, and when he is in possession of it.

The Dependence of a great Man upon a greater is a Subjection that lower Men cannot easily comprehend.

Popularity is a Crime from the Moment it is sought; it is only a Virtue when Men have it whether they will or no.

Friendship cannot live with Ceremony, nor without Civility.

Those friends who are above Interest are seldom above Jealousy.

A man that should call everything by its right Name, would hardly pass the streets without being knocked down as a Common Enemy.

Liberty is the Mistress of Mankind, she hath powerful Charms which so dazzle us that we find Beauties in her which are perhaps not there, as we do in other Mistresses; yet if she were not a Beauty, the World would not run mad for her.

Power without love hath a terrifying aspect, and the Worship which is paid to it is like that which the Indians give out of fear to Wild Beasts and Devils.

We are told by a contemporary that many of Lord Halifax's reflections occurred to him suddenly in conversation with his friends; we cannot but ask ourselves, however, who of his contemporaries were worthy to be the friends and intellectual companions of this spiritual son of Montaigne, who was nourished on his essays, and who appears to us a somewhat lonely figure amid the gay and shallow world of the Restoration, in the politics of which, nevertheless, he played a part of immense importance, although, both as a statesman and as an author, his name is barely remembered now.

VIII

The name of the next great aphorist on our list, Halifax's grandson, Lord Chesterfield, has not been obscured by Time; yet Time has treated it with even more injustice. To be distinguished and forgotten—or rather to have one's name live on, as Halifax's has lived, in the memory of a few distinguished spirits—this is a much more kindly fate than to glare before the public in the limelight which a series of unlucky incidents has cast upon the figure of Lord Chesterfield. The most damaging, in the eyes of posterity, of these incidents, is the famous clash or encounter of this piece of delicate porcelain with one of the hugest iron pots that ever swam in English waters. Dr. Johnson's letter to the patron who had failed him, full, as it is, of barely deserved, but immortal resentment, would suffice to sink any reputation; and another giant of our literature, Charles Dickens, has in his character, or caricature, of Sir John Chester dealt, with almost equal force and unfairness, another blow at this accomplished, but un-English figure. The incident, however, which most shocked Lord Chesterfield's contemporaries was the publication after his death of his letters to his son. The son was illegitimate, and the letters intimate; designed though they were for a particular character and a special purpose—to

prepare namely a shy and awkward boy, born out of wedlock, for the diplomatic service, and to teach him the good manners indispensable in that career—they were read as if they contained everything Lord Chesterfield regarded as necessary to form a complete system of moral education for the young.

Few things are more shocking to those who practise the arts of success than the frank description of those arts: that one should practise what one preaches is generally agreed, but anyone who has the indiscretion to preach what both he and his hearers practise must always incur—as Lord Chesterfield has incurred—the gravest moral reprobation. Lord Chesterfield was a man of the world, and avowed himself as such; like his grandfather he had played an illustrious part in public affairs, and he had also preserved, what so few who play such parts preserve, an uninjured reputation. His knowledge of men and affairs, of the causes of success and failure, were the fruit of much experience and profound observation. As the grandfather had wished to do for Chesterfield's mother, so the grandson, with an impulse apparently hereditary in the family, desired to do for his son, to impart to him the acquired knowledge of a lifetime, and supply by his own experience the boy's ignorance of the world. This world, which the old nobleman knew so well, the world he had mastered and enjoyed, and which, after retiring from it, he viewed with complete disillusion, was that limited, but lucid world of eighteenth-century society which reached its most shining perfection in France, whence its illumination spread over the rest of Europe. Of this finished culture, this achieved civilization, this rational, epicurean mastery of the art of living, Lord Chesterfield was the most accomplished and finished representative in England. He was as much at home in Paris as he was in London; Voltaire and Montesquieu were his friends, as well as the diplomatists and great ladies of the Paris *salons*; he shared the rational enthusiasms of the French thinkers, as well as the cynical wisdom of France's statesmen; he was, unlike Lord Halifax, completely at home in the age in which he lived; breathing its air and basking in its golden sunshine, he enjoyed to the full the fruits which were brought to ripeness by them. Among the fairest of these fruits was a certain exquisite art of social intercourse, a delicate perfection and grace of bearing and conversation, a gentleness and amiability in the art of pleasing, which was no growth of the English soil, but could only be acquired abroad. Most young Englishmen of condition were, in Lord Chesterfield's opinion, little more than louts: they had made indeed the grand tour abroad, but had learnt nothing from their travels, on which they had herded together in drunken debauches, returning home as refined and polished, he said, as Dutch skippers from a whaling expedition. That his son, and his godson and heir, to whom he

addressed another series of instructive letters, should not resemble these unlicked cubs, but become accomplished young men, fitted to adorn their age and country, was Lord Chesterfield's great desire and the purpose of his letters. These letters were not, he said, the severe and discouraging dictates of an old parent, but the friendly and practicable advice of a sincere friend, who remembers that he has been young himself, and knows the indulgence that is due to youth and inexperience. 'Yes,' he adds, 'I have been young, and a great deal too young. Idle dissipation and innumerable indiscretions, which I am now heartily ashamed and repent of, characterized my youth. But if my advice can make you wiser and better than I was at your age, I hope it may be some little atonement.'

Lord Chesterfield's letters, which he wrote as an atonement for his youthful errors, and which to many have seemed a strange atonement, are full of worldly wisdom and advice which finds a terse expression in the many aphorisms which adorn their pages. Besides these scattered maxims, he composed for the instruction of his son a set of aphorisms which are printed by themselves.

'Most maxim-mongers,' he says, in his preface to this collection, 'have preferred the prettiness to the justness of a thought, and the turn to the truth; but I have refused myself to everything that my own experience did not justify and confirm.' His aphorisms are indeed sincere expressions of his own thought and observation, but they are often little masterpieces of the literary art as well. Inheriting as he did his grandfather's gift for terse expression, and nourished as he was on La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, whom he continually quotes, and believing, as he believed, that form was as important as matter, and that indeed it was the form rather than the content of a phrase which impressed it upon us and fixed it in our memory, he had given a lifelong attention to the art of expressing thought in words. His aphorisms float sometimes on the wings of images—'Cunning,' he says, for instance, 'is the dark sanctuary of incapacity'; Wit, those who possess it, should wear like a sword in its scabbard, and not 'brandish it to the terror of the whole company'; the art of life was to make the world one's bubble, rather than be the bubble of the world.

But of all the wings of winged sayings—and aphorisms must have wings to make them fly from mouth to mouth—the neatest are woven of a kind of verbal felicity, which Chesterfield called the 'turn.' The turn is often the repetition of a word or phrase in a slightly altered guise (so Sir Walter Raleigh defines Dryden's use of the word) as 'the thought is turned over in the mind and presented in a new aspect.' This 'elegance of expression' takes the form generally with Chesterfield as a deft antithesis of phrasing, by which some

antithesis of thought is echoed and reinforced. ‘It is very disagreeable to seem reserved, and very dangerous not to be so’; ‘The weakest man in the world can avail himself of the passions of the wisest’; ‘Many a man would rather you heard his story than granted his request’—these among many others are instances of the antithetical turn in Chesterfield’s aphorisms. An antithesis is not, however, indispensable to the turn; often this verbal felicity is produced merely by the happy repetition of one word;—‘Let blockheads read what blockheads wrote,’ for instance; ‘What pleases you in others will in general please them in you.’ In the art of using the turn, Chesterfield’s model was La Rochefoucauld, who sometimes combines the antithesis and the repetition in one finished phrase, as for instance when he says: ‘We can often forgive those who bore us, but we cannot forgive those we bore.’

Although Lord Chesterfield was a master of the turn, he did not allow, as he says, the turn to be his master, and thus he avoided another pitfall of the aphorist, that of pretentiousness, of using a verbal felicity to give an appearance of thought where thought is lacking. When, for instance, Disraeli, who often fell into this pitfall, remarks ‘Nobody should ever look anxious except those who have no anxiety,’ the turn of expression he uses gives a momentary look of depth to an extremely shallow observation.

We have only to look at Sainte-Beuve’s luminous portrait of Lord Chesterfield, with its sympathetic interpretation of this accomplished figure, to realize that our accepted notion of him is a caricature of the coarse old English kind. Sainte-Beuve, who calls Chesterfield the La Rochefoucauld of England, describes him as one of the most brilliant minds of our country, and as an accomplished moralist—using the word in the wider and more humane sense which it preserves in France—a moralist, not of Zeno’s or Cato’s school, but of the more amiable school of Aristippus or Atticus. His letters, Sainte-Beuve says, were letters that Horace might have written to his son, if Horace had been a parent; he praises the spirit they breathe of tenderness and wisdom, the paternal affection of this patient, delicate, indefatigable father, striving to make out of his indolent and awkward son an accomplished man of action. Those who have a taste for this sort of thing may be interested in some specimens of Chesterfield’s admonitory maxims. As the father’s admonitions are largely concerned with the son’s conduct in society, there is much advice concerning the important art of observing the people he meets and discriminating among them. Thus he says:

> Distrust all those who love you extremely upon a very slight acquaintance, and without any visible reason. Be upon your guard too, against those who confess as their weaknesses all the cardinal

virtues. Suspect in general those who remarkably affect any one virtue. But (he cautiously adds) I say suspect them, for they are commonly imposters; but do not be sure that they are always so; for I have sometimes known saints really religious, blusterers really brave, reformers of manners really honest and prudes really chaste.

As to truthfulness, a man's veracity could be best estimated by his brains. 'The greatest fools,' he says, 'are the greatest liars. For my part, I judge every man's truth by his degree of understanding.'

People of high rank hated in general, he said, a difference of opinion, even in trifles: 'It is impossible,' he said, 'to inform them, but very easy to displease them.'

The art of pleasing is one of Chesterfield's great themes, and a few of his maxims on this subject are worth quoting.

If you will please people, you must please them in their own way.

Learn to shrink yourself to the size of the company you are in.

Never talk your best in the company of fools.

A wise man will live as much within his wit as his income.

Make love to the most impertinent beauty of condition that you meet with, and be gallant with all the rest.

Modesty is the only sure bait when you angle for praise.

This I will advise you too, which is never to attack whole bodies of any kind. Individuals forget sometimes, but bodies and societies never do.

One of the most important branches of the art of pleasing was, of course, the art of flattery. He imparts to his son, therefore, many secrets of the flatterer's art; one of which, for instance, was that women who were either indisputably beautiful, or indisputably ugly, should be flattered on the score of their understandings; and another that of all kinds of flattery, the most pleasing, and consequently the most effectual, was what he called 'flattering people behind their backs'—praising them, that was to say in the presence of people who, to make their own court, would repeat and even amplify such praises to the person whose favour they wished to win.

I have compared the coiners of aphorisms to die-engravers; but, unlike the

designers of a nation's currency, they impress their own image on the coins they model. The face of this accomplished man of the world, the expert in these matters, finds with even more clearness and erudition (to use the word erudition with its numismatic meaning) impressed on many of his coins of thought which are suitable for more general circulation, and which Lord Chesterfield, like his grandfather Halifax, polished and perfected. A few of these I shall now allow myself to quote.

Our prejudices are our mistresses; reason is at best our wife, very often heard indeed, but seldom minded.

Wise people may say what they will, but one passion is never cured but by another.

I would sooner wear other people's clothes than their vices; and they would sit upon me just as well.

Few men can be men of pleasure; every man may be a rake.

Many a friend will tell us our faults without reserve, who will not so much as hint at our follies.

As fathers commonly go, it is seldom a misfortune to be fatherless; and considering the general run of sons, so seldom a misfortune to be childless.

Few fathers care much for their sons, or at least, most of them care more for their money.

Youth is a state of continual ebriety.

I always treat fools and coxcombs with great ceremony; true good breeding not being a sufficient barrier against them.

Whoever contracts a friendship with a knave or a fool, has something bad to do or to conceal.

In any quarrel that person will generally be thought in the wrong, who it was foretold would quarrel.

Defamation and calumny never attack where there is no weak place; they magnify, but they do not create.

People in high life are hardened to the wants and distresses of mankind as surgeons are to their bodily pains.

Women's beauty, like men's wit, is generally fatal to the owners.

A man of sense may be in haste, but can never be in a hurry.

In matters of religion and matrimony I never give any advice, because I will not have anybody's torments in this world or the next laid to my charge.

The opinion of having power often procures power.

If the multitude ever deviate into the right, it is always for the wrong reason.

Children and subjects are much seldomer in the wrong than parents and kings.

Chesterfield's wit, which he tried to keep in its scabbard, sometimes flashes out, as when he says for instance, 'Everything suffers by translation except a Bishop'; and more genially when in his deaf old age, he said of himself and another deaf old peer, 'Tyrawley and I have been dead these two years; but we don't choose to have it known.'

If, after reading Sainte-Beuve's essay on Chesterfield, we recall Dr. Johnson's saying that his letters 'teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing-master,' we find ourselves in a very different critical and moral atmosphere. But even Dr. Johnson in a less exasperated mood was forced to admit that Chesterfield's correspondence, expurgated of what he considered its immoral precepts, would make a book which 'should be put into the hands of every young gentleman.'

IX

Lord Chesterfield was supposed to have described Dr. Johnson as 'a respectable Hottentot'; and the phrase, though apparently not meant for Johnson, was taken by their contemporaries as representing what the polite nobleman thought of the uncouth scholar. These two notable eighteenth-century figures lived indeed in worlds very different from each other; each was famous for his wit, but while Chesterfield regarded this quality as a possession dangerous for its possessor, Dr. Johnson, disporting himself in a less polished sphere, was hampered by no such scruples. To shine in conversation was in him, as Sir Joshua Reynolds said, a predominating passion; he fought on every occasion as if his reputation depended on the victory of the moment; and he fought with all the weapons. Among these he wielded with complete recklessness that shining sword of wit which the politic earl had said should be kept safely in its scabbard, and not brandished to the terror of the company. The strokes of this mighty Samson still reverberate in history; still he strides like great Hector sounding war's alarms among the dead; but we feel no pity for his victims. Time has changed into delight the terror of those lightning

strokes of repartee; we listen safely across the intervening years to their thunder. But more than by his wit Dr. Johnson still lives for us, and his voice still reverberates in our ears, as the master and great monarch of wise sayings. He is the greatest of our English aphorists—indeed for the number, the originality of his apophthegms, he has no equal in the world; there is no talker of ancient or modern times of whose sayings so many are remembered and constantly repeated. We owe the profusion of this store, of course, to his indefatigable and incomparable biographer; but their most enduring quality is the immense common sense, and the weight of experience and feeling behind them. They have their sources in the depths of deeply feeling nature; they are full of the knowledge of the good and evil in his own heart, and in the hearts of others. With this concrete experience of life was combined an extraordinary generalizing power, a wide grasp of thought, a power of applying general truths to particular occasions, of seeing little incidents in the illumination of large ideas, and of being inspired by them, as he said himself, to very serious reflections. A tub of butter amounted, when contemplated by the actor Munden, Charles Lamb wrote, to a platonic idea; and the most trivial object or occurrence, when contemplated through the magnifying glass of Dr. Johnson's mind, assumed gigantic proportions; he went through life making mountains out of molehills. This gift of aggrandizement, of bestowing what he called the 'grandeur of generality' upon his sayings, was due in part to a vocabulary which was the product as well as the organ of that gift. 'He that thinks with more extent than another,' he wrote, 'will want words of larger meaning,' and his store of sonorous Latinisms served well to express his extensive thoughts. His power of clothing his thoughts in words adequate to their ample meaning was the product of a lifelong effort; he had early made it a fixed rule, he told Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'to do his best on every occasion and in every company; to impart whatever he knew in the most forcible language he could put it in'; and this had become, he said, by constant practice habitual with him. 'His notions,' one of his listeners writes, 'rose up like the dragon's teeth sowed by Cadmus, all ready clothed and in bright armour too, fit for immediate battle'; and only occasionally Boswell enables us to see him pausing for a moment to give his thought a still more impressive form.

Dr. Johnson's aphoristic gift—and the power of generalizing observation and abstracting from it imposing truths is the very essence of that gift—is apparent in his earlier writings, in *Rasselas* and the *Rambler*; and his other essays are rich in the substance of aphoristic thought. Although the expression in these passages is often ponderous and diffuse, there are some of them which, from their weight of meaning and the neatness and perfection of their phrasing, deserve to rank as aphorisms; for the aphorisms of La Rochefoucauld

and the other masters of this art, though generally brief and pointed, are sometimes more ample in their form—paragraphs and almost little essays of distilled and essential thought. No literary form admits indeed of precise and strictly formal definition; long sentences may be sometimes aphorisms; but the briefer they are the better; and it is for the most part in the recorded conversation of Dr. Johnson's later years, when his weapon of speech had been tempered in the fire of innumerable verbal contests, that his sentences acquire their final point and perfection. Thus, for instance, in one of the *Ramblers* he writes, 'The time present is seldom able to fill desire or imagination with immediate enjoyment, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation.' Twenty-three years later, arguing with Boswell and Langton at General Oglethorpe's, he expressed this thought in a much more vivid manner by saying 'a man is never happy for the present, but when he is drunk.'

Some of his sayings are so familiar that one must almost apologize for showing them, as for instance:

> No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.
>
> If I had no duties, and no reference to futurity, I would spend my life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman.
>
> Mrs. Montagu has dropt me. Now, sir, there are many people whom one should like very well to drop, but would not wish to be dropt by.
>
> When a butcher tells you that his heart bleeds for his country, he has, in fact, no uneasy feeling.
>
> Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life.
>
> People in distress never think that you feel enough.
>
> Sir, that sympathetic feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind.
>
> The first Whig was the Devil.
>
> A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.
>
> No man would be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail.
>
> It is very strange, and very melancholy, that the paucity of human pleasures should persuade us ever to call hunting one of

them.

Many of Dr. Johnson's most famous sayings are the prompt and often crushing repartees with which he answered impertinent or tiresome enquiries, as for instance to the young man who impertinently asked him: 'What would you give, old gentleman, to be as young and sprightly as I am?' 'Why, Sir,' Dr. Johnson replied, 'I think I would almost be content to be as foolish.' Another young gentleman who suddenly enquired, 'Mr. Johnson, would you advise me to marry?' received the angry reply, 'I would advise no man to marry, Sir, who is not likely to propagate understanding.'

Boswell has the frankness to record some of the bites he himself received from this old bear, as one of these young gentlemen called him. Thus when he wrote that he had been puzzling his poor head about Free Will, Johnson answered:

> 'What have you to do with Liberty and Necessity? Or what more than to hold your tongue about it?'
>
> 'So, Sir,' said Boswell, 'you laugh at schemes of political improvement?' 'Why, Sir, most schemes of political improvement are very laughable things.'
>
> 'But is not the fear of death natural to man?' 'So much so, Sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it.'

When a lady of noble sentiments, on hearing of excesses indulged in by some people who were mentioned, said: 'I wonder what pleasure men can take in making beasts of themselves'; in Dr. Johnson's reply there is a tragic element: 'I wonder, madam, that you have not penetration enough to see the strong inducement to this excess; for he who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.'

Johnson was deeply ashamed of himself; and his self-contempt, as well as contempt for others, were capable of being coined, as he coined them, into shining phrases:

> He that strives against nature, will for ever strive in vain.
>
> Grief is a species of idleness.
>
> There is no wisdom in useless and hopeless sorrow; but there is something in it so like virtue, that he who is wholly without it cannot be loved.

Melancholy, indeed, should be diverted by every means but drinking.

We all live together in a world that is bursting with sin and sorrow.

He that wanders about the world sees new forms of human misery, and if he chances to meet an old friend, meets a face darkened with troubles.

Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding.

He that fixes his attention on things always before him will never have long cessations of anger.

Life is barren enough surely with all her trappings; let us be therefore cautious how we strip her.

The utmost which we can reasonably hope or fear, is to fill a vacant hour with prattle and be forgotten.

'There is nothing, Sir,' Dr. Johnson said, 'too little for so little a creature as man,' wisely adding, however, that it was by studying little things that we attained the great art of having as little misery and as much happiness as possible. Dr. Johnson, for all his tragic melancholy, cannot be said to have neglected this art of getting happiness; his zest for pleasure was, like his appetite for food, immense, and is clearly stamped on many of his coins of thought.

Life admits not of delays; when pleasure can be had, it is fit to catch it.

Our brightest blazes of gladness are commonly kindled by unexpected sparks.

Life is short. The sooner that a man begins to enjoy his wealth the better.

We would all be idle if we could.

A man seldom thinks with more earnestness of anything than he does of his dinner.

I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully; for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.

When a man is invited to dinner, he is disappointed if he does not get something good.

Any of us would kill a cow rather than not have beef.

A man who exposes himself when intoxicated, has not the art of getting drunk.

That people should endeavour to excel in conversation, I do not wonder; because in conversation praise is instantly reverberated.

But, Sir, may there not be very good conversation without a contest for superiority? No animated conversation, Sir.

Whoever thinks of going to bed before twelve o'clock is a scoundrel.

A man, Sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair.

Sir, I look upon every day to be lost, in which I do not make a new acquaintance.

High people, Sir, are the best.

Great lords and great ladies don't like to have their mouths stopped.

Sir, the insolence of wealth will crop out.

No man sympathizes with the sorrows of vanity.

Sir, it is a great thing to dine with the Canons of Christ Church.

When he whom everybody else flatters, flatters me, I then am truly happy.

Just praise is only a debt, but flattery is a present.

You think I love flattery; and so I do; but a little too much always disgusts me: that fellow Richardson, on the contrary, could not be contented to sail quietly down the stream of reputation, without longing to taste the froth from every stroke of the oar.

The highest panegyric that private virtue can receive is the praise of servants.

There is in human nature a general inclination to make people stare.

Were it not for imagination, Sir, a man would be as happy in the arms of a chambermaid as of a Duchess.

Every man of any education would rather be called a rascal than accused of deficiency in the graces.

Sir, I look upon myself as a very polite man.

The collector will, however, probably regard as the choicest drawers in his cabinet the ones which contain the coined wisdom of Dr. Johnson's deeply observing, deeply feeling nature. There are no aphorisms that bear more clearly the impress of their maker; these massy coins are authentically stamped with his imposing wig and features. Johnson awed his contemporaries not only by the 'loud voice and slow deliberate utterance' which Boswell so well describes; they were also impressed by the wit and wisdom of his remarks, but above all by the fact that it was he who made them. The weight of his extraordinary character, with all its amazing contradictions, gives them a resonance and importance that strongly affects us. Most sages and most aphorists have achieved a consistent attitude towards life; like La Rochefoucauld or like Chesterfield, or like Goethe, they have mastered both themselves and the world, small or large, in which they dwelt, and this lends a kind of uniformity—sometimes a kind of monotony—to their sayings. But Dr. Johnson had achieved no such harmony; he was not in this sense a master of the world or of his own nature. He lived, as he tells us, entirely without his own approbation; he was continually forming resolutions and continually breaking them; and it is Boswell's merit that he had the courage to reveal the contradictions and failings of his hero's character. High acts and noble qualities may win our respectful admiration, but it is after all people's errors, as Goethe said, which make us love them; and some of Johnson's eulogists have wronged his memory by trying to make him into a consistently enlightened figure. Johnson was fond also of paradox, and his most paradoxical remarks were accurately recorded; and when Boswell, wishing to be sure that none of them should escape him, inquired whether he had really said that 'the happiest part of a man's life is what he passes lying awake in bed in the morning,' Dr. Johnson replied, 'I may perhaps have said this; for nobody, at times, talks more laxly than I do.'

The self-confessed contradictions between Dr. Johnson's principles and his practice—the way, for instance, he preached, and, as he said, very sincerely preached, early-rising from an habitual bed of noon-day sloth—and all the other contrarieties of his character; his liberal sympathies and his fierce, narrow, party-spirit, his profound unhappiness and his amazing zest for life, his bluff common sense and his primitive superstition, and almost insane terror of death—all these contrasts, and the various vistas into life they opened for him, enabled him to grasp those glimmerings of truth and odd aspects of

experience which are the aphorist's nutriment—the game he hunts, and the object of his pursuit. But of all the contradictions of Dr. Johnson's nature, what makes him our supremest aphorist as well as most endears us to him, is the contrast between his craving for affection, his dependence on it, and his profound sense of the weakness and fragility of all human ties. 'We cannot be in his company long,' as Mr. Desmond MacCarthy has finely said, 'without becoming aware that what draws us to him so closely is that he combined a disillusioned estimate of human nature sufficient to launch twenty little cynics, with a craving for love and sympathy urgent enough to turn a weaker nature into a benign sentimentalist.'

But it is best to let the great man speak again for himself.

Those who do not feel pain seldom think that it is felt.

The world will never be long without some good reason to hate the unhappy.

The wretched have no compassion.

It is so very difficult for a sick man not to be a scoundrel.

He that fails in his endeavour after wealth or power, will not long retain either honesty or courage.

Every man wishes to be wise, and they who cannot be wise are almost always cunning.

Men do not suspect faults which they do not commit.

The men who can be charged with fewest failings are generally most ready to allow them.

Almost all absurdity of conduct arises from the imitation of those whom we cannot resemble.

Self-love is often rather arrogant than blind; it does not hide our faults from ourselves, but persuades us that they escape the notice of others.

The man who threatens the world is always ridiculous.

The reciprocal civility of authors is one of the most risible scenes in the farce of life.

Kindness is in our power, but fondness is not.

Nothing is more common than mutual dislike, where mutual approbation is particularly expected.

The most fatal disease of friendship is gradual decay, or dislike hourly increased by causes too slender for complaint, or too numerous for removal.

The great effect of friendship is beneficence, yet by the first act of uncommon kindness it is endangered, like plants that bear their fruit and die.

Love is only one of many passions, and it has no great influence on the sum of life.

It is commonly a weak man who marries for love.

Some cunning men choose fools for their wives, thinking to manage them, but they always fail.

Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.

Marriage is not commonly unhappy, otherwise than life is unhappy.

The business of life is to go forwards.

Life is a progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment.

To-morrow is an old deceiver, and his cheat never grows stale.

Dr. Johnson's sayings are those of a man well advanced in years, and were recorded when he had become old and famous. Let us then take leave of him when at the age of seventy-four he said:

There is a wicked inclination in most people to suppose an old man decayed in his intellects. If a young or middle-aged man, when leaving a company, does not recollect where he laid his hat, it is nothing; but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug up their shoulders, and say, 'His memory is going.'

X

The next aphorist on our list, though a younger contemporary of Chesterfield and Johnson, seems to belong to an age very different from theirs. If sayings can create a world—and the universe we inhabit was thus, we are told, originally created—one saying of William Blake's seems to transport us into a sphere of thought and feeling as remote from these eighteenth-century figures as the farthest planet. Blake's aphorisms in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with the other aphorisms scattered through his prose writings, are

indeed remarkable achievements, and contain, as Swinburne said of them, the quintessence and fine gold of his alembic. ‘Each, whether earnest or satirical, slight or great in manner, is full,’ Swinburne adds, ‘of that passionate wisdom and bright rapid strength proper to the step and speech of gods.’ Swinburne seldom indulged in understatement; but Blake’s *Proverbs of Hell* are certainly little masterpieces of this delicate art. No other aphorist has succeeded in compressing greater depths of meaning into fewer words; and save for a few apophthegms of the Greek Sages—‘Know thyself,’ ‘Seize the moment,’ ‘It is hard to be good,’ ‘Most men are bad’—it would be difficult to find in any literature sayings more brief and pointed than ‘Damn braces. Bless relaxes,’ and many other of Blake’s tiny, but pregnant maxims.

The ground covered by Blake’s aphorisms includes the three kinds of experience which, as we have seen, form the subject matter of this way of writing. Some of them are commonplaces, new-minted and given a fresh lustre by their phrasing and imagery: ‘The busy bee has no time for sorrow’; ‘The fox condemns the trap, not himself,’ for instance. Others contain bits of experience with which we are not unacquainted, though no one else has embodied them in words. But Blake’s most characteristic sayings belong to that rarest and most precious class which seem like new intuitions—seem to have been coined from a vein of gold hidden far below the surface of the familiar world: ‘The soul of sweet delight can never be defiled,’ for instance; ‘Weak is the joy which is never wearied’—‘The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.’ Blake is remarkable among aphorists in many ways, but most remarkable in that his proverbs have often a mysterious oracular quality; they seem to us pregnant with a kind of mystic meaning, although we are hard put to it to say exactly what that meaning is. ‘One thought fills immensity’; ‘The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instructions’; ‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time’—phrases like these impress our imagination with a kind of awe, although reason may suggest that they are, perhaps, little more than nonsense phrases. But Blake is a poet among our great aphorists; his phrases were coined in the mint of the imagination, he speaks, not with the voice of disillusioned age, but with that of romantic youth; and it is in reading one of his sentences, full of light and poetry, that we can best appreciate La Bruyère’s saying that ‘a delicate thought is the finest product, and, as it were, the flower of the soul.’

XI

After Blake we return with Hazlitt to the flat earth again, and to the realm of reason; we listen again to that chorus of voices which, since before the time of Ecclesiastes, has been crying ‘Vanity, all is vanity’ in our ears. Hazlitt was

in many ways as disillusioned as Dr. Johnson; but he was, as Johnson was not, bitter and sardonic, and he hated rather than loved his fellow human beings. But his zest for life was even greater than that of Johnson, or was nourished at least by a wider variety of pleasures; the joys of solitude, of walking, of travel, of violent games, of outdoor life and physical exertion added for him an intoxicating taste to the bitter draught of experience. And Hazlitt, though no poet, breathed the enchanted atmosphere of the great age of poetry in which he lived, while Rousseau, of whom he was a fervent disciple, had opened his eyes to the strange and deeply coloured beauty of the world which shone about him. He was a painter, too, and no one could derive a greater joy from a picture or a lovely landscape. 'The contemplation of truth and beauty is the proper object for which we were created, which calls forth the most intense desires of the soul, and of which it never tires'—a sentence like this, which would have sounded like cant in the eighteenth-century ears of Dr. Johnson, was nevertheless the expression of what was no mere aspiration, but the essential reality of a life otherwise so sordid, so acrid and unhappy.

Another romantic element in Hazlitt's nature, which would also have seemed like cant to Dr. Johnson, was his passionate love of liberty; his hope, in spite of his knowledge of 'that toad-eating animal, man,' for a reign of kindness and reason which might be ultimately established on the earth. His cry 'O Reason! when will thy long minority expire?' is a genuine expression of this hope, which he still cherished, although he well knew that, as he put it, 'if mankind had wished for what is right, they might have had it long ago.' Hazlitt, unlike Johnson, was a deliberate writer of aphorisms,[6] and a careful student of this form of literary art. In 1823 he published anonymously a volume of them entitled *Characteristics; in the Manner of Rochefoucault's Maxims*. He had been so struck, he tells us in the perusal of these French maxims, by the force and beauty of the style and matter, that he felt an earnest desire to embody some occasional thoughts of his own in the same form; and having written a few, both the novelty and the agreeableness of the task impelled him forward. In addition to the *Characteristics*, Hazlitt also printed in various magazines three other collections. Along with all these separate collections, Hazlitt, like other authors with the aphoristic gift, enriched all his writings, his essays, and his *Life of Napoleon* with such an abundance of terse sayings that, were they all put together, they would probably exceed in number those of any other English writer, with the exception of Dr. Johnson. Their quality is on the whole a high one; although they seldom possess that occasional surprise of diction which delights us in so many of Johnson's sayings, and are lacking also in the stamp of his warm and human character, they are often terse and profound and pointed, and, unlike Johnson, he often

makes use of the ‘turn’ to give them wings. ‘It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers’; ‘There is a pleasure in madness, which none but madmen know’—phrases like these recall the aphorisms of his French masters, or those of Chesterfield, their other English pupil. Hazlitt also reminds us of French writers like Chamfort in the almost vitriolic quality of some of his aphorisms. Old friendships, he says, are like stale food, ‘the stomach turns against them’; ‘We grow tired,’ he says again, ‘of everything but turning others into ridicule, and congratulating ourselves on their defects.’

A few more of Hazlitt’s aphorisms deserve to be quoted:

> Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.
>
> The least pain in our little finger gives us more concern and uneasiness, than the destruction of millions of our fellow-beings.
>
> Those who are at war with others, are not at peace with themselves.
>
> No wise man can have a contempt for the prejudices of others; he should even stand in a certain awe of his own.
>
> To give a reason for anything is to breed a doubt of it.
>
> Never pity people because they are ill-used. They only wait the opportunity to use others just as ill.
>
> I am always afraid of a fool. One cannot be sure that he is not a knave as well.
>
> Those who cannot miss an opportunity of saying a good thing are not to be trusted with the management of any great question.
>
> Ladies grow handsome by looking at themselves in the glass.
>
> Some persons make promises for the pleasure of breaking them.
>
> If a person has no delicacy, he has you in his power.
>
> Fashion is gentility running away from vulgarity, and afraid of being overtaken.
>
> Clever men are the tools with which bad men work.

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[6] Dr. Johnson had however planned, among other schemes he

never carried out, making a collection of ‘Maxims, Characters, and Sentiments, after the manner of Bruyère, collected out of ancient authors, particularly the Greek, with Apophthegms.’ (*Life*, iv, p. 382).

XII

After Hazlitt, Emerson is the next, and perhaps the last great aphorist who has written in English. Emerson’s note-books are full of detached thoughts and intuitions—the berries and wild fruit, as he called them, which he found in his basket after endless rambles in the New England woods and meadows. His essays are like Bacon’s, a mosaic of detached thoughts and aphorisms; they are not organized compositions, but glimpses of truth, as he described them; flashes of light followed by obscurity, and then another flash; each sentence, as he said himself, an infinitely repellent particle. The interest and value of his writings is to be found therefore in these clearly cut medallions of thought, these brief and pregnant phrases.

With the exception of Halifax, Emerson is the only writer in our language who has given his best care and attention to the detached—and the detachable—sentence; he is a master of the polished and perfected phrase. As most of these are hidden in the ten volumes of his Journals which no one reads, a few of them are worth quoting:

> The existing world is not a dream, and cannot with impunity be treated as a dream.
>
> We live ruins amidst ruins.
>
> God screens men from premature ideas.
>
> Solitude is impracticable, and society fatal.
>
> Children are all foreigners. We treat them as such.
>
> Our moods do not believe in each other.
>
> Nature delights in punishing stupid people.
>
> Why should we have only two or three ways of life, and not thousands?
>
> The conversation of men is a mixture of regrets and apprehensions.
>
> A system-grinder hates the truth.

When we quarrel, how we wish we had been blameless!

A man's growth is seen in the successive choirs of his friends.

In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed.

Dear heart, take it sadly home to thee, that there will and can be no co-operation.

Ah! if the rich were rich as the poor fancy riches!

A coarse nature still betrays itself in his contemptible squeals of joy.

Most of the persons whom I see in my own house I see across a gulf.

For all his decorum, benevolence and apparent mildness, Emerson, like other aphorists, was caustic and keen-sighted, and often drew upon that accumulated store of disillusion which this way of writing seems best fitted to express. Thus he says:

A person seldom falls sick, but the bystanders are animated with a faint hope that he will die.

We love force and we care very little how it is exhibited.

The dull pray; the geniuses are light mockers.

Every hero becomes a bore at last.

We do not quite forgive a giver. The hand that feeds us is in some danger of being bitten.

A sympathetic person is placed in the dilemma of a swimmer among drowning men; if he gives so much of a leg or a finger, they will drown him.

Take egotism out, and you would castrate the benefactors.

A saint is a sceptic once in twenty-four hours.

Between cultivated minds the first interview is the best.

Friends are fictions, founded on some single momentary experience.

Truth is beautiful, without doubt, and so are lies.

That which we call sin in others, is experiment for us.

No evil is pure, nor hell itself without its extreme satisfactions.

Every reform is only a mask under cover of which a more terrible reform advances.

Democracy becomes a government of bullies tempered by editors.

Every actual state is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too well.

But to write of Emerson as a cynic and pessimist would be absurdly to misrepresent him. He could dip his pen in the blackest ink, because he was not, he said, afraid of falling into the inkpot. His spirit was loving and benevolent; his disillusion and ironic observation were softened, and sometimes too much softened, by his idealism and ignorance of evil; and although he found that there was a crack in everything God had made, and some foible in every man, however saintly, he put his conclusions in terms with so much humanity in their daring, that they seem to add more to the gaiety than to the sadness of the human spectacle. In the sentence: 'Let us treat the men and women well: treat them as if they were real: perhaps they are,' he expressed both his disillusion and his tolerance for human beings—'chafed and irritable creatures with red faces' that we are.

As an aphorist Emerson ranks more with Blake than with any of our other writers of thoughts and maxims; in his sayings, as in Blake's, we find the imaginative quality of the English aphorism, and his phrases are sometimes luminous with a kind of poetic radiance, less brilliant than the flashing light of Blake's genius, but more serene, more like the illumination of the stars, 'the delicately emerging stars,' to borrow one of his own phrases, 'with their private and ineffable glances.' Thus he writes:

We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star.

I am God in nature: I am a weed by the wall.

Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous.

A crop of poets is as inevitable as a crop of violets or anemones.

Others of the sayings of this writer and poet are concerned with the art of literature.

Only write a dozen lines, and rest on your oars for ever.

Poets are not to be seen.

People do not deserve to have good writing, they are so pleased with the bad.

Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where he would not go.

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.

Life too near paralyses art.

If your subject does not appear the flower of the world at this moment, you have not yet rightly got it.

Men lose their tempers in defending their taste.

If I do not read, nobody will.

How attractive is the book in my friend's house which I should not read in my own!

Emerson was a preacher, the son and descendant of a line of preachers, and if his sentences escape—and some of them cannot be said to escape—being hortatory truisms, this is due partly to their imaginative phrasing, but still more to a certain humour which stamps them as their own, and a kind of provincial quaintness in their expression.

We grizzle every day. I see no need of it.

Few envy the consideration enjoyed by the oldest inhabitant.

The clergy are as like as peas. I cannot tell them apart.

Are you not scared by seeing that the Gypsies are more attractive to us than the Apostles?

Is not a small house best? Put a woman into a small house, and after five years she comes out large and healthy.

It is unfortunate that the habit of oral delivery, of lecturing to uncultivated audiences about the country, led Emerson to exaggerate this quaintness of expression, and somewhat strain and crack his voice. His best sentences are often to be found therefore in those journals in which he jotted down his thoughts and intuitions—the deposit, drop by drop, and day by day, of the

lifelong soliloquy of his mind. In his lectures and in his essays (which were delivered as lectures) a forced poetic note can sometimes be detected, a kind of shrill rhetoric, which obscures for too many readers that profundity of thought, and that occasional perfection of phrasing which makes him rank as by no means the least important in that succession of great aphorists who have contributed to our literature so rich, so varied, and so disregarded a store of wise, pungent or poetic sayings. Of these, the most profound, or at least the one I most often remember, is the following:

> A rush of thoughts is the only conceivable prosperity that can come to us.

XIII

In addition to these writers—Bacon, Selden, Halifax, Johnson, Blake, Hazlitt, and Emerson, there are several minor English aphorists who may be more briefly noted. First in date among these is Ben Jonson, who, in those ‘last drops from his quill,’ which he wrote when he was oppressed by poverty and disease and want of breath, and which he entitled *Discoveries* (thus suggesting the best translation I can find for the French word *aperçu*), noted down many wise and disillusioned thoughts and observations:

> What a deal of cold business [he says, for instance] doth a man mis-spend the better part of life in! In scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter-love in a dark corner.
>
> Many might go to heaven with half the labour they go to hell.
>
> A woman, the more curious she is about her face, is commonly the more careless about her house.
>
> The man that is once hated, both his good and his evil deeds oppress him.
>
> Princes learn no art truly, but the art of horsemanship. The reason is, the brave beast is no flatterer.
>
> Talking is the disease of age.

Ben Jonson’s aphorisms are not always, however, those of a cynic who, as Drummond of Hawthornden said, was ‘given rather to lose a friend than a jest.’ Thus he says: ‘Truth is man’s proper good; and the only immortal thing that was given to our mortality to use.’ In regard to wisdom and honesty, he says wisely: ‘A good life is a main argument.’ Ambition, he admits, is itself a

vice, but ‘is often the cause of great virtue.’ The remarks of this writer about the art of writing are of interest also. Thus he says:

> I will like and praise some things in a young writer; which yet, if he continue in, I cannot but justly hate him for the same.
>
> No great work, worthy of praise or memory, but came out of poor cradles.

His remark that ‘Ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing,’ is one of the best ever made on the subject of literary composition. He adds wisely, however: ‘No precepts will profit a fool.’

James Harrington, the author of *Oceana*, is a writer of a somewhat later date, who embodied, in two sets of aphorisms, his wise and liberal reflections on the troubled politics of his time. A few of these are worth quoting:

> Man may rather be defined as a religious than as a rational creature.
>
> The lust of government is the greatest lust.
>
> The people cannot see but they can feel.

Five divines of the Church of England must be also mentioned, Thomas Fuller, Benjamin Whichcote, and three bishops (for bishops are aphoristic folk), Joseph Hall, Jeremy Taylor and Thomas Wilson.

That miscellaneous and amusing writer Thomas Fuller published among his numerous writings three series of ‘Thoughts’—*Good Thoughts in Bad Times* (1645), *Good Thoughts in Worse Times* (1647), both written during the Civil Wars, and *Mixt Contemplations on Better Times*, published at the Restoration. The ‘Thoughts’ which make up these volumes are, like the numerous ‘Maxims’ of his *Holy and Profane State*, little essays and reflections, and belong to that way of writing in detached paragraphs which the French call *Pensées*. But among these we find, as in all Fuller’s writings, many aphoristic sentences which are brief and pointed, and often winged with the quaint images which floated about in his mind, and which give an amusing twist to peculiar style:

> Miracles are the swaddling clothes of infant churches.
>
> Only anchorets, that want company, may crown themselves with their own commendations.

Some, for fear their orations should giggle, will not let them smile.

To smell a turf of fresh earth is wholesome for the body; no less are thoughts of mortality cordial to the soul.

Some admiring what motives to mirth infants meet with in their silent and solitary smiles, have resolved (how truly I know not) that then they converse with angels.

Moscovite women esteem none loving husbands except they beat their wives.

Let not thy jests, like mummy, be made of dead men's flesh.

Anger is one of the sinews of the soul.

Mock not a cobbler for his black thumbs.

When hospitality died in England, she gave her last groan amongst the yeomen of Kent.

It is better that ten Drones be fed than one Bee be famished.

Benjamin Whichcote, born the year after Fuller, was the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, and the Provost of King's College, is remembered as one of the Cambridge Platonists, and also for his *Moral and Religions Aphorisms*, which, published in 1703, became a favourite devotional book among some Anglicans, and were reprinted in 1930 with an introduction by Dean Inge. Dean Inge gives high praise to this 'rich feast of aphorisms,' as he calls it, but it is a feast of edifying and spiritual reflections whose appeal to secular minds is perhaps less powerful than it ought to be. The aphorism, 'Heaven is first a temper, then a place'; 'It is not good to live in jest, since we must die in earnest,' are terse expressions, however, of his spiritual insight; and there is worldly wisdom in his saying: 'If I have not a friend, God send me an enemy, that I may hear of my faults.'

XIV

The first English bishop who was an aphorist, is the once famous, but now almost forgotten Joseph Hall (1574-1656), who was Bishop of Exeter and afterwards of Norwich. He was called in his lifetime the 'English Seneca,' for in addition to his satires (he was the earliest of English satirists) he published in his later and more pious years numerous volumes of meditations, devotional works and tracts. He deserves to be remembered as one of the anglican divines who was a writer of fine seventeenth-century prose, but in whom the Church

of England, which shows so little appreciation of its great writers, and presents so poor a shop-window to the world, seems to take no pride or interest. When I have written, as I have done so more than once in praise of these Worthies, I have seemed to hear this almost forgotten Bishop Hall stirring his old bones at Norwich, and asking why he, too, might not see his name in the papers. Although quite able when it was appropriate to 'rattle the terrible judgments of God against sinners,' and to do so with the splendid eloquence of the time, the book I find most attractive among his many publications is a little volume of *Occasional Meditations*, of the 'involuntary and sudden thoughts' which occurred to him in odd moments; when he shut one eye, for instance, or felt his arm benumbed, or happened to see two snails, or an owl in the twilight, or a goat, or a man yawning, or when the lights were brought in, or he heard a swallow in his chimney, or a cracked bell, or a barking dog, or a well-played lute. Although his meditations on these subjects are edifying, pious, and rather trite, the fact that the bishop thought it worth while to notice such little odd sensations shows a modern self-consciousness which it is curious to find in the age he lived in. Although Bishop Hall published no separate collection of aphorisms, his writings are full of aphoristic sentences, some of which are worth quoting:

> Sometimes young Devils prove old Saints.
>
> No tree bears fruit in Autumn, unless it blossoms in the Spring.
>
> None lives so ill, but they content themselves in somewhat; even the beggar likes the smell of his dish.
>
> Gold is the heaviest of all metals; it is no wonder that the rich man is carried downward to his Place.
>
> In age we talk much because we have seen much, and soon after shall cease talking for ever.
>
> If the Suns should rise but once to the Earth, I doubt every man would be a Persian.

'Friendship is brittle stuff'—this sentence is the evidence of an experience of the less cheerful side of the life of this divine who lived on to be ejected from his palace, and persecuted and imprisoned under the Commonwealth, and still more sad is his saying: 'I am a stranger even at home, therefore if the dogs of the world bark at me, I neither care nor wonder.'

