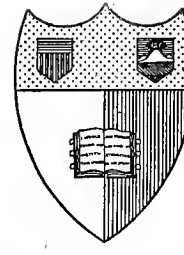

# THE CHOICE OF BOOKS

AND

# OTHER LITERARY PIECES

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BY

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# PREFACE.

THIS volume consists of essays and lectures, written at various times during the last twenty years, which I have been often urged to arrange in permanent form. It deals solely with books, art, and history—not with politics, philosophy, or religion; nor does it touch on any controversy but the perennial problems presented to us by literature and the study of the Past.

One-third of the volume is new. The larger part of the essay on Books, and the whole of that on St. Bernard, are now printed for the first time: those on Carlyle and on the French Revolution have not been previously published in England. The other essays have appeared here in the places and at the dates noted in the Table of Contents. And I have to thank the proprietors of the various publications there mentioned for the courtesy with which I am permitted to use them. All have been revised, and some partly re-written.

Five of these pieces, in their first shape, were given as lectures to a popular audience; and the colloquial manner has not been expunged from their more mature form.[1] All of them are now addressed, not so much to the critic and the student, as to the "general reader," who has my chief sympathies. He often needs guidance in the vast multiplicity of literature, and in sorting the materials offered him to study. And my aim has been the humble one to popularise a few accepted judgments as to typical books, men, and epochs.

The Choice of Books, the subject of about one-fifth of the present volume, has been in my thoughts for many years. And much of the first essay is taken from a series of Letters on Home Reading (still in the condition of *MSS. penes me*) intended as an annotated catalogue of selected books in four great departments of study. They were written long ago for the use of a very young lady, who now (let me add) encourages me to give them to a wider circle of readers, and so often aids me with suggestions from her ripe judgment.

What is now printed, it will be seen, deals in a regular way with familiar poetry alone; some notes on other branches of reading will be found in the whole of the volume. One day I hope to fill up this sketch.

[1] Part of the essay on reading, that on London, and the last three essays were spoken at the London Institution.

But a complete selection of books is the work of a lifetime, even if it be designed on a very simple scale, and intended for readers of moderate leisure.[1]

[1] Since these pages were in type, Mr. Butler has published his excellent prose version of the *Paradiso* (p. 50), and Mr. Ormsby his admirable translation of *Don Quixote* (p. 58).

# CONTENTS.

# I.

# THE CHOICE OF BOOKS

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## CHAPTER I.

### HOW TO READ.

It is the fashion for those who have any connection with letters to expatiate on the infinite blessings of literature, and the miraculous achievements of the press: to extol, as a gift above price, the taste for study and the love of reading. Far be it from me to gainsay the inestimable value of good books, or to discourage any man from reading the best; but I often think that we forget that other side to this glorious view of literature—the misuse of books, the debilitating waste of brain in aimless, promiscuous, vapid reading, or even, it may be, in the poisonous inhalation of mere literary garbage and bad men's worst thoughts.

For what can a book be more than the man who wrote it? The brightest genius seldom puts the best of his own soul into his printed page; and some famous men have certainly put the worst of theirs. Yet are all men desirable companions, much less

teachers, able to give us advice, even of those who get reputation and command a hearing? To put out of the question that writing which is positively bad, are we not, amidst the multiplicity of books and of writers, in continual danger of being drawn off by what is stimulating rather than solid, by curiosity after something accidentally notorious, by what has no intelligible thing to recommend it, except that it is new? Now, to stuff our minds with what is simply trivial, simply curious, or that which at best has but a low nutritive power, this is to close our minds to what is solid and enlarging, and spiritually sustaining. Whether our neglect of the great books comes from our not reading at all, or from an incorrigible habit of reading the little books, it ends in just the same thing. And that thing is ignorance of all the greater literature of the world. To neglect all the abiding parts of knowledge for the sake of the evanescent parts is really to know nothing worth knowing. It is in the end the same, whether we do not use our minds for serious study at all, or whether we exhaust them by an impotent voracity for desultory "information"—a thing as fruitful as whistling. Of the two evils I prefer the former. At least, in that case, the mind is healthy and open. It is not gorged and enfeebled by excess in that which cannot nourish, much less enlarge and beautify our nature.

But there is much more than this. Even to those who resolutely avoid the idleness of reading what is trivial, a difficulty is presented—a difficulty every day

increasing by virtue even of our abundance of books. What are the subjects, what are the class of books we are to read, in what order, with what connection, to what ultimate use or object? Even those who are resolved to read the better books are embarrassed by a field of choice practically boundless. The longest life, the greatest industry, joined to the most powerful memory, would not suffice to make us profit from a hundredth part of the world of books before us. If the great Newton said that he seemed to have been all his life gathering a few shells on the shore, whilst a boundless ocean of truth still lay beyond and unknown to him, how much more to each of us must the sea of literature be a pathless immensity beyond our powers of vision or of reach—an immensity in which industry itself is useless without judgment, method, discipline; where it is of infinite importance what we can learn and remember, and of utterly no importance what we may have once looked at or heard of. Alas! the most of our reading leaves as little mark even in our own education as the foam that gathers round the keel of a passing boat! For myself, I am inclined to think the most useful help to reading is to know what we should not read, what we can keep out from that small cleared spot in the overgrown jungle of "information," the corner which we can call our ordered patch of fruit-bearing knowledge. The incessant accumulation of fresh books must hinder any real knowledge of the old; for the multiplicity of volumes becomes a bar upon our use of any. In

literature especially does it hold—that we cannot see the wood for the trees.

How shall we choose our books? Which are the best, the eternal, indispensable books? To all to whom reading is something more than a refined idleness these questions recur, bringing with them the sense of bewilderment; and a still, small voice within us is for ever crying out for some guide across the Slough of Despond of an illimitable and ever-swelling literature. How many a man stands beside it, as uncertain of his pathway as the Pilgrim, when he who dreamed the immortal dream heard him "break out with a lamentable cry; saying, what shall I do?"

And this, which comes home to all of us at times, presses hardest upon those who have lost the opportunity of systematic education, who have to educate themselves, or who seek to guide the education of their young people. Systematic reading is but little in favour even amongst studious men; in a true sense it is hardly possible for women. A comprehensive course of home study, and a guide to books, fit for the highest education of women, is yet a blank page remaining to be filled. Generations of men of culture have laboured to organise a system of reading and materials appropriate for the methodical education of men in academic lines. Teaching equal in mental calibre to any that is open to men in universities, yet modified for the needs of those who must study at home, remains in the dim pages of that melancholy volume entitled *Libri valde desiderati.*

I do not aspire to fill one of those blank pages; but I long to speak a word or two, as the Pilgrim did to Neighbour Pliable, upon the glories that await those who will pass through the narrow wicket-gate. On this, if one can find anything useful to say, it may be chiefly from the memory of the waste labour and pitiful stumbling in the dark, which fill up so much of the travail that one is fain to call one's own education. We who have wandered in the wastes so long, and lost so much of our lives in our wandering, may at least offer warnings to younger wayfarers, as men who in thorny paths have borne the heat and burden of the day might give a clue to their journey to those who have yet a morning and a noon. As I look back and think of those cataracts of printed stuff which honest compositors set up, meaning, let us trust, no harm, and which at least found them in daily bread, —printed stuff which I and the rest of us, to our infinitely small profit, have consumed with our eyes, not even making an honest living of it, but much impairing our substance,—I could almost reckon the printing press as amongst the scourges of mankind. I am grown a wiser and a sadder man, importunate, like that Ancient Mariner, to tell each blithe wedding guest the tale of his shipwreck on the infinite sea of printers' ink, as one escaped by mercy and grace from the region where there is water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink.

A man of power, who has got more from books than most of his contemporaries, once said: "Form

a habit of reading, do not mind what you read, the reading of better books will come when you have a habit of reading the inferior." We need not accept this *obiter dictum* of Lord Sherbrooke. A habit of reading idly debilitates and corrupts the mind for all wholesome reading; the habit of reading wisely is one of the most difficult habits to acquire, needing strong resolution and infinite pains; and reading for mere reading's sake, instead of for the sake of the good we gain from reading, is one of the worst and commonest and most unwholesome habits we have. And so our inimitable humorist has made delightful fun of the solid books,—which no gentleman's library should be without,—the Humes, Gibbons, Adam Smiths, which, he says, are not books at all, and prefers some "kind-hearted play-book," or at times the *Town and County Magazine*. Poor Lamb has not a little to answer for, in the revived relish for garbage unearthed from old theatrical dung-heaps. Be it jest or earnest, I have little patience with the Elia-tic philosophy of the frivolous. Why do we still suffer the traditional hypocrisy about the dignity of literature—literature I mean, in the gross, which includes about equal parts of what is useful and what is useless? Why are books as books, writers as writers, readers as readers, meritorious, apart from any good in them, or anything that we can get from them? Why do we pride ourselves on our powers of absorbing print, as our grandfathers did on their gifts in imbibing port, when we know that there is a mode of

absorbing print which makes it impossible that we can ever learn anything good out of books?

Our stately Milton said in a passage which is one of the watchwords of the English race, "as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book." But has he not also said that he would "have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves, as well as men; and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors"? . . . Yes! they do kill the good book who deliver up their few and precious hours of reading to the trivial book; they make it dead for them; they do what lies in them to destroy "the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life;" they "spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Bookes." For in the wilderness of books most men, certainly all busy men, *must* strictly choose. If they saturate their minds with the idler books, the "good book," which Milton calls "an immortality rather than a life," is dead to them: it is a book sealed up and buried.

It is most right that in the great republic of letters there should be freedom of intercourse and a spirit of equality. Every reader who holds a book in his hand is free of the inmost minds of men past and present; their lives both within and without the pale of their uttered thoughts are unveiled to him; he needs no introduction to the greatest; he stands on no ceremony with them; he may, if he be so minded, scribble "doggrel" on his Shelley, or he may kick

Lord Byron, if he please, into a corner. He hears Burke perorate, and Johnson dogmatise, and Scott tell his border tales, and Wordsworth muse on the hillside, without the leave of any man, or the payment of any toll. In the republic of letters there are no privileged orders or places reserved. Every man who has written a book, even the diligent Mr. Whitaker, is in one sense an author; "a book's a book although there's nothing in't;" and every man who can decipher a penny journal is in one sense a reader. And your "general reader," like the gravedigger in Hamlet, is hail-fellow with all the mighty dead; he pats the skull of the jester; batters the cheek of lord, lady, or courtier; and uses "imperious Cæsar" to teach boys the Latin declensions.

But this noble equality of all writers—of all writers and of all readers—has a perilous side to it. It is apt to make us indiscriminate in the books we read, and somewhat contemptuous of the mighty men of the past. Men who are most observant as to the friends they make, or the conversation they share, are carelessness itself as to the books to whom they entrust themselves, and the printed language with which they saturate their minds. Yet can any friendship or society be more important to us than that of the books which form so large a part of our minds and even of our characters? Do we in real life take any pleasant fellow to our homes and chat with some agreeable rascal by our firesides, we who will take up any pleasant fellow's printed memoirs, we who delight

in the agreeable rascal when he is cut up into pages and bound in calf?

If any person given to reading were honestly to keep a register of all the printed stuff that he or she consumes in a year—all the idle tales of which the very names and the story are forgotten in a week, the bookmaker's prattle about nothing at so much a sheet, the fugitive trifling about silly things and empty people, the memoirs of the unmemorable, and lives of those who never really lived at all—of what a mountain of rubbish would it be the catalogue! Exercises for the eye and the memory, as mechanical as if we set ourselves to learn the names, ages, and family histories of every one who lives in our own street, the flirtations of their maiden aunts, and the circumstances surrounding the birth of their grandmother's first baby.

It is impossible to give any method to our reading till we get nerve enough to reject. The most exclusive and careful amongst us will (in literature) take boon companions out of the street, as easily as an idler in a tavern. "I came across such and such a book that I never heard mentioned," says one, "and found it curious, though entirely worthless." "I strayed on a volume by I know not whom, on a subject for which I never cared." And so on. There are curious and worthless creatures enough in any pot-house all day long; and there is incessant talk in omnibus, train, or street by we know not whom, about we care not what. Yet if a printer and a

bookseller can be induced to make this gabble as immortal as print and publication can make it, then it straightway is literature, and in due time it becomes "curious."

I have no intention to moralise or to indulge in a homily against the reading of what is deliberately evil. There is not so much need for this now, and I am not discoursing on the whole duty of man. I take that part of our reading which by itself is no doubt harmless, entertaining, and even gently instructive. But of this enormous mass of literature how much deserves to be chosen out, to be preferred to all the great books of the world, to be set apart for those precious hours which are all that the most of us can give to solid reading? The vast proportion of books are books that we shall never be able to read. A serious percentage of books are not worth reading at all. The really vital books for us we also know to be a very trifling portion of the whole. And yet we act as if every book were as good as any other, as if it were merely a question of order which we take up first, as if any book were good enough for us, and as if all were alike honourable, precious, and satisfying. Alas! books cannot be more than the men who write them; and as a fair proportion of the human race now write books, with motives and objects as various as human activity, books, as books, are entitled *à priori*, until their value is proved, to the same attention and respect as houses, steam-engines, pictures, fiddles, bonnets, and other products of

human industry. In the shelves of those libraries which are our pride, libraries public or private, circulating or very stationary, are to be found those great books of the world *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, those books which are truly "the precious life-blood of a master spirit." But the very familiarity which their mighty fame has bred in us makes us indifferent; we grow weary of what every one is supposed to have read; and we take down something which looks a little eccentric, some worthless book on the mere ground that we never heard of it before.

