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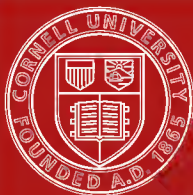
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QUESTIONS AT ISSUE

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IN PROSE

Northern Studies. 1879. *Popular edition.* 1890

Life of Gray. 1882. *Revised edition.* 1889

Seventeenth Century Studies. 1883. *Second edition.* 1885

Life of Congreve. 1888

A History of Eighteenth Century Literature. 1889. *Second edition.* 1891

Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S. 1890

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The Secret of Narcisse. *A Romance.* 1892

QUESTIONS AT ISSUE

BY

EDMUND GOSSE



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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TO

JOSEPH HENRY SHORTHOUSE

This Volume is Dedicated

BY

HIS AFFECTIONATE FRIEND

THE AUTHOR

Preface

TO the essays which are here collected I have given a name which at once, I hope, describes them accurately and distinguishes them from criticism of a more positive order. When a writer speaks to us of the works of the dead masters, of the literary life of the past, we demand from him the authoritative attitude. That Homer is a great poet, and that the verse of Milton is exquisite, are not Questions at Issue. In dealing with such subjects the critic must persuade himself that he is capable of forming an opinion, and must then give us his opinion definitely. But in the continent of literary criticism, where all else is imperial, there is a province which is still republican, and that is the analysis of contemporary literature, the frank examination of the literary life of to-day.

In speaking of what is proceeding around us no one can be trusted to be authoritative. The wisest, clearest, and most experienced of critics have notoriously been wrong about the phenomena of their own day. Ben Jonson selected the moment when *Hamlet* and *Othello* had just been performed to talk of raising "the despised head of poetry again, and

stripping her of those rotten and base rags wherewith the times have adulterated her form." Neither Hazlitt nor Sainte Beuve could be trusted to give as valuable a judgment on the work of a man younger than themselves as they could of any past production, be it what it might. To map the ground around his feet is a task that the most skilful geographer is not certain to carry out with success.

The insecurity of contemporary criticism is no reason, however, why it should not be seriously and sincerely attempted. On the contrary, the critic who has been accustomed to follow paths where the laws and criteria of literature are paramount, may be glad to slip away sometimes to a freer country, where the art he tries to practise is more instinctive, more emotional, and more controversial. In the schools of antiquity, when the set discourse was over, the lecturer mingled with his audience under the portico of the Museum, and then, I suppose, it was not any longer of the ancients that they talked, but of the poet of last night, and of the rhetorician of to-morrow.

The critic may enjoy the sense of having abandoned the lecturing desk or the tribune, and of mingling in easy conversation with men who are not bound to preserve any decorum in listening to his opinions. In the criticism of the floating literature of the day an opportunity is offered for sensibility, for the personal note, even for a certain indulgence in levity or irony. The questions of our own age are not yet settled by

tradition, nor hedged about with logical deductions; they are still open to discussion; they are still Questions at Issue. Such are all the aspects of the literary life which I endeavour to discuss in this volume of essays.

There can, nevertheless, be no reason why, although the dress and attitude be different, the critic should not be as true to his radical conceptions of right and wrong in literature, when he discusses the shifts and movements about him, as when he "bears in memory what has tamed great nations." The attention of a literary man of character may be diverted to a hundred dissimilar branches of his subject, but in dealing with them all he should be the servant of the same ideas, the defender of the same principles, the protector of the same interests. The battle rages hither and thither, but none of the issues of it are immaterial to him, and his attitude towards what he regards as the enemies of his cause should never radically alter. His functions should rather become more active and more militant when he feels that his temporary position deprives him of accidental authority; and even when he admits that the questions he discusses are matters of open controversy, he should, in bringing his ideas to bear upon them, be peculiarly careful to obey the orders of fundamental principles. All this is quite compatible, I hope, with the sauntering step, the conversational tone, the absence of all pedagogic assertion, which seem to me indispensable in the treatment of contemporary themes.

Of the essays here reprinted, nearly half are practically new to English readers, having been written for an American review, and having been quoted only in fragments on this side of the Atlantic. At the close of the volume I have added a Lucianic sketch, which, when it appeared anonymously in the *Fortnightly Review*, enjoyed the singular and embarrassing distinction of being attributed, in succession, to four amusing writers, each of whom is deservedly a greater favourite of the public than I am. I have seen this little extravaganza ticketed with such eminent names that I almost hesitate to have to claim it at last as my own. I hope there was none but very innocent fooling in it, and that not a word in it can give anybody pain. I think it was not an unfair representation of what literature in England, from a social point of view, consisted two years ago. Already death has been busy with my ideal Academy, and no dreamer of 1893 could summon together quite so admirable a company as was still citable in 1891.

LONDON, *April 1893.*

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The following Essays originally appeared in 'The Contemporary Review,' 'The Fortnightly Review,' 'The National Review,' 'The New Review,' 'The Forum,' 'The Century Magazine,' 'Longman's Magazine,' and 'The Academy.'

THE TYRANNY OF THE NOVEL

The Tyranny of the Novel

A PARISIAN Hebraist has been attracting a moment's attention to his paradoxical and learned self by announcing that strong-hearted and strong-brained nations do not produce novels. This gentleman's soul goes back, no doubt in longing and despair, to the heart of Babylon and the brain of Gath. But if he looks for a modern nation that does not cultivate the novel, he must, I am afraid, go far afield. Finland and Roumania are certainly tainted; Bohemia lies in the bond of naturalism. Probably Montenegro is the one European nation which this criterion would leave strong in heart and brain. The amusing absurdity of this whim of a pedant may serve to remind us how universal is now the reign of prose fiction. In Scandinavia the drama may demand an equal prominence, but no more. In all other countries the novel takes the largest place, claims and obtains the widest popular

attention, is the admitted tyrant of the whole family of literature.

This is so universally acknowledged now-a-days that we scarcely stop to ask ourselves whether it is a heaven-appointed condition of things, existing from the earliest times, or whether it is an innovation. As a matter of fact, the predominance of the novel is a very recent affair. Most other classes of literature are as old as the art of verbal expression: lyrical and narrative poetry, drama, history, philosophy—all these have flourished since the sunrise of the world's intelligence. But the novel is a creation of the late afternoon of civilisation. In the true sense, though not in the pedantic one, the novel began in France with *La Princesse de Clèves*, and in England with *Pamela*—that is to say, in 1677 and in 1740 respectively. Compared with the dates of the beginning of philosophy and of poetry, these are as yesterday and the day before yesterday. Once started, however, the sapling of prose fiction grew and spread mightily. It took but a few generations to overshadow all the ancient oaks and cedars around it, and with its monstrous foliage to dominate the forest.

It would not be uninteresting, if we had space to

do so here, to mark in detail the progress of this astonishing growth. It would be found that, in England at least, it has not been by any means regularly sustained. The original magnificent outburst of the English novel lasted for exactly a quarter of a century, and closed with the publication of *Humphrey Clinker*. During this period of excessive fertility in a field hitherto unworked, the novel produced one masterpiece after another, positively pushing itself to the front and securing the best attention of the public at a moment when such men as Gray, Butler, Hume, and Warburton were putting forth contributions to the old and long-established sections of literature. Nay: such was the force of the new kind of writing that the gravity of Johnson and the grace of Goldsmith were seduced into participating in its facile triumphs.

But, at the very moment when the novel seemed about to sweep everything before it, the wave subsided and almost disappeared. For nearly forty years, only one novel of the very highest class was produced in England; and it might well seem as though prose fiction, after its brief victory, had exhausted its resources, and had sunken for ever into obscurity. During the close of the eighteenth

century and the first decade of the nineteenth, no novel, except *Evelina*, could pretend to disturb the laurels of Burke, of Gibbon, of Cowper, of Crabbe. The publication of *Caleb Williams* is a poor event to set against that of the *Lyrical Ballads*; even *Thalaba the Destroyer* seemed a more impressive phenomenon than the *Monk*. But the second great burgeoning of the novel was at hand. Like the tender ash, it delayed to clothe itself when all the woods of romanticism were green. But in 1811 came *Sense and Sensibility*, in 1814 *Waverley*; and the novel was once more at the head of the literary movement of the time.

It cannot be said to have stayed there very long. Miss Austen's brief and brilliant career closed in 1817. Sir Walter Scott continued to be not far below his best until about ten years later. But a period of two decades included not only the work of these two great novelists, but the best books also of Galt, of Mary Ferrier, of Maturin, of Lockhart, of Banim. It saw the publication of *Hajji Baba*, of *Frankenstein*, of *Anastatius*. Then, for the second time, prose fiction ceased for a while to hold a position of high predominance. But Bulwer Lytton was already at hand; and five or six years of comparative

obscurity prepared the way for Dickens, Lever, and Lover. Since the memorable year 1837 the novel has reigned in English literature ; and its tyranny was never more irresistible than it is to-day. The Victorian has been peculiarly the age of the triumph of fiction.

In the history of France something of the same fluctuation might be perceived, although the production of novels of a certain literary pretension has been a feature of French much longer and more steadily than of English life. As Mr. Saintsbury has pointed out, "it is particularly noteworthy that every one of the eight names which have been set at the head" of the nineteenth-century literature of France "is the name of a novelist." Since the days of Flaubert—for the last thirty years, that is to say—the novel has assumed a still higher literary function than it held even in the hands of George Sand and Balzac. It has cast aside the pretence of merely amusing, and has affected the airs of guide, philosopher, and friend. M. Zola, justified to some extent by the amazing vogue of his own writings, and the vast area covered by their prestige, has said that the various classes of literary production are being merged in the novel, and are ultimately to disappear within it :

*Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove
Grow faint, for killing Truth hath glared on them ;
Our hills, and seas, and streams,
Dispeopled of their dreams,*

become the mere primary material for an endless series of naturalistic stories. And even to-day, when the young David of symbolism rises to smite the Goliath Zola, the smooth stones he takes out of his scrip are works of fiction by Maurice Barrès and Edouard Rod. The schools pass and nicknames alter ; but the novel rules in France as it does elsewhere.

We have but to look around us at this very moment to see how complete the tyranny of the novel is. If one hundred educated and grown men—not, of course, themselves the authors of other books—were to be asked which are the three most notable works published in London during the season of 1892, would not ninety-and-nine be constrained to answer, with a parrot uniformity, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *David Grieve*, *The Little Minister* ? These are the books which have been most widely discussed, most largely bought, most vehemently praised, most venomously attacked. These are the books in which the

“trade” has taken most interest, the vitality of which is most obvious and indubitable. It may be said that the conditions of the winter of 1892 were exceptional—that no books of the first class in other branches were produced. This may be true; and yet Mr. Jebb issued a volume of his Sophocles, Mr. William Morris a collection of the lyric poems of years, Mr. Froude his *Divorce of Catherine of Aragon*, and Mr. Tyndall his *New Fragments*. If the poets in chorus had blown their silver trumpets and the philosophers their bold bassoons, the result would have been the same: they would have won some respect and a little notice for their performances; but the novelists would have carried away the money and the real human curiosity. Who shall say that Mr. Freeman was not a better historian than Robertson was? yet did he make £4,500 by his *History of Sicily*? I wish I could believe it. To-day Mr. Swinburne may publish a new epic, Mr. Gardiner discover to us the head of Charles I. on the scaffold, Mr. Herbert Spencer explore a fresh province of sociology, or Mr. Pater analyse devils in the accents of an angel—none of these important occurrences will successfully compete, for more than a few moments, among educated people, with

the publication of what is called, in publishers' advertisements, "the new popular and original novel of the hour." We are accustomed to this state of things, and we bow to it. But we may, perhaps, remind ourselves that it is a comparatively recent condition. It was not so in 1730, nor in 1800, nor even in 1835.

Momentary aberrations of fashion must not deceive us as to the general tendency of taste. Mr. Hall Caine would have us believe that the public has suddenly gone crazy for stage-plays. "Novels of great strength and originality," says the author of *The Scapegoat*, "occasionally appear without creating more than a flutter of interest, and, meanwhile, plays of one-tenth their power and novelty are making something like a profound impression." What plays are these? Not the Ollendorfian attitudinising of M. Maeterlinck, surely! The fact is that two years ago it would have been impossible for any one to pen that sentence of Mr. Caine's, and it is now possible merely because a passion for the literary drama has been flogged into existence by certain able critics. With a limited class, the same class which appreciates poetry, the literary drama may find a welcome; but to suppose that it competes, or can, in this

country, even pretend to compete, with the novel is a delusion, and Mr. Caine may safely abandon his locusts and wild honey.

That we see around us a great interest in the drama is, of course, a commonplace. But how much of that is literary? When the delights of the eye are removed from the sum of pleasure, what is left? Our public is interested in the actors and their art, in the scenery and the furniture, in the notion of large sums of money expended, lost, or won. When all these incidental interests are extracted from the curiosity excited by a play, not very much is left for the purely literary portion of it—not nearly so much, at all events, as is awakened by a great novel. After all that has been said about the publication of plays, I expect that the sale of dramatic contemporary literature remains small and uncertain. Mr. Pinero is read; but one swallow does not make a summer. Where are the dramatic works of Mr. Sydney Grundy, which ought—if Mr. Caine be correct—to be seen on every book-shelf beside the stories of Mr. Hawley Smart?

If, however, I venture to emphasise the fact of the tyranny of the novel in our current literature, it is without a murmur that I do so. Like the harm-

less bard in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, I "write no satire," and, what is more, I mean none. It appears to me natural and rational that this particular form of writing should attract more readers than any other. It is so broad and flexible, includes so vast a variety of appeals to the emotions, makes so few painful demands upon an overstrained attention, that it obviously lays itself out to please the greatest number. For the appreciation of a fine poem, of a learned critical treatise, of a contribution to exact knowledge, peculiar aptitudes are required: the novel is within everybody's range. Experience, moreover, proves that the gentle stimulus of reading about the cares, passions, and adventures of imaginary personages, and their relations to one another—a mild and irresponsible mirroring of real life on a surface undisturbed by responsibility, or memory, or personal feeling of any kind—is the most restful, the most refreshing, of all excitements which literature produces.

It is commonly said, in all countries, that women are the chief readers of novels. It may well be that they are the most numerous, and that they read more exhaustively than men, and with less selection. They have, as a rule, more time. The general notion seems to be that girls of from six-

teen to twenty form the main audience of the novelist. But I am inclined to think that the real audience consists of young married women, sitting at home in the first year of their marriage. They find themselves without any constraint upon their reading: they choose what they will, and they read incessantly. The advent of the first-born baby is awaited in silent drawing-rooms, where through long hours the novelists supply the sole distraction. These young matrons form a much better audience than those timorous circles of flaxen-haired girls, watched by an Argus-eyed mamma, which the English novelist seems to consider himself doomed to cater for. I cannot believe that it is anything but a fallacy that young girls do read. They are far too busy with parties and shopping, chatting and walking, the eternal music and the eternal tennis. Middle-aged people in the country, who are cut off from much society, and elderly ladies, whose activities are past, and who like to resume the illusions of youth, are far more assiduous novel-readers than girls.

But, if we take these and all other married and unmarried women into consideration, there is still apparently an exaggeration in saying that it is they who make the novelist's reputation. Men read

novels a great deal more than is supposed, and it is probably from men that the first-class novel receives its *imprimatur*. Men have made Mr. Thomas Hardy, who owes nothing to the fair sex; if women read him now, it is because the men have told them that they must. Occasionally we see a very original writer who decidedly owes his fame to the plaudits of the ladies. M. Paul Bourget is the most illustrious example that occurs to the memory. But such instances are rare, and it is usually to the approval of male readers that eminent novelists owe that prestige which ultimately makes them the favourites of the women. Not all men are pressed by the excessive agitations of business life which are habitually attributed to their sex. Even those who are most busy find time to read, and we were lately informed that among the most constant and assiduous students of new novels were Lord Tennyson and Mr. Gladstone. Every story-teller, I think, ought to write as though he believed himself addressing such conspicuous veterans.

As I say, I do not revolt against the supremacy of the novel. I acknowledge too heavy a debt of gratitude to my great contemporaries to assume any but a thankful attitude towards them. In my

dull and weary hours each has come like the angel Israfel, and has invited me to listen to the beating of his heart, be it lyre or guitar, a solemn instrument or a gay one. I should be instantly bankrupt if I sought to repay to Mr. Meredith or Mr. Besant, Mr. Hardy or Mr. Norris, Mr. Stevenson or Mr. Kipling—to name no others—one-tenth part of the pleasure which, in varied quantity and quality, the stories of each have given me. I admit (for which I shall be torn in pieces) that the ladies please me less, with some exceptions; but that is because, since the days of the divine Mrs. Gaskell, they have been so apt to be either too serious or not serious enough. I suppose that the composition of *The Daisy Chain* and of *Donovan* serves some excellent purpose; doubtless these books are useful to great growing girls. But it is not to such stories as these that I owe any gratitude, and it is not to their authors that I address the presumptuous remarks which follow.

A question which constantly recurs to my mind is this: Having secured the practical monopoly of literature, having concentrated public attention on their wares, what do the novelists propose to do next? To what use will they put the unprecedented opportunity thrown in their way? It is

quite plain that to a certain extent the material out of which the English novel has been constructed is in danger of becoming exhausted. Why do the American novelists inveigh against plots? Not, we may be sure, through any inherent tenderness of conscience, as they would have us believe; but because their eminently sane and somewhat timid natures revolt against the effort of inventing what is extravagant. But all the obvious plots, all the stories which are not in some degree extravagant, seem to have been told already, and for a writer with the temperament of Mr. Howells there is nothing left but the careful portraiture of a small portion of the limitless field of ordinary humdrum existence. So long as this is fresh, this also may amuse and please; to the practitioners of this kind of work it seems as though the infinite prairie of life might be surveyed thus for centuries, acre by acre. But that is not possible. A very little while suffices to show that in this direction also the material is promptly exhausted. Novelty, freshness, and excitement are to be sought for at all hazards, and where can they be found?

The novelists hope many things from that happy system of nature which supplies them, year by year, with fresh generations of the ingenuous young.

The procession of adolescence moves on and on, and the front rank of it, for a month or a year, is duped by the novelist's report of that astonishing phenomenon, the passion of love. In a certain sense, we might expect to be tired of love-stories as soon as, and not before, we grow tired of the ever-recurring March mystery of primroses and daffodils. Each generation takes its tale of love under the hawthorn-tree as something quite new, peculiar to itself, not to be comprehended by its elders ; and the novelist pipes as he will to this idyllic audience, sure of pleasing, if he adapt himself never so little to their habits and the idiosyncrasies of their time.

That theory would work well enough if the novelist held the chair of Erotics at the University of Life, and might blamelessly repeat the same (or very slightly modified) lectures to none but the students of each successive year. But, unfortunately, we who long ago took our degree, who took it, perhaps, when the Professor was himself in pinafores, also continue to attend his classes. We are hardly to be put off with the old, old commonplaces about hearts and darts. Yet our adult acquiescence is necessary for the support of the Professor. How is he to freshen

up his oft-repeated course of lectures to suit our jaded appetites ?

It would be curious to calculate how many tales of love must have been told since the vogue of the modern story began. Three hundred novels a year is, I believe, the average product of the English press. In each of these there has been at least one pair of lovers, and generally there have been several pairs. It would be a good question to set in a mathematical examination : What is the probable number of young persons who have conducted one another to the altar in English fiction during the last hundred years ? It is almost terrible to think of this multitude of fictitious love-makings :

*For the lovers of years meet and gather ;
The sound of them all grows like thunder :
O into what bosom, I wonder,
Is poured the whole passion of years !*

One would be very sorry to have the three hundred of one year poured into one's own mature bosom. But how curious is the absolute unanimity of it all ! Thousands and thousands of books, every one of them, without exception, turning upon the attraction of Edwin to Angelina,

exactly as though no other subject on earth interested a single human being! The novels in which love has not formed a central feature are so few that I suspect that they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. At this moment, I can but recall a single famous novel in which love has no place. This is, of course, *L'Abbé Tigrane*, that delightful story in which all the interest revolves around the intrigues of two priestly factions in a provincial cathedral. But, although M. Ferdinand Fabre achieved so great a success in this book, and produced an acknowledged masterpiece, he never ventured to repeat the experiment. Eros revels in the pages of all his other stories.

This would be the opportunity to fight the battle of the novelists against Mrs. Grundy. But I am not inclined to waste ink on that conceded cause. After the reception of books like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and even *David Grieve*, it is plain that the English novelist, who cares and dares, may say almost anything he or she likes without calling flame out of heaven upon his head. There has been a great reform in this respect since the days when our family friend Mr. Punch hazarded his very existence by referring, in grimmest irony,

to the sufferings of "the gay." We do not want to claim the right, which the French have so recklessly abused, of describing at will, and secure against all censure, the brutal, the abnormal and the horrible. No doubt a silly prudishness yet exists. There are still clergymen's wives who write up indignantly from *The Vicarage, Little Pedlington*. I have just received an epistle from such an one, telling me that certain poor productions I am editing "make young hearts acquainted with vice, and put hell-fire in their hearts." "Woe unto you in your evil work," says this lady, doubtless a most sincere and conscientious creature, but a little behind the times. Of her and her race individually, I wish to say nothing but what is kind; but I confess I am glad to know that the unreflecting spirit they represent is passing away. It is passing away so rapidly that there is really no need to hearten the novelists against it. I am weary to death of the gentleman who is always telling us what a splendid novel he would write, if the publishers would only allow him to be naughty. Let him be bold and naughty, and we will see. If he is so poor-spirited as to be afraid to say what he feels he ought to say because of this

kind of criticism, his exposition of the verities is not likely to be of very high value.

But I should like to ask our friends the leading novelists whether they do not see their way to enlarging a little the sphere of their labours. What is the use of this tyranny which they wield, if it does not enable them to treat life broadly and to treat it whole? The varieties of amatory intrigue form a fascinating subject, which is not even yet exhausted. But, surely, all life is not love-making. Even the youngest have to deal with other interests, although this may be the dominant one; while, as we advance in years, Venus ceases to be even the ruling divinity. Why should there not be novels written for middle-aged persons? Has the struggle for existence a charm only in its reproductive aspects? If every one of us regards his or her life seriously, with an absolute and unflinching frankness, it will be admitted that love, extended so as to include all its forms—its sympathetic, its imaginative, its repressed, as well as its fulfilled and acknowledged, forms—takes a place far more restricted than the formulæ of the novelist would lead the inhabitant of some other planet to conjecture.

Unless the novelists do contrive to enlarge their borders, and take in more of life, that misfortune awaits them which befell their ancestors just before the death of Scott. About the year 1830 there was a sudden crash of the novel. The public found itself abandoned to Lady Blessington and Mr. Plumer Ward, and it abruptly closed its account with the novelists. The large prices which had been, for twenty years past, paid for novels were no longer offered. The book-clubs throughout the kingdom collapsed, or else excluded novels. When fiction re-appeared, after this singular epoch of eclipse, it had learned its lesson, and the new writers were men who put into their work their best observation and ripest experience.

It does not appear that in the thirties any one understood what was happening. The stuff produced by the novelists was so ridiculous and ignoble that "the nonsense of that divil of a Bullwig" seemed absolutely unrivalled in its comparative sublimity, although these were the days of *Ernest Maltravers*. It never occurred to the authors when the public suddenly declined to read their books (it read "Bullwig's," in the lack of anything else) that the fault was theirs. The

same excuses were made that are made now,—
“ necessary to write down to a wide audience ; ”
“ obliged to supply the kind of article demanded ; ”
“ women the only readers to be catered for ; ”
“ mammas so solicitous for the purity of what is
laid before their daughters.” And the crash came.

The crash will come again, if the novelists do not take care. The same silly piping of the loves of the drawing-room, the same obsequious attitude towards a supposititious public clamouring for the commonplace, inspire the majority of the novel-writers of to-day. Happily, we have, what our fathers in 1835 had not, half a dozen careful and vigorous men of letters who write, not what the foolish publishers ask for, but what they themselves choose to give. The future rests with these few recognised masters of fiction, and with their successors, the vigorous younger men who are preparing to take their place. What are these novelists going to do ? They were set down to farm the one hundred acres of an estate called Life, and because one corner of it—the two or three acres hedged about, and called the kitchen-garden of Love—offered peculiar attractions, and was very easy to cultivate, they have neglected the other ninety-seven acres. The

result is that by over-pressing their garden, and forcing crop after crop out of it, it is well-nigh exhausted, and will soon refuse to respond to the incessant hoe and spade ; while, all the time, the rest of the estate, rich and almost virgin soil, is left to cover itself with the weeds of newspaper police-reports.

It is supposed that to describe one of the positive employments of life,—a business or a profession, for example,—would alienate the tender reader, and check that circulation about which novelists talk as nervously as if they were delicate invalids. But what evidence is there to show that an attention to real things does frighten away the novel reader? The experiments which have been made in this country to widen the field of fiction in one direction, that of religious and moral speculation, have not proved unfortunate. What was the source of the great popular success of *John Inglesant* and then of *Robert Elsmere*, if not the intense delight of readers in being admitted, in a story, to a wider analysis of the interior workings of the mind than is compatible with the mere record of the billing and cooing of the callow young? We are afraid of words and titles. We are afraid of the word “psychology,”

and, indeed, we have seen follies committed in its name. But the success of the books I have just mentioned was due to their psychology, to their analysis of the effect of associations and sentiments on a growing mind. To make such studies of the soul even partially interesting, a great deal of knowledge, intuition, and workman-like care must be expended. The novelist must himself be acquainted with something of the general life of man.

But the interior life of the soul is, after all, a very much less interesting study to an ordinarily healthy person than the exterior. It is surprising how little our recent novelists have taken this into consideration. One reason, I cannot doubt, is that they write too early and they write too fast. Fielding began with *Joseph Andrews*, when he was thirty-five; seven years later he published *Tom Jones*; during the remainder of his life, which closed when he was forty-seven, he composed one more novel. The consequence is that into these three books he was able to pour the ripe knowledge of an all-accomplished student of human nature. But our successful novelist of to-day begins when he is two- or three-and-twenty. He "catches on," as they say, and he

becomes a laborious professional writer. He toils at his novels as if he were the manager of a bank or the captain of an ocean steamer. In one narrow groove he slides up and down, up and down, growing infinitely skilful at his task of making bricks out of straw. He finishes the last page of "The Writhing Victim" in the morning, lunches at his club, has a nap; and, after dinner, writes the first page of "The Swart Sombrero." He cannot describe a trade or a profession, for he knows none but his own. He has no time to look at life, and he goes on weaving fancies out of the ever-dwindling stores of his childish and boyish memories. As these grow exhausted, his works get more and more shadowy, till at last even the long-suffering public that once loved his merits, and then grew tolerant of his tricks, can endure him no longer.

The one living novelist who has striven to give a large, competent, and profound view of the movement of life is M. Zola. When we have said the worst of the *Rougon-Macquart* series, when we have admitted the obvious faults of these books—their romantic fallacies on the one hand, their cold brutalities on the other—it must be admitted that they present the results of a most laudable attempt

to cultivate the estate outside the kitchen-garden. Hardly one of the main interests of the modern man has been neglected by M. Zola, and there is no doubt at all that to the future student of nineteenth-century manners his books will have an interest outweighing that of all other contemporary novels. An astonishing series of panoramas he has unrolled before us. Here is *Le Ventre de Paris*, describing the whole system by which a vast modern city is daily supplied with food; here is *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the romance of a shop, which is pushed upwards and outwards by the energy of a single ambitious tradesman, until it swamps all its neighbours, and governs the trade of a district; here is *L'Argent*, in which, with infinite pains and on a colossal scale, the passions which move in *la haute finance* are analysed, and a great battle of the money-world chronicled; here, above all, is *Germinal*, that unapproachable picture of the agony and stress of life in a great mining community, with a description of the processes so minute and so technical that this novel is quoted by experts as the best existing record of conditions which are already obsolete.

In these books of M. Zola's, as every one knows, successive members of a certain family stand out

against a background of human masses in incessant movement. The peculiar characteristic of this novelist is that he enables us to see why these masses are moved, and in what direction. Other writers vaguely tell us that the hero "proceeded to his daily occupation," if, indeed, they deign to allow that he had an occupation. M. Zola tells us what that occupation was, and describes the nature of it carefully and minutely. More than this: he shows us how it affected the hero's character, how it brought him into contact with others, in what way it represented his share of the universal struggle for existence. So far from the employment being a thing to be slurred over or dimly alluded to, M. Zola loves to make that the very hero of his piece, a blind and vast commercial monster, a huge all-embracing machine, in whose progress the human persons are hurried helplessly along, in whose iron wheels their passions and their hopes are crushed. He is enabled to do this by the exceptional character of his genius, which is realistic to excess in its power of retaining and repeating details, and romantic, also to an extreme, in its power of massing these details on a huge scale, in vast and harmoniously-balanced compositions.

I would not be misunderstood, even by the most hasty reader, to recommend an imitation of M. Zola. What suits his peculiarly-constituted genius might ill accord with the characteristics of another. Nor do I mean to say that we are entirely without something analogous in the writings of the more intelligent of our later novelists. The study of the Dorsetshire dairy-farms in Mr. Hardy's superb *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is of the highest value, and more thorough and intelligible than what we enjoyed in *The Woodlanders*, the details of the apple-culture in the same county. To turn to a totally different school : Mr. Hall Caine's *Scapegoat* is a very interesting experiment in fresh fields of thought and experience, more happily conceived, if I may be permitted to say so, than fortunately executed, though even in execution far above the ruck of popular novels. A new Cornish story, called *Inconsequent Lives*, by that very promising young story-teller, Mr. Pearce, seemed, when it opened, to be about to give us just the vivid information we want about the Newlyn pilchard-fishery ; but the novelist grew timid, and forebore to fill in his sketch. The experiments of Mr. George Gissing and of Mr. George Moore deserve sympathetic acknowledgment. These are instances

in which, occasionally, or fantastically, or imperfectly, the real facts of life have been dwelt upon in recent fiction. But when we have mentioned or thought of a few exceptions, to what inanities do we not presently descend !

If we could suddenly arrive from another planet, and read a cluster of novels from Mudie's, without any previous knowledge of the class, we should be astonished at the conventionality, the narrowness, the monotony. All I ask for is a larger study of life. Have the stress and turmoil of a successful political career no charm ? Why, if novels of the shop and the counting-house be considered sordid, can our novelists not describe the life of a sailor, of a gamekeeper, of a railway-porter, of a civil engineer ? What capital central figures for a story would be the whip of a leading hunt, the foreman of a colliery, the master of a fishing smack, or a speculator on the Stock Exchange ! It will be suggested that persons engaged in one or other of these professions are commonly introduced into current fiction, and that I am proposing as a novelty what is amply done already. My reply is that our novelists may indeed present to us a personage who is called a stoker or a groom, a secretary of state or a pin-maker, but that,

practically, they merely write these denominations clearly on the breasts of lay-figures. For all the enlightenment we get into the habits of action and habits of thought entailed by the occupation of each, the fisherman might be the groom and the pin-maker the stock-broker. It is more than this that I ask for. I want to see the man in his life. I am tired of the novelist's portrait of a gentleman, with gloves and hat, leaning against a pillar, upon a vague landscape background. I want the gentleman as he appears in a snap-shot photograph, with his every-day expression on his face, and the localities in which he spends his days accurately visible around him. I cannot think that the commercial and professional aspects of life are unworthy of the careful attention of the novelist, or that he would fail to be rewarded by a larger and more interested audience for his courage in dealing closely with them. At all events, if it is too late to ask our accepted tyrants of the novel to enlarge their borders, may we not, at all events, entreat their heirs-apparent to do so ?

THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY
ON LITERATURE

The Influence of Democracy on Literature

IT is not desirable to bring the element of party politics into the world of books. But it is difficult to discuss the influence of democracy on literature without borrowing from the Radicals one of the wisest and truest of their watchwords. It is of no use, as they remind us, to be afraid of the people. We have this huge mass of individuals around us, each item in the coagulation struggling to retain and to exercise its liberty; and, while we are perfectly free to like or dislike the condition of things which has produced this phenomenon, to be alarmed, to utter shrieks of fright at it, is to resign all pretension to be listened to. We may believe that the whole concern is going to the dogs, or we may be amusing ourselves by printing Cook's tickets for a monster excursion to Boothia Felix or other provinces of

Utopia ; to be frightened at it, or to think that we can do any good by scolding it or binding it with chains of tow, is simply silly. It moves, and it carries the Superior Person with it and in it, like a mote of dust.

In considering, therefore, the influence of democracy on literature, it seems worse than useless to exhort or persuade. All that can in any degree be interesting must be to study, without prejudice, the signs of the times, to compare notes about the weather, and cheerfully tap the intellectual barometer. This form of inquiry is rarely attempted in a perfectly open spirit, partly, no doubt, because it is unquestionably one which it is difficult to carry through. It is wonderfully easy to proclaim the advent of a literary Ragnarok, to say that poetry is dead, the novel sunken into its dotage, all good writing obsolete, and the reign of darkness begun. There are writers who do this, and who round off their periods by attributing the whole condition to the democratic spirit, like the sailor in that delightful old piece played at the Strand Theatre, who used to sum up the misfortunes of a lifetime with the recurrent refrain, "It's all on account of Eliza."

The "uncreating words" of these pessimists are dispiriting for the moment, but they mean nothing.

Those of the optimist do not mean much either. A little more effort is required to produce his rose-coloured picture, but we are not really persuaded that because the brown marries the blonde all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Nor is much gained by prophecy. We have been listening to a gentleman, himself a biographer and an historian, who predicts, with babe-like *naïveté*, that all literary persons will presently be sent by the democracy to split wood and draw water, except, perhaps, "the historian or biographer." In this universal splitting of wood, some heads, which now think themselves mighty clever, may come to be rather disastrously cracked. It was not Camille Desmoulins whom Fate selected to enter into his own Promised Land of emancipated literature.

We gain little by a comparison of our modern situation with that of the ancient commonwealths. The parallel between the state of literature in our world and that in Athens or Florence is purely academic. Whatever the form of government, literature has always been aristocratic, or at least oligarchic. It has been encouraged or else tolerated; even when it has been independent, its self-congratulations on its independence have shown how temporary that liberty was, and how imminent the

relapse into bondage. The peculiar protection given to the arts by enlightened commonwealths surrounded by barbaric tyrannies was often of a most valuable character, but it resembled nothing which can recur in the modern world. The stimulus it gave to the creative temperament was due in great measure to its exclusiveness, to the fact that the world was shut out, and the appeal for sympathy made within a restricted circle. The Republic was a family of highly trained intelligences, barred and bolted against the vast and stupid world outside. Never can this condition be re-established. The essence of democracy is that it knows no narrower bonds than those of the globe, and its success is marked by the destruction of those very ramparts which protected and inspirited the old intellectual free States.

The purest and most elevated form of literature, the rarest and, at its best, the most valuable, is poetry. If it could be shown that the influence of the popular advance in power has been favourable to the growth of great verse, then all the rest might be taken for granted. Unfortunately, there are many circumstances which interfere with our vision, and make it exceedingly difficult to give an opinion on this point. Victor Hugo never questioned that

the poetical element was needed, but he had occasional qualms about its being properly demanded.