Our second Bishop is that great prose-poet, Jeremy Taylor, who, though his meaning was for the most part too richly adorned with splendid images to

be bottled in tiny phrases, yet gives us now and then in a brief and shining sentence the essence of his thought. ‘Virtue,’ he says, for instance, ‘is like hunger or thirst; it must be satisfied or we die.’ ‘He that loves not his wife and children, feeds a Lioness at home, and broods a nest of sorrow,’ is a sentence on married life in one of his sermons, and writing on the same subject in his *Holy Living* he picturesquely tells us: ‘Better sit up all night, than go to bed with a Dragon.’

Other sentences from Jeremy Taylor worth quoting are:

> Men are pleased to call that death which is the end of dying, when we cease to die any more.
>
> To a good man there are very many more reasons to be afraid of life than death.
>
> Every book is new to an ill memory.
>
> He that is to raise a Castle in an hour, sits down and does nothing towards it.

Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who was born in 1663, and died in 1755, was, like Lord Halifax, a deliberate writer of aphorisms; and in his *Sacra Privata* and his *Maxims of Piety and of Christianity* we possess two large collections of pious and edifying maxims. Wilson is principally remembered—as far as he is at all remembered—by the praise given by Matthew Arnold to this holy bishop, who united, Matthew Arnold says, the most sincere ardour and unction ‘to that downright honesty and plain good sense which our English race has so powerfully applied to the divine impossibilities of religion.’

Bishop Wilson’s maxims have often a perfection of form which distinguishes them from the general run of pious reflections. Since aphorisms are too apt to be cynical, let us take advantage of his art to elevate our minds for the moment, by quoting a few of what Matthew Arnold described as his ‘valuable precepts and admonitions of piety’:

> You say you believe the Gospel; you live as if you were sure not one word of it is true.
>
> One does not begin to fall when the fall becomes sensible.
>
> We never despise others, but when we do not reflect upon ourselves.
>
> Intemperance in talk makes a dreadful havoc in the heart.

We seldom ever laugh without crime.

Remember that you are something more than body.

All such dresses are forbidden, which incite irregular desires.

One unguarded look betrayed David.

He who loves praise, loves temptation.

He that fancies he is perfect, may lose by pride that which he attained by grace.

But the aphoristic art, with its taint of Original Sin—and it was by means of a general reflection that Satan tempted Eve—seems to have got the better of Bishop Wilson, as it did of Bishop Taylor, now and then. 'Love is a talkative passion' is a saying which his episcopal pen might blamelessly let drop, but on opening his *Maxims of Piety and Christianity*, we are surprised to find him saying: 'When we attend a funeral, we are apt to comfort ourselves with the happy difference that is betwixt us and our dead friend.' Even less edifying, and we must hope less true, is the remark on the first page of his volume: 'How many are raised to high posts in the Church by the instigation of the devil, that their fall may be more dismal!' Archbishops seem to have been able better than bishops to resist the Satanic temptations of the tongue. The only archiepiscopal saying which has become famous is that of Archbishop Whately: 'Throw dirt enough and some will stick'—a recommendation quoted by Newman (not without malice) in the preface to his *Apologia*.

XV

In addition to these divines there are three seventeenth-century writers, Hobbes and Milton and Sir Thomas Browne, in whose writings aphorisms can be found. The works of Hobbes are full, indeed, of aphoristic thought, but he did not often express it with aphoristic terseness; his definition of laughter as a 'sudden glory' caused by the sense of one's own superiority, is famous, as is also that of the Papacy as 'the Ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof'; and we find a true aphorism in the sentence 'The Contempt of good Reputation is called Impudence.' Milton's prose reflections are almost all too ample, and too amply embroidered, for us to call him an 'aphorismer,' in a word of his own coining. The following sentences may, however, be quoted:

Kings most commonly, though strong in Legions, are but weak at Arguments.

They who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness.

The giddy favour of a mutining Rout is as dangerous as their fury.

One demanding how God employed Himself before the world was made, had answer, that He was making Hell for curious questioners.

Truth never comes into the World, but like a Bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth.

Sir Thomas Browne is more deserving of the appellation of an aphorist; for though most of his meditations hover on vast and dusty wings, they are sometimes brief and pointed, as in the famous phrase: 'There is all Africa and her prodigies in us'; and they bear upon them his grave and ironic expression, with now and then the solemn, and yet whimsical smile with which he would sometimes gaze upon the world and its follies.

The vices we scoff at in others, laugh at us within.

There's another man within me that's angry with me.

Too many there be to whom a dead enemy smells well, and who find musk and amber in revenge.

The Religion of one seems madness unto another.

Affection should not be too sharp-eyed, and love is not to be made by magnifying glasses.

If things were seen as they truly are, the beauty of bodies would be much abridged.

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us.

The race of delight is short, and pleasures have mutable faces.

Tread softly and circumspectly in this funambulatory track and narrow path of goodness.

Afflictions induce callosities, miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon us.

In seventy or eighty years, a man may have a deep gust of the world; know what it is, what it can afford, and what it is to have been a man.

I am not so much afraid of death as ashamed thereof: 'tis the very disgrace and ignominy of our natures.

The world, which took but six days to make, is like to take six thousand to make out.

Another seventeenth-century writer, Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, was a deliberate writer of aphorisms; his works contain a collection of them, and though they are of no great interest or importance, there are among them at least two which may be quoted:

There are more fools than knaves in the world, else the knaves would not have enough to live upon.

This age will make a pretty Farce for the next, if it have any Wit at all to make use of it.

William Penn's *Some Fruits of Solitude, in Reflections and Maxims*, which was published anonymously in 1693, with the *More Fruits of Solitude* published in 1718, are collections of aphoristic sayings which enjoyed immense popularity in their time, and which Robert Louis Stevenson rediscovered and cherished with a peculiar enthusiasm. The ground for this enthusiasm is somewhat difficult to understand, as the reflections of the good Quaker show no great profundity of observation or subtlety of thought. Penn seems, however, to have studied La Rochefoucauld's maxims, and to have learned from him a certain neatness of expression, as when he says, for instance: 'They have a Right to censure, that have a Heart to help'; 'Equivocation is half-way to Lying, as Lying the whole way to Hell'; 'Every Stroke our Fury strikes is sure to hit ourselves at last.'

In the *Posthumous Works* of William Wycherley was published a collection of 308 *Maxims and Moral Reflections*; but these are almost completely devoid of any of the merits of this way of writing. Of much more interest are the maxims of a certain Dr. Fuller of Sevenoaks (1654-1734) who, though famous in his time, is forgotten now. I have attempted in the essay which follows, to wipe away a little of the dust of oblivion which covers his name.

XVI

The writing of aphorisms became something of a fashion in the eighteenth century.[7] Lord Shaftesbury shows in many a sentence of his *Characteristics* that he, like the French duke, and like Lords Halifax and Chesterfield, was a

master of this art. It is, indeed, essentially an aristocratic art, and its greatest master, the sardonic French duke, seems, as Lytton Strachey finely puts it, to have preserved always an air of aristocratic disdain, as if he were saying: 'Yes, these sentences are all perfect; but then, what else would you have? Unless one writes perfect sentences, why should one trouble to write?'

A few of Shaftesbury's sentences will show his quality.

> Our Manners, like our faces, though ever so beautiful, must differ in their Beauty.
>
> Gravity is of the very Essence of Imposture.
>
> The most ingenious way of becoming foolish, is by a System.
>
> 'Tis real Humanity and Kindness, to hide strong Truths from Tender Eyes.
>
> When Men are easy in themselves, they let others remain so.
>
> I know nothing, after all, so real or substantial as Myself.

Swift and Pope and Shenstone all left behind them collections of aphoristic sayings. Those of Swift are admirable in their sardonic terseness, as for example:

> A nice man is a man of nasty ideas.
>
> We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.
>
> I must complain the cards are ill-shuffled, till I have a good hand.
>
> No wise man ever wished to be younger.
>
> All panegyrics are mingled with an infusion of poppy.
>
> Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse.

Pope possessed beyond all poets the aphoristic turn of mind, but employed it mostly in his verse. He could, however, express himself in cutting prose. Men in those days wore rapiers, and he carried his into literature and unsheathed it, too.

> A family is but too often a common wealth of malignants.
>
> That character in conversation which commonly passes for

agreeable, is made up of civility and falsehood.

Party is the madness of many, for the gain of a few.

The most positive men are the most credulous.

Some people will never learn anything, for this reason, because they understand everything too soon.

There are some solitary wretches, who seem to have left the rest of mankind only as Eve left Adam, to meet the devil in private.

The aphorisms of another poet of the eighteenth century, Shenstone, are much more numerous, and are not lacking in observation of others and of himself. But though his coins possess a certain weight, lustre is for the most part lacking: there is little distinction in their form and phrasing. But not always, as for instance:

There seem to be near as many people that want passion as want reason.

When a wife or mistress lives as in a jail, the person that confines her lives the life of a jailer.

The word Folly is, perhaps, the prettiest word in the language.

There is nothing more universally commended than a fine day; the reason is that people can commend it without envy.

Another book deserves mention, Richard Fulke Greville's *Maxims, Characters and Reflections* (1756), a work which Boswell said, was 'entitled to more praise than it had received.' Fulke Greville, whom Fanny Burney described as 'the finest gentleman about Town,' wished to shine not only in that capacity, but as a writer and thinker as well, waited for fame after the publication of his book, 'with dignity rather than anxiety,' but appears to have shown himself a little disappointed when fame delayed. Virginia Woolf, in the Second Series of her *Common Reader*, gives a most amusing account of Dr. Burney's party at which Fulke Greville consented to meet some celebrities of the literary world, including Dr. Johnson, and was discomfited and forced to take his departure. 'It is a thousand pities,' Mrs. Woolf observes, 'that time with her poppy dust has covered Mr. Greville so that only his most prominent features, his birth, his person, and his nose emerge.' It may be perhaps possible to wipe away a little of that poppy dust by quoting a few of his aphorisms, which are certainly not without merit:

They who listen to themselves, are not listened to by others.

A proud man never shows his pride so much as when he is civil.

You should never be clever but when you cannot help it.

A man must be a fool indeed, if I think him one at the time he is applauding me.

No fruit has a more precise marked period of maturity than love; if neglected to be gathered at that time, it will certainly fall to the ground and die away.

They that seldom take pleasure, seldom give pleasure.

To divest one's self of some prejudices, would be like taking off the skin to feel the better.

The mirth of fools inspires melancholy.

No wonder we love disguised flattery, when we love it even when it is known.

We confess our faults in the plural, and deny them in the singular.

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[7] In 1701 a collection of aphorisms, purporting to be written by two authors, was published anonymously under the title of *Laconics*. A few sentences from it are perhaps worth quoting.

> When a wise man seems covetous, 'tis not that he loves money more, but that he values the world and mankind less.
>
> Women owe their ruin more to one another than to us.
>
> A golden shield is a great defence.
>
> 'Tis not a love to virtue, but a felicity of temper that makes us good.
>
> The fair sex would be an agreeable amusement to mankind if they did not make so deep an impression.

Truth is the only jewel that an ordinary person may come at easier than a King.

XVII

Aphoristic writing fell out of fashion in the nineteenth century; with the exception of Hazlitt and Emerson, none of its authors have paid much attention to this art. Hazlitt, indeed, describes Coleridge as spending his life in the momentary pursuit of truths as they were butterflies; and this pursuit, he adds, was Coleridge's chief faculty as well as pleasure. We possess several collections of Coleridge's thoughts and sayings, but these are, in their form, more brief essays than aphorisms, and we do not find among them many terse and pointed phrases. A few exceptions may be noted.

> Praises of the unworthy are felt by ardent minds as robberies of the deserving.
>
> To most men, experience is like the stern lights of a ship, which illumine only the track it has passed.
>
> He that will fly without wings must fly in his dreams.
>
> The wise only possess ideas; the greater part of mankind are possessed by them.
>
> The man's desire is for the woman; but the woman's desire is rarely other than for the desire of the man.
>
> Something inherently mean in action! Even the creation of the universe disturbs my idea of the Almighty's greatness.

The last saying is characteristic of this great idler; the sayings of the greatest man of action of his time, the Duke of Wellington, have become, like those of his ducal predecessor, La Rochefoucauld, more famous. 'Nothing,' he wrote after Waterloo, 'except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won'; and his sayings: 'All soldiers run away, madam'; 'I don't care a twopenny damn what becomes of the ashes of Napoleon Bonaparte'; 'When my journal appears, many statues must come down'; 'Always make water when you can'; are still remembered, as also his remark when he first saw the Reformed Parliament: 'I never saw so many shocking bad hats in my life.' Also remembered is the story of how, when someone accosted him in the street with the remark: 'Mr. Higginbottom, I believe,' the Duke replied: 'If you believe that, you will believe anything.'

Of the poets of the time, besides Coleridge, Keats and Shelley have written a few aphorisms about their art, as when Keats said:

> Poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity.

And Shelley wrote:

> A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.
>
> Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World.

In Shelley's lifetime a certain C. C. Colton published a big book called *Lacon; Many Thoughts in Few Words*, which enjoyed an enormous popularity, and of which at least eighteen editions were printed. Though it was described as 'one of the best collections of English aphorisms that will ever be put together,' a modern reader can find little more in it than verbiage and pretentious platitude.

Of a much more brilliant aphorist of this time, the learned and bibulous Irish scholar, Dr. Maginn, I have (since he is almost forgotten now) written a separate account, which will be found in the following pages.

The novelist, Lord Lytton, was not without the aphoristic gift, and printed at the age of twenty-three a little volume entitled, *Weeds and Wild Flowers*, by L. G. L. B. ('not published Paris 1826'), which included a few aphorisms worth quoting:

> A man should be very wise to play the fool.
>
> Vanity only sins when it hurts the vanity of others.
>
> Knowledge of the world is knowledge of its sins.
>
> If you wish to be loved, show more of your faults than your virtues.
>
> Men never forgive those in whom there is nothing to pardon.
>
> There is no feeling of liberty like that of escape from half-friends.

In his novel, *Paul Clifford* (1835), (as Mr. Bernard Shaw has reminded me), he included, under the title of *Tomlinsoniana*, a few more sayings:

> Yield to a man's tastes and he will yield to your interests.

Never commit the error of the over-shrewd, and deem human nature worse than it is.

When you talk to the half-wise, twaddle; when you talk to the ignorant, brag; when you talk to the sagacious, look very humble, and ask their opinion.

George Eliot's novels are rich in aphoristic wisdom; her mind had a width and depth something like that of Goethe's, but she lacked for the most part Goethe's terseness of expression. When she writes:

Watch your own speech, and notice how it is guided by your less conscious purposes.

It is the lot of every man who has to speak for the satisfaction of the crowd, that he must often speak in virtue of yesterday's faith, hoping it will come back to-morrow,

her psychological *aperçus* are of greater value than the expression of them. In Mrs. Poyser, however, she created the greatest aphorist of English fiction, and certain phrases from her other writings entitle her to be called the only female aphorist of whom this branch of literature can boast.

A fool or idiot is one who expects things to happen that never can happen.

Worldly faces never look so worldly as at a funeral.

Ignorance is not so damnable as humbug, but when it prescribes pills it may happen to do more harm.

Our thoughts are often worse than we are.

One way of getting an idea of our fellow-countrymen's miseries is to go and look at their pleasures.

Another Victorian novelist, George Meredith, was also a lover of aphorisms, and those he too sparely quotes from the *Egoist's Handbook* and from the Pilgrim's *Scrip*, make us wish that we possessed more sayings from these imaginary collections. Two at least are worth quoting:

In a dissension between a man and a wife that one is in the right who has the most friends.

Although it blew hard when Cæsar crossed the Rubicon, the

passage of that river is commonly calm.

From the novels of Disraeli collections of aphorisms have been made, but these must be classed for the most part among the counterfeits and false coins of thought.

Of all our story-tellers, Robert Louis Stevenson was the most accomplished aphorist; he was a writer of moral essays as well as of fiction, and in these essays can be found many witty and wise sayings. His aphorism: ‘To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive,’ is famous, and a few others are worth quoting.

> The obscurest epoch is to-day.
>
> A mortified appetite is never a wise companion.
>
> If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong.
>
> Temptations are beautiful.
>
> For God’s sake give me a young man who has brains enough to make a fool of himself!
>
> Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail, in good spirits.
>
> The price we pay for money is paid in liberty.
>
> It is perhaps a more fortunate destiny to have a taste for collecting shells than to be born a millionaire.
>
> Once you are married, there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good.
>
> Marriage is one long conversation, chequered by disputes.
>
> There can be no fairer ambition than to excel in talk.
>
> All natural talk is a festival of ostentation.

XVIII

Two other nineteenth-century writers who were endowed with the aphoristic turn of thought must have special mention; the first of these is Sir Henry Taylor, a poet whose play, *Philip van Artevelde*, is still remembered. Taylor was also an eminent Civil Servant and successful man of affairs, and for some strange reason it occurred to him to tell the truth about worldly success and how it is obtained—to describe the methods and arts by means of

which ambitious men achieve the objects of their ambition. In this book, which he called *The Statesman*, and which was a cause, among statesmen, of considerable scandal, he condensed in brief phrases much of that worldly wisdom which has so often found expression in aphoristic literature. Sir Henry Taylor, when he found how much right-thinking people had been scandalized by his *Statesman*, pretended that he had written it with an ironic intention; but his maxims, like those of Chesterfield, possess a kind of weight and cynical integrity, as if he had embodied in them the frank expression of genuine experience, and had not, like many aphorists, made any attempt to be amusing or plausible or clever or ironic.

> Conscience is, in most men, an anticipation of the opinion of others.
>
> The world will commonly end by making men that which it thinks them.
>
> Shy and unready men are great betrayers of secrets.
>
> In the intimacies which are formed by shy men, they do not choose, but are chosen.

But Sir Henry Taylor's subject being that of ambition his maxims are mostly concerned with this subject. Men of great abilities, he says, are generally of a vigorous animal nature; indeed, he had heard a statesman declare that most of them have died of over-eating. They are ambitious, for if ambition be wanting nothing will bring their minds into full activity, and nature may be said to have fallen short of her purposes. As to how then are they to attain the objects of their ambition, he gives much excellent advice. A statesman, he says, should marry fairly young, and more or less at the beginning of his career, as marriage is some protection at least against irruptions of ill-timed passion, which will take his mind away from his public duties. Since ambition is his vocation, he should marry ambitiously, and if he be not rich, should marry for money. But not a wife who idolizes him, for domestic flattery, he said, is the most dangerous of all flatteries. In the earlier stages of his career, he should make many acquaintances, and some of these should be of obscure and middle station, so that he may escape the discredit of seeming only to court the great. Some of these humble people, moreover, will probably rise in the world, and then he can easily, without the imputation of interested motives, renew and improve his relations with them. Potential friendships are, therefore, to be preferred to wanton intimacies which may easily become a burden as he rises in the world; but if he finds himself entangled in closer alliances with obscure and unserviceable men, he should

occasionally do to one of them a great and unexpected favour, which will enable him to spare his trouble in other instances.

Another point which it is important to remember, he expresses in the maxim, ‘One who would thrive by seeking favours from the great, should never trouble them for small ones’; for a Minister, he says, can probably make a man’s fortune with as little trouble as it costs him to write a note, and will measure the favour by the trouble it has cost him, rather than by its intrinsic value. It was important, moreover, to let people think they deceive us since, as he puts it:

> Men of the world, knowing that there are few things so unpopular as penetration, take care to wear the appearance of being imposed on.

On the art of flattering the great, Sir Henry Taylor makes many wise observations. Compliments should not be made on the spur of the occasion and seem prompted by it, but proffered after some interval of time, as something which has dwelt in the flatterer’s mind, and been long remembered by him. It was, moreover, the grace of flattery so to let your compliments fall that, as he put it, ‘you shall seem to consider them as a matter of indifference to whom they are addressed.’ The mode of flattery, however, which being at once safe and efficacious is best adapted to the purposes of a statesman, was the flattery of listening, of seeming to drink in every word that is said with thirsty ears, since, as Taylor aphoristically put it: ‘No siren did ever so charm the ear of the listener as the listening ear has charmed the soul of the siren.’

Such, then, were some of the tricks of the statesman, and such were the arts of rising in the world, as Sir Henry Taylor expounded them, which, he said, it would be quite as well for the statesman to despise as to practise. But was it worth while to take all this trouble? No, it wasn’t, he answered, with some emphasis. Few people deliberately concluded with themselves that happiness in life is to be best promoted by accomplishing the objects of ambition. Why then, notwithstanding their better judgment, did they devote their lives to this pursuit? Did they not desire to be happy? Yes, they did, but the happiness they pursued was their immediate satisfaction. The rising from one step to another was really delightful; and thus he said, writing as a statesman for other statesmen, for the pleasure of the transition, ‘we sacrifice the state.’

Of even more interest are the wise and pregnant sentences which abound in the writings of Walter Bagehot, that country banker who was not only the profoundest political thinker of his time, but also an accomplished painter of moral portraits, and a penetrating critic of literature as well. A few of his

observations on the behaviour of mankind in general are worth quoting.

> The whole history of civilization is strewn with creeds and institutions which were invaluable at first, and deadly afterwards.
>
> Strong beliefs win strong men, and then make them stronger.
>
> So long as there are earnest believers in the world, they will always wish to punish opinions.
>
> An inability to stay quiet, an irritable desire to act directly, is one of the most conspicuous failings of mankind.
>
> When great questions end, little parties begin.
>
> A great English divine has been described as always leaving out the principle upon which his arguments rested; even if it was stated to him, he regarded it as far-fetched and extravagant.
>
> Poverty is an anomaly to rich people. It is very difficult to make out why people who want dinner do not ring the bell.

Some of Bagehot's general reflections on the universe, and on life and human nature deserve to be remembered.

> Taken as a whole, the universe is absurd.
>
> A cold, cynical wisdom particularly disapproves of most men's *best* actions.
>
> Nothing is more unpleasant than a virtuous person with a mean mind.
>
> It is good to be without vices, but it is not good to be without temptations.
>
> The greatest mistake is trying to be more agreeable than you can be.
>
> Life is a school of probability.
>
> The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.

XIX

Among more modern writers, Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*, like Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, was a copious writer of thoughts and

reflections; but his notes, like those of Coleridge, are more like tiny essays than aphorisms, although they contain a certain number of terse and famous sayings.

> Life is like playing a violin solo in public and learning the instrument as one goes on.
>
> To live is like to love—all reason is against it, and all healthy instinct for it.
>
> No gold, no Holy Ghost.
>
> Though God cannot alter the past, historians can.
>
> Genius has been defined as a supreme capacity for taking trouble. It might be more fitly described as a supreme capacity for getting into trouble of all kinds.
>
> The New Jerusalem, when it comes, will probably be found so far to resemble the old as to stone its prophets freely.
>
> Life is one long process of getting tired.
>
> We have all sinned and come short of the glory of making ourselves as comfortable as we easily might have done.

Although Oscar Wilde's aphorisms are, for all their brilliance, more paradoxical than true, there are a few of them which deserve to be quoted.

> To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.
>
> Simple pleasures are the last refuge of the complex.
>
> Scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.
>
> Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it.
>
> The peerage is the best thing in fiction that the English have ever done.

Dean Inge has called attention to the aphorisms of Churton Collins, 'an able critic,' he describes him, 'who did not, I believe, show much worldly wisdom in his conduct of affairs.' Some of Collins' aphorisms, since most of them were only published in one of the Reviews, and have not been reprinted, are worth remembering.

> Truth is the object of philosophy, but not always of philosophers.

A wise man, like the moon, only shows his bright side to the world.

Envy is the sincerest form of flattery.

Never claim as a right what you can ask as a favour.

To profit from good advice requires more wisdom than to give it.

Never trust a man who speaks well of everybody.

Weak and impulsive people may be, and very often are, sincere, but they are seldom truthful.

Always mistrust a subordinate who never finds fault with his superior.

A woman who is confuted is never convinced.

There can be only one end to marriage without love, and that is love without marriage.

The world, like an accomplished hostess, pays most attention to those whom it will soonest forget.

The Secret of success in life is known only to those who have not succeeded.

The late F. H. Bradley has printed a few—too few—philosophical aphorisms in the preface of his *Appearance and Reality*, and in 1930 a little collection of his other aphorisms was printed at Oxford. A few of these may be quoted.

Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct.

Where everything is bad it must be good to know the worst.

The hunter for aphorisms on human nature has to fish in muddy water, and he is even condemned to find much of his own mind.

If what offends you in general attracts you in one, it is time to trust in Providence.

When all is rotten, it is a man’s work to cry stinking fish.

There are persons who, when they cease to shock us, cease to interest us.

The secret of happiness is to admire without desiring. And that is

not happiness.

In certain Victorian biographies, the lives for instance of Coventry Patmore, of Rossetti, and of Benjamin Jowett, we find little collections of aphoristic sayings; Rossetti's are not very characteristic; the connoisseur in these matters would hardly attribute without evidence to the author of the *Blessed Damozel* the remark, 'No skunk can get rid of his own name by giving it to another.' The sayings of the famous Master of Balliol bear a more authentic stamp of his own image: 'Young men make great mistakes in life; for one thing they idealize love too much'; 'I hope our young men will not grow into such *dodgers* as these old men are. I believe everything that a *young* man says to me'; 'Nowhere probably is there more true feeling and nowhere worse taste, than in a churchyard'—Jowett's surviving friends and pupils will recognize in these sayings the acute accents of the Master's speech.

Of all the collected sayings in these biographies those that Mrs. Creighton has printed in her life of Bishop Creighton are of the greatest interest and value. The late Bishop of London was, as Dean Inge has pointed out, a gifted aphorist; and when Creighton remarks, 'No people do so much harm as those who go about doing good,' adding, however, for our consolation, 'It is wonderful how little mischief we can do with all our trouble,' we learn, as we have learned from Bishop Wilson, that English prelates when they take to writing aphorisms can be quite as caustic as the lay masters of this form.[8]

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[8] Another dignitary of the English Church of a somewhat earlier date, Sydney Smith, Canon of St. Paul's, though he wrote some *Maxims and Rules of Life*, is more famous as a wit than as an aphorist. A few of his sentences are, however, worth quoting:

> A few yards in London dissolve or cement friendship.
>
> The best way of answering a bad argument is to let it go on.
>
> All establishments die of dignity.
>
> Arithmetic is the natural cure for the passion of fear.
>
> Human beings cling to their delicious

tyrannies and to their exquisite nonsense, till death stares them in the face.

Errors, to be dangerous, must have a great deal of truth mingled with them.

Who can prove his own personal identity? A man may think himself a clergyman, and believe he has preached for these ten years past; but I defy him to offer any sort of *proof* that he has not been a fishmonger all the time.

Peevishness is resentment, excited by trifles.

Old friendships are destroyed by toasted cheese, and hard salted meat has led to suicide.

Manners are the shadows of virtue.

It is a great proof of shyness to crumble bread at dinner.

Death must be distinguished from dying, with which it is often confounded.

Lightning must be the wit of heaven.

XX

Among living authors, Dr. Mackail's writings show that he possesses the aphoristic gift, although he rarely exercises it. His definition of success in life is, however, the most satisfactory I have ever found.

> To have known the best, and to have known it for the best, is success in life.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is almost the only living writer who has published a collection of detached aphoristic sentences. These are printed in his *Maxims for Revolutionists*.

> We are told that when Jehovah created the world he saw that it was good. What would he say now?
>
> Self-sacrifice enables us to sacrifice other people without blushing.

Home is the girl’s prison and the woman’s workhouse.

If you strike a child, take care that you strike it in anger.

Every man over forty is a scoundrel.

Man is the only animal which esteems itself rich in proportion to the number and voracity of its parasites.

Vulgarity in a King flatters the majority of the nation.

Hardly any of us have ethical energy enough for more than one really inflexible point of honour.

After all, the wrong road always leads somewhere.

Why was I born with such contemporaries?

Martyrdom is the only way in which a man can become famous without ability.

Hamlet’s experiences simply could not have happened to a plumber.

Mr. George Santayana’s writings show that this delicate art, so difficult and so full of perils, is not yet among the perished arts, since one of its masters is still living.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

It is easier to make a saint out of a libertine than out of a prig.

Not to believe in love is a great sign of dullness.

The family is one of nature’s masterpieces.

Dying is something ghastly, as being born is something ridiculous.

Society is like the air, necessary to breathe, but insufficient to live on.

The meaning of the word vanity never crosses the vulgar heart.

Why should not things be largely absurd, futile and transitory? They are so, and we are so, and they and we go very well together.

One real world is enough.

Great is this organism of mud and fire, terrible this vast, painful, glorious experiment.

A way foolishness has of revenging itself is to excommunicate the world.

Fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.

Mind is a great symptom of health.

The irrational in the human has something about it altogether repulsive and terrible, as we see in the maniac, the miser, the drunkard, or the ape.

Our dignity is not in what we do, but what we understand. The whole world is doing things.

Reason is not a force contrary to the passions, but a harmony possible among them.

Nature is innocent, and so are all her impulses and moods when taken in isolation; it is only on meeting that they blush.

Happiness is the only sanction of life; where happiness fails, existence remains a mad and lamentable experiment.

Happiness is something men ought to pursue, although they seldom do so.

To understand oneself is the classic form of consolation, to elude oneself is the romantic.

Culture is on the horns of this dilemma: if profound and noble it must remain rare, if common it must become mean.

It is in rare and scattered instants that beauty smiles even on her adorers, who are reduced for habitual comfort to remembering her past favours.

To be brief is almost a condition of being inspired.

To be bewitched is not to be saved.

For an idea ever to be fashionable is ominous, since it must afterwards be always old fashioned.

XXI

Life, as I have said, is the subject-matter of the aphorist, the life in this universe and on the planet of ‘that good, that bad’—as one of our aphorists described him—‘that knowing, that ignorant, that reasoning and unreasonable

creature, Man.' This incomprehensible being has been always the main object for the observation, moral or satiric, of gnomic writers; and his activities, as Dr. Johnson said, will furnish 'the materials of speculation to the end of time.' His modes of thought and action, his hopes and fears first engage our interest, his association with his fellow human beings, his ties of friendship, of love, marriage and the family, and his contacts, in all their infinite complexity, with the many-peopled world in which he plays his successful or ineffectual part. The passions of envy, anger and emulation aroused by his encounter with the world, the fools and knaves he meets there, the arts by which he circumvents them, and the worldly prudence that should guide him, form the subject matter of those worldly counsels in which our English aphorists abound. They seem to regard verbal encounters as of especial interest and importance, and to almost more than any other subject they have given their attention to the clash of tongues. 'A man is made by conversation,' Dr. Johnson said; his talk may establish or undo him in the world. A sage courtier of the Chinese empire once boasted that with his 'five inches of tongue' he had won his way to greatness in the great world; and this world of kings and courts, of ceremony and pageants, of wealth and vanity and fashion, has been the subject of much moral as well as worldly observation; while to the aphorists of so political a race as the English the subject of power and politics has always aroused, of course, a special interest.

Finally comes the great subject of death, with which this sententious creature vanishes from the scene of his activities, leaving behind a few memorable comments upon himself and his experiences. This aphoristic wisdom is, as I have suggested, not altogether to the taste of those who prefer to take nobler views of themselves and of human nature. Others there are, however, who like to become aware of the real nature and consequences of things, and the motives which seem inseparable from our mortal condition. This wisdom of disillusion teaches us to know ourselves and our fellow human beings; and if, as Plato says, we are puppets of the gods, and the universe is itself (as he hints) not altogether serious, man may acquire from this wisdom that capacity to despise himself which, it has been said, is perhaps his highest dignity. Charity, too, it teaches us; for our frailties, as the wise Halifax remarks, will pull our rage by the sleeve, and whisper gentleness to us in our censures.

But I feel that I am raising my voice into a tone rather above myself and most of the aphorists of whom I am writing. On the whole they are a malicious lot; their object is not to extricate man from the mire of his condition, but rather to roll him more deeply in it. So much do they enjoy fishing in muddy waters, that they are not unwilling to pursue their sport even in their own

bosoms.

Since I myself have been at the pains to collect so many of their unamiable sayings, it would be useless for me to deny that I also do not mind looking at the seamy side of things—or taking at least a glance now and then in that direction. Still, let me say, in justice to myself, that I retain enough rectitude to remember the moralist's admonition that this art of transfixing the ignominies of our nature on the pins of polished phrases is an art which it may be wiser not to cultivate; though certainly, as the cynical Duke wrote to the aphoristic Marquise de Sablé, the taste for it is a taste which is as catching as a cold.

1928.

X

A VISIT TO SEVENOAKS

I went to Sevenoaks the other day to see a doctor. As the purpose of my visit was not medical but moral, it was of little importance that Dr. Fuller died more than two hundred years ago at the age of eighty. What I rather regretted was the death after death, so to speak, of this once-famous physician—the way his name had come to be forgotten, or at the most confused with that of the Thomas Fuller who wrote *The Worthies* and the *Church History*—a divine who belonged to another generation and another family. My Thomas Fuller, when he was pluming himself, as he put it, for his flight to Heaven (a stately tablet, commemorating the date of that flight in 1734, I found in the near-by church) composed four books of 'Right Thinking and Acting,' for the purpose of instructing his son, John Fuller, how to manage his life amid the perplexities of human existence. This cautious regulation of conduct seems to have been in Sevenoaks at that time (as it is, indeed, I suppose, everywhere and always) a complicated business; to deal with it adequately, Dr. Fuller found that more than 6,000 maxims were needed. Many of these are borrowed platitudes; but most of them seem to be the fruit of his own observation, in which he tells his son the truth about life as he has seen it in Sevenoaks, where Vanity was, he said, the mainspring of almost all actions, whether good or bad.

The first chapter of this wisdom was to learn how to manage one's Passions; young John couldn't hope, of course, to tear them out by the roots; still he might hope to hold them down, at least for a time. 'Labour thou,' he says in one of the wisest of his maxims, 'to make thy Body go of the Soul's errands'; especially on the errand of marriage, on which subject he gives many counsels and cautions. John should marry a Fortune as well as a Face, and in general let his choice be determined by his ear, not by his eye, since we all, when we look at a woman, befool our judgments, he admits, with thinking too much of what he calls her 'fantastical Invisibilities.' Finally, in one of the wisest of matrimonial maxims, he says:

> Keep thy eyes wide open before Marriage; and half-shut afterwards.

With regard to the choice of friends, those should be selected who were full of Complacency, Alacrity, and pleasant Hope. But let John beware of

making too many friends, lest he be forced to sympathize with the troubles of too many people. A ‘melancholy, sad Soul’ should never be chosen: ‘He goes always heavy loaded,’ the Doctor warns his son, ‘and thou must bear half.’ Above all, impecunious friends were to be avoided—the old man is most emphatic on this point; he himself, he says in Maxim 1759, had been all his life clogged with several such, whose endless necessities had never let him enjoy his own money. If he hadn’t helped them, they had made a grievance of it; and if he had tried to do so, never—and this was the worst of it—had he really done them any good.

Enemies appear to have played at that date a larger part in men’s lives than they do at present, when we are too busy to spend our time plotting each others’ ruin—too busy, or too indifferent. But the leisurely town of Sevenoaks was, we gather, so full of evil plotting and malice that an honest man could not hope to thrive there without dissimulation; he must wear a mask, and encounter with his own craft that of his enemies. One good way to harm them, the good doctor suggests, was to over-praise them, and thus put people against them; another wise way was to give them good advice, which naturally they wouldn’t follow.

The class of people whom Dr. Fuller called ‘Grandees,’ were, with enemies, of the greatest importance. Aristocrats play no longer a predominant part in modern life, in which the gulf between the Great World and the Real World grows wider every year. But in the eighteenth century the Great were really great, and success in life largely depended upon a wary management of one’s relations with them. Dr. Fuller’s maxims are many on this subject. Save for what one could get from them, it was, on the whole, best, he told his son, to keep out of their way—a ‘plain, honest Man’ wasn’t likely to thrive in the shade of those ‘great Trees.’ All the same, there they were, round Sevenoaks, those Great People (couldn’t the Doctor see the deer grazing, just beyond his garden, in the park of Knole?); one must solicit their favours of course—not to do so was to confess oneself ‘a poor sneaking spirit’; and about the art of making requests he has a good deal to say. Spring them unexpectedly, he advises, before the Great Man has time to think of excuses; and, his defence once broken down, to spring immediately another request was often good policy. The morning was a bad time to ask for money; the afternoon was better, especially in fine weather. Other maxims for dealing with Magnates show the same worldly wisdom. Don’t give them information; they resent it; don’t muse or seem melancholy in their company, ‘they like it not’: and if John should be cheated by one of them ‘Lose thy Money,’ his father counsels, ‘and say Nothing.’

The art of talk is a matter about which the old Doctor talks a lot himself; it seems indeed to have been much more cultivated at Sevenoaks at that time than it is now anywhere in England. His advice on this subject consists mostly of warnings:

> Beware of a fine tongue, it will sting thee.
>
> Never provoke the Fury of Bigots by exposing their Sentiments.
>
> Be not extravagantly high in expression of thy Commendations of Men thou likest. It may make the Hearers' Stomachs rise.
>
> Take heed how thou offendest Men raised from low Condition.
>
> Sing and hum not to thyself, nor drum with thy Feet or Fingers in Company; It shows disregard.
>
> We do not injure Truth every time we do not speak it.
>
> Say not, I neither eat nor drink in a Morning; I am apt to be troubled with Corns; my Child said such a witty thing last Night.
>
> A constant popping off of Proverbs will make thee a By-word thyself.
>
> If thou hast a mind to get Esteem in Company, have the Art to edge about, till thou canst get into a Subject thou hast studied, and art Master of.
>
> To confirm and establish thy own Opinions, it is best to argue with Judgments below thine own.
>
> If thou art a Person that hast good Authority with the Company, it were good to look confidently, yet not scornfully, and then mildly say, 'This is my Opinion.'

Such was Dr. Fuller's opinion; such was life in Sevenoaks two hundred years ago, in which town he advised his son not to try to play the part of a 'governing, leading Man.' 'I'll tell thee,' he says, 'my very Thought; an obscure Life is more natural, the more easy.'

> The chief thing thou hast to study and endeavour in this World is to make thy Life comfortable.

This was the sum of the good old man's advice. Whether John Fuller achieved this laudable aspiration I do not know; to make oneself truly comfortable in this uncomfortable world isn't easy, and Samuel Butler

confesses, (as has been quoted), that we have all of us sinned and fallen short of that glory. Probably the admonitions of Dr. Fuller were as much wasted as those of that other eighteenth-century, admonitory parent.

Lord Chesterfield's home in London has been pulled down, but Dr. Fuller's handsome old house of red-brick still stands in Sevenoaks, and behind it still stretches his stately garden. In the sunshine of the October afternoon on which I paid my visit, an air of golden mediocrity seemed to envelop the place —a mediocrity of modest wealth and comfort, which, embodied in the eighteenth-century houses that face the unfrequented streets of smaller English towns, is one of the happiest and most perfect achievements of the English feeling for good taste, for beauty, and for the quiet dignity of life. I liked to think of the old gentleman prosing away there to his well-advised son. A bore if you like; but is an elderly moralist in a large wig out of place in a polite conversation-piece of eighteenth-century painting?

For those who have a taste for terse statements of truths about life as it really is (if indeed there be any who share my preference for salted rather than for sugared almonds at the feast of Reason), it may be of interest to quote a few more of Dr. Fuller's Maxims, which embody so practicable and complete a scheme of existence, and upon which, out of the seventeenth century he spent so much of his life in, there falls here and there a gleam of that period's vanishing splendour of diction.

> Indulge not a drowsy Temper in Bed. In the Grave there will be sleeping enough.
>
> If thou lookest too often in thy Glass, thou wilt not so much see thy Face as thy Folly.
>
> I advise thee to visit thy Relations and Friends, but I advise thee not to live too near them.
>
> Act nothing in a furious Passion, it is putting to Sea in a Storm.
>
> Learn how to refuse Favours. This is a great and a very useful Art.
>
> To quicken the Memory of past Kindness thou hast done to any one, is a very nice Point to Manage.
>
> Let not thy Will roar when thy Power can but whisper.
>
> If thou farest well, enjoy it to thyself, and do not cry Roast-meat.
>
> In case all the Constellations should bear thy Name, shouldest

thou be the better for it?

1936.

XI

CAPTAIN SHANDON

Readers of Thackeray will remember the Irish journalist, Captain Shandon, whom young Pendennis visits in Fleet prison, finding him dressed in a tattered dressing-gown, and talking with enthusiasm of the newly founded *Pall Mall Gazette*, which he was to edit, and to which magazine, 'written by gentlemen for gentlemen,' Pendennis was asked to contribute.

It is known that the portrait of Captain Shandon was drawn from the brilliant Irish scholar, essayist and poet, William Maginn, who had migrated from Cork to Edinburgh in 1820, where he had been welcomed by Blackwood, in whose magazine he had inaugurated the famous 'Noctes Ambrosianæ.' In 1823 he came to London, where he contributed to the *Quarterly Review* and various other publications. In 1831 he started the famous *Fraser's Magazine*, which published so much of the best work of the time. Thackeray describes Maginn as one of the best and cleverest and kindest of men, who won the love of everyone who met him, and whose sweetness of nature nothing could disturb. He was endowed with many brilliant gifts—almost indeed with genius—but unfortunately with no genius for moral conduct, being indeed entirely devoid of those virtues that make for respectability and success.

This world is in its way a moral world, but it is only moral in spots. On cold, calculating villains it seems to smile, and it allows solemn humbugs and oppressors to flourish like bay-trees; yet generous prodigals it lashes with unmitigated fury. Its distribution of rewards and punishments would be merely ludicrous, were it not so cruel; and the hallowed preference for the company of publicans and wine-bibbers over that of righteous Pharisees has not affected it in the least.

Certainly poor Dr. Maginn, who trod the primrose path so gaily, by no means deserved the wretched fate allotted to him. The greater part of his life was spent in a debtors' prison, and at the age of forty-nine he died, disreputable, consumptive and prematurely old.

> Barring drink and the girls, I ne'er heard of a sin;
> Many worse, and few better than bright, broken Maginn,—

Such was Lockhart's kindly epitaph, when the poor man's body was flung into

a nameless grave.

Nor has Posterity made, as it sometimes makes, the slightest effort to repair this injustice. Maginn is now remembered, as far as he is at all remembered, for the disastrous effect of his kindness to another half-comic, half-tragic figure of the time, the once famous spinster-poetess Letitia Landon, or L. E. L., as she was known to fame. Though no one reads her poems now, her mysterious and dreadful death in West Africa has kept her name alive. She figures also, we cannot but believe, in Thackeray's inimitable portrait of Miss Bunion, the authoress of *Heartstrings*, *The Deadly Nightshade*, *Passion Flowers*, as she makes her appearance at Mrs. Perkins's Ball.

> 'The sufferings she has had to endure are, she says, beyond compare; the poems which she writes breathe a withering passion, a smouldering despair, an agony of spirit that would melt the soul of a drayman, were he to read them. Well, it is a comfort to see that she can dance of nights, and to know (for the habits of illustrious literary persons are always worth knowing) that she eats a hot mutton chop for breakfast every morning of her blighted existence.
>
> 'She lives in a boarding-house at Brompton, and comes to the party in a fly.'

To this boarding-house in Brompton that most unsuitable person, Dr. Maginn, often came to help her with her outpourings of despair, and some of them he wrote himself; he bargained for her with her publishers, and puffed her volumes when they appeared. This was all very pleasant, but it was very unwise as well. It got them 'talked about,' as the expression is; but being conscious of the nature of their friendship, the genial Irishman and the gushing spinster paid no attention to the warnings of their friends. Before long these friends began to be inundated with anonymous letters full of calumny—letters which no one was able to trace to their source. Were they written by some other poet, envious, as poor Letitia would say, of her literary success? Or perhaps by the mother of Maginn's four children, made jealous by the report that Letitia had been seen sitting in her husband's lap? Or, as her latest biographer suggests, were these defamatory letters composed by the poetess herself, who, being affected by a queer hysteria, and unconsciously curious to experience in life the woes she had celebrated in song, started this campaign of calumny which caused her engagement to John Forster, the future biographer of Dickens, to be broken off, and drove the foolish, innocent, flirtatious, gushing old maid, whose sales were waning, to marry at last, out of the fear of never being married, a dour Scottish administrator from West Africa, where

her career was almost immediately ended by a dose of prussic acid. Whether she killed herself, or was murdered by someone who was jealous of her, was a mystery to her friends.

Maginn's connection with this story has not been forgotten; but none of his writings are remembered now. Though a brilliant talker, who rejoiced greatly in the sound of corks, he was not idle; his collected writings would fill as many volumes as those of Trollope; but they must now be sought for in the dusty old volumes of Blackwood or Fraser, or at the most in the small selection from them which was published by R. W. Montagu in 1885, and has long been out of print. Yet they are excellent reading, for Maginn was a sound scholar and possessed an admirable and racy style. His paper on Farmer's *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* is full of critical insight, and of an accurate, exquisite pedantry which I find delightful; and in an essay on Lady Macbeth he gives a luminous survey, which I have never seen equalled, of the treatment given to women in the literatures of Greece, of Rome, of Italy and England. He translated Homer also in a way that won the praise of Matthew Arnold; and in the writing of stories about Irish adventurers he beat on his own field Thackeray, who owed more to him than has ever been acknowledged. In looking through his amusing essays, I found one of special interest to those who try to see things as past generations saw them.

