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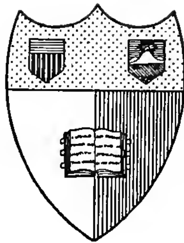

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To

EDWIN ANDERSON ALDERMAN

PRESIDENT OF
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I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
March 5, 1920

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CONTENTS

PAGE

I. BIOGRAPHY IN ANTIQUITY . . . 1

II. FROM MEDIÆVAL TO MODERN BIOGRAPHY . . . 55

III. BIOGRAPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY . . . 101

A SHORT LIST OF BOOKS 149

THE ART OF BIOGRAPHY

I

BIOGRAPHY IN ANTIQUITY

THE instinct of reproduction is, next to that of self-preservation, the most imperative of all. It includes not merely the desire to leave flesh-and-blood progeny but also, after human beings have reached a certain intellectual level, a desire to perpetuate symbols of their thoughts and experience, and evidences, however crude, of their passions. In the slow course of ages the savage comes to regard himself as an *individual*, that is, an ultimate unit, in his tribe or clan. Later he discovers that he is a *person*, a being through whom some other being, more than human, mysteriously speaks.

And so, as man acquires a richer endowment of expression, faculties more delicate, talents which he learns to control and to use with greater skill — in a word, self-expression — become one of his dominant characteristics.

Many of his records are unpremeditated. The rude figures which the Laplander scratched on reindeer bones had no further significance for him than the gratification of a fleeting fancy. He did not dream that they would be used long afterward by anthropologists to measure the degree of his savagery. The rough daubings on the walls of an Etruscan tomb may have had some religious meaning to those who made them; but for us who inspect them now they are merely markers in the scale of expression of the earliest Etruscans.

As men become more civilized, however, they labor consciously to express

themselves. They feel an inner urging to register remarkable events. A long time passes before the private individual counts in these records. As there is but one dominant person — the monarch — in and above their daily lives, and the collective life of their community, so the monarch is the subject around whom the chronicle is woven. "In the days of the Great King," or "In the ninth year of the reign of Tiglath-Pileser" — so run the formulas of the early chroniclers. But the monarch continues to be for a long time little more than a symbol or an abstraction of one who is all-powerful; neither his features nor his traits are individualized. But the men and women over whom a monarch reigned, nature individualized; each knew joy and suffering, each felt the glow of hope, or the bitterness of despair; you cannot lessen the weariness and pain

of the coffles of slaves who built the Pyramids or rowed the galleys, by generalizing. Still other generations must elapse before any individual lower than the monarch is held worthy of having his personal record or expression handed down.

Consider for a moment how arrogant it seems that any man should have his likeness preserved, his deeds, his thoughts, his passions! In the face of Infinity and of Eternity, what is he, but a speck? Is any particular bubble on the ever-flowing stream of Nile or Amazon — an iridescent beam at one moment, and gone the next — singled out for lasting remembrance? We look up at Sirius to-night, knowing that the dart of light which reveals the great star to us began its journey before our civilization itself began. If we could, would we preserve to-night's Sirian ray rather than to-morrow's?

Such questions answer themselves. We are men, and man is the measure for us. With difficulty and striving and many doubts and tears, we can come to an understanding of our duty here. The time tests of astronomy do not concern us, except as they teach us that we, too, are parts of the universe and should conduct ourselves with all the dignity which that implies.

I do not know which biography is the first to escape oblivion. Doubtless the earliest books of China, India, Egypt, and Western Asia contain biographical fragments hardly to be detached now from their surrounding text. For my purposes, however, I will take the story of Joseph in the book of *Genesis*, as a starter. Although I suspect that parts of it may be legendary and not biographical, it contains on the whole an orderly, consecutive, and, to a certain extent, indi-

vidualized life. It has, also, the typical quality peculiar to primitive works. An unusual play of emotion runs through it, and there is a plot with several dramatic crises which a modern playwright might envy.

Joseph, the young son of the Hebrew Patriarch Jacob, was hated by his brothers. They were jealous of him because their father loved him best of all, and the boy had an annoying way of dreaming dreams in which they bowed down before him. While tending their flocks they conspired together to kill him, but one of them, Reuben, advised against downright murder lest they should have his blood upon their hands. So they put him into a dry pit, having first stripped him of a coat of many colors which his father had given him, and Reuben hoped to steal back and rescue the boy after the other brothers had de-

parted. But a caravan of Ishmaelites came by on their way to Egypt with spicery and balm and myrrh, and Judah, another brother, with a true racial instinct for the commercial value, even of brothers, argued that, as it would profit them nothing to slay little Joseph, they should sell him to the Ishmaelites. This they did, and received for him twenty pieces of silver, about twelve dollars in American cash. They killed a goat, smeared with its blood the coat of many colors, and returned to Jacob, letting him suppose that his darling Joseph had been devoured by wild beasts.

The Ishmaelites went on into Egypt with the lad, and there Potiphar, Captain of the Guard to Pharaoh, bought him. Joseph was both willing, industrious, and far-sighted, and the Lord made all that he did to prosper. Potiphar, appreciating his value, promoted

him from post to post, until he rose to be the chief person, except his master, in the house.

Prosperity, however, though coveted by everybody, makes a dull background to a story, and so the ancient Hebrew or Egyptian biographer brings in at this point an almost tragic interruption. Potiphar's wife fell violently in love with the young and handsome Joseph, and attempted to seduce him, but he broke away from her and then she, in fury at being scorned, accused him to her husband. Thereupon Joseph was thrown into prison and had only the blackest future to look forward to. Some of his fellow prisoners had ominous dreams, which he interpreted, and, as his interpretations were verified, Joseph's reputation as a diviner spread beyond his prison walls.

After a while Pharaoh himself took to dreaming. He saw seven fat-flesh

kine which seven thin and lean kine swallowed up. He dreamed also that seven ears of corn came up in one stalk, full and good; and that seven other ears thin and withered and blasted with the east wind sprang up after them. In anxiety Pharaoh sent for his magicians, but none of them could interpret his dreams. Finally, having heard of Joseph, he ordered him to be brought from his dungeon, and Joseph interpreted the dreams as portending that after seven years of abundant harvests there would follow seven years of dearth.

Pharaoh rewarded him by making him Governor of Egypt, second to none except himself, and during the seven years of plenty Joseph, like an ancient Hoover, stored up, collected, and distributed grain and foodstuffs. Now, by a stroke of consummate art, if this be a story and not an act-

ual biography, the connection between Joseph's youth and the period of his power and splendor in Egypt is made. The years of dearth blasted the land of Canaan, and, when the pinch of hunger came, Jacob sent his sons down into Egypt to buy corn. There they dealt with Joseph, whom they did not recognize, but he recognized them and inquired for his father and the family, and when he heard that his mother had a younger son, Benjamin, Joseph desired to see him. His brothers talked among themselves in Hebrew and did not suppose that Joseph, with whom they spoke in Egyptian, understood them. But he sent them home with their sacks filled with corn, and with the money they had brought to pay for it in the mouth of each sack. He required them to leave Simeon, one of their brothers, and to return with Benjamin.

When they told their father Jacob of this demand he grieved sorely, for he had never ceased to lament the loss of Joseph, the youngest in the earlier time, and he feared now to lose Benjamin. Nevertheless, he consented at last rather than see all his people perish from hunger. So the brothers came again into Egypt with Benjamin, and when Joseph saw his own brother, the little Benjamin, he was so much moved that he went into another room and wept. After various contrivings, by which Joseph aimed at prolonging the anxiety of his brothers, for they were stricken with remorse and attributed the evils which had come to them as punishment for their sin against Joseph in selling him to the Ishmaelites, he made himself known to them, and they fell down and bowed their heads before him, thus fulfilling the early dream which had made them hate him.

The brothers were much amazed to find Joseph the chief person in Egypt, and perhaps they wondered whether he would not punish them for their wickedness long ago. But his affection prevailed. He kissed them and wept upon their necks, and they talked together. Pharaoh rejoiced when he heard of their coming, and he approved of Joseph's plan of sending them back to Canaan to fetch Jacob and all of Jacob's family into Egypt. This they did. The Patriarch came and was given lands and cattle, and, with his children and grandchildren around him, he prospered to the day of his death. Joseph survived him many years, never losing the good-will of the Pharaohs whom he served.

If the story was written to illustrate a moral, the moral is plain. Except for the long intervals of time which pass when nothing happens, it would

make an excellent drama, to which the two or three side episodes lend variety. Nothing could be more natural than the way in which results flow from the precedent causes. The uniformity with which Joseph always acts in character — is always generous and affectionate, self-controlled and virtuous — inclines me to believe that he was a real person, the story of whose life was handed down because it made a very deep impression upon both the Israelites and the Egyptians. The usual fable, or apologue, lacks the very precise individualized traits which are salient here.

In other parts of the Old Testament we come upon evident biographical fragments. The story of David, for example, is very vivid and personal, and it abounds in those supreme touches which the old Hebrew genius always displayed. Nevertheless, David's life,

like that of Joshua, seems to be history rather than biography.

When we come to the earliest of the Greek writers who may, on several accounts, be considered biographers, we are met by a similar intermixing of history and biography. Xenophon, who seems to me one of the Greeks of the great period who had a strange, man-of-the-world quality for an Athenian of his time, wrote two books which have been classed ever since as biographies, although, when you examine them closely, you see that other characteristics preponderate. Xenophon's "Cyropædia" purports to describe the boyhood and training of the great king Cyrus; but much of this period is known only through hearsay and legend, and then, when Xenophon goes on to tell about the campaigns and administration of Cyrus, he obviously becomes more historical than biographical. In-

deed, I might say philosophical, because he often inserts an anecdote or a reflection which may or may not belong to Cyrus but expresses the author's own view.

Likewise, in his "Memorabilia of the Life of Socrates" he follows no logical biographical order, but narrates in a discursive and entertaining style his recollections of Socrates and the stories he has heard. Xenophon was a sharp-eyed, clear-headed, practical man, and, like most practical men, he did not discern the deep and fine and exalting things of the spirit. Years ago I remember a practical man who was the neighbor of Ralph Waldo Emerson at Concord. When I asked him about Emerson he replied: "He was an honest man and a good neighbor. He always kept his half of the fence in repair." That was all that he saw, and his only means of judging Emerson. So

Xenophon, in spite of having a piercing intellect and various real talents, never fathomed the Socratic deeps. It took Plato for that — if, in fact, some of the deeps which Plato attributed to Socrates were not his own. Perhaps I have said enough to indicate why Xenophon's "Cyropædia" and "Memorabilia," interesting though they be, and important, are not examples of true biography.

What, you ask, is the difference between history and biography? What should a biography tell? First, it should reveal to us the individual, man or woman, that indivisible unit which has no exact counterpart in the world. But this alone is not enough—the individual may be known to us chiefly as a soldier, or a poet, or a statesman, or a merchant; so we must have unfolded to us the inevitable reactions between the individual and his profession.

Next, if not first, we shall expect to

learn how his environment in time and in place affects him. These are very subtle processes, although the class of men of science that regard all life, human and animal, as a manifestation of materialism "explain" us all as the mere products of our environment. This I do not believe.

Judged by whatever standard, the first real master of biography was Plutarch, a Greek who flourished in the latter half of the first century of the Christian era. His "Lives" of the celebrated Greeks and Romans of antiquity are a splendid monument to his instinct for penetrating to the heart of individuals. Not only events interest him, but also the way in which statesmen or soldiers shape events. In his Parallels he uses the comparative method, and tries to discover wherein Solon differed from Numa or Pompey from Marcus Brutus.