Thus the difficulties of literature are in their way as great as those of the world, the obstacles to finding the right friends are as great, the peril is as great of being lost in a Babel of voices and an ever-changing mass of beings. Books are not wiser than men, the true books are not easier to find than the true men, the bad books or the vulgar books are not less obtrusive and not less ubiquitous than the bad or vulgar men are everywhere; the art of right reading is as long and difficult to learn as the art of right living. Those who are on good terms with the first author they meet, run as much risk as men who surrender their time to the first passer in the street; for to be open to every book is for the most part to gain as little as possible from any. A man aimlessly wandering about in a crowded city is of all men the most lonely; so he who takes up only the books that he "comes across" is pretty certain to meet but few that are worth knowing.

Now this danger is one to which we are specially exposed in this age. Our high-pressure life of emergencies, our whirling industrial organisation or disorganisation have brought us in this (as in most things) their peculiar difficulties and drawbacks. In almost everything vast opportunities and gigantic means of multiplying our products bring with them new perils and troubles which are often at first neglected. Our huge cities, where wealth is piled up and the requirements and appliances of life extended beyond the dreams of our forefathers, seem to breed in themselves new forms of squalor, disease, blights, or risks to life such as we are yet unable to master. So the enormous multiplicity of modern books is not altogether favourable to the knowing of the best. I listen with mixed satisfaction to the pæans that they chant over the works which issue from the press each day: how the books poured forth from Paternoster Row might in a few years be built into a pyramid that would fill the dome of St. Paul's. How in this mountain of literature am I to find the really useful book? How, when I have found it, and found its value, am I to get others to read it? How am I to keep my head clear in the torrent and din of works, all of which distract my attention, most of which promise me something, whilst so few fulfil that promise? The Nile is the source of the Egyptian's bread, and without it he perishes of hunger. But the Nile may be rather too liberal in his flood, and then the Egyptian runs imminent risk of drowning.

And thus there never was a time, at least during the last two hundred years, when the difficulties in the way of making an efficient use of books were greater than they are to-day, when the obstacles were more real between readers and the right books to read, when it was practically so troublesome to find out that which it is of vital importance to know; and that not by the dearth, but by the plethora of printed matter. For it comes to nearly the same thing whether we are actually debarred by physical impossibility from getting the right book into our hand, or whether we are choked off from the right book by the obtrusive crowd of the wrong books; so that it needs a strong character and a resolute system of reading to keep the head cool in the storm of literature around us. We read nowadays in the market-place—I would rather say in some large steam factory of letter-press, where damp sheets of new print whirl round us perpetually—if it be not rather some noisy book-fair where literary showmen tempt us with performing dolls, and the gongs of rival booths are stunning our ears from morn till night. Contrast with this pandemonium of Leipsic and Paternoster Row the sublime picture of our Milton in his early retirement at Horton, when, musing over his coming flight to the epic heaven, practising his pinions, as he tells Diodati, he consumed five years of solitude in reading the ancient writers—

"Et totum rapiunt me, mea vita, libri."

Who now reads the ancient writers? Who syste-

matically reads the great writers, be they ancient or modern, whom the consent of ages has marked out as classics: typical, immortal, peculiar teachers of our race? Alas! the *Paradise Lost* is lost again to us beneath an inundation of graceful academic verse, sugary stanzas of ladylike prettiness, and ceaseless explanations in more or less readable prose of what John Milton meant or did not mean, or what he saw or did not see, who married his great aunt, and why Adam or Satan is like that, or unlike the other. We read a perfect library about the *Paradise Lost*, but the *Paradise Lost* itself we do not read.

I am not presumptuous enough to assert that the larger part of modern literature is not worth reading in itself, that the prose is not readable, entertaining, one may say highly instructive. Nor do I pretend that the verses which we read so zealously in place of Milton's are not good verses. On the contrary, I think them sweetly conceived, as musical and as graceful as the verse of any age in our history. A great deal of our modern literature is such that it is exceedingly difficult to resist it, and it is undeniable that it gives us real information. It seems perhaps unreasonable to many, to assert that a decent readable book which gives us actual instruction can be otherwise than a useful companion, and a solid gain. Possibly many people are ready to cry out upon me as an obscurantist for venturing to doubt a genial confidence in all literature simply as such. But the question which weighs upon me with such really

crushing urgency is this: What are the books that in our little remnant of reading time it is most vital for us to know? For the true use of books is of such sacred value to us that to be simply entertained is to cease to be taught, elevated, inspired by books; merely to gather information of a chance kind is to close the mind to knowledge of the urgent kind.

Every book that we take up without a purpose is an opportunity lost of taking up a book with a purpose—every bit of stray information which we cram into our heads without any sense of its importance, is for the most part a bit of the most useful information driven out of our heads and choked off from our minds. It is so certain that information, *i.e.* the knowledge, the stored thoughts and observations of mankind, is now grown to proportions so utterly incalculable and prodigious, that even the learned whose lives are given to study can but pick up some crumbs that fall from the table of truth. They delve and tend but a plot in that vast and teeming kingdom, whilst those whom active life leaves with but a few cramped hours of study can hardly come to know the very vastness of the field before them, or how infinitesimally small is the corner they can traverse at the best. We know all is not of equal value. We know that books differ in value as much as diamonds differ from the sand on the seashore, as much as our living friend differs from a dead rat. We know that much in the myriad-peopled world of books—very much in all kinds—is trivial, enervating,

inane, even noxious. And thus, where we have infinite opportunities of wasting our efforts to no end, of fatiguing our minds without enriching them, of clogging the spirit without satisfying it, there, I cannot but think, the very infinity of opportunities is robbing us of the actual power of using them. And thus I come often, in my less hopeful moods, to watch the remorseless cataract of daily literature which thunders over the remnants of the past, as if it were a fresh impediment to the men of our day in the way of systematic knowledge and consistent powers of thought, as if it were destined one day to overwhelm the great inheritance of mankind in prose and verse.

I remember, when I was a very young man at college, that a youth, in no spirit of paradox, but out of plenary conviction, undertook to maintain before a body of serious students, the astounding proposition that the invention of printing had been one of the greatest misfortunes that had ever befallen mankind. He argued that exclusive reliance on printed matter had destroyed the higher method of oral teaching, the dissemination of thought by the spoken word to the attentive ear. He insisted that the formation of a vast literary class looking to the making of books as a means of making money, rather than as a social duty, had multiplied books for the sake of the writers rather than for the sake of the readers; that the reliance on books as a cheap and common resource had done much to weaken the powers of memory; that it destroyed the craving for a general culture of

taste, and the need of artistic expression in all the surroundings of life. And he argued, lastly, that the sudden multiplication of all kinds of printed matter had been fatal to the orderly arrangement of thought, and had hindered a system of knowledge and a scheme of education.

I am far from sharing this immature view. Of course I hold the invention of printing to have been one of the most momentous facts in the whole history of man. Without it universal social progress, true democratic enlightenment, and the education of the people would have been impossible, or very slow, even if the cultured few, as is likely, could have advanced the knowledge of mankind without it. We place Gutemberg amongst the small list of the unique and special benefactors of mankind, in the sacred choir of those whose work transformed the conditions of life, whose work, once done, could never be repeated. And no doubt the things which our ardent friend regarded as so fatal a disturbance of society were all inevitable and necessary, part of the great revolution of mind through which men grew out of the mediæval incompleteness to a richer conception of life and of the world.

Yet there is a sense in which this boyish anathema against printing may become true to us by our own fault. We may create for ourselves these very evils. For the art of printing has not been a gift wholly unmixed with evils; it must be used wisely if it is to be a boon to man at all; it entails on us heavy re-

sponsibilities, resolution to use it with judgment and self-control, and the will to resist its temptations and its perils. Indeed, we may easily so act that we may make it a clog on the progress of the human mind, a real curse and not a boon. The power of flying at will through space would probably extinguish civilisation and society, for it would release us from the wholesome bondage of place and rest. The power of hearing every word that had ever been uttered on this planet would annihilate thought, as the power of knowing all recorded facts by the process of turning a handle would annihilate true science. Our human faculties and our mental forces are not enlarged simply by multiplying our materials of knowledge and our facilities for communication. Telephones, microphones, pantoscopes, steam-presses, and ubiquity-engines in general may, after all, leave the poor human brain panting and throbbing under the strain of its appliances, no bigger and no stronger than the brains of the men who heard Moses speak, and saw Aristotle and Archimedes pondering over a few worn rolls of crabbed manuscript. Until some new Gutemberg or Watt can invent a machine for magnifying the human mind, every fresh apparatus for multiplying its work is a fresh strain on the mind, a new realm for it to order and to rule.

And so, I say it most confidently, the first intellectual task of our age is rightly to order and make serviceable the vast realm of printed material which four centuries have swept across our path. To

organise our knowledge, to systematise our reading, to save, out of the relentless cataract of ink, the immortal thoughts of the greatest—this is a necessity, unless the productive ingenuity of man is to lead us at last to a measureless and pathless chaos. To know anything that turns up is, in the infinity of knowledge, to know nothing. To read the first book we come across, in the wilderness of books, is to learn nothing. To turn over the pages of ten thousand volumes is to be practically indifferent to all that is good.

But this warns me that I am entering on a subject which is far too big and solemn. It is plain that to organise our knowledge, even to systematise our reading, to make a working selection of books for general study, really implies a complete scheme of education. A scheme of education ultimately implies a system of philosophy, a view of man's duty and powers as a moral and social being—a religion. Before a problem so great as this, on which readers have such different ideas and wants, and differ so profoundly on the very premisses from which we start, before such a problem as a general theory of education, I prefer to pause. I will keep silence even from good words. I have chosen my own part, and adopted my own teacher. But to ask men to adopt the education of Auguste Comte, is almost to ask them to adopt Positivism itself.

Nor will I enlarge on the matter for thought, for foreboding, almost for despair, that is presented to us by the fact of our familiar literary ways and our

recognised literary profession. That things infinitely trifling in themselves: men, events, societies, phenomena, in no way otherwise more valuable than the myriad other things which flit around us like the sparrows on the housetop, should be glorified, magnified, and perpetuated, set under a literary microscope and focussed in the blaze of a literary magic-lantern—not for what they are in themselves, but solely to amuse and excite the world by showing how it can be done—all this is to me so amazing, so heart-breaking, that I forbear now to treat it, as I cannot say all that I would.

The Choice of Books is really the choice of our education, of a moral and intellectual ideal, of the whole duty of man. But though I shrink from any so high a theme, a few words are needed to indicate my general point of view in the matter.

In the first place, when we speak about books, let us avoid the extravagance of expecting too much from books, the pedant's habit of extolling books as synonymous with education. Books are no more education than laws are virtue; and just as profligacy is easy within the strict limits of law, a boundless knowledge of books may be found with a narrow education. A man may be, as the poet saith, "deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself." We need to know in order that we may feel rightly, and act wisely. The thirst after truth itself may be pushed to a degree where indulgence enfeebles our sympathies and unnerves us in action. Of all men perhaps the book-lover needs

most to be reminded that man's business here is to know for the sake of living, not to live for the sake of knowing.

A healthy mode of reading would follow the lines of a sound education. And the first canon of a sound education is to make it the instrument to perfect the whole nature and character. Its aims are comprehensive, not special; they regard life as a whole, not mental curiosity; they have to give us, not so much materials, as capacities. So that, however moderate and limited the opportunity for education, in its way it should be always more or less symmetrical and balanced, appealing equally in turn to the three grand intellectual elements—imagination, memory, reflection: and so having something to give us in poetry, in history, in science and in philosophy.

And thus our reading will be sadly one-sided, however voluminous it be, if it entirely close to us any of the great types and ideals which the creative instinct of man has produced, if it shut out from us either the ancient world, or other European poetry, as important almost as our own. When our reading, however deep, runs wholly into "pockets," and exhausts itself in the literature of one age, one country, one type, then we may be sure that it is tending to narrow or deform our minds. And the more it leads us into curious byways and nurtures us into indifference for the beaten highways of the world, the sooner we shall end, if we be not specialists and students by profession, in ceasing to treat our books as the com-

panions and solace of our lifetime, and in using them as the instruments of a refined sort of self-indulgence.

A wise education, and so judicious reading, should leave no great type of thought, no dominant phase of human nature, wholly a blank. Whether our reading be great or small, so far as it goes, it should be general. If our lives admit of but a short space for reading, all the more reason that, so far as may be, it should remind us of the vast expanse of human thought, and the wonderful variety of human nature. To read, and yet so to read, that we see nothing but a corner of literature, the loose fringe, or flats and wastes of letters, and by reading only deepen our natural belief that this island is the hub of the universe, and the nineteenth century the only age worth notice, all this is really to call in the aid of books to thicken and harden our untaught prejudices. Be it imagination, memory, or reflection that we address—that is, in poetry, history, science or philosophy, our first duty is to aim at knowing something at least of the best, at getting some definite idea of the mighty realm whose outer rim we are permitted to approach.

But how are we to know the best; how are we to gain this definite idea of the vast world of letters? There are some who appear to suppose that the "best" are known only to experts in an esoteric way, who may reveal to inquirers what schoolboys and betting-men describe as "tips." There are no "tips" in literature; the "best" authors are never dark horses; we need no "crammers" and "coaches" to

thrust us into the presence of the great writers of all time. "Crammers" will only lead us wrong. It is a thing far easier and more common than many imagine, to discover the best. It needs no research, no learning, and is only misguided by recondite information. The world has long ago closed the great assize of letters, and judged the first places everywhere. In such a matter the judgment of the world, guided and informed by a long succession of accomplished critics, is almost unerring. When some Zoilus finds blemishes in Homer, and prefers, it may be, the work of some Apollonius of his own discovering, we only laugh. There may be doubts about the third and the fourth rank; but the first and the second are hardly open to discussion. The gates which lead to the Elysian fields may slowly wheel back on their adamantine hinges to admit now and then some new and chosen modern. But the company of the masters of those who know, and in especial degree of the great poets, is a roll long closed and complete, and they who are of it hold ever peaceful converse together.