We are all familiar with the abhorrence, nausea and contempt felt by Byron and his friends for what Byron called the 'p——a-bed' poetry of Keats, of that 'pretentious and ill-bred Cockney poet, that miserable self-polluter of the human mind'; but Maginn, being a sound Tory of the school of Lockhart and Wilson, gives us in a review of *Adonais* the essence of the disgust of another group of good writers for what he calls the 'poetico-metaphysical maniac' Shelley, who, with the Godwinian colony of licentious atheists at Pisa was 'playing the Bacchanal beside the Tuscan Sea.' With gusto, wit and indignation, he writes of the dreary nonsense of *P. B. Shelley's* lamentations for the death of a *Mr. J. Keats*, 'a poor sendentary man of unhealthy aspect who left a decent calling for the melancholy trade of Cockney-poetry,' and who, after writing two or three little books of silly, presumptuous, verse, full of servile Cockney slang, had recently died of a consumption caused (so his friends alleged) by what right-minded people regarded as the undisputably just sentence of the *Quarterly Review*.

After a careful examination of *Adonais*, Maginn finds in this great poem only five readable lines; the rest of this 'odoriferous, colourific, daisy-enamoured style,' being a mere wild waste of words, upon which, in his own opinion, he greatly improved in an elegy on a tom-cat, which he prints with

pride.

> O bard-like spirit! beautiful and swift!
> Sweet lover of pale night!—
> The dazzling glory of thy gold-tinged tail,
> Thy whisker-wavering lips—

Surely lines like these were much better, much less nonsensical and inflated than those of P. B. Shelley's lament! Thus Maginn writes with honest conviction and total unawareness of the crushing Day-of-Judgment reversal which was fated to make ridiculous, before the tribunal of Posterity, this contemporary judgment.

But among Maginn's writings there is one sweet-tempered and infinitely witty book, which ought to make Posterity willing to forgive all his literary and other misdemeanours. In this little volume, which was entitled *The Maxims of Sir Morgan O'Doherty, Bart.*, our kindly tippler has embodied the sparkling essence of his convivial life. It begins with a description of how, in a pot-house, he met a portly, serious-minded old gentleman, with whom he fell into conversation, and whom, as they dined face [to (inferred by Transcriber)] face together, he describes as:

> 'a thoughtful man, delivering his sentences in a weighty and well-considered style. He did not say much, but what he did say was marked with the impress of thought. I found, indeed, that he was a man of only one reflection; but that was a great one. He cast his eye solemnly over the morning paper, which happened to contain the announcement of many bankruptcies. This struck the key-note of his one reflection. "Sir," said he to me, laying down the paper, and taking his spoon cautiously between his fingers, without making any attempt to lift it to his mouth, "Sir, I have now lived in this world sixty-three years, through at least forty of which I have not been a careless or inattentive spectator of what has been passing around me; and I have uniformally found, when a man lives annually on a sum *less* than his year's income—say, five hundred, or five thousand, or five hundred thousand pounds—for the sum makes no difference—that *that* man's accounts are clear at the end of the twelvemonth, and that he does not run into debt. On the contrary, I have uniformly found, when a man lives annually on a sum *more* than his year's income—say, five hundred, five thousand, or five hundred thousand pounds—for the sum makes no difference—that *that* man's accounts are liable, at the end of the twelvemonth, to get into confusion, and

that it must end by his running into debt. Believe me, Sir, that such is the result of my forty and odd years' experience in the world."

'The oracular gravity in which this sentence was delivered—for he paused between every word, I might say between every syllable, and kept the unlifted spoon all the time in suspense between the plate of mulligatawny and his lip, which did not receive the savoury contents until the last syllable died away—struck me with peculiar emphasis, and I puzzled my brain to draw out if possible something equally profound to give in return. Accordingly, after looking straight across at him for a minute, with my head firmly imbedded on my hands while my elbows rested on the table, I addressed him thus: "Sir," said I, "I have only lived thirty-three years in the world, and cannot, of course, boast of the vast experience which you have had; neither have my reasoning faculties been exerted so laboriously as yours appear to have been; but from twenty years' consideration I can assure you that I have observed it as a general rule, admitting of no exception, and thereby in itself forming an exception to a general rule, that if a man walks through Piccadilly, or the Strand, or Oxford Street—for the street makes no difference, provided it be of sufficient length—without an umbrella or other defence against a shower, during a heavy fall of rain, he is inevitably wet; while, on the contrary, if a man walks through Piccadilly, or the Strand, or Oxford Street—for the street makes no difference—during fine dry weather, he runs no chance whatever of being wet to the skin. Believe me, Sir, that such is the result of my twenty and odd years' experience in the world."

'The elderly gentleman had by this time finished his soup. "Sir," said he, "I agree with you. I like to hear rational conversation. Be so good as to give me your card. Here is mine. Name an early date to dine with me. Waiter, what's to pay? Will you, Sir, try my snuff? I take thirty-seven. I wish you, Sir, a good morning." So saying, he quitted the box, leaving me to ruminate upon the discovery made by a man who had lived sixty-three years in the world, and had observed its ways for forty and odd years of that period. I thought with myself that I, too, if I set about it seriously to reflect, might perhaps come to something as striking and original; and have accordingly set about this little work.'

Maginn's maxims thus inspired, being concerned as they mostly are with the three of the main interests of his life, eating and drinking and making love

(though shrewd observations on literature and human nature are mingled with them), possess one of the most important merits of this aphoristic way of writing: they are unmistakably his own—no one else could have written them; as for example:

Never take lobster-sauce to salmon.

Every popular preacher is a goose.

In order to know what cod really is, you must eat it in Newfoundland.

Ass-milk, they say, tastes exceedingly like woman's. No wonder.

In literature and in love, we generally begin in bad taste.

What is an old roofless cathedral compared to a well-built pie?

No cigar-smoker ever committed suicide.

He whose friendship is worth having, must hate and be hated.

It is singular that scarcely any tailor who can make a coat well, can make pantaloons.

Cold pig's face is one of the best things in the world for breakfast.

Much is to be said in favour of toasted cheese for supper.

Some people tell you you should not drink claret after strawberries. They are wrong.

When a man is drunk, it is no matter upon what he has got drunk.

Claret should always be decanted.

There is no such thing as female genius.

Hock cannot be too much, claret cannot be too little, iced.

Maxims are hard reading, demanding a constant stretch of the intellectual faculties. Every word must be diligently pondered, every assertion examined in all its bearings, pursued with a keen eye to its remotest consequences, rejected with a philosophic calmness, or treasured up with the same feeling as a possession to eternity.

Tap claret tastes best out of pewter pots.

Whenever you see a book frequently advertised, you may be pretty sure it is a bad one. If you see a puff quoted in the

advertisement, you may be quite sure.

Never wear a coat with a velvet collar.

We moderns are perhaps inferior to our ancestors in nothing more than in our epitaphs.

The finest of all times for flirting is a wedding. They are all agog, poor things!

Poetry is like claret, one enjoys it only when it is very new, or when it is very old.

People may talk as they like, but after all, London is London.

If a woman has had more than three husbands, she poisons them: avoid her.

The best of all pies is a grouse-pie.

1936.

XII

PENSÉES

I

George Moore once made a protest against the use of the word *pensée* in English which raises a question of more than linguistic interest. Mr. Moore had the Society for Pure English, and all the best authorities, with him when he said that the increasing number of unassimilated French words in English was a real danger to our speech. But this danger can hardly be met, as George Moore seemed to suggest, by putting a ban upon these words and having them deported as undesirable aliens. Many of them are necessary to us; we cannot get on without them; and it is contrary to the traditions of our language to reject the words we need merely because they are of foreign origin. Indeed, just as we have provided the French with a large part of their political vocabulary, so we have received from them a greater number of terms connected with the arts and literature. For many centuries it was our wise custom to enrich our language, and increase its powers of expression, by assimilating these borrowed terms. We did not hesitate to give them English shapes and sounds; and by thus incorporating them in our speech we made them current and available.

This process was at first not difficult. Words like *poem*, *prose*, *fiction*, *narration*, *dialogue*, *essay*, *memoir*, review found a ready admittance to our vocabulary. Of late years, however, a pedantic and false ideal of correctness has weakened our assimilative powers: many of our more recent borrowings, like *renaissance*, *connoisseur*, *rôle*, *bizarre*, although we use them, are only half at home among us; while others, like *dénouement*, *éclat*, *flair*, still live on as foreigners in our midst.

It would seem that, of all these words from across the Channel, words which, like *pensée*, have an accented é in the final syllable are most unwilling to throw off their outlandish garb. That this was not so in former times the Englishing of *levée* into levy, and our adoption of amity, liberty, majesty, refugee, and many other words with this termination, is sufficient proof. But such changes of form, though simple enough in appearance, seem almost beyond our modern powers; *banality* has indeed made a furtive appearance, to meet, however, at once the reprobation of our purists; the indispensable words *naivety* and *employee* have acquired the rights of citizenship; but *matinée*,

soirée, *protégé*, *fiancé*, *rechauffé*, *repoussé* still keep their foreign shapes. It would be hopeless now to try to naturalize *pensée* as ‘pensy’; while its old assimilation, ‘pansy,’ is limited to the flower with that pretty name.

Some of these indigestible aliens are perhaps not needed, and we may do well, as George Moore suggested, to deport them without mercy. Others, however, would seem to have their uses: no acceptable alternative for *fiancé* has been found (we can hardly hope that the pretty dialect use of *fancy* for this relation will ever be accepted); but there are good reasons why the word *pensée*, or some more available equivalent for it, would be a useful addition to our vocabulary. The word is in fact a word we need: it describes a way of writing and a special kind of book which we are unable to designate by any generally accepted term.

The origin in France, or at least the general currency, of this specialized use of *pensée* would seem to be due to the title given by Pascal’s friends to that miscellany of thoughts, maxims, aphorisms, meditations, and little essays, which they found after his death among his papers. This designation then came to be applied to other similar collections: to La Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes et Réflexions*, to La Bruyère’s *Caractères*, to the collected writings of Vauvenargues; and it was used for the title of Joubert’s *Pensées* and other volumes of this kind. All such books consist of detached thoughts and observations put together with little or no system or arrangement, each paragraph or sentence being complete in itself, and not fused with what follows or precedes it. Such books are collections of isolated units of composition; the beauty of form they may possess is, as with collections of epigrams or lyrics, in the art with which each separate piece is phrased and elaborated. These units, however, these separate pieces, can be divided—the authors sometimes so divide them—into three sub-species or classes of prose composition. First of these is the *pensée* proper—the paragraph or miniature essay, containing the essence of some meditation, appreciation, or observation. Along with these we often find a series of ‘Characters,’ brief portrayals of some individual, or of some special type or class or way of living. The flower or perfection of these books, however, consist in the witty or profound aphorisms of which I have written in a previous essay.

II

Books composed of characters and aphorisms and little essays are by no means lacking in our literature, although we possess no accepted designation for them. Several English writers imitated the characters of Theophrastus long before La Bruyère; and Bacon’s Essays, especially in the brief form of their first publication, were fragments, as he himself described them, of his thought;

‘grains of Salt,’ as he said in his letter to Prince Henry, ‘that will rather give you an Appetite than offend you with Satiety.’ Ben Jonson’s *Discoveries*, with its little paragraphs, is a true book of *pensées*, and Selden’s *Table Talk* belongs also to this class of literature. Fuller was essentially a writer of Thoughts, and published three volumes of them; and his *Holy and Profane State*, with its numerous maxims, is really a book of characters and reflections, upon which a loose scheme of arrangement has been somewhat perfunctorily imposed. Sir Thomas Browne is another writer of this kind; his meditations are indeed arranged into chapters in the *Urn Burial*, but are printed in separate paragraphs in his *Religio Medici* and his *Christian Morals*. Lord Shaftesbury claimed in his *Characteristics* the title of a miscellaneous writer, or ‘Miscellanarian,’ as he called it; the *Characters and Thoughts* of Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, belongs more properly to this class, in which we may also include Lord Chesterfield’s *Characters*. Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* is written in the form of paragraphs and tiny chapters; and lastly, among eighteenth-century books of this kind must be mentioned Shenstone’s *Essays on Men, Manners and Things*, which have been reprinted by Mr. Havelock Ellis, whose description of Shenstone as a *pensée*-writer called forth George Moore’s protest.

Several famous authors of the nineteenth century can be described as *pensée*-writers. Most important among these is Coleridge. I have already quoted Hazlitt’s description of him, as spending his life in the momentary pursuit of truths, and finding in this pursuit his greatest pleasure as well as the freest exercise of his powers. As Mr. T. M. Raysor, the editor of his *Shakespearean Criticism* says: ‘The fragment was the literary *genre* which was natural to Coleridge and only in the fragments of marginalia was he entirely himself.’ Coleridge sometimes pinned these captured butterflies together in essays and formless volumes; but it is in the various collections which we possess of his occasional reflections, his *Table Talk*, his *Omniana*, his *Miscellanies*, and, above all, perhaps in those extracts from his notebooks, published under the title of *Anima Poetæ*, that we come in closest contact with his mind. Hazlitt was himself an occasional writer, an indefatigable pursuer of the butterflies and dusky moths of thought. His inspiration came to him in intermittent gusts; he lacked, as his *Life of Napoleon* shows, the sustained concentration necessary for writing with success a book of any length. Hazlitt published several collections of detached thoughts and observations, and in his longer essays we find many passages which stand, as it were, by themselves, and could be transferred—as indeed he sometimes did transfer them—to essays on other subjects. This self-sufficiency of a thought, this independence of its context, is, Joubert said, the test and distinguishing mark of the *pensée*;

those *pensées* alone were perfect, he declared, which could be detached from their context and placed almost anywhere at will. Our last important writer of this kind is Samuel Butler, who left behind him a large collection of thoughts and observations; and it is in his *Notebooks* rather than his works of more regular composition, that his admirers find his most original and most important work.

It will be seen, therefore, that this ‘miscellaneous’ way of writing has been practised, and with much success, by many English authors. Various titles have been given to English volumes of this kind; they have been called Thoughts and Reflections, Meditations, Miscellanies, Characteristics, Maxims, Aphorisms; but as generic names all these are open to objection. The words ‘maxim’ and ‘aphorism’ are too exclusive to describe the little essay, or the Character; while ‘thought’ and ‘miscellany’ would include too much. ‘Reflection’ is perhaps our best translation of *pensée*; but the word, owing perhaps to Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, has acquired a somewhat didactic and drab colour; we should demoralize so respectable a word by associating it with the worldly maxims of Bacon and Chesterfield, or the sharp and cynical sayings of Halifax and Hazlitt.

If we cannot assimilate a foreign term, and cannot literally translate it, there is still a third course open to us; we may attempt to create at home some available equivalent. I tried for a while to believe that the word *Laconics*, which, as I have already noted, was the title of a collection of aphorisms published in 1701, might be used as a makeshift for this lacuna in our language. But as I didn’t really like *Laconics*, I was delighted when that word-expert, Miss Rose Macaulay, suggested to me that we might adopt the French word *pensées* in the form of *penses* for our need. After all, why not? *Penses* makes a well-sounding English word; and the punning suggestion of *pence*, or penny-pieces, will enhance the value of its meaning, since *pensées* are the penny coins of thought. Therefore, I leave it to its fate, since in these matters one can do no more than make suggestions. Even the great Julius Cæsar was forced to admit that, with all his power, he was not able to add a word to the language of the world he ruled.

III

Goethe was accustomed to warn poets against the great work, the elaborately constructed poem, which, allowing nothing else to thrive in its neighbourhood, tended to repel the thoughts and feelings of almost daily occurrence—thoughts and feelings which, if seized in their freshness, would be sure to prove, he said, of interest and value. This sage advice is not without its relevance to a certain class of prose-writers, who are subject to occasional

inspirations, but do not possess the gift of sustained and formal composition. Such writers, in undertaking a great work beyond their powers, will either neglect the impressions of the moment; or else, as often happens, they will attempt to incorporate them into the larger scheme, weakening and distorting them in the process. We may perhaps find in Emerson's writings an instance of this kind of deformation, this imposition of an arbitrary form upon material unsuited for it. Emerson was by nature a writer of *Pensées*; the basis of his work, as with all such writers, was the note-book in which he jotted down in brief paragraphs his thoughts and intuitions—the deposit, drop by drop and day by day, of the lifelong soliloquy of his mind. When he came to compose these formal essays and addresses which were the only means he found for presenting his thought to the public, he would select some title of large indefinite meaning—Fate, Experience, Compensation, Circles—and then turn to his journal for more or less relevant thoughts and phrases. As long as he could group these passages about some vague general theme he judged their order sufficient, and took no more trouble about it. 'Expect nothing,' he wrote to Carlyle, 'of my powers of composition'; his sentences, he said, could not be expected to cohere.

This method, or rather no-method, of composition makes his essays seem like collections of fragments tied up, as Carlyle said of them, in canvas bags; and it was the patchwork character of his work which made Matthew Arnold—though he considered Emerson's writings the most important English prose of the nineteenth century—deny him, nevertheless, the name of a great prose writer. It is indeed in the ten volumes of Emerson's Journals that we come into most unimpeded contact with Emerson's original and imaginative mind, can watch it flashing to its profound conclusions, and can drink most freshly from the ever-fresh fountain of his thought.

The soliloquy of a profound and original mind, its intuitions briefly and candidly noted down as they occur, without design or ulterior purpose, has often proved of greater value than more ordered compositions; and it is in this form that we possess one of the greatest of the world's great books. Although Pascal no doubt intended to impose a more definite shape upon his disconnected *pensées*, French critics do not regret that we possess them in all their amazing freshness and spontaneity, rather than digested into a formal volume of Christian apologetics. In works of this kind, as Sir Edmund Gosse has truly said, we do not look to find a system; and indeed this way of writing has proved irresistibly attractive to many of the world's finest spirits. It was thus that Leonardo da Vinci noted down his thoughts on art and science, and Joubert his subtle and profound literary appreciations; the writings of Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and most of the great French moralists are

collections of this kind.

In matters of literary form, as Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote in one of those letters of his which are full of such admirable criticism, ‘a thing does not exist, is not *done* unless it is willingly and wittingly done; to recognize the form you are employing and to mean it is everything.’ Many of our authors who have possessed a gift for this laconic way of writing, have been impeded or misdirected by the lack of a definite name for this mode of expression—a name which would help them to explore its possibilities, isolate its achievements and appreciate their interest and importance.

So great at its best is the ease, the economy of this way of expressing thought that we feel sometimes inclined to agree with Johnson’s remark to Dr. Robertson when he said, ‘I fancy mankind may come, in time, to write all aphoristically, except in narrative; grow weary of preparation and connection, and illustration, and all those arts by which a big book is made.’ While, therefore, we must agree with George Moore that the word *pensée* is an unsatisfactory addition to our vocabulary, we can hardly afford to deport this new importation until we find to take its place some more efficient appellation of our own—or at least some less outlandish makeshift.

1928.

XIII

THE REMBRANDT OF ENGLISH PROSE

I

In the year 1834 a tall, gaunt, middle-aged Scotsman of peasant origin drove with his wife, in a hackney coach loaded with their modest belongings, across London to Chelsea. As they passed through Belgrave Square a canary the lady carried with her burst into a lively trill of song, which the care-worn couple tried to take as a happy bird-omen for an adventure that was to be so momentous for themselves—and for the world also, though they didn't know it. In the little house in Cheyne Row which was their destination they remained until they died, and the house is now a museum and memorial of their lives.

Carlyle's history before this descent on London is well known. Born in 1795 (the year of Keats's birth), he was destined, as the cleverest son of a Scottish peasant family, for the ministry; and to Edinburgh the boy trudged to prepare himself for that career. He soon abandoned it, however, for literature, and attained, after some years of bitter poverty, a modest success which enabled him to marry, somewhat above his position, that brilliant mocking-bird of genius whom he was to love and quarrel with till her death. His earlier literary attempts, though scholarly and well-written, showed no signs of that mingled fire and gloom which were to make his later writings famous. In the eyes of the great Jeffrey, however, they found favour; Carlyle's contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* were welcomed, and Jeffrey declared that he showed great promise of becoming an elegant and accomplished writer.

Then Carlyle did what Jeffrey and literary Edinburgh regarded as a mad and almost wicked thing. He retired to the desert, taking his delicate wife to live in a tiny house which she had inherited, far away on a hill-top amid the moors of Dumfriesshire—perhaps the dreariest and bleakest spot in the British Islands. What drove him thither was a determination to become something more than a mere elegant writer for the reviews. He had tried, but failed, to obtain a professorship or other position of independence; and poverty and solitude he was prepared to face. But beneath this determination was a confused consciousness of something germinating and growing within him which oppressed his mind; an accumulating weight of meaning, some great thought which he must deliver to the world or be for ever wretched. For the greater part of six years, from the age of thirty-three till he was almost forty, he

remained in this rock-bound seclusion, brooding on his message, and experimenting in many ways to utter his unutterable thought. In the articles he wrote and published his prose began to gleam and darken with strange lights and shadows, which horrified his friends in Edinburgh, who honestly believed that he was going mad.

But the old Goethe and the young Emerson heard from afar a new and poignant note in English literature; Goethe wrote him letters of precious encouragement, and Emerson journeyed from America and paid one August day what Carlyle called an ‘angel’s visit’ to the desolate pair at Craigenputtock.

II

How shall we diagnose this prolonged crisis in Carlyle’s life? Was the troubled voice within him the moan of his indigestion, the voice, as he himself ironically described it, from the interior of his liver, or an outcry from some other physical maladjustment which he was destined to transmute—as genius can—into a source of power? Or was it, as some have held, a linguistic crisis in the career of an artist who had not yet found his medium of expression; a flood, seeking to burst forth, of splendid words and imaginative phrases; a confused accumulation on his palette of the pigments in which alone he could portray his vision of the world?

To this descendant of stern Scottish Calvinists the crisis could seem nothing but a moral crisis. The world stood in dire need of a Prophet he felt, not an artist; and in doubt and fear the thought grew upon him that he was perhaps this destined Prophet; that Fate had called upon him to deliver to mankind a message of tremendous import. What had driven him into the rocky solitudes was, he believed, the great Mystery of Existence, the dire need to face the Sphinx-like riddle of the Universe; to wrestle with it for an answer; to be answered or perish! ‘The idea of the Universe,’ he notes in his journal, ‘struggles dark and painful in me, which I must deliver out of me or be wretched.’ The dark enigma of human life, the strangeness of man’s position, standing amid the Immensities and Eternities alone on his little platform of existence, and facing the Universe which in awful majesty looms before him, a Universe with which his fundamental relation is deeper than all other relations, since the discovery of what is the right way of life depends upon his attitude to these powers of which he knows almost nothing—Carlyle’s sense of the drama of this sublime situation lies at the core of all his meaning. If indeed we note in his writings those passages in which the words and rhythms are most resonant, and the accent falls with the strongest emphasis, we shall find they are the expression of the cosmic wonder and terror which formed the darkly flaming

background of all his thoughts. The Universe of force and fire in which man finds himself is certainly a phenomenon which may well fill him with amazement; and that amazement has grown ever greater, the more he has learned of the strangeness of its constitution. Most men, however, are little troubled by that sense of their relation to it which was the master obsession of Carlyle's mind; the Universe, he wrote to Goethe from his lonely hill-top, was growing daily to him more mysterious, more august; and against this curtain of the *flammantia moenia mundi* he was afterwards to depict his grandest portraits, attributing, often with little warrant, to their figures vast imaginative thoughts that were more his than theirs. To Dr. Johnson, he wrote, the fact of this Universe was 'wonderful, unspeakable, divine-infernal': upon Mahomet the great mystery of existence glared in also, with its terrors, with its splendours. 'What am I,' he makes the Prophet wonder in his desert wanderings, 'what *is* this unfathomable Thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is Life? What is Death?' 'The grim rocks,' Carlyle wrote, 'of Mount Hara, of Mount Sinai, the stern sandy solitudes answered not. The great Heaven rolling silent overhead, with its blue-glancing stars, answered not. There was no answer.'

Yet Carlyle believed that there was an answer, desperately believed that in the thunders from Sinai and the voice from the whirlwind he had heard the answer. He made, like Pascal, the great *saltus* of faith, as Professor Grierson calls it, that identification of the divine authority and the human conscience, that desperate belief that Goodness and Justice are at the heart of things, however appalling and mysterious their workings may appear. But although he believed that some 'new and deeper view of the world' had arisen in him, his doctrine, when he formulated it, was in essence the stern Calvinism of his peasant ancestors, shorn indeed of its theological dogmas, but still darkly oppressive. With this doctrine and a richly coloured and resonant vocabulary in which to proclaim it, he descended from his hill-top like a fiery meteor, fallen from another planet, to denounce the materialism and Baal-worship of his age, and to prophesy to London of the Woe to come.

His reception was encouraging, but somewhat disconcerting as well. To be stoned by the world is a fate for which prophets are prepared; but what if the world welcomes and applauds them, and insists on crowning their brows with inappropriate roses? This was before very long Carlyle's experience. The world of fashion, which had crowded round the pulpit of that other prophet, Edward Irving—Carlyle's dearest friend and once dearer to his wife—who had also come from Annandale to London to preach damnation to it (and had damned himself, his friends believed, in the process), now flocked to Carlyle's lectures and read his pamphlets; and the more he lashed them with his

marvellous vocabulary of denunciation, the louder grew their acclamations. For a moment Carlyle's head grew giddy; for a moment he dreamed of a great resounding lecture-tour in America, in which he should proclaim, as with a lion's voice, to that continent the divine constitution of the Universe; that it was God's creation and not—'No, a thousand times no!'—that of some Upholsterer. But before long he came to loathe 'the detestable mixture of prophecy and play-actorism' which he called public lecturing, and he abandoned it as soon as he could afford to do so. He had always before his eyes the really dreadful fate of his poor friend Irving, who had been ruined by his 'swim-gloat' of London popularity, and the fate too of his two other fellow-Scotsmen, Burns and Walter Scott, the one ruined and the other made bankrupt by the world.

III

Carlyle lived for nearly fifty years in the honourable simplicity of his Chelsea home. He was regardless of wealth, and refused the honours and titles which were offered to him. He continued to be a voice crying in the wilderness; but so thrilling, so splendid was his voice, that the world would come to listen to it, and sometimes entice him away to their enchanted precincts. A prophet loves influence, a talker must have his audience; and in the great world Carlyle found an audience with the leisure to listen to and appreciate his splendid declamation. 'They keep Carlyle,' Emerson wrote, 'as a sort of portable cathedral-bell, which they like to produce in companies where he is unknown, and set a-swinging, to the surprise and consternation of all persons.' Was he being corrupted by the World? the visiting idealists from New England sadly asked each other; had this denouncer of flunkery become himself a flunkey? Was this exposer of shams a sham himself? Carlyle never became a flunkey; he said what he thought, he did what he liked, and made no concessions to the world of any kind. That he had been changed by the world's enchantment into what seemed like a sham-prophet, a Jeremiah with castanets, winking at his audience over the footlights, was the more well-grounded suspicion of these earnest observers. One of them, however, the elder Henry James, saw deeper into the matter; Carlyle was, he said, in essence not a moralist at all, but an artist; picturesqueness in man and nature was what he cared for above all things; he was, in fact, a painter who valued the good and evil of the world as a painter does his pigments, for the opportunities they give for the display of his pictorial powers.

Now that this verdict has come to be generally accepted: now that posterity has come to fix its attention, not on the moralist in Carlyle, but on the great unconscious artist beneath his prophet's garb: now that his incomparable gift

of expression—a gift which Matthew Arnold compared to that of Shakespeare—the rich accumulation in the gloom of his great imagination of darkly gleaming words and images, in the chiaroscuro of which he placed his scenes and portraits: now that this, and not his moral message, is what delights his readers, it is of interest to find a phrase to describe the ultimate quality of his pictorial vision. Such a formula or phrase, such a taper to light up and help us to explore Carlyle's murky volumes, is supplied to us by his fellow-countryman, Professor Grierson, in the words borrowed from him as the title of this essay. When Carlyle's best critics have written best about him, when James Russell Lowell, for instance, writes of scenes in his history which are seized on in an instant of intense illumination amid the surrounding darkness; when Leslie Stephen defines him as a painter who sacrifices everything to obtain the strongest contrasts of light and shade, and describes those passages of history in which Carlyle shows himself an unequalled master, 'those little islands of light in the midst of the darkening gloom of the past, on which you distinguished the actors of some old drama actually alive and moving'—do not these descriptions read like descriptions of Rembrandt's scenes of Bible history, with their shadows and glooms and strange illuminations? Carlyle possessed indeed the intense vision of the great Dutchman, and a mastery like his of the art of etching, and in a phrase or two could burn in upon our imagination some tiny, illimitable landscape, the figure of some grotesque old man or woman, some dim-lit interior of a peasant's cottage. Carlyle possessed also Rembrandt's broad touch—his free, rapid handling, his mastery of dramatic action, his sense of character, and his gift for character-portrayal. From his great canvases, as from Rembrandt's, strange old faces look at us with all the sadness and mystery of existence in their disdainful, weary eyes: Southey's eyes 'filled with gloomy bewilderment and incurable sorrow,' Coleridge's eyes 'as full of sorrow as of inspiration,' and in the eyes of the saintly old Chalmers 'a serene sadness as if evening and star-crowned night were coming on.'

Thus Carlyle brushes in his great word-pictures with a palette full, like that of Rembrandt, with mingled shades and colours. But from his theology, his cosmic musings, he derived elements beyond the handling of any mere painter's brush, by means of which he could depict his figures enveloped in a quasi-metaphysical atmosphere of mingled light and darkness. This sense of the mystery of existence, exasperated as it was by insomnia and ill-health, led him to create a new kind of shudder, a nightmarish, somnambulistic sensation, for which he found or invented (and he was a great creator of new words) a vocabulary for its expression, thus shedding on many of the scenes in his own life, or in the lives of other people, a spectral mist, out of which grotesque

faces gaze on us with awful eyes in silence. The word *spectre* was indeed just the word he needed to express the kind of ghostly astonishment with which he contemplated existence; we find it frequently in his pages, and he formed, in his wild, free way, many derivatives and composites which are first found, for the most part only found, in his writings; *spectracally*, *spectracalities*, *spectralisms*, *spectre-chimeras*, man as a *spectre-fighting* animal, and Carlyle himself 'a spectre moving amid spectres,' engaged in a dream-like struggle with that cloud-capt, fire-breathing spectre, the modern Democracy which he hated. This Shakespearean compound, 'cloud-capt,' was an echo of his earliest experiences in the art of words, when, as a schoolboy at Annan, one market-day, an itinerant Italian 'crying images' displayed for sale a plaster cast of what a woman in the crowd called 'Shankspeare,' and while she read beneath the bust the lines from *The Tempest* about 'the cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,' the little peasant boy listened entranced to the concluding words

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

These lines, thus heard in early youth, echoed in Carlyle's mind all his life, and as an old man of eighty he declared that they were the finest that had ever been written.[9]

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[9] In the same year William Allingham notes in his diary that one day Carlyle told him how, just after he had got out of his bath that morning and was drying his old body, the strange problem of his existence roused in him a kind of fury or exaltation, and he exclaimed: 'What the Devil then am I? After all these eighty years I know nothing at all about it.'

IV

This life-long, almost physical sensation of the spectracality and dream-like nature of life was enriched also from another set of morbidly acute sensations. Carlyle's exacerbated sense of hearing made him acutely sensitive to sound; and perhaps no writer since the Hebrew prophets made such constant use of audible sensations in the phrases and metaphors of his writing. His great prose-poem on the French Revolution is not only a great gallery of scenes and

portraits depicted in the smoke and glare of that volcanic outburst, but it is a great tone-poem as well, a rushing vociferous piece of orchestral music, resonant with trumpets and battle-cries, with salvoes of artillery and wild peals of tocsin-bells ringing from all steeples. Carlyle's response to the experience of life or history was indeed more like that of a painter or a musician than that of a thinker, and was more capable of expression in the language of visual or audible sensations than in the logical speech of scientific thought or reason. Ah! he wrote in one of his letters, could he but play on a violin or trombone, he could then express the inexpressible meaning, the preternatural feeling, in him —and that would be his speech!

And yet Carlyle, full as he felt himself of music, had no sense at all for the music of poetry. He tried to write poetry, tried it again and again, worked hard at it, but his verse was really grotesque in its badness. The lines he sang in his discordant voice to Jane Welsh during his courtship of that young lady:

> The gay saloon 'twas thine to tread,
> Its stateliest scenes adorning,

can only be equalled in their bathos by his translation of Mignon's lovely song in *Wilhelm Meister*:

> Kennst du das Land? . . . Dahin, Dahin
> Möcht 'ich mit dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn—
>
> Know'st thou that land so transcendently fair?
> Oh, would, my Beloved, that we could go there.

Like Sir Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor, he was a poet in his prose, but he was more prosaic than they in his poetry. But, like these seventeenth-century writers, his prose had much of the splendour and music which makes English imaginative prose so magnificent an organ of expression. This mastery was, however, a late acquirement and as has been said already, his early work shows no evidence of it.

V

It almost always happens that in the writings of a great author we find some vivid sensations of his early years to which he often returns, and which, as he grows more and more the master of his style, he describes with a power that becomes ever greater. For Carlyle these sensations were derived from the scenes in which he passed his boyhood, and above all from that great view of

the Solway and the surrounding mountains which spread before him as he trudged the six-mile road from Ecclefechan, where he was born, to Annan, where he went as a schoolboy, and whither, at the age of nineteen, he returned as a schoolmaster. This magnificent Solway region, with its sands and quicksands and the roar of the great tides as they rush upon them, has been one of the two parts of Scotland, Ruskin says, in which the highest intellectual, moral and poetic powers of the Scottish race have been developed. Burns was born at no great distance, and over this region Scott, in two of his greatest novels, has shed the purple cloud of his imagination. Carlyle returns again and again in memory to this landscape, would often revisit it, and always the 'great roar of the Solway,' the everlasting ocean voices, 'prophesying of Eternity, coming hither from Eternity,' sounded like an unearthly music in his ears, more unearthly than he could say. At each visit to this region its spectral quality grows upon him: 'Tartarus itself,' he wrote in 1837, 'and the pale Kingdoms of Dis could not have been more preternatural'; and later he wrote in his *Reminiscences*: 'Words cannot utter the wild and ghastly expressiveness of that scene to me; it seemed as if Hades itself and the gloomy realms of death and eternity were looking out on me through those poor old familiar objects; as if no miracle could be more miraculous than this same bit of space and bit of Time spread out before me.'

The mountains of Annandale, grim-bright in stormy weather, with hail-storms, 'black, brief, spring tempests,' rushing fiercely down their valleys and blotting out the sunshine—in these alternations of sun and storm, he seemed to find a symbol of what was the essential meaning to him of his own existence. Again and again he evokes these mountains in his writings, and ever with greater expressiveness as his mastery of language increases. This enrichment of his powers can be well illustrated by putting side by side two of his mountain descriptions, the first written at the age of twenty-nine in a love-letter to Jane Welsh, and another, twelve years after their marriage, to his friend Thomas Erskine:

> 'April 15, 1824. I am often very calm and quiet. I delight to see these old mountains, lying in the clear sleep of twilight, stirless as death, pure as disembodied spirits. . . . They are my own mountains! Skiddaw and Helvellyn, with their snowy cowls, among their thousand azure brethren are more to me than St. Gothard and Mont Blanc; Hartfell and Whitecombe raise their bald and everlasting heads into my native sky; and far beyond them, as I often picture, in their bright home, are Jane and her mother, sometimes thinking of me.'

‘April 3, 1848. Dear Mr. Erskine. I see nobody: I do not even read much. The old hills and rivers, the old earth with her star firmaments and burial-vaults, carry on a mysterious, unfathomable dialogue with me. It is eight years since I have seen a spring, and in such a mood I never saw one. It seems all new and original to me—beautiful, almost solemn. Whose great laboratory is that? The hills stand snow-powdered, pale, bright. The black hailstorm awakens in them, rushes down like a black swift ocean tide, valley answering valley; and again the sun blinks out, and the poor sower is casting his grain into the furrow, hopeful he that the Zodiacs and far Heavenly Horologes have not faltered; that there will be yet another summer added for us and another harvest.’

There are critics who maintain that prose is merely the sincere expression of thought and feeling, and these may find the first passage, written in all the sincerity of a lover, is better prose than the second, addressed to an elderly lawyer; but to others it may seem that the second passage in Carlyle’s late-acquired manner is superior in expressiveness and style. It is a matter of taste; but for those whose taste for magnificence in prose makes them prefer the later example, it will be of interest to quote a longer passage of this Rembrantesque way of writing:

‘Perhaps few narratives in History or Mythology are more significant than that Moslem one, of Moses and the Dwellers by the Dead Sea. A tribe of men dwelt on the shores of that same Asphaltic Lake; and having forgotten, as we are all too prone to do, the inner facts of Nature, and taken up with the falsities and outer semblances of it, were fallen into sad conditions,—verging indeed towards a certain far deeper Lake. Whereupon it pleased kind Heaven to send them the Prophet Moses, with an instructive word of warning, out of which might have sprung “remedial measures” not a few. But no: the men of the Dead Sea discovered, as the valet-species always does in heroes or prophets, no comeliness in Moses; listened with real tedium to Moses, with light grinning, or with splenetic sniffs and sneers, affecting even to yawn; and signified, in short, that they found him a humbug, and even a bore. Such was the candid theory these men of the Asphalt Lake formed to themselves of Moses. That probably he was a humbug, that certainly he was a bore.

‘Moses withdrew; but Nature and her rigorous veracities did not withdraw. The men of the Dead Sea, when we next went to visit them, were all changed into Apes, sitting on the trees there, grinning

now in the most unaffected manner; gibbering and chattering very genuine nonsense; finding the whole Universe now a most indisputable Humbug! The Universe has *become* a Humbug to these Apes, who thought it one. There they sit and chatter, to this hour; only, I believe, every Sabbath there returns to them a bewildered half-consciousness, half-reminiscence; and they sit, with their wizened smoke-dried visages, and such an air of supreme tragicality as Apes may; looking out through those blinking smoke-bleared eyes of theirs, into the wonderfulest universal smoky Twilight and undecipherable disordered Dusk of Things; wholly an Uncertainty, Unintelligibility, they and it; and for commentary thereon, here and there an unmusical chatter or mew:—truest, tragicalest Humbug conceivable by the mind of man or ape! They made no use of their souls; and so have lost them. Their worship on the Sabbath now is to roost there, with unmusical screeches, and half-remember that they had souls.'

To illustrate once more the development of Carlyle's style, let us contrast an early description of Coleridge's talk, with the famous passage in the *Life of Sterling*.

In 1824, on his first visit to London, he wrote:

'Coleridge is a steam-engine of a hundred horses' power, with the boiler burst. His talk is resplendent with imagery and shows of thought; you listen as to an oracle, and find yourself no jot the wiser. He is without beginning or middle or end. . . . A round, fat, oily, yet impatient little man, his mind seems totally beyond his own control; he speaks incessantly not thinking or remembering, but combining all these processes into one.'[10]

He writes later:

'The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps. . . . A heavy-laden, high-aspiring and surely much-suffering man. His voice, naturally soft and good, had contracted itself into a plaintive snuffle and singsong; he spoke as if preaching,—you would have said, preaching earnestly and also hopelessly the weightiest things. I still recollect his "object" and "subject," terms of continual recurrence in the Kantean province; and how he sang and snuffled them into "om-m-mject" and "sum-m-mject," with a kind of solemn shake or quiver, as he rolled along.'[11]

[10] *Thomas Carlyle*, Moncure D. Conway, 1881, p. 195.

[11] *Life of John Sterling*, Chap. VIII, p. 65.

VI

The difference between Carlyle's early prose, and the richness and resonance of his late style, is due partly to the immense vocabulary he had acquired, with its 'depth of fathomless adjective,' and the most far-fetched phrases of remote allusion, but, above all, as a needed corrective for this elevation his use of idiom and spoken speech. 'I think he has seen, as no other in our time,' his best critic, Emerson, wrote of him, 'how inexhaustible a mine is the language of Conversation. He does not use the *written* dialect of the time, in which scholars, pamphleteers and the clergy write, nor the Parliamentary dialect, in which the lawyer, the statesman, and the better newspapers write, but draws strength and mother-wit out of a poetic use of the spoken vocabulary, so that his paragraphs are all a sort of splendid conversation.'

This distinction which Emerson makes between the written and the spoken dialect is of capital importance in our appreciation of Carlyle's prose. Almost all our authors make use of the written dialect of their time, and rich and beautiful it is as they often use it; but this written dialect has a tendency to desiccation, is always on the way to becoming a dead language; and marvellous is the effect, like that of a fresh breeze from a window suddenly opened into a musty room, of the accents and syncopations and free syntax of the spoken voice. 'The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps'—no such living phrase speaks to us in Carlyle's early writings. Literature in many of its aspects is, as Stevenson said, 'no other than the shadow of good talk'; and this shadow or echo of good talk gives life, not only to the prose of dialogue and of drama—as with Plato or with Shakespeare—but there are essayists who, like Dryden and Charles Lamb, have endowed as by a miracle their pens with the gift of living speech. Certainly Carlyle's slowly acquired mastery of this most difficult of the arts of writing is his most remarkable achievement; and his later writings are all, as Emerson said, a sort of conversation—that splendid conversation of his which was one of the amazements of the age he lived in. For nearly fifty years he poured forth a splendid monologue, a Niagara of talk, a rhapsody of denunciation, vituperation, of scoffs and jeers, of pathos and self-mockery and harsh

laughter, with overtones in it of pathos and soft music, mingled with Rabelaisian touches which made his hearers shake with laughter. This marvellous monologue, delivered in the plangent sing-song of his broad Scottish accent, produced a splendour of expression which, as one listener said, could hardly be faced with steady eyes. Sometimes the 'haggard, moon-struck age' he lived in was the object of his fury; or he would turn on England, now become a 'dim owlery and habitation of doleful creatures,' of Higginbothams and Rigmaroles, and galvanic Puseyisms and dances of the sheeted Dead, all rushing on together to the Bottomless Abyss. And then the fierce old 'calamity-howler' would turn on some American visitor present, to denounce, with wicked delight, the democratic hope and 'nigger-delirium' of their country, chanting the praises of slavery, of whips and hand-cuffs and brass-collars, in words that made their hair stand on end. 'New spiritual Pythons, plenty of them; enormous Megatherions, as ugly as were ever born of mud, loom huge and hideous out of the twilight Future on America,' he chanted, in terms more true than they could guess, at these terrified 'sky-blue' idealists and mild 'potato-philosophers' from New England. And then the great lamenting voice would begin the burden of his own woes, the woes of a wretched, mourning, heavily laden creature, 'impoverished, bilious, bug-bitten, and bedevilled,' and sunk deep in the mud-oceans that raged from without and within. The chaos that reigned in Cheyne Row, the dust and dismay of house-cleaning, the smell of paint, the horror of veal-soup, and the perpetual ear-torment that agonized his ears, the screech of railway whistles at night, 'like the screech of ten thousand cats, and every cat of them as big as a cathedral,' piano-thumpings next door, the voices of screaming parrots and demon fowls, the howling of dogs, and a 'dim tremendous sound of organ grinders advancing from the distance,' were his frequent themes. Mrs. Carlyle had a fiery temper and a bitter tongue as well; and beneath the real devotion of this couple resentments smouldered, jealousies, disappointments, and unavowed frustrations, that would sometimes burst out in flame and uproar.

VII

Now that silence has fallen on that dwelling, what remains of the din of the great battle that so vociferously these two waged against the world and fate, against the anarchy within and without their walls? Is there nothing left, as Carlyle wrote of a famous feline conflict in Kilkenny, but 'a peaceable annihilation—a neighbourhood delivered from despair'? Much remains; and the delivered neighbourhood did well when it celebrated the upheaval of that memorable crater amid its quiet streets. The great lava-flood of molten words that once flowed from that now extinct volcano has cooled into immense

expanses of varied reading—into many volumes at least of good letters that delight the world.

Both Carlyle and Jane Welsh were incomparable letter-writers; which surpassed the other is a matter of controversy among their admirers, and many give the palm to Jane Welsh rather than to her husband. To others, the reading of Carlyle's letters, with their humour, pathos and splendid phrasing, is an even richer experience; and one fine critic, Henry James, the novelist, has put on record his boundless admiration for Carlyle as a letter-writer—as perhaps the very greatest of the masters of that art. Carlyle's vivid power of expression enables us to accompany his sonorous personality through a long period of the nineteenth century; and the incomparable keenness of the vision of his all-devouring eye etches for us in lightning flashes, or depicts in finished portraits, the great figures of his age. And as the dust of oblivion falls more thickly on that age, and the focus of interest and illumination shifts, posterity may come to gaze upon the nineteenth century through the windows of this house in Chelsea, as we now look back on the eighteenth century through those of Dr. Johnson, whom Carlyle with his prejudices, his intolerances, his tenderness, and the affection beneath his rugged sternness, resembles in many ways. Certainly it is Carlyle's letters, and perhaps above all those in the volumes of his correspondence with Emerson—one of the noblest and most beautiful records of human friendship—that will attract most readers: his letters, and the extracts from his journal which Froude prints in that brave and brilliant biography, which almost deserves to rank with Boswell's in outspokenness and vividness of character-portrayal. And with these will come Carlyle's autobiographical *Reminiscences*, and his half-autobiographical *Life of Sterling*, both of which, written from the deep wells of sorrow, reverence and affection in him, are so full of Rembrandtesque pictures and shadowy recollections of the past.

The taste for most of Carlyle's historical writings and all his prophetic denunciations is a more special taste; but to those addicted to draughts of this most potent spirit, the intoxication it produces is one for which the craving constantly recurs. Always for them, even in the fairest weather, a thunderstorm broods over Chelsea, and sooner or later will sweep down upon them. Once again that dark genie will burst from his jinn-bottle and fill the skies; and although they may have recovered their standards of good taste and reason, it is with a foreboding of horror that they gaze at the volumes of this outrageous old Enchanter which they know that they are fated to read again.