Plutarch has so large and hospitable

a mind that he brings with him an entire civilization. His random allusions, his quotations from ancient poets and prose-writers, his use of popular sayings current in his time, his familiarity with traditions, and with the gossip about great men, which often exceeds in trustworthiness the formal written statement, cannot be matched by any modern biographer. For the modern necessarily embraces only a fragment of his civilization; Plutarch, on the contrary, saw the record of Greece as closed and complete, and the record of Rome also — of Republican and characteristic Rome — as already made up. In this respect no modern can hope to compete with Plutarch. You may write a life of Bismarck, who was indisputably a world figure, but you cannot give to him the peculiar quality which belonged to Pericles or to Cæsar, a quality which emanates from Plutarch's

sketches of those great men like fragrance from a flower. As time goes on I suspect that posterity will see Bismarck loom up as Charlemagne does, or as Frederick Barbarossa, a huge figure amid surroundings which cannot be considered civilized in spirit. But when we read in Plutarch of Epaminondas or Timoleon, we feel that in spite of the lawlessness or quarrels amid which they lived, there was nothing barbaric about them.

It was Plutarch's good fortune, of course, to inherit, as it were

> "The glory that was Greece,"

and to be encircled by

> "The grandeur that was Rome."

But it is to his everlasting personal credit that by his knowledge and quick sympathy, coupled with genius, he embodied so much of the classical civilization in his works.

No wonder that the following story of Theodorus Gaza, the great scholar at the Revival of Learning, has been often quoted: "'Tis said that, having this extravagant question put to him by a friend, that if learning must suffer a general shipwreck, and he had only his choice left him of preserving one author, who should be the man he would preserve, he answered, Plutarch; and probably might give this reason, that in saving him he should secure the best collection of them all."

Being a moralist and immensely curious, as Job was, to understand why the Gods, who planted moral laws in the hearts of men, allowed the wicked to flourish and the virtuous to fail, he sometimes uses the subjects of his "Lives" as examples of the way in which moral laws disclosed themselves through mortal careers. Our age resents being "preached to," as it calls

moralizing of this sort. But fashion changes; a century ago our ancestors not only submitted to but relished moral reflections. Southey's "Life of Nelson" abounds in them, and it would be entertaining to inquire why Southey's Anglican moralizing seems almost obsolete, like that of the Sunday-school books of my youth, while Plutarch's is fresh and pertinent.

What Plutarch added to the Art of Biography was, therefore, most important. He reached the point of defining each individual very clearly. He had a most catholic interest in many types of persons, and in the case of public men he showed how far their individual qualities affected their public actions. As you first read the long series of his "Lives" you have an impression not unlike that which comes to you when you first walk through the Hall of Busts at the Naples Museum;

but when you stop to examine and to compare, you discover that each differs from the others, that each face has its own features.

Among so many and divers specimens I find it hard to choose special models; "Read until you are satisfied," would be the best advice; but if you wish to see Plutarch's methods and scope fairly illustrated, read, say, the "Alcibiades" and the "Julius Cæsar." What modern biographer could add much that is essential to our knowledge from Plutarch of the fundamental character of either of these men? In one respect the modern would make more orderly biographies. Plutarch writes by topics and not by chronology, so that we are not always sure where this or that episode belongs in time; but in spite of this lack we feel on finishing one of Plutarch's sketches that he has included all of the most neces-

sary facts about his subject. And our desire for chronology and sequence is really very modern. Sir Izaak Walton did not have it, nor did most of the writers of lives in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. We feel this desire, I think, because of the idea with us that in individuals, as in tribes and races, there is a constant evolution.

So we are most curious to know how the older man grew out of the younger, how the youthful Virginia hunter and surveyor, George Washington, became the founder of the American Republic, the most sane and perfectly poised of all statesmen. Events alone did not make him, but he had something in him to which events attached themselves, as iron filings to a magnet; and so of our still more unusual American, Abraham Lincoln, who, raised among wild and sordid backwoods conditions,

rose to wield power beyond that of Czars, without ever harboring a selfish, despotic thought. These amazing contrasts — call them paradoxes if you will — are what most absorb our attention. The contrast need not be one of event or position alone, but it may inhere in the character of the individual. We seek to explain the lapse into treason which no remorse could expiate, of Benedict Arnold, after nearly forty years of an apparently honorable life. There is an old Latin proverb, "*Nemo turpissimus repente*" — nobody turns absolutely bad all of a sudden. We wish to trace the steps by which the delinquence from virtue to guilt was reached. These are usually hidden and hard to uncover; for motive lies behind human acts, and motives are often very subtle. I was talking with President Roosevelt about some points in his career. He said nothing for two

or three minutes, and then, as if musing to himself, he said: "How strange motives are! When you did a certain thing, you thought that a single, clear reason determined you, but on looking back you see instead half a dozen mixed motives, which you did not suspect at the time."

The Mystery of the Will interests us most, as soon as we perceive that the Will guides conduct and action. Recent psychologists tell us that nobody is made all of one piece — all good or all bad; but that the state of consciousness in which each of us lives is based on subconsciousness, a compound of physical instincts and desires, of intuitions and inherited tendencies. All these perpetually try to stream up into consciousness and control it. When the animal in us, for instance, breaks through, we revert to cruelty, or to cunning, or to lust; and the object of

every civilization worthy of the name, is to strengthen the barrier so that these primal lower instincts shall be kept down. "Each of us," said a well-known psychologist to me, "is like an iceberg, two-thirds of which lies under water. We have mistakenly supposed that the third above the surface — our consciousness — which we see, was all."

This psychological aspect of personality greatly increases, of course, our difficulty in following the manifestations of the will. But this aspect, being quite modern, never appeared to Plutarch, or to the Ancients. They looked on men and their deeds as uncomplex, and I, at least, find a certain calming simplicity both in their biographies and histories, and in their epics and tragedies. Thanks to the divine faculty of the Imagination, Homer and Sophocles penetrated to the bottom of the human heart, so that,

although they had no knowledge of double and triple personality or of the Freudian Wish, or of inhibitions and hysteria, they were able to create figures which have never lost their hold on posterity. And yet the simplicity to which I allude belongs to them all, and it may be owing to their direct and naïve attitude toward actual persons. In reading their works we are spared the feeling that the author is leading us through the solution of a series of problems. The shadow of the problem darkens almost every intellectual product of the last half-century. But the Ancient, although he felt the burden of the mystery not less than the Modern feels it, kept a certain spontaneity, a freshness of outlook, and a sense of undulled wonder toward life.

We, on the other hand, are sophisticated; our deepest emotions, our strongest passions, have all been dissected and

classified, and described in books, to be pawed over and studied as problems.

For Plutarch, however, all was different. He was, I suppose, the most learned in philosophy, as well as in the immediate knowledge of history, of any biographer ancient or modern, but this did not rob him of spontaneity or his other ancient inheritance. He lacked, necessarily, our modern view of personality, and so he was not subtle, and he overlooked matters which seem to us mysterious and interesting. We recognize that in a large sense he carves each of his subjects out of a single block of stone — granite or marble or basalt, as the case may be — and yet his skill in portraying, and his human imagination produce finished products consistent, generally logical, and always lifelike. To understand his power to differentiate between mythical and half-mythical personages and historical

characters, read his Lives of Theseus and of Romulus, and compare them with the Lives of the Emperors Galba and Otho, or of Mark Antony and Tiberius Gracchus.

Dryden, one of the greatest of English literary critics, edited the earliest important version in English of Plutarch's "Lives." What he said of them may well be repeated in these later times, when erudition has grown to immense proportions but taste is as rare as it always was. "In reading Plutarch," he says, "the following points should be remembered. He is a moralist rather than a historian. His interest is less for politics and the changes of empires, and much more for personal character and individual action and motives to action; duty performed and rewarded; arrogance chastised, hasty anger corrected; humanity, fair dealing, and generosity triumphing

in the visible, or relying on the invisible world. His mind in his biographic memoirs is continually running on the Aristotelian Ethics and the high Platonic theories which formed the religion of the educated population of his time."

One other biographical gem comes to us from antiquity — the brief sketch of Agricola, by Tacitus, the Roman historian who was Plutarch's contemporary. In general plan and in topics chosen by the biographer to be emphasized, it resembles a Plutarchian sketch, but in literary treatment it could have been written only by the tersest of prose masters. Tacitus also indulges in pithy moral reflections.

Perhaps I ought to mention the "Life of Apollonius of Tyana," by Philostratus, although I have my doubts. It is not a normally planned and regularly conducted biography, but it

has remarkable value as a symptom. Apollonius was a Pythagorean ascetic, born in Cappadocia, who flourished at the beginning of the Christian era. From his boyhood he gave himself up to a pious life. He ate no meat; he dressed only in linen, the fur and wool of animals being unclean; he dedicated himself to chastity, and renounced the world and its pleasures in order to dwell among sages; he practised the Pythagorean rule of silence for five years. Not only did wisdom, capable of entrancing the masses, flow from his lips, but he performed miracles and was recognized as a great magician. Modesty seems to be the only virtue which he did not possess in full measure, if it be true that he boasted of being able to speak all languages without ever having learned them. But as the account which we have of him probably dates from more than a century after his

death, perhaps the boastful quality may have been added by tradition. In Rome he raised a noble lady from the dead. He travelled not only to Nineveh and India on the east but to Spain on the west; and even during the period when he observed silence he had the power, by a gesture or the change of expression in his face, to move and control multitudes. The reports of his travels read like the "Arabian Nights." Many of his contemporaries revered him whilst living as a deity, and for three centuries or more after his death people flocked to his shrines. Some persons called him an impostor; some a magician; some a god. He typifies the Holy Man during the last stage of Paganism, who had much in common with the Hindu ascetics, and was a precursor of the early Christian ascetics in the East.

In reading Philostratus's life of him

you will be kept on the alert to determine what parts are biographical and what parts are typical, and would apply to any Holy Man of his period. The fact that the cult of Apollonius is believed by some scholars to have been promoted by the adherents of vanishing Paganism in order to check the just rising cult of Christ, adds to the interest of the book.

I do not think that we need to pause and examine any of the other ancient biographers. The lives they wrote did not add new qualities to the Art of Biography. The lives of the Cæsars, by Suetonius, are, of course, famous, and they hold their popularity down to the present. But they are uncritical and they show no real insight into character, and Classicists to-day, who know the field, distrust the accuracy of some of Suetonius's details. He revelled in personal anecdotes, many of which

amuse us, but, as a modern critic remarks: "He panders rather too much to a taste for scandal and gossip." Nor did they reveal any genius in the writer comparable to that of Plutarch or of Tacitus. If you read the "Life of Nero" by Suetonius and compare it with the "Life of Alcibiades" by Plutarch, you cannot fail to detect the shallowness of the Roman writer compared with the depth of the Greek. Suetonius tells us of things on the surface, the gossip and innuendos and the mad and cruel acts. Plutarch, on the other hand, reveals to us the abiding character of Alcibiades — the very logic of him, so to speak. Yet in many respects Alcibiades equalled Nero in abnormality.

The constant direction in the evolution of Biography has been from the outward to the inward. At first the chief effort was to describe the external

man, the rank or position he filled and his visible acts. Kings, generals, and other conspicuous persons furnished the usual theme. Gradually, however, writers came to see that a king, in spite of his supreme station, might be very dull and uninteresting; consequently, they fixed their attention on persons who, being intrinsically interesting, did not require the fortuitous spotlight of a proud race or a high station. They came to perceive, also, that the motive behind the deed was the really essential thing to study and, if possible, to explain or at least to interpret.

The best modern Biography seems to me to differ from the ancient in just these points. If you turn to literature you find that a similar development has taken place. At first the characters in fiction were only slightly individualized. The type prevailed. Stories dealt with monarchs and heroes,

and then with nobles, for the everyday public was as eager to know how the upper classes lived as our public seems to be inquisitive about the coming and going, or the dress, sports, amusements, and scandals of our multimillionaires. The average English shopkeeper probably never spoke to a duke, but in the pages of a romance he could learn how dukes, earls, and barons were supposed to live, and how they spoke, and even what they thought. I suspect that the portraits of most of them, being purely imaginary and drawn by authors as ignorant as their readers, were hardly lifelike, but they served. They held the field for a long time, and they have not been wholly discarded even now, when novels of "high life" are greedily devoured every year.