Hence we may find it a useful maxim that, if our reading be utterly closed to the great poems of the world, there is something amiss with our reading. If you find Milton, Dante, Calderon, Goethe, so much "Hebrew-Greek" to you; if your Homer and Virgil, your Molière and Scott, rest year after year undisturbed on their shelves beside your school trigonometry and your old college text-books; if you have never opened the *Cid*, the *Nibelungen*, *Crusoe*, and

*Don Quixote* since you were a boy, and are wont to leave the Bible and the Imitation for some wet Sunday afternoon—know, friend, that your reading can do you little real good. Your mental digestion is ruined or sadly out of order. No doubt, to thousands of intelligent educated men who call themselves readers, the reading through a Canto of *The Purgatorio*, or a Book of the *Paradise Lost*, is a task as irksome as it would be to decipher an ill-written manuscript in a language that is almost forgotten. But, although we are not to be always reading epics, and are chiefly in the mood for slighter things, to be absolutely unable to read Milton or Dante with enjoyment, is to be in a very bad way. Aristophanes, Theocritus, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Molière are often as light as the driven foam; but they are not light enough for the general reader. Their humour is too bright and lovely for the groundlings. They are, alas! "classics," somewhat apart from our everyday ways; they are not "banal" enough for us; and so for us they slumber "unknown in a long night," just *because* they are immortal poets, and are not scribblers of to-day.

When will men understand that the reading of great books is a faculty to be acquired, not a natural gift, at least not to those who are spoiled by our current education and habits of life? *Ceci tuera cela*, the last great poet might have said of the first circulating library. An insatiable appetite for new novels makes it as hard to read a masterpiece as it seems to a Parisian boulevardier to live in a quiet country.

Until a man can truly enjoy a draft of clear water bubbling from a mountain side, his taste is in an unwholesome state. And so he who finds the Heliconian spring insipid should look to the state of his nerves. Putting aside the iced air of the difficult mountain tops of epic, tragedy, or psalm, there are some simple pieces which may serve as an unerring test of a healthy or a vicious taste for imaginative work. If the *Cid*, the *Vita Nuova*, the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and *Lycidas* pall on a man; if he care not for Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Red Cross Knight;* if he thinks *Crusoe* and the *Vicar* books for the young; if he thrill not with *The Ode to the West Wind*, and *The Ode to a Grecian Urn;* if he have no stomach for *Christabelle* or the lines written on *The Wye above Tintern Abbey*, he should fall on his knees and pray for a cleanlier and quieter spirit.

The intellectual system of most of us in these days needs "to purge and to live cleanly." Only by a course of treatment shall we bring our minds to feel at peace with the grand pure works of the world. something we ought all to know of the masterpieces of antiquity, and of the other nations of Europe. To understand a great national poet, such as Dante, Calderon, Corneille, or Goethe, is to know other types of human civilisation in ways which a library of histories does not sufficiently teach. The great masterpieces of the world are thus, quite apart from the charm and solace they give us, the master instruments of a solid education.

## CHAPTER II.

### POETS OF THE OLD WORLD.

I PASS from all systems of education—from thought of social duty, from meditation on the profession of letters—to more general and lighter topics. I will deal now only with the easier side of reading, with matter on which there is some common agreement in the world. I am very far from meaning that our whole time spent with books is to be given to study. Far from it. I put the poetic and emotional side of literature as the most needed for daily use. I take the books that seek to rouse the imagination, to stir up feeling, touch the heart—the books of art, of fancy, of ideals, such as reflect the delight and aroma of life. And here how does the trivial, provided it is the new, that which stares at us in the advertising columns of the day, crowd out the immortal poetry and pathos of the human race, vitiating our taste for those exquisite pieces which are a household word, and weakening our mental relish for the eternal works of genius! Old Homer is the very fountain-head of pure poetic enjoyment, of all that is spontaneous,

simple, native, and dignified in life. He takes us into the ambrosial world of heroes, of human vigour, of purity, of grace. He is the eternal type of the poet. In him, alone of the poets, a national life is transfigured, wholly beautiful, complete, and happy: where care, doubt, decay are as yet unborn. Here is the secular Eden of the natural man—man not yet fallen or ashamed. All later poetry paints an ideal world, conceived by a sustained effort of invention. Homer paints a world which he saw.

Most men and women can say that they have read Homer, just as most of us can say that we have studied Johnson's Dictionary. But how few of us take him up, time after time, with fresh delight! How few have even read the entire Iliad and Odyssey through! Whether in the resounding lines of the old Greek, as fresh and ever-stirring as the waves that tumble on the seashore, filling the soul with satisfying silent wonder at its restless unison; whether in the quaint lines of Chapman, or the clarion couplets of Pope, or the closer versions of Cowper, Lord Derby, of Philip Worsley, or in the new prose version, Homer is always fresh and rich.[1] And yet how seldom does

[1] Homer has exercised a greater variety of translators than any other author whatever. Of them all I prefer Lord Derby's Iliad, and Philip Worsley's Odyssey. Children usually begin their Homer through Pope, which has certainly the ring and fire of a poem, though it is not Homer's. Lord Derby preserves something of the *dignity* of the Iliad, which is essential to it; and Worsley preserves much of the fairy-tale charm of the Odyssey. His Iliad, completed by Conington, is almost a mis-

one find a friend spellbound over the Greek Bible of antiquity, whilst they wade through torrents of magazine quotations from a petty versifier of to-day, and in an idle vacation will graze, as contentedly as cattle in a fresh meadow, through the chopped straw of a circulating library. A generation which will listen to *Pinafore* for three hundred nights, and will read M. Zola's seventeenth romance, can no more read Homer than it could read a cuneiform inscription. It will read about Homer just as it will read about a cuneiform inscription, and will crowd to see a few pots which probably came from the neighbourhood of Troy. But to Homer and the primeval type of heroic man in his simple joyousness the cultured generation is really dead, as completely as some spoiled beauty of the ballroom is blind to the bloom of the heather or the waving of the daffodils in a glade.

take. Chapman, poet as he is, is rather archaic for ordinary readers, and too loose for scholarly readers. Cowper is rather monotonous. The rest are rather experiments than results. To English hexameters there are euphonic obstacles which seem to be insuperable. The first line of the Iliad has thirty letters, of which twelve only are consonants. The first line of Evangeline has fifty-four letters, of which thirty-six are consonants. Thus, whilst a Greek in pronouncing his hexameter has twelve hard sounds to form, the Englishman has thirty-six, or exactly three times as many.

Of the prose translations, that of Mr. Andrew Lang and his friends is as perfect as prose translation of verse can be. It necessarily loses the movement, the lilt, and the subtle charm of the verse. Flaxman's designs will be of great help in enjoying Homer, and also what E. Coleridge, Grote, Gladstone, M. Arnold, and Symonds have written.

It is a true psychological problem, this nausea which idle culture seems to produce for all that is manly and pure in heroic poetry. One knows—at least every schoolboy has known—that a passage of Homer, rolling along in the hexameter or trumpeted out by Pope, will give one a hot glow of pleasure and raise a finer throb in the pulse; one knows that Homer is the easiest, most artless, most diverting of all poets; that the fiftieth reading rouses the spirit even more than the first—and yet we find ourselves (we are all alike) painfully pshawing over some new and uncut barley-sugar in rhyme, which a man in the street asked us if we had read, or it may be some learned lucubration about the site of Troy by some one we chanced to meet at dinner. It is an unwritten chapter in the history of the human mind, how this literary prurience after new print unmans us for the enjoyment of the old songs chanted forth in the sunrise of human imagination. To ask a man or woman who spends half a lifetime in sucking magazines and new poems to read a book of Homer, would be like asking a butcher's boy to whistle "Adelaida." The noises and sights and talk, the whirl and volatility of life around us, are too strong for us. A society which is for ever gossiping in a sort of perpetual "drum" loses the very faculty of caring for anything but "early copies" and the last tale out. Thus, like the tares in the noble parable of the Sower, a perpetual chatter about books chokes the seed which is sown in the greatest books of the world.

I speak of Homer, but fifty other great poets and creators of eternal beauty would serve my argument. What Homer is to epic, that is Æschylus to the tragic art—the first immortal type. In majesty and mass of pathos the Agamemnon remains still without a rival in tragedy. The universality and inexhaustible versatility of our own Shakespeare are unique in all literature. But the very richness of his qualities detracts from the symmetry and directness of the dramatic impression. For this reason neither is Lear, nor Othello, nor Macbeth, nor Hamlet (each supreme as an imaginative creation) so typically perfect a tragedy as the Agamemnon. In each of the four there are slight incidents which we could spare without any evident loss. The Agamemnon alone of tragedies has the absolute perfection of a statue by Pheidias. The intense *crescendo* of the catastrophe, the absolute concentration of interest, the statuesque unity of the grouping, the mysterious halo of religion with which the ancient legend sanctified the drama, are qualities denied to any modern.[1]

[1] Of all the translations of the Agamemnon, I prefer that of Mr. E. D. A. Morshead, which seems to me by its union of accurate version with poetic vigour to stand in the front rank of English verse translation. Milman's version is the work of a poet, but not so completely master of the Greek ; Mr. R. Browning's is also the work of a poet and a scholar, but its uncouthness is not the rugged majesty of Æschylus. The Agamemnon is at times stormy in diction ; it is never queer. Miss Swanwick's beautiful translation has been published with Flaxman's designs. If Flaxman's genius is not so much in harmony with Æschylus as with Homer, he is quite at his best in the Agamemnon.

If the seven surviving dramas of Æschylus had followed into black night the other sixty-three, which we have lost, we should probably regard Œdipus the King of Sophocles as the type of the pure drama. And, in the exquisite tenderness and nobility of soul of the Antigone and the Œdipus at Colonus, Sophocles reaches a note of pathos, wherein Æschylus himself had inferior, and Shakespeare alone an equal mastery.[1] So, too, in comedy, Aristophanes is the eternal type. Inexhaustible fancy, the wildest humour, the keenest wit, the subtlest eye for character, combine in him with perennial inventiveness and exquisite melody. Demagogy, Presumption, Pedantry, every phase of extravagance and affectation, pass in turns across a stage which reaches from boisterous farce to splendid lyric poetry. The Phallic license of this ungovernable jester—a license without limit and, in familiar literature, without a match, is less a matter of vice or obscenity, than of social, local, and even religious convention.[2]

[1] Mr. E. D. A. Morshead has been as successful with the Œdipus King of Sophocles as with the Trilogy of Æschylus. Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of Sophocles is most elegant and, with the accuracy of a scholar, gives us something of the grace and lyric charm of Sophocles.

[2] It is singular that of this poet, in many respects the most Shakespearean of all the ancients, some of the best translations exist. Together they undoubtedly enable us to enter into the true Aristophanic spirit. The free version of Hookham Frere is almost as good as any translation in verse of an untranslatable ancient can be. Those of Cumberland and T. Mitchell have spirit, and the recent versions by B. B. Rogers have

Greece gave us the model and eternal type of written language, not only in epic, tragic, and comic poetry, but in imaginative prose, and in pure lyric. We come upon those marvellous fragments of Alcman, Alcæus, Sappho, and Tyrtæus, rescued for us by the diligent love of scholars, with the same sense of acute regret that we first see some head, trunk, or limb of the golden age of Greek sculpture unearthed from beneath a pile of rubbish. The history of mankind records few such irreparable losses as the lyrics of Greece, of which almost every line that is saved seems a faultless gem of art. It gives us a striking impression of the poetic fertility of Greece, when we remember that, from Homer to Longus, we have at least thirteen centuries of almost unbroken productiveness. No other literature has any continuous record so vast, nor any other language such an unbroken life.[1]

accuracy as well as spirit. Altogether we have an adequate rendering of some eight or nine of these masterpieces. One who will read the commentaries of Mitchell, Frere, Rogers, and the illustrations given us by Symonds and Mahaffy will get a living idea of this, the older comedy, the most amazing avatar of the pure Attic genius.

[1] Of Pindar and Theocritus we now possess prose versions, as perfect, I believe, as any prose version of a poet can be. Mr. E. Myers' recent translation of Pindar, and Mr. Lang's translation of Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus, preserve for us something even of the form of the original. I am wont to look on Mr. Lang's Theocritus, in particular, as a *tour-de-force* in translation at present without a rival. He has caught, although using prose, the music and lilt of the Greek verse. His version of the Pharmaceutria, of the Epithalamium, of the Adonis, suggests a metrical melody as plainly as does the English version

Here, as elsewhere and so often, Mr. Symonds is an unerring guide; and they who will study with care his versions and illustrations may at least come to know how great is our loss in the disappearance of the works of which these are but the remnant and the fragments. One of the most perfect of all translations is the quaint version of the Daphnis and Chloe of Longus, by old Amyot, improved by P. L. Courier. It is amongst the problems of history that this most Pagan, most Hellenic, and most romantic of pastorals, was contemporary with the "City of God;" was composed at a time when Christianity had long been the official religion of Greece, when Christendom was torn into segments by rival heresies and sects, and

of the Psalms. The excellent translation in verse by Mr. C. S. Calverley does not retain the music at all. Nor can I read patiently the verse translations of Pindar. There is no complete English version of the Poetæ Lyrici of Greece; but there are translations of some beautiful Fragments by Frere, Dean Milman, Lord Derby, J. A. Symonds, father and son, Professor Conington, and many others. Those of Milman can almost be read as poetry. The immortal Fragments of Sappho have exercised the art of a long line of translators from Catullus to Rossetti and Mr. Symonds—all, alas! in vain. The greatest recorded genius amongst women has left us those dazzling lines, which of all human poetry have been the most intensely searched, the most fondly remembered. But they remain essentially Greek; no other tongue can tell their fiery tale.