VIII

Carlyle was an earthborn spirit, a Titan, groaning under the Etna of his

dark obsessions; his attempts to scale those heavens of serene contemplation to which Goethe and Emerson attained were always defeated; always he fell back into his mud-element with outcries of despair. In him, as in Rembrandt, the sense of beauty was deficient, and the lovely light of reason shone but dimly and fitfully on his mind. ‘His power of expression,’ Jowett said of him, ‘outran his real intelligence, and constantly determined his opinion.’ But it is for his expression, not for his opinions, that many set so high a value on his writings —for that splendour and music, of which, since the seventeenth century, Carlyle was one of the greatest masters. Carlyle’s failure to impose his narrow, rigoristic, moralistic, joyless Annandale view of the world upon the world, added an element of tragedy to his deeply tragic sense of life. He suffered also the deeper tragedy of those who attempt to deify the Universe; who personify it as a God to find that they have made a Devil of it. Their cosmic piety plunges them into such abysses of moral contradiction that it becomes, as many believe it became with Carlyle, a mask of atheism and dark despair.

Carlyle was a ‘sick giant,’ as Emerson said of him; and ‘if genius were cheap,’ Emerson added, ‘we might do without Carlyle, but in the existing population, he cannot be spared.’ With this final verdict of his life-long friend, let us take leave of him as we see him walking with David Masson in the park one evening, under his extraordinary tall, broad-brimmed hat, which gave him the air of an old magician, and gazing up at the stars that were growing brighter as the daylight faded. He spoke of the infinite beauty and harmony of the Universe; but soon the old prophetic fury seized him; he began to denounce the irreverent, mocking spirit of the age. Too much jest, too much irony and laughter, too much sniggering at things! And then, as if remembering his own wild satirical torch-dancings, he paused, and giving a shrug of self-disgust: ‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, ‘I have given too much in to that myself!’; and the proud, melancholy old man walked on, lost in his life-long dialogue under the earnest stars with Death, Judgment and Eternity.

1934.

XIV

DONNE'S SERMONS

I

The enigmatic figure of John Donne is one that has attracted a good deal of attention in recent years; his life has been studied, his poems and letters carefully edited, his character analysed, and his position as a poet acutely debated. His harshness, his crabbed and often frigid way of writing, his forced conceits, his cynicism and sensuality, are extremely repellent to some readers; while to others the subtlety, the realism, and a certain modern and intimate quality in his poems, illuminated as they are with splendid flashes of imaginative fire, possess an extraordinary interest and fascination. There are people who hate Donne; there are others who love him, but there are very few who have read his poems and remain quite indifferent to him. His character is still a puzzle, his reputation as a poet, eclipsed for a long time and only revived in our own day, is by no means yet the subject of final agreement.

In spite of this modern interest in Donne, and the study which has been devoted to his works, there is one aspect of them which, until recently, had received no very adequate attention. In addition to his poems, his letters, and a few minor prose pieces, Donne left behind him an immense body of theological writings. By birth and by the tradition of his family a Roman Catholic, and for that reason shut out in his youth from the paths of secular ambition which had so great an attraction for him, he was of necessity much preoccupied with theological considerations; and it was not till after much study of controversial divinity that he succeeded in convincing himself of the truth of the Anglican position, which he finally made his own, and which, even in his secular days, he emphatically defended. When at the age of forty-two, after long experience of poverty and many worldly disappointments, he found all other paths of preferment closed to him, and at last, after much hesitation, took religious orders, he then began that career as a great divine and preacher which, until the revival of interest in his poetry, remained his principal claim to remembrance. But his fame as a preacher has been for the most part fame at second hand; it is due to Izaak Walton's descriptions of his preaching, rather than to any reading of the sermons themselves. The very quantity, indeed, of his sermons—and few Anglican divines of the period can have left behind them such a number—has discouraged students from thorough study of them;

and, indeed, to read these great folio volumes is a task not lightly to be undertaken. But it is not only the mere bulk and body of these folios, the great number and length of Donne's sermons, which daunts the reader; there is much in the writing itself which renders it difficult and distasteful to the modern mind. In the first place the pulpit, the cushion and the hour-glass have no longer any great attraction for us; few of us read sermons, and the collected and republished editions of the great seventeenth-century divines rest for the most part unopened on our shelves. People read novels, biographies, books of travel, social and political treatises instead of the sermons in which their grandfathers and grandmothers delighted: Henry Smith, Hooker, Andrewes, Barrow, South, Tillotson are names indeed, but little more than names to most of us; and even so great a writer of English prose, so exquisite an artist as Jeremy Taylor, is familiar only in extracts and selected passages. For modern theologians this old divinity, with its obsolete learning and forgotten controversies, has little more than an archaeological interest; while to the more secular-minded, the old divines, whose severe brows and square faces meet our eyes when we open their great folios, seem, with their imposed dogmas, their heavy and obsolete methods of exposition and controversy, almost as if they belonged to some remote geological era of human thought. We are reminded of Taine's image of them as giant saurians, slowly winding their scaly backs through the primeval slime, and meeting each other, armed with syllogisms and bristling with texts, in theological battle, to tear the flesh from one another's flanks with their great talons, and cover their opponents with filth in their efforts to destroy them.

And yet these old divines were great men, and some of them were great writers; their voices enthralled the best and wisest of their own generation, and it is a misfortune for their fame, and a misfortune for our literature, that they put their wisdom and observation and deep feeling, their great gifts of imagination, and their often exquisite mastery of the art of expression into the hortatory and controversial form of the sermon which time has rendered obsolete.

II

It must be admitted that the reasons, good or bad, which keep us from reading writers like Andrewes and Jeremy Taylor, face us at once, and seem even more valid, when we open a volume of Donne's sermons. All that has ceased to interest, all that actually repels us in the old theology, the scholastic divinity, the patristic learning, the torturing of texts, the interpretation of old prophesies, the obsolete controversies and refutation of forgotten heresies, the insistence on moral commonplaces, the intolerance of human frailty, and the

menaces of fearful judgment on it—with all these stock subjects, Donne, like his contemporaries, filled his sermons. But his case is even worse than theirs; not only as a theologian was he of an older breed, more remote and medieval than Jeremy Taylor, but he had also, personal to himself, the unhappy faculty of developing to their utmost the faults of any form of literary expression he adopted; and when he abandoned verse for sermon-writing, every defect of this kind of composition, everything that most offends us in the old preachers and sound expositors, was carried by him to a pitch which gives him a bad eminence over the most unreadable of them all.

That sermons like Donne's should have held great congregations spellbound seems astonishing, not only to the secular mind, but to theologians themselves. One of Donne's most distinguished successors at the Deanery of St. Paul's, Dean Milman, has written of them:

> 'It is difficult for a Dean of our rapid and restless days to imagine, when he surveys the massy folios of Donne's sermons—each sermon spreads out over many pages—a vast congregation in the Cathedral or at Paul's Cross, listening not only with patience but with absorbed interest, with unflagging attention, even with delight and rapture, to these interminable disquisitions, to us teeming with laboured obscurity, false and misplaced wit, fatiguing antitheses. However set off, as by all accounts they were, by a most graceful and impressive delivery, it is astonishing to us that he should hold a London congregation enthralled, unwearied, unsatiated. Yet there can be no doubt that this was the case. And this congregation consisted, both of the people down to the lowest, and of the most noble, wise, accomplished of that highly intellectual age. They sat, even stood, undisturbed, except by their own murmurs of admiration, sometimes by hardly suppressed tears.'[12]

It is only necessary to open a volume of Donne's sermons to find a justification for his successor's criticism. For instance, in preaching to Charles I at Whitehall on the text 'In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you,' he begins:

> 'There are occasions of Controversies of all kinds in this one Verse; And one is, whether this be one Verse or no; For as there are Doctrinall Controversies, out of the sense and interpretation of the words, so are there Grammaticall differences about the Distinction, and Interpunction of them: some Translations differing thereinn from the Originall (as the Originall Copies are distinguished, and

interpuncted now) and some differing from one another. The first Translation that was, that into Syriaque, as it is expressed by *Tremellius*, renders these words absolutely, precisely as our two Translations doe; And, as our two Translations doe, applies the second clause and proposition, *Si quo minus, if it were not so, I would have told you*, as in affirmation, and confirmation of the former, *In domo Patris, In my Fathers house there are many Mansions*, For, *if it were not so I would have told you*. But then, as both our Translations doe, the Syriaque also admits into this Verse a third clause and proposition, *Vade parare, I goe to prepare you a place*. Now *Beza* doth not so; *Piscator* doth not so; They determine this Verse in those two propositions which constitute our Text, *In my Fathers house, etc.* And then they let fall the third proposition, as an inducement, and inchoation of the next Verse.'

So the sermon goes inexorably on, immense paragraph after paragraph filled with quotations from the Fathers and quibbling controversies with Roman Catholic theologians, till suddenly the page lights up with a description of the unending day of eternity unsurpassed in our literature, how 'all the foure Monarchies, with all their thousands of yeares, And all the powerfull Kings, and all the beautifull Queenes of this world, were but as a bed of flowers, some gathered at six, some at seven, some at eight, All in one Morning, in respect of this Day,' and how, during all the time that had passed since the Creation, in this timeless mansion of Eternity, 'there was never heard quarter clock to strike, never seen minute glasse to turne.'

Contrasts almost as surprising as this meet us in the sermons of other seventeenth-century preachers, and here and there we come on passages of poignant expression and lyrical or sombre beauty clothed in the noblest language. For while regarded merely as a form of literary expression, the sermon has undoubted disadvantages which render those of one age difficult for the next age to appreciate, yet on the other hand this form of expression is one—since its subject matter is nothing less than the whole of life—which gives the widest possible scope to a great preacher. He can pour his whole soul into his sermon, his hopes, fears, and self-accusations, the furthest flights of his imagination, the ripest results of his philosophic meditations, all the wisdom of mellow experience, and even the most amusing details of satiric observation. The very circumstances of his delivery, the ceremonious solemnity of the church and pulpit, the great responsibility of the occasion, give a nobility to his utterance; and the presence of the congregation, the need to speak directly to the hearts and minds of men and women, lends a certain

dramatic intensity to all he says. Such circumstances, while they are full of danger for an insincere and rhetorical preacher, provide the most splendid opportunities for one endowed with earnest purpose and a sincere imagination. The exhortations of such a preacher can hardly help being noble in expression; and it is in the sermon therefore that we find some of the highest achievements of English prose—in the sermon, or in prophetic or didactic or even political eloquence written with the same high impulse and inspiration. For great prose needs a great subject matter, needs great themes and a high spectacular vision, a solemn and steadfast conception of life and its meaning. It must handle with deep earnestness the most profound themes, Good and Evil, Desire and Disillusion, the briefness of Life and the mystery of Death—the universal material and the great commonplaces of human thought in all ages. Such a mood is the mood of religion, in whatever dogmas it may be clothed; and it is the religious writer who can most impressively touch those organ stops of grave emotion which move us in the highest achievements of prose literature.

The seventeenth-century divines, moreover, with all the lumber which they inherited from the past, inherited much also that gives an enduring splendour to their works. In the doctrines of their faith they found a complete conception of existence, elaborated in all its details, and rich in memories and associations accumulated from the dawn of history. The Creation of the world, the Fall of Man, all the vicissitudes of the Chosen People, the sins and punishments of their Kings, the vehemence of their Prophets and their supernatural foresight, and the great central tragedy and hope of the Redemption—these were themes that came to their hands elaborated by the Fathers of the Church and by a whole succession of medieval writers; and now, just at this time, the Sacred Books which were the original sources of this deposit of Christian history and doctrine had been re-translated and clothed afresh in an unsurpassable beauty of language.

This noble diction, this intensity, and what we might almost call inspiration of language, which gives so poetic a colouring to the English version of the Scriptures, was not the achievement of one man, but almost the universal birthright of the time: with the Elizabethan dramatists and translators, the preachers and theological writers had their share in this great utterance, which, whether due to linguistic causes which ceased to operate, or to an intensity of poetic vision which afterwards vanished, certainly grows fainter and thinner and gradually dies away as the seventeenth century advances, and the age of theology is superseded by the age of Reason and common sense.

Annals of St. Paul's Cathedral, Henry Hart Milman, D.D., 2nd ed., 1869, p. 328.

III

If Donne's sermons are full, as we have said, of all that in the old divinity which has become distasteful to us, if he surpasses the preachers of that period in their faults and drawbacks, he shares also in their achievements, and indeed in many ways he overtops them all. Lost in the crabbed, unread, unreadable folios of his sermons, these 'volumes of religion and mountains of piety,' there are pages and passages of surprising beauty, which have been nevertheless almost entirely unknown to English readers. It is, indeed, somewhat curious that with the growing recognition of Donne's merits as a poet, so little attention was paid to the excellence of his prose. Equal in power and beauty to that of Sir Thomas Browne or Jeremy Taylor, and in passionate intensity surpassing even these great writers, it is almost unrepresented in our prose anthologies; and indeed, the best of these, Basil Montagu's *Selections*, includes no specimen of his writing. But the explanation of this is after all a simple one; unlike Jeremy Taylor or Sir Thomas Browne, Donne was famous first of all as a poet; and save for his little-known *Devotions*, he wrote no small book, no *Holy Dying* or *Urn Burial* in which he gave evidence of his powers as a prose writer. His shorter prose pieces, his *Paradoxes* and *Biathanatos*, and his elaborate letters do not represent him at his best; it is only here and there in isolated passages of his sermons that he put forth his full strength; and his best prose, not being therefore easily accessible, almost entirely escaped notice; and few even of the most enthusiastic readers of Donne's verse were aware that however highly they estimated his merits as a poet, he was equally worthy of fame as a prose writer—that, indeed, his mastery of the means of expression was perhaps even greater in prose than in poetry; was less impeded by those defects of technique and temperament which kept him from reaching the highest level of poetic achievement. There is truth, therefore, in the remark which Coleridge is reported to have made, when, in the year before his death, he visited Cambridge, that 'Donne's poetry must be sought for in his prose.' He preached his sermons, of course, for the purpose of moral and religious exhortation, and when he took orders in the English Church the doctrines and apologetics and controversial positions of that Church were, so to speak, imposed upon him; he accepted them without demur, but as Professor Grierson says:

> 'A reader may care little for the details of seventeenth-century theology and yet enjoy without qualification Donne's fervid and

original thinking, and the figurative richness, and splendid harmonies of his prose in passages of argument, of exhortation and of exalted meditation. It is Donne the poet who transcends every disadvantage of theme and method, and an outworn fashion in wit and learning. There are sentences in the sermons which, in beauty of imagery and cadence, are not surpassed by anything he wrote in verse, or by any prose of the century from Hooker's to Sir Thomas Browne's.'

Any one who may be inclined to think this praise of Donne's prose exaggerated should read—and above all, read aloud—the description for instance of God's bounty, which Professor Saintsbury has called unsurpassed, perhaps never equalled for the beauty of its rhythm and the Shakespearean magnificence of its diction; or the great peroration on 'falling out of the hands of God,' in which Donne sums up in a sombre and terrible sentence—one of the longest and most splendid sentences in the English language—the horror of the deprivation of God's love, and of eternal banishment from His presence.

'God made Sun and Moon to distinguish seasons, and day, and night, and we cannot have the fruits of the earth but in their seasons: But God hath made no decree to distinguish the seasons of his mercies; In paradise, the fruits were ripe, the first minute, and in heaven it is alwaies Autumne, his mercies are ever in their maturity. We ask *panem quotidianum*, our daily bread, and God never sayes you should have come yesterday, he never sayes you must againe to morrow, but *to day if you will heare his voice*, to day he will heare you. If some King of the earth have so large an extent of Dominion, in North, and South, as that he hath Winter and Summer together in his Dominions, so large an extent East and West, as that he hath day and night together in his Dominions, much more hath God mercy and judgement together: He brought light out of darknesse, not out of a lesser light; he can bring thy Summer out of Winter, though thou have no Spring; though in the wayes of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclypsed, damped and benummed, smothered and stupified till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the Sun at noon to illustrate all shadowes, as the sheaves in harvest, to fill all penuries, all occasions invite his mercies, and all times are his seasons.' . . .

'That God should let my soule fall out of his hand, into a bottomlesse pit, and roll an unremoveable stone upon it, and leave it

to that which it finds there (and it shall finde that there, which it never imagined, till it came thither) and never thinke more of that soule, never have more to doe with it. That of that providence of God, that studies the life of every weed, and worme, and ant, and spider, and toad, and viper, there should never, never any beame flow out upon me; that that God, who looked upon me, when I was nothing, and called me when I was not, as though I had been, out of the womb and depth of darknesse, will not looke upon me now, when, though a miserable, and a banished, and a damned creature, yet I am his creature still, and contribute something to his glory, even in my damnation; that that God, who hath often looked upon me in my foulest uncleannesse, and when I had shut out the eye of the day, the Sunne, and the eye of the night, the Taper, and the eyes of all the world, with curtaines and windowes and doores, did yet see me, and see me in mercy, by making me see that he saw me, and sometimes brought me to a present remorse, and (for that time) to a forbearing of that sinne, should so turne himselfe from me, to his glorious Saints and Angels, as that no Saint nor Angel, nor Christ Jesus himselfe, should ever pray him to looke towards me, never remember him, that such a soule there is; that that God, who hath so often said to my soule, *Quare morieris?* Why wilt thou die? and so often sworne to my soule, *Vivit Dominus*, As the Lord liveth, I would not have thee dye, but live, will neither let me dye, nor let me live, but dye an everlasting life, and live an everlasting death; that that God, who, when he could not get into me, by standing, and knocking, by his ordinary meanes of entring, by his Word, his mercies, hath applied his judgements, and hath shaked the house, this body, with agues and palsies, and set his house on fire, with fevers and calentures, and frighted the Master of the house, my soule, with horrors, and heavy apprehensions, and so made an entrance into me; That that God should frustrate all his owne purposes and practises upon me, and leave me, and cast me away, as though I had cost him nothing, that this God at last, should let this soule goe away, as a smoake, as a vapour, as a bubble, and that then this soule cannot be a smoake, a vapour, nor a bubble, but must lie in darknesse, as long as the Lord of light is light it selfe, and never sparke of that light reach to my soule; What Tophet is not Paradise, what Brimstone is not Amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally eternally, eternally from the sight of God?'[13]

[13] On the somewhat flimsy ground that John Marston also wrote sermons which have perished, while those of Donne have been preserved, this splendid passage was quoted at length by Mr. A. H. Bullen in his introduction to Marston's works. When I read it there it occurred to me that it might be worth while to look into a fine folio of Donne's sermons, which I had bought for the sake of its old gilded binding, and which had stood for years unopened on my shelves.

Book-collectors should by the way be warned against collecting old books for their bindings; there are sometimes dangerous spirits imprisoned in these leather bottles. Years before Donne seized upon me in this fashion, his old friend, Sir Henry Wotton, whose *Reliquiæ* also adorned my shelves, had emerged one day from his leather bottle, and put upon me the task of writing his life and editing his letters.

IV

The preachers of this, as of other periods, inherited certain set subjects and splendid commonplaces which it was their practice to repeat and elaborate and adorn. The Mercy of God, the Sinfulness of Man, the vanity of this world and the sorrows of the wicked, the sinner's death-bed, the Day of Judgment, the eternal torments of Hell, and the glory and blessedness of the saints in Heaven—these great themes formed the culminating points in their sermons, and were subjects which called for all their powers. Donne's own temperament and experience, his melancholy cast of thought and his mystical sense of another world, enabled him to treat many of these religious pieces with a vividness of feeling which removes them far from the region of the conventional and commonplace.

The great subject of Sin especially preoccupied him; his poet's sensibility and sensuous nature—and Donne is the most sensual of all the great English poets—made the allurements of the flesh very real to him; he knew all about temptation and the weakness of man's moral nature; like St. Augustine, with whom he has been more than once compared, the memory of his own transgressions and of the excesses of his youth was always with him; and his treatment of the psychology of sin, his descriptions of the 'various and vagabond heart of the sinner,' are written with a modern subtlety of analysis, a

frankness of self-confession, a curious mingling of asceticism and regret, which we find nowhere else except perhaps in the writings of St. Augustine, and which must hold the attention of the least theological reader; while his denunciations of judgments on sin, and his accounts of the sinner's death-bed, 'the clangour of the angels' trumpets and the horrour of the ringing bell,' are inspired by the feelings of one to whom these judgments and these terrors are very real and very dreadful.

> 'When I lye under the hands of that enemie, that hath reserved himselfe to the last, to my last bed, then when I shall be able to stir no limbe in any other measure then a Feaver or a Palsie shall shake them, when everlasting darknesse shall have an inchoation in the present dimnesse of mine eyes, and the everlasting gnashing in the present chattering of my teeth, and the everlasting worme in the present gnawing of the Agonies of my body, and anguishes of my minde, when the last enemie shall watch my remedilesse body, and my disconsolate soule there, there, where not the Physitian, in his way, perchance not the Priest in his, shall be able to give any assistance, And when he hath sported himselfe with my misery upon that stage, my death-bed, shall shift the Scene, and throw me from that bed, into the grave, and there triumph over me, God knowes, how many generations, till the Redeemer, my Redeemer, the Redeemer of all me, body, as well as soule, come againe; As death is *Novissimus hostis*, the enemy which watches me, at my last weaknesse, and shall hold me, when I shall be no more, till that Angel come, *Who shall say, and sweare that time shall be no more*, in that consideration, in that apprehension, he is the powerfullest, the fearfullest enemy; and yet even there this enemy *Abolebitur*, he shall be destroyed.

One of Donne's greatest themes was the Omnipotence of God, his mercy, his justice; and so real and vivid was his sense of God and the glory of the beatific vision, that unlike other preachers of the time he felt no need to terrify his congregations with the flames and physical horrors of Hell—to his religious mind the deprivation of God's love was in itself Hell, and no fires and tortures could add to that punishment. Save, therefore, as an eternal banishment from God's presence, Donne does not speak of Hell; but the description of Heaven, the glory of Heaven, was a theme that called forth his highest powers of eloquence and impassioned imagination.

Although Donne had studied the 'new philosophy,' and was aware of the discoveries of Copernicus, and could, for the purposes of metaphor and fancy,

make a literary use of these conceptions, his mind still had its habitation in the smaller, earth-centred Ptolemaic creation; the full realization of these new discoveries, the sense of the immensity of space and the unimportance of this earth in its unmeasured vastness, was a more modern way of feeling in which Donne had no share—which belongs later on in the seventeenth century to the time of Pascal. But contrasted with his imperfect realization of the infinity of space, his sense of the infinity of time was extremely vivid; the contrast between eternity and the briefness of human life he felt and described with sombre and ecstatic impressiveness. Eternity, the eternity of God and Heaven, is a theme to which he continually recurs, and which sheds a strange, still atmosphere over his descriptions of the timeless existence of the Blessed in their heavenly abodes.

And yet God was a terrible God, a God of curses and maledictions, of thunderbolts, of showers of blood, of earthquakes; his worship was not a mere matter of holy rejoicings, low voices, and holy whisperings; the preacher was not merely to preach comfort and consolation; he must denounce God's terrible judgments on his hearers, he must batter their souls and awaken those that slept in sin. The 'Ministers of God' are, Donne said, 'Sonnes of Thunder, they are full of waters, trampling of horses, runnings of Chariots'; '*Ite maledicti*, Goe yee accursed into Hell fire,' was part of their message; let not him to whom the Truth had been preached and had not believed it, let him never deceive himself, 'he shall be damned.'

> 'In the frame and constitution of al Religions, these Materials, these Elements have ever entred; Some words of a remote signification, not vulgarly understood, some actions of a kinde of halfe-horror and amazement, some places of reservation and retirednesse, and appropriation to some sacred persons, and inaccessible to all others. . . . In that very discipline which was delivered from God, by *Moses*, the service was full of mysterie, and horror, and reservation, By *terrible things* (Sacrifices of blood in manifold effusions) *God answered them*. . . . So that God in the Old, and Christ in the New Testament, hath conditioned his Doctrine, and his Religion (that is, his outward worship) so, as that evermore there should be preserved a Majesty, and a reverentiall feare, and an awfull discrimination of Divine things from Civill, and evermore something reserved to be inquired after, and laid up in the mouth of the Priest, that the People might acknowledge an obligation from him, in the exposition, and application thereof. Nay, this way of *answering us by terrible things* (that is, by things that imprint a holy

horror, and a Religious reverence) is much more in the Christian Church, then it can have beene in any other Religion.'

V

As a poet Donne seems to have adopted a certain harsh and crabbed way of writing, in revolt against the mellifluence of the Elizabethan taste. His poems show here and there indeed that he could, if he wished, touch those harp-strings of sweet music; but they also show, only too abundantly, that in this soft harmony he did not find the medium for the personal expression he desired. This crabbedness shows itself, too, in his letters and his earlier prose writing, and also in the uninspired portions of his sermons. But when he was most in earnest, when he came to treat with passionate seriousness some great theme of faith or morals, his wilfulness of language fell from him; and in his attempt to bring his message home to the hearts of his congregation he availed himself without stint of his own gifts as a poet, and all the music and splendour of the great contemporary speech.

Donne, indeed, often makes use of musical metaphors when he speaks of preaching; the preacher, he says, is a watchman, placed on a high tower to sound a trumpet; his preaching was the trumpet's voice, it was thunder, it was the beating of a drum, the tolling of a bell of warning, it was 'a lovely song, sung to an instrument'; the preacher should not speak with 'uncircumcised lips or an extemporal or irreverent or over-homely and vulgar language'; his style should be modelled on that of the Holy Ghost, whose style was 'a dilligent, and an artificial style,' and who in penning the Scriptures 'delights himself, not only with a propriety, but with a delicacy, and harmony, and melody of language; with height of Metaphors, and other figures, which may work greater impressions upon the Readers.' In addition to this august model, the style of the Church Fathers formed Donne's other model in his preaching, and he more than once calls attention to their 'elegant phrases,' their 'cadences and allusions and assimilations,' to Jerome's epistles 'full of heavenly meditation and curious expressions,' to Augustine's study to 'make his language sweet and harmonious,' and St. Bernard's effort to exalt 'devotion from the melodious fall of words.'

Coleridge, in his curious notes on Donne's sermons, remarks on the patristic leaven, the rhetorical extravagance, the taste for forced and fantastic analogies, which Donne derived from his study of the early Fathers; and, indeed, the influence of these models, falling in as it did with his natural taste for 'wit' and extravagant conceits, resulted often in far-fetched and fantastic passages; and there are whole sermons built up on one metaphor, on blood or water or tears or kisses, and even on vomit and circumcision, in which one

image is turned and twisted and elaborated and swollen out with figurative, moral and mystical meanings, grotesquely adorned with medical analogies and legal jargon and scholastic quibbles and rabbinical speculations, until we share to the full Dean Milman's amazement at the taste of those immense and attentive congregations, and are not surprised to hear that noblemen and gentlemen were sometimes taken up for dead, after listening to one of these hour-long conceits and overwhelming metaphors.

But then again this cumbrous style takes fire, this vast edifice of elaborate adornments blazes up into a splendid illumination; and remote as we are in time and taste from the audiences which stood for hours in the open air at Paul's Cross, or filled the choir of the old Cathedral, we share, if but for a moment, the delight which drew those ancient crowds to hear these products of what one contemporary called his 'Giant phancie,' to witness the gleams of what another described as that 'awfull fire' which burned in the brain of the great preacher.

But what compels our attention most in these discourses is when Donne 'preaches himself' in them, speaks of his past life, his sins and his remorse for them, of his present temptations, of his fears for his future fate, or his hopes of Heaven.

> 'When I consider that I was in my parents loynes (a substance unworthy of a word, unworthy of a thought) when I consider what I am now, (a Volume of diseases bound up together, a dry cynder, if I look for naturall, for radicall moisture, and yet a Spunge, a bottle of overflowing Rheumes, if I consider accidentall; an aged childe, a gray-headed Infant, and but the ghost of mine own youth) When I consider what I shall be at last, by the hand of death, in my grave, (first, but Putrifaction, and then, not so much as Putrifaction, I shall not be able to send forth so much as an ill ayre, not any ayre at all, but shall be all insipid, tastlesse, savourlesse dust; for a while, all wormes, and after a while, not so much as wormes, sordid, senslesse, namelesse dust) When I consider the past, and present, and future state of this body, in this world, I am able to conceive, able to expresse the worst that can befall it in nature, and the worst that can be inflicted upon it by man, or fortune; But the least degree of glory that God hath prepared for that body in heaven, I am not able to expresse, not able to conceive. . . .
>
> 'Let me wither and weare out mine age in a discomfortable, in an unwholesome, in a penurious prison, and so pay my debts with my bones, and recompence the wastfulnesse of my youth, with the

beggery of mine age; Let me wither in a spittle under sharpe, and foule, and infamous diseases, and so recompence the wantonnesse of my youth, with that loathsomnesse in mine age; yet, if God withdraw not his spirituall blessings, his Grace, his Patience, If I can call my suffering his Doing, my passion his Action All this that is temporall, is but a caterpiller got into one corner of my garden, but a mill-dew fallen upon one acre of my Corne.'

These personal passages have often for us another interest: we find in them a curious modern note or quality which we find almost nowhere else in the literature of that age. For in spite of his medieval cast of thought Donne was in some ways the most modern writer of his period; in his poems and in his strange, feverish *Meditations* there is a subtlety of self-analysis, an awareness of the workings of his own mind, which seems to belong to the nineteenth rather than to the seventeenth century. We hear him confessing, for instance, how, while he is preaching, he is partly in the pulpit; partly in his library at home; partly expounding his text, and partly thinking what his congregation will say to each other of his sermon when it is finished. So, too, with regard to prayer:

'When we consider with a religious seriousnesse the manifold weaknesses of the strongest devotions in time of Prayer, it is a sad consideration. I throw my selfe downe in my Chamber, and I call in, and invite God, and his Angels thither, and when they are there, I neglect God and his Angels, for the noise of a Flie, for the ratling of a Coach, for the whining of a doore; I talke on, in the same posture of praying; Eyes lifted up; knees bowed downe; as though I prayed to God; and, if God, or his Angels should aske me, when I thought last of God in that prayer, I cannot tell: Sometimes I finde that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell. A memory of yesterdays pleasures, a feare of to morrows dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine eare, a light in mine eye, an any thing, a nothing, a fancy, a Chimera in my braine, troubles me in my prayer. So certainely is there nothing, nothing in spirituall things, perfect in this world.'

Donne drew a distinction, in his letters, between the Jack Donne of his earlier life and Dr. Donne, the Dean and grave divine and preacher. But, as he himself said, men do not change their passions, but only the objects of them; God does not take men from their calling, but mends them in it; He loves renovations, not innovations. Just as each of the authors of the books of

Scripture, whether they were courtiers or shepherds or fishermen, kept the idiom and the interests of their profession in their sacred writings, so the regenerate soul, whether amorous, ambitious, or covetous, could find in God 'a fit subject, and just occasion to exercise the same affection piously, and religiously, which had before so sinfully transported, and possesst it.' So Donne retained his old passions and ways of thought; but whereas he had formerly, as he himself says of St. Augustine, made sonnets of his sins, he now made sermons of them. Dr. Donne was still Jack Donne, though sanctified and transformed, and those who have learned to know the secular poet will find in the writer of religious prose the same characteristics, the subtle, modern self-analytic mind moving in a word of medieval thought, the abstract, frigid scholastic intellect and the quickest senses, the forced conceits and passionate sincerity, the harsh utterance and the snatches of angel's music—in fact all that has attracted or perhaps repelled them in the author of the 'love-songs and satiric weeds,' the sensual elegies and rugged verse-letters of his earlier period.

VI

A preacher or moralist often betrays himself indirectly, for he is apt to see his own faults in others, and to dwell, in his exhortations, on the temptations and weaknesses to which he is especially exposed. It is characteristic of Donne that he should so frequently inveigh against the sins of the senses, and especially of the eye, which he said was 'the devil's doore, before the ear'; and characteristic also his frequent recurrence to the danger of remembering past sins—'the sinfull remembrance of former sins, which is a dangerous rumination, and an unwholesome chawing of the cud.' Another sin to which Donne frequently recurs is the sin of curiosity, the sin of the curious and subtle intellect, which, dissatisfied with the 'solid and fundamentall' doctrines necessary to salvation, longed for 'birds of Paradise, unrevealed mysteries out of Gods own bosom.' His reprobation of this unchastened curiosity, this presumption of men who 'being but worms will look into Heaven,' was partly, no doubt, an attack on the rising tide of Puritan and schismatic speculation; but it was also an indirect confession of the attraction, for his boundless intellectual curiosity, of the high and inexplicable problems of Christian metaphysics. Donne echoes Luther's denunciation of the 'hatefull, damnable Monosyllable, How'; again and again he warns his congregation against inquiries which were 'forc'd dishes of hot brains, and not sound meat,' 'spirituall *wantonnesses*, and unlawful and dangerous dallyings with mysteries of Divinity'; and yet again and again we find his own thoughts losing their way among mysteries above the reach of reason, the nature of the Trinity, Predestination, Election, Original Sin, many strange scholastic questions about

the Angels, the Devil, and the possibility of his ultimate salvation, and such high, insoluble problems as for instance whether the Serpent, as many of the Fathers believed, had feet and walked upright before the Fall.

Such was Donne as he reveals himself in his sermons, essentially in mind and temperament the same person as the poet, but turning his native gifts, and even his acquired stock of conceits and images, to new and sanctified uses. The mood resulting from this transformation has been well described by Professor Saintsbury as ‘a mood in which the memory of bygone earthly delights blends inextricably with the present fervour of devotion, and which to a fancy resembling his own might suggest a temple of Aphrodite or Dionysus turned into a Christian church, and served by the same priest as of old, with complete loyalty to his new faith, but with undying consciousness of the past.’

Thus one tries to explain Donne’s sermons and account for them in a satisfactory manner. And yet in these, as in his poems, there remains something baffling which still eludes our last analysis. Reading these old hortatory and dogmatic pages, the thought suggests itself that Donne is often saying something else, something poignant and personal, and yet, in the end, incommunicable to us. It sometimes seems as if he were using the time-honoured phrases of the accepted faith, its hope of heaven, and its terror of the grave, to express a vision of his own—a vision of life and death, of evil and horror and ecstasy—very different from that of other preachers; and we are troubled as well as fascinated by the strange music which he blows through the sacred trumpets.

VII

From Donne’s sermons themselves we can gather some impression of the effect in his own age of his preaching, either at court, where he often preached before James I or Charles I, or at Lincoln’s Inn, or at his parish church of St. Dunstan’s, or in the open air at Paul’s Cross, and above all before his ‘great and curious auditories’ at St. Paul’s, when the choir was so crowded that many of the poorer sort could not have seats, but must ‘stand and thrust,’ and where long murmurs of approval sometimes, he said, swallowed up one-quarter of his hour’s sermon.

We have other and outside evidence, too, of his influence as a preacher, and his manner and appearance in the pulpit. A member of the Dutch embassy in England, Constantine Huyghens, writes of the ‘wealth of his unequalled wit, and yet more incomparable eloquence in the pulpit,’ and we read of the great concourse of noblemen and gentlemen at one of his sermons at Lincoln’s Inn ‘whereof two or three were endangered and taken up dead for the time, with

the extreme press and thronging.'

Izaak Walton has described for us his manner in the pulpit:

> 'preaching the Word so, as shewed his own heart was possest with those very thoughts, and joyes that he laboured to distill into others: A Preacher in earnest, weeping sometimes for his Auditory, sometimes with them: alwayes preaching to himself, like an Angel from a cloud, but in none; carrying some, as St. *Paul* was, to Heaven in holy raptures, and inticing others by a sacred Art and Courtship to amend their lives; here picturing a vice so as to make it ugly to those that practised it; and a vertue so as to make it beloved even by those that lov'd it not; and, all this with a most particular grace and an unexpressible addition of comeliness.'

There are other evidences of the manner and effect of his preaching in the commendatory verses written at his death, in which mention is made of his 'speaking action,' 'pale looks, faint breath, and melting phrases.'

> Mee thinkes I see him in the pulpit standing,
> Not eares, or eyes, but all mens hearts commanding,
> Where wee that heard him, to our selves did faine
> Golden Chrysostome was alive againe;
> And never were we weari'd, till we saw
> His houre (and but an houre) to end did draw.
> How did he shame the doctrine-men,

one poet writes, and another:

> thy one houre did treate
> The thousand mazes of the hearts deceipt;
> Thou didst pursue our lov'd and subtill sinne,
> Through all the foldings wee had wrapt it in.

While another poet gives in Latin verses an even more vivid picture of his preaching:

> 'Whenever the orator stood in St. Paul's I have seen and heard with amazement the wonderful power with which he held men, as they lifted up their hearts and eyes, whilst he poured forth the wise eloquence of a Nestor, sweeter than honey. Now he holds them thunderstruck whilst he preaches the mystery of holy things never

> before granted to the people and not yet understood; they ponder his words with admiration, and stand with outstretched ears. Presently his manner and form of speaking are changed, and he treats of sad things—fate and the mournful hour of death, and the body returning to its primal ashes: then you might have seen all groan and grieve, and one here and there unable to restrain his tears.’

From these contemporary glimpses, and from the sermons themselves we can form some notion of the power, the grace, the eloquence, the sombre fascination which made Donne the most famous preacher of the time, and one of his great sermons an important event for his contemporaries. As we read these sermons, amid much that is remote and meaningless to us, we seem now and then to hear the tamber of a living voice, and then for a moment the past returns; and in the vast, dim-lit cathedral of old St. Paul’s we seem to see that awe-struck congregation as they gaze up at the courtly, spectral figure standing with his hour-glass in the pulpit, and pouring forth in impassioned eloquence his inmost thoughts of remorse and ecstasy, his poignant sense of the grave’s unspeakable horror, and Heaven’s unutterable glory; and this image is added to those many deeply coloured pictures which, hung in the chamber of the historic imagination, form for us our vision of that illustrious and varied period of English history.

VIII

Donne’s ecclesiastic career has been so adequately recounted by his biographers, Dr. Jessopp and Sir Edmund Gosse, that only the briefest recapitulation is necessary here. John Donne was born in 1573; he was the elder son of a rich London ironmonger, who died in 1576. His mother, who was descended from a sister of Sir Thomas More, came of a famous Roman Catholic family; she had two brothers who were Jesuits, and numbered among her relatives many prisoners and exiles for the sake of the Roman faith. She remained a devout Roman Catholic till the end of her life, and her son’s earliest years were spent in an atmosphere of Roman Catholic devotion. At the early age of eleven Donne went to Oxford, and afterwards to Cambridge; in 1590 we find him in London again, and in 1592 he was admitted to Lincoln’s Inn. A young man of brilliant intellect, he now found himself, as a Roman Catholic, shut out from the usual paths of honourable ambition, and faced with the problem whether he should remain in the old faith, and so sacrifice his worldly prospects, or should join the English Church and take his share in the life and interests of his country. Before coming to any conclusion he first surveyed and digested, he tells us, ‘the whole body of divinity, controverted between ours and the Roman Church’; and if his final decision coincided with

his interests, and if ten years later we find Donne a convinced opponent of Romanism, though we can hardly regard his change of faith as due to a genuine conversion to Anglicanism, or to any belief that it was alone the true church, it does not appear on the other hand to have been a mere apostasy prompted by political considerations. Donne was genuinely convinced that there was truth in each form of Christian religion, and that it was wisest and best for each man to accept the faith of his own country.

When after his somewhat stormy and spendthrift youth Donne made his rash marriage in 1601, and found himself desperately poor in consequence, half in disgrace, and with small prospects of worldly advancement, he resumed his theological studies; and in 1605 we find him assisting Dr. Thomas Morton, afterwards Bishop of Durham, in his controversies with the Roman Catholic writers. When his patron, Dr. Morton, became Dean of Gloucester in 1607, and offered to resign a living to him if he would take orders, Donne refused the offer. Walton tells us that this refusal was due to a sense of his own unworthiness, and the fear that the irregularities of his past life might bring dishonour on the sacred calling, but it is more likely, as his letters of the time suggest, that he had not yet abandoned the hope of some court advancement. But this hope was repeatedly disappointed: Donne was poor, burdened with a large family, and forced to live in humiliating dependence on the bounty of rich friends; and in 1612 we find him writing to the new court favourite, Rochester, that he had resolved to take orders. Rochester, however, seems to have discouraged this resolution; and it was not till three years later, and after further disappointments, that Donne, yielding to the persuasions of King James himself, finally determined to enter the Church. In January, 1615, he was ordained, and in the same year he became one of the king's chaplains and was made a Doctor of Divinity by the University of Cambridge.

Donne's earliest court sermon which has come down to us, and perhaps the first sermon which he preached as chaplain to the king, is dated April 21, 1616. Though much was expected of him, Izaak Walton tells us, his preaching exceeded all expectation; and indeed, if we recall the circumstances of the time, when the Overbury murder, one of the greatest scandals of English history, had just been made public in all its dreadful details; when the once omnipotent favourite of the king, the Earl of Somerset, stood publicly accused of complicity in this crime, and his guilty wife was imprisoned in the Tower, an astonishing effect must have been produced upon his auditory by his sombre and terrible denunciation of God's judgment on sinners:

> 'God is *the Lord of Hosts*, and he can proceed by Martial Law: he can hang thee upon the next tree; he can choak thee with a crum,

with a drop, at a voluptuous feast; he can sink down the Stage and the Player, The bed of wantonness, and the wanton actor, into the jaws of the earth, into the mouth of hell: he can surprise thee, even in the act of sin.'

In March, 1617, Donne was appointed to preach in the famous open-air pulpit of London at Paul's Cross, before the Lords of the Council and the City Magistrates. These sermons at Paul's Cross, which were preached by the most distinguished divines of England, had an official character of high importance, and were one of the great events of contemporary London. Donne on his first appearance in this open-air pulpit preached before an assembly of the greatest magnates of England, which included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Keeper Bacon, the Lord Privy Seal, the Master of the Rolls, 'and divers other great men,' a sermon of enormous length on the anniversary of the accession of James I, which, if delivered as it was printed, must have kept his congregation standing for at least two hours. It was, however, a contemporary letter-writer tells us, regarded as a 'dainty sermon,' and was 'exceedingly well-liked generally,' especially for the praise he bestowed upon Queen Elizabeth, 'that Queen, unmatchable, inimitable in her sex,' at the news of whose death everyone of the merchants of the City 'were running up and down like Ants, with their eggs bigger than themselves, every man with his bags, to seek where to hide them safely,' and all were 'under one common flood and depth of tears.'

IX

In this year Donne lost the dearly loved wife whom he had married in such romantic circumstances, and in his grief at this irreparable loss he seems to have taken his final 'step to the altar,' and to have undergone a real conversion; his mind was now more wholly set on heavenly things; and to his intellectual interest in theology and dogma was added a passionate devotion which increased as the years went by, till he became almost absorbed in that life of asceticism and spiritual exaltation which is reflected in his religious poetry, his meditations, and his great sermons.

In 1619 he was appointed to go as King's Chaplain with his friend, Lord Doncaster, on a mission to Germany. His farewell sermon to the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn has been preserved, also one of the two sermons he preached before the Electress Palatine, afterwards the Queen of Bohemia, at Heidelberg, and a sermon he preached at The Hague. This last he elaborated from his notes eleven years later into two sermons. Many of Donne's sermons are of enormous length, and if preached as written must have taken two or three

hours to deliver, instead of the hour marked by the running sands in the conspicuous hour-glass, to which Donne was accustomed to confine himself. But there is plenty of evidence to show that we do not now possess the sermons as he preached them. Donne, like other divines of the period, took no fully written manuscript with him into the pulpit; he preached from notes; and although when preaching at court or at St. Paul's on great occasions he would no doubt commit much of his sermon to memory, the whole text would be written out from memory afterwards, and subject to many additions and changes in the process of writing.

His preaching at The Hague is chiefly remarkable for the wealth of sustained nautical metaphors which pervade it. Donne, who in his youth had sailed in company with his college friend, Henry Wotton, and with Essex on two long voyages, is remarkable as a poet for his frequent use of nautical terms and his references to seafaring life and the ways of ships. He carried this breath of the sea with him into the pulpit; his sermons abound in nautical terms and images, and now he preached to this seafaring nation on the Apostles as fishers of men, taken from their nets 'weather-beaten with North and South winds, and rough-cast with foame, and mud'; and elaborated a giant simile of the world as a sea, in which all the inhabitants are fishes to be caught in the net of the Gospel and served up at the great marriage feast in Heaven, where, he added characteristically—and we must think surprisingly to the Dutch—whoever is a dish is a guest also, and whoever is served at the table sits at it.

After his return to England, Donne was appointed, towards the end of 1621, to the Deanery of St. Paul's. His first sermon preached in that cathedral was on Christmas Day, 1621. In the following year he preached two sermons which are not devoid of interest. The first of these was on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot; he had intended to deliver it from Paul's Cross in the open air, but the weather being bad, he preached it in the Cathedral, taking the opportunity of this commemoration to elaborate, with more wit than religious zeal, an ingenious conceit of the papists plotters attempting to make the houses of Parliament into a battery of artillery and murderous cannon, loading it with Peers, with People, with Princes, with the King, and discharging it upward, to shoot the God who was the King of England at the face of the God who reigned in Heaven. A week later he preached to the Virginia Company what has been called the first of English missionary sermons. In this sermon he expounded the view that English conquest and colonization were carried on to furnish salvation to the benighted heathen; a view which has proved more acceptable to the builders of the British Empire than, we may imagine, to the heathen themselves, whose feelings about it have not, however, been put on record.