Earlier, various passions or moods took possession of the writers of fiction,

and then the persons they depicted abounded in sensibility, or in candor, and, if I may use the expression, their tears flowed at every pore. Occasionally a huge block of actual life, like Fielding's "Tom Jones," startled the world into the conviction that truth surpasses all fictitious imaginings.

From another side, also, came a strong impulse to express the real, inner man, not the typical man, the creature whom convention had agreed upon. All judges do not look alike or act alike. All old fathers are not necessarily peppery in their temper and obdurate in their will. Each, being an individual, should be drawn as an individual. Lyric poets who poured out their inmost souls in verse, and autobiographers who unveiled their most private thoughts in confessions, impressed upon the world the fact that a real human being was quite unlike the

stiff and affected and really lifeless contrivances which fashion wished to substitute.

So fiction felt the replenishing and invigorating influence of these mighty sources of true passion, and the writers of Biography were moved, whether they would or not, by the writers of fiction. It would be, indeed, a paradox if a biographer, who sets out to describe the life of an actual person, should make him less lifelike, less real, than the novelist succeeds in making the phantom offspring of his imagination.

This illustrates how, if you would understand the growth of the Art of Biography, you must keep constantly in mind the parallel growth in the literary arts, especially in those of poetry and fiction. Nor should I omit painting also, for those who have access to collections which exhibit the historic progress of that art. The early paint-

ers and the Primitives had little skill in portraiture. They used conventional figures for Christ, and the Madonna, and others of the holy persons. The bodies they drew were angular and anatomically impossible, products of an age before anatomy had appeared to suggest that the human form may embody Beauty. Then the painters drew the faces of their saints from living models, and in time it came to be fashionable to paint a group of portraits of the family kneeling in adoration of the celestial personages to whom they dedicated the altarpiece. Then the art of portraiture culminated.

In Biography, also, we have similar stages — Byzantine figures with hardly a recognizable individual feature, wrists and ankles that cannot function, and expression that does not express. Then the Primitives, and next the coming to life of individuals, until we reach

the few consummate biographies which show us living men, each unlike the others, with passions, instincts, and desires, with motives, too, and will, which guides and governs them all.

From outward to inward — that is the direction which the Art of Biography has taken, and that is the direction which every true biographer should take. Only those who are fooled themselves, or love to fool others, imagine that life is nothing but surfaces. And yet, as we survey History, we come upon entire generations or epochs in which mankind seems to be content with surfaces. By a "gentleman's agreement" convention is accepted as sufficient. Traditions may keep alive the report of a long-past day when morals flourished and men believed ardently, and tried to practise their belief; but zeal cooled, the very capacity to hold a strong belief failed, and hypoc-

risy, under the guise of convention, or keeping up appearances, found a way by lip service to satisfy the last faint whispers of the spirit.

Finally, a crust forms over Society, until there comes a poet or a religious prophet and breaks this crust and drops his sounding plummet deep, deep into the very heart of human nature, and life wells up again. If we could analyze any age and discover to what extent it lived by tradition and habit, and to what extent it brought something new of its own, we should be better able to determine the value of that age in the march of progress; the same would be true in the case of individuals. We should know then with precision whether a great man was original, how much he borrowed either through inheritance or through contact with his fellows. But this close measurement, although possible

to the chemist when he weighs molecules and atoms, is still beyond our scope in dealing with human beings. Nevertheless, the biographer must do his utmost to help us to understand in how far his subject stood on his own feet and was original, and in how far he was derived, a product of custom and the Past, only one specimen of ten thousand stereotyped in the same mould.

The examples I have given of Biography in antiquity do not touch these considerations at all. Plutarch's men are what they are, and never suggest that he puzzled himself over analyzing where they got their substance and qualities, or their originality. Life to-day has become so much a tangle of problems — moral, religious, social, economic, hygienic — that we are fortunate indeed if we keep any freshness of youth, any bloom of wonder, for the

new adventures which meet us on our journey through it. We have learned so much about the mechanical and material forces that, like children with their toys, we must take apart our experiences, even our emotions, even our love and grief and remorse, and inspect their mechanism and assure ourselves that we are getting a normal share of each; but when we move among Plutarch's multitude they seem as natural, as uncomplicated, as the fields in summer seem to the boys and girls who play in them, and have not been weighted down by the knowledge which converts flowers into botanical specimens with Latin names.

The hope of the Biographer should be to emulate Plutarch in making his hero natural, and at the same time to add such information, not technical, not pedantic, as we more sophisticated inquirers of the later world crave to

know. The modern Biographer will not write to establish a theory or to illustrate a creed, but he will give the large and significant human facts in such a way that the reader who is curious about the theory or the creed will find his answer in them, while all readers will recognize their humanness.

The opinion — I may almost call it prejudice — prevails that contemporary history cannot be impartial, or fully informed, or final. I heard two of our historians discuss this matter, and ask how much time should elapse before the true history of a significant episode could be written. One urged that at least fifty years; the other, who measured by larger periods, thought that two or three hundred years would be required. The same discussion would apply to Biography, although the same limits would probably not be respected. Most personages who fill a

large place in popular estimation, while they live, dwindle very rapidly after their death, and in even a century would be forgotten. Nevertheless, the best biography that could be written within a few years of their death might be useful and important. Ought we, therefore, to observe rigidly the hundred-year limit? I do not think so.

The idea that the actual history or biography cannot be written until all the evidence is in seems to me misleading. What we get after a hundred years is a rationalized account, thanks to which we can pronounce a verdict, as a judge does. But events as they happen are seldom rational. They lack an orderly beginning, middle, and end, the unexpected plunges in, destroys the natural sequence, and turns the affair off in another direction. Which of us, in looking back over his life, can say that all his acts were logical

or orderly? You form a partnership with a man who turns out to be an embezzler; illness or accident which you could not foresee cuts your life in two, or any other stroke of good or evil fortune breaks the regular course of your career. You yourself, writing your autobiography, might not be aware of these or other influences in your development, but you would realize most poignantly, perhaps, how it affected you at the time, and seemed to give a different direction to your purposes.

In writing history or biography the first aim should be to tell the story as nearly as possible as the actors or hero underwent it. If you are dexterous you can supply such facts as have subsequently come out, to alter the view we have formed from our knowledge of its immediate unfolding.

What, for example, is the true story of the Battle of Waterloo? Is it the

cold, dead description which the military historian can write, having at his command all the verified details which have been collected during a century — an affair to be illustrated by diagrams and statistics, as passionless as a game of chess?—for in such an analysis the units are treated as being as unhuman as chessmen are. No, I cannot forget that every one of the one hundred and fifty thousand men at Waterloo was a human being, with a human capacity for fear or for courage, some of them intoxicated by the excitement and lust of battle, and every one of them having in his heart more than curiosity as to his individual fate.

Fossil history regards as negligible what went on in Napoleon's mind and in Wellington's during the tremendous vicissitudes of that day. It takes no count of the fact that throughout the earlier hours of the battle Napoleon

issued his orders on the assumption that Grouchy would arrive in the afternoon. Fossil history knows that Grouchy was not coming; it does not pay much attention to the desertion of the Dutch and other regiments, which would have disconcerted a General less unshakable than Wellington. No, to treat the acts and passions which make up history as dead things is not the highest aim of the historian. It substitutes intellectual processes — analysis, criticism of evidence, and the passing of judicial verdicts—for life at white heat. A true description of the Battle of Waterloo would make the reader, unless he have a heart of pumice-stone, thrill as he sees Ney lead the Old Guard on its magnificent charge from the little height of La Belle Alliance down through the valley, a scant half-mile, and up the slope of Mount St. Jean, to break itself against the iron wall of

Wellington's Redcoats and Grenadiers, in frantic valor, as surf upon a reef. Every one of these French Guards rode impetuously, gallantly, to the attack, not knowing as we do how it was to turn out, but conscious of the Old Guard's long record of glory, never dreaming that defeat was possible while Ney led and the Emperor looked on.

A little later in the afternoon, when an indistinct blur of troops was discerned in the east beyond St. Lambert, how describe the suspense of each Commander until he knew whose troops they were? And then, how tell of Wellington's relief when he found they were Blücher's, or Napoleon's surprise when he learned that they were not Grouchy's. You can never describe a battle, or any other historical event unless you put in the suspense, the passion, the half-knowledge, or complete

ignorance, which determined its outcome. If the Hindu host had known that Clive could muster, in comparison, only a handful of Englishmen at Plassey, they might not have fled in rout. Conversely, if the British had known that the Turkish force at Gallipoli was reduced to three shells, they would have made a final charge instead of retreating and abandoning the Dardanelles.

I conclude, therefore, that, although later history may serve a real purpose in correcting errors due to contemporary ignorance or prejudice, the best history or biography is that which comes as near as possible to reproducing the event or the person as in life. If you wish to describe an eruption of Vesuvius — to cite an example I have used elsewhere — you will not be satisfied to measure the blocks of lava, which the people of Naples use as pav-

ing-stones, but you will seek for the testimony of those who saw the eruption in process. To the imagination the acts of men seem to pour forth in perpetual flow from a volcano whose crater runs down into the Unknown, and, as you can never counterfeit motion by immobility, or molten lava by ice, so you cannot make death a substitute for life. Never fear, therefore, that History or Biography can be too lifelike; your difficulty will be to find means through the art of literature to produce an adequate simulation of lifelikeness. Fossil history, fossil biography cannot satisfy much longer living readers. Fossil history knows that Wellington had received a despatch from Blücher saying that he would join forces with the English on that day.

In reading biographies of men and women of different times and races we must be on our guard against the illu-

sions which mere dress and manners create. The first morning, when you walk through Mushki, in Cairo, the people seem all strange in face and look and dress, but their strangeness is so uniform that you fail to detect individuals among them. In a few days, however, you come to know them as individuals, to distinguish the Arabs from the Persians and the Caffirs and the Hindus; and among these again you see well-defined varieties. We are so much the victims of fashion that we attribute to its observance moral qualities, which have little or nothing to do with it. A soldier who launches bravely on a perilous cavalry charge would be covered with mortification, and would probably retreat if he found himself in a ballroom without his collar. But literature and biography should teach you not to judge by clothes. Young Abraham Lincoln would have

made a poor enough figure on Fifth Avenue in his deerskin pantaloons, and it is safe to say that not one of the cultured and fashionable New Yorkers who might have met him would have foreseen that he was to be the greatest American of the century.

So the Biographer should make it plain from the start that he introduces you to a real man or woman, and not to a lay figure or manikin wearing garments, stylish or otherwise. We will not dispute that "Manners maketh man," but manners of this sort spring from the moral nature or the temperament, and not merely from etiquette. Etiquette permits mean conduct, vulgarity, dissoluteness, and punishes only one crime, the crime of being found out.

I ask you to hold these general considerations in mind at every point in our brief study in Biography. Con-

stantly compare the evolution of this art with that of Painting and of Fiction. And, above all, do not be misled by any false or specious arguments into believing that fossil history or fossil biography can ever serve as substitutes for the true. Life has no real representative except Life, and therefore the best biography and the best history are the most lifelike.

We have traced the steps by which biographers in antiquity arrived at lifelikeness. More than a thousand years were to elapse before the appearance of the first tentative forerunners of modern biography.

II

FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN BIOGRAPHY

TO imply that the ten or twelve centuries after Plutarch were barren of biographical material would be incorrect, for a good many biographies were written during that period; indeed, a new and prolific variety sprang up. I refer of course to the lives or acts of the saints. With the spread of Christianity, the men and women who were missionaries and apostles naturally became conspicuous. They formed the *dramatis personæ* of what we may regard as the Christian counterpart of the classical mythology, with its heroes and demigods. They not only led holy lives, but they possessed superhuman faculties, chief among which was the

power to perform miracles, and, in the earlier times, when they strove to convert Pagans into Christians, they often suffered martyrdom. The world they lived in, being wofully ignorant of the simplest laws of nature, found it easier to believe than to disbelieve in so-called miracles. Only by a miracle could the Saint prove his Saintship.