*Peuples ! écoutez le poète,
Écoutez le rêveur sacré ;
Dans votre nuit, sans lui complète,
Lui seul a le front éclairé !*

he shouted, but the very energy of the exclamation suggests a doubt in his own mind as to its complete acceptability. In this country, the democracy has certainly crowded around one poet. It has always appeared to me to be one of the most singular, as it is one of the most encouraging features of our recent literary history, that Tennyson should have held the extraordinary place in the affections of our people which has now been his for nearly half a century. That it should be so delicate and so Æolian a music, so little affected by contemporary passion, so disdainful of adventitious aids to popularity, which above all others has attracted the universal ear, and held it without producing weariness or satiety; this, I confess, appears to me very marvellous. Some of the Laureate's best-loved lyrics have been before the public for more than sixty years. Cowley is one of the few English poets who have been, during

their lifetime, praised as much as Tennyson has been, yet where in 1720 was the fame of Cowley? Where in the France of to-day are the *Méditations* and *Harmonies* of Lamartine?

If, then, we might take Tennyson as an example of the result of the action of democracy upon literature, we might indeed congratulate ourselves. But a moment's reflection shows that to do so is to put the cart before the horse. The wide appreciation of such delicate and penetrating poetry is, indeed, an example of the influence of literature on democracy, but hardly of democracy on literature. We may examine the series of Tennyson's volumes with care, and scarcely discover a copy of verses in which he can be detected as directly urged to expression by the popular taste. This prime favourite of the educated masses never courted the public, nor strove to serve it. He wrote to please himself, to win the applause of the "little clan," and each round of salvos from the world outside seemed to startle him in his obstinate retirement. If it grew easier and easier for him to consent to please the masses, it was because he familiarised them more and more with his peculiar accent. He led literary taste, he did not dream of following it.

What is true of Tennyson is true of most of our

recent poets. There is one exception, however, and that a very curious one. The single English poet of high rank whose works seem to me to be distinctly affected by the democratic spirit, nay, to be the direct outcome of the influence of democracy, is Robert Browning. It has scarcely been sufficiently noted by those who criticise the style of that great writer that the entire tone of his writings introduces something hitherto unobserved in British poetry. That something is the repudiation of the recognised oligarchic attitude of the poet in his address to the public. It is not that he writes or does not write of the poor. It is a curious mistake to expect the democratic spirit to be always on its knees adoring the proletariat. To the true democracy all are veritably of equal interest, and even a belted earl may be a man and a brother. In his poems Robert Browning spoke as though he felt himself to be walking through a world of equals, all interesting to him, all worthy of study. This is the secret of his abrupt familiar appeal, his "Dare I trust the same to you?" "Look out, see the gipsy!" "You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?" the incessant confidential aside to a cloud of unnamed witnesses, the conversational tone, things all of which were before his time unknown in serious

verse. Browning is hail-fellow-well-met with all the world, from queen to peasant, and half of what is called his dramatic faculty is merely the result of his genius for making friends with every species of mankind.

With this exception, however, the principal poetical writers of our time seem to be unaffected by the pressure of the masses around them. They select their themes, remain true to the principles of composition which they prefer, concern themselves with the execution of their verses, and regard the opinion of the millions as little or even less than their great forerunners did that of emperor or prince-bishop. Being born with quick intelligences into an age burdened by social difficulties, these latter occasionally interest them very acutely, and they write about them, not, I think, pressed into that service by the democratic spirit, but yielding to the attraction of what is moving and picturesque. A wit has lately said of the most popular, the most democratic of living French poets, M. François Coppée, that his blazon is "des rimes riches sur la blouse prolétaire." But the central fact to a critic about M. Coppée's verse is, not the accident that he writes about poor people, but the essential point that his rhymes are richer and his verse more

faultless than those of any of his contemporaries. We may depend upon it that democracy has had no effect on his prosody, and the rest is a mere matter of selection.

The fact seems to be that the more closely we examine the highest examples of the noblest class of literature the more we become persuaded that democracy has scarcely had any effect upon them at all. It has not interfered with the poets, least of all has it dictated to them. It has listened to them with respect ; it has even contemplated their eccentricities with admiration ; it had tried, with its millions of untrained feet, to walk in step with them. And when we turn from poetry to the best science, the best history, the best fiction, we find the same phenomenon. Democracy has been stirred to its depths by the writings of Darwin ; but who can trace in those writings the smallest concession to the judgment or desire of the masses ? Darwin became convinced of certain theories. To the vast mass of the public these theories were incredible, unpalatable, impious. With immense patience, without emphasis of any kind, he proceeded to substantiate his views, to enlarge his exposition ; and gradually the cold body of democratic opposition melted around that fervent atom of heat, and, in

response to its unbroken radiation, became warm itself. All that can be said is that the new democratic condition is a better conductor than the old oligarchical one was. Darwin produces his effect more steadily and rapidly than Galileo or Spinoza, but not more surely, with exactly as little aid from without.

As far, then, as the summits of literature are concerned—the great masters of style, the great discoverers, the great intellectual illuminators—it may be said that the influence of democracy upon them is almost *nil*. It affords them a wider hearing, and therefore a prompter recognition. It gives them more readers, and therefore a more direct arrival at that degree of material comfort necessary for the proper conduct of their investigations, or the full polish of their periods. It may spoil them with its flatteries, or diminish their merit by seducing them to over-production; but this is a question between themselves and their own souls. A syndicate of newspapers, or the editor of a magazine may tempt a writer of to-day, as Villon was tempted with the wine-shop, or Coleridge with laudanum; but that is not the fault of the democracy. Nor, if a writer of real power is neglected, are people more or less to blame in 1892 than they were for letting Otway starve two hundred years

ago. Some people, beloved of the gods, cannot be explained to mankind by king or caucus.

So far, therefore, as our present experience goes, we may relinquish the common fear that the summits of literature will be submerged by democracy. When the new spirit first began to be studied, many whose judgment on other points was sound enough were confident that the instinctive programme of the democratic spirit was to prevent intellectual capacity of every kind from developing, for fear of the ascendancy which it would exercise. This is communism, and means democracy pushed to an impossible extremity, to a point from which it must rebound. No doubt, there is always a chance that a disturbance of the masses may for a moment wash over and destroy some phase of real intellectual distinction, just as it may sweep away, also for a moment, other personal conditions. But it looks as though the individuality would always reassert itself. The crowd that smashed the porcelain in the White House to celebrate the election of President Andrew Jackson had to buy more to take its place. The White House did not continue, even under Jackson, to subsist without porcelain. In the same way, edicts may be passed by communal councils forbidding citizens to worship

the idols which the booksellers set up, and even that consummation may be reached, to which a prophet of our own day looks forward, when we shall all be forced by the police to walk hand in hand with "the craziest sot in the village" as our friend and equal; none the less will human nature, at the earliest opportunity, throw off the bondage, and openly prefer Darwin and Tennyson to that engaging rustic. Indeed, all the signs of the times go to suggest that the completer the democracy becomes, the vaster the gap will be in popular honour between the great men of letters and "the craziest sot in the village." It is quite possible that the tyranny of extreme intellectual popularity may prove as tiresome as other and older tyrannies were. But that's another story, as the new catchword tells us.

Literature, however, as a profession or a calling, is not confined to the writings of the five or six men who, in each generation, represent what is most brilliant and most independent. From the leaders, in their indisputable greatness, the intellectual hierarchy descends to the lowest and broadest class of workers who in any measure hang on to the skirts of literature, and eke out a living by writing. It is in the middle ranks of this vast

pyramid that we should look to see most distinctly the signs of the influence of democracy. We shall not find them in the broad and featureless residuum any more than in the strongly individualised summits. But we ought to discover them in the writers who have talent enough to keep them aloft, yet not enough to make them indifferent to outer support. Here, where all is lost or gained by a successful appeal to the crowd as it hastens by, we might expect to see very distinctly the effects of democracy, and here, perhaps, if we look closely, we may see them.

It appears to me that even here it is not so easy as one would imagine that it would be to pin distinct charges to the sleeve of the much-abused democracy. Let us take the bad points first. The enlargement of the possible circle of an author's readers may awaken in the breast of a man who has gained a little success, the desire to arrive at a greater one in another field, for which he is really not so well equipped. An author may have a positive talent for church history, and turning from it, through cupidity, to fiction, may, by addressing a vastly extended public, make a little more money by his bad stories than he was able to make by his good hagiology, and so act to the detriment

of literature. Again, an author who has made a hit with a certain theme, or a certain treatment of that theme, may be held nailed down to it by the public long after he has exhausted it and it has exhausted him. Again, the complaisance of the public, and the loyal eagerness with which it cries "Give, give," to a writer that has pleased it, may induce that writer to go on talking long after he has anything to say, and so conduce to the watering of the milk of wit. Or—and this is more subtle and by no means so easy to observe—the pressure of commonplace opinion, constantly checking a writer when he shelves away towards either edge of the trodden path of mediocrity, may keep him from ever adding to the splendid originalities of literature. This shows itself in the disease which we may call *Mudieitis*, the inflammation produced by the fear that what you are inspired to say, and know you ought to say, will be unpalatable to the circulating libraries, that "the wife of a country incumbent," that terror before which Messrs. Smith fall prone upon their faces, may write up to headquarters and expostulate. In all these cases, without doubt, we have instances of the direct influence of democracy upon literature, and that of a deleterious kind. Not one of them,

however, can produce a bad effect upon any but persons of weak or faulty character, and these would probably err in some other direction, even at the court of a grand duke.

On the other hand, the benefits of democratic surroundings are felt in these middle walks of literature. The appeal to a very wide audience has the effect of giving a writer whose work is sound but not of universal interest, an opportunity of collecting, piecemeal, individual readers enough to support him. The average sanity of a democracy, and the habit it encourages of immediate, full, and candid discussion, preserves the writer whose snare is eccentricity from going too far in his folly. The celebrated eccentrics of past literature, the Lycophrons and the Gongoras, the Donnes and the Gombrevilles, were the spokesmen of small and pedantic circles, disdainful of the human herd, "sets" whose members rejoiced in the conceits and extravagance of their respective favourites, and encouraged these talented personages to make mountebanks of themselves. These leaders were in most cases excessively clever, and we find their work, or a little of it, very entertaining as we cross the history of *belles-lettres*. But it is impossible not to see that, for instance, each of the mysterious

writers I have mentioned would, in a democratic age, and healthily confronted with public criticism, have been able to make a much wholesomer and broader use of his cleverness. The democratic spirit, moreover, may be supposed to encourage directness of utterance, simplicity, vividness, and lucidity. I say it may be supposed to do so, because I cannot perceive that with all our liberty the nineteenth century has proceeded any farther in this direction than the hide-bound eighteenth century was able to do. On the whole, indeed, I find it very difficult to discover that democracy, as such, is affecting the quality of such good literature as we possess in any very general or obvious way. It may be that we are still under the oligarchic tradition, and that a social revolution, introducing a sudden breach in our habits, and perhaps paralysing the profession of letters for a few years, would be followed by a new literature of a decidedly democratic class. We are speaking of what we actually see, and not of vague visions which may seem to flit across the spectral mirror of the future.

But when we pass from the quality of the best literature to the quantity of it, then it is impossible to preserve so indifferent or so optimistic an attitude. The democratic habit does not, if I am cor-

rect, make much difference in the way in which good authors write, but it very much affects the amount of circulation which their writings obtain. The literature of which I have hitherto spoken is that of which analysis can take cognisance, the writing which possesses a measure, at least, of distinction, of accomplishment, that which, in every class, belongs to the tradition of good work. It is very easy to draw a rough line, not too high, above which all may fairly be treated as literature in *posse* if not in *esse*. In former ages, almost all that was published, certainly all that attracted public attention and secured readers, was of this sort. The baldest and most grotesque Elizabethan drama, the sickliest romance that lay with Bibles and with *billets-doux* on Belinda's toilet-table, the most effete didactic poem of the Hayley and Seward age, had this quality of belonging to the literary camp. It was a miserable object, no doubt, and wholly without value, but it wore the king's uniform. If it could have been better written, it would have been well written. But, as a result of democracy, what is still looked upon as the field of literature has been invaded by camp-followers of every kind, so active and so numerous, that they threaten to oust the soldiery themselves; persons in every variety of

costume, from court-clothes to rags, but agreeing only in this, that they are not dressed as soldiers of literature.

These amateurs and specialists, these writers of books that are not books, and essays that are not essays, are peculiarly the product of a democratic age. A love for the distinguished parts of literature, and even a conception that such parts exist, is not common among men, and it is not obvious that democracy has led to its encouragement. Hitherto the tradition of style has commonly been respected ; no very open voice having been as yet raised against it. But with the vast majority of persons it remains nothing but a mystery, and one which they secretly regard with suspicion. The enlargement of the circle of readers merely means an increase of persons who, without an ear, are admitted to the concert of literature. At present they listen to the traditional sonatas and mazurkas with bored respect, but they are really longing for music-hall ditties on the concertina. To this ever-increasing congregation of the unmusical comes the technical amateur, with his dry facts and exact knowledge ; the flip-pant amateur, with his comic " bits " and laughable miscellanies ; the didactic and religious amateur, anxious to mend our manners and save our souls.

These people, whose power must not be slighted, and whose value, perhaps, can only relatively be denied, have something definite, something serviceable to give in the form of a paper or a magazine or a book. What wonder that they should form dangerous rivals to the writer who is assiduous about the way in which a thing is said, and careful to produce a solid and harmonious effect by characteristic language ?

It was mainly during the close of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century that this body of technical, professional, and non-literary writing began to develop. We owe it, without doubt, to the spread of exact knowledge and the emancipation of speculative thought. It was from the law first, then from divinity, then from science, and last from philosophy that the studied graces were excluded—a sacrifice on the altar of positive expression. If a writer on precise themes were to adopt to-day the balanced elegance of Evelyn or Shaftesbury's stately and harmonious periods, he would either be read for his style and his sentiment or not at all. People would go for their information elsewhere. No doubt, in a certain sense, this change is due to the democracy ; it is due to the quickening and rarefying of public

life, to the creation of rapid needs, to a breaking down of barriers. But so long as the books and papers which deal with professional matters do not utterly absorb the field, so long as they leave time and space for pure literature, there is no reason why they should positively injure the latter, though they must form a constant danger to it. At times of public ferment, when great constitutional or social problems occupy universal attention, there can be no doubt that the danger ripens into real injury. When newspapers are full of current events in political and social life, the graver kind of books are slackly bought, and "the higher criticism" disappears from the Reviews.

We can imagine a state of things in which such a crowding out should become chronic, when the nervous system of the public should crave such incessant shocks of actuality, that no time should be left for thought or sentiment. We might arrive at the condition in which Wordsworth pictured the France of ninety years ago :

*Perpetual emptiness ! unceasing change !
No single volume paramount, no code,
No master spirit, no determined road ;
But equally a want of books and men !*

When we feel inclined to forebode such a shock-

ing lapse into barbarism, it may help us if we reflect how soon France, in spite of, or by the aid of, democracy, threw off the burden of emptiness. A recollection of the intellectual destitution of that country at the beginning of the century and of the passionate avidity with which, on the return of political tranquillity, France threw herself back on literary and artistic avocations, should strengthen the nerves of those pessimists who, at the slightest approach to a similar condition in modern England, declare that our intellectual prestige is sunken, never to revive. There is a great elasticity in the tastes of the average man, and when they have been pushed violently in one direction they do not remain fixed there, but swing with equal force to the opposite side. The æsthetic part of mankind may be obscured, it cannot be obliterated.

The present moment appears to me to be a particularly unhappy one for indulging in gloomy diatribes against the democracy. Books, although they constitute the most durable part of literature, are not, in this day, by any means its sole channel. Periodical literature has certainly been becoming more and more democratic; and if the editors of our newspapers gauge in any degree the taste of their readers, that taste must be becoming more

and more inclined to the formal and distinctive parts of writing. A few years ago, the London newspapers were singularly indifferent to the claims of books and of the men who wrote them. An occasional stately column of the *Times* represented almost all the notice which a daily paper would take of a volume. The provincial press was still worse provided; it afforded no light at all for such of its clients as were groping their way in the darkness of the book-market.

All this is now changed. One or two of the evening newspapers of London deserve great commendation for having dared to treat literary subjects, in distinction from mere reviews of books, as of immediate public interest. Their example has at length quickened some of the morning papers, and has spread into the provinces to such a signal degree that several of the great newspapers of the North of England are now served with literary matter of a quality and a fulness not to be matched in a single London daily twenty years ago. When an eminent man of letters dies, the comments which the London and country press make upon his career and the nature of his work are often quite astonishing in their fulness; space being dedicated to these

notices such as, but a few years ago, would have been grudged to a politician or to a prize-fighter. The newspapers are the most democratic of all vehicles of thought, and the prominence of literary discussion in their columns does not look as though the democracy was anxious to be thought indifferent or hostile to literature.

In all this bustle and reverberation, however, it may be said that there is not much place for those who desire, like Jean Chapelain, to live in innocence, with Apollo and with their books. There can be no question, that the tendency of modern life is not favourable to sequestered literary scholarship. At the same time, it is a singular fact that, even in the present day, when a Thomas Love Peacock or an Edward FitzGerald hides himself in a careful seclusion, like some rare aquatic bird in a backwater, his work slowly becomes manifest, and receives due recognition and honour. Such authors do not enjoy great sales, even when they become famous, but, in spite of their opposition to the temper of their time, in spite of all obstacles imposed by their own peculiarities of temperament, they receive, in the long run, a fair measure of success. They have their hour, sooner or later. More than that no author of their type could have

under any form of political government, or at any period of history. They should not, and, in fairness it must be said they rarely do, complain. They know that "Dieu paie," as Alphonse Karr said, "mais il ne paie pas tous les samedis."

It is the writers who want to be paid every Saturday upon whom democracy produces the worst effect. It is not the neglect of the public, it is the facility with which the money can be wheedled out of the pockets of the public on trifling occasions that constitutes a danger to literature. There is an enormous quantity of almost unmitigated shoddy now produced and sold, and the peril is that authors who are capable of doing better things will be seduced into adding to this wretched product for the sake of the money. We are highly solicitous nowadays, and it is most proper that we should be, about adequate payment for the literary worker. But as long as that payment is in no sort of degree proportioned to the merit of the article he produces, the question of its scale of payment must remain one rather for his solicitor than for the critics. The importance of our own Society of Authors, for instance, lies, it appears to me, in its constituting a sort of firm of

solicitors acting solely for literary clients. But the moment we go further than this, we get into difficulties. The money standard tends to become the standard of merit. At a recent public meeting, while one of the most distinguished of living technical writers was speaking for the literary profession, one of those purveyors of tenth-rate fiction, who supply stories, as they might supply vegetables, to a regular market, was heard to say with scorn, "Call *him* an author?" "Why, yes!" her neighbour replied, "don't you know he has written so and so, and so and so?" "Well," said the other, "I should like to know what his sales are before I allowed he was an author."

It would be highly inopportune to call for a return of the *bonâ fide* sales of those of our leading authors who are not novelists. It is to be hoped that no such indulgence to the idlest curiosity will ever be conceded. But if such a thing were done, it would probably reveal some startling statistics. It would be found that many of those whose names are only next to the highest in public esteem do not receive more than the barest pittance from their writings, even from those which are most commonly in

the mouths of their contemporaries. To mention only two writers, but these of singular eminence and prominence, it was not until the later years of their lives that either Robert Browning or Matthew Arnold began to be sure of even a very moderate pecuniary return on their books. The curious point was that both of them achieved fame of a wide and brilliant nature long before their books began to "move," as publishers call it. It is not easy to think of an example of this curious fact more surprising than this, that *Friendship's Garland* during many years did not pass out of one moderate edition. This book, published when Arnold was filling the mouths of men with his paradoxical utterances, lighted up all through with such wit and charm of style as can hardly, of its kind, be paralleled in recent prose; a masterpiece, not dealing with remote or abstruse questions, but with burning matters of the day—this entertaining and admirably modern volume enjoyed a sale which would mean deplorable failure in the case of a female novelist of a perfectly subterranean order. This case could be paralleled, no doubt, by a dozen others, equally striking. I have just taken up a volume of humour, the production of a "funny man" of

the moment, and I see on its title-page the statement that it is in its one hundred and nineteenth edition. Of this book, 119,000 copies have been bought during a space of time equal to that in which Matthew Arnold sold probably about 119 copies of *Friendship's Garland*. In the face of these facts it is not possible to say that, though it may buy well, the democracy buys wisely.

It is this which makes me fear that, as I have said, the democratic spirit is influencing disadvantageously the quantity rather than the quality of good literature. It seems to be starving its best men, and helping its coarsest Jeshuruns to wax fat. The good authors write as they would have written under any circumstances, valuing their work for its own sake, and enjoying that state of happiness of which Mr. William Morris has been speaking, "the happiness only possible to artists and thieves." But while they produce in this happy mood, the democracy, which honours their names and displays an inexplicable curiosity about their persons, is gradually exterminating them by borrowing their books instead of buying them, and so reducing them to a level just below

the possibility of living by pure literature. The result is, as any list of the most illustrious living authors (not novelists) will suggest, that scarcely a single man or woman of them has lived by the production of books. An amiable poet of the older school, whose name is everywhere mentioned with honour, used to say that he published books instead of keeping a carriage, as his fortune would not permit him to afford both of those luxuries. When we think of the prizes which literature occasionally offered to serious work in the eighteenth century, it seems as though there had been a very distinct retrogression in this respect.

The novel, in short, tends more and more to become the only professional branch of literature ; and this is unfortunate, because the novel is the branch which shelters the worst work. In other sections of pure letters, if work is not in any way good, it is cast forth and no more heard of. But a novel may be utterly silly, be condemned by every canon of taste, be ignored by the press, and yet may enjoy a mysterious success, pass through tens of editions, and start its author on a career which may lead to opulence. It would be interesting to know what it

is that attracts the masses to books of this kind. How do they hear of them in the first instance? Why does one vapid and lady-like novel speed on its way, while eleven others, apparently just like unto it, sink and disappear? How is the public appetite for this insipidity to be reconciled with the partiality of the same readers for stories by writers of real excellence? Why do those who have once pleased the public continue to please it, whatever lapses into carelessness and levity they permit themselves? I have put these questions over and over again to those whose business it is to observe and take advantage of the fluctuations of the book-market, but they give no intelligible reply. If the Sphinx had asked Œdipus to explain the position of "Edna Lyall," he would have had to throw himself from the rock.

If the novelists, bad or good, showed in their work the influence of democracy, they would reward study. But it is difficult to perceive that they do. The good ones, from Mr. George Meredith downwards, write to please themselves, in their own manner, just as do the poets, the critics, and the historians, leaving it to the crowd to take their books or let them lie. The commonplace ones write

blindly, following the dictates of their ignorance and their inexperience, waiting for the chance that the capricious public may select a favourite from their ranks. Almost the only direct influence which the democracy, as at present constituted in England, seems to bring to bear on novels, is the narrowing of the sphere of incident and emotion within which they may disport themselves. It would be too complicated and dangerous a question to ask here, at the end of an essay, whether that restriction is a good thing or a bad. The undeniable fact is that whenever an English novelist has risen to protest against it, the weight of the democracy has been exercised to crush him. He has been voted "not quite nice," a phrase of hideous import, as fatal to a modern writer as the inverted thumb of a Roman matron was to a gladiator. But all we want now is a very young man strong enough, sincere enough, and popular enough to insist on being listened to when he speaks of real things—and perhaps we have found him.

One great novelist our race has however produced, who seems not only to write under the influence of democracy, but to be absolutely inspired by the democratic spirit. This is Mr. W. D. Howells, and it is only by admitting this isolation of his, I think,

that we can arrive at any just comprehension of his place in contemporary literature. It is the secret of his extreme popularity in America, except in a certain Europeanised clique ; it is the secret of the instinctive dislike of him, amounting to a blind hereditary prejudice, which is so widely felt in this country. Mr. Howells is the most exotic, perhaps the only truly exotic writer of great distinction whom America has produced. Emerson, and the school of Emerson in its widest sense, being too self-consciously in revolt against the English oligarchy, out of which they sprang, to be truly distinguished from it. But England, with its aristocratic traditions and codes, does not seem to weigh with Mr. Howells. His books suggest no rebellion against, nor subjection to, what simply does not exist for him or for his readers. He is superficially irritated at European pretensions, but essentially, and when he becomes absorbed in his work as a creative artist, he ignores everything but that vast level of middle-class of American society out of which he sprang, which he faithfully represents, and which adores him. To English readers, the novels of Mr. Howells must always be something of a puzzle, even if they partly like them, and as a rule they hate them. But to the average educated

American who has not been to Europe, these novels appear the most deeply experienced and ripely sympathetic product of modern literature.

When we review the whole field of which some slight outline has here been attempted, we see much that may cheer and encourage us, and something, too, that may cause grave apprehension. The alertness and receptivity of the enormous crowd which a writer may now hope to address is a pleasant feature. The hammering away at an idea without inducing it to enter anybody's ears is now a thing of the past. What was whispered in London yesterday afternoon was known in New York this morning, and we have the comments of America upon it with our five o'clock tea to-day. But this is not an unmixed benefit, for if an impression is now quickly made, it is as quickly lost, and there is little profit in seeing people receive an idea which they will immediately forget. Moreover, for those who write what the millions read, there is something disturbing and unwholesome in this public roar that is ever rising in their ears. They ensconce themselves in their study, they draw the curtains, light the lamp, and plunge into their books, but from the darkness outside comes that distracting and agitating cry of the public that demands their

presence. This is a new temptation, and indicates a serious danger. But the popular writers will get used to it, and when they realise how little it really means it may cease to disturb them. In the meantime, let no man needlessly dishearten his brethren in this world of disillusion, by losing faith in the ultimate survival and continuance of literature.

1891.

HAS AMERICA PRODUCED A POET?

Has America Produced a Poet?

FOR the audacious query which stands at the head of this essay, it is not I, but an American editor, who must bear the blame, if blame there be. It would never have occurred to me to tie such a firebrand to the tail of any of my little foxes. He gave it to me, just as Mr. Pepys gave *Gaze not on Swans* to ingenious Mr. Birkenshaw, to make the best I could of a bad argument. On the face of it the question is absurd. There lies on my table a manual of American poetry by Mr. Stedman, in which the meed of immortality is awarded to about one hundred of Columbia's sons and daughters. No one who has a right to express an opinion is likely to deny that the learning, fidelity, and catholic taste which are displayed in this book are probably at this time of day shared, in the same degree, with its author, by no other living Anglo-Saxon writer. Why, then, should not Mr. Stedman's

admirable volume be taken as a complete and satisfactory answer to our editor's query? Simply because everything is relative, and because it may be amusing to apply to the subject of Mr. Stedman's criticism a standard more cosmopolitan and much less indulgent than his. Mr. Stedman has mapped out the heavens with a telescope; what can an observer detect with the naked eye?

There is an obvious, and yet a very stringent, sense in which no good critic could for a moment question that America has produced poets. A poet is a maker, a man or woman who expresses some mood of vital passion in a new manner and with adequate art. Turning to the accepted ranks of English literature, Tickell is a poet on the score of his one great elegy on Addison, and Wolfe, a century later, by his *Burial of Sir John Moore*. Those poems were wholly new and impassioned, and time has no effect upon the fame of their writers. So long as English poetry continues to be studied a little closely, Tickell and Wolfe will be visible as diminutive fixed stars in our poetical firmament. But in a rapid and superficial glance, Wolfe and Tickell disappear. Let the glance be more and more rapid, and only a few planets

of the first magnitude are seen. In the age before Elizabeth, Chaucer alone remains ; of the Elizabethan galaxy, so glittering and rich, we see at length only Spenser and Shakespeare ; then come successive splendours of Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Burns ; then a cluster again of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats. Last of all, still too low on the horizon to be definitely measured, Tennyson and Browning. Fifteen names in all, a sum which might be reduced to ten, perhaps, but never to fewer than ten, nor expanded, on the same scale, beyond eighteen or twenty at the outside. These fifteen are the great English poets, the selected glory and pride of five centuries, the consummation of the noblest dynasty of verse which the world has ever seen. What I take to be the problem is, Has America hitherto produced a poet equal to the least of these, raised as high above any possible vacillation of the tide of fashion ? What an invidious question !

In the first place, I will have nothing to do with the living. They do not enter into our discussion. There was never a time, in my opinion, when America possessed among her citizens so various and so accomplished singers, gifted in so many provinces of song, as in 1888. But the time has

not arrived, and long may it delay, when we shall be called upon to discuss the ultimate *status* of the now living poets of America. From the most aged of them we have not yet, we hope, received "sad autumn's last chrysanthemum." Those who have departed will alone be glanced at in these few words. Death is the great solution of critical continuity, and the bard whom we knew so well, and who died last night, is nearer already to Chaucer than to us. I shall endeavour to state quite candidly what my own poor opinion is with regard to the claim of any dead American to be classed with those fourteen or fifteen English inheritors of unassailed renown.

One word more in starting. If we admit into our criticism any patriotic or political prejudice, we may as well cease to wrangle on the threshold of our discussion. I cannot think that American current criticism is quite free from this taint of prejudice. In this, if I am right, Americans sin no more nor less than the rest of us English, and French; but in America, I confess, the error seems to me to be occasionally more serious than in Europe. In England we are not guiltless of permitting the most puerile disputes to embitter our literary arena, and because a certain historian is a

home-ruler or a certain novelist a Tory, each is anathema to the literary tribunal on the other side. Such judgments are as pitiable as they are ludicrous ; but when I have watched a polite American smile to encounter such vagaries of taste in our clubs or drawing-rooms, I have sometimes wondered how the error which prefers the non-political books of a Gladstonian to those of a Unionist, on political grounds alone, differs from that which thinks an American writer must have the advantage, or some advantage, over an English writer. Each prejudice is natural and amiable, but neither the one nor the other is exempt from the charge of puerility. Patriotism is a meaningless term in literary criticism. To prefer what has been written in our own city, or state, or country, for that reason alone, is simply to drop the balance and to relinquish all claims to form a judgment. The true and reasonable lover of literature refuses to be constrained by any meaner or homelier bond than that of good writing. His brain and his taste persist in being independent of his heart, like those of the German soldier who fought through the campaign before Paris, and who was shot at last with an Alfred de Musset, thumbed and scored, in his pocket.

One instance of the patriotic fallacy has so often annoyed me that I will take this opportunity of denouncing it. A commonplace of American criticism is to compare Keats with a certain Joseph Rodman Drake. They both died at twenty-five and they both wrote verse. The parallel ends there. Keats was one of the great writers of the world. Drake was a gentle imitative bard of the fourth or fifth order, whose gifts culminated in a piece of pretty fancy called *The Culprit Fay*. Every principle of proportion is outraged in a conjunction of the names of Drake and Keats. To compare them is like comparing a graceful shrub in your garden with the tallest pine that fronts the tempest on the forehead of Rhodopé.

When the element of prejudice is entirely withdrawn, we have next to bear in mind the fluctuations of taste in respect to popular favourites, and the uncertainty that what has pleased us may ever contrive to please the world again. I have been reminded of the insecurity of contemporary judgments, and of the process of natural selection which goes on imperceptibly in criticism, by referring to a compendium of literature published thirty years ago, and remarkable in its own time

for knowledge, acumen, and candour. In these volumes the late Robert Carruthers, an excellent scholar in his day and generation, gives a certain space to the department of American poetry. It is amusing to think how differently a man of Carruthers's stamp would cover the same ground to-day. He gives great prominence to Halleck and Bryant, he treats Longfellow and Poe not inadequately, he spares brief commendation to Willis and Holmes, and a bare mention to Dana and Emerson (as a poet). He alludes to no one else; and apart from his omissions, which are significant enough, nothing can be more curious than his giving equal *status* respectively to Halleck and Bryant, to Willis and Holmes, to Dana and Emerson. Thirty years have passed, and each of these pairs contains one who has been taken and one who has been left. Bryant, Holmes, and Emerson exist, and were never more prominent than to-day; but where are Halleck, Willis, and Dana? Under the microscope of Mr. Stedman, these latter three together occupy but half of one page out of four hundred, nor is there the slightest chance that these writers will ever recover the prominence which they held, and seemed to hold so securely, little more than a generation ago. The

moral is too obvious to need appending to this suggestive little story.

It is not in America only that a figure which is not really a great one gets accidentally raised on a pedestal from which it presently has to be ignominiously withdrawn. But in America, where the interest in intellectual problems is so keen, and where the dull wholesome bondage of tradition is unknown, these sudden exaltations are particularly frequent. When I was in Baltimore (and I have no happier memories of travel than my recollections of Baltimore) the only crumple in my rose-leaf was the difficulty of preserving a correct attitude toward the local deity. When you enter the gates of Johns Hopkins, the question that is asked is, "What think you of Lanier"? The writer of the *Marshes of Glynn* had passed away before I visited Baltimore, but I heard so much about him that I feel as though I had seen him. The delicately-moulded ivory features, the profuse and silken beard, the wonderful eyes waxing and waning during the feverish action of lecturing, surely I have witnessed the fascination which these exercised? Baltimore would not have been Baltimore, would have been untrue to its graceful, generous, and hospitable instincts, if it had not welcomed with enthusiasm

this beautiful, pathetic Southern stranger. But I am amazed to find that this pardonable idolatry is still on the increase, although I think it must surely have found its climax in a little book which my friend, President Gilman, has been kind enough to send me this year. In this volume I read that Shelley and Keats, "before disconsolate," now possess a mate; that "God's touch set the starry splendour of genius upon Lanier's soul"; and that all sorts of persons, in all sorts of language, exalt him as one of the greatest poets that ever lived. I notice, however, with a certain sly pleasure, that on the occasion of this burst of Lanierolatry a letter was received from Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "of too private a character to read." No wonder, for Dr. Holmes is the dupe of no local enthusiasm, and very well indeed distinguishes between good verse and bad.

From Baltimore drunk with loyalty and pity I appeal to Baltimore sober. What are really the characteristics of this amazing and unparalleled poetry of Lanier? Reading it again, and with every possible inclination to be pleased, I find a painful effort, a strain and rage, the most prominent qualities in everything he wrote. Never simple, never easy, never in one single lyric natural and

spontaneous for more than one stanza, always forcing the note, always concealing his barrenness and tameness by grotesque violence of image and preposterous storm of sound, Lanier appears to me to be as conclusively not a poet of genius as any ambitious man who ever lived, laboured, and failed. I will judge him by nothing less than those poems which his warmest admirers point to as his masterpieces; I take *Corn*, *Sunrise*, and *The Marshes of Glynn*. I persist in thinking that these are elaborate and learned experiments by an exceedingly clever man, and one who had read so much and felt so much that he could simulate poetical expression with extraordinary skill. But of the real thing, of the genuine traditional article, not a trace.

*I hear faint bridal-sighs of brown and green
Dying to silent hints of kisses keen
As far lights fringe into a pleasant sheen.*

This exemplifies the sort of English, the sort of imagination, the sort of style which are to make Keats and Shelley—who have found Bryant and Landor, Rossetti and Emerson, unworthy of their company—comfortable with a mate at last. If these vapid and eccentric lines were exceptional, if they were even supported by a minority of sane and

original verse, if Lanier were ever simple or genuine, I would seize on those exceptions and gladly forget the rest ; but I find him on all occasions substituting vague, cloudy rhetoric for passion, and tortured fancy for imagination, always striving, against the grain, to say something prophetic and unparalleled, always grinding away with infinite labour and the sweat of his brow to get that expressed which a real poet murmurs, almost unconsciously, between a sigh and a whisper.

*Wheresoe'er I turn my view,
All is strange, yet nothing new ;
Endless labour all along,
Endless labour to be wrong.*

Lanier must have been a charming man, and one who exercised a great fascination over those who knew him. But no reasonable critic can turn from what has been written about Lanier to what Lanier actually wrote, and still assert that he was the Great American Poet.