Donne's next sermon of public importance was preached in St. James's Palace a few days after the death of his old master James I. James died on March 27, 1625; the new king, Charles I, had shut himself up in St. James's Palace; but on Sunday, April 3, he sent for Donne to preach to him in the palace chapel. From a few scraps of old paper preserved by chance, we are able to make for ourselves a more than usually vivid picture of this Sunday afternoon nearly three hundred years ago. Donne, who had been seriously ill, was plainly thrown into great agitation by the royal command to preach before the inscrutable prince who was now beginning his fateful reign. He writes to a friend at court begging that on his arrival at the palace he may hide himself in an out-chamber or closet till the time for the sermon. He must preach fasting, he says, and after the sermon would steal into his coach and return home. Another letter of a contemporary witness describes the very pale face and deep mourning of the young king as he went to the chapel, draped in a plain black cloak that fell to his ankles. Donne began his sermon with a discreet reference to the death of the old king, and then proceeded to preach a controversial sermon against the Roman Catholic and Puritan controversialists of the time; but three weeks later, preaching at Denmark House, where the embalmed body of James I lay in state, his references to his departed master are more explicit; and in one splendid passage about the king's dead hand, he keeps repeating, at the end of his intricate clauses, the word 'dead' in a way that makes it ring out like the tolling of a bell, and which in his accomplished delivery must have produced a strange effect of musical and sombre rhetoric.

In 1625 Donne was driven out of London by the plague and took refuge with his friend Magdalen Herbert, George Herbert's mother, who was now married to Sir John Danvers, and lived in Danvers House in what was then the village of Chelsea. In 1627 Lady Danvers died and was buried in the parish church of Chelsea, where Donne preached the funeral sermon. In his unregenerate days Donne had written poems to Mrs. Herbert, almost as a lover; he had immortalized her in those famous lines:

> No *Spring*, nor *Summer* Beauty hath such grace,
> As I have seen in one Autumnall face,

and now, after an invocation to this loved ghost to arise from the consecrated dust in which she slept, he proceeds, in a long and noble panegyric to paint a portrait of her as she lived and as he and her family and friends knew her—a portrait which is one of the most vivid and beautiful we possess of those Elizabethan great ladies who befriended the poets of the time and still live for us immortalized in their poems.

Izaak Walton tells us that he was present in the church, and saw and heard Donne weep and preach this funeral sermon; and he repeats Donne's characteristic wish that 'all his Body were turn'd unto tongues, that he might declare her just praises to posterity.'

X

Donne, like Bossuet, was at his greatest in his funeral sermons; and it was indeed into the funeral sermons of the seventeenth century that the lyric passion and the dramatic energy of the preceding age seemed to find a new medium of expression. But Donne's inspiration was derived from earlier sources; his mind was in many ways essentially medieval, and in no way more so than in his medieval sense of death's horror. Even in his profane and secular poetry we note a preoccupation with this thought; and when as a preacher it was his duty to treat of Death in his sermons he spared his hearers none of the most macabre of his imaginations about it. There was an almost morbid love of ugliness in his curious temperament, a delight even greater than that of Swift in what is repulsive and disgusting, and in one of his sermons he describes the condition of man's bodily existence in terms of a splendid loathsomeness which have never been surpassed:

> 'Painters have presented to us with some horrour, the sceleton, the frame of the bones of a man's body; but the state of a body, in the dissolution of the grave, no pencil can present to us. Between that excrementall jelly that thy body is made of at first, and that jelly which thy body dissolves to at last; there is not so noysome, so putrid a thing in nature.

In these sermons on Death he could freely indulge his interest in what was almost an hallucination with him—the activities of the loathsome worm.

> 'If my soule could aske one of those *Wormes* which my dead body shall produce, Will you change with me? that worme would say, No; for you are like to live eternally in torment; for my part, I can live no longer, then the putrid moisture of your body will give me leave, and therefore I will not change; nay, would the *Devill* himselfe change with a damned soule? I cannot tell.'

XI

After the death of Magdalen Herbert the time was approaching when Donne must preach his own funeral sermon; his strength gradually declined,

twice he was afflicted with severe illness, and in 1630 his health finally gave way, and he retired to the country. But early in the next year he dragged himself up to London to preach his usual Lent sermon to the court—to sing, as one of his panegyrists wrote, like a swan, his mournful dirge—the great sermon which was published after his death as 'Deaths Duell,' and in which his sombre imagination and his morbid and fantastic genius shone forth with unearthly splendour. Walton gives a vivid description of this last dramatic appearance, how, when to the amazement of the beholders he appeared in the pulpit, 'many of them thought he presented himself not to preach mortification by a living voice: but, mortality by a decayed body, and dying face,' and how as they saw his tears and heard his faint and hollow voice, as he preached on his text: 'To God the Lord belong the issues from death,' they felt that the text had been prophetically chosen.

In this sermon, delivered, as is stated on its title-page, 'at White Hall, before the Kings Majesty. . . . Being his last Sermon, and called by his Majesties household, "The Doctors own Funerall Sermon," ' he says:

> 'For us that dye now and sleepe in the state of the dead, we must al passe this *posthume* death, this *death* after *death*, nay this death after buriall, this *dissolution* after *dissolution*, this *death* of *corruption* and *putrefaction*, of *vermiculation* and *incineration*, of *dissolution* and *dispersion* in and *from* the *grave*, when these bodies that have been the *children* of *royall parents*, & the *parents of royall children*, must say with *Job*, *Corruption thou art my father*, and *to the Worme thou art my mother & my sister. Miserable riddle*, when the *same worme* must bee *my mother*, and *my sister*, and *my selfe. Miserable incest*, when I must be *maried* to my *mother* and my *sister*, and bee both *father* and *mother* to my own *mother* and *sister*, *beget & beare* that *worme* which is all that *miserable penury*; when my *mouth* shall be *filled* with *dust*, and the *worme* shall *feed*, and *feed sweetly* upon me, when the *ambitious* man shall have *no satisfaction*, *if* the *poorest alive* tread upon him, nor the *poorest* receive any *contentment* in being made *equall* to *Princes*, for they *shall bee equall* but *in dust*.'

After singing, as it were at his own decease, this great and farewell threnody, Donne retired to the Deanery and began that spectacular preparation for death, that 'elaborate public decease,' as Gosse describes it, 'so long-drawn, so solemn, so boldly picturesque,' which so greatly impressed his contemporaries, and which, in the monument designed after the picture he had had painted of himself dressed in a winding sheet, has left in St. Paul's, as the

only relic which survived the conflagration of the old Gothic cathedral, so strange and beautiful a memorial.

We look back at the earlier period of the seventeenth century in England, not only through the windows which history opens for us; we see it even more clearly, though diversely tinctured, through the minds and imaginations of certain writers of the time; fresh in the morning light of Milton's early poems, calm in the sabbath sunshine of George Herbert's *Temple*, or dusky with the twilight of Sir Thomas Browne's meditations. Donne's sermons reveal for us another casement of that age's imagination, a sombre, deep-emblazoned gothic window, through which nevertheless the sunlight of to-day sometimes seems to strike, as it lights up the ascetic, enigmatic figure which it frames.

1920.

XV

JEREMY TAYLOR

I

In the leisure of my miscellaneous reading I have spent a good deal of time over the folios of seventeenth-century divines. What, for a secular-minded person like myself, is the charm of these volumes of old Theology? Why do I read and re-read the Sermons of preachers like Henry Smith, Donne and the works of Fuller, of Joseph Hall, of the Cambridge Platonists and Henry More? [14]

In drawing a picture for James I of the happiness of England under his reign, Bacon described as an element of that good fortune, 'his church enlightened with good preachers, a heaven with stars.' I like to gaze upon those stars; the charm for me of reading the works of these Anglican divines I find well described in an essay of Carlyle's as:

> 'that spirit of Humanity, of Love and mild Wisdom, over which the vicissitudes of mode have no sway. There is that excellence of the inmost nature which alone confers immortality on writings; that charm, which still, under every defacement, binds us to the pages of our own Hookers, and Taylors, and Brownes, when their way of thought has long ceased to be ours, and the most valued of their merely intellectual opinions have passed, as ours too must do, with the circumstances and events in which they took their shape or rise.'

This all sounds innocent enough, but these saunterings of mine along shady and now unfrequented lanes which lead to the secluded parsonages of the seventeenth century, are perhaps not altogether as blameless as they may appear. Dr. Johnson said of Prior that he 'poached for prey among obscure authors'; and remarked that it was well-known that Pope was addicted to the same practice; nor was it unlikely, he hinted, that the poet kept a regular collection of stolen and felicitous expressions, which he drew upon to enrich and ornament his verses. 'I must steal the word I want,' Swinburne openly avowed; and indeed, the greater our great poets the more numerous have been their 'stealths'—to use a word of Milton's, who was himself truly described by Dryden as 'a celestial Thief'; Homer was probably, as Virgil and Dante were certainly princes of this light-fingered gang; Shakespeare's plagarisms are

notorious; Pope and Tennyson picked the pockets of other poets, without scruple; and it has been said of Gray that he had hardly an epithet that was authentically his own.

Since the poets are such poachers, should a proser be blamed who follows in their footsteps? Montaigne has told us how he loved to steal phrases with which to enamel his own pages; and I am not unwilling to confess that I have no great reluctance to similar acts of appropriation. But one must perform them deftly, with as little danger as possible of detection; so, just as I often walk through lonely woods in Sussex to gather, wherever I see their golden gleam, certain funguses which are delicious eating, thus in the unfrequented thickets of old theology I collect words and phrases. Nor from any writings have I stolen more than from those of that master of verbal magic, Jeremy Taylor.

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[14] If Henry More had only, like most of these writers, been endowed with the gift of style, he would have been perhaps my favourite among them all. But he was a dull writer, and lives most vividly in his sayings as recorded by his biographer, Richard Ward. This ‘Angel of Christ’s’ as he was called, who spent almost fifty years in that Cambridge College, lived in a kind of holy ecstasy; he confessed that he was often ‘mad with pleasure,’ and that he couldn’t somehow get ‘melancholy enough’; and feared that he would die laughing. His college rooms he described as a Paradise in which a good angel dwelt, and the college beer he found ‘Seraphical’; even his own body was a perpetual delight to him; it possessed, most of all in spring, an aromatic scent of which he was aware when he took off his clothes to go to bed; and certain of its products sometimes smelt to him like violets. Although his many prose works and his immensely long poems are almost unreadable, he was a charming letter-writer, and his correspondence with his ‘heroical pupil,’ Lady Conway, have been collected by Miss Marjorie Hope Nicolson and printed in her delightful book, *The Conway Letters*. (Oxford Press, 1930.)

II

Our Romantic critics, Coleridge and Lamb and Hazlitt, rendered an important service to English letters by their rediscovery of many old English

writers who had fallen out of fashion. They saw, however, these old divines and dramatists looming somewhat larger than life in the misty past, and often praised them with more zeal than discrimination. There is no one perhaps whose fame has been more affected by this splendid injustice than Jeremy Taylor. Coleridge, to whom he was an object of almost unbounded admiration, extolled his ‘great and lovely mind’; and comparing him more than once with Shakespeare, placed him with Shakespeare and Milton and Bacon among the four great geniuses of our older literature.[15]

Coleridge inspired Charles Lamb, as Lamb tells us in one of his letters, with this ‘Love of Jeremy Taylor’, which led him to declare that Taylor ‘has more and more beautiful imagery . . . more knowledge and description of human life and manners than any prose book in the language: he has more delicacy and sweetness than any mortal, the “gentle” Shakespeare hardly excepted.’ Hazlitt equalled Coleridge and Lamb in this enthusiasm; ‘when the name of Jeremy Taylor is no longer remembered with reverence,’ he declared, ‘genius will have become a mockery, and virtue an empty shade.’ These are indeed high praises, and they come to us from sources which we cannot disregard. If any one who should, however, undertake to read (as I don’t believe these critics ever really read) the massive tomes of this ‘Shakespeare of divines,’[16] is likely to meet with no small disappointment. Jeremy Taylor’s works, which, in their modern reprint, fill nine closely printed volumes, belong almost altogether to that class of theological, hortatory, and devotional writing which has now but little interest, save for special students of religious history. He wrote for his own age, but the concerns of that age are no longer ours; the controversies in which he engaged have been almost forgotten; the doctrines he expounded, the ideals of piety and religion he upheld, have changed their aspect, and have been stated in other terms; his exhortations and denunciations fall but faintly upon our ears. A few fine passages in prose anthologies, a few sentences in his praise from Coleridge and Lamb and Hazlitt, preserve his fame; but it is a fame at second hand, a borrowed glory, and one that seems to be waning with the years.

It is no superfluous task for a modern student to fix his attention now and then on the fading splendours of these ancient reputations. Although he may hardly hope to restore their fame in its pristine lustre, he may yet find elements in their work which are of enduring value; and by disengaging these from the dead matter which surrounds them, and calling attention to their quality and interest, he may help to keep alive the renown of these ‘ever-memorable’ authors, whose names are famous, but whose works are no longer read. Literature, moreover, has its outskirts, its environing regions, where many of the streams arise which enrich its soil; there are orators like Burke, who,

though not primarily men of letters, must be counted among them; and especially do the contributions made to English literature by the divines of the golden age of the English Church deserve all the attention—if not quite all the praise—which has been given to them by our great English critics.

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[15] Coleridge's *Table Talk* (Oxford, 1917), p. 110. Elsewhere Coleridge writes: 'Learning, fancy, discursive intellect, *tria juncta in uno*, and of each enough to have alone immortalized a man he had. . . . Images, conceptions, notions, such as leave him but one rival, Shakespeare, there were' (*Literary Remains*, 1838, Vol. III, p. 333). In one of his letters Coleridge describes Jeremy Taylor as 'a miraculous combination of erudition, broad, deep and omnigenous; of logic subtle as well as acute, and as robust as agile, of psychological insight, so fine and yet so secure!' 'I believe,' he adds, 'such a complete man hardly shall we meet again' (*Letters*, 1895, p. 640).

[16] The phrase is William Mason's, though it has been attributed to Gray. See Mason's letter to Gray, of Jan. 8, 1761. (Gray's *Letters*, ed. Tovey, Vol. II, p. 191.)

III

Jeremy Taylor has been fortunate, not only in his critics, but in his biographers as well. The account of his life which Reginald Heber, afterwards Bishop of Calcutta, wrote as a preface to the modern reprint of Taylor's works, is full of information and acute criticism, and in 1847 the Rev. Robert Willmott published a charming and sympathetic study of his life and writings. These volumes are mainly concerned with Jeremy Taylor as a theologian and Anglican divine; Sir Edmund Gosse, his latest biographer, not only made considerable additions to our knowledge of Jeremy Taylor's life, but, treating him as a man of letters as well as a theologian, attempted for the first time to define his place in our literary history.

Jeremy Taylor was born at Cambridge in 1613. His father, although a barber, seems to have been a man of education, and indeed barbers then occupied a position in society somewhat above that of their modern successors. The boy was sent to the Perse School, and in 1626 entered Gonville and Caius College as a sizar, and was elected to a fellowship there,

which he held until 1636. In 1633 he took holy orders, and in the following year he was given the opportunity of preaching in London at St. Paul's, being asked to replace an older friend who was temporarily disabled from performing his lecturer's duty there. The sermons of this Cambridge youth aroused considerable enthusiasm, and attracting the attention of Archbishop Laud, he was taken under the protection of that prelate and joined to the group of young ecclesiastics who were being prepared to carry out Laud's policy in the Church.[17] By Laud's means Jeremy Taylor was given a fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, in 1635. Three years later he received a country living at Uppingham in Rutlandshire, where he resided with his wife, for he was now married, till the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642. As Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Charles I, he followed for two years the King in his campaigns; but in the beginning of 1645 he appears in South Wales, whither he seems to have retired with the plan of settling down to clerical work, but where he was followed by the storm of war, and was again involved in its vortex. In the defeat of a royalist force before Cardigan Castle he was captured by the Parliamentarians and imprisoned in that Castle, but was soon afterwards released. His release may have been due to the intervention of an important magnate of that region, the Earl of Carbery, a nobleman of moderate views, who contrived to keep on good terms with both the warring factions. At any rate we soon find Jeremy Taylor settled close to Golden Grove, Lord Carbery's residence in Carmarthenshire, where he joined with two other clergymen in conducting a school, and acted also as his patron's private chaplain. Lord Carbery, and still more Lord Carbery's young and saintly wife, played parts of great importance in the life of this famous clergyman; the earl gave him protection and peace and a means of living in those times of trouble, while in Lady Carbery he found his Muse and directing genius. It was for her that he wrote his devotional works, the *Holy Living* and the *Holy Dying*; she was a devout listener to his sermons, and it was at her suggestion that he collected them for publication.

After Lady Carbery's death, and the death of his own wife, which occurred at about the same time, Jeremy Taylor remained for a few years more in his Welsh retirement. He visited London, however, now and then, to attend to the publication of his books, and made the acquaintance there of John Evelyn, in whom he found a devoted friend and generous patron.[18] He preached in secret to little congregations of the anglicans and loyalists who were now more or less persecuted and in danger; he married again; he was often in financial difficulties and was more than once imprisoned, but he seems to have retained some sort of refuge in South Wales until the death there of two of his children, when he finally left that remote region for the metropolis. This was in 1657,

and in the following year he accepted, though with some reluctance, a modest position offered him by another noble patron, Lord Conway. This position was that of assistant lecturer at Lisburn in Ulster; and thither Jeremy Taylor took his family to reside at Portmore, Lord Conway's residence in Ireland. But he found anything but peace among the Ulster Presbyterians; he was persecuted and again imprisoned, but managed to escape to England in 1660. The Restoration made a great change in his fortunes, and it seemed as if he were now to enjoy the legitimate reward of his devotion to the Church and Throne. Charles II appointed him Bishop of Down and Connor, but his preferment brought with it little besides disillusion. His see proved to be to him a place of torment; the implacable Presbyterians over whom he was set in authority threatened and attacked him; a committee of Scotch spiders, he said, examined his works to find poison in them; they denounced him as an Arminian, a Socinian, a Papist, and finally forced this kindly hearted prelate to abandon the principles of toleration he had formerly advocated. Appealing to the force of the law, Jeremy Taylor dispossessed his opponents of their livings and drove them into prison and banishment or hiding. He did not, however, long survive his triumph over his enemies, dying in 1667 at the age of fifty-four.[19]

Our most intimate glimpses of Jeremy Taylor as a man are derived from his funeral sermon preached by his friend and faithful companion, George Rust. He was a wonder in his youth, Rust rhetorically tells us, 'and had he lived amongst the ancient Pagans, he had been usher'd into the world with a Miracle, and Swans must have daunc'd and sung at his Birth.' When at the age of twenty-one or twenty-two he had appeared in the pulpit of St. Paul's he preached, we are told, 'to the admiration and astonishment of his Auditory; and by his florid and youthful beauty, and sweet and pleasant air, and sublime and rais'd discourses, he made his hearers take him for some young Angel, newly descended from the Visions of Glory.'

Jeremy Taylor seems to have preserved all his life this comeliness of personal appearance, and was apparently not unaware of his good looks himself. As Bishop Heber remarks: 'few authors have so frequently introduced their own portraits, in different characters and attitudes, as ornaments to their printed works. So far as we may judge from these, he appears to have been above the middle size, strongly and handsomely proportioned, with his hair long and gracefully curling on his cheeks, large dark eyes, full of sweetness, an aquiline nose, and an open and intelligent countenance.'

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[17] George Rust, in his sermon at Jeremy Taylor's funeral, tells

us that Laud asked the young divine to preach before him. 'His discourse,' Rust says, 'was beyond exception, and beyond imitation; yet the wise Prelate thought him too young; but the great Youth humbly begg'd his Grace *to pardon that fault*, and promis'd *if he lived, he would mend it*.'

[18] A pathetic note of Jeremy Taylor's to John Evelyn, written on the death of a child on July 19, 1656, has been preserved.

> 'Deare Sir, I am in some little disorder by reason of the death of a little child of mine, a boy that lately made us very glad: but now he rejoyces in his little orbe, while we thinke, and sigh, and long to be as safe as he is.'

[19] The book I have already mentioned, Miss Nicolson's *Conway Letters*, gives many details of Jeremy Taylor's life in Ireland which were unknown to those who have previously written about him. Henry More had been at Cambridge with him for four years, and appears to have recommended him to Lord Conway, who wished to send someone to do for the small group of English Anglicans settled about his Ulster estate what Taylor had been doing for the persecuted Anglicans in London. Before going to Ireland, Jeremy Taylor visited the Conways at Ragley, and formed a spiritual friendship with that remarkable and holy woman, Lady Conway, who became famous in the seventeenth century for her philosophic speculations, and still more for her intolerable headache, which lasted for nearly thirty years, and for which none of the most famous physicians and quacks of Europe could find any alleviation. Lady Conway spent much of her life at Portmore, a splendid mansion which Inigo Jones had built on the shores of Lough Neagh, but which has long ago disappeared. There she was often visited by Jeremy Taylor; and as Henry More and the Cambridge Platonists had the quaint notion that they could establish a more spiritual view of things by convincing the world of the existence of ghosts, the two of them would go sometimes on ghost-hunts in the neighbourhood. These,

however, proved disappointing, as the ghosts declined to answer the Bishop's carefully prepared enquiries, and would vanish with undoctrinal moans, or disappear 'in white with a most melodious harmony,' which, though pleasant enough to hear, provided no definite information about the life beyond the grave. We learn also from these letters many details of Jeremy Taylor's troubles and persecutions in Ulster, and of his illness and death, in such circumstances of penury that Lord Conway had to provide money to pay for his funeral expenses. His last six years had been spent in fighting the Presbyterians, with more zeal, it appears, than discretion, as the Archbishop of Canterbury described him as a man of 'dangerous temper and apt to break out,' and said he had had much to do to keep him in order, and to provide diversions for him.

IV

Such, then, is the figure of this long-afflicted clergyman which, with a touch of not unamiable vanity, gazes out at us from the frontispieces of his various volumes. He was a person, Rust tells us, 'of a most sweet and obliging Humour, of great Candour and Ingenuity,' whose 'Soul was made up of Harmony, and he never spake, but he charm'd his Hearer, not only with the clearness of his Reason; but all his Words, and his very Tone, and Cadencies were strangely Musical.'

This Divine of 'golden voice and angelic aspect' has left behind him a large body of theological writings, many sermons and many volumes of religious edification and controversy. His first publication was a sermon preached at Oxford in 1638 on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, and dedicated to Archbishop Laud. Four years later he published a controversial defence of episcopacy, *Of the Sacred Order and Offices of Episcopacie. . . . Asserted against the Aërians, and Acephali, New and Old*. In 1647 he brought out the best known of his controversial works, *A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying*. The book, written to show, as it states on the title-page, 'the unreasonableness of prescribing to other mens Faith, and the Iniquity of persecuting differing opinions,' is important in English religious history as being one of the first—if not the first—deliberate appeals for religious toleration. The advantages of toleration were no doubt more apparent to Jeremy Taylor when he and his fellow-Anglicans were being persecuted, and when this book was written, than they appeared afterwards, when his own

Church had regained power, and he himself, as one of its prelates, felt himself compelled to fall back on the secular arm to silence his opponents. But his defence of toleration was, when it was written, both sincere and courageous, and caused some scandal in his own party, and shocked the King of England. [20]

His next controversial work, *Clerus Domini* (1651), was a defence of the ministerial office directed against the Puritans; in the *Real Presence* (1654) he attacked the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, while in the following year he managed to involve himself by his *Unum Necessarium* in controversy, not only with Puritans and Roman Catholics, but with the orthodox divines of his own Church; for in this volume, while he scandalized the Puritans by his denial of the damnation of unbaptized infants, and what he called 'the horrible doctrine of absolute Reprobation,' and offended the Roman Catholics by questioning the efficacy of death-bed repentance, he also, by his views regarding Original Sin and the consequences of Adam's Transgression, fell under the suspicion of Pelagianism, and was bitterly attacked by several Anglican writers. He obstinately defended his unorthodox views, however, in his next publication, *Deus Justificatus* (1656), and also in certain letters which were published in the same year. His last two important controversial works were written after he had become an Irish bishop, and were directed against the Roman Catholics. The first of these, the *Dissuasive from Popery*, was published in 1664, and was followed in 1667 by a Second Part, more than three times the length of the original volume.

With these books of controversy may be placed Jeremy Taylor's *Ductor Dubitantium*, his longest production, which was published in two immense folios in 1660. Though they contain much controversy, the main subject-matter of these two volumes is what is called casuistry—that is to say, cases of conscience which are discussed and decided in accordance with certain general religious and moral considerations. Many of these questions are more curious than edifying, and concern subjects which it is not unusual to discuss in print; while there are other points which it hardly seems necessary to raise, as when, for example, he discusses whether, in menacing the wicked with punishments and terrors, it would be wise for an English clergyman to warn a sinner that if he profanes the holy sacrament a tiger will meet and tear him in the churchyard; such a threat, he wisely decides, would be more likely to make the clergyman ridiculous than the sinner apprehensive. Jeremy Taylor spent many years in composing the *Ductor Dubitantium*; he regarded it as his masterpiece, and believed that it would secure his fame to succeeding ages. But succeeding ages have been otherwise preoccupied, and this 'most elephantine of all theological works,' as it has been called, is completely forgotten now. This is

indeed true of all Jeremy Taylor's controversial works; those who supported his views, as well as those who opposed them, have all vanished into oblivion; 'the Aërians and the Acephali, new and old,' have long since ceased from troubling, and his learned expositions are left to gather dust undisturbed on the shelves of old libraries.

Almost equal in bulk and in unreadableness are the various devotional writings which Jeremy Taylor has left behind him. The first and the longest of these is *The Great Exemplar*, which was published in 1649—a Christ, or rather a series of disquisitions and devout meditations on the principal events of Christ's life as recorded in the Gospels and the better-known traditions of the Church. The work is entirely uncritical; it pays no regard to facts and dates and the various narratives of the synoptists, but is didactic, devotional, and practical in its purpose. Still more practical are two manuals of prayers and litanies, *The Golden Grove* (1655) and the *Collections of Offices* (1658), which Jeremy Taylor composed as substitutes for the Church of England Liturgy, whose use was then forbidden.

Jeremy Taylor published three other devotional works, the *Holy Living* (1650), the *Holy Dying* (1651), and *The Worthy Communicant* (1660). The last of these is a discourse on the nature and uses of the Lord's Supper, and a manual of prayers and devotions preparatory to the Communion; while in the *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, Jeremy Taylor covers the whole ground of the Christian religious life as he understood it—of sin and repentance, of the duties and devotions and diet of the true Christian, and his preparation for the great and final act of death. The title of the first of these volumes well describes its contents, 'The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living. *In which are described* the *Means* and *Instruments* of obtaining every Virtue, and the *Remedies* against every Vice, and *Considerations* serving to the resisting all Temptations.' Most of the practical as well as the controversial questions with which he was concerned Jeremy Taylor treats also in his sermons, of which sixty-four have been preserved, in addition to long passages in *The Great Exemplar*, which are plainly passages from sermons preached at various times. Such, then, in outline is the bulk of Jeremy Taylor's work; all of it is religious writing, the only partial exception being a little *Discourse of Friendship*, though this, too, was written to discuss 'how far a dear and private friendship was authorized by the principles of Christianity.' This inquiry came to him from a neighbour in South Wales, Mrs. Katherine Philips of Cardigan Priory, who, as 'The Matchless Orinda,' was a famous figure in the seventeenth century, and indeed the first English poetess whose name is known to fame. Sir Edmund Gosse gives an account of this lady, who was the unquestioned Muse of South Wales, into which remote region she was the first to introduce, he tells us, 'a new sort

of sentimentality, an effusive celebration of friendship between persons of the same sex, which was quite fresh in England, and which attracted a great deal of attention.' She formed about her a group of *précieuses*, a society for the cultivation of 'brave friendships,' to which a few men were admitted. To each member she gave a romantic name, such as Rosania, Polycrite, Poliarchus, and Regina. It was for this sibyl of South Wales and her sisters that Jeremy Taylor, or 'The noble Palæmon,' as they called him, wrote this pious and eloquent justification of their cult. With the 'Matchless Orinda' and the lettered ladies of her court, with the poet Vaughan in the neighbourhood, and with Jeremy Taylor not far off, a lustre of literary distinction falls for a brief period of the seventeenth century on the south of Wales, and then fades away again from the mountains and valleys of that remote region.

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[20] In that best of all books on seventeenth-century theology. Principal Tulloch's *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, the author says 'The simplicity and grandeur of religious truth, and the independence of the special dogmas which divide Christians, has been well exhibited in the "Liberty of Prophesying"; but Taylor was himself—as some of his subsequent writings show—only partially emancipated from the crudities and formalities of scholastic tradition. He could not maintain, and, indeed, he probably never realized—in relation to thought and life as a whole—the same rational and enlightened elevation which necessity compelled him to occupy on the subject of the Church.' (Vol. II, Chap. II.)

V

Jeremy Taylor's object in writing his books of devotion was to provide Anglicans with those manuals of prayer and piety which serve so useful a purpose in the Roman Catholic communion. He seems to have followed the example and to have imitated the style of that devout soul and exquisite writer, St. François de Sales, whose volumes, although he does not mention them, must have been familiar to him. Both writers employ the same images of bees and birds, of the morning mushroom and the trembling needle; and the correspondence in method and form of Taylor's *Holy Living* and St. François's *Introduction à la vie dévote* is too close to be due to chance.

In writing of St. François de Sales, Sainte-Beuve distinguishes in the

history of Christianity between two types of its divines and spiritual fathers; there are the stern, masculine teachers, like St. Peter, Athanasius, St. Dominic, Bossuet, Luther, and Calvin; and contrasted with these combative doctrinal masters, there are gentler spirits like the author of the Fourth Gospel, like St. Francis of Assissi, like Melanchthon, St. François de Sales, and Fénelon—spirits whose zeal takes the form of charity and love. As contrasted with Hooker and Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor would represent in the English Church this class of gentler spirits. The writing of his controversial works was for him a painful duty; he was 'weary and toiled,' he said, 'with rowing up and down in this sea of questions'; and indeed the angry altercations of old theologians, exuding what Jeremy Taylor called 'the spit-venom of their poisoned hearts,' do not present an attractive or edifying spectacle. His devotional works, however, breathe the spirit of holy charity and joy, 'the sweetness of that fragrant piety,' which Emerson found in his writings, and which, indeed, as he said, has almost departed out of the world.

Like St. François de Sales and other devotional writers of his kind, Jeremy Taylor was a director of souls and a spiritual guide, especially for holy women; and just as de Sales wrote his *Introduction* for the edification of Madame de Charmoisy, Jeremy Taylor wrote his *Holy Living* and his *Holy Dying* for Lady Carbery; and these, and his other devotional works, became the favourite reading for generations of pious English gentlewomen.[21]

If Jeremy Taylor's controversial works have lost their interest for modern readers, his devotional writings stand in almost equal danger of oblivion. Pious writing of this kind soon falls out of fashion; and even the *Holy Dying*, which is considered Jeremy Taylor's masterpiece, and which has been described as one of the most beautiful prose compositions of the seventeenth century, will, I am afraid, in spite of a few splendid chapters, prove a disappointment to any one who attempts to read it through. Its lack of lucid arrangement, its wearisome reiterations of pious platitudes, its elaborate rules and tabulated exercises and lists of prayers and 'ejaculations,' make it a manual of practical devotion rather than a book for general reading. We can hardly agree with the praise Coleridge gave it, during his visit to Cambridge in the year before his death. 'And why should I not call Taylor a poet?' he said, 'is not the *Holy Living and Dying* a sacred and didactic poem, in almost as wide a sense of the word as the *Commedia* of Dante? What Bard of ancient or modern times has surpassed in richness of language, in fertility of fancy, in majesty of sentiment, in grace of imagery, this Spenser of English prose?'[22]

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Lord Shaftesbury, in his *Characteristicks* (III. v. 3), speaks of Jeremy Taylor's works as being the favourite good books of the most refined and politest devotees of either sex. 'They maintain,' he writes, 'the principal place in the study of almost every elegant and high divine. They stand in folios and other volumes, adorned with variety of pictures, gildings, and other decorations on the advanced shelves or glass-cupboards of the ladies' closets.'

[22] *S. T. Coleridge at Trinity, with Specimens of his Table Talk* (1836). This anonymous book is usually attributed to Lamb's friend, Grice, but others believe that it was written by Robert Aris Willmott.

VI

Bishop Heber, who edited Bishop Taylor's writings, said of his longest work, the *Ductor Dubitantium*, that it resembled in some degree those ancient inlaid cabinets, 'whose multifarious contents perplex our choice, and offer to the admiration or curiosity of a more accurate age a vast wilderness of trifles and varieties, with no arrangement at all, or an arrangement on obsolete principles; but whose ebony drawers and perfumed recesses contain specimens of every thing that is precious or uncommon, and many things for which a modern museum might be searched in vain.'

This large Taylorian simile may be extended to contain all of Taylor's writings; all his works are old cabinets of this kind, full of trifles, but containing also much that is curious and of value. The references to his personal history or to the circumstances of his private life are not many, and such as do occur are found, for the most part, in the dedications of his various works to his various patrons, and above all to Lord and Lady Carbery. These dedications are models of grace in their expression of personal esteem and affectionate gratitude; and in them are also to be found a few references to the evil times he lived in, and the persecuted state of the Church he loved and served.

As a disciple of Laud, Jeremy Taylor held the high views of episcopacy of his school, and was a convinced believer in institutional religion and what is called the Erastian point of view. The Church was, he said, the vine twined about the oak of the State; Religion being of itself soft and easy and defenceless, must lean upon the arm of Kings; ritual and ceremonial, the pomp of religious services were great aids, he believed, to devotion; and during the

eclipse of Church, and the persecution under the Commonwealth of what he called our ‘poor afflicted Mother,’ he looked back with poignant regret to the beautiful old-established order, to Jerusalem and ‘the pleasures of the Temple, the order of her services, the beauty of her buildings, the sweetness of her songs.’ His eyes had almost grown old, he wrote in 1655, with seeing the ‘horrid mischiefs’ due to rebellion and disobedience; but when after the Restoration he dedicates his great work on casuistry to Charles II, and when their duty stood, as he said, ‘on the sunny side’ at last, he is able to rejoice in the restoration of the Throne and Church. To his subsequent experiences, and to the circumstances of his residence in Ireland, Jeremy Taylor seldom, however, refers in his writings.

The writers of sermons and religious books were the essayists of their time; and we find in their works much concerning familiar topics which is really secular in its tone, and concerns itself with human affairs—with men’s faults and virtues and their social relations—which are of perennial interest to us all. Jeremy Taylor gives us, therefore, a general survey of man’s life and our mortal condition, the vanity of our desires, the folly and emptiness of our ambitions, and the misery of our lives. We are made of dust, he tells us; man is ‘a lump of folly and unavoidable necessities’; and our hearts, so intricate and various and trifling, so full of wantonness and foolish thoughts, come in for many a well-deserved if not altogether novel castigation.

In his treatment of the nature of man and his mortal condition, he follows for the most part in the footsteps of the old moralists and old theologians, and repeats, though with a certain grace and freshness of diction, received notions and well-established views. Sermons, he said, were not like ‘curious enquiries after new-nothings, but pursuance of old truths’; these truths he took for granted and asked no ultimate questions about them.

There are certain aspects, however, which lend an interest to his treatment of these ancient themes. His doctrine of disillusion, of the vanity of the world and the world’s temptations, he seems to have derived more from classical than Christian sources; and learned in the classics as he was, the instances and exemplifications of human misery in his sermons, being copied from Greek and Latin literature, could hardly have caused much disquiet in the breasts of his hearers in South Wales. Whatever mundane temptations the rural solitudes of that locality might have afforded, it was hardly necessary to warn them against corrupt longings for garments stained with the blood of the Tyrian fish, for oysters of Lucrinus, for the tender lard of Apulian swine, or condited bellies of the Scarus: for Galatian mules, or fat eunuchs for their slaves from Tunis.

Jeremy Taylor's writings and sermons are like those of many divines of the period, loaded, and indeed overloaded, with classical quotations; but his immense knowledge of ancient literature, his 'oceanic reading,' as Coleridge described it, was of service to him as more than a storehouse of recondite sins and appropriate quotations. His mind was filled with the noblest poetry of the ancients, his memory stored with all that was wise or beautiful or extraordinary in the ancient writers; and this constant reference to the classics, the borrowing, by this holy thief, of words and images and phrases from Greek and Latin writers, lends a great distinction, a Miltonic richness to his style, and fills it with the overtones and far-off echoes. Perhaps of all modern divines Jeremy Taylor is the most steeped in the ancient classics—of all save Fénelon, that most Hellenic of ecclesiastics, who so miraculously contrived to fuse together in *Télémaque* a beautiful and almost impossible harmony of Christian piety and the soul of ancient Greece. But Jeremy Taylor was not a Hellenist like Fénelon; a spirit so Greek as Fénelon's has appeared only once in the Church of modern times; he was, however, deeply influenced by one element of Greek thought, of that Platonic philosophy which Christianity had early absorbed from Platonism, and which was so potent an influence in the Anglican theology of his time. This religion of the spirit, this recognition of an unseen eternal world behind the flux of phenomena—a world of which the existing world is but an evanescent shadow, and which we apprehend, not with the senses but with the mind—this is the inspiration of that portion of Jeremy Taylor's writings which has for us the greatest spiritual value, since it is the expression of that permanent truth which underlies the shifting doctrines of the different ages of Christian history.

To pass from shadows to substances, from the pleasures of the senses to the contemplation of heavenly things and the joys of reason, from dwelling on this transitory earth to residence amid intellectual and eternal essences—this was for Jeremy Taylor the progress from earth to heaven, from death to eternal life. 'Children and fools,' he wrote, 'choose to please their senses rather than their reason, because they still dwell within the regions of sense, and have little residence amongst intellectuall essences.' The growth in grace was for him the growth in this life of the spirit; for it was possible, he said, to taste of this perfection while in our mortal state on earth; a man's heart and eye may be in the state of perfection, that is, in Heaven, before he sets his feet upon 'that golden threshold'; and God, 'the eternal essence,' would now and then grant his worshippers 'little antepasts of Heaven,' opening for him little 'loopholes of eternity'; he sometimes 'draws aside the curtains of peace, and shews him his throne, and visits him with irradiations of glory, and sends him a little star to stand over his dwelling, and then again covers it with a cloud.'

To feast as often as we can upon these ‘glorious communications of eternity,’ to live as much as possible in heaven while we are still on earth, this was to Jeremy Taylor, in his higher moments of spiritual vision, the essence of religion; this our consolation in a world of sorrow, our redemption from its vanity and nothingness and dust. It was by means of prayer, which, in spite of all its wonder-working powers is, he says, nothing but an ascent to God, that the devout soul is enabled to participate in eternity; and it is when he writes of prayer that he speaks with the sincerest unction, and floats heavenwards on the wings of his fairest images, like that symbol of prayer, the ascending lark, whose attempt he so beautifully describes ‘to get to heaven, and climbe above the clouds.’ Prayer, he says, ‘is the peace of our spirit, the stilnesse of our thoughts, the evennesse of recollection, the seat of meditation, the rest of our cares, and the calme of our tempest; prayer is the issue of a quiet minde, of untroubled thoughts, it is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meeknesse.’

This ‘Charity’ in the theological sense of the word—a sense for which we have, most unfortunately, no name in English since ‘Charity’ has become so narrowed in significance—this ‘divine frame and temper of spirit,’ which is so much more than benevolence, and without which, as St. Paul said, all faith and all knowledge could profit nothing, and the tongues of men and angels were but a tinkling cymbal—it was this Christ-like temper of the soul which was for Jeremy Taylor the crown of all religion, the essence of the Christian faith; Christianity was not so much a divine institution as ‘a divine frame and temper of spirit,’ ‘rather a divine life than a divine knowledge.’ Faith was the daughter of the affections and the will; ‘the will,’ he said, ‘must open the windowes, or the light of faith would not shine into the chamber of the soule.’ In heaven we shall first see and then love, but on earth we must first love, and then the divine knowledge will be bestowed upon us. His ideal, therefore, of Christianity was such a religion ‘as leads us to a huge felicity through pleasant ways’; and since of these ways prayers were to him of supreme importance, some of Jeremy Taylor’s loveliest writing is in the numerous prayers with which he fills his books of devotion. Each of these prayers, as Sir Edmund Gosse has said, is like a gush of music; they are among the most exquisite of their kind in the English language, and display the ‘delicate wholesomeness of his conscience and the inimitable distinction of his style.’

VII

Although we are told that he spent a large portion of each day in prayer, and in fact lived most of his life in heaven, Jeremy Taylor can hardly be counted a mystic of the quality of his contemporaries Traherne and Vaughan. He was too firmly planted in the familiar earth, too fond of its comforts and its

commonplaces; and many of the secular ideas of the age he lived in found their expression in his pages. Among these currents of thought we may note the rising tide of that secular, common-sense, practical give-and-take religion which was destined to dominate English eighteenth-century theology, and replace the ancient and sublime platonic ladder to the serene heavens of eternal peace. 'Let no man be hasty,' he writes, 'to eat the fruits of Paradise before his time'; and in a curious sentence, in which we find the spirit of the prosaic eighteenth century, with its fear of enthusiasm, expressing itself in the poetic speech of the century which preceded it, 'It is more healthful and nutritive,' Jeremy Taylor writes, 'to dig the earth and to eat of her fruits then to stare upon the greatest glories of the heavens and live upon the beams of the Sun; so unsatisfying a thing is rapture and transportation to the soul; it often distracts the faculties, but seldom does advantage piety, and is full of danger in the greatness of its lustre.' Books of mystical theology had in them, he said, 'the most high, the most troublesome, and the most mysterious nothings in the world, and little better than the effluxes of a *religious madness*.'

This more secular point of view, the light of this more modern common sense, modifies the gloom of Jeremy Taylor's vision; cheerfulness could not be completely banished; this scene of tears was after all not, it appeared, without its comforts and alleviations; time itself was chequered with black and white; and if our joys were ephemeral, our sorrows also did not last for ever. And in affliction, and the loss of all our worldly goods, how many sources of happiness remained! 'What now?' the impoverished parson asks with obvious reference to his own denuded state in Wales.

> 'Let me look about me. They have left me the Sun and the Moon, Fire and Water, a loving wife, and many friends to pity me, and some to relieve me, I can still discourse, . . . and still I sleep, and digest, I eat and drink, I reade and meditate, I can walk in my Neighbours pleasant fields, and see the varieties of natural beauties, and delight in all that in which God delights, that is, in virtue and wisdom, in the whole creation, and in God himself: and he that hath so many causes of joy, and so great, is very much in love with sorrow and peevishness, who loses all these pleasures, and chooses to sit down upon his little handful of thorns.'

Healthy labour, the endearments of society, and the pleasantness of conversation, he mentions among the joys of life; and friendship, which he beautifully celebrates: marriage, that 'Queen of friendships,' and domestic joys, and above all the delight of children;—and no one has written more beautifully of the happiness which children bring.

This more secular point of view can be noted in Jeremy Taylor's attitude towards religious melancholy, and the scruples of a distressed conscience. He acknowledges the effect of physical states on our mental condition; the soul, he says, follows the tempers or distempers of the body, and he declares that much which passes for scrupulosity of conscience is nothing but the effect of fatigue and sleeplessness and disease.

About ill-health and its consequences Jeremy Taylor is especially modern and observant, noting the enervation of the soul caused by the weakness of the body; and his accounts of illness, and of the psychological effects of bodily disorder, often read more like the notes of a modern doctor than those of an old-fashioned physician of souls. His attitude towards death is also modern; death being to him no longer the grisly horror of the old divines, but simply the end of a natural process of dissolution; as he says in a famous passage:

> 'Take away but the pomps of death, the disguises and solemn bug-bears, the tinsell, and the actings by candle-light, and proper and phantastic ceremonies, the minstrels and the noise-makers, the women and the weepers, the swoonings and the shrikings, the Nurses and the Physicians, the dark room and the Ministers, the Kinred and the Watchers, and then to die is easie, ready and quitted from its troublesome circumstances. It is the same harmlesse thing, that a poor shepherd suffered yesterday, or a maid servant to-day.'

These modern tendencies of his thought caused Jeremy Taylor, as we have seen, to be suspected of heresy; he was, his contemporaries thought, inadequately convinced of the total depravity of the human heart; and by questioning the doctrine of original sin, the imputation of Adam's transgression to posterity, he incurred the suspicion of Pelagianism, and became engaged in angry controversies with several divines of his own party. His denial of absolute Predestination and the damnation of unbaptized infants was regarded with horror by the Calvinists; his advocacy of religious toleration, his views on the inefficacy of death-bed repentance, shocked many devout Anglicans, and indeed, the Bishop of Calcutta tells us, he was led, on several of these points, to the expression of views which are irreconcilable with the Articles of the Church of England, and contrary to the plain sense of the scriptures.

And yet Jeremy Taylor, although on some points a precursor of the rational and deistic divines of the eighteenth century, was not a real opponent of the orthodoxy of his day. A sacerdotalist, a believer in ceremonies and institutional religion, he maintained the high views of Episcopacy held by Laud and his

supporters, and he accepted the orthodox doctrines of the Church to which he belonged. No one could see, indeed, or state more clearly, the difficulties of accepting many of these doctrines; why an omnipotent God should permit evil to exist, or predestine souls to eternal torment, and damn the heathens and old Israelites to a Hell of which he had never warned them—such doctrines were, he said, like the heads of the cherubim over the Mercy Seat; you could see their bright faces and golden wings, 'but there is no *body* to be handled'; the revelation is clear and the article plain, and yet the reason of it we cannot see at all.