Chapman has given us Hesiod as well as Homer, and Marlowe and Chapman a variation on Musæus. Frere has attempted to recall Theognis to life. But the metrical versions of these Greek lyrics, the most exquisitely artless, and yet the most magically graceful in the world, are little more, at the best, than scholarly exercises of a learned leisure.

when the warlike barbarians of the North had already plunged into chaos large portions of the Empire. The Hellenic genius of beauty, after twelve centuries of incessant energy, may be heard in this, its last song; unheeding revolutions and battles alike in thought, in society, and in life.

Passing from Greece to Italy, there is a great poetic void. There is no Roman Homer. Such Iliad as Rome has, must be sought for in Livy. The legends and lays which he built into the foundations of his resplendent story remain still traceable, just as, on the Capitol hill to this day, we see masses of peperino and red tufa, where the Tabularium serves as basement to the Renaissance Palace which Michael Angelo raised for the Senator. That great imperial race did not embody its life as a whole in any national poem. The Æneid of Virgil was the almost academic equivalent of a national epic. It bears to the Iliad some such relation as the *Polyeucte* of Corneille bears to the Agamemnon of Æschylus. Yet so touching are its episodes, so heroic its plan and conception, so consummate the form, so profound its influence over later generations of men, that it must for ever hold a place in the eternal poetry of mankind.[1]

[1] The translation of Virgil is a problem even more perplexing than that of Homer. Glorious John treated his epic with even less regard for the original than Pope, and with far less grace and dignity. The Æneid is hardly tolerable in the racy couplets which give point to Absolom and Achitophel. Mr. Conington's attempt to turn the Æneid into the rhyme of Marmion is a sad waste of ingenuity; nor does Mr. Morris mend

The other poetry of Rome is chiefly didactic, moral, or social. Rome has no tragedy except in her history, no comedy that is not more than half Greek. Horace, Ovid, Catullus, we read for their inimitable witchery of phrase; Juvenal, Plautus, and Terence, we read for their insight into men; Lucretius for his wonderful force of meditation, so strangely in anticipation of modern thought. But the genius of Roman poetry is wrapt up in its form. It is hardly communicable at all except in the original words. Translations of it are vain exercises of ingenuity.

Horace remains to this day the type of the untranslatable. Such wit, grace, sense, fire, and affection never took such perfect form—the perfect form of some gem of Athens, or some coin of Syracuse—save in those irrecoverable lyrics, where Sappho and Alcæus, they tell us, clothed yet richer thoughts in even rarer words.[1]

matters by turning it into a "marry-come-up," "my merry men all" kind of ballad. The majesty, the distinction, the symmetry of Virgil evaporate in both; more than in Dryden, who, at any rate, was a master of the English language and of the rhymed couplet. Mr. Conington's excellent prose version does not retain, hardly seeks to retain, any echo of the music, any trace of the mien of the mighty Roman. It is useful to those who need help in reading Virgil, but it is not such a veritable version as Mr. Lang has given us of Homer and Theocritus, and Dr. Carlyle of the Inferno, or Amyot of Daphnis and Chloe. There is but one way in which what used to be called the "English reader" can enjoy his Virgil, and that way is to learn Latin enough to read him, and I earnestly counsel him so to do.

[1] Since Horace, by common consent, is untranslatable, the

It is a melancholy thought that, with all our new apparatus of scholarship and antiquarian research, the present generation has less vital hold on ancient poetry than our forefathers had. We read it less, quote it less, care for it less than of old. The pedantry of collators and grammarians, the mechanic routine of the examination system, have almost quenched that noble zest in the classics which was meat and drink to them of old, to Fox, Johnson, Addison, or Milton. Our boys at university and school are ground between the upper and the nether millstone of interminable "passes," "Little-goes," and "Finals;" so that to a prize boy at Eton or Baliol his classical authors are no longer a glorious field of enjoyment and of thought—but what a cricket ground

translations of him, as might be expected, are innumerable. Where Milton and Pope did not succeed, and where many a poet has failed, the prize is not within the reach of mortal man. Lord Derby's shots, perhaps of all, come nearest the bull's-eye. Some odes of Mr. Conington are readable; he succeeds far better with Horace than with Virgil. On the whole, perhaps, the English reader, who will study the commentary and version of Sir Theodore Martin, will get some definite idea of one of the most interesting figures in the whole range of letters, of the most modern and most familiar of the ancients.

Mr. Munro and Mr. Robinson Ellis have given us editions of Lucretius and of Catullus, which are an honour to English scholarship. The admirable prose version of Lucretius by Mr. Munro is chiefly of service to the student. The poetic power of the great philosopher-poet is seen only in skeleton. Mr. Ellis' crabbed verse translation of Catullus is mainly useful as a specimen of what a translation should not be. Scholars have an incurable way with them, of pelting us with queer uncommon phrases which have a meaning perhaps identical with the

is to a professional bowler, a monotonous hunting-ground for a good "average" and gate-money.

A rational choice of books would restore to us the healthy use of the great classics of antiquity. Most of us find that true sympathy with our classics begins only then, when our academic study of them is wholly at an end. The college prizeman and the college tutor cannot read a chorus in the Trilogy but what his mind instinctively wanders on optatives, choriambi, and that happy conjecture of Smelfungus in the antistrophe. A less constant thumbing of glossaries and commentaries is needful to those who would enjoy.

But even to those to whom the originals are quite or almost closed, a conception of the ancient authors

original words, but which together produce a grotesque effect, wholly out of harmony with the poem translated. How can lines such as—

"Late-won loosener of the wary girdle,"

or—

"Pray unbody him only nose for ever,"

represent the airy notes of the most fantastic of the Latin poets, pouring forth his song like the lark on the wing? Or, again, can such a line as—

"The race is to Ate glued,"

represent the majestic terror of Æschylus?

In spite of Marlowe, Pope, Dryden, and Rowe, who have all tried their hands on the Latin poets, it may be doubted if any translation of them in verse can give any part of their genius, unless it be of the Satires and the Comedies, of which spirited and readable versions, or rather paraphrases, exist. But better than translations are such admirable commentaries on the classics, as those of Sellar, Symonds, F. Myers, Simcox, Theodore Martin, Conington, Ellis, and Munro.

is an indispensable condition of rational education. A clear idea of their subjects, methods, form, and genius, is within the power of all systematic readers. Our own generation has multiplied the resources by which they may be made familiar. All such resources have their value; a combination of them can give us something, though all together cannot give us the whole. A curious profusion of translation, in prose and in verse, singular critical insight, and unwearied zeal to present antiquity to us as a whole, is the special service of our own age. Painting, poetry, music, the stage, are all working to the same end. So that, with all that art, criticism, and translation can do, the unlearned, if they seek it diligently, may find the entrance, at least, into the portico of Athene.

It is the age of accurate translation. The present generation has produced a complete library of versions of the great classics, chiefly in prose, partly in verse, more faithful, true, and scholarly than anything ever produced before. It is the photographic age of translation; and all that the art of sun-pictures has done for the recording of ancient buildings, and more than that, the art of literal translation has done for the understanding of ancient poetry. A complete translation of a great poem is, of course, an impossible thing. The finest translation is at best but a copy of a part; it gives us more or less crudely some element of the original; the colour, the light and shade, the glow, are not there, lost as completely as they are

in a photograph. But in the large photograph—say of the Sistine Madonna—the lines and the composition are there, as no human hand ever drew them. And so, in a fine translation, the thought survives. One method gives us one element, another method some fresh element, and together we may get some real impression of the mighty whole.

Now, when some of us may have partly lost touch of the original, and some may never have acquired it, the use of translations, especially the use of varied translations, may give us much. In the very front rank come, for verse, Morshead's Trilogy of Æschylus, and his Œdipus the King of Sophocles, Mr. Philip Worsley's Odyssey, Lord Derby's Iliad, Frere's Aristophanes, the Greek Lyrics of Milman, and Fitzgerald's Calderon. These are all readable as poems in themselves; but they hardly come up to the typical examples of translations—translations of a poet by a poet—such as Shelley's Fragments, and Coleridge's Wallenstein. It is greatly to be deplored that Coleridge did not act on Shelley's suggestion and translate Faust. They who conscientiously struggle through Hayward, Sir Theodore Martin, Miss Swanwick, Bayard Taylor, and the rest, would have been grateful to see Faust, in the language of Wallenstein, Kubla Khan, and Christabelle. But there is only one of the translators of our day whom we can read without the continual sense that we are reading a translation. Edward Fitzgerald's translations alone read as if they were

original compositions; but the question for ever recurs, Are they translations at all?

For prose we can hardly have anything better than the Homer by Mr. Andrew Lang, Professor Butcher, E. Myers, and Walter Leaf; Mr. Lang's Theocritus; Mr. Myers' Pindar; Mr. Conington's prose Virgil; Munro's Lucretius; the Inferno, by John Carlyle; Dante, by Lamennais; the Cid, by Damas Hinard. Each of these, in its own way, gives us almost as much as translation ever can give. The prose translator naturally fails to give us music, movement, form; but he gives us the substantial thought with almost complete fulness. The verse translation, in the hands of a poet, if it somewhat miss the thought, recalls to us some echoes of the lilt of the poem. Put the two together, use them as helps alternately, and much of the real comes forth to us. Take the prose Iliad of Leaf, Lang, and E. Myers, and then with that listen to the music of old Chapman, and the martial ring of some battle-piece in Pope or Lord Derby, and something more than an echo of Homer is ours. Or, what is better still, take the prose Odyssey of Butcher and Lang, and therewith read the exquisite verse of Philip Worsley, and some of the quiet pieces of Cowper, and then with the designs of Flaxman, and the local colour of Wordsworth's Greece, and Mahaffy and Symonds, the imagination can restore us a vision of the Ithacan tale. The Inferno of John Carlyle has an even greater advantage; for the Biblical style, by association, suggests the music and pathos of the poetry, and that

without the affectation which attends all reproductions of Biblical phraseology. He has been well imitated by A. J. Butler in the Purgatory. The archaic French of Lamennais' version has much the same effect. These with Cary, and the beautiful book of Dean Church, ought to enable us to get at the sense and something of the form of the Divine Comedy.

With all this wealth of translation we have such elaborate general works on the history of ancient literature as those of K. O. Muller, Mure, and Simcox; and the fine studies of Greek and Latin poets, by J. A. Symonds, F. Myers, Professors Munro, Robinson Ellis, Conington, and Sellar; and by Mr. Gladstone, and Matthew Arnold. With all this abundance of critical resource, one who knows anything of Latin and Greek can learn to enjoy his ancient poets; and even one who knows nothing can gain some idea of their genius.

What Homer is to Greece, the early national epics and myths of other countries are to them; far inferior to the Greek in beauty, of less perennial value, but the true germ of the literature of each. Yet to the bulk of readers this fountain-head of all poetry lies in a region unexplored, as unknown as to our fathers were the sources of the Nile—*fontium qui celat origines.* The early poetry of India, with its wonderful mythology, rich as it is for its own poetic worth, opens to us more of the old Oriental mind than many a history. Sir William Jones, who first made this poetry accessible to Europe, was, in the intellectual world, the

Columbus who joined two continents. Since his day the labours of Professors Wilson, Max Müller, and Monier Williams have opened to us a new region of poetry, united two twin brethren, who have long lived estranged. Such a book as the Arabian Nights we are too apt to look on as a story-book, even perhaps a story-book for children. It is not so. Read between the lines, it presents to us the mind and civilisation of Islam, the civil side of that of which the Koran is the religious.

There is the same epical embodiment of the national genius in our early European poetry. The fierce Teuton and Norse races have each left us their own myths, of which this century alone has recognised the wild and tragic power, and has, in so many forms, now opened to the modern reader. The highest note of the barbaric drama is reached in the Nibelungen Lied—the Thyestean tragedy of the North—which, but for the excessive appeal to horror in its weird imagery, might take its place with the great epics of the world. Nay, that last terrific scene in the Hall of Etzel rests for ever on the memory as hardly inferior to that other supreme hour of vengeance, when the rags fall from off Odysseus, and he confronts the suitors with his awful bow.[1]

[1] Although every one, since Carlyle gave his sketch of it (*Miscell.* vol. iii.), has known something of the Nibelungen Lied, and although modern poetry and art have made it, in one form or other, as familiar as any legendary poem extant, it is singular that we have not got it in English in any satisfactory shape. For my part I prefer the German to the Norse type of the epic; for the latter has nothing equivalent to the sustained and elab-

France, too, has her epic literature in the *Chansons de Gestes*, the *Romans*, the *Fabliaux*—especially in the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Roman du Renart*, which should serve as types of the rest. Spain and the Celtic race of Western England and Western France have two great epic cycles, which cluster round the names of the Cid and of Arthur.

Whilst the Spanish Cycle is the more national, heroic, and stirring, the Arthurian Cycle is the best embodiment of chivalry, of romance, of gallantry. The vast cluster of tales which envelop King Arthur and his comrades is the expression of European chivalry and the feudal genius as a whole, idealising the knight, the squire, the lady, the princess of the Middle Ages. For all practical purposes, we English have it in its best form; for the compilation of Sir Thomas Malory is wrought into a mould of pure English, hardly second to the English of the Bible.[1] And yet our Arthurian Cycle has left far less traces on our national character than the cycle of the Cid has left on that of Spain. How high and loyal a type is each. Of the Cid it is said—

orate drama of the vengeance of Chriemhild. But where we can see plainly the scheme and bones of a mighty poem, it is vexatious to read it spun out into the monotonous garrulity of the existing 2459 stanzas, or to read it in the halting, stammering, doggrel of Lettsom. We need much a somewhat condensed version of the Siegfried and Chriemhild myth in the plain and stirring English in which Southey cast the Cid, or, better still, in that wherein Malory cast the old Arthurian Chansons.

[1] It will be seen that in the original text of Malory about 98 per cent of the words are pure English, without Latin alloy.

"Lo que non ferie el Caboso por quanto en el mundo ha;
Una deslealtanza, ca non la fizo alguandre."