It is not likely to be seriously contended that there were in 1888 more than four of the deceased poets of America who need to have their claims discussed in connection with the highest honours in the art. These are Longfellow, Bryant, Emerson, Poe.

There is one other name which, it may seem to some of my readers, ought to be added to this list. But originality was so entirely lacking in the composition of that versatile and mellifluous talent to which I allude, that I will not even mention here the fifth name. I ask permission rapidly to inquire whether Longfellow, Bryant, Emerson and Poe are worthy of a rank beside the greatest English twelve.

In the first place, what are we to say of Longfellow? I am very far from being one of those who reject the accomplished and delicate work of this highly-trained artist. If I may say so, no chapter of Mr. Stedman's book seems to me to surpass in skill that in which he deals with the works of Longfellow, and steers with infinite tact through the difficulties of the subject. In the face of those impatient youngsters who dare to speak of Longfellow and of Tupper in a breath, I assert that the former was, within his limitations, as true a poet as ever breathed. His skill in narrative was second only to that of Prior and of Lafontaine. His sonnets, the best of them, are among the most pleasing objective sonnets in the language. Although his early, and comparatively poor, work was exaggeratedly praised, his head was not turned, but, like a conscientious artist, he rose to better and better

things, even at the risk of sacrificing his popularity. It is a pleasure to say this at the present day, when Longfellow's fame has unduly declined; but it is needless, of course, to dwell on the reverse of the medal, and disprove what nobody now advances, that he was a great or original poet. Originality and greatness were just the qualities he lacked. I have pointed out elsewhere that Longfellow was singularly under Swedish influences, and that his real place is in Swedish literature, chronologically between Tegnér and Runeberg. Doubtless he seemed at first to his own people more original than he was, through his habit of reproducing an exotic tone very exactly.

Bryant appears to me to be a poet of a less attractive but somewhat higher class than Longfellow. His versification is mannered, and his expressions are directly formed on European models, but his sense of style was so consistent that his careful work came to be recognisable. His poetry is a hybrid of two English stocks, closely related; he belongs partly to the Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey*, partly to the Coleridge of *Mont Blanc*. The imaginative formula is Wordsworth's, the verse is the verse of Coleridge, and having in very early youth produced this dignified and novel flower,

Bryant did not try to blossom into anything different, but went on cultivating the Coleridge-Wordsworth hybrid down to the days of Rossetti and of villanelles. But Wordsworth and Coleridge had not stayed at the *Mont Blanc* and *Tintern Abbey* point. They went on advancing, developing, altering, and declining to the end of their days. The consequence is that the specimens of the Bryant variety do not strike us as remarkably like the general work of Wordsworth or of Coleridge. As I have said, although he borrowed definitely and almost boldly, in the first instance, the very persistence of Bryant's style, the fact that he was influenced once by a very exquisite and noble kind of poetry, and then never any more, through a long life, by any other verse, combined with his splendid command of those restricted harmonies the secret of which he had conquered, made Bryant a very interesting and valuable poet. But in discussing his comparative position, it appears to me to be impossible to avoid seeing that his want of positive novelty—the derived character of his sentiment, his verse, and his description—is absolutely fatal to his claim to a place in the foremost rank. He is exquisitely polished, full of noble suavity and music, but his irreparable fault is to be secondary,

to remind us always of his masters first, and only on reflection of himself. In this he contrasts to a disadvantage with one who is somewhat akin to him in temperament, Walter Savage Landor. We may admit that Bryant is more refined, more uniformly exquisite than Landor, but the latter has a flavour of his own, something quite original and Landorian, which makes him continue to live, while Bryant's reputation slowly fades away, like the stately crystal gables of an iceberg in summer. The "Water-Fowl" pursues its steady flight through the anthologies, but Bryant is not with the great masters of poetry.

We ascend, I think, into a sphere where neither Bryant nor Longfellow, with all their art, have power to wing their way, when we read such verses as

*Musketaquit, a goblin strong,
Of shard and flint makes jewels gay ;
They lose their grief who hear his song,
And where he winds is the day of day.*

*So forth and brighter fares my stream ;
Who drinks it shall not thirst again ;
No darkness stains its equal gleam,
And ages drop in it like rain.*

If Emerson had been frequently sustained at the heights he was capable of reaching, he would unquestionably have been one of the sovereign poets of the world. At its very best his phrase is so new and so magical, includes in its easy felicity such a wealth of fresh suggestion and flashes with such a multitude of side-lights, that we cannot suppose that it will ever be superseded or will lose its charm. He seems to me like a very daring but purblind diver, who flings himself headlong into the ocean, and comes up bearing, as a rule, nothing but sand and common shells, yet who every now and then rises grasping some wonderful and unique treasure. In his prose, of course, Emerson was far more a master of the medium than in poetry. He never became an easy versifier ; there seems to have been always a difficulty to him, although an irresistible attraction, in the conduct of a piece of work confined within rhyme and rhythm. He starts with a burst of inspiration ; the wind drops and his sails flap the mast before he is out of port ; a fresh puff of breeze carries him round the corner ; for another page, the lyrical *afflatus* wholly gone, he labours with the oar of logic ; when suddenly the wind springs up again, and he dances into a harbour. We are so pleased to find the

voyage successfully accomplished that we do not trouble to inquire whether or no this particular port was the goal he had before him at starting. I think there is hardly one of Emerson's octosyllabic poems of which this will not be found to be more or less an accurate allegorical description. This is not quite the manner of Milton or Shelley, although it may possess its incidental advantages.

It cannot be in candour denied that we obtain a very strange impression by turning from what has been written about Emerson to his own poetry. All his biographers and critics unite, and it is very sagacious of them to do so, in giving us little anthologies of his best lines and stanzas, just as writers on *Hudibras* extract miscellanies of the fragmentary wit of Butler. Judged by a chain of these selected jewels, Emerson gives us the impression of high imagination and great poetical splendour. But the volume of his verse, left to produce its own effect, does not fail to weaken this effect. I have before me at this moment his first collected *Poems*, published, as he said, at "the solstice of the stars of his intellectual firmament." It holds the brilliant fragments that we know so well, but it holds them as a mass of dull quartz may sparkle with gold dust. It has

odes about Contocook and Agischook and the Over-God, long nebulous addresses to no one knows whom, about no one knows what; for pages upon pages it wanders away into mere cacophonous eccentricity. It is Emerson's misfortune as a poet that his technical shortcomings are for ever being more severely reprov'd by his own taste and censorship than we should dare to reprove them. To the author of *The World-Soul*, in shocking verses, we silently commend his own postulate in exquisite prose, that "Poetry requires that splendour of expression which carries with it the proof of great thoughts." Emerson, as a verse-writer, is so fragmentary and uncertain that we cannot place him among the great poets; and yet his best lines and stanzas seem as good as theirs. Perhaps we ought to consider him, in relation to Wordsworth and Shelley, as an asteroid among the planets.

It is understood that Edgar Allen Poe is still unforgiven in New England. "Those singularly valueless verses of Poe," was the now celebrated *dictum* of a Boston prophet. It is true that, if "that most beguiling of all little divinities, Miss Walters of the *Transcript*," is to be implicitly believed, Edgar Poe was very rude and naughty at

the Boston Lyceum in the spring of 1845. But surely bygones should be bygones, and Massachusetts might now pardon the *Al Aaraaf* incident. It is not difficult to understand that there were many sides on which Poe was likely to be long distasteful to Boston, Cambridge, and Concord. The intellectual weight of the man, though unduly minimised in New England, was inconsiderable by the side of that of Emerson. But in poetry, as one has to be always insisting, the battle is not to the strong; and apart from all faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings of Poe, we feel more and more clearly, or we ought to feel, the perennial charm of his verses. The posy of his still fresh and fragrant poems is larger than that of any other deceased American writer, although Emerson may have one or two single blossoms to show which are more brilliant than any of his. If the range of the Baltimore poet had been wider, if Poe had not harped so persistently on his one theme of remorseful passion for the irrecoverable dead, if he had employed his extraordinary, his unparalleled gifts of melodious invention, with equal skill, in illustrating a variety of human themes, he must have been with the greatest poets. For in Poe, in pieces like *The Haunted Palace*, *The Conqueror*

Worm, *The City in the Sea*, and *For Annie*, we find two qualities which are as rare as they are invaluable, a new and haunting music, which constrains the hearer to follow and imitate, and a command of evolution in lyrical work so absolute that the poet is able to do what hardly any other lyricist has dared to attempt, namely, as in *To One in Paradise*, to take a normal stanzaic form, and play with it as a great pianist plays with an air.

So far as the first of these attributes is concerned, Poe has proved himself to be the Piper of Hamelin to all later English poets. From Tennyson to Austin Dobson there is hardly one whose verse-music does not show traces of Poe's influence. To impress the stamp of one's personality on a succeeding generation of artists, to be an almost (although not wholly) flawless technical artist one's self, to charm within a narrow circle to a degree that shows no sign, after forty years, of lessening, is this to prove a claim to rank with the Great Poets? No, perhaps not quite; but at all events it is surely to have deserved great honour from the country of one's birthright.

WHAT IS A GREAT POET?

What is a Great Poet?

THE answer to the question, "Has America produced a Poet?" which was published in the *Forum*, called forth a surprising amount of attention from the press in England as well as in America. It was quite impossible, and I did not expect, that such an expression of personal opinion would pass without being challenged. In America, particularly, it could not but disturb some traditions and wound some prejudices. But in the present instance, as always before, it has been my particular fortune to find that where criticism—by which I mean, not censure, but analysis—is candid and sincere, it meets in America with sincere and candid readers. In parenthesis, I may add, that when literary criticism of this kind is ill received in America, the fault usually lies with that unhappy system of newspaper reverberation by which "scraps" or

“items,” removed from their context and slightly altered at each fresh removal, go the round of the press, and are presently commented upon by journalists who have never seen what the critic originally wrote. In reading some of the principal articles which my essay called forth, I find one point dwelt upon, in various ways, in almost all of them. I find a fresh query started as to the standard which we are to take as a measurement for imaginative writers; and it seems to me that it may be interesting to carry our original inquiry a step further back, and to ask, What is a great poet?

If we are to limit the number of the most illustrious and commanding names, as I attempted to do, it is plain that we must also confine the historical range of our inquiry. Some of my reviewers objected to my selection being made among English poets only, and several of them attempted lists which included the poets of Europe or of the world. Yet, without exception, those critics displayed their national bias by the large proportion of Anglo-Saxon worthies whom they could not bring themselves to exclude from their dozen. Shakespeare must be there, and Milton, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Shelley;

already a third of the majestic company is English. One reviewer, who had been lately studying the Anthology, could not persuade himself to omit several of those dying dolphins of Byzantine song that drew the shallop of Agathias up into the Golden Horn ; and this when the whole tale of bards was not to exceed fifteen at most. One reviewer went to Iceland for a name, and another to Persia—charming excursions both of them, but calculated to exhaust our resources prematurely. The least reflection will remind us that the complexity and excessive fullness of modern interests have invaded literature also, and the history of literature ; to select from all time a dozen greatest names is a task of doubtful propriety, and certainly not to be lightly undertaken. It was all very well, in the morning of time, for the ancient critics to regulate their body-guards of Apollo by the numbers of the Muses or the Graces. Nothing could be pleasanter than that tale of the great lyrical poets of the world which we find so often repeated in slightly varying form :

“ The mighty voice of Pindar has thundered out of Thebes. The lyre of Simonides modulates a song of delicate melody. What brilliancy in

Ibycus and Stesichorus! What sweetness in Alcman! From the mouth of Bacchylides there breathe delicious accents. Persuasion exhales from the lips of Anacreon. In the Æolian voice of Alcæus we hear once more the Lesbian swan; and as for Sappho, that ninth great lyric poet, is not her place, rather, tenth among the Muses?"

If we are contributing lists of a dozen great poets, here are three-fourths of the company already summoned; yet splendid as are these names, and doubtless of irreproachable genius, the roll is, for modern purposes, awkwardly overweighted. Even if for those whose works Time has overwhelmed, we substitute the Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Theocritus, whom he has spared, the list is still impracticable and one-sided. Yet who shall say that these were not great poets in every possible sense of the word? From each of several modern European nations, from Italy and from France at least, a magnificent list of twelve could be selected, not one of whom their compatriots could afford to lose. Nay, even Sweden or Holland would present us with a list of twelve which should seem indisputably great to a Dutchman or a Swede. It is not possible

to spread the net so wide as to catch whales from all the ancient and all the modern languages at once. Let us restrain our ambition and see what criterion we have for measuring those of our own tongue and race.

Passing in review, then, the whole five centuries which divide us from the youth of Chaucer, we would seek to discover what qualities have raised a limited number of the poetical writers of those successive ages of English thought to a station permanently and splendidly exalted. Among the almost innumerable genuine poets of those five hundred years, are there ten or twelve who are manifestly greater than the rest, and if so, in what does their greatness consist ?

We are not here occupied with the old threadbare question, "What is a poet" ? but we may reply to it so far as to insist that when we are speaking and thinking in English the term excludes all writers, however pathetic and fanciful, who do not employ the metrical form. In many modern languages the word poet, *dichter*, includes novelists and all other authors of prose fiction. I once learned this to my cost, for having published a short summary of the writings of the living "poets" of a certain continental country,

one of the leading (if not the leading) novelist of that country, exclusively a writer in prose, indignantly upbraided me for the obviously personal slight I had shown him in leaving him entirely unmentioned. In English we possess and should carefully maintain the advantage which accrues from having a word so distinct in its meaning; and we may recollect that there is no trick in literary criticism more lax and silly than that of talking about "prose poetry" (a contradiction in terms), or about such men as Carlyle, Mr. Ruskin, or Jefferies as "poets." The greatness we are discussing to-day is a quality wholly confined to those who have made it their chief duty to speak to us in verse.

On these lines, perhaps, the main elements of poetical greatness will be found to be originality in the treatment of themes, perennial charm, exquisite finish in execution, and distinction of individual manner. The great poet, in other words, will be seen, through the perspectives of history, to have been fresher, stronger, more skilful, and more personal than his unsuccessful or less successful rival. When the latter begins to recede into obscurity it will be because prejudices that blinded criticism are being removed, and because the

candidate for immortality is being found to be lacking in one or all of these peculiar qualities. And here, of course, comes in the disputed question of the existence of genius. I confess that that controversy seems to me to rest on a mere metaphysical quibble. Robert McTavish is a plough-boy, and ends at the plough's tail. Robert Burns is a plough-boy, and ends by being set up, like Berenice's hair, as a glory and a portent in the intellectual zenith of all time. Are they the same to start with? Is it merely a question of taking pains, of a happy accident—of luck, in short? A fiddlestick's end for such a theory! Just as well might we say that a young vine that is to produce, in its season, a bottle of corton, is the same as a similar stick that will issue in a wretched draught of *vin bleu*. That which, from its very cotyledons, has distinguished the corton plant from its base brother, that is genius.

But even thus the discussion is vain and empty. What we have to deal with is the work and not the man. So long as we all feel that there is some quality of charm, vigour, and brightness which exists in Pope and is absent in Eusden, is discoverable in a tragedy of Shakespeare and is wanting in a transpontine melodrama, so long,

whether we call this quality by the good old name of genius, or explain it away in the jargon of some new-fangled sociography, we shall have basis enough for the conduct of our particular inquiry.

Perhaps I may now be permitted to recapitulate the list of a dozen English poets whom I ventured to quote as the manifest immortals of our British Parnassus. They are Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats. It will be noticed that there are thirteen names here, and my reviewers have not failed to remind me that it is notoriously difficult to count the stars. The fact is that Gray, the real thirteenth, was an afterthought; and I will admit that, although Gray is the author of what is perhaps the most imposing single short poem in the language, and although he has charm, skill, and distinction to a marvellous degree, his originality, his force of production, were so rigidly limited that he may scarcely be admitted to the first rank. When he published his collected poems Gray confessed himself "but a shrimp of an author," and conjectured that the book would be mistaken for "the works of a flea or a pismire." No doubt the explosive force which eggs a very

great writer on to constant expression was lacking in the case of Gray, and I yield him—a tender babe, and the only one of my interesting family which I will consent to throw to the wolves. The rest are inviolable, and I will defend them to the last ; but I can only put a lance in rest here for two of them.

The absence of a truly catholic taste, and the survival of an exclusive devotion to the romantic ideals of the early part of the present century, must, I suppose, be the cause of a tendency, on the part of some of those who have replied to me, to question the right of Dryden and Pope to appear on my list of great poets. It appears that Dryden is very poorly thought of at Crawfordsville, Indiana, and even at busier centres of American taste he is reported as being not much of a power. "Dryden is not read in America," says one of my critics, with jaunty confidence. They say that we in England are sometimes harsh in our estimates of America ; but I confess I do not know the Englishman bold enough to have charged America with the shocking want of taste which these children of her own have so lightly volunteered to attribute to her. Dryden not read in America ! It makes one wonder what *is* read. Probably Miss Amélie Rives ?

But to be serious, I can conceive nothing more sinister for the future of English literature than that to any great extent, or among any influential circle of reading and writing men, the majesty and sinewy force of the most masculine of all the English poets should be despised and rejected. Something of a temper less hurried than that of the man who runs and reads is no doubt required for the appreciation of that somewhat heavy-footed and sombre giant of tragic and of narrative song, John Dryden, warring with dunces, marching with sunken head—"a down look," as Pope described it—through the unappreciative flat places of our second Charles and James. Prosaic at times he is, slow, fatigued, unstimulating; but, at his best, how full of the true sublime, how uplifted by the wind of tragic passion, how stirred to the depths by the noblest intellectual and moral enthusiasm! For my own part, there are moments and moods in which nothing satisfies my ear and my brain as do the great accents of Dryden, while he marches down the page, with his elephants and his standards and his kettle-drums, "in the full vintage of his flowing honours."

There must be something effeminate and feeble in the nervous system of a generation which cannot bear this grandiose music, this virile tramp of

Dryden's soldiers and camp-followers ; something singularly dull and timid in a spirit that rejects this robust intellectual companion. And, with all his russet suit of homespun, Dryden is imbued to the core with the truest and richest blood of poetry. His vehemence is positively Homeric ; we would not give *Mac Flecknoe* in exchange even for the lost *Margites*. He possesses in a high degree all the qualities which we have marked as needed for the attribution of greatness. He is original to that extent that mainly by his efforts the entire stream of English poetry was diverted for a century and a half into an unfamiliar channel ; he has an executive skill eminently his own, and is able to amaze us to-day after so many subsequent triumphs of verse-power ; he has distinction such as an emperor might envy ; and after all the poets of the eighteenth century have, as Mr. Lowell says, had their hands in his pockets, his best lines are as fresh and as magical as ever.

Pope I will not defend so warmly, and yet Pope also was a great poet. Two of my American critics, bent on refuting me, have severally availed themselves of a somewhat unexpected weapon. Each of them reminds me that Mr. Lang, in some recent number of a magazine, has said that Pope is

not a poet at all. Research might prove that this heresy is not entirely unparalleled, yet I am unconvinced. I yield to no one in respect and affection for Mr. Lang, but in criticising that with which he feels no personal sympathy, he is merely a "young light-hearted master of the oar" of temperament. When Mr. Lang blesses, the object is blest; when he curses, he may bless to-morrow. Some day he will find himself alone in a country-house with a Horace; old chords will be touched, the mystery of Pope will reveal itself to him, and we shall have a panegyric that will make Lady Mary writhe in her grave. Let no transatlantic, or cisatlantic, infidel of letters be profane at the expense of a classic by way of pleasing Mr. Lang; his next emotion is likely to be "*un sentiment obscur d'avoir embrassé la Chimère.*"

To justify one's confidence in the great poetic importance of Pope is somewhat difficult. It needs a fuller commentary and a longer series of references than can be given here. But let us recollect that the nature-worship and nature-study of to-day may grow to seem a complete fallacy, a sheer persistence in affectation, and that then, to readers of new tastes and passions, Wordsworth and Shelley will be as Pope is now, that is to say,

supported entirely by their individual merits. At this moment, to the crowd, he is doubtless less attractive than they are; he is on the shady side, they on the sunny side of fashion. But the author of the end of the second book of *The Rape of the Lock*, of the close of *The New Dunciad*, of the Sporus portrait, and of the *Third Moral Essay*, has qualities of imagination, applied to human character, and of distinction, applied to a formal and delicately-elaborated style, which are unsurpassed, even perhaps by Horace himself. Satirist after satirist has chirped like a wren from the head of Pope; where are they now? Where is the great, the terrific, the cloud-compelling Churchill? Meanwhile, in the midst of a generation persistently turned away from all his ideas and all his models, the clear voice of Pope still rings from the arena of Queen Anne.

After all, this is mere assertion, and what am I that I should pretend to lay down the law? If we seek, on the authority of whomsoever, to raise an infallible standard of taste, and to arrange the poets in classes, like schoolboys, then our inquiry is futile indeed, and worse than futile. But the interest which this controversy has undoubtedly called forth seems to prove that there is a side on

which such questions as have been started are not unwelcome nor unworthy of careful study. It is not useless, I fancy, to remind ourselves now and then of the very high standard which literature has a right to demand from its more earnest votaries. In the hurry of life, in the glare of passing interests, we are apt to lose breadth of sympathy, and to make our own personal and temporary enjoyment of a book the criterion of its value. I may take up Selden's *Titles of Honour*, turn over a page or two, and lay it down in favour of the new number of *Punch*. I must not for this reason pledge myself to placing the comic paper of to-day in a niche above the best work of a great Elizabethan prose writer. But when a modern American says that he finds better poetry in Longfellow than in Chaucer, he is doing, to a less exaggerated degree, precisely this very thing. He feels his contemporary sympathies and limited experience soothed and entertained by the facile numbers of *Evangeline*, and he does not extract an equal amount of amusement and pleasure from *The Knight's Tale*.

From one point of view it is very natural that this should be so, and a critic would be priggish indeed who should gravely reprove such a pre-

ference. The result would be, not to force the reader to Chaucer, but to drive him away from poetry altogether. The ordinary man reads what he finds gives him the pure and wholesome stimulus he needs. But if such a reader, in the pride of his heart, should take upon himself to dogmatise, and to tell us that Longfellow's poetry is better than Chaucer's, we should be obliged to remind him that there are several factors to be taken into account before he can carry us away with him on the neck of such a theory. He has to consider how long the charm of Chaucer has endured, and how short a time the world has had to make up its mind about Longfellow; he has to appreciate the relation of Chaucer to his own contemporaries, the boldness of his invasion into realms until his day unconquered, the inevitable influence of time in fretting, wasting, and blanching the surface of the masterpieces of the past. To be just, he has to consider the whirligig of literature, and to ask himself whether, in the year 2289, after successive revolutions of taste and repetitions of performance, the works of Longfellow are reasonably likely to possess the positive value which scholars, at all events, still find in those of Chaucer. Not until all these, and still more, irregularities of relative

position are taken into account, can the value of the elder and the later poet be lightly laid in opposite balances.

There has been no great disposition to produce English candidates for the places of any of my original dozen. The *Saturday Review* thinks that I ought to have included Walter Scott, and the *St. James's Gazette* suggests Marlowe. There is much to be said for the claims of each of these poets, and I am surprised that no one has put in a plea for Herrick or Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Of Marlowe, indeed, we can to this day write nothing better than Michael Drayton wrote :

*Marlowe, bathed in the Thespian springs,
Had in him those brave translunary things
That our first poets had; his raptures were
All air and fire, which made his verses clear;
For that fine madness still he did retain,
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.*

He had the freshness and splendour of Heosphoros, the bearer of light, the kindler of morning; as the dawn-star of our drama, he ascended the heavens, in the auroral flush of youth, to announce the approaching majesty of Shakespeare. But his early death, and the unexampled character of the

genius who superseded him, have for centuries obscured the name of Marlowe, which scintillated half-extinguished in the blaze of *Hamlet* and *Othello*. His reputation has, however, increased during the last generation with greater rapidity than that of any other of our elder poets, and a time may yet come when we shall have popularly isolated him from Shakespeare to such a degree as to enforce a recognition of his individual greatness. At the present moment to give him a place among the twelve might savour of affectation.

In the case of Scott, I must still be firm in positively excluding him, although his name is one of the most beloved in literature. The *Waverley Novels* form Scott's great claim to our reverence, and, save for the songs scattered through them, have nothing to say to us here. Scott's long narrative poems are really *Waverley Novels* told in easy, ambling verse, and to a great measure, I must confess, spoiled, I think, by such telling. For old memory's sake we enjoy them still,

*Full sore amaz'd at the wondrous change,
And frighten'd as a child might be
At the wild yell and visage strange,
And the dark words of gramarye;*

but the stuff is rather threadbare, surely. The best

passages are those in which, with skill not less than that of Milton, Scott marshals heroic lists of Highland proper names. Scott was a very genuine poet "within his own limitations," as has been said of another favourite, whose name I will not here repeat. His lyrics, of very unequal merit, are occasionally of wondrous beauty. I think it will be found, upon very careful study of his writings, that he published eight absolutely perfect lyrical pieces, and about as many more that were very good indeed. This is much, and to how few can so high a tribute be paid! Yet this is not quite sufficient claim to a place on the summits of English song. Scott was essentially a great prose-writer, with a singular facility in verse.

If this amiable controversy, started in the first instance at the request of the Editor of the *Forum*, has led us to examine a little more closely the basis of our literary convictions, and, above all, if it has led any of us to turn again to the fountain-heads of English literature, it has not been without its importance. One danger which I have long foreseen from the spread of the democratic sentiment, is that of the traditions of literary taste, the canons of literature, being reversed with success by a popular vote. Up to the present time, in all parts of the

world, the masses of uneducated or semi-educated persons, who form the vast majority of readers, though they cannot and do not appreciate the classics of their race, have been content to acknowledge their traditional supremacy. Of late there have seemed to me to be certain signs, especially in America, of a revolt of the mob against our literary masters. In the less distinguished American newspapers which reach me, I am sometimes startled by the boldness with which a great name, like Wordsworth's or Dryden's, will be treated with indignity. If literature is to be judged by a *plebiscite* and if the *plebs* recognises its power, it will certainly by degrees cease to support reputations which give it no pleasure and which it cannot comprehend. The revolution against taste, once begun, will land us in irreparable chaos. It is, therefore, high time that those who recognise that there is no help for us in literature outside the ancient laws and precepts of our profession, should vigorously support the fame of those fountains of inspiration, the impeccable masters of English.

MAKING A NAME IN LITERATURE

Making a Name in Literature

AN American editor has asked me to say how a literary reputation is formed. It is like asking one how wood is turned into gold, or how real diamonds can be manufactured. If I knew the answer, it is not in the pages of a review that I should print it. I should bury myself in a cottage in the woods, exercise my secret arts, and wait for Fame to turn her trumpet into a hunting-horn, and wake the forest-echoes with my praises. In one of Mr. Stockton's stories a princess sets all the wise men of her dominions searching for the lost secret of what root-beer should be made of. The philosophers fail to discover it, and the magicians exhaust their arts in vain. Not the slightest light is thrown on the abstruse problem, until at last an old woman is persuaded to reveal that it ought to be made of roots. In the same way, the only quite ob-

vious answer to the query, How should a literary reputation be formed? is to reply, By thinking nothing at all about reputation, but by writing earnestly and carefully on the subjects and in the style most congenial to your habits of mind. But this is too obvious, and leads to no further result. Besides, I see that the question is not, how should be, but how is, a literary reputation formed. I will endeavour, then, to give expression to such observations as I may have formed on this latter subject.

A literary reputation, as here intended, is obviously not the eternal fame of a Shakespeare, which appears likely to last for ever, nor even that of a Dickens, which must endure till there comes a complete revolution of taste, but the inferior form of repute which is enjoyed by some dozens of literary people in each generation, and makes a centre for the admiration or envy of the more enthusiastic or idler portion of their contemporaries. There is as much cant in denying the attractiveness of such temporary glory as there is in exaggerating its weight and importance. To stimulate the minds of those who surround him, to captivate their attention and excite their curiosity, is pleasing to the natural man. We

look with suspicion on the author who protests too loudly that he does not care whether he is admired or not. We shrewdly surmise that inwardly he cares very much indeed. This instinctive wish for reputation is one of the great incentives to literary exertion.

Fame and money—these are the two chief spurs which drive the author on. The statement may sound ignoble, and the writers of every generation persist in avowing that they write only to amuse themselves and to do good in their generation. The noble lady in *Lothair* wished that she might never eat, or if at all, only a little fruit by moonlight on a bank. She, nevertheless, was always punctual at her dinner; and the author who protests his utter indifference to money and reputation is commonly excessively sensitive when an attack is made on his claims in either direction. Literary reputation is relative, of course. There may be a village fame which does not burn very brightly in the country town, and provincial stars that look very pale in a great city. The circumstances, however, under which all the various degrees of fame are reached, are, I think, closely analogous, and what is true of the local celebrity is true, relatively, of a Victor Hugo or of a

Tennyson. The importance of the reputation is shown by the expanse of the area it covers, not by the curve of its advance. The circle of a great man's fame is extremely wide, but it only repeats on a vast scale the phenomena attending on the fame of a small man.

The three principal ways in which a literary reputation is formed appear to be these: reviews, private conversation among the leaders of opinion, and the instinctive attraction which leads the general public to discover for itself what is calculated to give it pleasure. I will briefly indicate the manner in which these three seem to act at the present moment on the formation of notoriety and its attendant success, in the case of English authors. First of all, it is not unworthy of note that reputation, or fame, and monetary success, are not identical, although the latter is frequently the satellite of the former. One extraordinary example of their occasional remoteness, which may be mentioned without impertinence on the authority of the author himself, is the position of Mr. Herbert Spencer. In any list of living Englishmen eminently distinguished for the originality and importance of their books, Mr. Spencer cannot fail to be ranked high. Yet, as

every student of his later work knows, he stated in the preface of one of those bald and inexpensive volumes in which he enshrines his thought, that up to a comparatively recent date the sale of his books did not cover the cost of their publication. This was the case of a man famous, it is not too much to say, in every civilised country in the globe.

In pure literature there is probably no second existing instance so flagrant as this. But, to take only a few of the most illustrious Englishmen of letters, it is matter of common notoriety that the sale of the books of, say, Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Leslie Stephen, the Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Stubbs) and Mr. Lecky, considerable as it may now have become, for a long time by no means responded to the lofty rank which each of these authors has taken in the esteem of educated people throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. The reverse is still more curious and unaccountable. Why is it that there are writers of no merit at all, who sell their books in thousands where people of genius sell theirs in scores, yet without ever making a reputation? At the time when Tupper was far more popular than Tennyson, and Eliza Cook enjoyed ten times

the commercial success of Browning, even the votaries of these poetasters did not claim a higher place for them, or even a high place at all. They bought their books because they liked them, but the buyers evidently did not imagine that purchase gave their temporary favourites any rank in the hierarchy of fame. These things are a mystery, but the distinction between commercial success and fame is one which must be drawn. We are speaking here of reputation, whether attended by vast sales or only by barren honour.

Reviews have no longer the power which they enjoyed seventy years ago, of making or even of marring the fortunes of a book. When there existed hundreds of private book clubs throughout the country, each one of which proceeded to buy a copy of whatever the *Edinburgh* recommended, then the reviewer was a great personage in the land. We may see in Lockhart's *Life of Scott* that Sir Walter, even at the height of his success, and when, as Ellis said, he was "the greatest elephant in the world" except himself, was seriously agitated by Jeffrey's cold review of *Marmion*, not through irritable peevishness, which was wholly foreign to Scott's magnanimous nature, but because a slighting review was enough to

cripple a book, and a slashing review to destroy it. There is nothing of this kind now. No newspaper exists in Great Britain which is able to sell an edition of a book by praising it. I doubt if any review, under the most favourable circumstances and coming from the most influential quarter, causes two hundred copies of a book to be bought. A signed article by Mr. Gladstone is, of course, an exception; yet some have doubted of late whether a book may not be found so inept and so heavy as not to stir even at the summons of that voice.

The reviews in the professional literary papers are still understood to be useful in the case of unknown writers. A young author without a friend, if he has merit, and above all if he has striking originality, is almost sure to attract the notice of some beneficent reviewer, and be praised in the columns of one or other of the leading weeklies. These are the circumstances under which the native kindness of the irritable race is displayed most freely. The envy which sees merit in a new man and determines to crush it with silence or malignant attack, is inhuman, and practically, I fancy, scarcely exists. The entirely unheard-of writer wounds no susceptibilities,

awakens no suspicions, and even excites a pleasurable warmth of patronage. It is a little later on, when the new man is quite new no longer, but is becoming a formidable rival, that evil passions are aroused, or sometimes seem to have been aroused, in pure literary bosoms. The most sincere reviews are often those which treat the works of unknown writers, and this is perhaps the reason why the shrewd public still permits itself to be moved by these when they are strongly favourable. At any rate, every new-comer must be introduced to our crowded public to be observed at all, and to new-comers the review is still the indispensable master of the ceremonies.

But the power of reviews to create this form of literary reputation has of late been greatly circumscribed. The public grows less and less the dupe of an anonymous judgment, expressed in the columns of one of the too-numerous organs of public opinion. A more *naïve* generation than ours was overawed by the nameless authority which moved behind a review. Ours, on the contrary, is apt to go too far, and pay no notice, because it does not know the name of a writer. The author who writhed under the humiliation of attack in a

famous paper, little suspected that his critic was one Snooks, an inglorious creature whose acquaintance with the matter under discussion was mainly taken from the book he was reviewing. But, on the other hand, there is that story of the writer of some compendium of Greek history severely handled anonymously by the *Athenæum*, whose scorn of the nameless critic gave way to horror and shame when he discovered him to have been no other than Mr. Grote. On the whole, when we consider the careful, learned, and judicial reviews which are still to be found, like grains of salt, in the vast body of insipid criticism in the newspapers, it may be held that the public pays less attention to the reviews than it should. The fact seems to remain that, except in the case of entirely unknown writers, periodical criticism possesses an ever-dwindling power of recommendation.

It is in conversation that the fame of the best books is made. There are certain men and women in London who are on the outlook for new merit, who are supposed to be hard to please, and whose praise is like rubies. It is those people who, in the smoking-room of the club, or across the dinner-table, create the fame of writers and the success of new books. "Seen *Polyanthus*?" says one of

these peripatetic oracles. "No," you answer; "I am afraid I don't know what *Polyanthus* is." "Well, it's not half bad; it's this new realistic romance." "Indeed! By whom is it written?" "Oh! a fellow called—called Binks, I think—Binks or Bunks; quite a new man. You ought to see it, don't you know." Some one far down the table ventures to say, "Oh! I think it was the *Palladium* said on Saturday that it wasn't a good book at all, awfully abnormal, or something of that kind." "Well, you look at it; I think you'll agree with me that it's not half bad." Such a conversation as this, if held in a fructifying spot among the best people, does *Polyanthus* more good than a favourable review. It excites curiosity, and echoes of the praise ("not half bad" is at the present moment the most fulsome of existing expressions of London enthusiasm) reverberate and reverberate until the fortune of the book is made. At the same time, be it for ever remembered, there must be in *Polyanthus* the genuine force and merit which appeal to an impartial judge and convert reader after reader, or else vainly does the friendly oracle try to raise the wind. He betrays himself, most likely, by using the expression, "a very fine book," or "beautifully written." These phrases have a

falsetto air, and lack the persuasive sincerity of the true modern eulogium, "not half bad."