Jeremy Taylor did not hesitate, however, to pose before us these mysteries without a bottom; he accepted the existence of a personal Devil, although he admitted, 'we never heard his noises, nor have seen his affrighting shapes'; and while daring to exclude unbaptized infants from its flaming precincts, he expatiated without reluctance on the horrors of Eternal Torment, and the unimaginable miseries of the countless millions 'roasting in the seats of the reprobate, and doomed to dwell with devils to eternal ages.'

The truth is that Jeremy Taylor was not a logical theologian; he accepted for the most part without questioning it the Anglican position of the seventeenth century, that *via media* between the corruptions of Roman Catholicism on the one hand, and the dangers of Puritan fanaticism on the other.[23] In his ethical teaching also we find the same compromise between different ways of thinking; his ethics as well as his theology being an edifice composed, like the architecture of his time, of mingled classical and medieval elements. The rules he gives for right conduct in practical affairs are, like most Christian ethics, a curious blend of Christian ideals, and the teachings of classical philosophers, of Aristotle and Plato, of the Epicureans and the Stoics: and he often quotes, along with the 'orthodox and ancient fathers,' the sayings of the 'wise Heathens,' 'the old brave philosophers and poets,' who preached that 'contentedness which is the sum of all the old moral philosophy,' and the wisdom of making our unvoidable fate our necessary religion.

Good laws usually spring, Jeremy Taylor says, 'from ill manners, and excellent Sermons are occasioned by men's iniquities'; but the excellence of his own sermons owe but little to his realization of the sinfulness of man. Save drunkenness and gluttony,[24] there are no sins which he denounces at any length; he seems to have derived his notions of iniquity, as I have said, from his classical reading, and it is curious to note the contrast between his minute observation of Nature and his own sensations, with his vague and bookish notions of his fellow-men, and their characters and failings.

[23] Principal Tulloch says that Jeremy Taylor's spirit was not essentially philosophic, rational or liberal. He describes him as 'medieval, ascetic, casuistic in his mature type of thought. He is a scholastic in argument, a pietist in feeling, a poet in fancy and expression; he is not a thinker. He seldom moves in an atmosphere of purely rational light; and even when his instincts are liberal and his reason highly rational in its results, he brings but a slight force of thought, of luminous and direct comprehension, to bear upon his work.'

[24] Jeremy Taylor treats of over-eating in his *Holy Living*, and preached two sermons on the subject at Golden Grove. Lord Carbery, Sir Edmund Gosse suggests, may have been something of a gourmand.

VIII

Jeremy Taylor's presentation of the Anglican doctrines and the ethical thinking of his time has its historic interest; it represents the views of a preacher and seventeenth-century controversialist of great learning and of a liberal mind. But this interest is after all only a secondary interest; we read Jeremy Taylor as we read Donne and other preachers, and indeed the Hebrew prophets, less for their subject-matter, than for their style. And yet this distinction between style and subject-matter, between manner and meaning, is but a superficial distinction. The form in any work of art cannot be divorced from its content, for it is a part of that content; it expresses the reaction of the artist's mind to the subject he is treating, and cannot be separated from that totality of meaning which his work conveys to our senses and imagination. In Jeremy Taylor's best writing, when the poet emerged in the preacher, what he really says, rather than what he thinks he is saying—his unconscious rather than his conscious utterance—is the thing which is of real interest and importance to us. The preacher may be preaching with the most solemn emphasis of the four great last things, of Death and Judgment and Hell and Heaven, but if the poet within his cassock is singing at the same time of the dew on the leaves of the rose, it is to the song rather than the sermon that we listen. So when we speak of Jeremy Taylor's style we do not mean by style any mere technical tricks or methods of adornment. Style, as one of its modern masters has told us, is like the colouring of a painter, a quality of the writer's vision, the rendering and revelation of the world of his unique perception. The special delight which each new artist gives us is due to the enduring reality

which is revealed to him, and which he, in his turn, reveals to us.

It is Jeremy Taylor's possession of style in this sense, the revelation in the music and magic of words of a unique vision—it is this rarest of all gifts which we value in him, although he seems to have set no value upon it himself. We still read, or still should read, his tremulous pages for the beauty of the world which hung upon his pen, a world full of sun and the shimmer of water, a world delicately tinted, fleeting, evanescent, which is yet fixed and made imperishable by the alchemy of words.

IX

There is much in the literature of old theology which is of permanent interest, even to the most secular-minded of modern readers. In the works of certain theologians we find ourselves in contact with original minds of great constructive power; while there are others who appeal to us either by their profound knowledge of the human heart or by the mystical illumination and fervour of their spirits. Jeremy Taylor cannot rank, however, with the great thinkers and original minds of the Church, nor can he be counted with the profound psychologists or its saints and mystics. Even Coleridge, with all his veneration for Jeremy Taylor, confessed that what he expressed was little more than the theological commonplace of the time; that he 'had no ideas,' that in contrast with his handling of other people's opinions his own thought is 'all weather eaten, dim, useless, a *Ghost in marble*.'

Nor as a psychologist and analyst of the human heart is Jeremy Taylor worthy of our best attention. His treatment of human conduct, as his latest biographer says, 'is too often obvious, trite and starved,' nor for all its pious fragrance is there much profound mystical fervour or illumination in his practical and somewhat utilitarian piety.

What, then, are we to say about the fame of Jeremy Taylor? What is to be our attitude to these 'volumes of religion and mountains of piety' which he left behind him? His popularity among his contemporaries we can understand; the controversies in which he was engaged were to them of passionate interest, and the novelty of his devotional works made a strong appeal to the piety of that pious generation. But the revival of his reputation, his second crowning, the fact that his ghost was called up from the shades, and enthroned, by the King-makers of our literature, almost by the side of Shakespeare, and his name endowed with a posthumous glory that has once more grown dim—this is the extraordinary fate which demands an explanation, this the almost unprecedented fortune of an ancient divine, who, to borrow one of his own phrases, once wore a mitre and is now 'a little heap of dust.'

I quote these words—which fired Hazlitt's imagination—because the best way after all of approaching the problem of Jeremy Taylor's reputation is simply to copy out one of his own phrases. For the truth is that this devotional writer, though not endowed with the other qualities of genius, did possess one gift—the gift of conjuring with words—which is perhaps the most essential gift of a great writer, and which was possessed by him so happily and to so supreme a degree, that it is of itself enough to explain and almost to justify the splendid praises which have been so liberally heaped upon him.

In writing of Jeremy Taylor's style we must, however, distinguish between his usual and his occasionally inspired way of writing. The great bulk of his work, and all his controversial volumes, are written in a harmonious, graceful, Ciceronian style which stands midway between the elaborate, but somewhat clumsy prose of the Elizabethan era, and the more correct and sober medium of the eighteenth century. This easy, harmonious prose is always adequate for its purpose; it tends, however, to be somewhat impersonal, and even dry and colourless at times; and for the most part it cannot be said to surpass in merit the prose of the divines of the Restoration period. But now and then, as we read him, an imagination, radiant and strange, seems to unfold its wings and soar aloft; now and then this painful clergyman, as he writes down his arguments and expositions, seems to dip his pen in enchanted ink; the words begin to dance and glitter, and a splendour falls upon the illuminated page. And when this happens the effect is so surprising that it seems the result of a spell, an incantation, a kind of magic.

Matthew Arnold has written of that magic style, which is, he says, creative, and which, being creative, possesses an extraordinary value. The phrase 'magic of style' is, like the word 'creative,' somewhat vague in its meaning, but since Jeremy Taylor possessed this magic and this creative power of phrasing, since it is in fact his special quality, the thing that marks him out and makes him significant, any definition of his gift must involve an attempt to explain, or at least to describe, this incantatory power of words and phrases.

X

That great master of prose-style, Flaubert, declared that the criticism of literature fell behind that of science and history because it rested on no firm foundation; what literary critics lacked, he said, was a knowledge of the anatomy of style, of the nature and composition of the phrase. And indeed, when the critic is met by phrases like many of Jeremy Taylor's, with their haunting verbal music, he finds himself led captive by a charm and spell which he cannot analyse, an incalculable, incommunicable art neither to be imitated nor explained. Yet there are certain ingredients in this magic, certain ways of

producing these effects of beauty, which it is possible to observe and isolate and define. Two main elements in style may be thus distinguished, the sound and the image, the verbal music which enchants the ear, and the picture which fascinates the eye. There is a certain sensuous charm, a texture of pleasurable sensation, to be derived from the material qualities of the medium of any art; and Jeremy Taylor was a master of that verbal music, that felicity of sound and rhythm, which is the basis, the fundamental quality, of this audible art of language. 'No sigh for the folly of an irrevocable word'—in the harmonious variety of the vowel sounds of such a phrase we are charmed by this music; and above all, in the *chute de phrase*, in what Donne calls the 'melodious fall of words,' in the beautiful close of some great sentence, we are conscious of his mastery of sound and rhythm—as when, for instance, in describing the passage of an eagle through the air, he says, 'as long as her flight lasted, the Air was shaken; but there remains no path behind her.'

This wonder-working effect of sound and rhythm can perhaps be best noted when Jeremy Taylor expresses the same idea in a less, and then a more, perfect form. Thus in one of his earlier works he writes: 'Lucifer and many Angels walking upon the battlements of heaven grew top-heavy and fell into the state of devils'; but in the *Holy Dying* he says of these fallen angels: 'They grew vertiginous and fell from the battlements of heaven.' In the contrast of these phrases, they 'grew top-heavy and fell into the state of devils'—'they grew vertiginous and fell from the battlements of heaven,' we can perceive the little changes of word and rhythm which make so much difference—and how much it is! Another instance may be given. In one passage Jeremy Taylor compares the death of virtuous men to the 'descending of ripe and wholesome fruits from a pleasant and florid tree,' but in another to 'ripe and pleasant fruit falling from a fair tree and gathered into baskets for the planters use.' Here again, with just a slight change of cadence, a new arrangement of epithets, the miracle happens, the crystallization takes place, and the phrase becomes a phrase of enchantment. Whether results like this are chance results, or the product of careful writing, it is impossible to say. But if we judge by what we know about the methods of other writers, we must think it likely that prose of this kind is seldom produced without pains and labour; and that Jeremy Taylor, like his contemporary Sir Thomas Browne, was an author who wrote commonly with a current pen, but who occasionally took a poet's pains to produce more splendid passages and pages.

In addition to this music of phrase, we often note in Jeremy Taylor's fine passages a singular and happy audacity of diction. Although in the instructions he issued to the clergymen of his diocese in Ireland, he warned them against 'fantastical' terms and instructed them to confine themselves in their sermons

to ‘primitive, known and accustomed words,’ it cannot be said the Bishop always practised what he preached. His somewhat archaic use in his adjectives of the comparative degree, as when he writes of ‘the air’s looser garment,’ or the ‘wilder fringes of the fire,’ is so frequent as to become a mannerism, though a happy one; and not infrequently, like Milton, he adorns his page with classicisms, or uses some word of classical derivation with its original and etymological meaning. But what above all gives its unique character to the diction of his finest pages is his audacity in using unexpected words, words which, being deprived by the context of their ordinary meaning, become luminous with the remoter associations usually latent in them, as the sun’s corona is visible when the sun is itself eclipsed. Thus Jeremy Taylor writes of the fading rose falling at last on to the ‘portion of weeds and *outworn* faces,’ and the falling tide deserting the ‘*unfaithful* dwelling of the sand.’ This beauty of diction in which Jeremy Taylor embalmed his thoughts was noticed by Coleridge; his very words seeming, as Coleridge wrote: ‘beauties and fragments of poetry from a Euripides or Simonides.’ The faults of great authors, the same critic has remarked, are generally their excellencies carried to an excess, and the fullness, overflow, superfluity, which Coleridge notes in Jeremy Taylor’s prose, the over-abundant piling up of clauses, words, and epithets, provides nevertheless in his happier passages that richness of organ music which gives a certain splendour to our older prose, and makes our modern way of writing sometimes seem short-breathed and jejune in comparison.

> ‘We long for perishing meat, and fill our stomachs with corruption; we look after white and red, and the weaker beauties of the night; we are passionate after rings and seals, and enraged at the breaking of a Crystall . . . our hearts are hard, and inflexible to the softer whispers of mercy and compassion, having no loves for any thing but strange flesh, and heaps of money, and popular noises, for misery and folly: and therefore we are a huge way off from the Kingdome of God, whose excellencies, whose designs, whose ends, whose constitution is spiritual and holy, and separate, and sublime, and perfect.’

This is one of Jeremy Taylor’s more splendid pages; but he can write with an equal beauty in quieter passages, as, for instance, when he says of children: ‘No man can tell but he that loves his children, how many delicious accents make a mans heart dance in the pretty conversation of those dear pledges; their childishnesse, their stammering, their little angers, their innocence, their imperfections, their necessities are so many little emanations of joy and

comfort to him that delights in their persons and society.'

English writing has no doubt gained much in precision and conciseness since these great periodic sentences have fallen out of fashion; but we have paid for our gain by the loss of that long-breathed eloquence, that great Atlantic roll of English prose with which few modern writers, save perhaps Landor and De Quincey and Ruskin, have attempted to enrich their pages. In addition to his mastery of verbal music, Jeremy Taylor possessed an extraordinarily rich and powerful visual imagination, and his genius was, as Sir Edmund Gosse said, essentially sensorial, and 'when it ceased to be stirred by images and sensations, it ceased to be attractive.' He renders the impressions of sight so vividly that we share in his visual impressions; he personifies abstractions and turns them into living creatures which we seem to see before us; a sin, for instance, that 'will look prettily, and talk flattering words, and entice thee with softnesses and easy fallacies,' or a grief that, if you stay but till to-morrow, 'will be weary, and will lie downe to rest.'

But the main quality and magic of Jeremy Taylor's style is the rich and abundant use of his visual gift in the perpetual creation of similes and metaphors—the welling-forth, as from an inexhaustible fountain, of shining and flashing images. The command of simile and metaphor—and metaphors are only less explicit similes—was, Aristotle said, by far the most important element in style, for it was the gift of nature and could not be imparted by another, and was the mark of what he called the εὐφυής, the 'genius,' as we translate the word, although our modern idea of genius is hardly a Greek conception.

XI

There have been authors of eminence, it is true, who have made but a sparing use of metaphors, yet the power of thinking in images, *le don des images*, has always been an important part of the endowment of the greatest writers. Indeed, the greater he is, the more richly, like Æschylus, or Plato, or Shakespeare, he seems to be dowered with this splendid gift. As soon as a rich imagination beings to glow, it finds itself in need of metaphors and figurative expressions to convey its warmth of meaning; and these images, though sometimes derived from the other senses, are for the most part visual images, since thoughts and moods and feelings seem to find in visible objects both their most appropriate embodiment and their most potent means of impressing themselves upon the minds and sensibilities of others.

The use of metaphors and figured diction is, among prose-writers, most abundant in sermons and religious writings, for imagery, by its appeal to the

imagination, is of especial value for the conveyance of religious ideas and transcendental experience.

'Reasons,' Taylor's contemporary, Thomas Fuller, wrote, 'are the pillars of the fabrick of a Sermon; but similitudes are the windows which give the best light'; and the sermons of all ages abound in windows of this kind. They are in Jeremy Taylor's sermons, however, so abundant and so vast, that the religious edifice often seems to be all windows, like some late-Gothic church. But what most distinguishes these windows is not only their great sun-illumined spaces, but the richness elsewhere of their deeply stained glass. Does not, for instance, his description of the soul in sickness possess the radiance of coloured detail which we find in some small medieval or Pre-Raphaelite church window?

> 'In sicknesse, the soul begins to dresse her self for immortality: and first she unties the strings of vanity. . . . Then she drawes the curtains, and stops the lights from coming in, and takes the pictures down, those phantastic images of self-love, and gay remembrances of vain opinion, and popular noises. . . . Then she layes by all her vain reflexions, beating upon her Chrystall and pure mirrour from the fancies of strength and beauty, & little decayed prettinesses of the body.'

The figures of other preachers, rich and abundant as they often are, partake of the nature of rhetorical figures; to produce their effect, to persuade the will, or satisfy the understanding, they must be familiar to their audience, and the sense of this appeal to an audience always accompanies them. But the images of Jeremy Taylor, although he too was an orator, are a poet's images; they surprise us by their novelty of expression, and his aim seems to be to express his own emotions rather than to excite those of others, to delight the imagination rather than to move the will, to enrich and feed the mind with lyric tenderness and beauty, rather than to furnish it with motives for action.

In his Oxford lectures on Poetry, Keble illustrates this distinction between the rhetorical and the poetic use of images by comparing Burke's description of Marie Antoinette, 'decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in; glittering like the morning star,' with what Jeremy Taylor says, in his funeral sermon of Lady Carbery: 'In all her Religion, in all her actions of relation towards God, she had a strange evenness and untroubled passage, sliding towards her ocean of God and infinity, with a certain and silent motion.' Both illustrations, Keble says, are models of splendid style, 'but while Burke speaks as an accomplished orator, Taylor touches the heights of poetry.'[25]

Jeremy Taylor's poetic images flash out sometimes in brief similes, as when he speaks of the wealth that 'flies away like a bird from the hand of a child,' or compares the charity and humility of the Virgin to 'the pure leaves of the whitest Lilly,' or describes her grief at the Crucifixion as being 'deep as the waters of the abysse, but smooth as the face of a Pool.' But more often he elaborates his sermons and fills their windows with great pictures, great epic similes, which, like those of Homer or of Milton, are used for their poetic and decorative value, and are enriched with details and ornaments which have little relevance to the idea which they are supposed to illustrate. These elaborate descriptions of the dawning sun or the fading rose so delight the imagination and so fill it with images of beauty, that we soon forget—as the preacher himself seems to have almost forgotten—the moral and religious meaning they are supposed to illustrate.

It is, then, this gift of splendid metaphor, of flashing before our eyes pictures which are of the highest poetic beauty, and are clothed in a soft radiance of words, which is Jeremy Taylor's special gift and supreme endowment. It is this, and almost this alone, which makes him a great writer, and explains the otherwise almost fantastic comparison of his genius to that of Shakespeare. For lacking as he lacked most of the other qualities of Shakespeare's greatness, Jeremy Taylor nevertheless, as Coleridge pointed out, almost rivals Shakespeare in that supremest gift of the poet, the power of embodying his thought in images of beauty and splendour.

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[25] *Keble's Lectures on Poetry*, 1832-41, translated by E. K. Francis (1912), Vol. I, p. 50. I owe this reference to Robert Willmott's biography of Jeremy Taylor.

XII

Jeremy Taylor may be described as a writer, with one gift, and only one, of the highest quality; and for this singularity his writings deserve a place among the rarities and more precious curiosities of our literature. But there is another and still more curious reason for allotting him this place; for although endowed with the poet's gifts of imagery and music, it was in prose that he found his appropriate medium of expression; and when he turned to verse, his light was eclipsed and his power faded. We possess a number of poems of his composition; he tried to express many of his ideas, both in verse and prose, and it is curious to compare his treatment of the same themes in the different mediums. In his sermon on the Day of Judgment, for instance, he describes the

‘thunders of the dying and groaning heavens and the crack of the dissolving world, when the whole fabrick of nature shall shake into dissolution and eternall ashes’:

When earth shall vanish from thy sight,
The heavens that never err’d,
But observ’d
Thy laws, shal from thy presence take their flight,

is the poor rendering he gives in verse of the same subject.

Or, to take another instance, let us compare Jeremy Taylor’s descriptions in verse and in prose of the rising sun.

What glorious light!
How bright a Sun after so sad a night
Does now begin to dawn! Bless’d were those eyes
That did behold
This Sun when he did first unfold
His glorious beams, and now begin to rise.

In the *Holy Dying* he thus describes the sunrise:

> ‘But as when the Sun approaches towards the gates of the morning, he first opens a little eye of Heaven, and sends away the spirits of darknesse, and gives light to a cock, and calls up the lark to Mattins, and by and by gilds the fringes of a cloud and peeps over the Eastern hills, thrusting out his golden horns, like those which decked the browes of *Moses* when he was forced to wear a vail, because himself had seen the face of God; and still while a man tells the story, the sun gets up higher, till he shows a fair face and a full light, and then he shines one whole day, under a cloud often, and sometimes weeping great and little showers, and sets quickly: so is a man’s reason and his life.’

We cannot compare these passages in prose and verse without being immediately aware that the verse is prosaic and the prose is poetry—poetry with no formal metre, but with a rich music of its own, with a cadence, a harmony of sound, which as Sainte-Beuve said of Chateaubriand, almost justifies the masters of this large music in their disdain of verse, with its mechanical beats and ever-repeated rhythms.

Let us take two other of Jeremy Taylor’s famous prose lyrics, the similes

of the Rose and of the Lark.

> ‘But so have I seen a Rose newly springing from the cleft of its hood, and at first it was fair as the Morning, and full with the dew of Heaven, as a Lambs fleece; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darknesse, and to decline to softnesse, and the symptomes of a sickly age; it bowed the head, and broke its stalk, and at night having lost some of its leaves, and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and outworn faces.’
>
> ‘For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grasse and soaring upwards singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climbe above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern winde, and his motion made irregular and unconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, then it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings; till the little creature was forc’d to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned musick and motion from an Angell as he passed sometimes through the aire about his ministries here below.’[26]

What has English grammar to say about writing which so outrageously flouts its rules, and English criticism, with its neat distinctions between poetry and prose, and the respective domains of each—how is our criticism to deal with prose-lyrics like these, which are as musical and poetical as almost any verse?

We may say, and justly say, that, for any one who did not possess Jeremy Taylor’s gifts of imagination, it would be a most fatal thing to try to imitate his imaginative prose; and we may note, as Matthew Arnold noted, passages in which, owing to a failure of sobriety and good taste, this prose becomes overadorned and florid and sometimes grotesque. And yet a judicious criticism, eager to welcome excellence in all its varied forms, cannot but pay a tribute of admiration to this high, unprecedented way of writing, so rich in images and colour, in beauty and pathos of expression.

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[26] James Russell Lowell says of this passage, ‘Dryden’s description of a descending lark is charming, yet even this

wants the etherial tincture that pervades the style of Jeremy Taylor, making it, as Burke said of Sheridan's eloquence, "neither prose nor poetry, but something better than either".' (*Among my Books*, I, p. 22.)

It might be supposed that giant similes like those of Jeremy Taylor would be completely out of place in modern prose. One modern writer, however, has been able to handle them with admirable effect. When Henry James wishes, for instance, to describe the renunciation, on the part of a wronged lady, of all vindictive feelings, he says that these passions of fury and revenge, as she thought of them, 'figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles.' (*The Golden Bowl*, Book V, Chap. II.)

Compare also in the same novel the earlier 'pagoda' simile: 'This situation has been occupying for months and months the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned at the overhanging eaves with silver bells that tinkled ever so charmingly when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow: looking up all the while at the fair structure that spread itself so amply and rose so high, but never quite making out as yet where she might have entered had she wished.' *Ibid.*, Book IV, Chap. I.

XIII

Such, then, are the peculiarities of Jeremy Taylor's talent, the curious questions which his writings suggest. Equally curious is the fact that, although he must have been conscious of this special gift, he seems to have set no especial value upon it. His main purpose in writing was controversial and

hortatory; his great work of moral casuistry was the work he believed would bring him lasting fame; of his splendid gifts of style and imagery, he made only an occasional and, as it were, a casual use; and there is not much evidence of them in the works of his earlier or his later period. It was really only during the few happy, sequestered years which he spent in South Wales, amid the mountains and valleys and woodlands of that remote and romantic region, when, after the ruin, as he regarded it, of Church and State, and the shipwreck of his own private fortunes, he so miraculously found refuge at Golden Grove—it was only then that he unfolded his golden talent from its napkin—that, as Sir Edmund Gosse put it, his genius 'spread its branches and flowered like a magnolia under the shadow of a southern wall in a quiet courtyard.'

I have spoken of the kindness shown to their chaplain by Lord Carbery and his young and saintly wife. The earl was his patron and protector, and in the countess he found a gentle friend and pious disciple; it was apparently for her that he filled his sermons at Golden Grove with radiant splendour, and illuminated with gold-leaf the books of devotion which he dedicated to her use; almost all his finest pages and passages were preached before her or written for her perusal; the most beautiful of all his books, the *Holy Dying*, was composed for her edification; and when she died in holiness before its printing, he produced, to use his own phrase, the sheets of that publication as a covering for her hearse—as a purple pall, we may describe it, for this sainted lady, of sombre and splendid prose.

This holy friendship and spiritual devotion was thus the inspiration of Jeremy Taylor's genius, and it was in the sunshine of Lady Carbery's admiration that—if we may allow ourselves so profane an image—her chaplain spread before her the fan of his splendid talent, rich with colours dipped in heaven and many-tinted dyes. When this sunshine is darkened at her death, the display is over, the glittering round is folded up; the radiance begins to fade from Jeremy Taylor's pages, and their fine gold is dimmed.

The light of the sun he basked in for a few years of his overclouded life fills the sermons of those years with a bright illumination, and indeed it is from the sun itself that he borrows his fairest-shining similes and illustrations. His description of the sunrise I have already quoted—a passage which Coleridge knew by heart and which Hazlitt compared to a morning landscape of Claude Lorraine's. We read elsewhere of the 'dispassionate and gentle sun of an autumn morning'; of the sun kissing the frozen earth in winter, or turning red in the mists it has drawn up from the fens, and darkened by them. But it is above all the full-blazing sun of noontide that he loves to celebrate; the sun that blinds the beholder's eye with looking upon 'too big a beauty.' Thus he

says, for instance, in one of his large and shining similes: ‘Repentance is like the Sun, which enlightens not onely the tops of the Eastern hils, or warms the wall-fruits of *Italy*; it makes the little Balsam tree to weep precious tears with staring upon its beauties; it produces rich spices in *Arabia*, and warms the cold Hermit in his grot.’ Friendship again, he says, is like the sun; some people have but a small share in his beams, only a dark day and a long night from him, snows and white cattle, a miserable life.

> ‘But some have splendid fires, and aromatick spices, rich wines and well-digested fruits, great wit and great courage; because they dwell in his eye, and look in his face, and are the Courtiers of the Sun, and wait upon him in his Chambers of the East.’

Such a courtier of the sun dwelt within the clerical garb of this Anglican divine, who celebrates the rites of sun-worship with an almost Persian fervour.

What often gives a freshness and vividness to these images is the loving notation of many minor and minute manifestations of the sun’s glory; the sun’s rays shining through little chinks and making little cones and pyramids of light in a darkened room, or, as Virgil had already noted, reflected from a vessel full of water and flickering on the walls and roof of the room in which the vessel stands. Many other minute phenomena of illumination attracted his curious attention, the light of a glow-worm, or the sparkling of a diamond; the dim illumination of the moon in eclipse, or the ‘least spark of the Pleiades,’ and the flickering or the steady light of candles, from which he draws many of his most elaborate similes.

Not only light itself, but the eye which receives it was the object of his interest and study; ‘a mans, or a womans or a hauks eye’ was, he said, ‘more beauteous and excellent’ than any jewel in the crown of a king; there were eyes that looked healthily as a friendly planet, and innocent as flowers; but others that were ‘dim as a sullied mirror.’ ‘An eye,’ he says in one of the strangest of his similes, ‘that dwells too long upon a starre must be refreshed with lesser beauties and strengthened with greens and looking-glasses, lest the sight become amazed with too great a splendor’; and although this must be regarded as an observation remote from common experience, we can all recognize the accuracy of his description of those thousands of little fantastic fires which seem to burn when we press our eyeballs, or the diffused light of the sun which penetrates into eyes closed with the eye-lid; a favourite and characteristic image of Jeremy Taylor’s, which he uses to describe the hidden truths of Christ’s parables shining through their veil, or even more beautifully the ‘lustre of virtue’ which men cannot help perceiving though they close their

eyes against it.

Sir Edmund Gosse has finely noted this sensitiveness of Jeremy Taylor to the phenomena of light, and adds that he writes with equal happiness about water in almost all its forms. ‘The sun reflecting upon a lympid fountain,’ this phrase of Jeremy Taylor’s gives us a picture in miniature of the luminous world in which his imagination delighted—a world gleaming with the ripple and the shine of water. In his observation of aqueous phenomena he employs the same minute, almost microscopic, observation, as when he writes, for instance, of a drop of water falling into dust.

> ‘When a little water is spilt from a full vessel and falls into its enemy dust, it curles it self into a drop and so stands equally armed in every point of the circle dividing the forces of the enemy, that by that little union it may stand as long as it can; but if it be dissolved into flatnesse it is changed into the nature and possession of the dust.’

Although Jeremy Taylor sometimes made use of metaphors and similes from the grander phenomena of nature, from clouds and storms and angry seas, from tempestuous winds roaring in the tree-tops of a forest, his world of images is for the most part composed of things luminous and minute and transitory and flickering; of glow-worms, shooting-stars, and the flames of tapers, of bees and dancing gnats, of the trembling needle, of birds’ nests and the ‘little rings of the vine when they begin to curl,’ of the morning mushroom, of the rose that fades, of ‘the down of thistles, and the softest gossamer.’

XIV

We do not always remember how largely our modern love of nature is of theological origin, how much our delight in the creation is due to our belief, or the belief of our ancestors, in the beneficent design and loving purpose of its great Creator. Although sterner theologians like the Jansenists and the Calvinists regarded the world as under a curse and as an abyss of corruption, the gentler spirits of the Christian faith saw in the beauties of the natural world reflections and emanations of the divine beauty—these pious clergymen walking out (and surely the thought of them is a holy one) to suck divinity out of Nature’s flowers. God, Jeremy Taylor said, was the ‘God of beauties and perfections’; the beauteous frame of heaven and earth was ‘the glasse in which he beheld his wisedom.’ ‘God is glorified in the Sunne and Moon, in the rare fabrick of the honeycombs, in the discipline of Bees, in the œconomy of Pismires, in the little houses of birds, in the curiosity of an eye, God being

pleased to delight in those little images and reflexes of himself from those pretty mirrours.'

The similes of Jeremy Taylor's great contemporary, Milton, are drawn for the most part from history, from mythology, from travellers' tales or the writings of astronomers; they open vast and shadowy perspectives and are full of remote resonances and echoes. Jeremy Taylor makes use sometimes of these bookish and remote images; the Lybian lion, for instance, struck with a Mauritanian spear, the mice of Africa which hide golden ore in their bowels, the howling of 'a herd of Evening wolves when they misse their draught of blood in their midnight Revels,' or the Lapland witches, who 'dance the round, but there is a horror and a harshnesse in the Musick.' For the most part, however, his images are drawn from Nature as he observed its minute perfections with careful and, it would seem, myopic eyes; and, as his latest biographer has said, 'with the solitary exception of Shakespeare, there is no writer in all our early literature who has made so fresh and copious and effective a use of metaphor taken directly from the observation of natural objects.'

Jeremy Taylor not only observed the things he saw about him, and often, as Mr. Bridges has said of Keats, drew his images from common things, which are for the first time represented as beautiful,[27] but he also possessed another quality, a warmth or tenderness, which Mr. Bridges noted as being of inestimable value in Keats's poems. The gentle stream, 'that begs leave of every turfe to let it passe,' the little breeze 'soft as the breath of heaven, not willing to disturb the softest stalk of a violet,' the flies that 'doe rise againe from their little graves in walls,' and dance awhile in the sun's winter beams, the dashes of 'affectionate raine'; or 'the throbs and little beatings' of the lover's watch—these are a few instances of that warmth of imagery which verges on the sentimental and yet so exquisitely escapes it.

This delicate observation, this poetic use of concrete detail, seemed to lose, for the following generation, its interest and to be replaced by the hackneyed and generalized imagery of poetic convention—it might almost seem, indeed, as if the variegated world, with its richness of light and colour, had faded away from the eyes of men. Wordsworth states that with very few exceptions he could find, in the poetry of the period between the publication of *Paradise Lost* and Thomson's *Seasons*, no new images drawn from the observation of external nature, or written with the poet's eye steadily fixed upon its object. But with the 'return to Nature' of the Romantic Movement, with the recovered vision of external beauty, it was natural that the fame of Jeremy Taylor, who, in his use of shining imagery, may be regarded as the last of the Elizabethans,

should acquire a new lustre. His gift of imagination, his perpetual evocation of pictorial images, are all the more striking because this essentially poetic gift shines out, not in poetry, but in didactic and controversial prose; we can observe it there, as it were, in isolation; and we can observe it there also in its excess. For it may be said of Jeremy Taylor, as it was said of Chateaubriand, that his imagination, and his image-making power, are too potent; his metaphors and similes are too luminous for their moral purpose, they outshine and over-adorn and almost obliterate the moral thought they are meant to illustrate. We can indeed hardly share with much confidence the hope of Jeremy Taylor's pious editor that those who read his writings for their beauties will appropriate to themselves the moral lessons they convey.

The possession of a style full of magic is disadvantageous in another way to the earnest preacher and writer of moral prose. It is a dangerous thing for him to denounce evil in lovely chimes of words; for the boundaries of invective and panegyric approach each other more closely than they ought to in a completely moral world, and thunders of denunciation may be sometimes accompanied by brilliant flashes that dazzle and delight our eyes. A sin which is damned with too much eloquence may arouse more interest than holy execration; and when we hear from Jeremy Taylor of the flash of falling stars, we, too, are tempted to steal from the altar and gaze on these 'little images of beauty and pleasure'; or as we read his reprehension of the casuistry of the Roman Catholics and their choice of venial sins, we are almost persuaded to warm ourselves also at those 'phantastick fires,' and to dance with them in the light of glow-worms. 'The harlot's hands that build the fairy castle' are hardly regarded by us with all the reprobation they deserve; and a sinner who, with a heart seduced by wine and rage and folly goes 'singing to his grave,' may seem to have made what is after all a not inglorious end.

That the fineness of Jeremy Taylor's similes and the quaintness of his sentences were regarded by some at least of his contemporaries as inappropriate for the inculcation of plain gospel truths, is evident from the well-known passage in one of Bishop South's sermons, in which he ridicules such ear-tickling phrases as 'The fringes of the North Star,' the 'down of Angels' wings,' or 'the beautiful locks of Cherubims,' or the use of 'starched similtudes, introduced with a "Thus have I seen a cloud rolling in its airy mansion," and the like.' This was not, the severe bishop remarks, the way the Apostles, poor mortals, preached the Gospel; these sublimities were above the rise of the apostolic spirit.

Coleridge is reported to have said in one of his lectures on Shakespeare ‘that one of the purposes and tests of true poetry was the employment of common objects in uncommon ways—the felicitous and novel use of images of daily occurrence. Everybody had seen snow falling on a river, and vanishing instantly, but who had applied this result of ordinary observation with such novelty and beauty as Burns in his lines alluding to the transitoriness of pleasure,

> Like snow that falls upon a river,
> A moment white, then gone for ever—

a simile which Coleridge said he would rather have written than all the poetry that Sir Walter Scott was ever likely to produce.

XV

Jeremy Taylor tells us that in composing his *Holy Dying* he had made a collection of passages from the Fathers, preserving their meaning, but changing their arrangement, in order that, as he puts it, ‘by placing some of their dispersed meditations into a chain, or sequell of discourse, I may with their precious stones make an *Union*, and compose them into a jewel.’ To make some such ‘union’ or composite jewel out of Jeremy Taylor’s dispersed meditations would be the best—would, indeed, be the only way—to make modern people read him. Enough has been said of his vast and voluminous works, and of their lack of modern interest, and also of the occasional passages of great beauty in them, to show that if it is ever wise to submit an author to this sifting process, there is hardly anyone who would profit by it more than Jeremy Taylor.

Since the fame of the immortals is never really fixed, but must still follow the ebbs and flows of sublunary fashions, our old writers of finely wrought and imaginative prose have fallen out of favour. But is it not wiser to welcome excellence in all the expressive forms in which it presents itself to our appreciation? May we not admit the existence of great writers who, were poets but not versifiers, and say of Jeremy Taylor, as was said of De Quincey, that he has revealed new capacities of the language: has enlarged our conceptions concerning the possibilities of what Dryden described as ‘the other harmony of prose’?

1930.

XVI

FINE WRITING

I

The literary aspirants, of whom the world seems full to-day, are not lacking in advisers to guide their youthful pens and to warn them of the perils in their path. This path is, we are told, full of dreadful pitfalls into which the unwary may be too easily engulfed. Luckily two of our best-known contemporary critics, Mr. Middleton Murry and Mr. Herbert Read, have each written books on Style, and they, as well as several members of the flourishing school of Cambridge criticism, have been at pains to place conspicuous danger-signals at the edge of these abysses.

Their warnings are directed in particular against any attempts at what is called ‘fine writing,’ any undue preoccupation with the technique of prose composition. Time spent in labouring to perfect one’s style, or to make of it an instrument for the production of imaginative effects, is, Mr. Read tells us, just so much time wasted. Indeed Mr. Middleton Murry says it is worse than this, for nothing could be more dangerous than the notion that the more poetic is prose, the finer it is; this is a heresy that cannot be too much deplored and combated. ‘The terrible attraction of words,’ the impulse to use them for anything more than exact symbols of the things they stand for, is another danger; any sacrifice of sense to euphony being, these critics tell us, the beginning of decadence: ‘it is a step on the downward path.’ The histories and associations of words, are, Mr. Read says, entirely irrelevant to prose-style, their face-value in current usage being their only value. The young writer is also warned against rhythmical effects and the use of images, and is told that any conscious care for such devices, any playing, like Stevenson, of the sedulous ape to the masters of this technique, must be carefully eschewed; though Mr. Read more generously admits that ‘less talented writers like Stevenson and Gibbon’ may indeed set themselves a standard in this fashion and feeble-mindedly ape it if they like.

Now all this preaching about dangers and decadence, and even ‘downright wickedness,’ may seem to some of us uncalled for at the present time. There was supposed, indeed, about forty or fifty years ago, to exist somewhere a little cenacle of ill-conditioned people, who were addicted to the fabrication of prose-patterns out of far-fetched and jewel-tinted words; and it was felt at the

time, as I remember, that the police should be called upon to put a stop to their activities. I myself was not infrequently warned in my youth against the example of such polishers of fine phrases; but I do not recall any precise mention of the names of these miscreants, nor did I ever become aware of the least signs of their baleful influence upon contemporary letters. I used, indeed, to wonder sometimes whether—granted their existence—what might be wrong with them was not so much what they did, but the fact that they did it badly.

However that may be—and the whole affair still remains one of considerable obscurity—I cannot believe that this danger can be counted among the perils that are now threatening our civilization. Does any one seriously suppose that the youth of the present day are in the least tempted to retire to lonely garrets, to ascend stylite or stylistic columns, in order to spend laborious years in meditating the thankless Muse of Prose? Since, however, so large a part of criticism consists in repeating what has been said by former critics, may it not be that the battle-cries I have quoted are due to the fact that our modern critics are still engaged in a conflict with these defunct and, it may be, imaginary bogeys? And anyhow, suppose that there are still among us persons who feel an inclination to spend their lives in the study of perfection, do they deserve to be so severely warned and reprobated? Though they may be devoting themselves to an obscure and derided occupation, does not their enthusiasm, when compared with other forms of fascist and fanatical activities, seem almost innocuous after all? The fever of perfection is not catching; and if it be foolish for these astrophils to hitch their wagons (in Emerson's phrase) to this remotely glittering star, surely they cannot reasonably be supposed to inflict any serious damage on the solar system and the general scheme of things.

II

If, however, this modern outcry be something more than an echo from half-forgotten battles, how can its emphasis be explained? May it be accounted for by the fact that the spirit of Puritanism, having been banished from the province of moral conduct, has found a refuge among the arts? Do these critics of the art of writing, like certain critics of other arts, occupy themselves with the craft of literary composition because they think it wrong? 'Treating your adversary with respect,' Dr. Johnson once remarked, with more candour than good feeling, 'is giving him an advantage to which he is not entitled'; and since my pen shows itself not discinclined to engage in a controversy on this subject, I shall permit it to make to our modern critics, especially of the Cambridge school, a few suggestions which are not amiable, and are perhaps unfair. The disconcerting fact may first be pointed out that if you write badly

about good writing, however profound may be your convictions or emphatic your expression of them, your style has a tiresome trick (as a wit once pointed out) of whispering: 'Don't listen!' in your readers' ears. And it is possible also to suggest that the promulgation of new-fangled aesthetic dogmas in unwieldy sentences may be accounted for—not perhaps unspitefully—by a certain deficiency in aesthetic sensibility; as being due to a lack of that delicate, unreasoned, prompt delight in all the varied and subtle manifestations in which beauty may enchant us.

Or, if the controversy is to be carried further; and if, to place it on a more modern basis, we adopt the materialistic method of interpreting aesthetic phenomena now in fashion, may we not find reason to believe that the antagonism between journalist critics and the fine writers they disapprove of is due in its ultimate analysis to what we may designate as economic causes? Are not the authors who earn their livings by their pens, and those who, by what some regard as a social injustice, have been more or less freed from this necessity—are not these two classes of authors in a sort of natural opposition to each other? He who writes at his leisure, with the desire to master his difficult art, can hardly help envying the profits of money-making authors, since his own work—at least till years, and often many years, have passed—has no appreciable market value. Unsaleability seems almost to be the hall-mark, in modern times, of quality in writing. Whatever may give to books that power over the mind and enduring charm which will turn them into classics, seems to be dull, and even to be repellent, to contemporary readers. The earlier volumes of Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, in which we now find poems of enduring beauty, fell as flat on their publication as any books can fall. The greater number of Matthew Arnold's first book of verse, *The Strayed Reveller*, were not sold, and the author had them destroyed; and the same fate befell the earliest poems of Robert Bridges, whose gifts did not indeed receive any general recognition until about twenty years had passed; while FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyám* gravitated to the penny box on the bookstalls until Rossetti found it there.

Something of the same chilling reception was given to several masterpieces of prose which afterwards became famous. Ten years were required to exhaust the first edition of Lamb's *Elia*; Pater's *Renaissance* did not reach a third edition till seventeen years had passed; and the book which some regard as the greatest prose-achievement of the nineteenth century, Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, remained unreprinted (save in one abridgement) for more than thirty years. Although in the much smaller and much more highly cultivated worlds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some books, like George Herbert's *Temple*, and the *Religio Medici*, like the works of Sterne, like Gray's *Elegy* and

Gibbon's *History*, became popular at once, the enormous and half-educated publics of present-day England and America, though welcoming the novels of our famous novelists, acclaim as masterpieces books that are soon forgotten, while ignoring all that is exquisite and rare. Nor can we regard this indifference to quality as a phenomenon which is out of date. I suppose that the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins are looked upon by the younger generation as the most important of recent publications, but they seem to have been in no haste to buy them; for of this beautiful volume, which was edited by Robert Bridges and exquisitely produced by the Oxford Press, only seven hundred copies were sold in the ten years which followed its first appearance in 1918.

The most accomplished master in recent times of English prose-composition was Henry James; and the unsaleability of his later works was almost beyond belief. His books were praised by all reviewers, and his name is now respected by the younger generation. But did his contemporaries buy his novels, or do those who now profess to be his admirers buy them? A few people, perhaps, as he wrote of another novelist, might beg or borrow or steal a copy of his volumes; they might even, as he said, delegate one of their little clique to repeat them aloud from memory, but they never bought them. At the end of his long career he found himself utterly, as he said, and 'unsurmountably unsaleable'; his publishers wrote that all demand for several of his books had ceased, and their plates must be broken up.

III

If this, then, is the almost inevitable fate under present circumstances of fine writers, others, whose copious compositions flood the bookshops, are naturally enough not unenvious of the distinction which is at last awarded to those who take pains to make their work as perfect as they can. Nor do they seem at all unwilling to listen to the modern critics who tell them that those who practise their art for the sake of art, and seek perfection in it, are engaged in a vain, and possibly a pernicious, undertaking. In fact if, as sometimes happens, a journalist or bestseller drags down some stylist from his column and administers a thorough trouncing to him, the spectacle does not, I believe, give to the popular authors any grave discomfort.

Such a castigation was not long ago administered by a Cambridge critic to the figure of the most famous of all the stylists, and indeed the patron saint of their esoteric cult, Gustave Flaubert, in an essay in which this martyr was pilloried, so to speak, on his own pillar for his haughty disdain of the ordinary ways of living, his renouncement of the joys of family affection, parenthood, and love.

But since Cambridge, after Tennyson left it more than a hundred years ago, has not been discredited by sending into the world more than one or two of those conscious artists who, like Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, William Morris, Ruskin, Walter Pater, Robert Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Max Beerbohm have given in Oxford their attention to art rather than to politics, economics, or moral thought, it might be considered that Mr. F. L. Lucas's attack on Flaubert, who died a good many years ago, and was after all a Frenchman, was not, considering the time and place of its delivery, a matter of critical necessity.