"That which the Perfect One would not do for all that the world holds;
For a deed of disloyalty he never yet did in aught."[1]

And so of Lancelot it is said: "Thou were head of all Christian knights; and thou were the courtiest knight that ever bare shield; and thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman; and thou were the kindest man that ever strake with sword; and thou were the goodliest person ever came among press of knights; and thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou were the

[1] The Cid Cycle of poems has fared better than the Nibelungen. Besides the well-known translations by Lockhart in verse, and by Southey in prose, there is a stirring fragment of the Cid poem by Frere, and two analyses and versions of the Cid ballads and the Epic: the former by George Dennis, the latter by John Ormsby. Without going so far as Southey, who called the Cid the "finest poem in the Spanish language," or so far as Prescott, who called it "the most remarkable performance of the Middle Ages," we must allow that it stands in the very first rank of national poems. Its peculiar value to us is in the fact that it is the earliest of all the great national poems of modern Europe which have reached us in a perfectly unadulterated form, unless we include Beowulf in this number. And if we take the ideal Cid of the romances, chronicle, and poem together, and as he lives in the imagination of the Spanish people, the Cid legend stands at the head of the legendary poetry of Europe. But they who desire to master the poem itself should read the book which Damas Hinard wrote for the Empress Eugénie (Paris, 4to, 1858), the text with a prose version, commentary, and glossary.

sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest."[1]

Methinks that the tale of the death of Arthur, Guinevere, and of Lancelot, as told by Malory, along with the death and last death-march of the Cid, as told in the Chronicle, may stand beside the funeral of Hector, which closes the Iliad—

"ὣς οἵγ' ἀμφίεπον τάφον Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο."[2]

That immense and varied mass of legend had its religious as well as its secular side. The Lives of the Saints, of which the Golden Legend is the cream, contains, in the theological domain, the same interminable series of romances, usually wearisome,

[1] σῇ τ' ἀγανοφροσύνῃ, καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσι.—*Il.* xxiv. 772.

[2] In nothing has the revival of sound critical taste done better service than in recalling us to the Arthurian Cycle, the dayspring of our glorious literature. The closing books of Malory's Arthur certainly rank, both in conception and in form, with the best poetry of Europe; in quiet pathos and reserved strength they hold their own with the epics of any age. Beside this simple, manly type of the mediæval hero the figures in the Idylls of the King look like the dainty Perseus of Canova placed beside the heroic Theseus of Pheidias.

It is true, as Mr. Matthew Arnold has said, that poetry and prose are perfectly distinct forms of utterance. But the line which marks off poetry from prose is not an absolutely rigid one, and we may have the essentials of poetry without metre or scansion. In Malory's Death of Arthur and Lancelot, or in Chapters of Job and Isaiah in the English Bible, we have the conceptions, the melody, the winged words, and inimitable turns of phrase which constitute the highest poetry. We need a term to include the best imaginative work in the most artistic form, and the only English word left is—poetry.

always inventive, and at times nobly poetic, which the mediæval romances give us in the domain of chivalry. Far more useful historically, and far more closely bound up with the imaginative literature of Europe, are the delightful collections of Fabliaux, the parent of so much in Boccaccio, Chaucer, even in Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Molière. That wonderful storehouse of the lay and bourgeois spirit of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries preserves for us an inimitable picture of the knighthood, ladyhood, and yeomanry of the Middle Ages.[1]

In the real national lays of the old world, in legend, romance, and tale, in their first native form, we have a complete history of civilisation: the source from which Virgil and Livy, Boccaccio and Chaucer, Shakespeare and Calderon, drew their inspiration, the source of almost all that is most living and true in subsequent art. It is a cycle at once of poetry, of reflection, of manners, the nature of the race flinging itself forth into expression in its own artless way before the canons of poetry were invented, or the race of critics spawned. He to whom this poetry as

[1] We have now in 6 vols. the new collection of Fabliaux, by MM. de Montaiglon and G. Raynaud (Paris, 1872-1886). But as this, the first complete collection, is printed from the old MSS. verbatim, it is of little use except to students of French literature. The prose version of Legrand d'Aussy is eminently readable; but as the augmented edition of this, by Renouard, is not now very easily found, an accessible and popular prose version of these inimitable tales is amongst the pressing wants of the general reader. And herein the more outrageous license, peculiar to this form of poetry, might very well disappear.

a whole is familiar, who had heard its full heart throbbing against its sturdy side, would know the great spirits of the human race, and would live in some of its noblest thoughts. And withal, it is so easy, so plain, and fascinating in itself, lying in a few familiar volumes, one-tenth of the bulk of that mountain of literary husks, wherewith men fill themselves as Mudie's cart comes round, chewing rather than reading, careless of method, self-restraint, or moral aim.

## CHAPTER III.

### POETS OF THE MODERN WORLD.

MODERN poetry in its developed form opens with the great epic of Catholicism, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante. We Northern people are too ready to treat our own Shakespeare as the poetic embodiment of all that can interest humanity. But what Shakespeare is to the Teutonic races, Dante is to the Latin races. And on certain sides he is far more distinctly the philosopher, the historian, the prophet. He is all this, often in a way which seriously mars his perfection as a poet. But to a student of literature, it is all the more interesting that he so often recalls to us in whole cantos of his poem, now Plato, now Tacitus, now Augustine. The Divine Comedy is no easy task; neither its language, nor its meaning, nor its design are always obvious. To most readers it presents itself as a mystical vision; some find in it historical satire, others a religious allegory. It reminds us at times of the Vision of Piers Ploughman, again of the Pilgrim's Progress, now of the Apocalypse and the Book of Job, or again of the

Faery Queen and Faust. It is all of these and much more. It is the review in one vast picture of human life as a whole, and human civilisation as a whole; all that it had been, was, and might become, as presented to the greatest brain and profoundest nature of the Middle Ages. It is man and the world seen, it is true, through the Catholic Camera Obscura—a picture intense, vivid, complete, albeit in a light not seldom narrow and artificial. Every part and episode has its double and treble meaning. And when we have penetrated within to know some one or two of its senses, it is to find that there are many more wrapped up within its folds and hidden to our eye. It is a Bible or Gospel—Bible and Gospel without revelation or canonical authority, and, like the older Bible, full of mystery and difficulty; but, none the less, in spite of mysteriousness and difficulties, especially fitted for the daily study of all who can read with patience, insight, and singleness of heart. As it has been said of other books that move us deeply, "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

There is an entire library of Dantesque literature, mostly to my mind needless. But it must be remembered that few readers can enjoy Dante perfectly without the assistance of some translation or notes of some kind. Mr. Ruskin once hazarded the glorious paradox that Cary's Dante was better reading than Milton's Paradise Lost. Cary is useful for Dante, just as Conington is useful for Virgil; but it can hardly be called poetry. The other verse

translations of Dante I can only read as "cribs." Dr. John Carlyle's admirable prose version of the *Inferno* has been well continued for the *Purgatorio* by A. J. Butler. And he has just published a like version of the *Paradiso*. For my own part I prefer Lamennais' translation of the Divine Comedy into antique French prose, the effect of which is at once weird and solemn. This, with the brief notes in the Florentine edition, and what the two Carlyles and Dean Church have written, and the diligent reading of Dante himself, including his Vita Nuova (Rossetti's excellent translation), and the rest of his prose should be better than the entire Dantesque library which has grown up round the poem. The most melancholy of all superstitions is that which restricts the reading of Dante to the *Inferno*, and even to a few famous episodes in that. The *Inferno* alone gives no adequate idea of Dante's social conceptions. The *Purgatorio* is, to my mind, the most profound, as well as the most beautiful part of all the work of Dante.

The first commentator on Dante, Boccaccio, has left us the earliest perfect example of modern prose; on one side of it, still the most beautiful of modern prose, that which in music and native grace comes nearest to the prose of Plato. The immortal stories of the *Decameron* have that rich glow of the wit and grace of the Middle Ages, that aroma of full-blossoming life which binds us with its spell in the Italian dramas of Shakespeare, and which is so near akin to the

Italian mastery of the arts of form. The *Decameron*, as belongs to its age and the whole Fabliaux literature from which it sprung, is redolent of that libertine humanism which stamps the Renascence; but not a few of its tales are free from offence, and there are published selections which may fitly be read by the young.[1]

The great Italian epics of Ariosto and Tasso, and the lyrics of Petrarch, have exercised over the ages which they have charmed, and over the races whom they have inspired, an influence as profound and humanising as any which poetry has ever exerted. We, whose imagination has been trained by darker and fiercer types, do not easily fall in with the poetic sources of the Southern passion for sentiment and colour. But though this Italian poetry is in a world far other from ours of to-day, and though much of it is in a form artificial to our taste, its importance in literature and in history should give it a place in any systematic course of reading.[2]

[1] Amongst others there is a small selection for the use of schools (Turin, 1882, 8vo). Boccaccio's language and meaning are so easy that neither translation nor commentary are needed, nor do I know of any worth reading.

[2] No one in this century seems to read the English translations of the Italian epics in rhymed heroics in imitation of Mr. Pope and Mr. Dryden, which were so much in vogue in the last century, or those which in imitation of Chapman were in vogue in the century preceding. It must be allowed that they are rather meritorious performances than good reading; but it was better to read Ariosto and Tasso so than not to read them at all. I feel the same even of the many really excellent versions of

In the later Italian poets there are no unfrequent bursts of true poetry, as if from time to time the great lyre of old ages gave forth of itself some strange spontaneous air, where it hung fixed as a trophy of the past, though there be none who dare take it from its resting-place, or strike the chords of the departed masters.[1]

As for French poetry, apart from the glorious lyrics of the older language, some exquisite echoes of which have been heard again in our own age, the world-wide and world-abiding masterpieces are to be found in the long roll of the dramatists of France. The French drama is, to the ordinary English reader, one of the stumbling-blocks of literature. He finds it universally counted amongst the classics of modern Europe, and most justly so; he gathers that it exerts a profound fascination and influence over the French race; he can perceive its symmetry and subtle art of style. But he does not enjoy it, and he does not read it, and, except when some famous "star" is performing, he does not care to hear it from the stage. And whether he listens to it, or reads it, he inevitably ends with that most futile resource, some trite and *banal* comparison with Shakespeare. Glorious Will

Petrarch's sonnets. But the subtle complexity and charm of the Petrarchian sonnet is as incommunicable as that of Horace. Yet one would like to see a version by Mr. Swinburne.

[1] And that in spite of the beautiful things of Filicaja, Leopardi, and Manzoni, whose Cinque Maggio surpasses that of Byron almost as much as his Promessi Sposi falls short of the Bride of Lammermoor.

has not a little to answer for, in that, most unwittingly, he has stopped up the ears of his countrymen to some of the most perfect moods of the lyre, which chanced to be those he never struck. There is much in the method and genius of the French drama which falls chill and stark on ears accustomed to the abounding life of a Shakespearean play. He who begins by comparing the two methods is lost; he might as well compare an Italian garden and a tropical forest. To enjoy these French dramas in all their subtle finish requires perhaps for an Englishman, a more special study of their peculiar poetic form than most readers can give. The French drama, like the Greek and the Roman, is to the typical drama of Spain, England, and Germany what a statue is to a picture. Neither lyrical wealth of imagery, nor rapidity of action, nor multiplicity and contrast of situations, nor subtle involution of motive, are the instruments of art employed. The dominant aim is to produce one massive impression; the artistic instrument is harmony of tone; the form is consistently ideal, never realistic. The realism and movement which we look for in a play are as alien to the classical drama as trousers and boots to a classical statue.

Even if the French classical plays had less poetic power of their own, they would still hold a high place in any serious scheme of reading for their historical and ethical value. They form the most systematic and successful effort ever made in literature to idealise in modern poetry the great types of character and

race, as they move in one unending procession across the general history of mankind. They epitomise civilisation in a regular series of striking tableaux of the past, and of the East; so that they hold up the mirror, (not quite successfully to Nature), but to the successive phases of human society and the moral power and tone of each. Thus judged, in spite of some serious defects and much coldness, yet by the innate grandeur of his soul, the statuesque unity of form, and by virtue of the profound moral impression which he has left on his countrymen, Corneille remains one of the greatest of modern poets.

The even superior grace, tenderness, and versatility of Racine make him a more popular favourite. It is not necessary to enter on the secular debate to which of the rivals the palm is to be given. Voltaire, with all his inferiority to both, carried out in a form which suits the genius of his language and people the design of the elder dramatists, to idealise for our modern world most remote and different types of human life. Dryden and Otway in England attempted the same purpose; Metastasio and Alfieri were more successful in Italy; Goethe and Schiller revived it in Germany. It cannot be pronounced a true success in the hands of any of them. Doubtless, it remains for the future to show us all that awaits human genius in this magnificent field of art—the idealisation of the past in a form at once poetic and true. Scott may be said to have accomplished it in prose for considerable epochs and phases of the past. No one can pretend

that even Shakespeare did anything in this sphere at all worthy of himself; or indeed that he had any adequate sense of the problem. With all their shortcomings and their tolerance of academic conventions, the French dramatists afford us the most serious, and on the whole the most successful, example of a real historical poetry.

The same earnestness of purpose and systematic method distinguish also the old comic drama of France. Justice has been done to the inimitable genius of Molière. It may be doubted if justice has yet been done to his power as philosopher, moralist, and teacher. As profound a master of human nature on its brighter side as Shakespeare himself, he gives us an even more complete and systematic analysis of modern society, and a still larger gallery of its familiar types. Inexhaustible good nature, imperturbable good sense, instinctive aversion to folly, affectation, meanness, and untruth, ever mark Molière; he is always humane, courteous, sound of heart; he is never savage, morose, cynical, or obscene; he has neither the mad ribaldry of Aristophanes, nor the mad rage of Swift; he never ceases to be a man, wise, tender, and good in every fibre, even whilst we feel the darker mood of pensive perplexity that human frivolity perpetually awakens in his soul.