But there are reputations formed in other places than in London dining-rooms and the libraries of clubs. There are certain books which are not welcomed by the reviews, and which fail to please or even to meet the eye of experts in literature, which nevertheless, by some strange and unaccountable attraction, become known to the outer public, and are eagerly accepted by a very wide circle of readers. I am not aware that the late Mr. Roe was ever a favourite with the writing or speaking critics of America. He achieved his extraordinary success not by the aid, but in spite of the neglect and disapproval of the lettered classes. I have no close acquaintance with Mr. Roe's novels, but I know them well enough to despair of discovering why they were found to be so eminently welcome to thousands of readers. So far as I have examined them, they have appeared to me to be—if I may speak frankly—neither good enough nor bad enough to account for their popularity. It is not that I am such a prig as to disdain Mr. Roe's honourable industry; far from it. But his books are lukewarm; they have neither the heat of a rich insight into character, nor the deathly coldness of false or

insincere fiction. They are not ill-constructed, although they certainly are not well-constructed. It is their lack of salient character that makes me wonder what enabled them to float where scores and scores of works not appreciably worse or better than they have sunk.

Most countries possess at any given moment an author of this class. In England we have the lady who signs her eminently reputable novels by the pseudonym of "Edna Lyall." I do not propose to say what the lettered person thinks of the author of *Donovan*; I would only point out that the organs of literary opinion do not recognise her existence. I cannot recollect ever noticing a prominent review of one of her books in any leading paper. I never heard them so much as mentioned by any critical reader. To find out something about "Edna Lyall" I have just consulted the latest edition of *Men of the Time*, but she is unknown to that not excessively austere compendium. And now for the reverse of the medal. I lately requested the mistress of a girls' school, a friend of mine, to ask her elder classes to write down the name of the greatest English author. The universal answer was "Shakespeare." What could be more respectable? But the second

question was, "Who is your favourite English author?" And this time, by a large majority, Edna Lyall bore off the bell.

I think this amiable lady may be consoled for the slight which *Men of the Time* puts upon her. It seems plain that she is a very great personage indeed to all the girls of the time. But if you ask me how such a subterranean reputation as this is formed, what starts it, how it is supported, I can only say I have failed, after some not unindustrious search, to discover. I may but conjecture that, as I have suggested, the public instinctively feels the attraction of the article that satisfies its passing requirement. These illiterate successes—if I may use the word "illiterate" in its plain meaning and without offence—are exceedingly ephemeral, and sink into the ground as silently and rapidly as they rose from it. What has become of Mrs. Gore and Mrs. March? Who wrote *Emilia Wyndham*, and to what elegant pen did the girls who are now grandmothers owe *Ellen Middleton*? Alas! it has taken only forty years to strew the poppy of oblivion over these once thrilling titles.

For we have to face the fact that reputations are lost as well as won. What destroys the fame of an accepted author? This, surely, is a question

not less interesting than that with which we started, and a necessary corollary to it. Not unfavourable reviews, certainly. An unjust review may annoy and depress the author, it may cheer a certain number of his enemies and cool the ardour of a few of his friends, but in the long run it is sure to be innocuous in proportion to its injustice. I have in my mind the mode in which Mr. Browning's poems were treated in certain quarters twenty years ago. I remember more than one instance in which critics were permitted, in newspapers which ought to have known better, to exemplify that charge of needless obscurity which it was then the fashion to bring against the poet, by the quotation of mutilated fragments, and even by the introduction of absurd mistakes into the transcription of the text. Now, in this case, a few persons were possibly deterred from the further perusal of a writer who appeared, by these excerpts, to be a lunatic; but I think far more were roused into vehement sympathy for Mr. Browning by comparing the quotations with the originals, and so finding out that the reviewers had lied.

It rests with the author, not the critic, to destroy his own reputation. No one, as Bentley said, was ever written down except by himself, and the public

is quite shrewd enough to do a rough sort of justice to the critic who accuses as well as to the author who is arraigned. As Dangle observes, "it certainly does hurt an author of delicate feelings to see the liberties the reviews take" with his writings; but if he is worth his salt at all, he will comfort himself by thinking, with Sir Fretful, that "their abuse is, after all, the best panegyric." To an author who is smarting under a more than common infliction of this kind of peppering, one consolatory consideration may be hinted—namely, that not to be spoken about at all is even worse than being maligned.

One of the most insidious perils that waylay the modern literary life is an exaggerated success at the outset of a career. A very remarkable instance of this has been seen in our time. Thirteen years ago a satire was published, which, although essentially destructive, and therefore not truly promising, was set forth with so much novelty of execution, brightness of wit, and variety of knowledge that the world was taken by storm. The author of that work was received with plaudits of the most exaggerated kind, and his second book was looked forward to with unbounded anticipation. It came, and though fresh and witty, it had

less distinction, less vitality than the first. Book after book has marked ever a further step in steady decline, and now that once flattered and belauded writer's name is one no more to conjure with. This, surely, is a pathetic fate. I can imagine no form of failure so desperately depressing as that which comes disguised in excessive juvenile success. In literature, at least as much as in other professions, the race is not to the swift, although the battle must eventually be to the strong. There is a blossoming, like that of forced annuals, which pays for its fulness and richness by a plague of early sterility.

What the young writer of wholesome ambition should pray for is, not to flash like a meteor on the astonished world of fashion, but by solid and admirable writing slowly to win a place which has a firm and wide basis. There is such a fate as to suffer through life from the top-heaviness of an initial success. Such a struggle as Thackeray's may be painful at the time, and may call for the exercise of a great deal of patience and good temper. It is, nevertheless, a better thing in the long run to serve a novitiate in Grub Street, than, like Samuel Warren, to be famous at thirty, and die almost forgotten at

seventy. There is a deadly tendency in the mind which too easily has found others captivated by his effusions, to fancy that anything is good enough for the public. A precocious favourite conceives that he has only to whistle and the world will at any moment come back to him. The soldier who meets with no resistance throws aside his armour and relaxes his ambition. He forgets that, as Andrew Marvell says :

*The same art that did gain
A power, must it maintain.*

Some danger to a partially established reputation is to be met with from the fickleness of public taste and the easy satiety of readers. If an imaginative writer has won the attention of the public by a vigorous and original picture of some unhackneyed scene of life which is thoroughly familiar to himself, he is apt to find himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he turns to a new class of subjects, the public which has already "placed" him as an authority on a particular subject, will be disappointed ; on the other hand, if he sticks to his last, he runs the chance of fatiguing his readers and of exhausting his own impressions. For such an author, ultimate success probably lies on the side of courage. He

must reject the temptation to indulge the public with what he knows it wants, and must boldly force it to like another and still unrecognised phase of his talent. He ought, however, to make very sure that he is right, and not his readers, before he insists upon a change. It is not every one who possesses the versatility of the first Lord Lytton, and can conquer new worlds under a pseudonym at the age of fifty. There are plenty of instances of men of letters who, weary of being praised for what they did well, have tried to force down the throats of the public what everybody but themselves could see was ill-done. I remember Hans Christian Andersen, in the last year of his life, telling me that the books he should really be remembered by were his dramas and his novels, not the fairy-stories that everybody persisted in making so much fuss about. He had gone through life without gaining the least skill in gauging his own strength or weakness. Andersen, however, was exceptionally uncritical; and the author who is not blinded by vanity can generally tell, before he reaches middle life, in what his real power consists.

Yet, when we sum up the whole question, we have to confess that we know very little about the causes which lead to the distribution of public praise.

The wind of fame bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound of it without knowing whence it cometh. This, however, appears to be certain, that, except in the case of those rare authors of exceptionally sublime genius who conquer attention by their force of originality, a great deal more than mere cleverness in writing is needful to make a reputation. Sagacity in selection, tact in dealing with other people, suppleness of character, rapidity in appreciation, and adroitness in action—all these are qualities which go to the formation of a broad literary reputation. In these days an author must be wide awake, and he must take a vast deal of trouble. The age is gone by when he could sit against the wall and let the gooseberries fall into his mouth. The increased pressure of competition tells upon the literary career as much as upon any other branch of professional life, and the author who wishes to continue to succeed must keep his loins girded.

THE LIMITS OF REALISM IN FICTION

The Limits of Realism in Fiction

IN the last new Parisian farce, by M. Sarcey's clever young son-in-law, there is a conscientious painter of the realistic school who is preparing for the Salon a very serious and abstruse production. The young lady of his heart says, at length: "It's rather a melancholy subject; I wonder you don't paint a sportsman, crossing a rustic bridge, and meeting a pretty girl." This is the climax, and the artist breaks off his relations with Young Lady No. 1. Toward the end of the play, while he is still at work on his picture, Young Lady No. 2 says: "If I were you, I should take another subject. Now, for instance, why don't you paint a pretty girl, crossing a rustic bridge, and met by a sportsman?"

This is really an allegory, whether M. Gandillot intends it or not. Thus have those charming, fresh, ingenuous, ignorant, and rather stupid

young ladies, the English and American publics, received the attempts which novelists have made to introduce among them what is called, outside the Anglo-Saxon world, the experimental novel. The present writer is no defender of that class of fiction ; least of all is he an exclusive defender of it ; but he is tired to death of the criticism on both sides of the Atlantic, which refuses to see what the realists are, whither they are tending, and what position they are beginning to hold in the general evolution of imaginative literature. He is no great lover of what they produce, and most certainly does not delight in their excesses ; but when they are advised to give up their studies and paint pretty girls on rustic bridges, he is almost stung into partisanship. The present essay will have no interest whatever for persons who approve of no more stringent investigation into conduct than Miss Yonge's, and enjoy no action nearer home than Zambeziland ; but to those who have perceived that in almost every country in the world the novel of manners has been passing through a curious phase, it may possibly not be uninteresting to be called upon to inquire what the nature of that phase has been, and still more what is to be the outcome of it.

So far as the Anglo-Saxon world is concerned, the experimental or realistic novel is mainly to be studied in America, Russia, and France. It exists now in all the countries of the European Continent, but we know less about its manifestations there. It has had no direct development in England, except in the clever but imperfect stories of Mr. George Moore. Ten years ago the realistic novel, or at all events the naturalist school, out of which it proceeded, was just beginning to be talked about, and there was still a good deal of perplexity, outside Paris, as to its scope and as to the meaning of its name. Russia, still unexplored by the Vicomte de Vogüé and his disciples, was represented to western readers solely by Turgénéff, who was a great deal too romantic to be a pure naturalist. In America, where now almost every new writer of merit seems to be a realist, there was but one, Mr. Henry James, who, in 1877, had inaugurated the experimental novel in the English language, with his *American*. Mr. Howells, tending more and more in that direction, was to write on for several years before he should produce a thoroughly realistic novel.

Ten years ago, then, the very few people who take an interest in literary questions were looking

with hope or apprehension, as the case might be, to Paris, and chiefly to the study of M. Zola. It was from the little villa at Médan that revelation on the subject of the coming novel was to be awaited; and in the autumn of 1880 the long-expected message came, in the shape of the grotesque, violent, and narrow, but extremely able volume of destructive and constructive criticism called *Le Roman Expérimental*. People had complained that they did not know what M. Zola was driving at; that they could not recognise a "naturalistic" or "realistic" book when they saw it; that the "scientific method" in fiction, the "return to nature," "experimental observation" as the basis of a story, were mere phrases to them, vague and incomprehensible. The Sage of Médan determined to remove the objection and explain everything. He put his speaking-trumpet to his lips, and, disdainful to address the crassness of his countrymen, he shouted his system of rules and formulas to the Russian public, that all the world might hear.

In 1880 he had himself proceeded far. He had published the Rougon-Macquart series of his novels, as far as *Une Page d'Amour*. He has added since then six or seven novels to the bulk of his works, and he has published many forcible and

fascinating and many repulsive pages. But since 1880 he has not altered his method or pushed on to any further development. He had already displayed his main qualities—his extraordinary mixture of versatility and monotony, his enduring force, his plentiful lack of taste, his cynical disdain for the weaknesses of men, his admirable constructive power, his inability to select the salient points in a vast mass of observations. He had already shown himself what I must take the liberty of saying that he appears to me to be—one of the leading men of genius in the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the strongest novelists of the world; and that in spite of faults so serious and so eradicable that they would have hopelessly wrecked a writer a little less overwhelming in strength and resource.

Zola seems to me to be the Vulcan among our later gods, afflicted with moral lameness from his birth, and coming to us sooty and brutal from the forge, yet as indisputably divine as any Mercury-Hawthorne or Apollo-Thackeray of the best of them. It is to Zola, and to Zola only, that the concentration of the scattered tendencies of naturalism is due. It is owing to him that the threads of Flaubert and Daudet, Dostoiefsky and

Tolstoi, Howells and Henry James can be drawn into anything like a single system. It is Zola who discovered a common measure for all these talents, and a formula wide enough and yet close enough to distinguish them from the outside world and bind them to one another. It is his doing that for ten years the experimental novel has flowed in a definite channel, and has not spread itself abroad in a thousand whimsical directions.

To a serious critic, then, who is not a partisan, but who sees how large a body of carefully composed fiction the naturalistic school has produced, it is of great importance to know what is the formula of M. Zola. He has defined it, one would think, clearly enough, but to see it intelligently repeated is rare indeed. It starts from the negation of fancy—not of imagination, as that word is used by the best Anglo-Saxon critics, but of fancy—the romantic and rhetorical elements that novelists have so largely used to embroider the home-spun fabric of experience with. It starts with the exclusion of all that is called “ideal,” all that is not firmly based on the actual life of human beings, all, in short, that is grotesque, unreal, nebulous, or didactic. I do not understand Zola to condemn the romantic writers of the past; I do not think he has spoken

of Dumas *père* or of George Sand as Mr. Howells has allowed himself to speak of Dickens. He has a phrase of contempt—richly deserved, it appears to me—for the childish evolution of Victor Hugo's plots, and in particular of that of *Notre Dame de Paris*; but, on the whole, his aim is rather to determine the outlines of a new school than to attack the recognised masters of the past. If it be not so, it should be so; there is room in the Temple of Fame for all good writers, and it does not blast the laurels of Walter Scott that we are deeply moved by Dostoiefsky.

With Zola's theory of what the naturalistic novel should be, it seems impossible at first sight to quarrel. It is to be contemporary; it is to be founded on and limited by actual experience; it is to reject all empirical modes of awakening sympathy and interest; its aim is to place before its readers living beings, acting the comedy of life as naturally as possible. It is to trust to principles of action and to reject formulas of character; to cultivate the personal expression; to be analytical rather than lyrical; to paint men as they are, not as you think they should be. There is no harm in all this. There is not a word here that does not apply to the chiefs of one of the two great

parallel schools of English fiction. It is hard to conceive of a novelist whose work is more experimental than Richardson. Fielding is personal and analytical above all things. If France counts George Sand among its romanticists, we can point to a realist who is greater than she, in Jane Austen. There is not a word to be found in M. Zola's definitions of the experimental novel that is not fulfilled in the pages of *Emma*; which is equivalent to saying that the most advanced realism may be practised by the most innocent as well as the most captivating of novelists. Miss Austen did not observe over a wide area, but within the circle of her experience she disguised nothing, neglected nothing, glossed over nothing. She is the perfection of the realistic ideal, and there ought to be a statue of her in the vestibule of the forthcoming Académie des Goncourts. Unfortunately, the lives of her later brethren have not been so sequestered as hers, and they, too, have thought it their duty to neglect nothing and to disguise nothing.

It is not necessary to repeat here the rougher charges which have been brought against the naturalist school in France—charges which in mitigated form have assailed their brethren in Russia and

America. On a carefully reasoned page in the copy of M. Zola's essay *Du Roman* which lies before me, one of those idiots who write in public books has scribbled the remark, "They see nothing in life but filth and crime." This ignoble wielder of the pencil but repeats what more ambitious critics have been saying in solemn terms for the last fifteen years. Even as regards Zola himself, as the author of the delicate comedy of *La Conquête de Plassans*, and the moving tragedy of *Une Page d'Amour*, this charge is utterly false, and in respect of the other leaders it is simply preposterous. None the less, there are sides upon which the naturalistic novelists are open to serious criticism in practice. It is with no intention of underrating their eminent qualities that I suggest certain points at which, as it appears to me, their armour is conspicuously weak. There are limits to realism, and they seem to have been readily discovered by the realists themselves. These weak points are to be seen in the jointed harness of the strongest book that the school has yet produced in any country, *Le Crime et le Châtiment*.

When the ideas of Zola were first warmly taken up, about ten years ago, by the most

earnest and sympathetic writers who then were young, the theory of the experimental novel seemed unassailable, and the range within which it could be worked to advantage practically boundless. But the fallacies of practice remained to be experienced, and looking back upon what has been written by the leaders themselves, the places where the theory has broken down are patent. It may not be uninteresting to take up the leading dogmas of the naturalistic school, and to see what elements of failure, or, rather, what limitations to success, they contained. The outlook is very different in 1890 from what it was in 1880; and a vast number of exceedingly clever writers have laboured to no avail, if we are not able at the latter date to gain a wider perspective than could be obtained at the earlier one.

Ten years ago, most ardent and generous young authors, outside the frontiers of indifferent Albion, were fired with enthusiasm at the results to be achieved by naturalism in fiction. It was to be the Revealer and the Avenger. It was to display society as it is, and to wipe out all the hypocrisies of convention. It was to proceed from strength to strength. It was to place all imagination upon a scientific basis, and to open boundless vistas

to sincere and courageous young novelists. We have seen with what ardent hope and confidence its principles were accepted by Mr. Howells. We have seen all the Latin races, in their coarser way, embrace and magnify the system. We have seen Zola, like a heavy father in high comedy, bless a budding generation of novel-writers, and prophesy that they will all proceed further than he along the road of truth and experiment. Yet the naturalistic school is really less advanced, less thorough, than it was ten years ago. Why is this ?

It is doubtless because the strain and stress of production have brought to light those weak places in the formula which were not dreamed of. The first principle of the school was the exact reproduction of life. But life is wide, and it is elusive. All that the finest observer can do is to make a portrait of one corner of it. By the confession of the master-spirit himself, this portrait is not to be a photograph. It must be inspired by imagination, but sustained and confined by the experience of reality. It does not appear at first sight as though it should be difficult to attain this, but in point of fact it is found almost impossible to approach this species of perfection.

The result of building up a long work on this principle is, I hardly know why, to produce the effect of a reflection in a convex mirror. The more accurately experimental some parts of the picture are, the more will the want of balance and proportion in other parts be felt. I will take at random two examples. No better work in the naturalistic direction has been done than is to be found in the beginning of M. Zola's *La Joie de Vivre*, or in the early part of the middle of Mr. James's *Bostonians*. The life in the melancholy Norman house upon the cliff, the life among the uncouth fanatic philanthropists in the American city, these are given with a reality, a brightness, a personal note which have an electrical effect upon the reader. But the remainder of each of these remarkable books, built up as they are with infinite toil by two of the most accomplished architects of fiction now living, leaves on the mind a sense of a strained reflection, of images blurred or malformed by a convexity of the mirror. As I have said, it is difficult to account for this, which is a feature of blight on almost every specimen of the experimental novel; but perhaps it can in a measure be accounted for by the inherent disproportion

which exists between the small flat surface of a book and the vast arch of life which it undertakes to mirror, those studies being least liable to distortion which reflect the smallest section of life, and those in which ambitious masters endeavour to make us feel the mighty movements of populous cities and vast bodies of men being the most inevitably misshapen.

Another leading principle of the naturalists is the disinterested attitude of the narrator. He who tells the story must not act the part of Chorus, must not praise or blame, must have no favourites ; in short, must not be a moralist but an anatomist. This excellent and theoretical law has been a snare in practice. The nations of continental Europe are not bound down by conventional laws to the same extent as we English are. The Anglo-Saxon race is now the only one that has not been touched by that pessimism of which the writings of Schopenhauer are the most prominent and popular exponent. This fact is too often overlooked when we scornfully ask why the foreign nations allow themselves so great a latitude in the discussion of moral subjects. It is partly, no doubt, because of our beautiful Protestant institutions ; because we go to Sunday-schools and take a lively interest in the souls of other people ; because,

in short, we are all so virtuous and godly, that our novels are so prim and decent. But it is also partly because our hereditary dulness in perceiving delicate ethical distinctions has given the Anglo-Saxon race a tendency to slur over the dissonances between man and nature. This tendency does not exist among the Latin races, who run to the opposite extreme and exaggerate these discords. The consequence has been that they have, almost without exception, being betrayed by the disinterested attitude into a contemplation of crime and frailty (notoriously more interesting than innocence and virtue) which has given bystanders excuse for saying that these novelists are lovers of that which is evil. In the same way they have been tempted by the Rembrandtesque shadows of pain, dirt, and obloquy to overdash their canvases with the subfusc hues of sentiment. In a word, in trying to draw life evenly and draw it whole, they have introduced such a brutal want of tone as to render the portrait a caricature. The American realists, who were guarded by fashion from the Scylla of brutality, have not wholly escaped, on their side and for the same reason, the Charybdis of insipidity.

It would take us too far, and would require a constant reference to individual books, to trace the weaknesses of the realistic school of our own day.

Human sentiment has revenged itself upon them for their rigid regulations and scientific formulas, by betraying them into faults the possibility of which they had not anticipated. But above all other causes of their limited and temporary influence, the most powerful has been the material character which their rules forced upon them, and their excess of positivism and precision. In eliminating the grotesque and the rhetorical they drove out more than they wished to lose; they pushed away with their scientific pitchfork the fantastic and intellectual elements. How utterly fatal this was may be seen, not in the leaders, who have preserved something of the reflected colour of the old romance, but in those earnest disciples who have pushed the theory to its extremity. In their sombre, grimy, and dreary studies in pathology, clinical bulletins of a soul dying of atrophy, we may see what the limits of realism are, and how impossible it is that human readers should much longer go on enjoying this sort of literary aliment.

If I have dwelt upon these limitations, however, it has not been to cast a stone at the naturalistic school. It has been rather with the object of clearing away some critical misconceptions about the future development of it. Anglo-Saxon criticism of the perambulating species might, perhaps, be persuaded

to consider the realists with calmer judgment, if it looked upon them, not as a monstrous canker that was slowly spreading its mortal influence over the whole of literature, which it would presently overwhelm and destroy, but as a natural and timely growth, taking its due place in the succession of products, and bound, like other growths, to bud and blossom and decline. I venture to put forth the view that the novel of experiment has had its day; that it has been made the vehicle of some of the loftiest minds of our age; that it has produced a huge body of fiction, none of it perfect, perhaps, much of it bad, but much of it, also, exceedingly intelligent, vivid, sincere, and durable; and that it is now declining, to leave behind it a great memory, the prestige of persecution, and a library of books which every highly educated man in the future will be obliged to be familiar with.

It would be difficult, I think, for any one but a realistic novelist to overrate the good that realism in fiction has done. It has cleared the air of a thousand follies, has pricked a whole fleet of oratorical bubbles. Whatever comes next, we cannot return, in serious novels, to the inanities and impossibilities of the old "well-made" plot, to the children changed at nurse, to the madonna

heroine and the god-like hero, to the impossible virtues and melodramatic vices. In future, even those who sneer at realism and misrepresent it most wilfully, will be obliged to put in their effects in ways more in accord with veritable experience. The public has eaten of the apple of knowledge, and will not be satisfied with mere marionettes. There will still be novel-writers who address the gallery, and who will keep up the gaudy old convention and the clumsy *Family Herald* evolution, but they will no longer be distinguished people of genius. They will no longer sign themselves George Sand and Charles Dickens.

In the meantime, wherever I look I see the novel ripe for another reaction. The old leaders will not change. It is not to be expected that they will write otherwise than in the mode which has grown mature with them. But in France, among the younger men, every one is escaping from the realistic formula. The two young athletes for whom M. Zola predicted ten years ago an "experimental" career more profoundly scientific than his own, are realists no longer. M. Guy de Maupassant has become a psychologist, and M. Huysmans a mystic. M. Bourget, who set all the ladies dancing after his ingenious, musky books,

never has been a realist ; nor has Pierre Loti, in whom, with a fascinating freshness, the old exiled romanticism comes back with a laugh and a song. All points to a reaction in France ; and in Russia, too, if what we hear is true, the next step will be one toward the mystical and the introspective. In America it would be rash for a foreigner to say what signs of change are evident. The time has hardly come when we look to America for the symptoms of literary initiative. But it is my conviction that the limits of realism have been reached ; that no great writer who has not already adapted the experimental system will do so ; and that we ought now to be on the outlook to welcome (and, of course, to persecute) a school of novelists with a totally new aim, part of whose formula must unquestionably be a concession to the human instinct for mystery and beauty.

1890.

IS VERSE IN DANGER?

Is Verse in Danger ?

WE are passing through a period obviously unfavourable to the development of the art of poetry. A little while ago there was an outburst of popular appreciation of living verse, but this is now replaced, for the moment, by an almost ostentatious indifference. These alternations of curiosity and disdain deceive no one who looks at the history of literature with an eye which is at all philosophical. It is easy to say, as is commonly said, that they depend on the merit of the poetry which is being produced. But this is not always, or even often, the case. About twenty years ago a ferment of interest and enthusiasm was called forth, all over the English-speaking world, by the early writings of Mr. Swinburne and by those of the late Mr. Rossetti. This was deserved by the merit of those productions ; but the disdain which, twenty years earlier,

the verse of Mr. Robert Browning and Mr. Matthew Arnold had met with, cannot be so accounted for. It is wiser to admit that sons never look at life with their fathers' eyes, and that taste is subject to incessant and almost regular fluctuations. At the present moment, though men should sing with the voice of angels, the barbarian public would not listen, and a new Milton would probably be less warmly welcomed in 1890 than a Pomfret was two centuries ago or a Bowles was in 1790. Literary history shows that a demand for poetry does not always lead to a supply, and that a supply does not always command a market. He who doubts this fact may compare the success of Herrick with that of Erasmus Darwin.

The only reason for precluding a speculation on the future of the art of poetry with these remarks, is to clear the ground of any arguments based on the merely momentary condition of things. The eagerness or coldness of the public, the fertility or exhaustion of the poets, at this particular juncture, are elements of no real importance. If poetry is to continue to be one of the living arts of humanity, it does not matter an iota whether poetry is looked upon with contempt by the members of a single generation. If poetry is declining, and, as a matter

of fact, is now moribund, the immense vogue of Tennyson at a slightly earlier period will take its place among the insignificant phenomena of a momentary reaction. The problem is a more serious one. It is this : Is poetry, in its very essence, an archaic and rudimentary form of expression, still galvanised into motion, indeed, by antiquarianism, but really obsolete and therefore to be cultivated only at the risk of affectation and insincerity ; or is it an art capable of incessant renovation—a living organism which grows, on the whole, with the expansion of modern life ? In other words, is the art of verse one which, like music or painting, delights and consoles us with a species of expression which can never be superseded, because it is in danger of no direct rivalry from a similar species ; or was poetry merely the undeveloped, though in itself the extremely beautiful, infancy of a type which is now adult, and which has relinquished its charming puerilities for a mode of expression infinitely wider and of more practical utility ? Sculptors, singers, painters must always exist ; but need we have poets any longer, since the world has discovered how to say all it wants to say in prose ? Will any one who has anything of importance to communicate be likely in the future

to express it through the medium of metrical language ?

These questions are not to be dismissed with a smile. A large number of thoughtful persons at the present time are, undoubtedly, disposed to answer them in the affirmative, although a certain decency forbids them openly to say so. Plenty of clever people secretly regard the Muse as a distinguished old lady, of good family, who has been a beauty and a wit in her day, but who really rules only by sufferance in these years of her decline. They whisper that she is sinking into second childhood, that she repeats herself when she converses, and that she has exchanged her early liberal tastes for a love of what is puerile, ingenious, and "finikin." A great Parisian critic has just told us that each poet is read only by the other poets, and he gives as the reason that the art of verse has become so refined and so elaborate that it passes over the heads of the multitude. But may it not be that this refinement is only a decrepitude—the amusement of an old age that has sunk to the playing of more and more helplessly ingenious games of patience ? That is what those hint who, more insidious by far than the open enemies of literature, suggest that poetry has had

its reign, its fascinating and imperial tyranny, and that it must now make way for the democracy of prose.

Probably there would have been no need to face this question, either in this generation or for many generations to come, if it had not been for a single circumstance. The great enemies of the poets of the present are the poets of the past, and the antiquarian spirit of the nineteenth century has made the cessation of the publication of fresh verse a possibility. The intellectual condition of our times differs from that of all preceding ages in no other point so much as in its attitude toward the writings of the dead. In those periods of renovation which have refreshed the literatures of the world, the tendency has always been to study some one class of deceased writers with affection. In English history, we have seen the romantic poets of Italy, the dramatists of Spain, the Latin satirists, and the German ballad-mongers, exercise, at successive moments, a vivid influence on English writers. But this study was mainly limited to those writers themselves, and did not extend to the circle of their readers; while even with the writers it never absorbed at a single moment the whole range of poetry. We may take one instance.

Pope was the disciple of Horace and of the French Jesuits, of Dryden and of the conceit-creating school of Donne. But he was able to use Boileau and Crashaw so freely because he addressed a public that had never met with the first and had forgotten the second ; and when he passed outside this narrow circle he was practically without a rival. To the class whom he addressed, Shakespeare and Milton were phantoms, Chaucer and Spenser not so much as names. The only doubt was whether Alexander Pope was man enough to arrest attention by the intrinsic merits of his poetry. If his verse was admitted to be good, his public were not distracted by a preference for other verse which they had known for a longer time.

This remained true until about a generation ago. The great romantic poets of the beginning of this century found the didactic and rhetorical verse-writers of the eighteenth century in possession of the field, but they found no one else there. Their action was of the nature of a revolt—a revolution so successful that it became constitutional. All that Wordsworth and Keats had to do was to prove their immediate predecessors to be unworthy of public attention, and when once they had per-

suaded the reading world that what they had to offer was more pleasing than what Young and Churchill and Darwin had offered, the revolution was complete. But, in order to draw attention to the merits of the proposed change, the romantic poets of the Georgian age pointed to the work of the writers of the Elizabethan age, whom they claimed as their natural predecessors—the old stock cast out at the Restoration and now reinstated. The public had entirely forgotten the works of these writers, except to some extent those of the dramatists, and it became necessary to reprint them. A whole galaxy of poetic stars was revealed when the cloud of prejudice was blown away, and a class of dangerous rivals to the modern poet was introduced.

The activity of the dead is now paramount, and threatens to paralyse original writing altogether. The revival of the old poets who were in direct sympathy with Keats and Wordsworth has extended far beyond the limits which those who inaugurated it desired to lay down. Every poetic writer of any age precedent to our own has now a chance of popularity, often a very much better chance than he possessed during his own lifetime. Scarcely a poet, from Chaucer downward, remains inedited.

The imitative lyrist who, in a paroxysm of inspiration, wrote one good sonnet under the sway of James I., but was never recognised as a poet even by his friends, rejoices now in a portly quarto, and lives for the first time. The order of nature is reversed, and those who were only ghosts in the seventeenth century come back to us clothed in literary vitality.

In this great throng of resuscitated souls, all of whom have forfeited their copyright, how is the modern poet to exist? He has no longer to compete—as “his great forefathers did, from Homer down to Ben”—with the leading spirits of his own generation, but with the picked genius of the world. He writes an epic; Mr. Besant and the Society of Authors oblige him to “retain his rights,” to “publish at a royalty,” and to keep the rules of the game. But Milton has no rights and demands no royalty. The new poet composes lyrics and publishes them in a volume. They are sincere and ingenious; but why should the reader buy that volume, when he can get the best of Shelley and Coleridge, of Gray and Marvell, in a cheaper form in *The Golden Treasury*? At every turn the thronging company of the ghosts impedes and disheartens the modern writer, and it is no wonder

if the new Orpheus throws down his lyre in despair when the road to his desire is held by such an invincible army of spectres. In the golden age of the Renaissance an enthusiast is said to have offered up a manuscript by Martial every year, as a burnt sacrifice to Catullus, an author whom he distinctly preferred. The modern poet, if he were not afraid of popular censure, might make a yearly holocaust of editions of the British classics, in honour of the Genius of Poetry. There are many enemies of the art abroad, but among them all the most powerful and insidious are those of its own household. The poets of to-day might contrive to fish the murex up, and to eat turtle, if it were not for the intolerable rivalry of "souls of poets dead and gone."

On the whole, however, it is highly unlikely that the antiquarian passion of our age will last. Already it gives signs of wearing out, and it will probably be succeeded by a spirit of unreasonable intolerance of the past. Intellectual invention will not allow itself to be pinioned for ever by these soft and universal cords of tradition, each as slight as gossamer in itself, but overwhelming in the immense mass. As for the old poets, young verse-writers may note with glee that these

rivals of theirs are being caught in the butterfly net of education, where they will soon find the attractive feathers rubbed off their wings. One by one they pass into text-books and are lost. Chaucer is done for, and so is Milton; Goldsmith is annotated, Scott is prepared for "local examinations," and even Byron, the loose, the ungrammatical, is edited as a school book. The noble army of extension lecturers will scarcely pause in their onward march. We shall see Wordsworth captured, Shelley boiled down for the use of babes, and Keats elaborately annotated, with his blunders in classical mythology exposed. The schoolmaster is the only friend the poet of the future dares to look to, for he alone has the power to destroy the loveliness and mystery which are the charm of the old poets. Even a second-rate verse-writer may hope to live by the side of an Elizabethan poet edited for the Clarendon Press.

This remedy may, however, be considered fantastic, and it would scarcely be wise to trust to it. There is, nevertheless, nothing ironical in the statement that an exaggerated attention paid to historical work leaves no time and no appetite for what contemporaries produce. The neglect of poetry is so widespread that if the very small

residuum of love of verse is expended lavishly on the dead, the living are likely to come off badly indeed. The other arts, which can better defend themselves, are experiencing the same sense of being starved by the old masters. The bulk of the public neither buys books nor invests in pictures, nor orders statuary according to its own taste, but according to the fashion; and if the craze is antiquarian, we may produce Raphaels in dozens and Shelleys in shoals; they will have to subsist as the bears and the pelicans do.

Let us abandon ourselves, however, to the vain pleasure of prophesying. Let us suppose, for the humour of it, that what very young gentlemen call "the might of poesy" is sure to reassert itself, that the votaries of modern verse will always form a respectable minimum, and that some alteration in fashion will reduce the tyranny of antiquarianism to decent proportions. Admit that poetry, in whatever lamentable condition it may be at the present time, is eternal in its essence, and must offer the means of expression to certain admirable talents in each generation. What, then, is the form which we may reasonably expect it to take next? This is, surely, a harmless kind of speculation, and the moral certainty of being fooled by

the event need not restrain us from indulging in it. We will prophesy, although fully conscious of the wild predictions on the same subject current in England in 1580, 1650, and 1780, and in France in 1775 and 1825. We may be quite sure of one thing, that when the Marlowe or the André Chénier is coming, not a single critic will be expecting him. But in the meantime why show a front less courageous than that of the history-defying Zadkiel?