To an open-minded modern it must seem queer, to say the least, that it often took so long for the experts, who ought to be the best qualified, to discover whether a person was a saint or not. The pious antics of that most engaging Spanish nun, Saint Theresa de Sepeda, for instance, were regarded with more than suspicion by orthodox Catholics during her lifetime, but they were set up forty years after she died as unquestionable proofs that she was a saint. More astonishing still is the case of Joan of Arc, who was recently

canonized after she had been dead over four hundred and eighty years.

"The Lives of the Saints" which were composed and preserved during the Middle Age and later, often contained delightful traditions about their subjects, and embodied in this great volume of biographical ingredients there are probably many true stories of the way in which simple and devout Christians practised their religion and, if need be, died for it. But I do not recall that the writers added anything to the Art of Biography. If you once admit that a person has the power to raise the dead, or, when decapitated, to walk with his head under his arm, or to perform any other alleged miracle, you lose touch with reality so completely that History and Biography cease to have meaning for you. It will not do to argue, as many Spiritists and Occultists argue to-day, that, as

there are many things in life which we do not understand, so we must not assert that the spooks and apparitions and communications with the dead, which they declare real, are not real. I lose interest in reading about the miracle-workers, just as I do in reading about fairy godmothers and the magical personages of the medieval legends. If you believe literally that a witch can turn a pumpkin into a coach, and rats into coachmen, what *can't* you believe? There is no farther scope for surprise. The world becomes topsyturvy and lawless, and the dwellers in it are inferior to the incurable inmates of a lunatic asylum. Reason too has its august and holy rights, and those who flippantly turn their backs upon it to pursue specious and flimsy phantoms are not fit to live in this world or any other which a rational mind can conceive of.

One real biography shines out upon us from the Dark Age like the steady flame of a candle among a throng of evanescent will-o'-the-wisps. This is the "Life of the Emperor Charlemagne" (or Charles the Great) by his secretary and private chaplain, Eginhard or Einhard. He took Suetonius as his model, and after devoting forty pages to the wars and political work of the masterful King, he spends the last twenty pages on the King's private life and personal affairs. This part is really interesting. Einhard, by merely reciting rather commonplace, human facts, succeeds in making Charlemagne live. Although Einhard was a Frankish barbarian, writing in Latin which he confesses he could not use subtly, he achieved a recognizable portrait, which even so slight a trifle as the statement that the King disliked physicians because they prescribed boiled meats, and

he insisted on eating his roasted, fills out. Einhard does not write a deliberate eulogy, but he tells only the noble or worthy things about his master, whom he so evidently reveres, that it would be sacrilege for him to set down any blemishes. Thus he speaks of Charlemagne's great affection for his daughters. The King loved them so much that he insisted on having them always near him, and would not allow them to marry, and he pretended to be unaware that they led immoral lives, which gave rise to much scandal.

As we hold Einhard's little Essay in our hand and reflect that it contains much of the vital contemporary knowledge of Charlemagne which has come down to posterity, and look at the ten massive volumes of Nicolay and Hay's "Abraham Lincoln," we understand the immense advantage which the modern hero has over the medieval or the

ancient in securing a written monument of his career. David Masson erected a similar monument in "The Life of John Milton and the History of His Time." But after a thousand years how many persons, do you think, will *read* these encyclopedic works? Nicolay and Hay will be consulted as long as Lincoln is remembered, but to be read is quite another matter. After eleven hundred years, however, we read Einhard's sketch of Charlemagne, for it takes but an hour. The bullet journeys farther than the boulder.

Charlemagne stands as a colossal monarch at the beginning of the Middle Age. Louis IX of France stands at its close, not equal to Charlemagne in significance, but still a very important and interesting sovereign, who had the good fortune of having his life told in one of the most delightful biographies, ancient or modern. Jean, Sire de Join-

ville, wrote it, a noble who was among the King's intimates in war and peace. Out of his great love and reverence he composed a work which, although it added little to the Art of Biography, is a real addition to the world's source of pleasure, being itself a work of art. You will not find an orderly or consecutive narrative of the career of Saint Louis, but you will find his most important events properly described, and you will be able to look, as through peepholes, into his very heart. Not merely that; you will become acquainted with the Barons of France and the other Crusaders who devoted themselves to the King's service, and you will understand the motives and practices of an entire caste, the caste which was swayed by the ideals of Chivalry. Next to Saint Louis, Joinville himself may be regarded as the hero of the book, because he pours out

in it his own likes and dislikes, and his criticism of men and of policy.

I find him an agreeable companion. Fashion in modern biography does not approve the too frequent intrusion of the biographer himself, or his opinions. But any reader who quarrels with Joinville on this score must be a rigid formalist in danger of petrifying into a pedant; and pedants are beyond the reach of the divinest art. Some one has suggested that Joinville comes second between Villehardouin and Froissart among the old French historians, and that he embodies the manhood prime of that state of society, just as Froissart represents its decadence.

Joinville describes to us men and women who actually believed in Chivalry, and lived it, and joyously served their sovereign, who was to them both king and model. The people of that age, however, had another ideal of

sainthood, and Francis of Assisi was its edifying pattern.

The book entitled "The Little Flowers of St. Francis," probably written by an unknown monk of the thirteenth century, is not a formal biography, but a collection of the sayings and acts of St. Francis told most naïvely and sweetly. The Saint could not have written an autobiography, because for him to narrate himself many of his miracles and benevolent acts, would seem indelicate. But, for accomplishing the purpose which the author intended, he could have employed no better form of composition. After reading the *Fioretti* you feel that you know St. Francis, and you are so thoroughly imbued with the uncritical, myth-making, and miracle-seeing world in which he lived that it all seems very natural. You follow intimately the every-day life of a holy person at the

end of the Middle Age, who devoted himself to altruistic work.

In the "Imitation of Christ," which was written in the fifteenth century, and Thomas à Kempis still seems to have the best claim to be its author, we meet the third type of medieval personality, the man who was wholly absorbed in his religious meditations, prayers, and self-depreciations. It is an unapproached record of the ascetic, who strives almost frantically to save his own soul. Some one has remarked that from first to last he is so obsessed by this purpose that he never mentions saving the soul of, or even helping, any one else. And yet Christ bade us give up our individual life for the sake of another, and find our own soul by losing it for the sake of another.

These three books which portray, in St. Louis the Christian knight and cru-

sader performing his duty according to the ideals of chivalry; the Christian St. Francis seeking altruistic ideals; and the Christian ascetic imprisoned in himself, desperately clutching at the salvation of his *own* soul, reveal to us, by biography and by pseudo-biography, many most characteristic elements of Medieval Man.

Coming down a century and a half, the next example I shall mention is the "Life of Cardinal Wolsey," by his Gentleman Usher, George Cavendish. Wolsey, you will remember, was both an ecclesiastic and the chief adviser of Henry VIII — one of those double-natured men, a layman on one side and an official churchman on the other, several of whom, before and after the Reformation, served as prime ministers for the monarchs of Spain, France, and England. He belongs in the list with Ximenes, Richelieu, Mazarin, Fleury,

and Alberoni. Judged by whatever standard, Wolsey, the butcher's son, was one of the greatest of English statesmen — the first, I should say, who had a vision of England as a dominant force in the world-politics of that era. Cavendish's "Life" of him is much more personal than political, so that any one who reads it for a forthright narrative of events will be disappointed. But if you read it as a biography which gives in a series of memorable pictures the important crises in an extraordinary career, you will not be disappointed. The steps by which the humble butcher's son was befriended and sent to Oxford, where he graduated at fifteen and then took orders, and was rapidly promoted, became chaplain to Henry VII at thirty-four, Dean of Lincoln at thirty-seven, Almoner to Henry VIII the next year, Bishop of Lincoln at forty-three, and Archbishop of York

the same year [1514], and Cardinal the next year, are briefly indicated.

But the substance of the book relates to Wolsey's close companionship with the headstrong and vicious Henry VIII. Among the paradoxes of history at which we have a right to smile is the English Reformation, promoted by Wolsey to gratify the temporal ambition of the young king, while he himself was intriguing to be made Pope of the Roman Church, from which he was really separating England. The reader of Cavendish, however, is likely to remember longest those passages in which the biographer describes the eclipse of his master. What can be more pitiable, for instance, than the death-bed scene, in which the Cardinal is deserted by every one except Cavendish and a few devoted followers, and is not even allowed to die in peace by the rapacious and heartless King? Having heard

that Wolsey, in his disgrace, still had a few hundred pounds, which the royal vultures had been unable to scent and seize, Henry despatched a messenger, a "Mr. Kingstone," to demand them of the dying man. And so true a servant of Henry was Mr. Kingstone that he almost interrupted the administering of extreme unction to the fast-failing Cardinal.

Although Cavendish can hardly be claimed as an innovator in Biography, those passages of his which I refer to show that he was sensitive to the importance of personal details — a direction in which the Art was to develop until it reached its highest expression.

History shows few examples of the fall of a mighty personage from towering splendor and domination into the dust, equal to Wolsey's, and in Cavendish's simple narrative the tragic contrast is all the more impressive because

of the absence of all effort to produce a melodramatic effect. We see Wolsey's utter surprise and blank amazement at it. We see also how it sobered and saddened the honest Cavendish, who could not understand how such a calamity could, by God's Providence, be allowed to strike down such a man. That the truly great statesman Wolsey should be the sport and victim of the violent and lascivious Henry and his shameless paramour Anne Boleyn, sorely tested Cavendish's religious trust. His biography illustrates how much the peculiar qualities of the biographer help to make or mar a biography. In truth, the ideal biographer is one who is so sensitive to his subject's qualities that he, better than any one else, perceives them. He may not be a master in the art of expression, but if his divination is sure, this lack also may be compensated. No one can doubt this in the

case of Cavendish, who saw the good side and the noble of his master, who gave his own affection free rein and dedicated himself nearly thirty years later to publish to the after-world Wolsey's true story.

By reading that story and by comparing it with Shakespeare's portrait of Wolsey in *King Henry VIII* you can see the difference in method between a sympathetic chronicler and the greatest of dramatists. Cavendish makes Wolsey say: "If I had served God as diligently as I have the king, he would not have given me over in my grey hairs." This becomes, by Shakespeare's magic:

> "Oh Cromwell, Cromwell!
> Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, he would not in mine age
> Have left me naked to mine enemies."

Do we not feel throughout that Shakespeare has almost adopted Cavendish's

view of the Cardinal? The words which he puts into the mouth of Thomas Cromwell in rebuking Gardiner, the Bishop of Winchester, are but the refrain which murmurs half-plaintively from many of the biographer's pages:

"My Lord of Winchester, you are a little,
By your good favour, too sharp; men so noble,
However faulty, yet should find respect
For what they have been: 'tis a cruelty
To load a falling man."

Shakespeare's other historical plays abound, of course, in lines and passages based on Holinshed and other chroniclers, and no one can fail to perceive how much he borrowed from Plutarch's sketch of Julius Cæsar for his portrait of the noblest Roman of them all. To have inspired Shakespeare would save Cavendish from oblivion, but the actual worth of the biography will keep it alive as long as men prize genuine

fragments of human life and tragic fortune.

One of Wolsey's contemporaries whose life has lasting smack and flavor was Sir Thomas More, and his son-in-law, Roper, wrote a biography which should be read along with Cavendish's, by any one who wishes to know the prevalent ideals in biography toward the middle of the sixteenth century in England. The book is also of much intrinsic interest, as it should be to give a truthful report of More, in whom humor and wisdom were finely blended, and whose character shone forth nobly in a time of turncoats and sycophants. In the main, Roper follows without imitating (because, as he probably never saw Cavendish's book in manuscript, he could not have imitated it) the meandering method of the "Life of Wolsey." Most biographers in that age preferred that method. It

was as if they sat down with you and talked over the career of their subject, remembering this or that point as they talked on, quite indifferent to the bounds of time and sequence.