Not long before the date of this attack on Flaubert there moved in our midst an author who was devoting without disguise all his time to artistic activities and nothing else. This, again, was Henry James, and shortly before his death he received a still more thorough castigation at the hands of an eminent social thinker and the author of many popular novels, who felt himself called upon to denounce his works and ways in a book which was entitled *Boon*. Henry James did not, as he intimated to his castigator, find that he enjoyed being held up to reprobation as a ridiculous and vapid person, and, to use his own words, as an 'extraordinarily futile and void writer.' Mr. Wells wrote in reply that he had indeed assailed his old friend with harsh antagonism; but he had done so, he said, from a sense of duty, since he regarded him as a public menace, whose views of literature were carrying everything before them, and exerting an altogether pernicious influence on the youth of the age. The 'poor, lonely, and independent old artist-man,' as Henry James elsewhere described himself, replied somewhat tartly that he was not in the least conscious of being, or of having ever been, such a public menace; that no youth eager to be perverted by him had ever come his way. He had indeed, as he wrote more than once, completely failed to make out that his experiments in form, or his interest in the exquisite problems of composition, had succeeded in making any sort of effect on any sort of person; and that no hint of critical appreciation of his success or failure had ever reached him from whatever source. His general sense was, he said, that of launching his works into a great, grey void, from which no echo or message could be expected to return.

Subsequent events have proved that the alarm of the social thinker was, as Henry James believed, quite unfounded; and even the recent evocation of his figure in the incongruous disguise of a Communist scarecrow will not lessen this impression. In reading a recently published book called *Beginnings* in which Mr. L. A. G. Strong has collected the experiences of fourteen of the most famous authors who have established their reputation in the post-war period, I find indeed that the name of Henry James is not so much as mentioned; and all the problems of composition which occupied his attention

seem entirely to have escaped their notice. Indeed I imagine that the prefaces to Henry James's novels and stories, which prefaces have now been printed together in one volume, and which admit us into what he called 'the closed chamber of the artist's meditations, the sacred back-kitchen,' would seem funny reading to these contemporaries of ours; and the late, acquired style in which he wrote them, with his immensely rich vocabulary—the richest vocabulary, perhaps, of any writer in English since Shakespeare—with his palatial metaphors, his great periods and parentheses, and the beauty of the phrases which glitter on his page, would appear, to these young writers in a hurry, fantastic and absurd. Nor do I believe that the record they contain of this artist's struggles with the presentation of his subject, with what he called 'the dear little deadly question of how to do it,' would possess for them the slightest interest. For in these ingenuous narratives of modern achievement no mention can be found of struggles with problems of style and presentation, or indeed of any struggles whatever.

IV

It is easy, too easy, for a traditionalist to write with irony about a generation younger than his own. He may indeed feel tempted sometimes into repeating the supplication of the Psalmist, to 'Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord.' More profitable he will find it, however, to try to discover merit in a world in which its appearance is rare; nor will it be without advantage for him to try to estimate as impartially as he can the value for letters of ambitions and ideals with which he may find himself somewhat out of sympathy.

Such a critic, if he be possessed of any knowledge of literary history, cannot but admit that the achievement of excellence in the arts is often a by-product of activities inspired by what seem quite inartistic motives—the need to inculcate moral lessons, the envy of other artists, the desire to gain wealth and publicity by winning the approbation of the public in the lucrative display of one's own lime-lit and engaging personality. Nor will he dismiss as unworthy of consideration the material which forms the main subject-matter of these recent compositions, the 'slices of life,' as Henry James called them, which they slap down before their readers, their recollections of their puritanical upbringing, of the stupidity of their freely caricatured parents, uncles and aunts and other relatives, and the dreams and wish-fulfilments of young persons of either sex. For such material has formed, as he knows, the main subject-matter, after all, of many novelists to whom our debt cannot be easily over-estimated.

The theory of composition which these young writers profess, and which is

confirmed for them by the teachings of our younger critics, may also find at least a partial justification in the history of letters. That the sincere, spontaneous communication to the reader of the writer's own valued experiences is the essence of style; that the author is born and not made, and that if he cannot, as they express it, 'get the hang of writing' for himself no outside aid can help him; that he must have something to say and not bother how he says it; that he does best what comes easiest to him, and achieves his finest effects, as Scott said of his own achievements, by a kind of 'hurried frankness of composition'—much may be alleged in defence of this doctrine. There is, undoubtedly, as history proves, an effortless, spontaneous way of writing by which authors of happy natural endowment, who are born in a propitious epoch of their country's literature, seem to start at a point that others cannot attain to by any efforts, and who are the inheritors, rather than the acquirers, of a perfect faculty.

This Atticism of style is a quality to which French critics give the highest praise; it is that bareness, that light, clear, delicate quality, without emphasis or sparkle, of certain Attic writers, which seems to reflect the fine spareness of the Attic plain, and the light, transparent sky above it. The appearance of this Atticism in French prose Sainte-Beuve dates from the publication of Pascal's *Provinciales*; he found it in the writings of men like de Retz, La Rochefoucauld, Bussy-Rabutin, who wrote as they talked, when men of acuter wits and better race spoke a purer language. He described as the most famous manifestations of this Atticism the *Gil Blas* of Le Sage and the *Manon Lescaut* of Prévost; he found it also sometimes in Voltaire; although it hardly survived in its purity, he said, beyond the middle of the eighteenth century, save in the talk of certain old women of the world, who sat at ease in their corners and said crudely and frankly just what they thought without asking any one's permission.

Of this Atticism and golden ease, this effortless limpidity and simple elegance, which never offends the ear but never makes any conscious effort to please it, our literature presents fewer examples of perfection. We taste its quality in Dryden's prose and in that of Cowley and Swift and Goldsmith, in Gray's, Cowper's, Horace Walpole's, and Edward FitzGerald's letters, in White's *Selborne*, and in Newman's *Apologia*.

V

It may be worth while, however, to consider whether this care-free method of composition may not be attended by certain disadvantages as well; or whether at least the promulgation of the doctrine that it is the only kind of prose which any one should try to write ought to be accepted without question.

Lytton Strachey, whose more sensational achievements have rather overshadowed the fine quality of his criticism, has pointed out that this easy way of writing, which Dryden, he says, first established and Swift brought to perfection, has, like all methods of writing, its faults and dangers—faults which, though of course unimportant in the work of a great master, become glaring in those of second-rate practitioners. ‘It is very flat and very loose,’ he says, ‘it has no formal beauty, no elegance, no balance, no trace of the deliberation of art.’ There yawns indeed, he adds, a great gulf between those who like magnificence in prose and those who hate it. It would be foolish, however, as he sensibly points out, to claim superiority for either of these two ways of writing, or to suppose that the effects of one style can be produced by the other.

Still more profound is the gulf between those who value the informational elements of literature, its truthfulness as a transcript of experience, its penetration into the secrets of life and feeling, and those who take more interest in the musical and creative potency of language. The power of words to create, as it were, their meaning was well described by Mr. Sturge Moore, when, writing of some young poets, he said that ‘the poet is not full of emotions and perceptions as a vat is full of grapes. He is like all young creatures, playful. He plays with language, attracted by its beauties and possibilities, and in doing so he does for himself what afterwards his poems do for us—he awakens or creates emotions in his heart that it knew little or nothing of before, and as he continues he clarifies, strengthens and adds to them.’ Robert Bridges expressed much the same view in contrasting his youthful inspiration with that of his young friend Dolben, whom he describes as possessing a much more intense poetic temperament than his own. Dolben, he says, looked upon poetry in its emotional aspect as the naïve outcome of peculiar personal emotion; and the only thing he liked in it was its power of exciting or expressing his own valued feelings. Bridges, on the other hand, regarded poetry from the artistic side; what led him to it was the ‘inexhaustible satisfaction of form, the magic of speech’ which lay in the ‘masterly control of the material,’ a mastery which he hoped to learn. He had never believed, he said, that the poet’s emotions were in any way better than his own, or his own than those of another’s; the value of their expression consisting rather in the expression itself.

VI

Now although I suppose that even the most austere of our modern critics will allow the poet to take pains with his verse, and even avail himself of the music and associations of the words he uses, they certainly regard it as

unpermissible, and as a sign of decadence, for the writer of prose to have recourse to the means or attempt to produce the effects which the poet may make use of without blame. This doctrine they base upon the rigid and very clear distinction which they try to draw between Poetry and Prose; between the elements of our nature to which each of them should address itself, and the methods it should use to make that appeal. These two methods of composition are therefore separated into two water-tight compartments, neither of which must be allowed to influence the other without the danger of infection. The aim of Poetry, they tell us, is to appeal to the imagination, and above all to the emotions; and since there is between rhythm and emotion a deep biological connexion, a metrical arrangement of language, and often the use of rhyme, is the appropriate means of creating that heightened sensibility which Poetry arouses; and as Poetry appeals to the imagination also it may be allowed to avail itself of the music of words, of their associations, and the images and metaphors which poets use.

Prose on the other hand, they tell us, is not addressed to feeling or to the imagination, but to the reason. ‘Poetry,’ as one of them writes, ‘is the expression of one form of mental activity, Prose the expression of another form.’ Its progress is that of a series of logical propositions; and the vocabulary it employs must consist of words deprived of all overtones of music, and all echoes and associations. Clarity, terseness, perspicuity are the only virtues of the prose-writer, since his object is the communication of ideas, and any attempt on his part to step beyond these limits can result only in writing a kind of bastard poetry, which betrays itself, they say, in the use of pattern—not indeed of the regular pattern of poetry, but of repetitions of stress and cadence and equal length of phrases.

This clear distinction between Prose and Poetry appears at first sight an admirable achievement of modern criticism, and the rules based upon it seem as if they ought to be of the greatest value to writers at the beginning of their careers. Indeed, the doctrine that all expression of thought in prose is and should be a spontaneous process; that, as Mr. Read epigrammatically puts it, ‘style is spontaneity’; that all time wasted by the Prose-writer in the search for images, or in the choice of words (since one synonym is as good as another) is just so much time wasted; that if only our observations are true, and our thoughts sincere, the right words will rush to our pens without care and trouble—this labour-saving doctrine has been cordially welcomed by copious writers; and it proved, as Leslie Stephen pointed out, a notion full of reassurance to that admirable and indefatigable journalist, Southey, who was the first to proclaim the great truth that style can be acquired, and indeed only acquired, by never thinking about style at all.

Others have attributed the popularity of this doctrine to the growing importance in these days of women writers; since, as Sainte-Beuve pointed out, women seldom or never form their own palettes or exercise any conscious choice of words, being quite content with the common and current vocabulary of the day.

VII

But, alas, this clear-cut differentiation turns out, like so many dogmatic pronouncements in these matters, to be involved in difficulties of a most perplexing nature. The distinction between Poetry and Prose, Mr. Read is forced to admit, can never be a formal one; no analysis, however careful and minute, can ever separate into two distinct camps the multiple rhythms of either form. There may be, he says, an absolute or ‘pure’ kind of Prose, to which all prose-styles should approximate, and by which they can be judged and tested; he hopes there is such a standard, and ventures to suggest that in Swift’s later writing, devoid as it is of ornament and striking phrases, may be found the closest approximation to it. And yet Swift’s style has, he confesses, occasional lapses, and Dr. Johnson’s remark that ‘the rogue never hazards a metaphor’ is not entirely to be ignored.

Mr. Read tries to establish this distinction on the dogmatic statement (whatever it may mean) that while Prose is constructive, Poetry is creative. This, he says, is the real distinction between them. But then Mr. Middleton Murry tells us that the bulk of the creative work of the nineteenth century has been done in Prose; and that the Prose fiction of that period was able to achieve all, or almost all, the effects of Poetry. In this confusion the Professor of English Literature at Cambridge attempts to make more clear this discrimination by quoting the well-known statement of Clutton-Brock that the cardinal virtue of Poetry is Love, while that of Prose is Justice; but he finds himself compelled to modify this statement by suggesting that ‘high-compelling Emotion,’ rather than ‘Love,’ is the essential virtue of Poetry, and ‘Persuasion’ that of Prose.

The latest writer to engage in this dispute is Mr. F. W. Bateson, who in his book *English Poetry and the English Language* attempts to establish this distinction on a firmer basis. He also regards Poetry and Prose as quite separate ways of writing; Prose, he says, is essentially a method of progression, which moves from point to point in a continuous series of propositions, and the words it uses are devoid of value in themselves. They are merely symbols or counters, and transparency is their only virtue. Poetry, on the other hand is unprogressive; a poem stands still; and being an instantaneous whole, its words are conspicuous, for they are an essential part of the structure which they

themselves create. It is certainly something of a relief to escape from the vagueness of words like ‘Creative,’ ‘Love,’ ‘Justice,’ ‘high-compelling Emotion,’ and ‘Persuasion’; but although Mr. Bateson’s book contains much about the influence of language on Poetry which is interesting and suggestive, the distinction he draws between it and Prose seems almost more questionable than those of the others. When he states that in his opinion lyrics are devoid of movement, and goes on to say that he regards poetic drama (including, I suppose, that of Shakespeare) as essentially a form of Prose, the earnest inquirer seems to find himself in a fog that grows thicker than ever.

The truth is that (as Pater pointed out) attempts to circumscribe the arts on *a priori* grounds are always liable to be discredited by the facts of artistic production; and certainly the path of those dogmatists who preach that Poetry must be poetic and Prose prosaic is beset by several lions of a formidable aspect. The ways in which they try to meet and circumvent these creatures are interesting to observe.

Most fearsome of all these lions is that great, solemn, heraldic, hierarchic animal, the Authorized Translation of the Bible, whose pages of magnificent Prose have never been surpassed. Mr. Robert Lynd faced this awe-inspiring beast with perhaps more rashness than consideration, by his bold affirmation that the fine writing of these translators was due to their ignorance of the real meaning of the original text, and not to any fastidious desire to write good Prose. Mr. Middleton Murry, however, approaches the monster with much more circumspection. While admitting the surpassing beauty of certain pages in the English Bible, he regards it as hardly an exaggeration to say that the style of at least one half of this translation is ‘atrocious’; and indeed, in mere point of style, Renan’s *Life of Jesus* is infinitely superior to the authorized version of the Gospels. We must be on our guard, therefore, he warns us, against the dangerous notion that the English Bible is the highest achievement of English Prose, since such a superstitious reverence stands in the way of a frank approach to the problem of Style. Its magnificent passages are, moreover, he tells us, the expression of a passionate monotheism which is so remote from the modern mind that they may be safely left out of our consideration.

Another lion to be met is Milton; but to one who holds, as Mr. Middleton Murry holds, that a great work of literature is not so much a triumph of language as a victory over language, a writer like Milton, who deliberately devoted himself to a conscious study of the effects which can be produced by the choice of words—such a writer may be more easily dismissed. ‘There is death,’ he says, in Milton; the *Paradise Lost* is a ‘corruption of our language’

which all but killed it. Milton was, moreover, a poet, and his Prose is in a way Poetry also.

Even more formidable is that great Prose magician, Sir Thomas Browne, who, with his wealth of rhythmical elaboration, as Lytton Strachey has described it, his stylistic bravura, the pomp and splendour of his imagination, the brilliance of his phrasing, and the wealth and variety of suggestion in his use of words, wrote pages which some regard as being among the most marvellous achievements of our literature. Browne's poetic Prose must, however, Mr. Middleton Murry tells us, be disregarded in any serious consideration of the problem of Style. It is lacking, he says, in that judicious appeal to the judgment, and that absolute precision of statement, which are the specific qualities of excellence in Prose.

> 'Though Somnus in Homer be sent to rouse up Agamemnon, I find no such effects in these drowsy approaches of sleep. To keep our eyes open longer were but to act our Antipodes. The huntsmen are up in America, and they are already past their first sleep in Persia.'

Why, the old-fashioned reader may plaintively ask with Hazlitt, why should we cut ourselves from beauty like this with a theory?

The lions of milder roar like Walter Pater, who whispers that language is more than half our thought, seem to be regarded by our theorists as unworthy of serious consideration. Pater's once famous essay on *Style* they do not mention; and Mr. Herbert Read only pauses to name 'enervation' as the characteristic of those pages in *The Child in the House* about the red hawthorn, in which readers once used to find such rare beauty and distinction.

With the lion, Henry James, who lived much longer and whose castigation by Mr. Wells has been already mentioned, Mr. Middleton Murry deals in a somewhat gentler fashion. Henry James's delight in contemplating the formal beauty of his intricate designs results, he tells us, in a hypertrophy of style which has, he admits, a certain vitality; it is, however, he warns us, but the vitality of a weed or a mushroom, 'that we cannot call precisely spurious, but which we certainly cannot call real.'

VIII

If, however, we turn our attention from theories about Prose to the actual achievements of our great prose-writers (and such a shift of attention from abstract theory to concrete fact is worth making now and then) we shall find

that English literature is extremely rich—rich beyond that perhaps of any other country—in Prose which is full of Poetry and colour, and rises now and then to passages of especial beauty (‘purple patches’ if you like). Few indeed of our authors of established fame have paid the least regard to the laws of composition which our critics so emphatically proclaim. Many of the Elizabethans wrote magnificent and imaginative Prose, Sidney, Bacon, Raleigh, Shakespeare; it illuminates the pages of the old translators, North and Florio and Shelton; the translators of the Bible used it with miraculous effect, and Cranmer, in framing the Anglican liturgy, was among its greatest masters. So, too, the old divines wrote it. Hooker and Donne and Jeremy Taylor, and other seventeenth-century authors, Burton and Milton, and of course above all and beyond all Sir Thomas Browne. In the eighteenth century we hear echoes of it in Burke and Gibbon, and not infrequently in Samuel Johnson. The nineteenth is even richer than the eighteenth century in Prose of this kind: Landor, Charles Lamb and Hazlitt, Coleridge, De Quincey and Ruskin, Carlyle and Newman and Emerson availed themselves of its resources; and among more recent writers may be mentioned Pater and Stevenson and Charles Doughty and Conrad and Henry James.

Imaginative Prose seemed indeed at one time likely to become the special art of the modern world; but not many of its masters are mentioned, save for reprobation, by the authors of recent books on Style; those whom they prefer to praise and quote being for the most part writers who cared little how they wrote, and in especial that famous master of clumsy phrases and undistinguished diction, the great Thomas Hardy.

However, it is not easy to destroy established reputations, and any attempts to reverse what Gibbon called ‘the unerring sentence of time’ are almost always doomed to failure. Since the writers of imaginative Prose whose achievements are regarded as among the glories of our literature have never hesitated to address themselves to our imagination and our feelings, are we not almost forced to conclude that the reprobation by our modern critics for this way of composition must be due to a certain insensitiveness to beauty? And anyhow, has the distinction they draw between Poetry and Prose the fundamental importance which they give it? ‘This brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire’—‘Look, the unfolding star calls up the shepherd’—‘The music of the moon sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale’—who, unfamiliar with these phrases, would know that the first two are from Shakespeare’s Prose, and the other from Tennyson’s blank verse? There are, indeed, long passages of Shakespeare which have been printed sometimes as Prose, and again as verse. May not then this distinction, at least as it is commonly presented, be founded, as so many of our distinctions

are founded, on what is little more than a confusion of terms? ‘If I were a Professor of English,’ that admirable prose-writer, Benjamin Jowett, is reported to have said: ‘I would teach my young men that prose-writing is a kind of Poetry.’ Already before his time poets themselves, Wordsworth and Shelley and Coleridge, had protested against this verbal confusion. The distinction between poets and prose-writers Shelley described as a vulgar error, and Wordsworth declared that he had made use against his own judgment of this false discrimination, which had introduced into criticism so much confusion; the only strict antithesis to Prose being, in fact, not Poetry, but metre. Coleridge also called attention to this difficulty, pointing out that the writings of Plato and Jeremy Taylor furnished undeniable proofs that Poetry of the highest kind could exist without a regular metre. He even suggested that the word *Poesy* (which is now nothing more than an archaic synonym for *Poetry*) might be revived as a generic term for that quality in either metrical or non-metrical compositions which was poetical in character and appealed to the imagination and the aesthetic sense. This meaning of *poesy* is indeed authorized by our older English usage; Bacon used *poesy* both for works in prose and works in verse; and Sir Philip Sidney wrote: ‘It is not rhyming and versifying that maketh Poesy. One may be a poet without versing and a versifier without Poetry.’

Aristotle made no distinction between Poetry and Prose, and owing to the absence of the English verbal dilemma foreign writers do not greatly concern themselves with this somewhat dull and inane debate. *Gedicht* is used in German of Prose works; and in France, though the technical distinction between Poetry and Prose is of course recognized, a more fortunate vocabulary has preserved them from the confusion against which Shelley and Wordsworth and Coleridge protested. The differentiation made by French writers is between *vers* and *prose*; and their word for Poetry, *poésie*, though frequently used for metrical compositions, has a much wider meaning, being applied to prose compositions like Fénelon’s *Télémaque* and the *Atala* and *René* of Chateaubriand. *Poésie* in fact is used by them in the sense that Coleridge suggested for *poesy*, and as Henry James used our word ‘Poetry’ in what he called its largest literary sense, for any form of writing whose highest bid is, as he expressed it, ‘addressed to the imagination, to the spiritual and aesthetic vision, the mind led captive by a charm and a spell, an incalculable art.’

I suppose that no one will deny that the French critics have made themselves, by their profound and subtle studies of the problems of imaginative writing, the undisputed masters of that most modern and in some ways most exquisite of all the arts of letters, that of literary appreciation. I am not unacquainted with their work; but I cannot remember encountering in the

writings of Sainte-Beuve, of Lemaître, of Faguet, of Anatole France, or the others any serious discussion of the essential (as opposed to the technical) differences between Prose and Poetry, or any attempts to limit one or the other to a field exclusively its own.

Surely this is a more liberal way to appreciate the almost infinite variety of pleasures we can derive from our reading. Why should we not keep the gardens of the Muses—and Prose, too, has its Muses—as places for harmless recreation? What need is there to divide them up into little plots with narrow paths between them? These gardens, as Bacon phrased it, ‘keep the privilege of the Golden Age; they ever flourish and are in league with Time’;—though they lie remote indeed from the market-place where the books of the year are sold in large editions.

IX

There are those (and I am one of them) who find a special charm in poesy which is not in metre, being devoid of the regular beat of patterned verse. Is there any valid reason why we should not indulge our taste for the musical and imaginative Prose of the Bible and our older writers—should not indeed look upon it as a taste as blameless as any other? May we not indeed allege that this old-fashioned fashion of fine writing, with its lovely phrases, and the cumulative effect of its innumerable minutiæ of expression, can be found to possess over modern Prose certain advantages of its own? It would seem in the first place that, unlike the art of Poetry, the art of writing careful Prose can, to a certain extent at least, be learnt by any one who will take the trouble; and that, in whatever pursuit he may afterwards take up, scholarship or history, politics or law or religion, all the skill he may have acquired in expressing himself with grace and elegance will be of advantage to him. The writing of expressive Prose, the mastery of a rich vocabulary, seems indeed to be much more often the result of taking pains than of natural endowment. Sir Thomas Browne’s letters show no signs of that magic of style which, in his more formal writings, was plainly the result of the careful contrivance of a highly developed artistic consciousness; and the impromptu letters of the unsurpassed master of French Prose, Gustave Flaubert, are, French critics tell us, so badly written and so full of faults as to be really shocking.

It follows, therefore, that imaginative Prose can be written in ages (like the present) when the writing of splendid verse seems, for the time at least, to be no longer possible. The Muses of Verse are unaccountable creatures, whose appearances are intermittent. But the Muses of Prose are always ready to respond to the appeal of those who call upon them; and even in the deadest of periods for poets in the eighteenth century they did not refuse their assistance

to Sterne, Johnson, Burke and Gibbon.

Still another advantage of this way of writing is its unexplored possibilities. Fontanes was of course much mistaken when he declared *tous les vers sont faits*, before the age of Victor Hugo; and Flaubert fell into the same mistake when he said that all the potentialities of metre had been explored. He was certainly right, however, in declaring that the possibilities of Prose had hardly been experimented with at all.

> ‘There is a gloom in deep love, as in deep water: there is a silence in it which suspends the foot, and the folded arms and the dejected head are the images it reflects. No voice shakes its surface: the Muses themselves approach it with a tardy and a timid step, and with a low and tremulous and melancholy song.’

> ‘ “A well-a-day!—do what we can for him,” said Trim, maintaining his point,—“the poor soul will die. . . . *He shall not die, by G——!*” cried my uncle Toby.
>
> —The *accusing spirit*, which flew up to Heaven’s chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in;—and the *recording angel*, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever.’

> ‘Nature, green as she looks, rests everywhere on dread foundations, were we farther down; and Pan, to whose music the Nymphs dance, has a cry in him that can drive all men distracted.’

> ‘To take a boat in a pleasant evening, and with musick to row upon the waters, which *Plutarch* so much applauds, *Elian* admires upon the river *Pineus*: in those *Thessalian* fields, beset with green Bayes, where Birds so sweetly sing that passengers enchanted as it were with their heavenly musick, *omnium laborum et curarum obliviscantur*, forget forthwith all labours, care and grief: or in a *Gundilo* through the grand *Canale* in *Venice*, to see those goodly Palaces, must needs refresh and give content to a melancholy dull spirit.’

> ‘Precipitous, with his reeling satyr rout about him, re-peopling and re-illuming suddenly the waste places, drunk with a new fury beyond the grape, Bacchus, born in fire, fire-like flings himself at the Cretan. . . . With the desert all ringing with the mad cymbals of his

followers, made lucid with the presence and new offers of a god,—as if unconscious of Bacchus, or but idly casting her eyes as upon some unconcerning pageant—her soul undistracted from Theseus—Ariadne is still pacing the solitary shore in as much heart-silence, and in almost the same local solitude, with which she awoke at day-break to catch the forlorn last glances of the sail that bore away the Athenian.'

'None of us seem to have thought the Alps would be visible without profane exertion in climbing hills. . . . It was drawing towards sunset when we got up to some sort of garden promenade—west of the town, I believe; and high above the Rhine, so as to command the open country across it to the south and west. At which open country of low undulation, far into blue,—gazing as at one of our own distances from Malvern of Worcester, or Dorking of Kent,—suddenly—behold—beyond! There was no thought in any of us for a moment of their being clouds. They were clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky, and already tinged with rose by the sinking sun. Infinitely beyond all that we had ever thought or dreamed,—the seen walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us; not more awful, round heaven, the wall of sacred Death.'

Do not these sentences of Landor, Sterne, Carlyle, Burton, Lamb, and Ruskin, suggest possibilities of expression which the medium of verse cannot easily surpass?

Indeed, the age-long and ever-baffled attempt to make into Poetry the Prose of the Psalms seems to show that this Prose possesses qualities of rhythm and music with which verse finds it difficult to compete.

'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters——'

George Herbert hardly improved on this Prose in his verses:

The God of love my shepherd is,
And he that doth me feed.
While he is mine and I am his,
What can I want or need?

He leads me to the tender grass,
Where I both feed and rest,
Then to the streams that gently pass;
In both I have the best.

And even when Milton in the height of his powers made verse of the sentence: ‘Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other,’ his rendering—

Mercy and Truth that long were miss’d,
Now joyfully are met,
Sweet Peace and Righteousness have kiss’d
And hand in hand are set—

cannot be said to be as poetic as the Bible’s Prose.

It is indeed somewhat remarkable that our modern poets, anxious as they seem to free their writing from the shackles of verse, and from that monotony of regular beats which Poetry demands, should not have availed themselves of this ancient and beautiful tradition of English poetic Prose. They only fidget us (as Mr. MacCarthy has pointed out) by the typographical presentation as verse of what is really Prose, by the jingles of their occasional rhymes, and by that exaggerated preciosity which seems almost inevitable in writing Poetry, but which would be instinctively avoided by a prose-writer.

Another advantage of this way of writing is the greater opportunity it offers for the expression of an artist’s individual temperament, of the idiosyncrasy of his soul and his personal sense of life. A few poets like Virgil and Milton have created within the limits of verse a rhythm which is unmistakably their own; but most versifiers are forced to fit their moods into the accepted metres of patterned words. But the greater diversity of rhythms at the disposal of the prose-writer enables him to express his mood and meaning in a style more individual to himself, and leave his own imprint on every page he writes.

X

And yet our lover of fine writing would go far astray if he should suggest that the proser should usurp the throne and arrogate to himself the splendid

mantle of the poet. The old discrimination between Prose and Poetry is after all not founded on a mere verbal confusion. A distinction which has been so long established cannot be without a basis, although, like that between *Classical* and *Romantic*, no one has ever been able to define it in terms which all are willing to accept. There is undoubtedly an intimate connexion between rhythm and emotion; rhythm, as Goethe said, has something magical in it, which can even make us feel that the sublime is within our reach; and the great body of song of all the ages sufficiently proves that the rhythm of metre is the most powerful means of appealing to and sustaining the imagination. All that we need to remember is that Prose also can have its song; can also float aloft on its own ample wings and flashing feathers; that it need not be invariably pedestrian and appeal only to the reason.

There is, as Pater pointed out, such a thing as the imaginative reason; and if, seduced by the example of the discriminators I have been discussing, I were tempted to try to draw myself a distinction between Prose and Poetry, I should not be disinclined to say that while Poetry is primarily addressed to imaginative feeling, Prose is best fitted perhaps to appeal to this imaginative reason which Pater has described. But any such discrimination I should make with many reservations; Poetry like that of Pope's speaks more to reason than to emotion, while much of the poetic prose of the Bible is addressed above all to the feelings.

> 'Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.'
>
> 'He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.'
>
> 'Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.'

Many passages, however, could be quoted to support the tentative suggestion that the bid of imaginative Prose is above all a bid to our imaginative reason. There is, for instance, Hamlet's beautiful, idiomatic, ironic speech: 'What a piece of work is a man!' which is, perhaps, the finest passage of English Prose which was ever written. Indeed, to this mood or temper of our reason, irony seems specially congenial; and were I ever tempted to dogmatize, I should be inclined to say that an ironic way of writing is the one to which

Prose is peculiarly adapted. I could instance among the ancients the irony of Plato, of Tacitus, and Lucian, and among the moderns the irony of Hamlet and of Falstaff, of Pascal, of Burton, Sterne, and Fielding, of Voltaire, of Swift, and of Gibbon, who was perhaps a greater artist than he knew.

Irony, however, is little to the taste of most readers, who do not much care to laugh at themselves and other people. This way of writing has, however, as Saintsbury pointed out, one advantage; the liking for it is one which never palls. The few who enjoy this dry beverage can never have enough; lofty sentiments and noble views of things may satiate them sometimes, but irony is always to their taste.

XI

How few they were in number, Henry James wrote in 1887, and how easily one could name them, the writers whose Prose was personal and expressive! If he felt this fifty years ago, how much more easily, were he living now, could he count among our contemporaries those who show in their writings any signs, save some private jabber, of a style which is their own! The diction, the run of phrase of each of them, seems, with very few exceptions, quite indistinguishable from that of the others, each of whose pages might have been written by any one of his fellows. Nor of that Atticism and happy grace which distinguished some of our earlier writers will he find any trace; almost all contemporary Prose will seem to him to have come from a common waste-paper basket, to which he cannot but think that it will almost immediately return. Where, he asks himself, are the bestsellers of last year? They are as disregarded, he suspects, as the dilapidated nests of last year's birds, who have raised their lively broods and disappeared, whither, no one knows.

More than once, when I have looked upon the map of the British Empire, I have wondered why, amongst all the many millions of its inhabitants, here in England, or in the great Dominions of Canada, South Africa, and Australia, there are to-day so few who have made an effort to acquire distinction in the writing of English Prose.

And America, the land of my birth, America!

Not long ago, when staying in an Italian villa, I went down to Florence with an American fellow-guest, who had business to transact with the American Consul in that city. Sitting with him in the waiting-room of the Consulate, where one of its employees was busy with his pen, we found ourselves confronted by an immense map of the great Republic—it almost completely covered one of the walls of the apartment.

Youth has its dreams, its longings for distinction; among all the eager young men and women of that vast country, nowhere on those prairies or among those mountains, by the side of no lake or river or of either ocean, in not one of those resounding cities or multitudinous universities, does the thought no longer come to any one, I asked myself, that the instrument of speech which they make use of all day long has resonance sleeping within it of unimaginable beauty? Never to any one of them does it now occur to try to master, as others have mastered, the powers of magical evocation, the elfin music, the ironic echoes which are latent in English Prose? The golden sceptre of style gilds everything it touches, and can make immortal those who grasp it: to no one of those aspiring youths does the thought ever suggest itself that it might be an adventure among adventures to try to wield that wand?

'Why, good Heavens!' I cried to my companion, as I pointed at the broad face of that great, unanimous, univocal Republic, 'why, from the point of view of Style, that whole Continent could now sink beneath the sea, and never leave a ripple!'

The American clerk dropped his pen and gazed at me in astonishment; the American eagle on the consular escutcheon seemed to ruffle angry feathers; and my American companion intimated to me that I had better keep to myself any further reflections suggested by the view of that large glazed map of my native country.

XII

A critic recently expressed the belief that a great period of English literature was just about to dawn upon us. If the survivor from another age, as he glances at the books which now flood the bookshops, finds in them everything which, as Henry James expressed it, makes for charm and distinction of style, for conviction, for illusion, 'every touch that directly evokes and finely presents is unsurpassably absent,' he cannot escape the impression that, to borrow another of Henry James's phrases, 'the small fry of the day submit to a further shrinkage.' He must, of course, take into account the possibility that he may have become the victim of that illusion of a general decline which is so often the accompaniment of declining years. But even if a great day of English literature has dawned without his knowledge, he may legitimately regret that the Prose which was formerly one of its adornments is no longer written, and question the perspicacity of those critics who do their best to discourage and reprobate this method of expression. And though he may surmise that it is vain for him to preach a doctrine which is to-day so out of fashion, he may console himself with the satisfaction of reiterating, however ineffectually, the truism that it is never unprofitable for an artist to study the

qualities and possibilities of the medium he works in; and that for a writer to write as well as he can is, after all, at all times and in all conditions, the best way of writing.

1936.

XVII

ANN WHITALL

I

A little, shabby old book, found by chance among my mother's papers, has come into my hands. On the cover is written 'Diary for the years 1760, 1761, and 1762 Kept by A. W.,' and within, every page is closely filled with small, old handwriting. The diarist was Ann Whitall, my mother's great-grandmother. She was by birth one of the Cooper family of Cooper's Point, a family of New Jersey Quaker farmers, from which Fenimore Cooper was descended. Born in 1716, she married in 1739 a neighbouring farmer, James Whitall, and became the mother of nine children, seven of whom, five boys and two daughters, were living when this journal was written. Their home was at Red Bank, a house which still stands on the banks of the Delaware river, nearly opposite the mouth of the Schuylkill, and about six miles from Philadelphia. Save for one appearance in Revolutionary history, little was known of Ann Whitall until her diary was found. Its faded writing and fantastic spelling are not altogether easy to decipher, but to anyone who, like myself, has read and re-read it, this little volume, saved by chance out of the wreck of time, gives a curiously vivid glimpse of a notable character of Quaker life in America, a century and a half ago.

At the date when this book was written the Quakers had been settled for nearly a hundred years in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Originally exiled from England for the sake of their faith, and suffering at first many privations, they had soon become prosperous; and these English yeomen and farmers, called from their homes and fields by the religious excitements of the seventeenth century, and swept across the Atlantic by one of the storms of that stormy period, had soon fallen back into the rural ways of their race, amid the peace and plenty of their American home. The eighteenth-century houses they built for themselves still remain as evidence of the quiet of their comfortable lives. In such a house Ann Whitall lived amid great trees and prosperous orchards and meadows, with the broad Delaware flowing by. Sandy roads led to several near-by Quaker settlements with their prim Meeting-houses, whither on First days and Fifth days the farmers would ride, or drive in their farm wagons, and, hitching their horses in the sheds, would gather in silence in the still interior, where an elderly Friend would be moved now and then to preach

or pray; and where sometimes a farmer or farmer's wife, weary with the week's work, would fall into a peaceful doze. A most innocent old community, it seems to us now, with its quiet faith, its rustic cares and labours, and with William Penn's little Quaker city just across the river.

This, however, as we learn from her diary, was not Ann Whitall's view of her surroundings. Her imagination found wickedness all about her equal to the wickedness of Egypt, or the abominations of Babylon and Assyria denounced by the prophets. Satan, she declares, was hunting up and down the banks of the Delaware; roaring lions threatened to destroy them all in a flood of wickedness, and there was no place of safety. With a kind of awful delight she dwelt upon the portents that announced the fall of Jerusalem, how the river was turned back, a comet hung like a flaming sword over the city, and armies were seen fighting with horses and chariots in the heavens; and she seems to have searched the New Jersey sky with anxious eyes for similar portents. The corn was to husk, the wood gone to town, but was it a time, she wrote, to 'bi and to sel, and to git gain, was it a tim to set and sleep?' Were they not threatened with a fate like the fate of Sodom? 'O that we may be stopt in the Plain as Balum wos by his ass he rid apon, or as Pharoh wos in the reed see!' 'We must go and leve it all behind us, and we dont no how soon; then fare wel corn, fare wel wod, fair wel il compani that has tuck all my time when I shud a bin a redding or a righting som gud matter, like juge Hal, or a wolking a lone a midatating sum gud, like Isaac of old.' 'This field wonts plowing and the tother wonts plantting—O remember you must go and leve it all before long!' 'O our time, our pracious time, how du we spend it?' she enquires, and she was always attempting to keep the awful brevity of life and the immanence of the divine Judgment before the eyes of her husband and sons. 'I think of going into the earth—out of the earth we cam, into it we must go again'; but there were some, she notes with obvious reference to her family, who were 'so eger ater the world, they hant time to think thay shall di: if thay did, how cud thay be so wicked?' Playing ball, wrestling and skating—and skating on the First Day (or Sunday), was, she thought, quite as iniquitous as playing ball, and of itself sufficient to draw down a Judgment from heaven—these were among the special iniquities which polluted that rural community. And when her boys went skating after Meeting, where all the 'rotscum' of the earth met together, 'the more the better,' their mother, left alone in the farm-house, would compare the Quaker villages of Woodbury Creek and Haddonfield to the Cities of the Plain, and predict dreadful Judgments upon them; or, in words written, she said, for her children to read when she was laid in her grave, she would urge upon her sons that they should remember 'Job's children, whot revelin thare wos with them, and whot becom of them.' 'Soon cut off,' she adds

concisely.

II

Ann Whitall calls the reflections with which she fills her diary her ‘Medditations,’ and plainly the impulse was strong in her to write down her thoughts, her griefs and her vivid impressions. Sometimes late at night, or on some quiet First Day afternoon, when peace had descended for a brief period upon that house full of turmoil and children, she would take her pen and her little book and begin: ‘I must right sum of my gref down’—‘I have a mani times thought with a great deal of sorow’; ‘O I often ses, whot wil becom of me, I am so beset on every side’; ‘Oh I left my work to go and right down som of my medditations.’

The meditations which she thus prefaces, the thoughts which thus found utterance, are concerned with her own life and troubles and the affairs of the little community in which she lived. She tells how she dreamt as a little girl that the Indians were about to kill her; she speaks of her longing for solitude, her fear of death, and draws appropriate morals from the misfortunes or the misdoings of her neighbours. Many details, too, of the life of the farm-house are mentioned in her diary, and the cries of her distressed spirit appear side by side with the homely receipts of the careful housewife, a medicine for fever of upland sumach berries and loaf-sugar and brandy, and her belief that whatever was good for poisons was also good for scalds and burns. She writes, too, of the farm-work, the cattle, the ploughing and reaping, and of the weather, the droughts or rainy summers, the storms that almost blew down the house, of the violent winters, ‘snow upon snow,’ ‘the trees heavy with snow’; and her phrases are always curiously vivid. ‘It is the 19 of March,’ she notes in the year 1762, ‘and so violent cold—if it holds so cold whot will becom of the poure dum creters? O it sounds in my ears every day, whot will thay du for wont of hay?’ ‘O the poore dum creters,’ she says a day or two later, ‘it sounds in my ears how they du sufer.’ But soon she notes with evident pleasure the arrival of spring, ‘it is got so worm that we can plant pees; the frost is out of the ground the grass dus begin to gro and the frogs begin to cri’; and soon there was grass enough, she notes, for at least ‘som of the cretars.’

Ann Whitall’s husband is frequently mentioned in her meditations—a well-to-do farmer who was plainly much fonder of fishing than of going to Meeting. He would row off with his boys down the river in his boat; and when he was not at work, or fishing, she notes bitterly that he would go to bed. He often ‘made his game’ of her, and of the Meetings she loved to attend; he delighted in what she regarded as ill company, and in one passage (which was afterwards crossed out) she declared that she believed that he had been the ruin of them

all. However, when one day her husband had an accident in cutting a cider-spill, and the knife slipped and pierced his breast just below his heart, she rejoiced most sincerely that the accident had not killed him. ‘O what a great favour he is still liveing among his children,’ she meditates, ‘O wonderful inded: it is won of the grattest blessings that his Children and I can have a this side the grave to have him a long with us. Tho we dont agree,’ she continues, ‘so wel as we shud du about some matters, I of[t] thinks, be it as it will now, it wod be a hundred fold wos, if I was alone with such a pasal of children. O, I ofen thinks, what wod be com of me, if he was tuck away?’

It was, in fact, this ‘pasal’ of children which was the main cause of Ann Whitall’s troubles. Her youngest son John, who lived to be my grandfather’s father, was, when the diary begins, a child of three, too young to run after the world, but often ill, and plainly the unlucky one of the family. At one time he had a bad fever—mourned and grieved like an old man, ‘Cries and ses “I is sick” ’; another time he fell into boiling water and was terribly scalded. His mother had treated the burn, she writes, with sumach root boiled in hog’s fat, and chestnut leaves to allay the pain; adding, with her love of prescriptions, that it might have been better if they had put on it Indian meal and cold water, or molasses and salt to get the fire out, or Irish potatoes, or spirit of turpentine, or sweet oil and the white of an egg beaten together, or ‘rat tel snake rute’ boiled in hog’s fat. Under this entry is a note written in the trembling hand of an old woman and dated 1788, twenty-six years later, in which she remarks that John had always had bad luck as a child, and had now returned home ruined, having lost fifteen hundred pounds in one vessel ‘all gon to the botom.’ But her eldest boys James, who was then twenty-one, and Job, who was two years younger, though they were healthy and strong enough, were causes of deeper sorrow to their ‘pore afflicted Mother.’ ‘Now James and Job has tuck up the trad of running about of a firs day for to git bad compiny,’ she notes in 1762. They would go skating, would go off, staring about and prattling and talking: they would not think of Death and their latter end—nothing brought them home but night. ‘O I ofen ses,’ she writes, ‘has any poure mortal in the hol world so much troubel as I; every day worm wood and gol. Som of it I right down for them to see when I am lade in my grave, for I du belive it wil com hom to them when thay mant think of it. James and Job will du what they plees; for if I say won word they wil begin to houf me—and where is thare manners to huf thare Mother? And such a burden apon me; there father, he wil go to bed, and allways wod, and sarvents and all du what they will, and the house be turned out of dores.’ Again we hear the same complaint: ‘The boys nor thare father has no religion in them, but to go to meeting when thay plees, and to tel me I am no better then them selves nor so gud, with all my going to

meetings, and huf me every day I live. O it is bitter as wormwud and gal: I think sum times thay are so cros to me, all of them, and so ogly and unmanarly that there never wos a mother so unhappy as I am.'

It is plain enough that Ann Whitall herself was by no means easy to live with; all company except the company of pious old Friends she regarded as bad company, or 'pisen'; she not only disapproved of her sons' pastimes and pleasures, and wished them to spend their time in Meetings and meditations on Death, but she plainly did her best to try to force them to conform to her notions. The following is significant: 'O I have ofen thought of it with a grat del of sorow, O the harm we du our children by leting of them go into ill compani. Won of them said we shud have it to answar for. O ceep [keep] them in while they are young and master them.' Again and again she recurs to the need of severity and discipline with children, and quotes from Jeremiah:

> 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.
>
> He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.'

Sometimes, too, she would copy out from some pious eighteenth-century book a page or two bearing on the wickedness and ingratitude of children—passages which, with their correct orthography, and insipid style, read curiously in the midst of her passionate spelling and vivid Old Testament English. 'We do sometimes with sorrow observe,' one of these extracts begins, 'the unwearied labours of a Parent's love, bestowed without the desired effect; 'tis mournful to see children pierce with bitterness the breast that has been their support in their infantile years; to fill that eye with sorrow, that has dropt over them the tear of maternal fondness! 'Tis a cruel thing for a child to mingle Gall and Wormwood, in the cup of a Parent descending to the Grave; let us be assured,' Ann Whitall copies out with grim satisfaction, 'that their own portion of gall and wormwood will be doubly encreased.'

Her daughters, Sarah and Hannah, at least when they were little girls, were of more comfort to their mother. Once when she was nursing three of her sons who were ill and could not leave the house, she describes Hannah and Sarah going off to Meeting with their father, Hannah riding her mother's mare, and Sarah behind her. Hannah was eight years old, Sarah two years younger. The girls were fond of going to Meetings, and would often cry when they could not go, their mother writes, adding, however, a characteristic doubt as to whether they would be so good when they grew older.