It is usually said, in hasty generalisation, that the poetry of the present age is unique in the extreme refinement of its exterior mechanism. Those who say this are not aware that the great poets whose virile simplicity and robust carelessness of detail they applaud—thus building tombs to prophets whom they have never worshipped—have, almost without exception, been scrupulously attentive to form. No modern writer has been so learned in rhythm as Milton, so faultless in rhyme-arrangement as Spenser. But what is true is that a care for form, and a considerable skill in the technical art of verse, have been acquired by writers of a lower order, and that this sort of perfection is no longer the hall-mark of a great master. We may expect it, therefore, to attract less

attention in the future ; and although, assuredly, the bastard jargon of Walt Whitman, and kindred returns to sheer barbarism, will not be accepted, technical perfection will more and more be taken as a matter of course, as a portion of the poet's training which shall be as indispensable, and as little worthy of notice, as that a musician should read his notes correctly.

Less effort, therefore, is likely to be made, in the immediate future, to give pleasure by the manner of poetry, and more skill will be expended on the subject-matter. By this I do not understand that greater concession will be made than in the past to what may be called the didactic fallacy, the obstinate belief of some critics in the function of poetry as a teacher. The fact is certain that nothing is more obsolete than educational verse, the literary product which deliberately supplies information. We may see another Sappho ; it is even conceivable that we might see another Homer ; but a new Hesiod, never. Knowledge has grown to be far too complex, exact, and minute to be impressed upon the memory by the artifice of rhyme ; and poetry had scarcely passed its infancy before it discovered that to stimulate, to impassion, to amuse, were the proper duties of an art which appeals to the emotions, and to the emotions

only. The curious attempts, then, which have been made by poets of no mean talent to dedicate their verse to botany, to the Darwinian hypothesis, to the loves of the fossils, and to astronomical science, are not likely to be repeated, and if they should be repeated, they would scarcely attract much popular attention. Nor is the epic, on a large scale—that noble and cumbersome edifice with all its blank windows and corridors that lead to nothing—a species of poetic architecture which the immediate future can be expected to indulge in.

Leaving the negative for the positive, then, we may fancy that one or two probabilities loom before us. Poetry, if it exist at all, will deal, and probably to a greater degree than ever before, with those more frail and ephemeral shades of emotion which prose scarcely ventures to describe. The existence of a delicately organised human being is diversified by divisions and revulsions of sensation, ill-defined desires, gleams of intuition, and the whole gamut of spiritual notes descending from exultation to despair, none of which have ever been adequately treated except in the hieratic language of poetry. The most realistic novel, the closest psychological analysis in prose, does no more than skim the surface of the

soul ; verse has the privilege of descending into its depths. In the future, lyrical poetry will probably grow less trivial and less conventional, at the risk of being less popular. It will interpret what prose dares not suggest. It will penetrate further into the complexity of human sensation, and, untroubled by the necessity of formulating a creed, a theory, or a story, will describe with delicate accuracy, and under a veil of artistic beauty, the amazing, the unfamiliar, and even the portentous phenomena which it encounters.

The social revolution or evolution which most sensible people are now convinced is imminent, will surely require a species of poetry to accompany its course and to celebrate its triumphs. If we could foresee what form this species will take, we should know all things. But we must believe that it will be democratic, and that to a degree at present unimaginable. The aristocratic tradition is still paramount in all art. Kings, princesses, and the symbols of chivalry are as essential to poetry, as we now conceive it, as roses, stars, or nightingales. The poet may be a pronounced socialist ; he may be Mr. William Morris ; but the oligarchic imagery pervades his work as completely as if he were a troubadour of the thirteenth century. It is difficult

to understand what will be left if this romantic phraseology is destroyed, but it is still more difficult to believe that it can survive a complete social revolution.

A kind of poetry now scarcely cultivated at all may be expected to occupy the attention of the poets, whether socialism hastens or delays. What the Germans understand by epic verse—that is to say, short and highly finished studies in narrative—is a class of literature which offers unlimited opportunities. What may be done in this direction is indicated in France by the work of M. Coppée. In England and America we have at present nothing at all like it, the idyllic stories of Mr. Coventry Patmore presenting the closest parallel. The great danger which attends the writing of these narratives in English is the tendency to lose distinction of style, to become humorous in dealing with the grotesque and tame in describing the simple. Blank verse will be wholly eschewed by those who in the future sing the annals of the humble; they will feel that the strictest art and the most exquisite ornament of rhyme and metre will be required for the treatment of such narratives. M. Coppée himself, who records the adventures of seam-

stresses and engine-drivers, of shipwrecked sailors and retail grocers, with such simplicity and moving pathos, has not his rival in all France for purity of phrase and for exquisite propriety of versification.

The modern interest in the drama, and the ever-growing desire to see literature once more wedded to the stage, will, it can hardly be doubted, lead to a revival of dramatic poetry. This will not, of course, have any relation to the feeble lycean plays of the hour—spectacular romances enshrined in ambling blank verse—but will, in its form and substance alike, offer entertainment to other organs than the eye. Probably the puritanic limitations which have so long cramped the English theatre will be removed, and British plays, while remaining civilised and decent, will once more deal with the realities of life and not with its conventions. Neither the funeral baked meats of the romantic English novel, nor the spiced and potted dainties of the French stage, will satisfy our playgoers when once we have strong and sincere playwrights of our own.

In religious verse something, and in philosophical verse much, remains to be done. The

wider hope has scarcely found a singer yet, and the deeper speculation has been very imperfectly and empirically celebrated by our poets. Whether love, the very central fountain of poetic inspiration in the past, can yield many fresh variations, remains to be seen. That passion will, however, in all probability be treated in the future less objectively and with a less obtrusive landscape background. The school which is now expiring has carried description, the consciousness of exterior forms and colours, the drapery and upholstery of nature, to its extreme limit. The next development of poetry is likely to be very bare and direct, unembroidered, perhaps even arid, in character. It will be experimental rather than descriptive, human rather than animal. So at least we vaguely conjecture. But whatever the issue may be, we may be confident that the art will retain that poignant charm over undeveloped minds, and that exquisite fascination, which for so many successive generations have made poetry the wisest and the fairest friend of youth.

TENNYSON—AND AFTER

Tennyson—and After

AS we filed slowly out of the Abbey on the afternoon of Wednesday, the 12th of October, 1892, there must have occurred to others, I think, as to myself, a whimsical and half-terrifying sense of the symbolic contrast between what we had left and what we emerged upon. Inside, the grey and vitreous atmosphere, the reverberations of music moaning somewhere out of sight, the bones and monuments of the noble dead, reverence, antiquity, beauty, rest. Outside, in the raw air, a tribe of hawkers urging upon the edges of a dense and inquisitive crowd a large sheet of pictures of the pursuit of a flea by a "lady," and more insidious salesmen doing a brisk trade in what they falsely pretended to be "Tennyson's last poem."

Next day we read in our newspapers affecting accounts of the emotion displayed by the vast

crowds outside the Abbey—horny hands dashing away the tear, seamstresses holding the “the little green volumes” to their faces to hide their agitation. Happy for those who could see these things with their fairy telescopes out of the garrets of Fleet Street. I, alas!—though I sought assiduously—could mark nothing of the kind. Entering the Abbey, conducted by courteous policemen through unparalleled masses of the curious, we distinguished patience, good behaviour, cheerful and untiring inquisitiveness, a certain obvious gratitude for an incomprehensible spectacle provided by the authorities, but nothing else. And leaving the Abbey, as I say, the impression was one almost sinister in its abrupt transition. Poetry, authority, the grace and dignity of life, seemed to have been left behind us for ever in that twilight where Tennyson was sleeping with Chaucer and with Dryden.

In recording this impression I desire nothing so little as to appear censorious. Even the external part of the funeral at Westminster seemed, as was said of the similar scene which was enacted there nearly two hundred years ago, “a well-conducted and uncommon public ceremony, where the philosopher can find nothing to condemn, nor

the satirist to ridicule." But the contrast between the outside and the inside of the Abbey, a contrast which may possibly have been merely whimsical in itself, served for a parable of the condition of poetry in England as the burial of Tennyson has left it. If it be only the outworn body of this glorious man which we have relinquished to the safeguard of the Minster, gathered to his peers in the fulness of time, we have no serious ground for apprehension, nor, after the first painful moment, even for sorrow. His harvest is ripe, and we hold it in our granaries. The noble physical presence which has been the revered companion of three generations has, indeed, sunk at length :

*Yet would we not disturb him from his tomb,
Thus sleeping in his Abbey's friendly shade,
And the rough waves of life for ever laid.*

But what if this vast and sounding funeral should prove to have really been the entombment of English poetry? What if it should be the prestige of verse that we left behind us in the Abbey? That is a question which has issues far more serious than the death of any one man, no matter how majestic that man may be.

Poetry is not a democratic art. We are constantly being told by the flexible scribes who live to flatter the multitude that the truest poetry is that which speaks to the million, that moves the great heart of the masses. In his private consciousness no one knows better than the lettered man who writes such sentences that they are not true. Since the pastoral days in which poets made great verses for a little clan, it has never been true that poetry of the noblest kind was really appreciated by the masses. If we take the bulk of what are called educated people, but a very small proportion are genuinely fond of reading. Sift this minority, and but a minute residue of it will be found to be sincerely devoted to beautiful poetry. The genuine lovers of verse are so few that if they could be made the subject of a statistical report, we should probably be astounded at the smallness of their number. From the purely democratic point of view it is certain that they form a negligible quantity. They would produce no general effect at all if they were not surrounded by a very much larger number of persons who, without taste for poetry themselves, are yet traditionally impressed with its value, and treat it with conventional respect, buying it a

little, frequently conversing about it, pressing to gaze at its famous professors, and competing for places beside the tombs of its prophets. The respect for poetry felt by these persons, although in itself unmeaning, is extremely valuable in its results. It supports the enthusiasm of the few who know and feel for themselves, and it radiates far and wide into the outer masses, whose darkness would otherwise be unreached by the very glimmer of these things.

There is no question, however, that the existence in prominent public honour of an art in its essence so aristocratic as poetry—that is to say, so dependent on the suffrages of a few thousand persons who happen to possess, in greater or lesser degree, certain peculiar qualities of mind and ear—is, at the present day, anomalous, and therefore perilous. All this beautiful pinnacled structure of the glory of verse, this splendid position of poetry at the summit of the civil ornaments of the Empire, is built of carven ice, and needs nothing but that the hot popular breath should be turned upon it to sink into so much water. It is kept standing there, flashing and sparkling before our eyes, by a succession of happy accidents. To speak rudely, it is kept

there by an effort of bluff on the part of a small influential class.

In reflecting on these facts, I have found myself depressed and terrified at an ebullition of popularity which seems to have struck almost everybody else with extreme satisfaction. It has been very natural that the stupendous honour apparently done to Tennyson, not merely by the few who always valued him, but by the many who might be supposed to stand outside his influence, has been welcomed with delight and enthusiasm. But what is so sinister a circumstance is the excessive character of this exhibition. I think of the funeral of Wordsworth at Grasmere, only forty-two years ago, with a score of persons gathering quietly under the low wall that fenced them from the brawling Rotha; and I turn to the spectacle of the 12th, the vast black crowd in the street, the ten thousand persons refused admission to the Abbey, the whole enormous popular manifestation.* What does it mean? Is Tennyson, great as he is, a thousand times greater than Wordsworth? Has poetry, in forty years, risen at this ratio in the public estimation? The democracy, I fear,

* See Mr. Hall Caine's interesting article in the *Times* for October 17th, 1892.

doth protest too much, and there is danger in this hollow reverence.

The danger takes this form. It may at any moment come to be held that the poet, were he the greatest that ever lived, was greater than poetry; the artist more interesting than his art. This was a peril unknown in ancient times. The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were scarcely more closely identified with the men who wrote them than Gothic cathedrals were with their architects. Cowley was the first English poet about whom much personal interest was felt outside the poetic class. Dryden is far more evident to us than the Elizabethans were, yet phantasmal by the side of Pope. Since the age of Anne an interest in the poet, as distinguished from his poetry, has steadily increased; the fashion for Byron, the posthumous curiosity in Shelley and Keats, are examples of the rapid growth of this individualisation in the present century. But since the death of Wordsworth it has taken colossal proportions, without, so far as can be observed, any parallel quickening of the taste for poetry itself. The result is that a very interesting or picturesque figure, if identified with poetry, may attract an amount of attention and admiration

which is spurious as regards the poetry, and of no real significance. Tennyson had grown to be by far the most mysterious, august, and singular figure in English society. He represented poetry, and the world now expects its poets to be as picturesque, as aged, and as individual as he was, or else it will pay poetry no attention. I fear, to be brief, that the personal, as distinguished from the purely literary, distinction of Tennyson may strike, for the time being, a serious blow at the vitality of poetry in this country.

Circumstances have combined, in a very curious way, to produce this result. If a supernatural power could be conceived as planning a scenic effect, it could hardly have arranged it in a manner more telling, or more calculated to excite the popular imagination, than has been the case in the quick succession of the death of Matthew Arnold, of Robert Browning, and of Tennyson.

Insatiate archer ! could not one suffice ?

Thy shaft flew thrice ; and thrice our peace was slain.

A great poet was followed by a greater, and he by the greatest of the century, and all within five years. So died, but not with this crescent effect, Shakespeare, Beaumont, and Raleigh ; so Vanbrugh,

Congreve, Gay, Steele, and Defoe; so Byron, Shelley, and Keats; so Scott, Coleridge, and Lamb. But in none of these cases was the field left so exposed as it now is in popular estimation. The deaths of Keats, Shelley, and Byron were really momentous to an infinitely greater degree than those of Arnold, Browning, and Tennyson, because the former were still in the prime of life, while the latter had done their work; but the general public was not aware of this, and, as is well known, Shelley and Keats passed away without exciting a ripple of popular curiosity.

The tone of criticism since the death of Tennyson has been very much what might, under the circumstances, have been expected. Their efforts to overwhelm his coffin with lilies and roses have seemed paltry to the critics, unless they could succeed, at the same time, in laying waste all the smaller gardens of his neighbours. There is no doubt that the instinct for suttee lies firmly embedded in human nature, and that the glory of a dead rajah is dimly felt by us all to be imperfect unless some one or other is immolated on his funeral pile. But when we come to think calmly on this matter, it will be seen that this offering up of the live poets as a burnt sacrifice to the memory of their dead

master is absurd and grotesque. We have boasted all these years that we possessed the greatest of the world's poets since Victor Hugo. We did well to boast. But he is taken from us at a great age, and we complain at once, with bitter cries—because we have no poet left so venerable or so perfect in ripeness of the long-drawn years of craftsmanship—that poetry is dead amongst us, and that all the other excellent artists in verse are worthless scribblers. This is natural, perhaps, but it is scarcely generous and not a little ridiculous. It is, moreover, exactly what the critics said in 1850, when Arnold, Browning, and Tennyson had already published a great deal of their most admirable work.

The ingratitude of the hour towards the surviving poets of England pays but a poor compliment to the memory of that great man whose fame it professes to honour. I suppose that there has scarcely been a writer of interesting verse who has come into anything like prominence within the lifetime of Tennyson who has not received from him some letter of praise—some message of benevolent indulgence. More than fifty years ago he wrote, in glowing terms, to congratulate Mr. Bailey on his *Festus*; it is only yesterday that we were hearing

of his letters to Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. William Watson. Tennyson did not affect to be a critic—no man, indeed, can ever have lived who less *affected* to be anything—but he loved good verses, and he knew them when he saw them, and welcomed them indulgently. No one can find it more distasteful to him to have it asserted that Tennyson was, and will be, “the last of the English poets” than would Tennyson himself.

It was not my good fortune to see him many times, and only twice, at an interval of about twelve years, did I have the privilege of hearing him talk at length and ease. On each of those occasions, however, it was noticeable with what warmth and confidence he spoke of the future of English poetry, with what interest he evidently followed its progress, and how cordially he appreciated what various younger men were doing. In particular, I hope it is not indiscreet to refer to the tone in which he spoke to me on each of these occasions of Mr. Swinburne, whose critical conscience had, it must not be forgotten, led him to refer with no slight severity to several of the elder poet's writings. In 1877 Mr. Swinburne's strictures were still recent, and might not unreasonably have been painfully

recollected. Yet Tennyson spoke of him almost as Dryden did two hundred years ago to Congreve :

*And this I prophesy—thou shalt be seen
(Though with some short parenthesis between)
High on the throne of wit, and, seated there,
Not mine (that's little), but thy laurel wear.*

It would never have occurred to this great and wise man that his own death could be supposed to mark the final burning up and turning to ashes of the prophetic bays.

These are considerations, however—to return to my original parable—for the few within the Abbey. They are of no force in guiding opinion among the non-poetical masses outside. These, dangerously moved for the nonce to observe the existence of poetry, may make a great many painful and undesirable reflections before the subject quits their memory. There is always a peril in a popular movement that is not founded on genuine feeling, and the excitement about Tennyson's death has been far too universal to be sincere. It is even now not too early for us to perceive, if we will face it calmly, that elements of a much commoner and emptier nature than reverence for a man of genius have entered into the stir about the Laureate's burial. The multitude so stirred into an excited

curiosity about a great poet will presently crave, of course, a little more excitement still over another poet, and this stimulant will not be forthcoming. We have not, and shall not have for a generation at least, such another sacrifice to offer to the monster. It will be in the retreat of the wave, in the sense of popular disappointment at the non-recurrence of such intellectual shocks as the deaths of Browning and Tennyson have supplied, that the right of poetry to take precedence among the arts of writing will for the first time come to be seriously questioned. Our critics will then, too late, begin to regret their suttee of the Muses; but if they try to redeem their position by praising this living poet or that, the public will only too glibly remind them of their own dictum that "poetry died with Tennyson."

In old days the reading public swept the literature of its fathers into the dust-bin, and read Horace while its immediate contemporaries were preparing works in prose and verse to suit the taste of the moment. But nowadays each great writer who passes out of physical life preserves his intellectual existence intact and becomes a lasting rival to his surviving successor. The young novelist has no living competitor so dangerous to

him as Dickens and Thackeray are, who are nevertheless divided from him by time almost as far as Milton was from Pope. It is nearly seventy years since the earliest of Macaulay's *Essays* appeared, and the least reference to one of them would now be recognised by "every schoolboy." Less than seventy years after the death of Bacon his *Essays* were so completely forgotten that when extracts from them were discovered in the common-place book of a deceased lady of quality, they were supposed to be her own, were published and praised by people as clever as Congreve, went through several editions, and were not detected until within the present century. When an age made a palimpsest of its memory in this way it was far easier to content it with contemporary literary excellence than it is now, when every aspirant is confronted with the quintessence of the centuries.

It is not, however, from the captious taste of the public that most is to be feared, but from its indifference. Let it not be believed that, because a mob of the votaries of Mr. Jerome and Mr. Sims have been drawn to the precincts of the Abbey to gaze upon a pompous ceremonial, these admirable citizens have suddenly taken to reading

Lucretius or *The Two Voices*. What their praise is worth no one among us would venture to say in words so unmeasured as those of the dead Master himself, who, with a prescience of their mortuary attentions, spoke of these irreverent admirers as those

*Who make it seem more sweet to be
The little life of bank and brier,
The bird who pipes his lone desire
And dies unheard within his tree,
Than he that warbles long and loud,
And drops at Glory's temple-gates,
For whom the carrion-vulture waits
To tear his heart before the crowd.*

If this is more harsh reproof than a mere idle desire to be excited by a spectacle or by an event demands, it may nevertheless serve us as an antidote to the vain illusion that these multitudes are suddenly converted to a love of fine literature. They are not so converted, and fine literature—however scandalous it may sound in the ears of this generation to say it—is for the few.

How long, then, will the many permit themselves to be brow-beaten by the few? At the present time the oligarchy of taste governs our vast republic of readers. We tell them to praise

the Bishop of Oxford for his history, and Mr. Walter Pater for his essays, and Mr. Herbert Spencer for his philosophy, and Mr. George Meredith for his novels. They obey us, and these are great and illustrious personages about whom newspaper gossip is continually occupied, whom crowds, when they have the chance, hurry to gaze at, but whose books (or I am cruelly misinformed) have a relatively small circulation. These reputations are like beautiful churches, into which people turn to cross themselves with holy water, bow to the altar, and then hurry out again to spend the rest of the morning in some snug tavern.

Among these churches of living fame, the noblest, the most exquisite was that sublime cathedral of song which we called Tennyson; and there, it is true, drawn by fashion and by a choral service of extreme beauty, the public had formed the habit of congregating. But at length, after a final ceremony of incomparable dignity, this minster has been closed. Where will the people who attended there go now? The other churches stand around, honoured and empty. Will they now be better filled? Or will some secularist mayor, of strong purpose and an enemy to sentiment, order them to be deserted altogether? We may, at any rate,

be quite sure that this remarkable phenomenon of the popularity of Tennyson, however we regard it, is but transitory and accidental, or at most personal to himself. That it shows any change in the public attitude of reserved or grumbling respect to the best literature, and radical dislike to style, will not be seriously advanced.

What I dread, what I long have dreaded, is the eruption of a sort of Commune in literature. At no period could the danger of such an outbreak of rebellion against tradition be so great as during the reaction which must follow the death of our most illustrious writer. Then, if ever, I should expect to see a determined resistance made to the pretensions of whatever is rare, or delicate, or abstruse. At no time, I think, ought those who guide taste amongst us to be more on their guard to preserve a lofty and yet generous standard, to insist on the merits of what is beautiful and yet unpopular, and to be unaffected by commercial tests of distinction. We have lived for ten years in a fool's paradise. Without suspecting the truth, we have been passing through a period of poetic glory hardly to be paralleled elsewhere in our history. One by one great luminaries were removed—Rossetti, Newman, Arnold, Browning sank,

each star burning larger as it neared the horizon. Still we felt no apprehension, saying, as we turned towards Farringford :

" Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île."

Now he is gone also, and the shock of his extinction strikes us for the moment with a sense of positive and universal darkness.

But this very natural impression is a mistaken one. As our eyes grow accustomed to the absence of this bright particular planet, we shall be more and more conscious of the illuminating power of the heavenly bodies that are left. We shall, at least, if criticism directs us carefully and wholesomely. With all the losses that our literature has sustained, we are, still, more richly provided with living poets of distinction than all but the blossoming periods of our history have been. In this respect we are easily deceived by a glance at some chart of the course of English literature, where the lines of life of aged writers overlap those of writers still in their early youth. The worst pessimist amongst us will not declare that our poetry seems to be in the utterly and deplorably indigent condition in which the death of Burns appeared to leave it in 1796. Then the beholder, glancing round, would see nothing but

Crabbe, grown silent for eleven years, Cowper insane, Blake undeveloped and unrecognised; the pompous, florid Erasmus Darwin left solitary master of the field. But we, who look at the chart, see Wordsworth and Coleridge on the point of evolution, Campbell and Moore at school, Byron and Shelley in the nursery, and Keats an infant. Who can tell what inheritors of unfulfilled renown may not now be staining their divine lips with the latest of this season's blackberries?

But we are not left to these conjectural consolations. I believe that I take very safe ground when I say that our living poets present a variety and amplitude of talent, a fulness of tone, an accomplishment in art, such as few other generations in England, and still fewer elsewhere, have been in a position to exult in. It would be invidious, and it might indeed be very difficult and tedious, to go through the list of those who do signal honour to our living literature in this respect. Without repeating the list so patiently drawn up and so humorously commented upon by Mr. Traill, it would be easy to select from it fifteen names, not one of which would be below the fair meridian of original merit, and many of which would rise far above it. Could so much have been said in 1592, or in 1692, or in

1792? Surely, no. I must not be led to multiply names, the mere mention of which in so casual a manner can hardly fail to seem impertinent; yet I venture to assert that a generation which can boast of Mr. Swinburne and Miss Christina Rossetti, of Mr. William Morris and Mr. Coventry Patmore, of Mr. Austin Dobson and Mr. Robert Bridges, has no reason to complain of lack of fire or elevation, grace or versatility.

It was only in Paradise, so we learn from St. Basil, that roses ever grew without thorns. We cannot have the rose of such an exceptional life as Tennyson's without suffering for it. We suffer by the void its cessation produces, the disturbance in our literary hierarchy that it brings, the sense of uncertainty and insufficiency that follows upon it. The death of Victor Hugo led to precisely such a rocking and swaying of the ship of literature in France, and to this day it cannot be said that the balance there is completely restored. I cannot think that we gain much by ignoring this disturbance, which is inevitable, and still less by folding our hands and calling out that it means that the vessel is sinking. It means nothing of the kind. What it does mean is that when a man of the very highest rank in the profession lives to an exceptionally great age, and

retains his intellectual gifts to the end, combining with these unusual advantages the still more fortuitous ones of being singular and picturesque in his personality and the object of much ungratified curiosity, he becomes the victim, in the eyes of his contemporaries, of a sort of vertical mirage. He is seen up in the sky where no man could be. I trust I shall not be accused of anything like disrespect to the genius of Tennyson—which I loved and admired as nearly to the pitch of idolatry as possible—when I say that his reputation at this moment is largely mirage. His gifts were of the very highest order ; but in the popular esteem, at this moment, he holds a position which is, to carry on the image, topographically impossible. No poet, no man, ever reached that altitude above his fellows.

The result of seeing one mountain in vertical mirage, and various surrounding acclivities (if that were possible) at their proper heights, would be to falsify the whole system of optical proportion. Yet this is what is now happening, and for some little time will continue to happen *in crescendo*, with regard to Tennyson and his surviving contemporaries. There is no need, however, to cherish "those gloomy thoughts led on by spleen" which the melancholy events of the past month have

awakened. The recuperative force of the arts has never yet failed the human race, and will not fail us now. All the *Tit-Bits* and *Pearson's Weeklies* in the world will not be able to destroy a fragment of pure and original literature, although the tastes they foster may delay its recognition and curtail its rewards.

The duty of all who have any influence on the public is now clear. So far from resigning the responsibility of praise and blame, so far from opening the flood-gates to what is bad—on the ground that the best is gone, and that it does not matter—it behoves those who are our recognised judges of literary merit to resist more strenuously than ever the inroads of mere commercial success into the Temple of Fame. The Scotch ministry preserve that interesting practice of “fencing the tables” of the Lord by a solemn searching of would-be communicants. Let the tables of Apollo be fenced, not to the exclusion or the discomfort of those who have a right to his sacraments, but to the chastening of those who have no other mark of his service but their passbook. And poetry, which survived the death of Chaucer, will recover even from the death of Tennyson.

SHELLEY in 1892

Shelley in 1892

Centenary Address delivered at Horsham, August 11, 1892

WE meet to-day to celebrate the fact that, exactly one hundred years ago, there was born, in an old house in this parish, one of the greatest of the English poets, one of the most individual and remarkable of the poets of the world. This beautiful county of Sussex, with its blowing woodlands and its shining downs, was even then not unaccustomed to poetic honours. One hundred and thirty years before, it had given birth to Otway; seventy years before, to Collins. But charming as these pathetic figures were and are, not Collins and not Otway can compare for a moment with that writer who is the main intellectual glory of Sussex, the ever-beloved and ethereally illustrious Percy Bysshe Shelley. It has appeared to me that you might, as a Sussex audience, gathered in a Sussex town, like to be reminded, before we go any further, of the exact connection of our poet with the county—

of the stake, as it is called, which his family held in Sussex, and of the period of his own residence in it. You will see that, although his native province lost him early, she had a strong claim upon his interests and associations.

When Shelley was born, on the 4th of August, 1792, his grandfather, afterwards a baronet, Sir Bysshe Shelley, was ensconced at Goring Castle, while his father, the heir to the title, Mr. Timothy Shelley, inhabited that famous house, Field Place, which lies here at your doors. Mr. Timothy Shelley had married a lady from your nearest eastern neighbour, the town of Cuckfield; he was M.P. for another Sussex borough, Shoreham; in the next Parliament he was to represent, if I am not mistaken, Horsham itself. The names which meet us in the earliest pages of the poet's biographies are all Sussex names. It was at Warnham that he was taught his earliest lessons, and it was in Warnham Pond that the great tortoise lurked which was the earliest of his visions. St. Irvine's, in whose woods he loved to wander by moonlight, has disappeared, but Strode is close to you still, and if St. Leonard's Forest has shrunk somewhat to the eastward since Shelley walked and raved in its allies, you still possess it in your neighbourhood.

Until Shelley was expelled from Oxford, Field Place was his constant residence out of school and college hours. Nor, although his father at first forbade him to return, was his connection with Sussex broken even then. The house of his uncle, Captain Pilfold, was always open to him at Cuckfield, and when the Duke of Norfolk made his kind suggestion that the young man should enter Parliament, as a species of moral sedative, it was to a Sussex borough that he proposed to nominate him. Shelley's first abortive volume of poems was set up by a Horsham printer, and it was from Hurstpierpoint that Miss Hitchener, afterwards known as the "Brown Demon," started on her disastrous expedition into the lives of the Shelleys. It was not until 1814, on the eve of his departure for the Continent, that Shelley came to Sussex for the last time, paying that furtive visit to his mother and sisters, on which, in order to conceal himself from his father, he buttoned the scarlet jacket of a guardsman round his attenuated form.

If I have endeavoured, by thus grouping together all the Sussex names which are connected with Shelley, to attract your personal and local sympathy around the career of the poet, it is with no intention to claim for him a provincial significance.

Shelley does not belong to any one county, however rich and illustrious that county may be; he belongs to Europe—to the world. The tendency of his poetry and its peculiar accent were not so much English as European. He might have been a Frenchman, or an Italian, a Pole, or a Greek, in a way in which Wordsworth, for instance, or even Byron, could never have been anything but an Englishman. He passes, as we watch the brief and sparkling record of his life, from Sussex to the world. One day he is a child, sailing paper boats among the reeds in Warnham Pond; next day we look, and see, scarcely the son of worthy Mr. Timothy Shelley of Field Place, but a spirit without a country, "a planet-crested shape sweeping by on lightning-braided pinions" to scatter the liquid joy of life over humanity.

Into the particulars of this strange life I need not pass. You know them well. No life so brief as Shelley's has occupied so much curiosity, and for my part I think that even too minute inquiry has been made concerning some of its details. The "Harriet problem" leaves its trail across one petal of this rose; minuter insects, not quite so slimy, lurk where there should be nothing but colour and odour. We may well, I think, be

content to-day to take the large romance of Shelley's life, and leave any sordid details to oblivion. He died before he was quite thirty years of age, and the busy piety of biographers has peeped into the record of almost every day of the last ten of those years. What seems to me most wonderful is that a creature so nervous, so passionate, so ill-disciplined as Shelley was, should be able to come out of such an unprecedented ordeal with his shining garments so little specked with mire. Let us, at all events, to-day, think of the man only as "the peregrine falcon" that his best and oldest friends describe him.

We may, at all events, while a grateful England is cherishing Shelley's memory, and congratulating herself on his majestic legacy of song to her, reflect almost with amusement on the very different attitude of public opinion seventy and even fifty years ago. That he should have been pursued by calumny and prejudice through his brief, misrepresented life, and even beyond the tomb, can surprise no thinking spirit. It was not the poet who was attacked; it was the revolutionist, the enemy of kings and priests, the extravagant and paradoxical humanitarian. It is not needful, in order to defend Shelley's genius aright, to inveigh

against those who, taught in the prim school of eighteenth-century poetics, and repelled by political and social peculiarities which they but dimly understood, poured out their reprobation of his verses. Even his reviewers, perhaps, were not all of them "beaten hounds" and "carrion kites"; some, perhaps, were very respectable and rather narrow-minded English gentlemen, devoted to the poetry of Shenstone. The newer a thing is, in the true sense, the slower people are to accept it, and the abuse of the *Quarterly Review*, rightly taken, was but a token of Shelley's opulent originality.

To this unintelligent aversion there succeeded in the course of years an equally blind, although more amiable, admiration. Among a certain class of minds the reaction set in with absolute violence, and once more the centre of attention was not the poet and his poetry, but the faddist and his fads. Shelley was idealised, etherealised, and canonised. Expressions were used about his conduct and his opinions which would have been extravagant if employed to describe those of a virgin-martyr or of the founder of a religion. Vegetarians clustered around the eater of buns and raisins, revolutionists around the enemy of kings, social anarchists around the husband of Godwin's

daughter. Worse than all, those to whom the restraints of religion were hateful, marshalled themselves under the banner of the youth who had rashly styled himself an atheist, forgetful of the fact that all his best writings attest that, whatever name he might give himself, he, more than any other poet of the age, saw God in everything. This also was a phase, and passed away. The career of Shelley is no longer a battlefield for fanatics of one sort or the other; if they still skirmish a little in its obscurer corners, the main tract of it is not darkened with the smoke from their artillery. It lies, a fair open country of pure poetry, a province which comes as near to being fairyland as any that literature provides for us.

We cannot, however, think of this poet as of a writer of verses in the void. He is anything but the "idle singer of an empty day." Shelley was born amid extraordinary circumstances into an extraordinary age. On the very day, one hundred years ago, when the champagne was being drunk in the hall of Field Place in honour of the birth of a son and heir to Mr. Timothy Shelley, the thunder-cloud of revolution was breaking over Europe. Never before had there

been felt within so short a space of time so general a crash of the political order of things. Here, in England, we were spectators of the wild and sundering stress, in which the other kingdoms of Europe were distracted actors. The faces of Burke and of his friends wore "the expression of men who are going to defend themselves from murderers," and those murderers are called, during the infancy of Shelley, by many names, Mamelukes and Suliots, Poles and Swedes, besides the all-dreaded one of *sansculottes*. In the midst of this turmoil Shelley was born, and the air of revolution filled his veins with life.

In Shelley we see a certain type of revolutionist, born out of due time, and directed to the bloodless field of literature. The same week that saw the downfall of La Fayette saw the birth of Shelley, and we might believe the one to be an incarnation of the hopes of the other. Each was an aristocrat, born with a passionate ambition to play a great part in the service of humanity; in neither was there found that admixture of the earthly which is needful for sustained success in practical life. Had Shelley taken part in active affairs, his will and his enthusiasm must have broken, like waves, against the

coarser type of revolutionist, against the Dantons and the Robespierres. Like La Fayette, Shelley was intoxicated with virtue and glory; he was chivalrous, inflammable, and sentimental. Happily for us, and for the world, he was not thrown into a position where these beautiful qualities could be displayed only to be shattered like a dome of many-coloured glass. He was the not unfamiliar figure of revolutionary times, the *grand seigneur* enamoured of democracy. But he was much more than this; as Mr. Swinburne said long ago, Shelley "was born a son and soldier of light, an archangel winged and weaponed for angel's work." Let us attempt to discover what sort of prophecy it was that he blew through his golden trumpet.

It is in the period of youth that Shelley appeals to us most directly, and exercises his most unquestioned authority over the imagination. In early life, at the moment more especially when the individuality begins to assert itself, a young man or a young woman of feeling discovers in this poet certain qualities which appear to be not merely good, but the best, not only genuine, but exclusively interesting. At that age we ask for light, and do not care how it is distributed; for

melody, and do not ask the purpose of the song ; for colour, and find no hues too brilliant to delight the unwearied eye. Shelley satisfies these cravings of youth. His whole conception of life is bounded only by its illusions. The brilliancy of the morning dream, the extremities of radiance and gloom, the most pellucid truth, the most triumphant virtue, the most sinister guilt and melodramatic infamy, alone contrive to rivet the attention. All half-lights, all arrangements in grey or russet, are cast aside with impatience, as unworthy of the emancipated spirit. Winged youth, in the bright act of sowing its intellectual wild oats, demands a poet, and Horsham, just one hundred years ago, produced Shelley to satisfy that natural craving.