The Italian Renaissance produced one splendid biographical monument, in the "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects," by George Vasari. The collection covers the three centuries from Giotto and the Pisani to Vasari's own contemporaries, including Titian and Tintoret. The individual sketches, especially those of the men of the last century treated by Vasari, are probably more nearly correct than are those of most of Plutarch's subjects who lived centuries before Plutarch himself wrote. Vasari may have been personally acquainted with the chief Masters of the sixteenth century, and he heard the facts and gossip about those whom he

did not personally know. You get the impression, therefore, of the sort of man each of them was, and you learn a great many things about his professional career — who employed him, and how much he was paid. In addition to all this, Vasari frequently adds his own criticisms of the paintings, statues, and buildings, so that you have the standard of art criticism of one of the later masters of the Renaissance, and what, in many cases, was certainly the fashionable or orthodox verdict of the time.

Coming back to English writers the Lives written by Sir Izaak Walton must not be overlooked. They have in their way the charm which has delighted generations of readers of "The Compleat Angler," and they describe men who were themselves interesting. They are truly landmarks, although in their composition they represent no

new advance. Walton was a pains-taking searcher for facts, as his appendix to the "Life of Mr. Richard Hooker" bears witness. But brute dates and events seem of secondary importance compared with his delightful gossip about his subjects. I think of him as on a sunny summer afternoon, sitting under the shade of a tree and patiently waiting for a fish to bite his hook, enjoying the angler's mild suspense, which does not, however, cut him off from a cosey and quiet chat with a friend. How much of himself goes into his sketches, and how glad we are to have it!

The personal quality—that determines our likes and dislikes, our pleasures and our pains! Strictly speaking, of course, we ought to have as little as possible of the personality of the biographer intruded into his work, and yet, being human, we not only tolerate

but enjoy it, when it does not wrong the truth. And especially to the older writers, whether Plutarch or Joinville or Cavendish, we willingly grant the privilege of expressing their own opinions.

Although he was not primarily a biographer, I must not pass over Lord Clarendon, whose history is rich in some of the best-drawn portraits in existence. He had an eye for seeing features, and complexion, and the play of expression, and for reproducing them all on the printed page as wonderfully as Sir Joshua Reynolds does on canvas. And any one who loves the splendor of jeweled words, and the beauty of elegant but unaffected phrase, glories over the way in which Clarendon knew how to match precious substance with rare style. Those portraits of his are like the heads cut by the antique lapidary on emerald or

sapphire, and not on common onyx or carnelian.

Perhaps the most personal records of all are those which cannot be classed as biographical and yet, nevertheless, reveal passion at its supreme moments. Take the "Letters of Abélard and Héloise": their passion keeps them alive after eight hundred years. Likewise, many Autobiographies or Confessions burn with an undying glow. Much of the passionate emotion, worship, love, remorse, and spiritual distress speaks out of the Old Testament from individuals whose names are forgotten. The passion lives on, although the heart which it consumed has vanished.

So I have said nothing about Autobiography, and the reason must be evident. Autobiography is not like Biography, an art whose development we can trace. It is the record of in-

dividual lives by the men themselves. It may be as abstract as are the Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius, and tell us little about the external life of the man but unfold to us in the amplest confidence the very stuff his soul was made of. The Confessions of St. Augustine are equally soul-revelations, as if the lightnings of the Eternal flashed down into the Saint's being, and lighted it up with terrible distinctness. But how shall we compare his Confessions with Rousseau's, or with the astonishing revelations of Benvenuto Cellini? We appraise an autobiography by its representative value and by its literary expression. Although many autobiographies do not spring from St. Augustine's spiritual depths, they are still precious. If you but analyze yourself truly and have some indefinable charm in your nature — something which you yourself do not suspect, but

which the world delights in — your story of yourself is bound to live. It may be that you have not charm, but that your experience is so unusual, so full of real interest, that it will attract as Solomon Maimon's does, or as Richard Jefferies's "The Story of My Heart" does. And, as persons repel as well as attract, so do their Confessions. A literary friend of mine to whom I had attributed a catholic taste, tried to read "The Story of My Heart," and he confessed to me with a frankness which never deserted him, that he had found it so abominable that he burnt it, unfinished, in the furnace. I have always wondered what there was in it which so aroused his indignant aversion.

I was reading lately Lord Morley's "Recollections," and I laid the book down with great disappointment. Why was I disappointed? Here was

a work by the foremost man of letters in England since Tennyson died, a man who while still very young won a high place in the esteem of the only public whose verdict really counts, and who has continued during half a century not merely to justify the early applause but to reach other heights. A mere author may live aloof from the world and produce his novels, or poems, or histories in privacy, as a bird sings from a tree whose foliage hides him. But Morley strode into the arena where every motion of the gladiator is public, and there he took and gave blows, and championed the cause of almost every radicalism which, for good or for evil, has transformed the complacent, conservative English-speaking world of 1850 into the whirling vortex of to-day. From publicist and polemic he became politician and statesman, and spent thirty-five years in

Parliament. He fought in the great battles for Home Rule; he was a Cabinet Minister and President of the Council; in menacing crises England chose him to be Chief Secretary for Ireland and later Chief Secretary for India; he was the intimate and confidant of Gladstone and his biographer.

Better than any one else of his age John Morley seems to fulfil the ideal which St. Paul set for himself: he had unlimited sympathy, and was made all things to all men by that sympathy. This does not mean that he gave up his own essential nature, that he acquiesced meanly, or compromised from a desire to please, or that he was simply a chameleon. It means that he held in abeyance his idiosyncrasies so that they should not prevent him from understanding you perfectly; having that understanding he could the better

persuade you, argue with you, perhaps even win you over.

And yet I was disappointed. The two volumes of his "Recollections" do not spring from his heart and passion, but from his intellect, his fund of information. The larger part of one volume is loaded with letters to the Earl of Minto, the Viceroy of India, which let us see Lord Morley as a perfect official letter-writer, abounding in culture, in special knowledge, and in urbanity, but never off his guard, never spontaneous. Read John Stuart Mill's "Autobiography" in order to perceive how a man of Morley's type, intellectual and rational, can yet *feel* and utter his feeling.

But my theme is Biography and I touch on Autobiography merely to show how different it is, and how different must be the criteria by which we judge it. As in the case of Fiction,

however, the influence of Autobiography on the writing of Biography has probably been greater than biographers or readers suspect. When we became accustomed to the intimate revelations which persons who wrote their own lives vouchsafed to us, we came to expect something similar in the portraits which biographers drew of their subjects. The best of all human documents happens to be Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson," and not an Autobiography of Johnson by himself; but the reason why Boswell's work holds the primacy is precisely because we feel that it could not have been better if Johnson himself had written it. This leads me to remark that the fact that a man knows himself better than anybody else can know him does not necessarily imply that he can write the best story about himself. This is a matter of Art rather than of Knowl-

edge, and I hope later to refer to it briefly.

Johnson's "Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets: With Critical Observations on Their Works" may be regarded as a monument either in Biography or in literary criticism. I believe that current fashion in criticism sneers at old Doctor Johnson, and indeed I doubt whether most of the critics have ever read him. If he could glance at those masterpieces which sometimes live a month which they load with their praises, I suspect that he would say: "Tut! tut! Sir, a man might write such stuff forever if he would *abandon* his mind to it."* And yet a mind whose tastes and standards have not been formed by the literary gossip of newspapers from day to day will discover in Johnson a *corpus* of sound criticism.

* Boswell, IV, 183.

The biographical part of his "Lives" is subordinate to the critical. He gives a straightforward account of a man before discussing the poems, but he never fails to note pertinent facts or illustrative anecdotes concerning the man as well as the poet. And, like his own Boswell, he sometimes recalls mere habits which bring the human side of his subject nearer to us. Thus, in his essay on Milton, he mentions such a detail as this: "When he did not care to rise early, he had something read to him by his bedside; perhaps at this time his daughters were employed. He composed much in the morning and dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm."

Several other of Doctor Johnson's "Lives" besides that of Milton, especially those of Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Savage, are of considerable bulk,

and as specimens of brief biography they seem to me to be not inferior to similar modern examples. The modern are different in many respects, and probably the reader to-day finds them easier to read than he does Johnson, because they are written in the dialect of to-day. But I doubt whether, on the whole, the modern surpass Johnson's in fundamental biographical substance.

By a singular and happy coincidence Doctor Johnson found in James Boswell his perfect biographer. Look at him from any angle you will, it must seem incredible that the old Doctor, with his queer ways, his scrofula, his tea-drinking, his other-mindedness, his brusque and almost brutal retorts, his sordid dwelling, should have been better known to five generations of English-speaking people throughout the world than any other individual. "He

had genius," you say, "and the world is always interested in genius," but there have been men of far greater genius than his of whom we have not a tenth of the personal details that Boswell has told us of him. Somebody has reconstructed the life of Frederick the Great, day by day, from his birth to his death, but assuredly such a monumental monstrosity — worthy to stand beside the Leipsic *Sieges Denkmal* — will never have enthusiastic readers, at least outside of Germany. And even there it may require the incentive of a cash prize to induce many to read it through. When I apply the phrase "enthusiastic readers" to Boswell, I am hardly correct, for those who read him at all soon rise above the stage of demonstrative enthusiasm where they feel that admiring adjectives are as unnecessary as lovers of landscape do, when they watch a sunset, or a tempest

at sea, or shadows and sunshine at play among the mountains.

And yet this same James Boswell who produced the chief masterpiece in modern biography was long in getting even a nod of recognition from the critical public. Everybody saw the greatness of his "Life of Johnson," and in a very few years after its publication that book became a part of the intellectual equipment of cultivated persons throughout the English-speaking world, and it has never ceased to hold this place. Even now, those who admire the biography admit only grudgingly the claims of Bozzy. Nevertheless, masterpieces are not produced by manikins. Sometimes, however, the gulf of disenchantment opens between the man and his work. We regret, for instance, when we learn of it, the sordidness of J. M. W. Turner's character and life, and we are glad that oblivion has

screened us from knowing too much about the Elizabethan dramatists or the painters of the Italian Renaissance.

Boswell's bad reputation with posterity was fixed by Macaulay, who saw characters as painters in the Levant see landscape, a blaze of sunlight contrasted with unmodulated silhouettes and shadows. Macaulay never wrote a sentence which the youngest reader could not understand. When, therefore, he took Boswell for a sitter he left nothing uncertain, no margin for speculation, no borderland for doubt. In many a passage, which ninety years ago rang with metallic clearness through the world, he held poor Boswell up for contempt and odium. As a model of portraiture by vituperation, Macaulay's sketch of Boswell can hardly be matched. Let me quote a part of a famous passage:

"He was the laughingstock of the

whole of that brilliant society which has owed to him the greater part of its fame. He was always laying himself at the feet of some eminent man, and begging to be spit upon and trampled upon. He was always earning some ridiculous nickname, and then 'binding it as a crown unto him' — not merely in metaphor, but literally. He exhibited himself at the Shakspeare Jubilee, to all the crowd which filled Stratford-on-Avon, with a placard around his hat, bearing the inscription of *Corsica Boswell.* In his tour, he proclaimed to all the world, that at Edinburgh he was known by the appellation of *Paoli Boswell.* Servile and impertinent, — shallow and pedantic, — a bigot and a sot, — bloated with family pride, and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a talebearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns

of London, — so curious to know everybody who was talked about, that, Tory and High Churchman as he was, he manœuvred, we have been told, for an introduction to Tom Paine, — so vain of the most childish distinctions, that, when he had been to court, he drove to the office where his book was being printed without changing his clothes, and summoned all the printers' devils to admire his new ruffles and sword; — such was this man; — and such he was content and proud to be. Everything which another man would have hidden, — everything, the publication of which would have made another man hang himself, was matter of gay and clamorous exultation to his weak and diseased mind."