Ann Whitall must, however, have been a more genial person than her

‘Medditations,’ written in moments of lonely despair, would lead us to believe; and it was the tradition among her descendants that, although she was difficult to live with, all her children were devoted to her. More than once she reproves herself for laughing; and at the end of her journal she confesses, in a burst of frankness, that she is much too fond of eating. ‘I find sum fredum to right what a tarabel thing this eating of tu much is, and has been to me a many times: I think I can say of a truth it is the worst sin that ever I did. I du belive it is as bad as drinking too much; eating tu much is the root of all evil in me, I du belive. O had I aminded it when I was young; but O this enimy of our poure souls always adriveing of us into sin—O that his chain mout be shortned won link!’ She does not tell us whether the devil’s chain was ever shortened, and we must hope that in addition to the draughts of wormwood and gall she so often mentions, she continued to feast on the hearty meals of the farm-house, the shad and wild duck, the sweet corn and the water-melons of the bountiful New Jersey fare. Certainly she needed indeed all the strength that food could give to live up to the stern ideal her religion set before her. ‘I often thinks,’ she writes, ‘if I cud be so fixt as never to Laugh nor to smil, I shud be won step better. It fils me with sorow when I see peopel so ful of laf and prat. Our Lord pronounces a woe against them that laugh now, for they shall weep and mourn. The Wicked, says holy Job, spend their Days in Mirth, and in a moment, go down to the grave. Solomon said of Laughter, it is a madness, and of Mirth, What duth it?’ ‘O I thinks,’ she cries, ‘cud my ies run down with tears all ways’; and she evidently considered it her duty to ‘cri day and night,’ and thought that the time to be given to religion and to mourning—and they seem to have been very much the same thing to her—should be at least twelve hours in the twenty-four. In the midst of her busy life and her big family of children Ann Whitall felt herself a solitary spirit; ‘I am alone,’ she writes, ‘like a Phenex, none of my mind,’ and she finds consolation in quoting words written by the Psalmist in his grief and solitude.

> ‘I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.
>
> I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top.
>
> My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.
>
> I acknowledge my transgressions: behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.’

As she copies out this last text a perturbing thought visits this mother of many children. ‘If it is a sin to git children,’ she suddenly asks, ‘how comes so

much of it dun? It tis a grate mistry,' she adds, 'to me.'

III

Amid her family cares and drudgery and sorrow Ann Whitall, like most imaginative people, had a sanctuary for her thoughts, whither her desires turned, and whence her life drew its nourishment and strength. It was no vision of Heaven, for Heaven she never mentions, it was in the thought of Quaker Meeting that her mind took refuge—the little plain Meeting House, with its rows of Friends, its mystic silence, or the prophetical sermons, lamentings and denunciations of its holy Preachers. There were several of these Meeting-houses within riding distance of Red Bank—at Woodbury Creek, at Haddonfield, at Salem, and meetings took place in them not only on Sundays, but on certain weekdays as well. In fine weather she rode to them on her mare, but on wet days she would drive with her family, when she could make them go with her, or often, as she sadly notes, by herself. It was with a heavy heart that she went alone; and sometimes, when the weather was very bad, her husband would not let her have the wagon. One day of storm there was a Quarterly Meeting at Haddonfield—'I asked for the wagon,' she writes, 'but all in vain'; so she mounted her mare, and riding through the downpour, as she went along with the water running down her skin, she reproved herself with thoughts of how much more those travelling preachers, Susannah Haddon and Jane Crosway, suffered week after week, 'a travaling about, and the tears runing down thair faises for our sins.'

Another time she was thrown from her mare. '3 day of 5 month [1761]. I must right sum of my trubbel, mare cict [kicked] up with me; down I went and hurt sum, but gut apon a nuther mare and went to meeting, and thare wos Samual Miflins Mother, and spoak a grate del to us. I com hom by myself, tu mourn and tu cry to the Lord. O that ever any mortel liveing wos ever born to no [know] the trobel that I no; no creeter can I have to ride that is fit, but I ma cri out my dais, and mourne and more trubbel every day I live, nothing but wormwood and goll to drink at.' She returned to find the house deserted—her children and their father were all 'a gading a brod. O what is more rong in my mind, all ways a gading abrod when firs day coms; thare father is not at hom won firs day in a hol year if he can halp it. O I think if I had a bin cild [killed] to day with the fol of[f] the mares back, then I had been gon from all tears and troubbel.' There were many forms of death as sudden as this she reflects, continuing her Meditation; but her time had not yet come, her cup was not full of bitters yet, she must drink more wormwood and gall; 'O the showers of tears that has fell from my fass this day, and now while I am a wrighting.' Her only comfort was to go again to Meeting. 'O I think if it wont for the comfort

that I git sometims at Meeting, to here som such worthes of the same mind with my self, I cud not a stud til now, I must a sank in sorow.' There was her refuge 'out of the turmile of the world, O this wicked world'; there, with other serious-minded Friends, she could weep over the sins of their little community, 'rasel for a blessing as Jacob did,' and listen to the invectives and denunciations and forebodings of woe in which her soul delighted. Save for occasional 'Medditations' upon her woes and troubles at home, Ann Whitall's diary is mainly a record of these Meetings and the sermons preached in them. 'A humbling melting time we had togather,' she records of one of them, 'O what a meltting time it wos! Some comfort to the comfortless like clouds of rain to the thursty ground.' Sometimes the Meetings passed in unbroken silence, but the silence was good to her; sometimes they were hard and laborious, but often an elderly preacher would, as she says, in her vivid idiom, 'rattel us agoing.' 'Hard to cep [keep] the enemy out,' she notes on another occasion: 'O as Adam Mot said in our Meeting, he is always rady to take us of our whack' [off our watch?].

Perhaps those travelling Friends, preaching day after day to little drowsy congregations of New Jersey Quakers, attached no very distinct meaning to the solemn denunciations they chanted out of the Old Testament prophets. Traditional echoes of older sermons, they were the last waves, beating themselves out on the peaceful Delaware shores, of the seventeenth-century storms in which Quakerism arose. 'O they had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their father's idols; wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgements whereby they should not live.' 'Weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you, for you have lived in Pleasure on the Earth and been wanton; ye have nourished your Hearts as in a day of Slaughter.' 'Thus saith the Lord, Say a sword is sharpened to make a sure slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter'—phrases like these written down in Ann Whitall's journal carry with them a faint echo of the falsetto sing-song and prophetical chant of some old lamenting ghost, some venerable man or ancient and holy woman, lifting up a tremulous voice amid the silence of a rural Meeting. 'What is all the week of turmile,' Ann Whitall asks, 'to the consolation and comfort of such a meeting?'

IV

In reading this old journal, full of splendid phrases and daring figures of speech from the Bible, one of her descendants at least cannot avoid the suspicion that a large part of the pleasure his ancestress took in her religion was, although she had of course no notion of it, a literary pleasure. The desire for self-expression which inspired her 'Medditations' seems like a genuine

literary impulse, as if this farmer's wife and mother of many children possessed, surreptitious and unsuspected, a gift for writing, which, under the circumstances of her life and her time could come to no fruition. The vivid idiom of her diary betrays a real feeling for words, and she took an evident delight in the splendid sayings of the Old Testament, as she read them at home, or heard them chanted in Meeting. Indeed, the Hebrew prophets, so great is the magic of style, seem to have imposed upon her imagination the view of life which they had expressed in such a sombre magnificence. This ignorant, illiterate, and yet profoundly lettered old lady saw the world about her, as Don Quixote saw it, through the magnifying medium of literature; her mind was full, not of giants and enchanters, but of the seals of the Apocalypse, of the snares of Satan, of pollutions and awful abominations, of 'whoring under the green trees,' of idolatry and dreadful forebodings of woe. Having done her best with the material before her—meagre as it was—to find among the New Jersey Quakers the abominations enumerated by the Old Testament prophets, she took a solemn joy in the sermons preached out of Ezekiel in which that rural community was denounced as being as full of iniquity as was Jerusalem before its fall. That they were most deservedly menaced by a dreadful Judgment (or 'gugement' as she spelt it) Ann Whitall had good reason to believe; and when, one First Day, Alice Hall, a travelling preacher from 'old England,' impressively warned them of their fate—'the gugements of the Lord,' Friend Hall impressively chanted, 'is a coming upon this land'—Ann Whitall makes a note, with grim satisfaction, of this forecast; adding, fifteen years later, another note of its appalling fulfilment, when strangely enough, upon that little community, in fact upon the home of the Whitalls itself, the long-expected Judgment did at last come crushing down, a literal and by no means metaphorical woe, descending with blood and fire and slaughter upon their farm, and filling its fields with corpses.

It was apparently the female preachers, and above all the visiting women Friends from England, who indulged in the strongest language, and the invectives of these holy old Quaker pythonesses adorn Ann Whitall's diary with her richest feasts of lamentation and liturgies of words. In addition to Alice Hall, that prophetess of woe, two other English Friends, Jane Crosway and Susannah Haddon, especially impressed her by the way in which, with tears running down their faces, they cried and grieved over the sins of the American Quakers. 'Who can exceed them tu weman?' she says of them, and once after listening to the lamentations of Friend Crosway, Ann Whitall, afflicted as she was by the 'feteg and turmile' of her farm and family, writes with vain longing: 'O I thinks, had I nothink to du but to go a long with har!'

Ann Whitall not only loved going to Meeting, but she considered it one of

the gravest of sins not to go. ‘Now what is the honour and glory of him that made us, ant it going to meetings?’ she asks with conviction; and in the arctic storms of winter from which she suffered—‘I am so cold if I steer [stir] from the fier; none so cold as I that has life’—she was afraid to go, she confesses, and yet afraid to stay at home for fear of offending her Mighty Maker. ‘I have paid dear,’ she says, ‘for staying at home, tho som makes a lite matter of it.’ And once in July when her husband stayed away from a week-day Meeting in order to reap the corn, she wrote an indignant Meditation in which she compares his conduct with that of Boaz, for Boaz came to his farm from Bethlehem—‘Now wont that from meeting he cam?’ she asks, while her husband, although twenty years married and the father of grown-up sons, would still neglect the Meeting for his farm, in spite of all her warnings.

V

Nothing, however, in this mortal state is perfect; even in her loved Meetings Ann Whitall could find much cause for misgiving and tears. It was indeed only too plain that the general corruption of the evil times she lived in had penetrated into the Meeting-houses and tainted the ‘poure moarnful gang’ of worshippers. As Ann Whitall sat and listened to those solemn preachers she could see before her eyes plain evidence of the abominations which they denounced. ‘The old hor of bablon has brats among you,’ one preacher declared, and Ann Whitall knew that he spoke the truth. Not only were some absent—and some, alas, of her own family—who ought to have been there; but among the Friends who did attend there were others who indulged in ‘staring about,’ and were too much given, she feared, to ‘wandering thogts.’ Some even would occasionally go to sleep, and this sin or ‘abomonation’ of sleeping in Meeting caused her great distress of spirit; again and again she recurs to it. ‘O the concern I wos in to think of so many that can set and sleep meeting ater meeting, year ater year,’ she writes; and on one occasion she was ‘led’ as the Quaker phrase is, to remonstrate with a drowsy widow, who, we gather, did not receive her admonitions in a very Christian spirit.

The sin of dozing off during sermons was, to the old preachers, an appalling and inexplicable transgression which they mention with amazement. How was it possible, they would cry out, that while they were ‘rattling the terrible Judgment of God against sinners,’ those sinners themselves should be nodding off into comfortable naps? That famous Elizabethan divine, Henry Smith of silver tongue, expresses eloquently the horror of this paradox in the sermon on Noah’s Judgment, which he delivered after the defeat of the Armada. The occasion was one which called for the most devout attention of his audience; and yet they were so sound asleep that to a stranger who should

enter the sacred edifice, they might appear a congregation of deceased persons, over whom he was delivering a funeral oration. It was true, he admitted, that during the awful uproar that threatened with shipwreck the vessel which was carrying Jonah to Tarsish, that Hebrew Prophet had lain sound asleep; yet not for them, he told his congregation, ah, not for them! as for Jonah, had God summoned a huge Fish to carry them in its belly safely to the land.

Now while I cannot in any way excuse (and who indeed can excuse it?) the somnolence of that Elizabethan congregation, I feel that a plea of mitigation might be entered before the Throne of Judgment for the long-deceased New Jersey widow whom my great, great-grandmother reprobated. In the prolonged quiescence of Quaker Meetings, which the silence of the desert and the uncommunicating dumbness of fishes, as Charles Lamb said, could not equal, I at least found in my Quaker boyhood that the temptation to take a snooze was one which was difficult, I may even say almost impossible, to resist. There have been moments, to tell the truth, when I would suspect that even on the eyelids of the Elders of the Meeting, who sat facing us in a solemn row, a touch of the oblivious poppy had now and then fallen.

This somniferous abomination was not the only one which Ann Whitall noted in these Meetings. The very Elders themselves were sometimes, she said, so ‘cros and so crusty,’ there was no speaking to them if they did amiss; they tried to keep young Friends from speaking, and there was far too much talk and criticism of the Preachers. Causes of distress also were the signs of worldly fashions among the New Jersey Friends. Fashions travelled but slowly in those days; French modes crossed the Atlantic in little sailing vessels indeed, but it must have been slowly and in very faint shadows that they made their way in the Quaker community. Ann Whitall was, however, quick to perceive and denounce them. Several of her Meditations are devoted to this subject. ‘O the fashings and runing into them!’ she exclaims, horrified by the report that ‘the garls in penselvani has got thare necks set with a black ribon. A sorrowful site inded,’ she adds, ‘but what did that dear frind Nickles David tel them? The old peopel had not dun there duty; and that wos the reason that the young wos no better; six of them garls from darbe [Derby in Pennsylvania, across the river] was here from John Hunts; I thought thay did not belong to frinds til I was in formd thay did. But I a mani times think, whot signifies my being concarned a bout fashings? Where is won frinds child or children but som doddry fashion or a nother on thare backs or heds; here is this day Josiah Albasons soun, all the soun he has; his hat is clos up be hind.’ For it was not only the young women whom the ‘enemi’ tempted; his power over the young men was plainly shown by the way they wore ‘thare hats sot up behind,’ and next she says, they will be having ribbons to tie their hair. Indeed the galleries

of the Meeting, where the younger Friends sat, stank ‘with fashings,’ she declares in her vigorous language. Equally vigorous are her denunciations of calico, tea and tobacco. ‘Is there not a dreadful sound of troubles now in our ears? Do not the Clouds gather Blackness?’ she asks. ‘O lamentable is our cas I think; I am so fild with sorow amani times a bout the wicked. O, I think and my ies run down with tears all ways! And the abomanation of the times! So much excess of to-bacha and tee is as bad, so much of it; and thay will pretind thay cant du with out it; jest like the to-back-a trade. And there is the calico. O the calico! We pretend to go in a plain dres and plain speach, but whare is our plainness? Ant we like all the rest, be who thay will? Whot fashon hant the quakers got, as William Hunt said. O that we had a many such as he, or anuf such; there wod be no calico among the quakers. No, no, nor so many fashon mongers. I think to-backco and tee and calico may all be set down with the negors, all won as bad as another.’

If Somnus, if the Gods of Food and Fashion (whatever may be their heathen names) had already found a footing in Ann Whitall’s time among the Friends, she makes no mention of another Deity of the Pagans who was destined to set up his throne in the very centre of their conclaves.

It has been the ironic fate of the sect of Quakers that their never-relaxed anxiety to attain scriptural unworldliness, has of itself turned them into worldly people. The confidence they everywhere inspired, by making others trust them, filled their pockets with worldly pelf: they really couldn’t help it. As tradesmen who were the first to place fixed prices on their goods, as honest manufacturers, as brewers and trusted bankers, families like the Barclays, the Gurneys, Buxtons, Lloyds and Hoares and Peases, have founded those dynasties of English Quakers, whose names, redolent of wealth, are familiar to us all on the signs of public houses, on the great portals of breweries and banks. So inevitable, indeed, has been the accumulation of wealth among these pious people, that an impecunious Quaker is now an anomaly, a *rara avis,* like a white blackbird, in the social scheme of things.

Although already in Anne Whitall’s time, across the Delaware which flowed beneath her windows, Mammon had taken his seat in the Philadelphia Meeting-houses—not, indeed, with gold eyebrows, as Carlyle describes him, diamond eyes and a belly full of jewels, but attired in Quaker garb and with a benevolent expression on his face, it was only after the decease of this pious female that her grandson founded that glass factory, in which edifice, since I live, as it were, in a house of glass myself, I cannot be expected to throw stones. Indeed, if the Quakers, and my forefathers among them, learned to love money for the benefits they persuaded themselves it enabled them to bestow

upon the world, there have been moments in which I have hoped that among these benefits might be reckoned my bookish leisure, which has been made possible by some remnants of the savings of my progenitors, a hundred years ago. For a man of letters to cultivate his gift, however tiny, some such store of old gold is almost necessary; and indeed, as the history of literature teaches us, even almost all our poets (with the exception of Shakespeare—who is an exception to all rules) have been thus modestly endowed.

VI

With the year 1762 Ann Whitall's journal comes to an end; she had filled all its pages. Here and there, however, where there was a corner of space, a few entries of later dates appear. They are brief, but they show that her spirit had not been broken by advancing years. In 1777 there is a concise note stating, as I have said, that 'the gugements of the Lord' foretold by Alice Hall, that visiting Friend from England, had in that year all come upon them. What those Judgments consisted in she does not say, but they have their record, as we shall see, in the history of the times.

The next added entry is as follows: '23 of 6 mo. 1780, a cler plasent day. A dry time, the gras is drid up in a many places. O we wont rain, but who is worthy of won drop? We desarve a famin.' In 1783 there is a note of a most sorrowful Meeting, 'so dad and so miserabel.' The last note of all, in the aged handwriting of an old woman, is the one already given about her son John Whitall and his misfortunes. Ann Whitall died in 1797, at the age of eighty-one; her husband survived until 1808.

A few memories of this old couple lived on among their descendants; how on one occasion their ancestress, catching sight of the legs of a thief on the stairs, had followed up after him immediately, and finding him under a bed, had dragged him out and led him downstairs by the collar and slapped his face and bade him begone. It was also the tradition that at the time she was denouncing the fashions in her Meditations, she herself would wear in Meetings a straw bonnet lined with pink silk. The more pious of her descendants take the charitable view, however, that this was a part of the correct Quaker costume of the time. Of her husband, whom she regarded as such a worldling, an anecdote was remembered which shows that he, too, was scrupulous after the manner of the old-fashioned Quakers. James Whitall, it was said, having once visited a neighbour and settled a bargain with him for an exchange of land, became, on his return home, uneasy in his mind lest he had made too good a bargain, and so the next morning put his horse to his wagon and started out to return and add to his offer. Half-way, however, to his neighbour's, he met on the road that neighbour himself, who beset by similar

misgivings, was coming to increase the extent of land he had offered.

VII

Such are the family traditions, but James and Ann Whitall and their house and farm appear for a moment in a more definite light during the Revolutionary War, under circumstances which demand a word of explanation. Philadelphia was in 1777 the seat of the new-formed revolutionary government; and in defence of their capital from the British, the Americans constructed a series of forts opposite and below Philadelphia on the banks of the Delaware, to keep off the British fleet, since without the fleet and its supplies the British forces, even should they capture Philadelphia, would not be able to remain in possession of that city. One of these forts, Fort Mercer, it was afterwards called, was placed on the farm at Red Bank, only a few hundred yards from the Whitalls' house. When in 1777 the British, under Sir William Howe, began to threaten Philadelphia, this fort was strengthened, and a French engineer, Maudit du Plessis, had charge of the work. The Whitalls, whose Quaker principles he could hardly be expected to understand, were regarded by him as sympathisers with the British, so he destroyed their barn and cut down their fruit-trees. When Sir William Howe, after defeating the American troops at the battle of Brandywine, marched into Philadelphia, he made determined efforts to capture the river-forts, in order that he might join forces with the fleet which, under the command of his brother, Lord Howe, was cruising about the lower reaches of the Delaware. Red Bank being the key to the position, a combined naval and military force was sent to attack it—six vessels from the fleet, and an army of 2500 Hessians, or German mercenary troops, from the British Army in Philadelphia, under the command of Count Donop. The attack took place on October 22, 1777; Colonel Christopher Greene, with four hundred men of the Second Rhode Island Regiment, gallantly defended the fort against a force more than six times as large as his own. Count Donop was mortally wounded, the Hessians were driven back, leaving three or four hundred dead and wounded on the field. The naval attack was equally unsuccessful. Three of the British vessels ran aground; the American fleet attacked them with galleys and floating batteries and fire-ships; one of them was abandoned and burnt by its crew; the largest, a sixty-four gun frigate, took fire and her magazine exploded; the others were driven off. During the battle which raged about the house, Ann Whitall sat upstairs spinning in the midst of the uproar. As a Quaker, of course, she utterly disapproved of fighting; during the war with the French she had thought, as her diary shows, that the very mention of war was wicked, and her soul was not one that human weapons could very much daunt. She sat, therefore,

industriously spinning, and refused to move until a twelve-pound shot from a British vessel crashed through the wall behind her back; whereupon she reluctantly took up her wheel and went slowly downstairs to go on with her spinning in the cellar.

When evening fell, however, and the battle was over and the enemy had retreated, she came upstairs to take care of the wounded who were carried to her house. We are told that she scolded the Hessians for coming to America to butcher people, but that she was active and kindly in nursing them, and it was indeed an unrivalled opportunity to gratify her love of prescriptions. Count Donop died in her house, and was buried on the farm.

'It is finishing a noble career early,' he said, 'but I die a victim of my ambition and the avarice of my sovereign.'

This battle of Red Bank, the gallant defence of the fort against the British forces, became famous in American history as one of the first successes of the Revolutionary army. But to Ann Whitall it was plainly nothing but the long-delayed Judgment which she had always expected, and which Friend Alice Hall had told them fifteen years before would fall upon them. This rage of musketry and cannon, the destruction of their barn and orchard, the cannon-ball that crashed into their house, the heaps of the slain in their meadow, the man-of-war exploding before their windows; all this—how could she doubt it?—was the accomplishment of the Divine Purpose; troops being sent from England and France and Germany, and battleships brought across the Atlantic as a fit punishment for the 'abomanations' of their little Quaker community, for the Meetings they had not attended, or the naps they had taken in them, and for the skating and fishing their children had indulged in on Sunday afternoons.

The American troops, owing to the loss of other strategic positions, were forced, in spite of their gallant defence, to abandon Red Bank; and La Fayette, then a volunteer in the American Army, crossed the Delaware to facilitate their retreat. In 1780, when the Americans were again in possession of Philadelphia, La Fayette, accompanied by another Frenchman, the Marquis de Chastellux, and by the French engineer Du Plessis, crossed over from Philadelphia to visit the remains of Fort Mercer. De Chastellux gives in his *Mémoires* an account of this visit, telling how on their way across the Delaware Du Plessis explained (as far indeed as that officer understood them) the peculiar views of the Whitall household, and prepared his companions for a cool reception. The reception was, however, even cooler than he had expected. They called on James Whitall at Red Bank, and found him seated in the chimney corner cleaning herbs, but he remained silent and would not even look up at the young

Frenchmen, who tried all their arts in vain to make him talk. We can but dimly imagine what each party, the New Jersey Quaker and the French soldiers thought of each other, and we cannot but regret that Ann Whitall, who did not deign to appear, has not written one of her Meditations on this visit.

VIII

There are other documents which show that some at least of the Quakers of this time were less narrow than Ann Whitall in their religious outlook—it is only necessary to mention that other New Jersey Quaker, John Woolman who, as her journal shows, often preached at the Meetings she attended. She, however, drew her religion entirely from the Old Testament, and lived in fear of a jealous God and his terrible punishments. She dreaded death, and drew no comfort from the thought of a future life—her one prayer was for rest: 'I hope I may rest when I am lade in the dust.'

The house Ann Whitall lived in still stands on the banks of the Delaware, and has been made into a little museum, full of the records of this famous battle. The damage done by the cannon-ball that drove her downstairs is still visible, but of Ann Whitall herself the only memorials which remain are a few anecdotes and this little old book of 'Medditations.' The Quakers of that day placed no stones over their dead—their graves were but nameless mounds of green about their Meeting-Houses. But though Ann Whitall lies beneath one of these, long since departed from the 'turmile of the world' to the rest she longed for, yet her spirit still lives in this newly discovered journal. And it has lived on, and still lives on in another manner. Every now and then, among her female descendants, in some grand-daughter or great-grand-daughter, the 'Cooper snap,' as it was called, which was brought by Ann Cooper into the placid Whitall family, has reappeared—some Whitall woman has arisen like a Deborah to hold sway in her family, and in such wider spheres as her opportunities have offered. Such a Deborah was Ann Whitall's grand-daughter, Hannah Whitall, who established and long dominated a big school in Philadelphia; such another was her grand-daughter, my mother, Hannah Whitall Smith, who was famous as a Quaker preacher in her day, and as the writer of religious books with a world-wide circulation. Another may be found in my mother's niece, Miss Carey Thomas, who, as President of Bryn Mawr College, ruled so long over that institution.

Even now, in the American or English nurseries of her descendants, Ann Whitall seems to stir in some cradle, and her plangent voice makes itself heard. The husband of a niece of mine once told me that after his marriage he found that his wife was an ogress, was the daughter and grand-daughter of ogresses, and had become the mother of a fourth of the species. Somewhere back in the

family history could perhaps be found, he surmised, the ogress from whom they were descended. Perhaps this little book of Ann Whitall's reveals the matriarch and aboriginal mother of these Whitall women, these vehement, powerful, Penthesilean females.

1901.

XVIII

THE ‘LITTLE PROUST’

I

To those of us who are readers and assiduous re-readers of Proust’s enormous novel, it is a curious experience to turn back to his earliest publication, to the book written by the precocious boy, whose social successes are described at such length in *La Recherche du Temps Perdu*. This first book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, appeared in 1896, seventeen years before the publication of *Du Côté de chez Swann*. *Les Plaisirs* is a large, shiny volume, a pretentious ‘tome’ for the drawing-room, printed in the most expensive manner, and made hideously elegant by Madeleine Lemaire’s illustrations of the *higlif* of the nineties—an amazing élite of melancholy great ladies, exquisitely fashionable in costumes which time, in its unforgiving fashion, has made inconceivably out of date. A few copies of this large book appeared recently in the London bookshops, and one of these copies came, in the happiest manner, into my possession. It contains the literary exercises and first attempts of the ‘little Proust’ of the great novel, some verses of no especial merit, a few stories and set pieces of description, and a number of short poems in prose. These pieces were all written, the author tells us, between his twentieth and his twenty-third year; the style is somewhat sententious, immature and precocious: it is the writing of a boy—but, one sees at once, of a boy of genius. For here, not only in their bud, but in their first exquisite flowering, we find all the great qualities of Proust’s later work—the beautiful sensibility, the observation, as of an insect with an insect’s thousand eyes, the subtle and elaborate study of passion, with its dawn, its torments of jealousy, and—what is so original in the great novel—the analysis, not only of falling in love, but of falling out of it; the inevitable fading away of passion into cold indifference. Indeed, most of the themes, and often the very situations, of the later work, are not only adumbrated, but happily rendered in this boyish volume; the romantic lure of the world and its heartless vulgarity, the beauty of landscapes, of trees and blossoming hedges, and the sea, the evocative power of names, the intermittences of memory, the longing of the child for its mother’s good-night kiss, the great dinner-party, with all the ambitions and pretences of hosts and guests cynically analysed and laid bare. And here, too, we find something which, to my mind, is of even greater interest, and about which, as Proust’s other critics have hardly mentioned it, a few words may not

be out of place.

II

When the little Proust plunged into the full stream of his Parisian experiences, he was, we are told by one of his friends, already, from his early studies, steeped in the philosophy of Plato; and although his feverish days were filled with love-affairs and worldly successes, and he drained to its dregs, as we say, the enchanting cup of life, all that he felt and saw seems but to have confirmed in that precocious youth the lesson which Plato had already taught him—the lesson, namely, that the true meaning of life is never to be found in immediate experience; that there is another reality which can be envisaged only by the mind, and, as it were, created by the intellect—a deeper and more ultimate reality, in the presence of which life no longer seems contingent, mediocre, mortal. Certainly in that great battle between the Giants and the Gods, which Plato describes, the battle in which the Giants affirm that only those things are real which can be touched and handled, while the Gods defend themselves from above out of an unseen world, 'mightily contending' that true essence consists in intelligible ideas—in this eternal warfare Proust is found fighting as conspicuously as Shelley on the side of the Gods. Hope for him, as for Shelley,

> Creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;

and it is this attitude towards life, this creative contemplation of experience, which to my mind gives its deeper significance to Proust's work, and lends an importance and depth of meaning to the youthful and rather shabby love-affairs, the fashionable worldlinesses which form so large a part of his subject-matter. Proust's ultimate 'intention' in writing his great novel, the intention which gives a form to this immense work, was made clear at last by the publication of the final volume. It is plain that when he retired from the world to sift and analyse his experience, it was with the purpose to disengage from that flux of life and time the meanings implicit in it; to recover, to develop in the dark room of consciousness, and recreate the ultimate realities and ideals which experience reveals to the experiencing observer. The title of the whole work, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, and that of this ultimate volume, *Le Temps Retrouvé*, are clear indications of this purpose.

That there is something irremediably wrong in the present moment; that the true Reality is the creation of desire and memory, and is most present in hope, in recollection and absence, but never in immediate experience; that we kill

our souls by living, and that it is in solitude, in illness, or at the approach of death that we most truly possess them—it is on these themes, which are repeated with deeper harmonies and richer modulations throughout his later work, that the young Proust harps in this overture to the masterpiece which was to come. Surely, one thinks, a book of such exquisite promise and youthful achievement, heralded as it was to the world by Anatole France's preface, and talked of, no doubt, in the Paris salons, must have produced a remarkable impression on people so cultivated as the Parisians, so alert to discover and appreciate literary merit. However, as we know, it produced no such impression; no one seems to have had the slightest notion of its importance, or to have guessed that a new genius had appeared, a bright star of morning had arisen. And when, after publishing this large, shiny, unappreciated volume, its author disappeared from the world into a solitary sick-room, he seems to have been thought of (as far as he was thought of at all) as a pretentious, affected boy who had been made a pet of for a while in worldly regions—a little dilettante with his head turned, who had gone up like a rocket in the skies of fashion, but would be heard of no more in the world of letters, where anyhow this pretty coruscation had attracted almost no attention. This seems to have been the impression of even those among Proust's personal friends who were themselves writers, and who, on re-reading *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, are now amazed, as M. Gide confesses, that they should have been so blind to its beauty when they first read it; that, in the first eagle-flights of this young genius they had seen little more than the insignificant flutterings of a fashionable butterfly.

III

When we read the lives of the great artists of the past, we are apt to be amazed at the indifference of their contemporaries to their early achievements; we cannot believe that we, too, in the same circumstances, would have been so undiscerning. But here, happening in our own days, is an obvious instance of this contemporary blindness; and as I read the little Proust's first volume, and see spread so clearly before me, as in the light of a beautiful dawn, the world of his creation, I try to make myself believe that, if the noontide of his genius had never illuminated that world, and made it familiar to me, that if Proust had never lived to write *Swann* and the *Guermantes*, I, too, should be as blind as were his friends to its beauty and merits. I tell myself this, and yet with the book before me, I cannot believe it. But then I remind myself of what I already know very well, that new dawns in art are apt to appear on just the horizons towards which we are not looking, and over landscapes of which we have as yet not the slightest knowledge; and that is is only afterwards, when the

master’s whole *œuvre* is familiar to us, that we can see the real merits of his early attempts, and read back into them the meaning and value of his complete and acknowledged achievement. The moral of all this (and it is pleasant to end, if possible, one’s reflections with a moral)—the moral is that we do not know, we cannot know, what those tiresome persons, our younger contemporaries, are really up to, and what shadows they already cast before them; that we must ‘look to the end,’ as the old saying has it; and that in the first attempts of other youths who, like the little Proust, were endowed with genius, but whose gifts, unlike his, faded before they flowered, we possess perhaps worlds of the imagination which actually exist and shine in the light of an exquisite dawn before our eyes, although our eyes cannot see them.

1923.

XIX

JANE AUSTEN

I

Every now and then, when the earth has swung a billion miles or so round the ellipsis of its orbit, I sit down upon the unsteady planet and read through all Jane Austen's novels. To open them more often would make them lose their freshness; to put off their reperusal would be to postpone the recurrence of what I have come to consider one of the assured felicities of our celestial outing. Since this enjoyment was not yet due when the Oxford edition of Jane Austen appeared, and I had still a long way to travel before I should reach, in the interstellar spaces, my appointed meeting-place with that maiden lady, I resolved, wisely, if vainly, to do no more than look at the illustrations and read the notes.

It is hardly possible—so difficult is the art of writing—for authors to create masterpieces which are perfect; but it is possible for scholars to produce perfect editions of them. I had long prided myself on my knowledge of Jane Austen, but Dr. Chapman made me feel at once what an ignoramus I was in this branch of learning. I had not known, but I learnt from him (and he speaks with all the scholarship of Oxford and the Oxford Press behind him) that Miss Bates was called 'Hetty' in her family circle, and that Lady Catherine de Bourgh's lady's-maid was named 'Dawson,' and—most culpable ignorance of all!—that the joints of cold meat and trays of sandwiches which make their appearance at odd hours in the drawing-rooms of these novels were substitutes for the, as yet, uninvented meal of luncheon, and not, as I had always regarded them, supererogatory refections, intercalated into a calendar of repasts as fixed and frequent as our own.

I was indeed disconcerted and upset in more than one way by the perusal of these notes. Among other things, Dr. Chapman suggests that the drawing-room at Hartfield was perhaps upstairs, instead of on the ground-floor, as I had always pictured it. If this be so, the Hartfield of my imagination, the home of Emma and Mr. Woodhouse, must be at once pulled down and built up again. Already its walls are full of cracks, and its lawns disfigured with bricks and rubbish. But there was one awful moment when the whole Jane Austen world began to shake a little. It happened in this way: I was innocently considering a suggested emendation in *Pride and Prejudice*, when I was caught by the

interest of the story, and swept along, against my better resolution, in the stream of the too-familiar narrative.

In Jane Austen's novels, unlike most masterpieces of literature, there are no expanses of sacred boredom, no level places where the reader may pause and taste their quality. They are ineluctable in their interest; once we take them up we cannot put them down; we are borne on, breathless, to their termination. It is like starting on a switchback railway—once started, you cannot stop. But I had been hurried up and down over the course of the great husband-hunt of the Bennet family too recently for unqualified enjoyment on this occasion. Nor did I altogether like the company in which I found myself. Jane and Elizabeth are, of course, delightful, and Mr. Bennet is Mr. Bennet, but the others, Lydia and Mary, Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine, seemed to me rather obvious, unsubtle, over-caricatured and oppressive. 'It is good!' I keep reassuring myself; 'it really is good!' I repeated, attempting to stifle the misgiving which seemed to threaten one of my dearest literary beliefs Now I very well know that misgivings of this kind, 'unbottomings,' as the old Quakers called them, should not be stifled; that we all believe a great deal too much, that the world is full of ardours and indignations, patriotisms and Fascisms which will burst it, and drown the human race in a welter of blood, if they are not abated; that, if we are to be saved, it is Doubt, and not Faith, which will save us; that the still, small voice which, in the heat of our declamations, whispers 'Fiddlesticks!' is a voice from heaven; that it is only by bursting through the shells of our habitual admirations—or at least, by detaching ourselves, and looking at them from without—that we can emerge into a realm of more serene appreciation. I know all this; and yet how I hate the sight, in the walls of my prison-house of taste, of those cracks and little fissures; how harsh the light, how chill the icy air that percolates within through those interstices!

II

I know as well, however, that these intimations of infidelity are often fallacious portents; that true beliefs are none the worse for a little shaking, and often prove themselves all the more solid when the doubts about them turn out to be themselves without foundation. It was, therefore, without too much misgiving that I turned from *Pride and Prejudice* to the novel of Jane Austen which I have always preferred above all the others. For I have, of course, my favourite novel; all her readers have one. We are a sect of zealots, who, like other zealots, are divided into sub-sects animated by a good deal of bitterness against each other. Largest in number, but least discriminating of these, is the one which maintains that *Pride and Prejudice* is the best of all the novels; then come a few mild and melancholy admirers of *Persuasion*; then the partisans of

Emma (a small, but acrimonious body); and finally there are the wise and wide-minded, judicious laudators of *Mansfield Park*. I am myself a Mansfield Parker. As to the rumour that there is a still more esoteric group of readers, who single out and prefer *Pride and Prejudice* for transcendental reasons, utterly different from the reasons of the vulgar herd—I do not give it the slightest credence. They are said to live in Edwardes Square. I don't believe in them. In that otherwise exquisite essay of appreciation, Dr. A. C. Bradley's lecture on Jane Austen, the only fault I have to find is that he seems to lend too much countenance to these rumours.

It was, therefore, to *Mansfield Park* that I turned when the solid and seemly world of Jane Austin began to totter. *Mansfield Park* belongs, with *Emma* and *Persuasion*, to the later or Chawton period, which followed, after about eleven years of silence, the Steventon period of her girlhood, when between the ages of twenty and twenty-two she wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*.

III

It is important for true appreciation of Jane Austen's work to discriminate between the novels of these two periods. The earlier ones are the work of a precocious, shrewd and satirical girl of genius, whose amazing gifts for farce and caricature, though suited for a satiric story like *Northanger Abbey*, display themselves almost too glaringly in works with larger and more human themes. *Pride and Prejudice*, the masterpiece of this early period, is incomparably witty, but it does not, to my mind, bear constant re-reading like the later novels. It is too full of parody and the hardness of youth; the comic characters are pilloried without mercy; there is something in it which smacks too much of the almost brutal caricature of the eighteenth century; something, too, which is both didactic and mercenary and (dare I say it?) almost common in its tone. The reader finds himself in a kind of base complicity with Mrs. Bennet—he participates too fully in her vulgar triumphs when her daughters marry rich young men.

But in the later novels, the sharp-witted girl and vicarage-moralist has matured into a woman of great depth and tenderness of feeling. The element of mere caricature is almost eliminated; her comic characters like Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Bates and Lady Bertram, are, unlike Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, seen from within, and treated with sympathy; we are made to see the touching aspect of their stupidity and folly. Even the odious Mrs. Norris has perfect justice done to her; indeed, the benumbed collapse at the disgrace of her favourite niece, of this hateful and apparently heartless—yet really heart-broken—woman, is an example of high, impartial equity which

can hardly be equalled outside of Shakespeare.

A French critic, who recently made a special study of Jane Austen, has said that the later novels, when compared with the earlier group, show no change of method, or increase of artistic power. But in my last perusal I have been specially impressed, not only by the increased subtlety of Jane Austen's rendering of comic character in her later period, but also by her acquirement of new gifts of artistic presentation. There is much that might be said on this subject, for one could write about Jane Austen for ever; I shall only, however, mention a few of the qualities which characterize the later, as opposed to the earlier group of novels. For one thing, there is no real development of character in the earlier works; Marianne Dashwood indeed changes in *Sense and Sensibility*, and so does Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, but these are unexplained and somewhat incredible transformations. The change of Darcy, indeed, from his reluctant and almost brutal first proposal to the modest and tender chivalry he displayed a few months later, is more like something in a fairy-tale than a development of character in life as we know it. Very different is the subtle way in which Emma profits and is changed by her experience, the exquisite late blossoming of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, and the growth of Fanny Price in the atmosphere of *Mansfield Park*.

Another quality of the later novels is that of beauty; to *Mansfield Park* and to *Persuasion* at least we can apply the adjective beautiful in a way we can hardly apply it to any of the novels of the earlier group. The beauty of these stories depends in part, I think, on the fact that their scenes are much more visible, although there is not much detailed description of them. The town of Bath shines in *Persuasion* like a charming aquatint before our eyes; in *Mansfield Park* we always see that formal mansion in its park.[28] But this effect of richer colour and chiaroscuro is still more due to one subtle and exquisite power which Jane Austen developed in the maturity of her genius, the power of rendering what I shall call, for want of a better term, the moral atmosphere of places, the tones, that is, of collective feeling, the moral climates which are produced by, and surround, different groups of people, and fill, as with a body of dense and saturated air, the places where they live. We are all sensitive to these local atmospheres; we have all experienced what happens when we change them; how values and interests which flourish in one climate wither away at once in another; how anecdotes which are welcomed and laughed at among one set of acquaintances become unspeakable in a different group. The part that these all-pervading atmospheres play in social life is enormous, but how inadequate are almost all the renderings of them which we find, even in the greatest fiction!

In Jane Austen's earlier novels there is little or no diversity of moral climates; but the rich effect of *Mansfield Park* is largely due to the masterly contrast of the peace and quiet air of that mansion, with the very different weather which pervades Fanny's home in Portsmouth. In *Emma*, the air of Highbury is so dense that Jane Austen seems to have felt that no contrast of climate was needed to enhance its rich effect; but *Persuasion* is rich in the chiaroscuro of these contrasts—the atmosphere of Kellynch, then that of Uppercross, and then the elegant air of Bath.

Jane Austen indeed explicitly notes herself in this novel how 'every little social commonwealth dictates its own matter of discourse,' and how 'a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion and idea.'

I do not know whether anyone has noted how much in the construction of her plots Jane Austen relies upon one contrivance, the False Attachment. In five of her six novels the hero or heroine (in some cases both hero and heroine) are more or less attracted by persons unworthy of their affection, and then turn to their worthy love, as the trembling and distracted needle turns at last and rests in its true direction.

Only in *Northanger Abbey*, although James Morland is disenchanted of his attachment to Isabella Thorpe, does Jane Austen not avail herself of this device.

This system was not indeed Jane Austen's invention; Shakespeare made use of it in a superficial fashion, in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and in *Romeo and Juliet*; and, after Jane Austen, Trollope employed it; there being always, as Henry James said, a young lady who has two lovers in his novels, or a young man who has two sweethearts. But this shift of spirit and deep feeling from the unworthy to the worthy lover is used by no novelist in so masterly a fashion as by Jane Austen, to whom it is the essential foundation of her plots.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen's first novel, Ferrars has fallen in love as a boy with Lucy Steele before he meets his true counterpart in Elinor; Marianne is wildly attached to Willoughby, before she transfers her affections to the worthy Colonel Brandon; Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* falls under the charm of Wickham, only to discover that Darcy is the man she really loves.

This system is woven in a still more masterly way into the structure of the later novels. It is by means of Captain Wentworth's vain attempts in *Persuasion* to attach himself to Louisa Musgrave that he becomes aware that Anne Elliot is the only woman he can really love; Emma's fancying herself

attracted by Frank Churchill reveals to her unawareness her devotion to Knightley; and in the comic underplot of the novel she drives Harriet Smith into two sentimental errors before her appropriate and happy marriage to the worthy young farmer, Robert Martin.

In *Mansfield Park* the false attachment is put to still finer and indeed to almost tragic uses. Edmund falls very seriously in love with Mary Crawford; Fanny Price almost succumbs to Henry's genuine attachment, and it is only by means of the deeply moral characters of Fanny and Edmund that they escape the charms of the charming, most charming, Crawfords, who are yet not really worthy of them.

It was in my enjoyment of these and other effects and qualities in the later works of Jane Austen, that my fidelity to her fame, shaken for a moment, was happily re-established; and now I feel that I can look forward with confidence again to ever-recurring perusals of her novels, as long as I shall be whirled through space upon this planet, reading, reading, round the sun.

1924.

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[28] *Mansfield Park* was identified (with practical certainty to my mind) by Sir Frank MacKinnon a few years ago, as being a house called Cottesbrooke Hall, which lies in the centre of the Pytchley country, nine miles north of Northampton. In the *Times Literary Supplement* of Dec. 10, 1931, Dr. R. W. Chapman published this information. As the estate came into the market in 1935, I procured from the agents who were putting it up to auction an order to view the house, and induced a neighbour of mine to motor me there to see it. We visited first of all the village; we saw Mrs. Norris's house, the unusually large rectory, with Dr. Grant's big field adjoining, both of which stood in just the proper relation to the mansion. Then we went into the church, which contains what really seem to be the monuments of the Bertram family, the tomb of Sir Thomas, and plaques to the memory of Edmund and Fanny and Julia Bertram. There is none of course for the errant Maria Rushworth; but Mrs. Norris and even Dr. Grant seem to have their memorials.

In what we call 'reality,' but which is now but a dim

shadow of the novel, the name of the owners of Mansfield Park was Langham, the first Baronet being Sir James Langham (1594-1671), a rich Turkey merchant, alderman and afterwards Sheriff of London, who purchased the estate in 1639. The Hall was built by the fourth Baronet, Sir John Langham in 1720, and is described as 'an elegant modern-built brick house,' by John Bridges in his *History of the Antiquities of Northamptonshire* (1791). That beautiful and stately house in the great park we visited next; saw the stairs on which Edmund found the little Fanny weeping, the breakfast room in which she wrote her letter to her brother William, and her room upstairs with its empty grate. Then downstairs we went into the library with the billiard-room adjoining, which was the scene of the rehearsal of *Lovers' Vows*. We were almost frightened here by the thought that we might meet Sir Thomas Bertram himself. Suppose Julia had burst suddenly in and exclaimed: 'My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment.'

Was Jane Austen ever at Cottesbrooke Hall? There is good reason to believe (as Dr. Chapman points out) that she was acquainted with the Sir James Langham of the time, and that her brother, Henry Austen, was familiar with his family. It may be that he supplied her with the necessary plans and information, and indeed she writes in one of her letters that she could find out from Henry all she wanted. But anyone who has made this most delightful of all Jane Austen pilgrimages, will find it difficult to believe that she had not been there herself, so accurately does she describe all the details. The only way, however, to settle this important question would be to call her up from the dead and ask her; but unluckily, the technique of this kind of evocation has not yet been perfected.

It is perhaps worth noting that the name of Langham is preserved in Langham Place, where the town house (now destroyed) of the family was situated in Jane Austen's time, and that the church there of All Saints was built at about this date, and preserves untouched the time-mark of the period when *Mansfield Park* was written.

Transcriber’s Notes

Obvious typographic errors have been corrected, but otherwise the spelling is unchanged.

The footnotes have been renumbered sequentially throughout the entire book.

[The end of *Reperusals and Re-Collections* by Logan Pearsall Smith]