Men will continue to ask if his great masterpiece, the *Misanthrope*, be pure comedy or serious drama; if the poet intended to justify *Alceste*, or to excuse *Philinte*. Doubtless both fountains of feeling well

up in him, as he meditates on the insoluble problems of artificial society and the eternal dilemmas of social compromise. The systematic and philosophic spirit of Molière strike us emphatically if we take the whole collection of his plays, and see how distinctly each type of character is in turn presented to our eyes, and how complete and various the entire series appears. No other painter of manners has given us a gallery of portraits so carefully classed. But the measure of Molière is hardly to be taken till we see him presented at the Comédie Française; where a long tradition of actors and critics, combining with each other, produces the most perfect embodiment of the scenic art which the modern stage has achieved.

The prolific drama of Spain is certainly, from a national and ethical point of view, more interesting than the classical drama of France. In variety, imaginative energy, and *brio*, it is surpassed only by our own. It has exerted an even more manifold and permanent hold over the minds of its own people. And in its association with the religion of the people, their profoundest religious belief, as well as their inmost religious feeling, the Spanish drama has a quality which gives that supreme dignity to the drama of Athens, but which, since the Middle Ages, has been lost elsewhere to the drama of Europe. The Spanish drama by its wonderful originality and variety is certainly one of the most striking phenomena in the history of poetry. It is melancholy to think how complete is the neglect of a literature so rich and

rare. Of late Calderon is beginning to be better known. His magnificent imagination, his infinite fertility, his power and passion have a real Shakespearean note; whilst his purity and devotional fervour remind us of the Catholic period of Corneille's career. In our own day he has exercised the skill of a crowd of translators. Shelley gave us a fine fragment from the Magician; Trench, M'Carthy, and others have tried their hands on one of the most difficult problems in the art of translation. But the English reader can obtain some adequate conception of Calderon from the seven plays of which an admirably poetic version has been given us by Edward Fitzgerald, the translator, or periphrast, of Omar Kayyam. If Fitzgerald's accuracy had equalled his ingenuity, he might claim the very first place amongst modern translators.[1] Auguste Comte had so high an opinion of the Spanish dramatists that, in the midst of his philosophic labours, he made a selection of twenty plays from different poets, a work edited by his friend, J. S. Florez, and published in Paris in 1854 (Teatro Español).

[1] It is much to be regretted that except the Mayor of Zalamea in the first series of six dramas, and the Wonder-working Magician in the later volume, Fitzgerald deliberately selected the less important dramas. The seven selected by Comte as types out of the nearly two hundred surviving pieces are: La Vida es sueno, El Alcalde de Zalamea, A secreto agravio secreta venganza, No siempre lo peor es cierto, Mañanas de abril y mayo, La Nave del Mercader, La Viña del Señor. Of these, the second only has been translated by Fitzgerald.

One production of the Spanish imagination alone has obtained universal rank amongst the great masterpieces of the world. Cervantes carried to the highest point that pensive and prophetic spirit which seems to mark all the greater humourists, unless it be Aristophanes in his wilder moods. Like Rabelais and Molière, like Shakespeare and Fielding, Cervantes is ever reminding us, in the loudest peals of our mirth, that life is full of mystery and of struggle. But none of these profound spirits have handled the problems of life with greater breadth or more noble tenderness than the author of Don Quixote. This inimitable work is the serio-comic analogue of Dante's Vision. It is a burlesque divine comedy: the survey of human society, its types of character, and its moral problems, at a moment when one great phase of history was giving way to another. It is melancholy to find this glorious work too often regarded as a mere collection of buffooneries and intrigues. The true Don Quixote presents to us the secular contest between the past and the present. This great creation is as much history and philosophy as it is romance or comedy. It idealises the doubt and wonder bred in the soul of its heroic author, a soldier at once of the old world and of the new, one who united the crusading instinct of the Cid with the practical genius of Molière; who saw clearly the inevitable conflict between the old world of chivalry and the new world of industry and science; and sympathising with both, felt a clear and conscious mission to announce to chivalry its inexor-

able doom, teaching the new world withal what it lacked of chivalry and heroism. And, uniting in himself at once good sense and chivalry, Cervantes points out to us at last a possible union of these two.

The poets of Germany need not detain us. Germany has indeed but one great poet of European rank, the encyclopædic Goethe, whose exquisite lyrics and the inexhaustible Faust are a constant refreshment to the thoughtful spirit. The wonderful intellectual impulse which Goethe gave to all forms of literature in his generation, doubtless the most imimportant of the whole nineteenth century, has tended rather to excessive than to deficient estimate of his direct work as a poet. The other German poets are often graceful and learned; we read them conscientiously when we first acquire the language, and their delightful ballads continually exercise the ingenuity of translators, both domestic and public. But except to the lovely lyrics of Goethe and Heine, I venture to doubt if many of us return to them with increasing zest. In the present day they get possibly an even excessive attention from those who, like many young persons, have never read a line of Dante, Ariosto, Chaucer, or Calderon.

Of our English poets there is little that needs to be said, all the more that a dominant school of criticism now guides the public taste in this matter with consummate judgment; and that the general interest in poetry is perhaps at once wider and more healthy than it has ever been at any period of our history. The best

estimates of our great masterpieces have been reduced to a popular form in the admirable handbook of Mr. S. A. Brooke, and the judgment of Mr. Matthew Arnold in poetry is almost as much a final verdict as that of Sainte Beuve himself. Here and there specialists and partisans worry us with exaggeration and hobbies of their own. But, as a rule, the position of the greater poets is perfectly established and clearly understood. It is no pretension of these few pages to do more than utter a few words of plea for reading at any rate the best.

Even of Shakespeare himself it is better to recognise frankly the truth, that he is not seldom far from at his best, and occasionally produces quite unworthy stuff. No poet known to us was so careless of his genius, so little jealous of his own work, and none has left his creations in a form so unauthentic and confused; for no one of his plays was published with his name in his lifetime. Let us face the necessity, that it is better in such case to know his eight or ten masterpieces thoroughly, rather than to treat his thirty-six supposed pieces with equal irreverent veneration. With Milton the case is different. In the Paradise Lost and in the Lyrics—lyrics unsurpassed in all poetry, and for Englishmen, at least, the high-water mark of lyrical perfection, equally faultless in their poetic form and in their moral charm, the poet seems to be putting his whole inspiration into every line and almost every phrase. And thus, till his strength began to wane with life, this most self-

possessed of the poets hardly ever swerves or swoops in his calm majestic flight.

Of our poets, and especially of our modern poets, there is happily now but little need to speak. All serious readers are sufficiently agreed. That Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth belong, each in his way and each in his degree, to the perpetual glories of our literature, is no longer open to doubt. No one needs any pressing to read Coleridge, Scott, Tennyson, and Browning; they have all enjoyed an ample, almost an excessive, recognition in their own lifetime. But a little word may be spoken in season respecting our honoured Laureate—a word which the critics keep too much to themselves. There is danger lest conventional adulation and a certain unique quality of his may tend to mislead the general public as to the true place of Tennyson amongst poets. Since the death of Wordsworth he has stood, beyond all question, in a class wholly by himself, far above all contemporary lyric poets. It is no less certain that he, alone of the Victorians, has definitely entered the immortal group of our English poets, and stands beside Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Nay, we must go further than this. Tennyson has a gift of melody in meditative lyric, more subtle and exquisite than any poet but Shakespeare and Shelley. He has, moreover, a *curiosa felicitas* of phrase, a finished grace, sustained over the whole of *In Memoriam*, which is peculiarly rare in English poetry; one which reminds us of the unerring certainty of touch in Horace,

Racine, Heine, and Leopardi. But this delightful quality is a somewhat late product of any literature, and is seldom found with equal power of imagination. The Laureate has had the good fortune to live in an epoch of amazing fecundity, and to embody in graceful verse the originality and fervour of an original and fervid age. The young, brimful of the hopes and feelings which teem in our time, are eager to hail a poet who is in many ways to the cultivated class of our time that which Victor Hugo has been to the French people. They are apt to forget that a unique gift of melody and an undertone of sentimental philosophising does not amount to imaginative power of the very first rank. When we survey calmly the more ambitious pieces of this exquisite lyrist, such as that somewhat boudoir epic, the Idylls of the King; the conventional dramas, and the facile ballads of his decline, we find ourselves in presence of a mind where the power of expression outweighs the thought: one that can strike out little of a really high type, either in character, in narration, or in drama. These consummately graceful verses have none of that wealth of imagination, that flashing insight into life, that tragic thunderpeal, which often, it may be, with far less chastened diction, are revealed to us by the mighty spirits of Scott, Byron, and Goethe. Let us read our Tennyson and be thankful, without supposing, like some young ladies' pet curate, that this is the high-water mark of English poetry.

Finally, as to prose romances, the same principles

will serve, though they are even more difficult to apply. Read the best. Our great eighteenth century novelists have won a place in the abiding literature of the world—a place beside the poets more specially so called. Their knowledge of human nature, their humour, their dramatic skill, their pathos, make them peers of those who have used the forms of verse, and it is in the form and not in substance that they may rank below the masters of the creative art in verse. First among them all is the generous soul of Fielding, to whom so much is forgiven for the nobleness of his great heart. On him and on the others there rests the curse of their age, and no incantation can reverse the sentence pronounced upon those who deliberately stoop to the unclean. It is a grave defect in the splendid tale of Tom Jones—of all prose romances the most rich in life and the most artistic in construction—that a Bowdlerised version of it would be hardly intelligible as a tale. Grossness, alas! has entered into the marrow of its bones. Happily, vice has not; and amidst much that is repulsive, we feel the good man's reverence for goodness, and the humane spirit's honour of every humane quality, whilst the pure figure of the womanly Sophia (most womanly of all women in fiction) walks in maiden meditation across the darkest scenes, as the figure of the glorified Gretchen passes across the revel in the Walpurgis-Nacht.

The same century too gave us (and without any of its defects) two immortal masterpieces of creative art—the exquisite idyll of Goldsmith and the original con-

ception of Defoe. We are so familiar with the Vicar of Wakefield and Robinson Crusoe that we are too ready to forget their extraordinary influence over the whole European mind. We are hardly sensible that both contain noble lessons for every age. Robinson Crusoe, which is a fairy tale to the child, a book of adventure to the young, is a work on social philosophy to the mature. It is a picture of civilisation. The essential moral attributes of man, his innate impulses as a social being, his absolute dependence on society, even as a solitary individual, his subjection to the physical world, and his alliance with the animal world, the statical elements of social philosophy, and the germs of man's historical evolution have never been touched with more sagacity, and assuredly have never been idealised with such magical simplicity and truth. It remains, with Don Quixote, the only prose work of the fancy which has equal charms for every age of life, and which has inexhaustible teaching for the student of man and of society.

Of Walter Scott one need as little speak as of Shakespeare. He belongs to mankind, to every age and race, and he certainly must be counted as in the first line of the great creative minds of the world. His unique glory is to have definitely succeeded in the ideal reproduction of historical types, so as to preserve at once beauty, life, and truth, a task which neither Ariosto and Tasso, nor Corneille and Racine, nor Alfieri, nor Goethe and Schiller—no! nor even Shakespeare himself entirely achieved. It is true that their instrument was the more exacting one of verse,

whilst Scott's was prose. But in brilliancy of conception, in wealth of character, in dramatic art, in glow and harmony of colour, Scott put forth all the powers of a master poet. His too early death, like that of Shakespeare, leaves on us a cruel sense of the inexhaustible quality of his imagination. Prodigious excess in work destroyed in full maturity that splendid brain, and to the last he had magnificent bursts of his old power. But for this the imagination of Scott might have continued to range over the boundless field of human history. What we have is mainly of the Middle Ages, the genius of chivalry in all its colour and moral beauty; but he had no exclusive spirit and no crude doctrines. And as Cervantes is ever reminding us how much of the mediæval chivalry was doomed, so Scott, whilst singing the same plaintive death-chant, is for ever reminding us how much of it is destined to endure.

The genius of Scott has raised up a school of historical romance; and though the best work of Chateaubriand, Manzoni, and Bulwer may take rank as true art, the endless crowd of inferior imitations are nothing but a weariness to the flesh. A far higher place in the permanent field of beauty belongs to the work of Miss Edgeworth, Miss Austen, and George Eliot, who have founded a new school of romantic art, with the subtle observation, the delicate shades of character, and the indescribable *finesse* peculiarly adapted to women's work. These admirable pictures of society hold a rare and abiding place in English literature.

But assuredly black night will quickly cover the vast bulk of modern fiction—work as perishable as the generations whose idleness it has amused. It belongs not to the great creations of the world. Beside them it is flat and poor. Such facts in human nature as it reveals are trivial and special in themselves, and for the most part abnormal and unwholesome. I stand beside the ceaseless flow of this miscellaneous torrent as one stands watching the turbid rush of Thames at London Bridge, wondering whence it all comes, whither it all goes, what can be done with it, and what may be its ultimate function in the order of providence. To a reader who would nourish his taste on the boundless harvests of the poetry of mankind, this sewage outfall of to-day offers as little in creative as in moral value. Lurid and irregular streaks of imagination, extravagance of plot and incident, petty and mean subjects of study, forced and unnatural situations, morbid pathology of crime, dull copying of the dullest commonplace, melodramatic hurly-burly, form the certain evidence of an art that is exhausted, produced by men and women to whom it is become a mere trade, in an age wherein change and excitement have corrupted the power of pure enjoyment.