It happens that Carlyle wrote about Boswell at the same time as Macaulay. He had the same facts to draw his inferences from. He, too, knew all of

Boswell's foibles and the many traditions, mostly disparaging, which circled round his reputation. Nevertheless, Carlyle discovered in Boswell something which Macaulay did not see. In his impetuous, deeply penetrating, passionate strokes, he says:

"Boswell was a person whose mean or bad qualities lay open to the general eye; visible, palpable to the dullest. His good qualities, again, belonged not to the time he lived in; were far from common then; indeed, in such a degree were almost unexampled; not recognizable therefore by every one; nay, apt even (so strange had they grown) to be confounded with the very vices they lay contiguous to and had sprung out of. That he was a winebibber and gross liver; gluttonously fond of whatever would yield him a little solacement, were it only of a stomachic character, is undeniable

enough. That he was vain, heedless, a babbler; had much of the sycophant, alternating with the braggadocio, curiously spiced too with an all-pervading dash of the coxcomb; that he gloried much when the tailor, by a court-suit, had made a new man of him; that he appeared at the Shakspeare Jubilee with a ribbon imprinted '*Corsica Boswell*,' round his hat; and in short, if you will, lived no day of his life without doing and saying more than one pretentious ineptitude: all this unhappily is evident as the sun at noon."

Here you see are the same elements, and yet the impression left upon you is not that of despising or loathing, but rather that of suspended judgment. Admitting that Boswell had all these defects, Carlyle lets you imply that the cheap and tawdry fellow still possessed qualities which would retrieve him. Carlyle himself looked through the

eyes of Sympathy, without which we cannot well understand the hearts of men and the mainspring of causes.

Would it not be an astonishing thing if a poor wine-bibbing fop — and nothing more — were capable of creating a really stupendous work in art or literature? A common ruffian in the diggings of the Klondike may find the largest gold nugget on record, or a slave in the diamond fields of Golconda may unearth a Koh-i-noor; but a work of art, a true book or painting, a statue or temple, does not exist ready-made, needing only to be discovered by some fortunate finder. The work of art is a creation, and it can never come into being without the transmuting agency of the artist. Accordingly, James Boswell must receive the credit for the unique qualities which produced his "Life of Samuel Johnson." Do not suppose that it was his wine-bibbing, or his syco-

phancy, or his fribbling vanity, or any other of his foibles which qualified him for his Biography. In all cases where the artist seems unworthy of his work, remember Emerson's truth:

> "Not from a vain or shallow thought
> His awful Jove young Phidias brought."

What is the secret of Boswell's mastery? First, and second, and third, he was a highly sensitized photographic plate, receptive to the most delicate impressions from Johnson. He saw everything, he preserved everything, but his sympathy kept him from misinterpreting the old Doctor's words and gestures and acts. Boswell is there as a transparent glass through which you look at the real Johnson. The glass is not tinged or flecked to give you a Boswellian distortion. Next to his gifts of transparency and of receptivity and of sympathy comes his gift of selec-

tion. This is the distinctive talent of the artist, and with him it seems to have been intuitive. He knew just what to choose among his mass of materials, and he chose so naturally that there seems to be no art at all. He had, too, the gift of emphasis, which is only another form of proportion.

Almost equally rare as these gifts was his power of expression, or literary style. Most persons think that he had no style. You read him page by page, and chapter by chapter, and are never conscious of his style. Therein lies its excellence. As you read you see the things he tells about and you remember the episode but not the words he used. Transparency, in which the author does not project himself between the reader and the text, is again the talent. You have only to reflect what the four volumes of the Biography of Johnson would be if they were

written by Walter Pater or any other of the much lauded and festooned official modern "stylists," in order to thank God that James Boswell was none of them. We relish a little guava jelly now and then, but the mere thought of it through four octavo volumes gives one nausea.

I make no attempt to discover why it is that Samuel Johnson, described in the minutest details by his devoted biographer, should so captivate generation after generation of readers. One evident attraction is Johnson's wit. We are too apt to think of him as the exploiter of a ponderous style, as being elephantine in his person and movements, and as a pompous literary autocrat; but what made him triumph, in spite of all these, was wit, at once quick and sharp and sound — for real wit must spring from sound ideas or it is merely a verbal play or a trick of

expression. Nearly one hundred and forty years after his death, I find in Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations" almost a hundred of Johnson's sayings in prose, some of which are like household words and every one of them has his peculiar stamp. How many of the professional wits to-day will be thus lavishly quoted in the year 2060? Mr. Bernard Shaw makes us laugh, but his persiflage compared with Johnson's fundamental wit seems no more lasting than is the effervescence on a noisy sparkling stream.

In our present survey of the development of the Art of Biography, Boswell's masterpiece is the culmination. It gave, for the first time, a complete account of a human being. In it we have not merely the external man and a narration of his acts, but the inside as well as the outside, all adequate to the original. The wise Bos-

well does not use Johnson as a figure on whom to drape any theory or his own prejudices. His vision penetrates, not because he has an eager and keen mind which delights to exercise itself in such analysis, but because he has sympathy and love which not only see but understand. And, whether by intuition or by intent, he commands a style which is a perfect medium for his thoughts. Finally, he has for a subject a creature strange, but with a strangeness which attracts every one, and still, after these many, many years, has not worn out the world's interest.

III

BIOGRAPHY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A GOOD many years ago, when Mr. Howells was fighting manfully his campaign for Realism, he remarked that if the novelist could get inside of the heart and brain of a moke, smoking his corn-cob pipe on a log, he could produce a portrait which would throw Shakespeare's Hamlet, or any other masterpiece, into the shade. I do not believe that this is literally true. I do not believe that the brain of any moke, or of any person now living, be he white, black, yellow, or mottled, could match Shakespeare's brain in interest. Providence has ordered it so that, although we are all made of the same stuff, that stuff

has innumerable varieties, and, humanly speaking, those varieties are not equal in interest, in charm, or in beauty or significance. But we see what Mr. Howells meant, and the fragment of truth in his meaning. And there are many biographies to prove that the excellence and interest of a biography do not depend upon the high position of its subject. If only the biographer can pluck out the heart of a man or woman, no matter how humble, and reveal it truly, the world will rejoice.

The modicum of truth which the Realist's doctrine contained, passed into fiction and other forms of literature, and into painting and into sculpture. The penalty exacted for establishing any truth is exaggeration, and for a good while Realism ran to all lengths. No matter how inane or sordid or putrescent a story might be,

if it were only sufficiently strewn with dirt, the Realists hailed it as a masterpiece; but in the long run the taste of the human soul is more to be relied upon than is that of any doctrinaire, and the time came when the human soul repudiated the creed of dirt for dirt's sake. But the good which Realism had to offer remained, and we see the result in Biography not less than in Fiction.

The best biographies written since 1870 are much closer to life than those of the middle and earlier part of the nineteenth century. Of course the adoption of the scientific method, in following which men studied other men, including celebrities, as dispassionately as they studied animals or chemical elements, exerted a structural influence over biography.

Formerly, if a biographer were writing about a statesman, for instance,

he instinctively carried in his mind the ideal of how a statesman ought to be portrayed; in like fashion the sculptor draped him in a toga, holding a scroll of orations in his left hand. This served as well as a sign-board to warn you that the subject was a statesman and orator, and to prepare you to examine the statue properly. If you will compare Stanhope's "Life of William Pitt the Younger," with John Morley's "Life of Gladstone," you will perceive the change that had come about in less than a hundred years, in the writing of biographies of statesmen; and even Mr. Morley was less "Realistic" than is Mr. Winston Churchill in his life of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. This was to be expected, for Mr. Gladstone was almost a symbol, and in his life he passed through the typical English experiences at school, at the University, in the Anglican Church, and

in Parliament, which made him in some respects rather the carrier-on and embodiment of traditions, than a highly individualized person. In their conservatism the English still cling to the medieval habit of setting the Place above the Man. They write about the Regius Professor at Oxford, or the Dean of St. Paul's, or the Archbishop of Canterbury without giving their family names, so that unless you have these, and a thousand others stored away in your memory, you must consult some reference book in order to discover who the Professor was, or the Dean in 1830, or in 1860.

This English practice partly accounts, I think, for the difference between English and American biographies of officials. We speak of John C. Calhoun and not of the Senator from South Carolina, of Phillips Brooks and not of the Protestant Episcopal

Bishop of Massachusetts, of John Marshall and not of the Chief Justice of the United States, and so of all the rest, whom we refer to by name and not by title, unless there is a particular reason for giving the title. The texture of the lives led by the Americans was also so fresh and unconventional that it furnished little excuse for imitating the English practice in terminology. In England the successful man, whatever his profession, rose to this or that office, which may have existed for generations, and so it was natural for him to be known by the office or rank. In the United States, on the other hand, the pioneer in one decade might be a State Governor or a Bishop or a General in the next, and so he was known for himself, and not for his office. A perfect example is Abraham Lincoln, whom the most conventional of English biographers would find it impossible

to de-individualize. Speaking of Lincoln, let me commend, in passing, a recent biography of him by Lord Charnwood, who, though not an American, has succeeded in a remarkable way in understanding what I may call the *Americanism* of Lincoln and of his environment.

We might suppose that having reached in Boswell's "Johnson" the culmination of the biographical art, we need not pursue our examination farther. But, in fact, evolution does not necessarily stop with the creation of a perfect specimen, and the nineteenth century and our own have produced many sorts of biography which call for our attention. It took a long time for Boswell's example to influence other biographers. The traditional idea continued that biographies must be constructed according to well-recognized patterns. Just as the "dignity of his-

tory" had to be respected, so respect for the "proprieties" had to be observed. The intimate life of a man, his every-day doings, his weaknesses and follies and mistakes, must not be mentioned. But he must be described as being perpetually on parade, the counterpart of the portraits of men in their best apparel. This fashion has by no means passed away. I read recently a book of General Robert E. Lee, which was so stuffed with virtues that I began to doubt the existence of any virtue, and only when the author stated that General Lee used to take his ease in a rocking-chair, sitting in his stocking-feet, did I perceive that he was a real person.

I must forego any attempt to criticise in detail even the foremost of modern biographies, but I shall touch upon several of them which are representative. Earliest among the Brit-

ish is "Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of his Life," by Thomas Moore, which was published in 1830. I can hardly overpraise Byron's own material, which forms a considerable part of this work. To me he seems the best of English letter-writers, in the sense that he was the most spontaneous, and, so to speak, reckless, uttering his thought or whim of the moment without concern for publication or discretion. Most of the other famous letter-writers are conscious that posterity is looking over their shoulder while they write. With Stevenson a letter was not like a private, unpremeditated chat with a friend, but a set literary performance, in which all was premeditated and wrought with his highest skill as a literary artist.

The substance of Byron's Letters is often disappointing, because it belongs

to the baser side of his nature, and we are irritated and grieved to find a genius like his seeming to prefer the lower levels. But as human documents his journals, and especially his letters, are invaluable. Moore's connecting narrative, though in the main good, is not remarkable. He wrote as a practised literary man, not as a born biographer. His style is smooth and rather graceful, but more antiquated now than Boswell's, and he evidently suffers by contrast with the rush and vividness and humor and finality of Byron's. Like most of us Moore used a trowel; Byron carried a poniard. We smile now or moralize as we remember that, a century ago, some of the critics esteemed Moore as superior to Byron, even in poetry; and they regarded Byron as the luckiest of men to have Moore for a biographer.

This merely illustrates the wide-

spread fallacy which still survives that anybody can write a biography. Moore, being a popular poet, must necessarily be a great biographer; but they would not have predicted that he would be the best man to choose to compose a symphony or to paint a portrait. This sophism runs through almost every stratum. Formerly, when any distinguished citizen — lawyer or judge, merchant or writer — died, it was taken for granted that his clergyman, if he had one, would write his life, unless his wife, sister, or cousin were preferred — a still more foolish custom. I recall only one biography by a widow which was really successful, Mrs. Kingsley's "Life of Charles Kingsley." On the other hand, I could mention several which were marred because the widow interfered with the biographer, or even guided the pen while the biographer wrote. After the family

have found a writer whose judgment and discretion they can trust, they should religiously refrain from meddling. A witty English friend of mine, whose cousin, Sir Alfred Lyall, was writing the life of Lord Dufferin, said to me: "I think Sir Alfred would agree with you, that suttee should be made compulsory on the widows of celebrities."