It is not for grey philosophers, or hermits wearing out the evening of life, to pass a definitive verdict on the poetry of Shelley. It is easy for critics of this temper to point out weak places in the radiant panoply, to say that this is incoherent, and that hysterical, and the other an ethereal fallacy. Sympathy is needful, a recognition of the point of view, before we can begin to judge Shelley aright. We must throw ourselves back to what we were at twenty, and recollect how dazzling, how fresh, how

full of colour, and melody, and odour, this poetry seemed to us—how like a May-day morning in a rich Italian garden, with a fountain, and with nightingales in the blossoming boughs of the orange-trees, with the vision of a frosty Apennine beyond the belt of laurels, and clear auroral sky everywhere above our heads. We took him for what he seemed, “a pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift,” and we thought to criticise him as little as we thought to judge the murmur of the forest or the reflections of the moonlight on the lake. He was exquisite, emancipated, young like ourselves, and yet as wise as a divinity. We followed him unquestioning, walking in step with his panthers, as the Bacchantes followed Dionysus out of India, intoxicated with enthusiasm.

If our sentiment is no longer so rhapsodical, shall we blame the poet? Hardly, I think. He has not grown older, it is we who are passing further and further from that happy eastern morning where the light is fresh, and the shadows plain and clearly defined. Over all our lives, over the lives of those of us who may be seeking to be least trammelled by the commonplace, there creeps ever onward the stealthy tinge of conventionality, the admixture of the earthly. We cannot honestly

wish it to be otherwise. It is the natural development, which turns kittens into cats, and blithe-hearted lads into earnest members of Parliament. If we try to resist this inevitable tendency, we merely become eccentric, a mockery to others, and a trouble to ourselves. Let us accept our respectability with becoming airs of gravity ; it is another thing to deny that youth was sweet. When I see an elderly professor proving that the genius of Shelley has been overrated, I cannot restrain a melancholy smile. What would he, what would I, give for that exquisite ardour, by the light of which all other poetry than Shelley's seemed dim ? You recollect our poet's curious phrase, that to go to him for common sense was like going to a gin-palace for mutton chops. The speech was a rash one, and has done him harm. But it is true enough that those who are conscious of the grossness of life, and are over-materialised, must go to him for the elixir and ether which emancipate the senses.

If I am right in thinking that you will all be with me in considering this beautiful passion of youth, this recapturing of the illusions, as the most notable of the gifts of Shelley's poetry to us, you will also, I think, agree with me in placing only second to it the witchery which enables this writer,

more than any other, to seize the most tumultuous and agitating of the emotions, and present them to us coloured by the analogy of natural beauty. Whether it be the petulance of a solitary human being, to whom the little downy owl is a friend, or the sorrows and desires of Prometheus, on whom the primal elements attend as slaves, Shelley is able to mould his verse to the expression of feeling, and to harmonise natural phenomena to the magnitude or the delicacy of his theme. No other poet has so wide a grasp as he in this respect, no one sweeps so broadly the full diapason of man in nature. Laying hold of the general life of the universe with a boldness that is unparalleled, he is equal to the most sensitive of the naturalists in his exact observation of tender and humble forms.

And to the ardour of fiery youth and the imaginative sympathy of pantheism, he adds what we might hardly expect from so rapt and tempestuous a singer, the artist's self-restraint. Shelley is none of those of whom we are sometimes told in these days, whose mission is too serious to be transmitted with the arts of language, who are too much occupied with the substance to care about the form. All that is best in his exquisite collection of verse cries out against this wretched heresy.

With all his modernity, his revolutionary instinct, his disdain of the unessential, his poetry is of the highest and most classic technical perfection. No one, among the moderns, has gone further than he in the just attention to poetic form, and there is so severe a precision in his most vibrating choruses that we are taken by them into the company, not of the Ossians and the Walt Whitmans, not of those who feel, yet cannot control their feelings, but of those impeccable masters of style,

*who dwelt by the azure sea
Of serene and golden Italy,
Or Greece the mother of the free.*

And now, most inadequately and tamely, yet, I trust, with some sense of the greatness of my theme, I have endeavoured to recall to your minds certain of the cardinal qualities which animated the divine poet whom we celebrate to-day. I have no taste for those arrangements of our great writers which assign to them rank like schoolboys in a class, and I cannot venture to suggest that Shelley stands above or below this or that brother immortal. But of this I am quite sure, that when the slender roll is called of those singers, who make the poetry of England second only to that of Greece (if even of

Greece), however few are named, Shelley must be among them. To-day, under the auspices of the greatest poet our language has produced since Shelley died, encouraged by universal public opinion and by dignitaries of all the professions, yes, even by prelates of our national church, we are gathered here as a sign that the period of prejudice is over, that England is in sympathy at last with her beautiful wayward child, understands his great language, and is reconciled to his harmonious ministry. A century has gone by, and once more we acknowledge the truth of his own words :

*The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not ;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb.*

SYMBOLISM AND
M. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

Symbolism and M. Stéphane Mallarmé

THE name which stands at the head of this essay is that of a writer who is at the present time more talked about, more ferociously attacked, more passionately beloved and defended, and at the same time less understood, than perhaps any other man of his intellectual rank in Europe. Even in the ferocious world of Parisian letters his purity of motive and dignity of attitude are respected. Benevolent to those younger than himself, exquisitely courteous and considerate in controversy, a master of that suavity and reserve the value of which literary persons so rarely appreciate, M. Mallarmé, to one who from a distance gazes with curiosity into the Parisian hurly-burly, appeals first by the beautiful amenity of his manners—a dreamy Sir Launcelot riding through a forest of dragons to

help the dolorous lady of Poesy from pain. In the incessant pamphlet-wars of his party, others seem to strike for themselves, M. Mallarmé always for the cause; and when the battle is over, and the rest meet to carouse round a camp-fire, he is always found stealing back to the ivory tower of contemplation. Before we know the rights of the case, or have read a line of his verses, we are predisposed towards a figure so pure and so distinguished.

But though the personality of M. Mallarmé is so attractive, and though he marches at the head of a very noisy rabble, exceedingly little seems to be clearly known about him in this country. Until now, he has published in such a rare and cryptic manner, that not half a dozen of any one of his books can have reached England. Two or three abstruse essays in prose, published in the *National Observer*, have lately amazed the Philistines. Not thus did Mr. Lillyvick understand that the French language was to be imparted to Morleena Kenwigs. Charming stories float about concerning Scotch mammas who subscribed to the *National Observer* for the use of their girls, and discovered that the articles were written in Moldo-Wallachian. M. Mallarmé's theories have been ridiculed and travestied, his style parodied, his practice gravely

rebuked ; but what that practice and style and theories are, has scarcely been understood. M. Mallarmé has been wrapped up in the general fog which enfolds our British notions of symbolists and impressionists. If the school has had a single friend in England, it has been Mr. Arthur Symons, one of the most brilliant of our younger poets ; and even he has been interested, I think, more in M. Verlaine than in the Symbolists and Décadents proper.

It was in 1886 that the Décadents first began to be talked about. Then it was that Arthur Rimbaud's famous sonnet about the colours of the vowels flashed into celebrity, and everybody was telling everybody else that

*A's black ; E, white ; I, blue ; O, red ; U, yellow ;
But purple seeks in vain a vowel-fellow.*

Those were the days, already ancient now ! of Noël Loumo and Marius Tapera, when the inexpressible Adoré Floupette published *Les Délivrescences*. Where are the delivrescences of yesteryear ? Where is the once celebrated scene in the "boudoir oblong aux cycloïdes bigarrures" which enlivened *Le Théâtre chez Miranda* of M. Jean Moréas ? These added to the gaiety of nations, and have been forgotten ;

brief life was here their portion. Fresh oddities come forward, poets in shoals and schools, Ewolutive-instrumentists, Cataclysmists, Trombonists—even while we speak, have they not faded away? But amidst all this world of phantasmagoria, among these fugitive apparitions and futile individualities, dancing once across the stereopticon and seen no more—one figure of a genuine man of letters remains, that of M. Stéphane Mallarmé, the solitary name among those of the so-called Décadents which has hitherto proved its right to serious consideration.

If the dictionaries are to be trusted, M. Mallarmé was born in 1842. His career seems to have been the most uneventful on record. He has always been, and I think still is, professor of English at the Lycée Fontanes in Paris. About twenty years ago he paid a short visit to London, carrying with him, as I well remember, the vast portfolio of his translation of Poe's *Raven*, with Manet's singular illustrations. His life has been spent in a Buddhistic calm, in meditation. He has scarcely published anything, disliking, so it is said, the "exhibitionnisme" involved in bringing out a book, the banality of types and proofs and revises.

His revolutionary ideas with regard to style

were formulated about 1875, when the *Parnasse Contemporain*, edited by the friends and co-evals of M. Mallarmé, rejected his first important poem, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, which appeared at length in 1876, as a quarto pamphlet, illustrated by Manet. In the same year he gave his earliest example of the new prose in the shape of an essay prefixed to a beautiful reprint of Beckford's *Vathek*, a volume bound in vellum, tied with black and crimson silk, and produced in a very small edition. Ridicule was the only welcome vouchsafed to these two couriers of the Décadance. Perhaps M. Mallarmé was somewhat discouraged, although absolutely unsubdued.

He remained long submerged, but with the growth of his school he was persuaded to reappear. In 1887 one fascicule only of his complete poems was brought out in an extraordinary form, photolithographed from the original manuscript. In 1888 followed a translation of the poems of Edgar Poe. But until 1893 the general reader has had no opportunity, even in France, of forming an opinion on the prose or verse of M. Mallarmé. Meanwhile, his name has become one of the most notorious in contemporary literature. A thousand eccentricities, a thousand acts of revolt against

tradition, have been perpetrated under the banner of his tacit encouragement. It is high time to try and understand what M. Mallarmé's teaching really is, and what his practice.

To ridicule the *Décadents*, or to insist upon their extravagance, is so easy as to be unworthy of a serious critic. It would be quite simple for some crusty Christopher to show that the poems of master and scholars alike are monstrous, unintelligible, ludicrously inept, and preposterous. M. Mallarmé has had hard words, not merely from the old classical critics such as M. Brunetière, but from men from whom the extremity of sympathy might have been looked. Life-long friends like M. Leconte de Lisle confess that they understood him once, but, alas! understand him no longer; or, like M. François Coppée, avoid all discussion of his verses, and obstinately confine themselves to "son esprit élevé, sa vie si pure, si belle." When such men as these profess themselves unable to comprehend a writer of their own age and language, it seems presumptuous for a foreigner to attempt to do so, nor do I pretend that in the formal and minute sense I am able to comprehend the poems of M. Mallarmé. He remains, under the most loving scrutiny, a most difficult writer. But, at all

events, I think that sympathy and study may avail to enable the critic to detect the spirit which inspires this strange and cryptic figure. Study and sympathy I have given, and I offer some results of them, not without diffidence.

Translated into common language, then, the main design of M. Mallarmé and his friends seems to be to refresh the languid current of French style. They hold—and in this view no English critic can dare to join issue with them—that art is not a stable nor a definite thing, and that success for the future must lie along paths not exactly traversed in the immediate past. They are tired of the official versification of France, and they dream of new effects which all the handbooks tell them are impossible to French prosody. They make infinite experiments, they feel their way; and I have nothing to reproach them with except their undue haste (but M. Mallarmé has not been hasty) in publishing their “tentatives.” Their aims are those of our own Areopagites of 1580, met “for the general surceasing and silence of bold Rymers, and also of the very best of them too”—“our new famous enterprisé for the exchange of barbarous rymes for artificial verses.” We must wish for the odd productions of these modern Parisian

euphuists a better fate than befell the trimeter iambics of Master Drant and Master Preston. But the cause of their existence is plain enough. It is the exhaustion, the enervation of the language, following upon the activities of Victor Hugo and his contemporaries. It is, moreover, a reaction towards freedom, directly consequent upon the strict and impersonal versification of the Parnassians. When the official verse has been burnished and chased to the metallic perfection of M. de Hérédia's sonnets, nothing but to withdraw to the wilderness in sheepskins is left to would-be poets of the next generation.

To pass from Symbolism generally to M. Mallarmé and his particular series of theories, he presents himself to us above all as an individualist. The poets of the last generation were a flock of singing-birds, trained in a general aviary. They met, as on the marble pavement of some new Serapeum, to contend in public for the rewards of polished verse. In contrast with these rivalries and congregations M. Mallarmé has always shown himself solitary and disengaged. As he has said: "The poet is a man who isolates himself that he may carve the sculptures of his own tomb." He refuses to obey that hierarchical tradition of which

Victor Hugo was the most formidable pontiff. He finds the alexandrine, as employed in the intractable prosody of modern France, a rigid and puerile instrument, from which melodies can nowadays no more be extracted. So far as I comprehend the position, M. Mallarmé does not propose, as do some of his disciples, to reject this noble verse-form altogether, and to slide into a sort of rhymed Walt Whitmanism. I cannot trace in his published poems a single instance of such a determination. But it is plain that he takes the twelve syllables of the line as forming, not six notes, but twelve, and he demands permission to form with these twelve as many combinations as he pleases. Melody, to be gained at any sacrifice of the old Jesuit laws, is what he desiderates: harmony of versification, obtained in new ways, by extracting the latent capabilities of the organ until now too conventionally employed.

So much, very briefly, for the prosodical innovation. For the language he demands an equal refreshment, by the rejection of the old worn phrases in favour of odd, exotic, and archaic terms. He takes up and adopts literally the idea of Théophile Gautier that words are precious stones, and should be so set as to flash and radiate from

the page. More individually characteristic of M. Mallarmé I find a certain preference for enigma. Language, to him, is given to conceal definite thought, to draw the eye away from the object. The Parnassians defined, described, analysed the object until it stood before us as in a coloured photograph. M. Mallarmé avoids this as much as possible. He aims at allusion only; he wraps a mystery around his simplest utterance; the abstruse and the symbolic are his peculiar territory. His aim, or I greatly misunderstand him, is to use words in such harmonious combinations as will suggest to the reader a mood or a condition which is not mentioned in the text, but is nevertheless paramount in the poet's mind at the moment of composition. To the conscious aiming at this particular effect are, it appears to me, due the more curious characteristics of his style, and much of the utter bewilderment which it produces on the brain of an indolent reader debauched by the facilities of realism.

The longest and the most celebrated of the poems of M. Mallarmé is *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*. It appears in the "florilège" which he has just published, and I have now read it again, as I have often read it before. To say that I understand it bit by

bit, phrase by phrase, would be excessive. But if I am asked whether this famous miracle of unintelligibility gives me pleasure, I answer, cordially, Yes. I even fancy that I obtain from it as definite and as solid an impression as M. Mallarmé desires to produce. This is what I read in it: A faun—a simple, sensuous, passionate being—wakens in the forest at daybreak and tries to recall his experience of the previous afternoon. Was he the fortunate recipient of an actual visit from nymphs, white and golden goddesses, divinely tender and indulgent? Or is the memory he seems to retain nothing but the shadow of a vision, no more substantial than the “arid rain” of notes from his own flute? He cannot tell. Yet surely there was, surely there is, an animal whiteness among the brown reeds of the lake that shines out yonder? Were they, are they, swans? No! But Naiads plunging? Perhaps!

Vaguer and vaguer grows the impression of this delicious experience. He would resign his woodland godship to retain it. A garden of lilies, golden-headed, white-stalked, behind the trellis of red roses? Ah! the effort is too great for his poor brain. Perhaps if he selects one lily from the garth of lilies, one benign and beneficent yielder of her cup to thirsty lips, the memory,

the ever-receding memory, may be forced back. So, when he has glutted upon a bunch of grapes, he is wont to toss the empty skins into the air and blow them out in a visionary greediness. But no, the delicious hour grows vaguer; experience or dream, he will now never know which it was. The sun is warm, the grasses yielding; and he curls himself up again, after worshipping the efficacious star of wine, that he may pursue the dubious ecstasy into the more hopeful boskages of sleep.

This, then, is what I read in the so excessively obscure and unintelligible *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*; and, accompanied as it is with a perfect suavity of language and melody of rhythm, I know not what more a poem of eight pages could be expected to give. It supplies a simple and direct impression of physical beauty, of harmony, of colour; it is exceedingly mellifluous, when once the ear understands that the poet, instead of being the slave of the alexandrine, weaves his variations round it like a musical composer. Unfortunately, *L'Après-Midi* was written fifteen years ago, and his theories have grown upon M. Mallarmé as his have on Mr. George Meredith. In the new collection of *Vers et Prose* I miss some pieces which I used to admire—in particular, surely, *Placet*, and the delightful poem called

Le Guignon. Perhaps these were too lucid for the worshippers. In return, we have certain allegories which are terribly abstruse, and some subfusc sonnets. I have read the following, called *Le Tombeau d'Edgard Poe*, over and over and over. I am very stupid, but I cannot tell what it says. In a certain vague and vitreous way I think I perceive what it means; and we are aided now by its being punctuated, which was not the case in the original form in which I met with it. But, "O my Brothers, ye the Workers," is it not still a little difficult?

*Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change,
 Le Poëte suscite avec un glaive nu
 Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu
 Que la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange !
 Eux, comme un vil sursaut d'hydre oyant jadis l'ange
 Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu
 Proclamèrent très haut le sortilège bu
 Dans le flot sans honneur de quelque noir mélange.
 Du sol et de la nue hostiles, ô grief !
 Si notre idée avec ne sculpte un bas-relief
 Dont la tombe de Poe éblouissante s'orne
 Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscur
 Que ce granit du moins montre à jamais sa borne
 Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur.*

Of the prose of M. Mallarmé, I can here speak but briefly. He has not published very much of it ;

and it is all polished and cadenced like his verse, with strange transposed adjectives and exotic nouns fantastically employed. It is even more distinctly to be seen in his prose than in his verse that he descends directly from Baudelaire, and in the former that streak of Lamartine that marks his poems is lacking.

The book called *Pages* can naturally be compared with the *Poèmes en Prose* of Baudelaire. Several of the sketches so named are now reprinted in *Vers et Prose*, and they strike me as the most distinguished and satisfactory of the published writings of M. Mallarmé. They are difficult, but far more intelligible than the enigmas which he calls his sonnets. *La Pipe*, in which the sight of an old meerschaum brings up dreams of London and the solitary lodgings there; *Le Nénuphar Blanc*, recording the vision of a lovely lady, visible for one tantalising moment to a rower in his boat; *Frisson d'Hiver*, the wholly fantastic and nebulous reverie of archaic elegances evoked by the ticking of a clock of Dresden china; each of these, and several more of these exquisite *Pages*, give just that impression of mystery and allusion which the author deems that style should give. They are exquisite—so far as they go—pure, distinguished, ingenious; and the

fantastic oddity of their vocabulary seems in perfect accord with their general character.

Here is a fragment of *La Pénultième*, on which the reader may try his skill in comprehending the New French :

“ Mais où s’installe l’irrécusable intervention du surnaturel, et le commencement de l’angoisse sous laquelle agonise mon esprit naguère seigneur, c’est quand je vis, levant les yeux, dans la rue des antiquaires instinctivement suivie, que j’étais devant la boutique d’un luthier vendeur de vieux instruments pendus au mur, et, à terre, des palmes jaunes et les ailes enfouies en l’ombre, d’oiseaux anciens. Je m’enfuis, bizarre, personne condamnée à porter probablement le deuil de l’inexplicable Pénultième.”

As a translator, all the world must commend M. Mallarmé. He has put the poems of Poe into French in a way which is subtle almost without parallel. Each version is in simple prose, but so full, so reserved, so suavely mellifluous, that the metre and the rhymes continue to sing in an English ear. None could enter more tenderly than he into the strange charm of *Ulalume*, of *The Sleeper*, or of *The Raven*. It is rarely indeed that a word suggests that the melody of one, who was a symbolist

and a weaver of enigmas like himself, has momentarily evaded the translator.

M. Mallarmé, who understands English so perfectly, has perhaps seen the poems of Sydney Dobell. He knows, it is possible, that thirty or forty years ago there was an English poet who cultivated the symbol, who deliquesced the language, as he himself does in French. Sydney Dobell wrote lovely, unintelligible things, that broke, every now and then, into rhapsodies of veritable beauty. But his whole system was violent. He became an eccentric cometary nebula, whirling away from our poetic system at a tangent. He whirled away, for all his sincere passion, into oblivion. This is what one fears for the Symbolists : that being read with so great an effort by their own generation, they may, by the next, not be read at all, and what is pure and genuine in their artistic impulses be lost. Something of M. Mallarmé will, however, always be turned back to with respect and perhaps with enthusiasm, for he is a true man of letters.

TWO PASTELS

Mr. R. L. Stevenson as a Poet

A PRETTY little anthology might be made of poems by distinguished writers who never for a moment professed to be poets, and who only "swept, with hurried hand, the strings" when they thought nobody was listening. The elegant technical people of the eighteenth century, who never liked to be too abstruse to seem polite, would contribute a great many of these flowers that were born to bloom unseen. It is not everybody who is aware that the majestic Sir William Blackstone was "guilty," as people put it, of a set of one hundred octosyllabic verses which would do credit to any laurelled master on Parnassus. We might, indeed, open our little volume with *The Lawyer's Farewell to his Muse*. Then, of course, there would be Bishop Berkeley's unique poem, *Westward the Course of Empire*

takes its Way; and Oldys, the antiquary, would spare us his *Busy, curious, thirsty Fly*. We should appeal to Burton for the prefatory verses in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and to Bacon for *The World's Bubble*. If I had any finger in that anthology, Smollett's *Ode to Leven Water* should by no means be omitted. It would be a false pride that would reject Holcroft's *Gaffer Gray*, or Sydney Smith's *Receipt for a Salad*, which latter Herrick might have been glad to sign. Hume's solitary poem should be printed by itself, or with some of Carlyle's lyrics, and George Eliot's sonnets, in an appendix, as an awful warning.

As we come down to recent times the task of editing our anthology would grow difficult. In our day, the prose writers have either been coy or copious with their verses. If Professor Tyndall has never essayed the Lydian measure it is very surprising, but we have not yet been admitted to hear his shell; nor has Mr. Walter Besant, to the best of my belief, published an ode to anything. Let the shades of Berkeley and Smollett administer reproof. Until quite lately, however, we should have been contented to close our selection with "The bed was made,

the room was fit," from *Travels with a Donkey*. But Mr. Stevenson is now ineligible—he has published books of poems.

That this departure is not quite a new one might be surmised by any one who has followed closely the publications of the essayist and novelist whom a better man than I am has called "the most exquisite and original of our day." Though Mr. Stevenson's prose volumes are more than twelve in number, and though he had been thought of essentially as a prose writer, the ivory shoulder of the lyre has peeped out now and then. I do not refer to his early collections of verse, to *Not I, and other Poems*, to *Moral Emblems*, and to *The Graver and the Pen*. (I mention these scarce publications of the Davos press in the hope of rousing wicked passions in the breasts of other collectors, since my own set of them is complete.) These volumes were decidedly occult. A man might build upon them a reputation as a sage, but hardly as a poet. Their stern morality came well from one whose mother's milk has been the *Shorter Catechism*; they are books which no one can read and not be the better for; but as mere verse, they leave something to be desired. *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda*, if you happen to be

lucky enough to possess them, *e passa*. Where the careful reader has perceived that Mr. Stevenson was likely to become openly a poet has been in snatches of verse published here and there in periodicals, and of a quality too good to be neglected. Nevertheless, the publication of *A Child's Garden of Verses* (Longmans, 1885) was something of a surprise, and perhaps the new book of grown-up poems, *Underwoods* (Chatto and Windus, 1887) is more surprising still. There is no doubt about it any longer. Mr. Stevenson is a candidate for the bays.

The *Child's Garden of Verses* has now been published long enough to enable us to make a calm consideration of its merits. When it was fresh, opinion was divided, as it always is about a new strong thing, between those who, in Mr. Longfellow's phrase about the little girl, think it very, very good, and those who think it is horrid. After reading the new book, the *Underwoods*, we come back to *A Child's Garden* with a clearer sense of the writer's intention, and a wider experience of his poetical outlook upon life. The later book helps us to comprehend the former; there is the same sincerity, the same buoyant simplicity, the same curiously candid and

confidential attitude of mind. If any one doubted that Mr. Stevenson was putting his own childish memories into verse in the first book, all doubt must cease in reading the second book, where the experiences, although those of an adult, have exactly the same convincing air of candour. The first thing which struck the reader of *A Child's Garden* was the extraordinary clearness and precision with which the immature fancies of eager childhood were reproduced in it. People whose own childish memories had become very vague, and whose recollections of their games and dreams were hazy in the extreme, asked themselves how far this poet's visions were inspired by real memory and how far by invention. The new book sets that question at rest ; the same hand that gave us—

*My bed is like a little boat ;
Nurse helps me in when I embark ;
She girds me in my sailor's coat,
And starts me in the dark ;*

and the even more delicious—

*Now, with my little gun, I crawl
All in the dark along the wall,
And follow round the forest-track
Away behind the sofa-back,—*

now gives us pictures like the following :

My house, I say. *But hark to the sunny doves,
That make my roof the arena of their loves,
That gyre about the gable all day long
And fill the chimneys with their murmurous song :*
Our house, they say ; and mine, the cat declares,
*And spreads his golden fleece upon the chairs ;
And mine the dog, and rises stiff with wrath
If any alien foot profane the path.*
*So, too, the buck that trimmed my terraces,
Our whilome gardener, called the garden his ;
Who now, deposed, surveys my plain abode
And his late kingdom, only from the road.*

We now perceive that it is not invention, but memory of an extraordinarily vivid kind, patiently directed to little things, and charged with imagination ; and we turn back with increased interest to *A Child's Garden*, assured that it gives us a unique thing, a transcript of that child-mind which we have all possessed and enjoyed, but of which no one, except Mr. Stevenson, seems to have carried away a photograph. Long ago, in one of the very earliest, if I remember right, of those essays by R. L. S. for which we used so eagerly to watch the *Cornhill Magazine* in Mr. Leslie Stephen's time, in the paper called "Child Play," this retention of what is wiped off from the memories of the rest of us was clearly displayed. Out of this rarely sug-

gestive essay I will quote a few lines, which might have been printed as an introduction to *A Child's Garden* :

“In the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. ‘Making believe’ is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character. I could not learn my alphabet without some suitable *mise-en-scène*, and had to act a business-man in an office before I could sit down to my book. . . . I remember, as though it were yesterday, the expansion of spirit, the dignity and self-reliance, that came with a pair of mustachios in burnt cork, even when there was none to see. Children are even content to forego what we call the realities, and prefer the shadow to the substance. When they might be speaking intelligently together, they chatter gibberish by the hour, and are quite happy because they are making believe to speak French.”

Probably all will admit the truth of this statement of infant fancy, when it is presented to them in this way. But how many of us, in perfect sincerity, not relying upon legends of the nursery, not refreshed by the study of our own children's “make-believe,” can say that we clearly recollect the method of it? We shall find that our memories

are like a breath upon the glass, like the shape of a broken wave. Nothing is so hopelessly lost, so utterly volatile, as the fancies of our childhood. But Mr. Stevenson, alone amongst us all, appears to have kept daguerreotypes of the whole series of his childish sensations. Except the late Mrs. Ewing, he seems to be without a rival in this branch of memory as applied to literature.

The various attitudes of literary persons to the child are very interesting. There are, for instance, poets like Victor Hugo and Mr. Swinburne who come to admire, who stay to adore, and who do not disdain to throw their purple over any humble article of nursery use. They are so magnificent in their address to infancy, they say so many brilliant and unexpected things, that the mother is almost as much dazzled as she is gratified. We stand round, with our hats off, and admire the poet as much as he admires the child; but we experience no regret when he presently turns away to a discussion of grown-up things. We have an ill-defined notion that he reconnoitres infancy from the outside, and has not taken the pains to reach the secret mind of childhood. It is to be noted, and this is a suspicious circumstance, that Mr.

Swinburne and Victor Hugo like the child better the younger it is.

*What likeness may define, and stray not
From truth's exactest way,
A baby's beauty? Love can say not,
What likeness may.*

This is charming ; but the address is to the mother, is to the grown-up reflective person. To the real student of child-life the baby contains possibilities, but is at present an uninteresting chrysalis. It cannot carry a gun through the forest, behind the sofa-back ; it is hardly so useful as a cushion to represent a passenger in a railway-train of inverted chairs.

Still more remote than the dithyrambic poets are those writers about children — and they are legion—who have ever the eye fixed upon morality, and carry the didactic tongue thrust in the cheek of fable. The late Charles Kingsley, who might have made so perfect a book of his *Water-Babies*, sins notoriously in this respect. The moment a wise child perceives the presence of allegory, or moral instruction, all the charm of a book is gone. Parable is the very antipodes of childish "make-believe," into which the element of

ulterior motive or secondary moral meaning never enters for an instant. The secret of the charm of Mrs. Gatty's *Parables from Nature*, which were the fairest food given to very young minds in my day, was that the fortunate child never discovered that they were parables at all. I, for one, used to read and re-read them as realistic statements of fact, the necessity of pointing a moral merely having driven the amiable author to the making of her story a little more fantastic, and therefore more welcome, than it would otherwise be. It was explained to me one hapless day that the parables were of a nature to instil nice principles into the mind; and from that moment Mrs. Gatty became a broken idol. Lewis Carroll owed his great and deserved success to his suppleness in bending his fancy to the conditions of a mind that is dreaming. It has never seemed to me that the *Adventures in Wonderland* were specially childish; dreams are much the same, whether a child or a man is passive under them, and it is a fact that Lewis Carroll appeals just as keenly to adults as to children. In Edward Lear's rhymes and ballads the love of grotesque nonsense in the grown-up child is mainly appealed to; and these are certainly appreciated more by parents than by children.

It would be easy, by multiplying examples, to drive home my contention that only two out of the very numerous authors who have written successfully on or for children have shown a clear recollection of the mind of healthy childhood itself. Many authors have achieved brilliant success in describing children, in verbally caressing them, in amusing, in instructing them ; but only two, Mrs. Ewing in prose, and Mr. Stevenson in verse, have sat down with them without disturbing their fancies, and have looked into the world of "make-believe" with the children's own eyes. If Victor Hugo should visit the nursery, every head of hair ought to be brushed, every pinafore be clean, and nurse must certainly be present, as well as mamma. But Mrs. Ewing or Mr. Stevenson might lead a long romp in the attic when nurse was out shopping, and not a child in the house should know that a grown-up person had been there. There are at least a dozen pieces in the *Child's Garden* which might be quoted to show what is meant. "The Lamplighter" will serve our purpose as well as any other :

*My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky ;
It's time to take the window to see Learie going by ;*

*For every night at tea-time, and before you take your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the
street.*

*Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker and as rich as he can be ;
But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
O Learie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps
with you !*

*For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door,
And Learie stops to light it as he lights so many more ;
And O ! before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
O Learie, see a little child, and nod to him to-night.*

In publishing this autumn a second volume, this time of grown-up verses, Mr. Stevenson has ventured on a bolder experiment. His *Underwoods*, with its title openly borrowed from Ben Jonson, is an easy book to appreciate and enjoy, but not to review. In many respects it is plainly the work of the same fancy that described the Country of Counterpane and the Land of Story-books, but it has grown a little sadder, and a great deal older. There is the same delicate sincerity, the same candour and simplicity, the same artless dependence on the good faith of the public. The ordinary themes of the poets are untouched ; there is not one piece from cover to cover which deals with the passion of love. The book is occupied with friend-

ship, with nature, with the honourable instincts of man's moral machinery. Above all, it enters with great minuteness, and in a very confidential spirit, into the theories and moods of the writer himself. It will be to many readers a revelation of the everyday life of an author whose impersonal writings have given them so much and so varied pleasure. Not a dozen ordinary interviewers could have extracted so much of the character of the man himself as he gives us in these one hundred and twenty pages.

The question of admitting the personal element into literature is one which is not very clearly understood. People try to make rules about it, and say that an author may describe his study, but not his dining-room, and his wife, but not her cousin. The fact is that no rules can possibly be laid down in a matter which is one of individual sympathy. The discussion whether a writer may speak of himself or no is utterly vain until we are informed in what voice he has the habit of speaking. It is all a question which depends on the *timbre* of the literary voice. As in life there are persons whose sweetness of utterance is such that we love to have them warbling at our side, no matter on what subject they speak, and others to

whom we have scarcely patience to listen if they want to tell us that we have inherited a fortune, so it is in literature. Except that little class of stoic critics who like to take their books *in vacuo*, most of us prefer to know something about the authors we read. But whether we like them to tell it us themselves, or no, depends entirely on the voice. Thackeray and Fielding are never confidential enough to satisfy us; Dickens and Smollett set our teeth on edge directly they start upon a career of confidential expansion; and this has nothing to do with any preference for *Tom Jones* over *Peregrine Pickle*. There is no doubt that Mr. Stevenson is one of those writers the sound of whose personal voices is pleasing to the public, and there must be hundreds of his admirers who will not miss one word of "To a Gardener" or "The Mirror Speaks," and who will puzzle out each of the intimate addresses to his private friends with complete satisfaction.

The present writer is one of those who are most under the spell. For me Mr. Stevenson may speak for ever, and chronicle at full length all his uncles and his cousins and his nurses. But I think if it were my privilege to serve him in the capacity of Molière's old woman, or to be what a

friend of mine would call his "foolometer," I should pluck up courage to represent to him that this thing can be overdone. I openly avow myself an enthusiast, yet even I shrink before the confidential character of the prose inscription to *Underwoods*. This volume is dedicated, if you please, to eleven physicians, and it is strange that one so all compact of humour as Mr. Stevenson should not have noticed how funny it is to think of an author seated affably in an armchair, simultaneously summoning by name eleven physicians to take a few words of praise each, and a copy of his little book.

The objective side of Mr. Stevenson's mind is very rich and full, and he has no need to retire too obstinately upon the subjective. Yet I know not that anything he has written in verse is more worthily dignified than the following little personal fragment, in which he refers, of course, to the grandfather who died a few weeks before his birth, and to the father whom he had just conducted to the grave, both heroic builders of lighthouses :

*Say not of me that weakly I declined
The labours of my sires, and fled the sea,
The towers we founded and the lamps we lit,
To play at home with paper like a child.*

*But rather say: In the afternoon of time
A strenuous family dusted from its hands
The sand of granite, and beholding far
Along the sounding coast its pyramids
And tall memorials catch the dying sun,
Smiled well content, and to this childish task
Around the fire addressed its evening hours.*

This is a particularly happy specimen of Mr. Stevenson's blank verse, in which metre, as a rule, he does not show to advantage. It is not that his verses are ever lame or faulty, for in the technical portion of the art he seldom fails, but that his rhymeless iambics remind the ear too much now of Tennyson, now of Keats. He is, on the contrary, exceedingly happy and very much himself in that metre of eight or seven syllables, with couplet-rhymes, which served so well the first poets who broke away from heroic verse, such as Swift and Lady Winchilsea, Green and Dyer. If he must be affiliated to any school of poets it is to these, who hold the first outworks between the old classical camp and the invading army of romance, to whom I should ally him. Martial is with those octosyllabists of Queen Anne, and to Martial might well have been assigned, had they been in old Latin, the delicately homely lines, "To a Gardener." How felicitous is this quatrain about the onion—

*Let first the onion flourish there,
Rose among roots, the maiden fair,
Wine-scented and poetic soul
Of the capacious salad-bowl.*

Or this, in more irregular measure, and enfolding a loftier fancy—

*Sing clearer, Muse, or evermore be still,
Sing truer, or no longer sing!
No more the voice of melancholy Jacques
To make a weeping echo in the hill;
But as the boy, the pirate of the spring,
From the green elm a living linnet takes,
One natural verse recapture—then be still.*

It would be arrogant in the extreme to decide whether or no Mr. R. L. Stevenson's poems will be read in the future. They are, however, so full of character, so redolent of his own fascinating temperament, that it is not too bold to suppose that so long as his prose is appreciated those who love that will turn to this. There have been prose writers whose verse has not lacked accomplishment or merit, but has been so far from interpreting their prose that it rather disturbed its effect and weakened its influence. Cowley is an example of this, whose ingenious and dryly intellectual poetry positively terrifies the reader away from his

eminently suave and human essays. Neither of Mr. Stevenson's volumes of poetry will thus disturb his prose. Opinions may be divided as to their positive value, but no one will doubt that the same characteristics are displayed in the poems, the same suspicion of "the abhorred pedantic sanhedrim," the same fulness of life and tenderness of hope, the same bright felicity of epithet as in the essays and romances. The belief, however, may be expressed without fear of contradiction that Mr. Stevenson's fame will rest mainly upon his verse and not upon his prose, only in that dim future when Mr. Matthew Arnold's prophecy shall be fulfilled and Shelley's letters shall be preferred to his lyrical poems. It is saying a great deal to acknowledge that the author of *Kidnapped* is scarcely less readable in verse than he is in prose.