Genius, industry, subtlety, and ingenuity have (it must yet be acknowledged) thrown their best into the fiction of to-day ; and not a few works of undeniable brilliancy and vigour have been produced. Of course everybody reads, and every one enjoys, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer, the Brontes, Trollope, George

Eliot. Far be it from any man, even the severest student, to eschew them. There are no doubt typical works of theirs which will ultimately be recognised as within the immortal cycle of English literature, in the nobler sense of this term. He would be a bold man who should say that *Pickwick* and *Vanity Fair*, the *Last Days of Pompeii* and *Jane Eyre*, the *Last Chronicle of Barset* and *Silas Marner*, will never take rank in the roll which opens with *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa*, the *Vicar* and *Tristram Shandy*. It may be that the future will find in them insight into nature and beauty of creative form, such as belongs to the order of all high imaginative art. But as yet we are too near and too little dispassionate to decide this matter to-day. And, in the meantime, the indiscriminate zest for these delightful writers of our age too often dulls our taste for the undoubted masters of the world.

Certain it is that much, very much, of these fascinating moderns has neither the stamp of abiding beauty, nor the saving grace of moral truth. Dickens, alas! soon passed into a mannerism of artificial whimsicalities, alternating with shallow melodrama. Thackeray wearies his best lovers by a cynical monotony of meanness. By grace of a very rare genius, the best work of the Brontes is saved, as by fire, out of the repulsive sensationalism they started, destined to perish in shilling dreadfuls. Trollope only now and then rises, as by a miracle, out of his craft as an industrious recorder of pleasant commonplace. And even George Eliot, conscientious artist as she is,

too often wrote as if she were sinking under the effort to live up to her early reputation. On all of these the special evils of their time weigh more or less. They write too often as if it were their publishers and not their genius which prompted the work; or as if their task were to provide a new set of puzzles in rare psychological problems.

In romance every one can write something; clever men and women can write smart things, extremely clever men and women can write remarkable things. And thus, whilst so large a part of the educated world writes fiction, what we get even from the best is too often sensational, morbid, sardonic, artificial, trivial, or mean. We all read them and shall continue to read them; and thousands of tales which have far inferior quality. But they lack the moral and social insight of true romance. They are not the stuff of which our daily reading should consist. They are destined for the most part to a not very distant oblivion. When a regular training of the poetic capacity shall have become general, their enormous vogue will be over. In the meantime let each of us deal with them as he finds right, remembering this, that they can hardly claim a place as an indispensable part of our serious education.

In substance the same thing holds good of the foreign romances of our own generation. Neither German, Italian, nor Spanish fiction, so far as I know, can pretend to a place beside the modern fiction of England and France. And he would be a bold

patriot who should rank the fiction of England, since the death of Scott, above that of Victor Hugo, George Sand, Balzac, Mérimée, Théophile Gautier, and Dumas. But the wonderful powers of all these are unhappily counterbalanced by the defects of their qualities. If Victor Hugo be in the sum the greatest European literary force since Goethe and Scott, the readers of his prose have too often to suffer from rank stage balderdash. Balzac wearies us all by a sardonic monotony of wickedness; George Sand by an unwomanly proneness to idealise lust. *Notre Dame* and *Les Misérables*, *Père Goriot* and *Eugénie Grandet*, *Consuelo* and *La Mare aux Diables*, *Capitaine Fracasse* and *Vingt Ans Après* are books of extraordinary vigour; but it would seem to me treason against art to rank even the best of them with immortal masterpieces, such as *Tom Jones* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

Contemporary English romance, however insipid and crude in art, is usually wholesome, or at worst harmless; but what words remain for the typical French novel which at present fills the place of reading to so large a part of educated Europe? By the accident of language the French novel is written, not for Frenchmen, but for all men of culture and leisure; its world is not the real world of Frenchmen at all, but an artificial world of cosmopolitan origin, which has its conventional home on the boulevards; its writers are not the leaders of French literature, but a special school of feuilletonists. It is intensely smart, diabolically ingenious, and with a really masterly

command of its own peculiar style and method. Beside it the raw stuff which dribbles incessantly into the circulating libraries of England, Germany, and America, is the work of amateurs who are still learning the difficulties of their own trade. But with all this skill, it is to me even more unreadable. The contortions it makes in its efforts to twist out novel situations, the mere literary knowingness, the monotonous variations on its one string of adultery—adultery without love, sentiment, or excuse; a purely conventional and feuilleton kind of adultery, existing nowhere in nature, unless it be in some gambling centre of blackguardly "high life;" its want of any trace of what can be justly regarded as real art, or as real human nature—all these make the "French novel" to me more unapproachable than a Leipsic edition of the Apostolic Fathers. Men of brains and knowledge read it—read it, we know, daily; just as they smoke cavendish, and as the French subaltern takes absinthe. But no one enjoys it. *Non ragioniam di lor, non guarda, ma passa.* To be addicted to it, is a vice; to manufacture it, is a crime. They are not books, these things. To imbibe this compound, is not to read.

In Europe, as in England, Walter Scott remains as yet the last in the series of the great creative spirits of the human race. No one of his successors, however clear be the genius and the partial success of some of them, belongs to the same grand type of mind, or has now a lasting place in the roll of the

immortals. It should make us sad to reflect that a generation, which already has begun to treat Scott with the indifference that is the lot of a "classic," should be ready to fill its insatiable maw with the ephemeral wares of the booksellers, and the reeking garbage of the boulevard.

We all read Scott's romances, as we have all read Hume's History of England; but how often do we read them, how zealously, with what sympathy and understanding? I am told that the last discovery of modern culture is that Scott's prose is commonplace; that the young men at our universities are far too critical to care for his artless sentences and flowing descriptions. They prefer Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Mallock, and the Euphuism of young Oxford, just as some people prefer a Dresden Shepherdess to the Caryatides of the Erectheum, pronounce Fielding to be low, and Mozart to be *passé*. As boys love lollypops, so these juvenile fops love to roll phrases about under the tongue, as if phrases in themselves had a value apart from thoughts, feelings, great conceptions, or human sympathy. For Scott is just one of the poets (we may call poets all the great creators in prose or in verse) of whom one never wearies, just as one can listen to Beethoven, or watch the sunrise or the sunset day by day with new delight. I think I can read the *Antiquary*, or the *Bride of Lammermoor*, *Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward*, and *Old Mortality*, at least once a year afresh.

Scott is a perfect library in himself. A constant

reader of romances would find that it needed months to go through even the best pieces of the inexhaustible painter of eight full centuries and every type of man; and he might repeat the process of reading him ten times in a lifetime without a sense of fatigue or sameness. The poetic beauty of Scott's creations is almost the least of his great qualities. It is the universality of his sympathy that is so truly great, the justice of his estimates, the insight into the spirit of each age, his intense absorption of self in the vast epic of human civilisation. What are the old almanacs that they so often give us as histories beside these living pictures of the ordered succession of ages? As in Homer himself, we see in this prose Iliad of modern history, the battle of the old and the new, the heroic defence of ancient strongholds, the long impending and inevitable doom of mediæval life. Strong men and proud women struggle against the destiny of modern society, unconsciously working out its ways, undauntedly defying its power. How just is our island Homer! Neither Greek nor Trojan sways him; Achilles is his hero; Hector is his favourite; he loves the councils of chiefs, and the palace of Priam; but the swine-herd, the charioteer, the slave-girl, the hound, the beggar, and the herdsman, all glow alike in the harmonious colouring of his peopled epic. We see the dawn of our English nation, the defence of Christendom against the Koran, the grace and the terror of feudalism, the rise of monarchy out of baronies, the rise of parliaments out of monarchy,

the rise of industry out of serfage, the pathetic ruin of chivalry, the splendid death-struggle of Catholicism, the sylvan tribes of the mountain (remnants of our pre-historic forefathers) beating themselves to pieces against the hard advance of modern industry; we see the grim heroism of the Bible-martyrs, the catastrophe of feudalism overwhelmed by a practical age which knew little of its graces, and almost nothing of its virtues. Such is Scott, who, we may say, has done for the various phases of modern history, what Shakespeare has done for the manifold types of human character. And this glorious and most human and most historical of poets, without whom our very conception of human development would have ever been imperfect, this manliest, and truest, and widest of romancers we neglect for some hothouse hybrid of psychological analysis, for the wretched imitators of Balzac, and the jackanapes phrasemongering of some Osric of the day, who assures us that Scott is an absolute Philistine.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MISUSE OF BOOKS.

In speaking with enthusiasm of Scott, as of Homer, or of Shakespeare, or of Milton, or of any of the accepted masters of the world, I have no wish to insist dogmatically upon any single name, or two or three in particular. Our enjoyment and reverence of the great poets of the world is seriously injured nowadays by the habit we get of singling out some particular quality, some particular school of art, for intemperate praise, or, still worse, for intemperate abuse. Mr. Ruskin, I suppose, is answerable for the taste for this one-sided and spasmodic criticism; he asks readers to cast aside Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron, and to stick to—such goody-goody dribble as *Evangeline* and the *Angel in the House*. And now every young gentleman who has the trick of a few adjectives will languidly vow that Marlowe is supreme, or Murillo foul. It is the mark of rational criticism, as well as of healthy thought, to maintain an evenness of mind in judging of great works, to recognise great qualities in due proportion, to feel that defects are

made up by beauties, and beauties are often balanced by weakness. The true judgment implies a weighing of each work and each workman as a whole, in relation to the sum of human cultivation and the gradual advance of the movement of ages. And in this matter we shall usually find that the world is right, the world of the modern centuries and the nations of Europe together. It is unlikely, to say the least of it, that a young person who has hardly ceased making Latin verses will be able to reverse the decisions of the civilised world; and it is even more unlikely that Milton and Molière, Fielding and Scott, will ever be displaced by a poet who has unaccountably lain hid for one or two centuries. I know, that in the style of to-day, I ought hardly to venture to speak about poetry unless I am prepared to unfold the mysterious beauties of some unknown genius who has recently been unearthed by the Children of Light and Sweetness. I confess I have no such discovery to announce. I prefer to dwell in Gath and to pitch my tents in Ashdod; and I doubt the use of the sling as a weapon in modern war. I decline to go into hyperbolic eccentricities over unknown geniuses, and a single quality or power is not enough to rouse my enthusiasm. It is possible that no master ever painted a buttercup like this one, or the fringe of a robe like that one; that this poet has a unique subtlety, and that an undefinable music. I am still unconvinced, though the man who cannot see it, we are told, should at once retire to the place where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

I am against all gnashing of teeth, whether for or against a particular idol. I stand by the men, and by all the men, who have moved mankind to the depths of their souls, who have taught generations, and formed our life. If I say of Scott, that to have drunk in the whole of his glorious spirit is a liberal education in itself, I am asking for no exclusive devotion to Scott, to any poet, or any school of poets, or any age, or any country, to any style or any order of poet, one more than another. They are as various, fortunately, and as many-sided as human nature itself. If I delight in Scott, I love Fielding, and Richardson, and Sterne, and Goldsmith, and Defoe. Yes, and I will add Cooper and Marryat, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen—to confine myself to those who are already classics, to our own country, and to one form of art alone, and not to venture on the ground of contemporary romance in general. What I have said of Homer, I would say in a degree, but somewhat lower, of those great ancients who are the most accessible to us in English—Æschylus, Aristophanes, Virgil, and Horace. We need not so worship Shakespeare as to neglect Calderon, Molière, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Alfieri, Goethe, those dramatists, in many forms, and with genius the most diverse, who have so steadily set themselves to idealise the great types of public life and of the phases of human history. What I have said of Milton I would say of Dante, of Ariosto, of Petrarch, and of Tasso; and in a measure I would say it of Boccaccio and Chaucer, of Camoens

and Spenser, of Rabelais and of Cervantes, of Gil Blas and the Vicar of Wakefield, of Byron and of Shelley, of Goethe and of Schiller.

I protest that I am devoted to no school in particular: I condemn no school, I reject none. I am for the school of all the great men; and I am against the school of the smaller men. I care for Wordsworth as well as for Byron, for Burns as well as Shelley, for Boccaccio as well as for Milton, for Bunyan as well as Rabelais, for Cervantes as well as for Dante, for Corneille as well as for Shakespeare, for Goldsmith as well as Goethe. I stand by the sentence of the world; and I hold that in a matter so human and so broad as the highest poetry the judgment of the nations of Europe is pretty well settled, at any rate after a century or two of continuous reading and discussing. Let those who will assure us that no one can pretend to culture, unless he swear by Fra Angelico and Sandro Botticelli, by Arnolpho the son of Lapo, or the Lombardic bricklayers, by Martini and Galuppi (all, by the way, admirable men of the second rank); and so, in literature and poetry, there are some who will hear of nothing but Webster or Marlowe; Blake, Herrick, or Villon; William Langland or the Earl of Surrey; Guido Cavalcanti or Omar Kayyam. All of these are men of genius, and each with a special and inimitable gift of his own. But the busy world, which does not hunt poets as collectors hunt for curios, may fairly reserve these lesser lights for the time when they know the greatest well.

So, I say, think mainly of the greatest, of the best known, of those who cover the largest area of human history and man's common nature. Now when we come to count up these poets accepted by the unanimous voice of Europe, we have some thirty or forty names, and amongst them are some of the most voluminous of writers. I have been running over but one department of literature alone—the poetic. I have been naming those only, whose names are household words with us, and the poets for the most part of modern Europe. Yet even here we have a list which is usually found in not less than a hundred volumes at least. Now poetry and the highest kind of romance are exactly that order of literature which not only will bear to be read many times, but that of which the true value can only be gained by frequent, and indeed habitual, reading. A man can hardly be said to know the 12th Mass or the 9th Symphony, by virtue of having once heard them played ten years ago; he can hardly be said to take air and exercise because he took a country walk once last autumn. And so, he can hardly be said to know Scott or Shakespeare, Molière or Cervantes, when he once read them since the close of his schooldays, or amidst the daily grind of his professional life. The immortal and universal poets of our race are to be read and re-read till their music and their spirit are a part of our nature; they are to be thought over and digested till we live in the world they created for us; they are to be read devoutly, as devout men read

their Bible and fortify their hearts with psalms. For as the old Hebrew singer heard the heavens declare the glory of their Maker, and the firmament showing his handiwork, so in the long roll of poetry we see transfigured the strength and beauty of humanity, the joys and sorrows, the dignity and struggles, the long life-history of our common kind.