The next important biography in English to follow that of Byron was Lockhart's "Life of Scott." It added no new variety to the art, but it is an admirable example of excellence without originality. Lockhart wrote well. He avoided passing fashions in style; he adhered to a chosen vocabulary and to a chosen scale. He felt emotions himself and he could describe them in Scott, and he possessed the rare gift of being simple, when the emotions themselves were most intense.

But Lockhart's defect was in draw-

ing his portrait on too vast a scale. His biography stretches to nine volumes, some four thousand octavo pages. What an elephantine gift to hand on to poor Posterity, our after-comer, imaginary like Sairey Gamp's Mrs. Harris, who is to read all the books which we leave unread, to crown with laurel the innumerable heads of genius which we neglected, to convert, by some strange alchemy, our mountains of lies into truth, and to do justice to unhonored reputations!

Lockhart narrates in too great detail; he lacks that power of selection which stamps the man of genius in any art. He quotes too copiously from Scott's letters and journals. Scott, unlike Byron, not being a vivacious and swift letter-writer, does not provide first-rate biographical material in his correspondence. He is informational rather than imaginative or temperamental.

A wiser selector than Lockhart would have made a separate work of Scott's journals of travel — as Boswell published Johnson's "Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland." But, after all, Scott was so nobly human in nature, so true in heart, so wholesome, that I find it hard to blame Lockhart for telling us too much about him.

Selection! the discerning Greeks did not make a Muse of her because they took it for granted that she was a necessary part of every Muse. During the past century she has been the most neglected of all. Time was when an author or other artist worked only under the stress of a compelling inspiration. But, among moderns authorship or the other arts is a trade. Only early death can prevent a novelist to-day from filling a ten-foot bookshelf. Our leading American master of fiction has eighty volumes or more

to his credit. Carlyle, as has been well said, preached the fatuity of speech and the excellence of silence in twenty large volumes. Balzac left three times that number, and the prolific Alexandre Dumas, *père*, has been explained as a syndicate and not as an individual. Victor Hugo — but why go on? The multi-vocal H. G. Wells gets out three books a year; much must be allowed, however, to the pioneer who, as early as 1918, amazed the world by discovering God; and, since Mr. Wells has a remarkable business sense, we may be sure that he took out a patent on his discovery.

Does not this volubility imply, as I just said, that writing no longer waits on inspiration? Your successful novelist turns out his two thousand or two thousand five hundred words a day, as regularly and with as little wear and tear on his brain as your popular

baker achieves his daily stint of mixing, cutting, and frying a thousand doughnuts. Writing and baking have become trades. This result is confirmed by biographers also; for, as I have remarked, modern biography has been noticeably affected by fiction. In England financial motives have also caused biographies, as well as novels, to swell in bulk. For a long time three volumes was the accepted limit of a novel, that limit being fixed by the willingness of a sufficient number of buyers to pay a guinea for a three-volume novel. Latterly, when four or five shillings, or seven and six, mark the price which the greatest number of readers will pay for their fiction, the text is correspondingly shortened. For a long time past a guinea has been the traditional sum to be paid for a biography, and, as no publisher could give, without blushing, less than two

volumes of paper, binding, and presswork for that figure, biographies have been written to fill two volumes. Hence the appalling list of two-volume lives of British statesmen and ecclesiastics, irrespective of the fact that many of them could be adequately embalmed in a hundred pages, whereas a few of the others might deserve a thousand pages. The standard of biography is set by fashion and the publishers at two volumes, but Mr. Gladstone and some bishops and archbishops be so strong that they come to three volumes.

What becomes of the artist — and, as I have so often insisted, the biographer must be an artist — if he is forced, for the pecuniary profit of his publisher, to ignore his art and to inflate three or four signatures of text into a thousand pages? Even biographers who are above sacrificing any

ideal for commercial reasons, often fail because they have neither the requirements of art nor any training. Mrs. Charles Kingsley, for example, wrote her life of her husband in two volumes, but she subsequently reduced it to one, and the improvement must be evident to every reader.

In judging novelists and biographers, therefore, we must understand what size convention prescribed for their works. Suppose that a sculptor had to make his statues, irrespective of their subjects, of the same dimensions, because he could procure packing-boxes of only one size to ship them in, what would become of the art of sculpture? The true biographer, however, writes neither to fill out nor to curtail, but to present his subject in just proportion.

The reaction of fiction on biography conduced to improve the substance of biographical writing, by forcing it

to be more vivid, more lifelike. Readers who found the phantoms which the imagination of Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot created as lifelike as themselves, would not tolerate the biographies in which real persons were more unsubstantial than phantoms. Why, they ask, should Colonel Newcome and Becky Sharpe, David Copperfield and Lady Dedlock, Tito Melema and Maggie Tulliver, or George Meredith's Richard Feverel and Sir Willoughby Patterne, live and breathe, and be as actually our companions as are our most intimate friends, while the lay figures whom biographers set up and call by the names of historic persons are as dead as mummies, or even as fossils? Insensibly, therefore, fiction set an example in vitality to the biographers.

Further, from the middle of the Nineteenth Century on, Science began visibly

to affect both these arts. For Science studied an animal, a flower, a tree, dispassionately and with the utmost thoroughness. Science used a microscope, and the public, becoming gradually accustomed to the way in which Science described its specimens, instinctively looked for a similar method when biographers and novelists portrayed *their* subjects. In the end the scientific method, applied to the arts, defeated its purpose by substituting material and mechanical standards for spiritual. Science can vivisect bodies, but up to the present the soul of man eludes the microscope and the scalpel. The essential subject of the biographer is the soul of man.

I do not like to fix dates because, in the transition between one social or intellectual or religious season and another, there is the same elasticity as in the passage from spring to summer,

or from autumn to winter. You cannot say absolutely that any day marked the line of division. The year 1859, which saw the publication of Darwin's "Origin of Species," stands out in the retrospect as the beginning of the new epoch and the end of the old; but we perceive now that for several years before 1859 the new ideas were in the air (to use a vague term of that time) and that for a decade or more after 1859 the old ideas survived, even if they did not prevail. In Biography, I think, the most characteristic specimens of the changing ideals as to substance and method appeared in John Morley's studies of Voltaire and of Rousseau. Nothing better of its kind exists in English so far as I know. Morley does not attempt to write a consecutive story of the events which made up the external life of either man. He gives us, rather, a survey

of the intellectual and moral development of each, and, as any of us can verify by looking over his own experience, this development does not coincide with external happenings. It was the discovery of Wordsworth's poems which revolutionized John Stuart Mill's inner life, and so almost every important man acknowledges that he got a great impetus or permanent spiritual direction from some book or person.

Morley works by what I may call the oblique method in biography. He seems to be more bent on criticising than describing, but when his portrait is complete you recognize its lifelikeness. If you watched Monet paint, you would wonder why he splashed on one stroke or another, but when you viewed his finished picture at the proper distance you would see that every drop of paint had its purpose, and that not

a stroke was superfluous. Similarly, Morley, who was by no means an Impressionist, and never splashes on his colors, achieves the portrait which he meant to paint.

His evolution as a biographer was so remarkable that we might well devote an entire lecture to it. From those two early monographs of Voltaire and Rousseau he passed on to not less searching, though less considerable, studies of Diderot and other Frenchmen, and of Edmund Burke. This last seems to me to be the finest sketch in English of a political philosopher. But Mr. Morley went on, and in his "Life of Oliver Cromwell" he chose the dramatic rather than the philosophical method, and in his "Gladstone" he combined both kinds in a work which some persons regard as a salient masterpiece in recent biography. Perhaps it is hardly that; it is packed with

information much of which Morley only could give, but does it not belong to the encyclopedic works like Nicolay and Hay's "Abraham Lincoln," rather than to the really biographical works of which Boswell's "Johnson" is the model? In his "Life of Cobden" Morley again presents to us the ebb and flow of great political and economic forces, with their frequent clash, rather than the intimate biography of the Free Trade champion. But this, too, is legitimate, and indeed in the life of any statesman the problem of his biographer is to reach a balance between history and biography, between the person and the cause. Nor should we overlook Morley's "Sir Robert Walpole," in which he rescues from generations of odium the reputation of a statesman who really deserved an honorable fame.

The wonderful Greeks who visualized

in permanent and vital symbols even their deepest thoughts, pictured Time, Chronos, as devouring his children. His appetite is as insatiable now as ever. Just as we have come to regard one fashion as enduring, he creates another to take its place. Thomas Carlyle thundered his depreciatory doctrines on eighteenth-century France until he had made the world listen to him and believe; and then, while his echoes still went reverberating, John Morley came and taught us, in tones far less vehement, to see the good in the France which Carlyle had weighed and found wanting. Morley's account of Voltaire, if you seek to know what Voltaire actually was in Time, will give you the necessary information. But for Carlyle Time was always merely a film, stretching in front of Eternity, neither wholly transparent nor wholly opaque. So Carlyle's judgments are

not those of a decade or a fashion, but those which conform to the Eternal Laws, as he saw them. And Voltaire, or Rousseau, or Mirabeau, have a very different appearance to the intellect busied primarily with things temporal, from what they have when they are thrown on the screen of things spiritual and eternal.

During nearly forty years I have passed through several phases in my estimate of Thomas Carlyle. He made me a Hero-Worshipper and a Hater of Shams; he held me spell-bound by his humor and by the magnificence of many of his pages; he disclosed to me Reality more real than I had found in any other writer; he spoke to me with an austerity strangely fascinating, and in language as rhythmic as the long, everlasting roll of the sea, messages that might have come from a Hebrew prophet.

Then followed a period, not entirely of disillusion, but of criticism and of slackened admiration. I perceived his mannerisms both in diction and in method. If Nature has mannerisms she disguises them. Although she brings us a hundred storms in a year, each seems original and not an imitation of any which went before. I fell to doubting Carlyle's Eternal Verities, and I asked myself whether a man who did not discern a living hero in two of his contemporaries, like Lincoln and Cavour, could be trusted to discover dead heroes in times long past, and to measure them truly. Having lived through, if not outgrown, the Age of Wonder, I hungered for hard, concrete facts, for Ideals which could be demonstrated, for the logic and continuity which Science affords us.

Then I entered a third phase, in which I saw again Carlyle as an amaz-

ing genius — Carlyle, who flashed into the very heart and soul of men and women; Carlyle, who had a special gift for seeing through many parts of the film of Time which were opaque to most of us; Carlyle, who beyond all other historians understood the terror of Life and its inexorable doom, in which each of us has a stake. I delighted afresh in his incomparable humor. Who can compare with him in seizing upon the small, homely, cosey things? How he pounces on an apparent trifle, which, properly estimated, was the pivot on which history turned, — such, for instance, as old Dragoon Drouet, who, having caught a glimpse of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette taking flight in their berline toward the French border, strides over the fields by a short cut to Varennes, intercepts them there, causes their arrest, and so turns awry the catastrophe

of the French Revolution. I doubt whether any other biographer or historian has ever equalled Carlyle in his genius for discerning the smallest detail in externals and in sweeping, as on a Seraph's wing, over vast generalizations on the inmost meaning of Life.