1887.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling's Short Stories

TWO years ago there was suddenly revealed to us, no one seems to remember how, a new star out of the East. Not fewer distinguished men of letters profess to have "discovered" Mr. Kipling than there were cities of old in which Homer was born. Yet, in fact, the discovery was not much more creditable to them than it would be, on a summer night, to contrive to notice a comet flaring across the sky. Not only was this new talent robust, brilliant, and self-asserting, but its reception was prepared for by a unique series of circumstances. The fiction of the Anglo-Saxon world, in its more intellectual provinces, had become curiously feminised. Those novel-writers who cared to produce subtle impressions upon their readers, in England and America, had become

extremely refined in taste and discreet in judgment. People who were not content to pursue the soul of their next-door neighbour through all the burrows of self-consciousness had no choice but to take ship with Mr. Rider Haggard for the Mountains of the Moon. Between excess of psychological analysis and excess of superhuman romance there was a great void in the world of Anglo-Saxon fiction. It is this void which Mr. Kipling, with something less than one hundred short stories, one novel, and a few poems, has filled by his exotic realism and his vigorous rendering of unhackneyed experience. His temperament is eminently masculine, and yet his imagination is strictly bound by existing laws. The Evarras of the novel had said:

*Thus gods are made,
And whoso makes them otherwise shall die,*

when, behold, a young man comes up out of India, and makes them quite otherwise, and lives.

The vulgar trick, however, of depreciating other writers in order to exalt the favourite of a moment was never less worthy of practice than it is in the case of the author of *Soldiers Three*. His relation to his contemporaries is curiously slight. One living writer there is, indeed, with whom it is not

unnatural to compare him—Pierre Loti. Each of these men has attracted the attention, and then the almost exaggerated admiration, of a crowd of readers drawn from every class. Each has become popular without ceasing to be delightful to the fastidious. Each is independent of traditional literature, and affects a disdain for books. Each is a wanderer, a lover of prolonged exile, more at home among the ancient races of the East than among his own people. Each describes what he has seen in short sentences, with highly coloured phrases and local words, little troubled to obey the laws of style if he can but render an exact impression of what the movement of physical life has been to himself. Each produces on the reader a peculiar thrill, a voluptuous and agitating sentiment of intellectual uneasiness, with the spontaneous art of which he has the secret. Totally unlike in detail, Rudyard Kipling and Pierre Loti have these general qualities in common, and if we want a literary parallel to the former, the latter is certainly the only one that we can find. Nor is the attitude of the French novelist to his sailor friends at all unlike that of the Anglo-Indian civilian to his soldier chums. To distinguish we must note very carefully the difference between

Mulvaney and *mon frère Yves*; it is not altogether to the advantage of the latter.

The old rhetorical manner of criticism was not meant for the discussion of such writers as these. The only way in which, as it seems to me, we can possibly approach them, is by a frank confession of their personal relation to the feelings of the critic. I will therefore admit that I cannot pretend to be indifferent to the charm of what Mr. Kipling writes. From the first moment of my acquaintance with it it has held me fast. It excites, disturbs, and attracts me; I cannot throw off its disquieting influence. I admit all that is to be said in its disfavour. I force myself to see that its occasional cynicism is irritating and strikes a false note. I acknowledge the broken and jagged style, the noisy newspaper bustle of the little peremptory sentences, the cheap irony of the satires on society. Often—but this is chiefly in the earlier stories—I am aware that there is a good deal too much of the rattle of the piano at some café concert. But when all this is said, what does it amount to? What but an acknowledgment of the crudity of a strong and rapidly developing young nature? You cannot expect a creamy smoothness while the act of vinous fermentation is proceeding.

Wit will shine

*Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line ;
A noble error, and but seldom made,
When poets are by too much force betray'd ;
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime,
Still show a quickness, and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rime.*

In the following pages I shall try to explain why the sense of these shortcomings is altogether buried for me in delighted sympathy and breathless curiosity. Mr. Kipling does not provoke a critical suspension of judgment. He is vehement, and sweeps us away with him ; he plays upon a strange and seductive pipe, and we follow him like children. As I write these sentences, I feel how futile is this attempt to analyse his gifts, and how greatly I should prefer to throw this paper to the winds and listen to the magician himself. I want more and more, like *Oliver Twist*. I want all those "other stories" ; I wish to wander down all those bypaths that we have seen disappear in the brushwood. If one lay very still and low by the watch-fire, in the hollow of Ortheris's greatcoat, one might learn more and more of the inextinguishable sorrows of Mulvaney. One might be told more of what happened, out of the moonlight,

in the blackness of Amir Nath's Gully. I want to know how the palanquin came into Dearsley's possession, and what became of Kheni Singh, and whether the seal-cutter did really die in the House of Suddhoo. I want to know who it is who dances the *Hállí Hukk*, and how, and why, and where. I want to know what happened at Jagadhri, when the Death Bull was painted. I want to know all the things that Mr. Kipling does not like to tell—to see the devils of the East “rioting as the stallions riot in spring.” It is the strength of this new story-teller that he reawakens in us the primitive emotions of curiosity, mystery, and romance in action. He is the master of a new kind of terrible and enchanting peepshow, and we crowd around him begging for “just one more look.” When a writer excites and tantalises us in this way, it seems a little idle to discuss his style. Let pedants, then, if they will, say that Mr. Kipling has no style; yet, if so, how shall we designate such passages as this, frequent enough among his more exotic stories?

“Come back with me to the north and be among men once more. Come back when this matter is accomplished and I call for thee. The bloom of the peach-orchards is upon all the valley, and

here is only dust and a great stink. There is a pleasant wind among the mulberry-trees, and the streams are bright with snow-water, and the caravans go up and the caravans go down, and a hundred fires sparkle in the gut of the pass, and tent-peg answers hammer-nose, and pony squeals to pony across the drift-smoke of the evening. It is good in the north now. Come back with me. Let us return to our own people. Come !”

I

The private life of Mr. Rudyard Kipling is not a matter of public interest, and I should be very unwilling to exploit it, even if I had the means of doing so. The youngest of living writers should really be protected for a few years longer against those who chirp and gabble about the unessential. All that needs to be known, in order to give him his due chronological place, is that he was born in Bombay in Christmas week, 1865. The careful student of what he has published will collect from it the impression that Mr. Kipling was resident in India at an age when few European children remain there; that he returned

to England for a brief period; that he began a career on his own account in India at an unusually early age; that he has led a life of extraordinary vicissitude, as a journalist, as a war correspondent, as a civilian in the wake of the army; that an insatiable curiosity has led him to shrink from no experience that might help to solve the strange riddles of Oriental existence; and that he is distinguished from other active, adventurous, and inquisitive persons in that his capacious memory retains every impression that it captures.

Beyond this, all that must here be said about the man is that his stories began to be published—I think about eight years ago—in local newspapers of India, that his first book of verse, *Departmental Ditties*, appeared in 1886, while his prose stories were not collected from a Lahore journal, of which he was the sub-editor, until 1888, when a volume of *Plain Tales from the Hills* appeared in Calcutta. In the same year six successive pamphlets or thin books appeared in an *Indian Railway Library*, published at Allahabad, under the titles of *Soldiers Three*, *The Gadsbys*, *In Black and White*, *Under the Deodars*, *The Phantom 'Rickshaw*, and *Wee Willie Winkie*. These formed the literary baggage of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, when, in 1889, he came

home to find himself suddenly famous at the age of twenty-three.

Since his arrival in England Mr. Kipling has not been idle. In 1890 he brought out a Christmas annual called *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot*, and a short novel, *The Light that Failed*. Already in 1891 he has published a fresh collection of tales called (in America) *Mine Own People*, and a second miscellany of verses. This is by no means a complete record of his activity, but it includes the names of all his important writings. At an age when few future novelists have yet produced anything at all, Mr. Kipling is already voluminous. It would be absurd not to acknowledge that a danger lies in this precocious fecundity. It would probably be an excellent thing for every one concerned if this brilliant youth could be deprived of pens and ink for a few years and be buried again somewhere in the far East. There should be a "close time" for authors no less than for seals, and the extraordinary fulness and richness of Mr. Kipling's work does not completely reassure us.

The publications which I have named above have not, as a rule, any structural cohesion. With the exception of *Badalia Herodsfoot* and

The Light that Failed, which deal with phases of London life, their contents might be thrown together without much loss of relation. The general mass so formed could then be redivided into several coherent sections. It may be remarked that Mr. Kipling's short stories, of which, as I have said, we hold nearly a hundred, mainly deal with three or four distinct classes of Indian life. We may roughly distinguish these as the British soldier in India, the Anglo-Indian, the Native, and the British child in India. In the following pages, I shall endeavour to characterise his treatment of these four classes. ~~I retain the personal impression that it is pre-eminently as a poet that we shall eventually come to regard him.~~ For the present his short stories fill the popular mind in connection with his name.

II

There can be no question that the side upon which Mr. Kipling's talent has most delicately tickled British curiosity, and British patriotism too, is his revelation of the soldier in India. A great body of our countrymen are constantly being drafted out to the East on Indian service. They serve

their time, are recalled, and merge in the mass of our population ; their strange temporary isolation between the civilian and the native, and their practical inability to find public expression for their feelings, make these men—to whom, though we so often forget it, we owe the maintenance of our Empire in the East—an absolutely silent section of the community. Of their officers we may know something, although *A Conference of the Powers* may perhaps have awakened us to the fact that we know very little. Still, people like Tick Boileau and Captain Mafflin of the Duke of Derry's Pink Hussars are of ourselves ; we meet them before they go out and when they come back ; they marry our sisters and our daughters ; and they lay down the law about India after dinner. Of the private soldier, on the other hand, of his loves and hates, sorrows and pleasures, of the way in which the vast, hot, wearisome country and its mysterious inhabitants strike him, of his attitude towards India, and of the way in which India treats him, we know, or knew until Mr. Kipling enlightened us, absolutely nothing. It is not surprising, then, if the novelty of this portion of his writings has struck ordinary English readers more than that of any other.

This section of Mr. Kipling's work occupies the seven tales called *Soldiers Three*, and a variety of stories scattered through his other books. In order to make his point of view that of the men themselves, not spoiled by the presence of superior officers, or by social restraint of any sort, the author takes upon himself the character of an almost silent young civilian who has gained the warm friendship of three soldiers, whose intimate companion and chum he becomes. Most of the military stories, though not all, are told by one of these three, or else recount their adventures or caprices.

Before opening the book called *Soldiers Three*, however, the reader will do well to make himself familiar with the opening pages of a comparatively late story, *The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney*, in which the characteristics of the famous three are more clearly defined than elsewhere. Mulvaney, the Irish giant, who has been the "grizzled, tender, and very wise Ulysses" to successive generations of young and foolish recruits, is a great creation. He is the father of the craft of arms to his associates; he has served with various regiments from Bermuda to Halifax; he is "old in war, scarred, reckless, resourceful, and in his pious hours an unequalled soldier." Learoyd, the second of these friends, is

“ six and a half feet of slow-moving, heavy-footed Yorkshireman, born on the wolds, bred in the dales, and educated chiefly among the carriers' carts at the back of York railway-station.” The third is Ortheris, a little man as sharp as a needle, “ a fox-terrier of a cockney,” an inveterate poacher and dog-stealer.

Of these three strongly contrasted types the first and the third live in Mr. Kipling's pages with absolute reality. I must confess that Learoyd is to me a little shadowy, and even in a late story, *On Greenhow Hill*, which has apparently been written in order to emphasise the outline of the Yorkshireman, I find myself chiefly interested in the incidental part, the sharp-shooting of Ortheris. It seems as though Mr. Kipling required, for the artistic balance of his cycle of stories, a third figure, and had evolved Learoyd while he observed and created Mulvaney and Ortheris, nor am I sure that places could not be pointed out where Learoyd, save for the dialect, melts undistinguishably into an incarnation of Mulvaney. The others are studied from the life, and by an observer who goes deep below the surface of conduct. How penetrating the study is, and how clear the diagnosis, may be seen in one or two stories which lie somewhat

outside the popular group. It is no superficial idler among men who has taken down the strange notes on military hystéria which inspire *The Madness of Ortheris* and *In the Matter of a Private*, while the skill with which the battered giant Mulvaney, who has been a corporal and then has been reduced for misconduct, who to the ordinary view and in the eyes of all but the wisest of his officers is a dissipated blackguard, is made to display the rapidity, wit, resource, and high moral feeling which he really possesses, is extraordinary.

We have hitherto had in English literature no portraits of private soldiers like these, and yet the soldier is an object of interest and of very real, if vague and inefficient, admiration to his fellow-citizens. Mr. Thomas Hardy has painted a few excellent soldiers, but in a more romantic light and a far more pastoral setting. Other studies of this kind in fiction have either been slight and unsubstantial, or else they have been, as in the baby-writings of a certain novelist who has enjoyed popularity for a moment, odious in their sentimental unreality. There seems to be something essentially volatile about the soldier's memory. His life is so monotonous, so hedged in by routine, that he forgets the details of it as soon as the restraint is

removed, or else he looks back upon it to see it bathed in a fictitious haze of sentiment. The absence of sentimentality in Mr. Kipling's version of the soldier's life in India is one of its great merits. What romance it assumes under his treatment is due to the curious contrasts it encourages. We see the ignorant and raw English youth transplanted, at the very moment when his instincts begin to develop, into a country where he is divided from everything which can remind him of his home, where by noon and night, in the bazar, in barracks, in the glowing scrub jungle, in the ferny defiles of the hills, everything he sees and hears and smells and feels produces on him an unfamiliar and an unwelcome impression. How he behaves himself under these new circumstances, what code of laws still binds his conscience, what are his relaxations and what his observations, these are the questions which we ask and which Mr. Kipling essays for the first time to answer.

Among the short stories which Mr. Kipling has dedicated to the British soldier in India there are a few which excel all the rest as works of art. I do not think that any one will deny that of this inner selection none exceeds in skill or originality *The Taking of Lungtungpen*. Those who have not read

this little masterpiece have yet before them the pleasure of becoming acquainted with one of the best short stories, not merely in English, but in any language. I do not know how to praise adequately the technical merit of this little narrative. It possesses to the full that masculine buoyancy, that power of sustaining an extremely spirited narrative in a tone appropriate to the action, which is one of Mr. Kipling's rare gifts. Its concentration, which never descends into obscurity, its absolute novelty, its direct and irresistible appeal to what is young and daring and absurdly splendid, are unsurpassed. To read it, at all events to admire and enjoy it, is to recover for a moment a little of that dare-devil quality that lurks somewhere in the softest and the baldest of us. Only a very young man could have written it, perhaps, but still more certainly only a young man of genius.

A little less interesting, in a totally different way, is *The Daughter of the Regiment*, with its extraordinarily vivid account of the breaking-out of cholera in a troop-train. Of *The Madness of Ortho* I have already spoken; as a work of art this again seems to me somewhat less remarkable, because carried out with less completeness. But it would be hard to find a parallel, of its own class,

to *The Rout of the White Hussars*, with its study of the effects of what is believed to be supernatural on a gathering of young fellows who are absolutely without fear of any phenomenon of which they comprehend the nature. In a very late story, *The Courting of Dinah Shadd*, Mr. Kipling has shown that he is able to deal with the humours and matrimonial amours of Indian barrack-life just as rapidly, fully, and spiritedly as with the more serious episodes of a soldier's career. The scene between Judy Sheehy and Dinah, as told by Mulvaney in that story, is pure comedy, without a touch of farce.

On the whole, however, the impression left by Mr. Kipling's military stories is one of melancholy. Tommy Atkins, whom the author knows so well and sympathises, with so truly is a solitary being in India. In all these tales I am conscious of the barracks as of an island in a desolate ocean of sand. All around is the infinite waste of India, obscure, monotonous, immense, inhabited by black men and pariah dogs, Pathans and green parrots, kites and crocodiles, and long solitudes of high grass. The island in this sea is a little collection of young men, sent out from the remoteness of England to serve "the Widder," and to help to preserve for her the rich and barbarous empire of the East. This

microcosm of the barracks has its own laws, its own morals, its own range of emotional sentiment. What these are the new writer has not told us (for that would be a long story), but shown us that he himself has divined. He has held the door open for a moment, and has revealed to us a set of very human creations. One thing, at least, the biographer of Mulvaney and Ortheris has no difficulty in persuading us—namely, that “God in his wisdom has made the heart of the British soldier, who is very often an unlicked ruffian, as soft as the heart of a little child, in order that he may believe in and follow his officers into tight and nasty places.”

III

The Anglo-Indians with whom Mr. Kipling deals are of two kinds. I must confess that there is no section of his work which appears to me so insignificant as that which deals with Indian “society.” The eight tales which are bound together as *The Story of the Gadsbys* are doubtless very early productions. I have been told, but I know not whether on good authority, that they were published in serial form before the author was twenty-one.

Judged as the observation of Anglo-Indian life by so young a boy, they are, it is needless to say, astonishingly clever. Some pages in them can never, I suppose, come to seem unworthy of his later fame. The conversation in *The Tents of Kedar*, where Captain Gadsby breaks to Mrs. Herriott that he is engaged to be married, and absolutely darkens her world to her during "a Naini Tal dinner for thirty-five," is of consummate adroitness. What a "Naini Tal dinner" is I have not the slightest conception, but it is evidently something very sumptuous and public, and if any practised hand of the old social school could have contrived the thrust and parry under the fire of seventy critical eyes better than young Mr. Kipling has done, I know not who that writer is. In quite another way the pathos of the little bride's delirium in *The Valley of the Shadow* is of a very high, almost of the highest, order.

But, as a rule, Mr. Kipling's "society" Anglo-Indians are not drawn better than those which other Indian novelists have created for our diversion. There is a sameness in the type of devouring female, and though Mr. Kipling devises several names for it, and would fain persuade us that Mrs. Herriott, and Mrs. Reiver, and Mrs.

Hauksbee possess subtle differences which distinguish them, yet I confess I am not persuaded. They all—and the Venus Annodomini as well—appear to me to be the same high-coloured, rather ill-bred, not wholly spoiled professional coquette. Mr. Kipling seems to be too impatient of what he calls “the shiny toy-scum stuff people call civilisation” to paint these ladies very carefully. *The Phantom Rickshaw*, in which a hideously selfish man is made to tell the story of his own cruelty and of his mechanical remorse, is indeed highly original, but here it is the man, not the woman, in whom we are interested. The proposal of marriage in the dust-storm in *False Dawn*, a theatrical, lurid scene, though scarcely natural, is highly effective. The archery contest in *Cupid's Arrows* needs only to be compared with a similar scene in *Daniel Deronda* to show how much more closely Mr. Kipling keeps his eye on detail than George Eliot did. But these things are rare in this class of his stories, and too often the Anglo-Indian social episodes are choppy, unconvincing, and not very refined.

All is changed when the central figure is a man. Mr. Kipling's officials and civilians are admirably vivid and of an amazing variety. If any one

wishes to know why this new author has been received with joy and thankfulness by the Anglo-Saxon world, it is really not necessary for him to go further for a reason than to the moral tale of *The Conversion of Aurelian McGoggin*. Let the author of that tract speak for himself :

“Every man is entitled to his own religious opinions ; but no man—least of all a junior—has a right to thrust these down other men’s throats. The Government sends out weird civilians now and again ; but McGoggin was the queerest exported for a long time. He was clever—brilliantly clever—but his cleverness worked the wrong way. Instead of keeping to the study of the vernaculars, he had read some books written by a man called Comte, I think, and a man called Spencer, and a Professor Clifford. [You will find these books in the Library.] They deal with people’s insides from the point of view of men who have no stomachs. There was no order against his reading them, but his mamma should have smacked him. . . . I do not say a word against this creed. It was made up in town, where there is nothing but machinery and asphalte and building—all shut in by the fog. . . . But in this country [India], where you really see humanity—raw,

brown, naked humanity—with nothing between it and the blazing sky, and only the used-up, over-handled earth underfoot, the notion somehow dies away, and most folk come back to simpler theories.”

Those who will not come back to simpler theories are prigs, for whom the machine-made notion is higher than experience. Now Mr. Kipling, in his warm way, hates many things, but he hates the prig for preference. Aurelian McGoggin, better known as the Blastoderm, is a prig of the over-educated type, and upon him falls the awful calamity of sudden and complete nerve-collapse. Lieutenant Golightly, in the story which bears his name, is a prig who values himself for spotless attire and clockwork precision of manner; he therefore is mauled and muddied up to his eyes, and then arrested under painfully derogatory conditions. In *Lispeth* we get the missionary prig, who thinks that the Indian instincts can be effaced by a veneer of Christianity. Mr. Kipling hates “the sheltered life.” The men he likes are those who have been thrown out of their depth at an early age, and taught to swim off a boat. The very remarkable story of *Thrown Away* shows the effect of preparing for India by a life “unspotted

from the world" in England; it is as hopelessly tragic as any in Mr. Kipling's somewhat grim repertory.

Against the *régime* of the prig Mr. Kipling sets the *régime* of Strickland. Over and over again he introduces this mysterious figure, always with a phrase of extreme approval. Strickland is in the police, and his power consists in his determination to know the East as the natives know it. He can pass through the whole of Upper India, dressed as a fakir, without attracting the least attention. Sometimes, as in '*Beyond the Pale*, he may know too much. But this is an exception, and personal to himself. Mr. Kipling's conviction is that this is the sort of man to pervade India for us, and that one Strickland is worth a thousand self-conceited civilians. But even below the Indian prig, because he has at least known India, is the final object of Mr. Kipling's loathing, "Pagett, M.P.," the radical English politician who comes out for four months to set everybody right. His chastisement is always severe and often comic. But in one very valuable paper, which Mr. Kipling must not be permitted to leave unprinted, *The Enlightenment of Pagett, M.P.*, he has dealt elaborately and quite seriously with this noxious creature.

Whether Mr. Kipling is right or wrong, far be it from me in my ignorance to pretend to know. But his way of putting these things is persuasive.

Since Mr. Kipling has come back from India he has written about society "of sorts" in England. Is there not perhaps in him something of Pagett, M.P., turned inside out? As a delineator of English life, at all events, he is not yet thoroughly master of his craft. Everything he writes has vigour and picturesqueness. But *The Lamentable Comedy of Willow Wood* is the sort of thing that any extremely brilliant Burman, whose English, if slightly odd, was nevertheless unimpeachable, might write of English ladies and gentlemen, having never been in England. *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot* was in every way better, more truly observed, more credible, more artistic, but yet a little too cynical and brutal to come straight from life. And last of all there is the novel of *The Light that Failed*, with its much-discussed two endings, its oases of admirable detail in a desert of the undesirable, with its extremely disagreeable woman, and its far more brutal and detestable man, presented to us, the precious pair of them, as typical specimens of English society. I confess that it is *The Light that Failed* that has

wakened me to the fact that there are limits to this dazzling new talent, the *éclat* of which had almost lifted us off our critical feet.

IV

The conception of Strickland would be very tantalising and incomplete if we were not permitted to profit from his wisdom and experience. But, happily, Mr. Kipling is perfectly willing to take us below the surface, and to show us glimpses of the secret life of India. In so doing he puts forth his powers to their fullest extent, and I think it cannot be doubted that the tales which deal with native manners are not merely the most curious and interesting which Mr. Kipling has written, but are also the most fortunately constructed. Every one who has thought over this writer's mode of execution will have been struck with the skill with which his best work is restrained within certain limits. When inspiration flags with him, indeed, his stories may grow too long, or fail, as if from languor, before they reach their culmination. But his best short stories—and among his best we include the majority of his native Indian tales—are cast at once, as if

in a mould; nothing can be detached from them without injury. In this consists his great technical advantage over almost all his English rivals; we must look to France or to America for stories fashioned in this way. In several of his tales of Indian manners this skill reaches its highest because most complicated expression. It may be comparatively easy to hold within artistic bonds a gentle episode of European amorosity. To deal, in the same form, but with infinitely greater audacity, with the muffled passions and mysterious instincts of India, to slur over nothing, to emphasise nothing, to give in some twenty pages the very spicy odour of the East, this is marvellous.

Not less than this Mr. Kipling has done in a little group of stories which I cannot but hold to be the culminating point of his genius so far. If the remainder of his writings were swept away, posterity would be able to reconstruct its Rudyard Kipling from *Without Benefit of Clergy*, *The Man who Would be King*, *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, and *Beyond the Pale*. More than that, if all other record of Indian habits had been destroyed, much might be conjectured from these of the pathos, the splendour, the cruelty, and the mystery of India. From *The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows* more is to

be gleaned of the real action of opium-smoking, and the causes of that indulgence, than from many sapient debates in the British House of Commons. We come very close to the confines of the moonlight-coloured world of magic in *The Bisara of Pooree*. For pure horror and for the hopeless impenetrability of the native conscience there is *The Recrudescence of Imray*. In a revel of colour and shadow, at the close of the audacious and Lucianic story of *The Incarnation of Krishna Mulwaney*, we peep for a moment into the mystery of "a big queen's praying at Benares."

Admirable, too, are the stories which deal with the results of attempts made to melt the Asiatic and the European into one. The red-headed Irish-Thibetan who makes the king's life a burden to him in the fantastic story of *Namgay Doola* represents one extremity of this chain of grotesque Eurasians; Michele D'Cruze, the wretched little black police inspector, with a drop of white blood in his body, who wakes up to energetic action at one supreme moment of his life, is at the other. The relapse of the converted Indian is a favourite theme with this cynical observer of human nature. It is depicted in *The Judgment of Dungara*, with a rattling humour worthy of Lever, where the whole

mission, clad in white garments woven of the scorpion nettle, go mad with fire and plunge into the river, while the trumpet of the god bellows triumphantly from the hills. In *Lispeth* we have a study—much less skilfully worked out, however—of the Indian woman carefully Christianised from childhood reverting at once to heathenism when her passions reach maturity.

The lover of good literature, however, is likely to come back to the four stories which we named first in this section. They are the very flower of Mr. Kipling's work up to the present moment, and on these we base our highest expectations for his future. *Without Benefit of Clergy* is a study of the Indian woman as wife and mother, uncovenanted wife of the English civilian and mother of his son. The tremulous passion of Ameera, her hopes, her fears, and her agonies of disappointment, combine to form by far the most tender page which Mr. Kipling has written. For pure beauty the scene where Holden, Ameera, and the baby count the stars on the housetop for Tota's horoscope is so characteristic that, although it is too long to quote in full, its opening paragraph must here be given as a specimen of Mr. Kipling's style in this class of work:

“Ameera climbed the narrow staircase that led to

the flat roof. The child, placid and unwinking, lay in the hollow of her right arm, gorgeous in silver-fringed muslin, with a small skull-cap on his head. Ameera wore all that she valued most. The diamond nose-stud that takes the place of the Western patch in drawing attention to the curve of the nostril, the gold ornament in the centre of the forehead studded with tallow-drop emeralds and flawed rubies, the heavy circlet of beaten gold that was fastened round her neck by the softness of the pure metal, and the clinking curb-patterned silver anklets hanging low over the rosy ankle-bone. She was dressed in jade-green muslin, as befitted a daughter of the Faith, and from shoulder to elbow and elbow to wrist ran bracelets of silver tied with floss silk; frail glass bangles slipped over the wrist in proof of the slenderness of the hand, and certain heavy gold bracelets that had no part in her country's ornaments, but, since they were Holden's gift, and fastened with a cunning European snap, delighted her immensely.

“ They sat down by the low white parapet of the roof, overlooking the city and its lights.”

What tragedy was in store for the gentle astrologer, or in what darkness of waters the story ends, it is needless to repeat here.

In *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes* a civil engineer stumbles by chance on a ghastly city of the dead who do not die, trapped into it, down walls of shifting sand, on the same principle as the ant-lion secures its prey, the parallel being so close that one half suspects Mr. Kipling of having invented a human analogy to the myrmeleon. The abominable settlement of living dead men is so vividly described, and the wonders of it are so calmly, and, as it were, so temperately discussed, that no one who possesses the happy gift of believing can fail to be persuaded of the truth of the tale. The character of Gunga Dass, a Deccanee Brahmin whom Jukes finds in this reeking village, and who, reduced to the bare elements of life, preserves a little, though exceedingly little, of his old traditional obsequiousness, is an admirable study. But all such considerations are lost, as we read the story first, in the overwhelming and Poe-like horror of the situation and the extreme novelty of the conception.

A still higher place, however, I am inclined to claim for the daring invention of *The Man who would be King*. This is a longer story than is usual with Mr. Kipling, and it depends for its effect, not upon any epigrammatic surprise or

extravagant dénouement of the intrigue, but on an imaginative effort brilliantly sustained through a detailed succession of events. Two ignorant and disreputable Englishmen, exiles from social life, determine to have done with the sordid struggle, and to close with a try for nothing less than empire. They are seen by the journalist who narrates the story to disappear northward from the Kumharsan Serai disguised as a mad priest and his servant starting to sell whirligigs to the Ameer of Kabul. Two years later there stumbles into the newspaper office a human creature bent into a circle, and moving his feet one over the other like a bear. This is the surviving adventurer, who, half dead and half dazed, is roused by doses of raw whisky into a condition which permits him to unravel the squalid and splendid chronicle of adventures beyond the utmost rim of mountains, adventures on the veritable throne of Kafiristan. The tale is recounted with great skill as from the lips of a dying king. At first, to give the needful impression of his faint, bewildered state, he mixes up his narrative, whimpers, forgets, and repeats his phrases; but by the time the curiosity of the reader is fully arrested, the tale has become limpid and straightforward enough. When it has to be

drawn to a close, the symptoms of aphasia and and brain-lesion are repeated. This story is conceived and conducted in the finest spirit of an artist. It is strange to the verge of being incredible, but it never outrages possibility, and the severe moderation of the author preserves our credence throughout.

It is in these Indian stories that Mr. Kipling displays more than anywhere else the accuracy of his eye and the retentiveness of his memory. No detail escapes him, and, without seeming to emphasise the fact, he is always giving an exact feature where those who are in possession of fewers facts or who see less vividly are satisfied with a shrewd generality.

v

In Mr. Kipling's first volume there was one story which struck quite a different note from all the others, and gave promise of a new delineator of children. *Tods' Amendment*, which is a curiously constructed piece of work, is in itself a political allegory. It is to be noticed that when he warms to his theme the author puts

aside the trifling fact that Tods is an infant of six summers, and makes him give a clear statement of collated native opinion worthy of a barrister in ample practice. What led to the story, one sees without difficulty, was the wish to emphasise the fact that unless the Indian Government humbles itself, and becomes like Tods, it can never legislate with efficiency, because it never can tell what all the *jhampanis* and *saises* in the bazar really wish for. If this were all, Mr. Kipling in creating Tods would have shown no more real acquaintance with children than other political allegorists have shown with sylphs or Chinese philosophers. But Mr. Kipling is always an artist, and in order to make a setting for his child-professor of jurisprudence, he invented a really convincing and delightful world of conquering infancy. Tods, who lives up at Simla with Tods' mamma, and knows everybody, is "an utterly fearless young pagan," who pursues his favourite kid even into the sacred presence of the Supreme Legislative Council, and is on terms of equally well-bred familiarity with the Viceroy and with Futteh Khan, the villainous loafer *khit* from Mussoorie.

To prove that *Tods' Amendment* was not an

accident, and also, perhaps, to show that he could write about children purely and simply, without any after-thought of allegory, he brought out, as the sixth instalment of the *Indian Railway Library*, a little volume entirely devoted to child-life. Of the four stories contained in this book one is among the finest productions of its author, while two others are very good indeed. There are also, of course, the children in *The Light that Failed*, although they are too closely copied from the author's previous creations in *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*; and in other writings of his, children take a position sufficiently prominent to justify us in considering this as one of the main divisions of his work.

In his preface to *Wee Willie Winkie*, Mr. Kipling has sketched for us the attitude which he adopts towards babies. "Only women," he says, but we may doubt if he means it, "understand children thoroughly; but if a mere man keeps very quiet, and humbles himself properly, and refrains from talking down to his superiors, the children will sometimes be good to him, and let him see what they think about the world." This is a curious form of expression, and suggests the naturalist more than the lover of children.

So might we conceive a successful zoologist affirming that the way to note the habits of wild animals and birds is by keeping very quiet, and lying low in the grass, and refraining from making sudden noises. This is, indeed, the note by which we may distinguish Mr. Kipling from such true lovers of childhood as Mrs. Ewing. He has no very strong emotion in the matter, but he patiently and carefully collects data, partly out of his own faithful and capacious personal memory, partly out of what he still observes.

The Tods type he would probably insist that he has observed. A finer and more highly developed specimen of it is given in *Wee Willie Winkie*, the hero of which is a noble infant of overpowering vitality, who has to be put under military discipline to keep him in any sort of domestic order, and who, while suffering under two days' confinement to barracks (the house and verandah), saves the life of a headstrong girl. The way in which Wee Willie Winkie—who is of Mr. Kipling's favourite age, six—does this is at once wholly delightful and a terrible strain to credence. The baby sees Miss Allardyce cross the river, which he has always been forbidden to do, because the river is the frontier, and beyond it are bad

men, goblins, Afghans, and the like. He feels that she is in danger, he breaks mutinously out of barracks on his pony and follows her, and when she has an accident, and is surrounded by twenty hill-men, he saves her by his spirit and by his complicated display of resource. To criticise this story, which is told with infinite zest and picturesqueness, seems merely priggish. Yet it is contrary to Mr. Kipling's whole intellectual attitude to suppose him capable of writing what he knows to be supernatural romance. We have therefore to suppose that in India infants "of the dominant race" are so highly developed at six, physically and intellectually, as to be able to ride hard, alone, across a difficult river, and up pathless hilly country, to contrive a plan for succouring a hapless lady, and to hold a little regiment of savages at bay by mere force of eye. If Wee Willie Winkie had been twelve instead of six, the feat would have been just possible. But then the romantic contrast between the baby and his virile deeds would not have been nearly so piquant. In all this Mr. Kipling, led away by sentiment and a false ideal, is not quite the honest craftsman that he should be.

But when, instead of romancing and creating, he

is content to observe children, he is excellent in this as in other branches of careful natural history. But the children he observes, are, or we much misjudge him, himself. *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep* is a strange compound of work at first and at second hand. Aunt Rosa (delightfully known, without a suspicion of supposed relationship, as "Antirosa"), the Mrs. Squeers of the Rocklington lodgings, is a sub-Dickensian creature, tricked out with a few touches of reality, but mainly a survival of early literary hatreds. The boy Harry and the soft little sister of Punch are rather shadowy. But Punch lives with an intense vitality, and here, without any indiscretion, we may be sure that Mr. Kipling has looked inside his own heart and drawn from memory. Nothing in the autobiographies of their childhood by Tolstoi and Pierre Loti, nothing in Mr. R. L. Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses*, is more valuable as a record of the development of childhood than the account of how Punch learned to read, moved by curiosity to know what the "falchion" was with which the German man split the Griffin open. Very nice, also, is the reference to the mysterious rune, called "Sonny, my Soul," with which mamma used to sing Punch to sleep.

By far the most powerful and ingenious story,

however, which Mr. Kipling has yet dedicated to a study of childhood is *The Drums of the Fore and Aft*. "The Fore and Aft" is a nickname given in derision to a crack regiment, whose real title is "The Fore and Fit," in memory of a sudden calamity which befell them on a certain day in an Afghan pass, when, if it had not been for two little blackguard drummer-boys, they would have been woefully and contemptibly cut to pieces, as they were routed by a dashing troop of Ghazis. The two little heroes, who only conquer to die, are called Jakin and Lew, stunted children of fourteen, "gutter-birds" who drink and smoke and "do everything but lie," and are the disgrace of the regiment. In their little souls, however, there burns what Mr. Pater would call a "hard, gem-like flame" of patriotism, and they are willing to undergo any privation, if only they may wipe away the stigma of being "bloomin' non-combatants."

In the intervals of showing us how that stain was completely removed, Mr. Kipling gives us not merely one of the most thrilling and effective battles in fiction, but a singularly delicate portrait of two grubby little souls turned white and splendid by an element of native greatness. It would be difficult to point to a page of modern English more poignant

than that which describes how "the only acting-drummers who were took along," and—left behind, moved forward across the pass alone to the enemy's front, and sounded on drum and fife the return of the regiment to duty. But perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole story is that a record of shocking British retreat and failure is so treated as to flatter in its tenderest susceptibilities the pride of British patriotism.

1891.

AN ELECTION AT THE ENGLISH
ACADEMY

An Election at the English Academy

ATHENÆUM CLUB, PALL MALL, S.W.

TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, R.E.A., Samoa

DEAR MR. STEVENSON,—Last night I think that even you must have regretted being a beach-comber. Even the society of your friend Ori-a-Ori and the delights of kava and bread-fruit can hardly make up to you for what you lost in Piccadilly. It was the first occasion, as you are aware, upon which we have been called upon to fill up a vacancy in the Forty. You know, long before this letter reaches you, that we have already lost one of our original members. Poor Kinglake! I thought at the time that it was a barren honour, but it was one which his fame imperatively demanded. I can't say I knew him: a single introduction, a few gracious words in a low

voice, a grave and sad presence—that is all I retain of him personally. I shall know more when our new Academician has to deliver the eulogium on his predecessor. What an intellectual treat it will be!

We had a splendid gathering. Do you recollect that when the papers discussed us, before our foundation, one thing they said was that there never would be a decent attendance? I must confess our business meetings have been rather sparsely filled up. Besant is invariably there, Lecky generally, a few others. There has always been a quorum—not much more. But between you and me and those other palms—the feathery palms of your cabin—there has not been much business to transact; not much more than might have been left to assiduous Mr. Robinson, our paid secretary. But last night the clan was all but complete. There were thirty-seven of us, nobody missing but Mr. Ruskin and yourself. Ruskin, by the way, wrote a letter to be read at the meeting, and then sent on to the *Pall Mall Gazette*—so diverting! I must cut it out and enclose it. But his style, if this is to be taken as an example, is not quite what it was.*

* MY DEAR SIR,—What in the Devil's name should I do at your assemblage of notorieties? I neither care nor wish to care

Well, I am still so excited that I hardly know where to begin. To me, a real country bumpkin, the whole thing was such an occasion! Such a *social* occasion! I must begin from the beginning. I came all the way up from Luxilian, my green uniform, with the golden palm-shoots embroidered on it, safely packed in my portmanteau under my dress-clothes. To my great annoyance the children had been wearing it in Christmas charades. My dear wife, ay me, has so little firmness of character. By-the-by, I hope you wear yours on official occasions in Samoa? The whole costume, I should fancy, must be quite in a Polynesian taste.

whom you elect. The only *Gardiner* I ever heard of was Henry's Bloody Bishop. If "Kiss me *Hardy*" came before us, it would be worth while for the only true Tory left in England to vote for him; but he has been with God this good half century. My £100 a year as Academician—recoverable, they tell me, in case of lapsed payment, from Her Majesty herself—I spend in perfecting my collection of the palates of molluscs, who keep their inward economy as clean as the deck of a ship of the line with stratagems beautiful and manifold exceedingly. Few of your Academicians show an apparatus half so handsome when they open their mouths. How unlike am I, by the way, in my retirement, from Bismarck across the waters, who squeaks like a puppy-dog on his road to the final parliamentary sausage-making machine of these poor times. Would it not be well for your English Academy, instead of these election follies, to bestir itself with a copy of *The Crown of Wild Olive* for his heart's betterment? But keep your Lydian modes; I hold my Dorian.--Ever faithfully yours, JOHN RUSKIN.

I was more "up" in the candidates and their characteristics than you would expect. Ah! I know you think me rather a Philistine—but can an Academician be a Philistine? That is a question that might be started when next the big gooseberry season begins. I was "up" in the candidates because, as good luck would have it, Sala had been spending a week with me in the country. Delightful companion, but scarcely fitted for rural pleasures. He mentioned such a great number of eminent literary persons whom I had never heard of—mostly rather occasional writers, I gathered. He has an extraordinarily wide circle, I find: it makes me feel quite the Country Mouse. He did not seem to know much about Gardiner, it is true, but then he could tell me all that Hardy had written—or pretty nearly all; and, of course, as you know, Gardiner is my own hobby.

The moment I got to Paddington I foolishly began looking hither and thither for fellow-"immortals." Rather absurd, but not so absurd as you might suppose, for there, daintily stepping out of a first-class carriage, whom should I see but Max Müller. I scarcely know him, and should not have ventured to address him, but he called out: "Ah! my dear friend, we come, I suspect, on the

same interesting, the same patriotic errand!" I had felt a few qualms of conscience about my own excitement in the election; we are so quiet at Luxilian that we can scarcely measure the relative importance of events. But Max Müller completely reassured me. It was delightful to me to see how seriously he regarded the event. "Europe," he said, "is not inattentive to such a voice as the unanimity of the English Academy may—may wield." I could not help smiling at the last word, and reflecting how carelessly the most careful of us professional writers expresses himself in conversation. But his enthusiasm was very beautiful, and I found myself more elevated than ever. "It is permitted to us," he went on, "to whisper among ourselves what the world must not hear—the unthinking world—that the social status of English Academician adds not a little dignity to literature. One hopes that, whoever may be added to our number to-night, the social——eh?" I had formulated just the same feeling myself. "Only in so far," he went on, "as is strictly consistent with the interests of literature and scholarship—of course? Good-bye!" and he left me with an impression that he wanted to vote for both candidates.

There was a little shopping I had to do in Regent Street, after I had left my costume at the Academy, and I called in at Mudie's for a moment on my way to the British Museum. To give you an idea of the mental disturbance I was suffering from, I asked the very polite young man at the counter for my own *Mayors of Woodshire*—you know, my seventeenth-century book—instead of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which my wife wanted to read. I did not realise my mistake till I saw the imprint of the Clarendon Press. At last I got to the manuscript room, made my references, and found that our early dinner hour was approaching. I walked westward down Oxford Street, enjoying the animation and colour of the lovely evening, and then, suddenly, realising what the hour was, turned and took a hansom to the Athenæum.

Who should meet me in the vestibule but Seeley? Less and less often do I find my way to Cambridge, and I hesitated about addressing him, although I used to know him so well. He was buried in a reverie, and slowly moving to the steps. I suppose I involuntarily slackened my speed also, and he looked up. He was most cordial, and almost immediately began to talk

to me about those notes on the commercial relations of the Woodshire ports with Poland which I printed in the *English Historical* two (or perhaps three) years ago. I daresay you never heard of them. I promised to send him some transcripts I have since made of the harbour laws of Luxilian itself—most important. I longed to ask Seeley whether we might be sure of his support for Gardiner, but I hardly liked to do so, he seemed so much more absorbed in the past. I took for granted it was all right, and when we parted, as he left the Club, he said, "We meet later on this evening, I suppose?" and that was his only reference to the election.

I am hardly at home yet at the Athenæum, and I was therefore delighted to put myself under Lecky's wing. I soon saw that quite a muster of Academicians was preparing to dine, for when we entered the Coffee Room we found Mr. Walter Besant already seated, and before we could join him Mr. Black and Mr. Herbert Spencer came in together and approached us. We had two small tables placed together, and just as we were sitting down, Lord Lytton, who was so extremely kind to me in Paris last autumn when I left my umbrella in the Eiffel Tower, made his

appearance. We all seemed studiously to make no reference, at first, to the great event of the day, while Mr. Spencer diverted us with several anecdotes which he had just brought from a family in the country—not at all, of course, of a puerile description, but throwing a singular light upon the development of infant mind. After this the conversation flagged a little. I suppose we were all thinking of the same thing. I was quite relieved when a remark of Lecky's introduced the general topic.

Our discussion began by Lord Lytton's giving us some very interesting particulars of the election of Pierre Loti (M. Viaud) into the French Academy last week, and of the social impression produced by these contests. I had no idea of the pushing, the intriguing, the unworthy anxiety which are shown by some people in Paris who wish to be of the Forty. Lord Lytton says that there is a story by M. Daudet which, although it is petulant and exaggerated, gives a very graphic picture of the seamy side of the French Academy. I must read this novel, for I feel that we, as a new body destined to wield a vast influence in this country, ought to be forewarned. I ventured to say that I did not think that

English people, with our honest and wholesome traditions, and the blessings of a Protestant religion, would be in any danger of falling into these excesses. Nobody responded to this; I am afraid the London writers are dreadfully cynical, and Black remarked that we six, at all events, were poachers turned inside out. They laughed at this, and I was quite glad when the subject was changed.

Lord Lytton asked Mr. Besant whether he was still as eager as ever about his Club of Authors, or whether he considered that the English Academy covered the ground. He replied that he had wholly relinquished that project for the present. His only wish had been to advocate union among authors, on a basis of mutual esteem and encouragement, and he thought that the Academy would be quite enough to do that, if it secured for itself the building which is now being talked about, as a central point for consultation on all matters connected with the literary life and profession. But this notion did not seem to command itself to Mr. Spencer, who said that it seemed to him that the Forty were precisely those whom success or the indulgence of the public had raised above the need or the desire

of consultation. "I am very glad to have the pleasure of playing a game of billiards with you, Mr. Besant, but why should I consult you about my writings? I conceive that the duty of our Academy is solely to insist on a public recognition of the dignity of literature, and that if we go a step beyond that aim, we prepare nothing but snares for our feet."

"Whom, then, do you propose," continued Lecky to Besant, "to summon to your consultations?"

"Surely," was the reply, "any respectable authors."

"Outsiders, then," said Mr. Spencer, "a few possible and a multitude of impossible candidates?"

"Female writers as well as male?" asked Black; "are we to have the literary Daphne at our conversaziones—"

*With legs toss'd high on her sophee she sits,
Vouchsafing audience to contending wits?*

How do you like that prospect, Lecky?"

"But poorly, I must confess. We have tiresome institutions enough in London without adding to them a sort of Ptolemaic Mouseion, for us to strut about on the steps of, in our palm-costume, attended by dialectical ladies and troops of intriguing pupils.

Though that, I am sure," he added courteously, "is the last thing our friend Besant desires, yet I conceive it would tend to be the result of such consultation."

"What then," said the novelist, "is to be the practical service of the English Academy to life and literature?"

At this we all put on a grave and yet animated expression, for certainly, to each of us, this was a very important consideration.

"Putting on one side," began Mr. Spencer, "the social advantage, the unquestionable dignity and importance given to individual literary accomplishment at a time when the purer parts of writing—I mean no disrespect to you novelists—are greatly neglected in the general hurly-burly; putting on one side this function of the English Academy, there remains, of course——"

But, at this precise moment, when I was literally hanging on the lips of our eminent philosopher, the door opened with a considerable noise of gaiety, and Mr. Arthur Balfour entered, in company with a gentleman, who was introduced to me presently as Mr. Andrew Lang.

"Two more Academicians, and this time neither novelists nor philosophers," said Black.

They sat down close to us, so that the conversation was still general.

"We were discussing the Academy," said Lord Lytton. "And we," replied Mr. Balfour, "were comparing notes about rackets. Lang tells me he has found a complete description of the game in one of the Icelandic sagas."

"Played with a shuttlecock," said Mr. Lang, throwing himself back with a gesture of intense fatigue. "By the way, when we get to B in our Academy dictionary, I will write the article *battledore*. It is Provençal, I believe; but one must look up Skeat."

"We shall be very old, I am afraid, before we reach letter B," I remarked, "shall we not?"

"Oh! no," said Mr. Lang, "we shall fire away like fun. All we have to do is to crib our definitions out of Murray."

"I hardly think that," said Mr. Besant; "we seem to have precious little to occupy ourselves with, but our dictionary at least you must leave us."

We talked this over a little, and the general opinion seemed to be that it would turn out to be more an alphabetical series of monographs on the history of our language than a dictionary in the

ordinary sense. And who was to have the courage to start it, no one seemed able to guess.

A general conversation then began, which was of not a little interest to me. The merits of our two candidates were warmly, but temperately discussed. Everybody seemed to feel that we ought to have them both among us ; that our company would still be incomplete if one was elected. Black suggested that some public-spirited Academician should perform the Happy Despatch, so as to supply the convenience of two vacancies. Lord Lytton reminded us that we were doing, on a small scale, what the French Academy itself did for a few years,—from the election of Guizot to that of Labiche—namely, meeting in private to wrangle over the merits of the candidates. We laughed, and set to with greater zeal, I painting Gardiner in rosier colours as Besant advanced the genius of Hardy.

While this was going on Sir Frederick Leighton joined us, listening and leaning in one of his Olympian attitudes. “I find,” he said at last, “that I am able to surprise you. You are not aware that there is a third candidate.” “A third candidate ?” we all exclaimed. “Yes,” he said ; “before the hour was too far advanced yesterday, our secretary received the due notice from his

Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury." "Ah! you mean for your own Academy," some one said; "as chaplain in the room of the poor Archbishop of York?" "No," Sir Frederick answered, smiling, "as a candidate for *our* Academy, the English Academy." (And, indeed, I recollected that Leighton was one of our original members. I cannot quite recall upon what literary grounds, but he is a charming person, and a great social acquisition.)

There was a pause at this unexpected announcement. "I am sorry," said Mr. Balfour at last, "that the Archbishop, whom I greatly esteem and admire, should have laid himself open to this rebuff. We cannot admit him, and yet how extremely painful to reject him. He has scarcely more claim to belong to this Academy than I have, and——" At this we all, very sincerely, murmured our expostulation, and Lord Lytton, leaning across, said: "My dear Arthur, you are our Haussonville!" "I am afraid I am more likely," he replied, "to be your Audriffet-Pasquier. But here I am, and it was none of my seeking. I am, at least, determined not to use what fortieth-power I have for the election of any but the best purely literary candidates." There was no direct reply to this, and presently we all got up and separated to prepare for

the election, each of us manifestly disturbed by this unexpected news.

As I was going out of the Club, I met Jebb, whom I was very glad to greet. I used to know him well, but I go so seldom to Cambridge in these days that I can scarcely have seen him since he took his doctor's degree in letters, which must be seven or eight years ago, when I came up to see my own boy get his B.A. He was quite unchanged, and as cordial as ever. The night was so clear that we decided to walk, and, as we passed into Pall Mall, the moonlight suddenly flooded the street.

"How the nightingales must be singing at Luxilian," I cried.

"And that nest of singing-birds with whom I saw you dining," said Jebb, "how did they entertain you?"

"The best company in the world," I replied; "and yet——! Perhaps Academicians talk better in twos and ones than *en masse*. I thought the dinner might have been more brilliant, and it certainly might have been more instructive."

"They were afraid of one another, no doubt," said the Professor; "they were afraid of you. But how could it have been more instructive?"

“I was in hopes that I should hear from all these accomplished men something definite about the aims of the Academy, its functions in practical life—what the use of it is to be, in fact.”

“Had they no ideas to exchange on that subject? Did they not dwell on the social advantages it gives to literature? Why, my dear friend, between ourselves, the election of a new member to an Academy constituted as ours is, so restricted in numbers, so carefully weeded of all questionable elements, is in itself the highest distinction ever yet placed within the reach of English literature. In fact, it is the Garter.”

“But,” I pursued, “are we not in danger of thinking too much of the social matter? Are we not framing a tradition which, if it had existed for three hundred years, would have excluded Defoe, Bunyan, Keats, and perhaps Shakespeare himself?”

“Doubtless,” Jebb answered, “but we are protected against such folly by the high standard of our candidates. Hardy, Gardiner—who could be more unexceptionable? who could more eminently combine the qualities we seek?”

“You are not aware, then,” I said, “that a third candidate is before us?”

“ No! Who ? ”

“ The Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“ Ah ! ” he exclaimed, and we walked on together in silence.

At the door of the Academy Jebb left me, “ for a moment or two,” he said, and proceeded up Piccadilly. I ascended the steps of our new building, and passed into the robing-room. Whom should I meet there, putting on his green palm-shoots, but Mr. Leslie Stephen. I was particularly glad to have a moment’s interview with him, for I wanted to tell him of my great discovery, a fifth Nicodemus, Abbot of Luxilian, in the twelfth century. Extraordinary thing! Of course, I imagined that he would be delighted about it, although he has not quite reached N yet, but I can’t say that he seemed exhilarated. “ Five successive Nicodemuses,” I said, “ what do you think of that ? ” He murmured something about “ all standing naked in the open air.” I fancy he is losing his interest in the mediæval biographies. However, before I could impress upon him what a “ find ” it is, Mr. Gladstone came in with the Bishop of Oxford, and just then Sala called me out to repeat a story to me which he had just heard at some club. I thought it good at the time—something about “ Manipur ”

and "many poor"—but I have forgotten how it went.

Upstairs, in the great reception-room, the company was now rapidly gathering. You may imagine how interesting I found it. Everywhere knots of men were forming, less, I felt, to discuss the relative claims of Hardy and Gardiner than to deplore the descent of the Archbishop into the lists. The Duke of Argyll, who courteously recognised me, deigned to refer to this topic of universal interest. "I would have done much," he said, "to protect him from the annoyance of this defeat. A prince of the Anglican Church, whom we all respect and admire! I fear he will not have more than—than—perhaps *one* vote. Alas! alas!"

Various little incidents caught my eye. Poor Professor Freeman, bursting very hastily into the room, bounced violently against Mr. Froude, who happened to be standing near the door. I don't think Mr. Freeman can have realised how roughly he struck him, for he did not turn or stop, but rushed across the room to the Bishop of Oxford, with whom he was soon in deep consultation about Gardiner, no doubt; I did not disturb them. Lord Salisbury, with pendant arms, gently majestic, stood on the hearth-rug talking to an elderly gentleman of pleas-

ing aspect, in spectacles. I heard some one say something about "the other uncrowned king of Brentford," but I did not understand the allusion. I suppose the gentleman was some supporter of the Ministry, but I did not catch his name.

Lecky was so kind as to present me to Professors Huxley and Tyndall, neither of whom, I believe, ought to have been out on so fresh a spring night; neither, I hope to hear this evening, is the worse for such imprudence. A curious incident now occurred, for as we were chatting, Huxley suddenly said, in a low voice: "Gladstone has his eye upon you, Tyndall." The professor flounced about at this in a great agitation, and replied, so loudly that I feared it would be generally heard—"He had better not attempt to address me. I should utter six withering syllables, and then turn my back upon him. Gladstone, indeed, the old ——." But at this moment, to my horror, Mr. Gladstone glided across the floor with his most courtly and dignified air, and held out his hand. "Ah! Professor Tyndall, how long it seems since those beautiful days on the Bel Alp." There was a little bridling and hesitating, and then Tyndall took the proffered hand. "I was wandering," said the Grand Old Man, "without a guide, and now I have found one,

the best possible. I am——” “Oh!” broke in the professor, “I thought it would be so. I am more delighted than——” “Pardon me,” interrupted Mr. Gladstone with an exquisite deprecation, “I am mainly interested at the moment in the Sirens. I am lost, as I said, without a guide, and I have found one. Your experiments with the sirens on the North Foreland——

ἰεῖσαι ὅπα κάλλιστον,——”

and then, arm in arm, the amicable and animated pair retired to a corner of the room.

Impossible to describe to you all the incidents of this delightful gathering. In one corner the veteran Dr. Martineau was seated, conversing with Mr. Henry Irving. I was about to join them when I was attracted by a sharp and elastic step on the stairs, and saw that Lord Wolseley, entering the room, and glancing quickly round, walked straight to a group at my left hand, which was formed around Mr. George Meredith.

“For whom must I vote, Mr. Meredith?” he said. “I place myself in your hands. Is it to be the Archbishop of Canterbury?”

“Nay,” replied Mr. Meredith, smiling, “for the prelate I shake you out a positive negative. The

customary guests at our academic feast—well ; poet, historian, essayist, say novelist or journalist, all welcome on grounds of merit royally acknowledged and distinguished. But this portent of a crozier, nodding familiarly to us with its floriated tin summit, a gilt commodity, definitely hostile to literature—never in the world. How Europe will boom with cachinnation when it learns that we have invented the Academy of English Letters for the more excellent glorification of mere material episcopacy, a radiant excess of iridescence thrown by poetry upon prelacy, heart's blood of books shed merely to stain more rosily the *infulæ* and *vittæ* of a mitre. I shall be tempted into some colloquial extravagance if I dwell on this theme, however ; I must chisel on Blackmore yonder for floral wit, and so will, with permission, float out of your orbit by a bowshot."

Dr. Jowett now made his appearance, in company with Mr. Swinburne ; and they were followed by a gentleman in a rough coat and picturesque blue shirt, who attracted my attention by this odd costume, and by his very fine head, with flowing beard and hair. I was told it was the poet Morris ; not at all how I had pictured the author of *The Epic of Hades*. And finally, to our infinite delight, Lord Tennyson himself came in, leaning

on Jebb's arm, and we felt that our company was complete.

We clustered at last into our inner council-room, at the door of which the usher makes us sign our names. What a page last night's will be for the enjoyment of posterity ! We gradually settled into our places ; Lord Tennyson in his presidential chair, Lecky in his post of permanent secretary ; our excellent paid secretary hurrying about with papers, and explaining to us the routine. It seemed more like a club than ever at that moment, our charming Academy, with the best of all possible society. As I sat waiting for business to begin, my thoughts ran more and more upon the unfortunate candidature of the Archbishop. I reflected on what the Duke of Argyll had said, the wretchedness of the *one* vote. He should, at least, have two, I determined ; and I asked my neighbour, Mr. Frederic Harrison, if he knew what Dr. Benson had published. "I have an idea," he replied, "that he is the author of a work entitled *The Cathedral: its Necessary Place in the Life and Work of an Academy.*"

Our proceedings were interrupted for a moment by the entrance of Cardinal Manning, who desired to be permitted, before the election began, to add

to the names of the candidates that of Mr. W. T. Stead. At this there was a general murmur, and Mr. Lang muttered: "If it comes to that, I propose Bridge" (or "Brydges"—I could not catch the name). The Cardinal continued: "I know I have a seconder for him in my eminent friend opposite." We all looked across at Archdeacon Farrar, who objected, with considerable embarrassment: "No, no; when I said that, I did not understand what the final list of candidates was to be. I must really decline." The Cardinal then turned to Mr. John Morley, who shook his head. "The Academy will have more need of Mr. Stead ten years hence, perhaps, than it has now." And with that the incident terminated.

The moment had at last arrived, and we expected a prolonged session. By a system of successive ballotings, we have to work on until one candidate has a positive majority; this may take a long time, and may even fail to be accomplished. The President rang his bell, and the names were pronounced by the secretary:

EDWARD WHITE BENSON, Archbishop of
Canterbury,
SAMUEL RAWSON GARDINER, and
THOMAS HARDY.

As soon as he had recorded his vote, our venerable President left us ; the remainder of the company awaited the result with eager curiosity. The general opinion seemed to be that the votes for Gardiner and Hardy would prove pretty equal, and I began to feel a little qualm at having thrown mine away. But when Mr. Gladstone, taking the President's chair, rang his bell, and announced the result of the voting, it is not too much to say that we were stupefied. The votes were thus divided :

The Archbishop of Canterbury	.	19
Gardiner	8
Hardy	7
Blank votes	3

There was, accordingly, no need for a second ballot, since the Archbishop had secured a positive majority of the votes. I felt a little uncomfortable when I reflected that my vote, if loyally given to Gardiner, would have necessitated a reopening of the matter. Never mind. Better as it is. The election is a very good one, from a social point of view particularly.

The company dispersed rather hurriedly. On the stairs, where Mr. Arthur Balfour was offering his arm to Lord Selborne, I heard the latter say,

"We may congratulate ourselves on a most excellent evening's work, may we not?" Mr. Balfour shook his head, but I did not catch his reply; he seemed to have lost something of his previous good spirits.

This morning the daily papers are in raptures, the Gladstonians as much as the Unionists. A great honour, they all say, done to the profession of literature. "Quite a social triumph," the *Morning Post* remarks; "a bloodless victory in the campaign of letters"—rather happy, is it not? But one of those young men of the *National Observer*, who was waiting for me outside the Academy last night, and kindly volunteered to see me home to the hotel—where he was even good enough to partake of refreshment—was rather severe. "Not a single *writer* in the d——d gang of you," he said. A little coarse, I thought; and not positively final, as criticism.

I am,

Yours very faithfully,

1891.

APPENDICES

I

TENNYSON—AND AFTER?

WHEN this essay first appeared in *The New Review*, the scepticism it expressed with regard to the universal appreciation of the poet was severely censured in one or two newspapers. On the other hand, the accomplished author of *Thyrza* and *New Grub Street* obliged me with a letter of very great interest, which fully confirmed my doubts. Mr. Gissing has kindly permitted me to print his letter here. His wide experience among the poor makes his opinion on this matter one which cannot lightly be passed by :

“ Nov. 20, 1892.

“ SIR,—Will you pardon me if I venture to say with what satisfaction I have read your remarks about Tennyson in *The New Review*, which has only just come into my hands ?

“ The popular mind is my study, and I know that Tennyson’s song no more reached it than it reached the young-eyed cherubim. Nor does *any* song reach

the populace, rich and poor, unless, as you suggest, it be such as appears in *The Referee*.

“After fifteen years’ observation of the poorer classes of English folk, chiefly in London and the south, I am pretty well assured that, whatever civilising agencies may be at work among the democracy, poetry is not one of them. Reading, of one kind or another, is universal ; study, serious and progressive, is no longer confined to the ranks that enjoy a liberal education ; but the populace, the industrial and trading masses, not merely remain without interest in poetry, but do not so much as understand what the term poetry means. In other intellectual points, the grades of unlettered life are numerous ; as regards appreciation of verse, the People are one. From the work-girl, with her penny novelette, to the artisan who has collected a little library, the natural inclination of all who represent their class is to neglect verse as something exotic, something without appeal to their instincts. They either do not read it at all—the common case—or (with an exception to be noticed) they take it as a quaint variety of prose, which custom has consecrated to religion, to the affections, and to certain phases of facetiousness.

“In London, through all orders of society below the liberally educated, it is a most exceptional thing to meet with a person who seeks for verse as verse ; who recognises the name of any greater poet not hackneyed in the newspapers, or who even distantly

apprehends the nature of the poet's art. In the north of England, where more native melody is found, self-taught readers of poetry are, I believe, not so rare; but they must still be greatly the exception. As to the influence of board-schools, one cannot doubt that the younger generation are even less inclined to a taste for poetry than their fathers. Some elderly people, in Sunday languor, take up a book of verse with which they have been familiar since early days (Mrs. Hemans, Eliza Cook, Montgomery, Longfellow); whereas their children cannot endure printed matter cut into rhythmic lengths, unless the oddity solicit them in the columns of a paper specially addressed to their intelligence.

“At the instigation of those zealous persons who impress upon shopkeepers, clerks and artisans, the duty of ‘self-culture in leisure hours,’ there undoubtedly goes on some systematic reading of verse—the exceptional case to which I alluded. It is undertaken in a resolute spirit by pallid men, who study the poet just as they study the historian, the economist, the master of physical science, and their pathetic endeavour is directed by that species of criticism which demands—exclusively—from poetry its ‘message for our time.’ Hence, no doubt, the conviction of many who go down to the great democratic deep that multitudes are hungering for the poet's word. Here, as in other kindred matters, the hope of such enthusiasts arises from imperfect understanding. Not in lecture-hall and classroom can the mind of the people be discovered.

Optimism has made a fancy picture of the representative working-man, ludicrous beyond expression to those who know him in his habitat; and the supremely ludicrous touch is that which attributes to him a capacity for enjoying pure literature.

“I have in mind a typical artisan family, occupying a house to themselves, the younger members grown up and, in their own opinion, very far above those who are called ‘the poor.’ They possess perhaps a dozen volumes: a novel or two, some bound magazines, a few musty works of popular instruction or amusement; all casually acquired and held in no value. Of these people I am able confidently to assert (as the result of specific inquiry) that they have in their abode no book of verse—that they never read verse when they can avoid it—that among their intimates is no person who reads or wishes to read verse—that they never knew of any one buying a book of verse—and that not one of them, from childhood upwards, ever heard a piece of verse read aloud at the fireside. In this respect, as in many others, the family beyond doubt is typical. They stand between the brutal and the intelligent of working-folk. There must be an overwhelming number of such households through the land, representing a vast populace absolutely irresponsive to the word of any poet.

“The custodian of a Free Library in a southern city informs me that ‘hardly once in a month’ does a volume of verse pass over his counter; that the ex-

ceptional applicant (seeking Byron or Longfellow) is generally 'the wife of a tradesman'; and that an offer of verse to man or woman who comes simply for 'a book' is invariably rejected; 'they won't even look at it.'

"What else could one have anticipated? To love poetry is a boon of nature, most sparingly bestowed; appreciation of the poet's art is an outcome of studious leisure. Even an honest liking for verse, without discernment, depends upon complex conditions of birth, breeding, education. No one seeks to disparage the laborious masses on the ground of their incapacity for delights necessarily the privilege of a few. It was needless folly to pretend that, because one or two of Tennyson's poems became largely known through popular recitation, therefore Tennyson was dear to the heart of the people, a subject of their pride whilst he lived, of their mourning when he departed. My point is that *no* poet holds this place in the esteem of the English lower orders.

"Tennyson? The mere price of his works is prohibitive to people who think a shilling a very large outlay for printed paper. Half a dozen of his poems at most would obtain a hearing from the average uneducated person. We know very well the kind of home in which Tennyson is really beloved for the sake of perhaps half his work—and that not the better half. Between such households and the best discoverable in the world of which I speak, lies a chasm of

utter severance. In default of other tests, Tennyson might be used as a touch-stone to distinguish the last of gentle-folk from the first of the unprivileged.

“On the day of his funeral, I spoke of the dead poet to a live schoolmaster, a teacher of poor children, and he avowed to me, quite simply, that he ‘couldn’t stand poetry—except a few hymns;’ that he had thoroughly disliked it ever since the day, when as a schoolboy, he had to learn by heart portions of *The Lady of the Lake*. I doubt whether this person could have named three pieces of Tennyson’s writing. He spoke with the consciousness of being supported by general opinion in his own world.

“Some days before, I was sitting in a public room, where two men, retired shopkeepers, exchanged an occasional word as they read the morning’s news. ‘A great deal here about Lord Tennyson,’ said one. The ‘Lord’ was significant; I listened anxiously for his companion’s reply. ‘Ah—yes.’ The man moved uneasily, and added at once: ‘What do you think about this long-distance ride?’ In that room (I frequented it on successive days with this object) not a syllable did I hear regarding Tennyson save the sentence faithfully recorded. This was in the south of England; perhaps it could not have happened in the north.

“As a boy, I at one time went daily to school by train. It happened once that I was alone in the carriage with a commercial traveller; my Horace was open before me, and it elicited a remark from the man of samples, who

spoke with the accent of that northern county, and certainly did not belong to the educated class. After a word or two, he opened his bag, and took out an ancient copy, battered, thumbed, pencilled, of—Horatius Flaccus. Without this, he told me, he never travelled. From a bare smattering obtained at school, he had pursued the study of Latin; Horace was dear to him; he indicated favourite odes——

“ Everywhere there are the many and the few. What of the multitude in higher spheres? Their leisure is ample; literature lies thick about them. It would be amusing to know how many give one hour a month to the greater poets. . . .

“ Believe me, Sir, yours faithfully,

“ GEORGE GISSING.

“ To Edmund Gosse, Esq.”

II

M. MALLARMÉ AND SYMBOLISM

IT was with not a little hesitation that I undertook to unravel a corner of the mystic web, woven of sunbeams and electrical threads, in which the poet of *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* conceals himself from curious apprehension. There were a dozen chances of my interpretation being wrong, and scarcely one of its being right. My delight therefore may be conceived when I received a most gracious letter from the mage himself; Apollonius was not more surprised when, by a fortunate chance, one of his prophecies came true. I quote from this charming paper of credentials, which proceeds to add some precious details:—

“Votre étude est un miracle de divination . . . Les poètes seuls ont le droit de parler; parce qu'avant coup, ils savent. Il y a, entre toutes, une phrase, où vous écarterez tous voiles et désignez la chose avec une clairvoyance de diamant, le voici: ‘His aim . . . is to use words in such harmonious combination as will suggest to the reader a mood or a condition *which is not mentioned*

in the text, but is nevertheless paramount in the poet's mind at the moment of composition.'

“Tout est là. Je fais de la Musique, et appelle ainsi non celle qu'on peut tirer du rapprochement euphonique des mots, cette première condition va de soi ; mais l'aude-là magiquement produit par certaines dispositions de la parole; où celle-ci ne reste qu'à l'état de moyen de communication matérielle avec le lecteur comme les touchés du piano. Vraiment entre les lignes et audessus du regard cela se passe, en toute pureté, sans l'entremise de cordes à boyaux et de pistons comme à l'orchestre, qui est déjà industriel ; mais c'est la même chose que l'orchestre, sauf que littérairement ou silencieusement. Les poètes de tous les temps n'ont jamais fait autrement et il est aujourd'hui, voilà tout, amusant d'en avoir conscience. Employez Musique dans le sens grec, au fond signifiant Idée au rythme entre les rapports ; là, plus divine que dans son expression publique on Symphonique. Très mal dit, en causant, mais vous saisissez ou plutôt aviez saisi toute au long de cette belle étude qu'il faut garder telle quelle et intacte. Je ne vous chicane que sur l'obscurité ; non, cher poète, excepté par maladresse ou gaucherie je ne suis pas obscur, du moment qu'on me lit pour y chercher ce que j'énonce plus haut, où la manifestation d'un art qui se sert—mettons incidemment, j'en sais la cause profonde—du langage : et le deviens, bien sûr ! si l'on se trompe et croit ouvrir le journal. . . . — Votre

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