As a biographer Carlyle is very uneven. Having decided that Frederick the Great was a hero before he undertook to write about him, he could never look straight at the man except when he had magnifying or distorting glasses on. The result is that Carlyle, the most insistent of all historians on the moral interpretation of history, makes of Frederick the Great, who was really a monarch without moral sense in public affairs and the corrupter of the German people, a hero and model. No wonder that Carlyle, blinded by this false simulation of greatness, should not recognize true greatness in George

Washington but should sneer at him. Granted, however, that Frederick's portrait was to be painted as Carlyle saw him, what other historian could equal the variety, the humor, with which Carlyle painted it? For life-likeness it could not be excelled, and yet it lacks symmetry, compactness, and the supreme quality of finality and beauty. If Carlyle only had had more of the Greek in his make-up! If he had only taken the Greek motto — Μῆδεν ἁγαν — nothing too much — which every artist should carry stamped on his heart! But he was a Goth, and the Gothic genius riots in digressions and superfluities. He reminds me of Rembrandt among the painters, who gets so many of his effects from shadows and darkness. The figures in Carlyle's historic dramas seem, like Rembrandt's portraits, to emerge out of blackest night into life and color

before they sink back into blackest night again.

> "We are no other than a moving row
> Of magic shadow-shapes that come and go
> Round with this sun-illumin'd lantern held
> In midnight by the Master of the Show."

Carlyle's "Oliver Cromwell" is another masterpiece of interpretation. In it he exalts another great man who, it happened, was worthy of exaltation. Perhaps it is fanciful to suggest that to understand this book we must remember that it was written ten years after "The French Revolution" — the most astonishing prose epic in the language. In his study of the upheaval in France Carlyle saw that anarchy and ruin must result from such an upheaval unless there were a truly strong and wise man to lead it. Oliver Cromwell, who dominated the English Revolution and was swayed by the deepest religious principles (fanaticism,

his enemies would say), *was* a strong man and worthy of being revered. If, on the other hand, you turn to the "Life of Schiller," written earlier, before his passion for interpretation hurried Carlyle before it, you will discover rather a conventional specimen of biography in the first third of the Nineteenth Century. His "Life of John Sterling," however, is one of the sweetest revelations of a fine, manly character which one friend ever made of another; although, viewed from the ideals of Art, it has its excrescences and excesses.

The Italians have a proverb which sums up the common opinion of authors toward translators: "*Traduttore, traditore.*" The play on the Italian words cannot be reproduced in English, but the meaning can be: "Translator, traitor or betrayer." I feel that in too many cases this motto would

apply also to biographers, and to no one more conspicuously than to James Anthony Froude. I once asked Charles Eliot Norton, who knew both men, how Carlyle came to designate Froude as his biographer, and Mr. Norton replied by quoting Landor's sadly cynical epigram:

> "The wisest of the wise
> Listen to pretty lies,
> And love to hear them told.
> Doubt not that Solomon
> Listen'd to many a one,
> Some in his youth and more when he grew old."

Froude, who was younger than Carlyle by more than twenty years, had been one of his earliest and stanchest devotees, and as Carlyle sank into old age Froude attended him assiduously, and, it is not unkind to infer, suggested that he be made the great man's literary executor and biographer. We can see how, under the

circumstances, Carlyle should be gratified to know that a disciple who gave him back his own opinions should have charge of this important service. But see how tragic the results were!

Thomas Carlyle, in many respects, filled for the English-speaking world during fifty years of the Nineteenth Century, a place similar to that filled in the Eighteenth Century by Samuel Johnson. Through the good fortune of having James Boswell for his biographer, Johnson lives as the most interesting, if not as the most beloved, figure of his age; whereas Carlyle, after the publication of his life by Froude, suffered a personal eclipse from which he has not yet emerged. This is not owing to the fact that the fashion in writing History has changed, that Science has discredited Romanticism, that liberal and even radical ideas have swamped Carlyle's conservatism

— Johnson's Toryism also had gone out of fashion before he died, but that did not lessen the interest men took in his personality: Carlyle's wounded name with posterity was owing to Froude's betrayal.

I do not imply that Froude intentionally traduced Carlyle, his natural purpose being, of course, to magnify his hero; but as a biographer he was both false and inartistic. He was false because he used the material which he found in Carlyle's letters and diaries to scourge persons whom he himself hated; he was inartistic because by putting the wrong emphasis on Carlyle's conduct he gave the world a wrong impression of the *total* man. To pick out a temporary state of mind, a fleeting irritation, a unique rudeness, a whim or foible, harmless and even amusing if described properly, and to present these as if they

were habitual, the very bone and sinew of the man's character, was bad art. That kindest of critics and sweetest-natured of friends, Horace Furness, told me that he never wanted to hear of Carlyle again after he read in Froude's "Life" that he had allowed his wife to scrub the bricks in the little back yard of Number 5, Cheyne Row. "Miserable creature!" said Mr. Furness, "he ought to have gone down on his knees and scrubbed them himself!"

Now, if it was necessary to record that incident at all Froude might have done it in such a way as to show its proper relation with the rest of Carlyle's life, instead of making it appear an ungallant and almost brutal fact which must spring from the man's whole character. Few can be the households in which there are not occurrences which, if ripped out of their proper perspective, would not expose

husbands and wives to very harsh and totally unjustified inferences.

This is merely one example out of hundreds in Froude's "Biography" which illustrate the harm biographers may do by improper emphasis, unless each event is so framed that the reader can judge it truly, as he would do if he could have seen it himself. He either sins wilfully or is incompetent. In Froude's case we are forced to conclude that he sinned deliberately, in order to gratify his own spite or to push his own opinions. How otherwise shall we explain the multitude of verbal changes from Carlyle's manuscript to Froude's printed version — changes in some of which the neutral or kindly epithets of the original became abusive or malignant? How otherwise shall we explain that the slip of paper on which Carlyle prohibited the publication of one of the volumes of "Reminis-

cences" disappeared, and that Froude discovered it only after the volume was printed, and Carlyle's niece insistently demanded it? I cite Froude as the great warning to biographers. He not only committed a crime against the hero he wished to glorify, but I fear that he so damaged Carlyle's reputation that it can be restored only when some true man, equipped with honesty, artistic sense, and adequate biographical talent shall write a life of him.

How different the fortune of Macaulay, Carlyle's chief contemporary master in the writing of History! His "Life," by his nephew, Sir George Otto Trevelyan, seems to me second only to Boswell's "Johnson." Trevelyan wrote on a different plan from Boswell's, but he achieved what he intended not less remarkably than did Boswell. In this work you have a perfect interweaving of biography and

history, balance, discretion, a rare skill in summarizing, ample quotation from letters and journals, but not too ample, and a sufficiently intimate portrayal of Macaulay as public man, and especially as son, brother, uncle, and friend. The doctrinaires, who supposed thirty years ago that they had killed Macaulay, are themselves dead, but he lives on, and it seems quite unlikely that the English-speaking race will soon if ever throw over into oblivion this spokesman of some of its mightiest characteristics. As long as Macaulay is read Trevelyan's "Life" of him also will be read, and it will serve as a pattern for countless future biographers.

Remember that one-half — I might almost say four-fifths — of a biography depends on the biographer. The charm of the "Life of Alice Freeman Palmer" springs from the fact

that her husband, Professor George H. Palmer, wrote it. He saw her as a beautiful ideal, and had the art and imagination and glow to make us all see her as he did. On the other hand, Justin Winsor, in his biography of Columbus, falls short, because he devotes too much time to the low qualities and misdemeanors of Columbus. Now, Columbus was created to discover America, and not to be a pattern like St. Francis of Assisi, or some of the Pilgrim Fathers, of the highest Christian virtues. In like fashion, it seems to me, the Reverend A. V. G. Allen's portrait of Phillips Brooks is out of drawing, because he emphasizes too much matters which interested Allen as a Theologian more than they did Brooks as an Evangelist whose mission it was to speak at all times and at all places, with wonderful persuasion, the message of God.

I shall not attempt to discuss, even briefly, the later biographies in English. I have already mentioned Morley's "Life of Gladstone" and Winston Churchill's "Life" of his father, Lord Randolph. The latter would be twice as good if it were half as long, for Churchill errs, as most Englishmen do, in attaching an exaggerated importance to partisan political details. After all, Sir Stafford Northcote, Goschen, Lord Hartington, and even Lord Salisbury are not personages of heroic size or gigantic importance when viewed through the perspective of thirty years, and Mr. Churchill describes them so minutely that I at least find it difficult to trace in his description the trunk-line of their policy.

Hallam Tennyson's "Life" of his father would confirm those who hold that the widow or son of a celebrity ought never to be his biographer.

On the other hand, Francis Darwin and Leonard Huxley both produced satisfactory biographies of their fathers.

I have not considered French, Italian, and German biographical works, partly because I am not familiar with enough of them to draw any general conclusions. A whole library has been written about Napoleon, but so far as I know nobody has yet achieved a transcendent biography of him. The same is true of Bismarck, and the likelihood seems slight that he will ever be put into a book to be read throughout the world. For German biographers are so absorbed in the shoe-buckles and laundry bills of their heroes — witness Düntzer's "Goethe" and "Schiller" — that they are unable to get inside of the man, or even to stand upright and look at him eye to

eye. They have too much the posture of lackeys and valets.

In French, Paul Sabatier's "Life of St. Francis" illustrates how, through sympathy, the right biographer can almost persuade his readers that a character who comes to them through a golden mist of miracles is real. More recently Valéry-Radot has depicted the great man of science, Louis Pasteur, so nobly that he seems as worthy of wearing a halo as did any medieval saint. In one branch of biography the French have excelled, and that is in critical and analytical lives of public men. Whoever reads the monographs on Cavour and on Metternich, by Charles de Mazade, will see excellent specimens of this *genre*, which has thriven too little among us because our historical students were long intimidated by the German professors, who

sneered at any work in which foot-notes and references did not outmeasure the text. But this despotism by pedants is, we may hope, at an end.

And so, after our long survey, we bring the Art of Biography down to the present, when multiplicity seems to be its foremost trait. We understand that any man who is *interesting* may be a proper subject for a biographer; king, dukes, and the upper classes must now have more than their title and position in order to attract us. We recognize, also, that each person, like the sitter for a painter, requires to be drawn in the attitude and atmosphere which will most fitly reveal him. I regard sympathy as an indispensable qualification in the biographer, although a good many persons still believe that devil's advocates are more likely to tell the truth. The sym-

pathy which I mean, however, does not degenerate into unrestrained eulogy, but interprets the defects, blunders, and even the sins of its subject, in their true relations. The aim of the biographer should be *Totality*, which, if achieved, coincides with Michael Angelo's definition of Beauty: "Il Più nell' Uno"—The whole in one, or the universal in the particular.

> "To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower;
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And eternity in an hour."

So I leave Biography on the threshold of what may be a Golden Age. Its outlook was never brighter. Its votaries will practise it with a constantly increasing skill. The demand for veracity will not slacken. The public, grown more discerning, will read it with greater relish. And I think that we may predict that the general

average of biographical writing will be higher than it has been, though the number of master biographers like that of master portrait-painters can never be large, hardly more than two or three in a century.

The fact that the persons and events the biographer depicts were *real* will lend to them an additional attractiveness.

Given life, the first impulse of life — the incessant, triumphant impulse — is to manifest itself in individuals. From the beginning there has never been a moment, or the fraction of a second, when the universe or the tiniest part of it, became abstract. In the world of matter not less than in the organic world of animals and plants, always and everywhere and forever — individuals! From atom to Sirius, nothing but individuals! Even in the protean transmutation of one thing

into another, of life into death, and death into life, individuality keeps pace with each changing stage.

Since the process of individualization is from lower to higher, from simple to complex, the acknowledged great men in history, or the persons who stand out from any mass, are endowed with unusual qualities, or with common qualities in an uncommon degree — an endowment which gives them more points of contact, more power, more interest, more charm. These are the men and women whom biography perpetuates. The master creations of fiction spring from the human brain; the subjects of biography are the very creations of God himself; the realities of God must forever transcend the fictions of man.

A SHORT LIST OF BOOKS

I have been asked to furnish a short list of the books referred to in these Essays. The titles I have set down are either those of the editions which I myself have used or which the reader will probably find the most convenient to procure. I make no attempt to compile a complete bibliography.

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