I have said but little of the more difficult poetry, and the religious meditations of the great idealists in prose and verse, whom it needs a concentrated study to master. Some of these are hard to all men, and at all seasons. The Divine Comedy, in its way, reaches as deep in its thoughtfulness as Descartes himself. But these books, if they are difficult to all, are impossible to the gluttons of the circulating library. To these munchers of vapid memoirs and monotonous tales such books are closed indeed. The power of enjoyment and of understanding is withered up within them. To the besotted gambler on the turf the lonely hill-side glowing with heather grows to be as dreary as a prison; and so, too, a man may listen nightly to burlesques, till *Fidelio* inflicts on him intolerable fatigue. One may be a devourer of books, and be actually incapable of reading a hundred lines of the wisest and the most beautiful. To read one of such books comes only by habit, as prayer is impossible to one who habitually dreads to be alone.

In an age of steam it seems almost idle to speak of Dante, the most profound, the most meditative, the most prophetic of all poets, in whose epic the panorama

of mediæval life, of feudalism at its best, and Christianity at its best, stands, as in a microcosm, transfigured, judged, and measured. To most men the *Paradise Lost*, with all its mighty music and its idyllic pictures of human nature, of our first child-parents in their naked purity and their awakening thought, is a serious and ungrateful task—not to be ranked with the simple enjoyments; it is a possession to be acquired only by habit. The great religious poets, the imaginative teachers of the heart, are never easy reading. But the reading of them is a religious habit, rather than an intellectual effort. I pretend not to be dealing with a matter so deep and high as religion, or indeed with education in the fuller sense. I will say nothing of that side of reading which is really hard study, an effort of duty, matter of meditation and reverential thought. I need speak not of such reading as that of the Bible; the moral reflections of Socrates, of Aristotle, of Confucius; the Confessions of St. Augustine and the City of God; the discourses of St. Bernard, of Bossuet, of Bishop Butler, of Jeremy Taylor; the vast philosophical visions that were opened to the eyes of Bacon and Descartes; the thoughts of Pascal and Vauvenargues, of Diderot and Hume, of Condorcet and de Maistre; the problem of man's nature as it is told in the *Excursion*, or in *Faust*, in *Cain*, or in the *Pilgrim's Progress;* the unsearchable outpouring of the heart in the great mystics of many ages and many races; be the mysticism that of David or of John; of Mahomet or of

Bouddha; of Fénelon or of Shelley; of à Kempis or of Goethe.

I pass by all these. For I am speaking now of the use of books in our leisure hours. I will take the books of simple enjoyment, books that one can laugh over and weep over; and learn from, and laugh or weep again; which have in them humour, truth, human nature in all its sides, pictures of the great phases of human history; and withal sound teaching in honesty, manliness, gentleness, patience. Of such books, I say, books accepted by the voice of all mankind as matchless and immortal, there is a complete library at hand for every man, in his every mood, whatever his tastes or his acquirements. To know merely the hundred volumes or so of which I have spoken would involve the study of years. But who can say that these books are read as they might be, that we do not neglect them for something in a new cover, or which catches our eye in a library? It is not merely to the idle and unreading world that this complaint holds good. It is the insatiable readers themselves who so often read to the least profit. Of course they have read all these household books many years ago, read them, and judged them, and put them away for ever. They will read infinite dissertations about these authors; they will write you essays on their works; they will talk most learned criticism about them. But it never occurs to them that such books have a daily and perpetual value, such as the devout Christian finds in his morning and evening

psalm; that the music of them has to sink into the soul by continual renewal; that we have to live with them and in them, till their ideal world habitually surrounds us in the midst of the real world; that their great thoughts have to stir us daily anew, and their generous passion has to warm us hour by hour; just as we need each day to have our eyes filled by the light of heaven, and our blood warmed by the glow of the sun. I vow that, when I see men, forgetful of the perennial poetry of the world, muck-raking in a litter of fugitive refuse, I think of that wonderful scene in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the Interpreter shows the wayfarers the old man raking in the straw and dust, whilst he will not see the Angel who offers him a crown of gold and precious stones.

This gold, refined beyond the standard of the goldsmith, these pearls of great price, the united voice of mankind has assured us are found in those immortal works of every age and of every race whose names are household words throughout the world. And we shut our eyes to them for the sake of the straw and litter of the nearest library or bookshop. A lifetime will hardly suffice to know, as they ought to be known, these great masterpieces of man's genius. How many of us can name ten men who may be said entirely to know (in the sense in which a thoughtful Christian knows the Psalms and the Epistles) even a few of the greatest? I take them almost at random, and I name Homer, Æschylus, Aristophanes, Virgil,

Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Calderon, Corneille, Molière, Milton, Fielding, Goethe, Scott. Of course every one has read these, but who really knows them, the whole meaning of them? They are too often taken "as read," as they say in the railway meetings.

Take of this immortal choir the liveliest, the easiest, the most familiar, take for the moment the three—Cervantes, Molière, Fielding. Here we have three men who unite the profoundest insight into human nature with the most inimitable wit: *Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* in one; "sober, steadfast, and demure," and yet with "Laughter holding both his sides." And in all three, different as they are, is an unfathomable pathos, a brotherly pity for all human weakness, spontaneous sympathy with all human goodness. To know *Don Quixote*, that is to follow out the whole mystery of its double world, is to know the very tragi-comedy of human life, the contrast of the ideal with the real, of chivalry with good sense, of heroic failure with vulgar utility, of the past with the present, of the impossible sublime with the possible common-place. And yet to how many reading men is *Don Quixote* little more than a book to laugh over in boy-hood! So Molière is read or witnessed; we laugh and we praise. But how little do we study with insight that elaborate gallery of human character; those consummate types of almost every social phenomenon; that genial and just judge of imposture, folly, vanity, affectation, and insincerity; that tragic

picture of the brave man born out of his time, too proud and too just to be of use in his age! Was ever truer word said than that about Fielding as "the prose Homer of human nature?" And yet how often do we forget in *Tom Jones* the beauty of unselfishness, the well-spring of goodness, the tenderness, the manly healthiness and heartiness underlying its frolic and its satire, because we are absorbed, it may be, in laughing at its humour, or are simply irritated by its grossness! Nay, *Robinson Crusoe* contains (not for boys but for men) more religion, more philosophy, more psychology, more political economy, more anthropology, than are found in many elaborate treatises on these special subjects. And yet, I imagine, grown men do not often read *Robinson Crusoe*, as the article has it, "for instruction of life and ensample of manners." The great books of the world we have once read; we take them as read; we believe that we read them; at least, we believe that we know them. But to how few of us are they the daily mental food! For once that we take down our Milton, and read a book of that "voice," as Wordsworth says, "whose sound is like the sea," we take up fifty times a magazine with something about Milton, or about Milton's grandmother, or a book stuffed with curious facts about the houses in which he lived, and the juvenile ailments of his first wife.

And whilst the roll of the great men yet unread is to all of us so long, whilst years are not enough to master the very least of them, we are incessantly

searching the earth for something new or strangely forgotten. Brilliant essays are for ever extolling some minor light. It becomes the fashion to grow rapturous about the obscure Elizabethan dramatists; about the note of refinement in the lesser men of Queen Anne; it is pretty to swear by Lyly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia;* to vaunt Lovelace and Herrick, Marvell and Donne, Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne. All of them are excellent men, who have written delightful things, that may very well be enjoyed when we have utterly exhausted the best. But when one meets bevies of hyper-æsthetic young maidens, in lack-a-daisical gowns, who simper about Greene and John Ford (authors, let us trust, that they never have read) one wonders if they all know *Lear* or ever heard of *Alceste.* Since to nine out of ten of the "general readers," the very best is as yet more than they have managed to assimilate, this fidgeting after something curious is a little premature and perhaps artificial.

For this reason I stand amazed at the lengths of fantastic curiosity to which persons, far from learned, have pushed the mania for collecting rare books, or prying into out-of-the-way holes and corners of literature. They conduct themselves as if all the works attainable by ordinary diligence were to them sucked as dry as an orange. Says one, "I came across a very curious book, mentioned in a parenthesis in the *Religio Medici;* only one other copy exists in this country." I will not mention the work, because I

know that, if I did, at least fifty libraries would be ransacked for it, which would be unpardonable waste of time. "I am bringing out," says another quite simply, "the lives of the washerwomen of the Queens of England." And when it comes out we shall have a copious collection of washing-books some centuries old, and at length understand the mode of ironing a ruff in the early mediæval period. A very learned friend of mine thinks it perfectly monstrous that a public library should be without an adequate collection of works in Dutch, though I believe he is the only frequenter of it who can read that language. Not long ago I procured for a Russian scholar a manuscript copy of a very rare work by Greene, the contemporary of Shakespeare. Greene's *Funeralls* is, I think, as dismal and worthless a set of lines as one often sees; and as it has slumbered for nearly three hundred years, I should be willing to let it be its own undertaker. But this unsavoury carrion is at last to be dug out of its grave; for it is now translated into Russian and published in Moscow (to the honour and glory of the Russian professor) in order to delight and inform the Muscovite public, where perhaps not ten in a million can as much as read Shakespeare. This or that collector again, with the labour of half a lifetime and by means of half his fortune, has amassed a library of old plays, every one of them worthless in diction, in plot, in sentiment, and in purpose; a collection far more stupid and uninteresting in fact than the burlesques and pantomimes of the last fifty years.

And yet this insatiable student of old plays will probably know less of Molière and Alfieri than Molière's housekeeper or Alfieri's valet; and possibly he has never looked into such poets as Calderon and Vondel.

Collecting rare books and forgotten authors is perhaps of all the collecting manias the most foolish in our day. There is much to be said for rare china and curious beetles. The china is occasionally beautiful; and the beetles at least are droll. But rare books now are, by the nature of the case, worthless books; and their rarity usually consists in this, that the printer made a blunder in the text, or that they contain something exceptionally nasty or silly. To affect a profound interest in neglected authors and uncommon books, is a sign for the most part—not that a man has exhausted the resources of ordinary literature—but that he has no real respect for the greatest productions of the greatest men of the world. This bibliomania seizes hold of rational beings and so perverts them, that in the sufferer's mind the human race exists for the sake of the books, and not the books for the sake of the human race. There is one book they might read to good purpose, the doings of a great book collector—who once lived in La Mancha. To the collector, and sometimes to the scholar, the book becomes a fetich or idol, and is worthy of the worship of mankind, even if it be not of the slightest use to anybody. As the book exists, it must have the compliment paid it of being invited to the shelves.

The "library is imperfect without it," although the library will, so to speak, stink when it is there. The great books are of course the common books; and these are treated by collectors and librarians with sovereign contempt. The more dreadful an abortion of a book the rare volume may be, the more desperate is the struggle of libraries to possess it. Civilisation in fact has evolved a complete apparatus, an order of men, and a code of ideas, for the express purpose one may say of degrading the great books. It suffocates them under mountains of little books, and gives the place of honour to that which is plainly literary carrion.

Now I suppose, at the bottom of all this lies that rattle and restlessness of life which belongs to the industrial Maelström wherein we ever revolve. And connected therewith comes also that literary dandyism, which results from the pursuit of letters without any social purpose or any systematic faith. To read from the pricking of some cerebral itch rather than from a desire of forming judgments; to get, like an Alpine club stripling, to the top of some unscaled pinnacle of culture; to use books as a sedative, as a means of exciting a mild intellectual titillation, instead of as a means of elevating the nature; to dribble on in a perpetual literary gossip, in order to avoid the effort of bracing the mind to think—such is our habit in an age of utterly chaotic education. We read, as the bereaved poet made rhymes—

"For the unquiet heart and brain,
A use in measured language lies;
The sad mechanic exercise,
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain."

We, to whom steam and electricity have given almost everything excepting bigger brains and hearts, who have a new invention ready for every meeting of the Royal Institution, who want new things to talk about faster than children want new toys to break, we cannot take up the books we have seen about us since our childhood: Milton, or Molière, or Scott. It feels like donning knee-breeches and buckles, to read what everybody has read, what everybody can read, and which our very fathers thought good entertainment scores of years ago. Hard-worked men and over-wrought women crave an occupation which shall free them from their thoughts and yet not take them from their world. And thus it comes that we need at least a thousand new books every season, whilst we have rarely a spare hour left for the greatest of all. But I am getting into a vein too serious for our purpose: education is a long and thorny topic. I will cite but the words on this head of the great Bishop Butler. "The great number of books and papers of amusement which, of one kind or another, daily come in one's way, have in part occasioned, and most perfectly fall in with and humour, this idle way of reading and considering things. By this means time, even in solitude, is happily got rid of, without the pain of attention; neither is any part of it more

put to the account of idleness, one can scarce forbear saying is spent with less thought, than great part of that which is spent in reading." But this was written a century and a half ago, in 1729; since which date, let us trust, the multiplicity of print and the habits of desultory reading have considerably abated.

A philosopher with whom I hold (but whose opinions I have no present intention of propounding) proposed a method of dealing with this indiscriminate use of books, which I think is worthy of attention. He framed a short collection of books for constant and general reading. He put it forward "with the view of guiding the more thoughtful minds among the people in their choice for constant use." He declares that, "both the intellect and the moral character suffer grievously at the present time from irregular reading." It was not intended to put a bar upon other reading, or to supersede special study. It is designed as a type of a healthy and rational syllabus of essential books, fit for common teaching and daily use. It presents a working epitome of what is best and most enduring in the literature of the world. The entire collection would form in the shape in which books now exist in modern libraries, something like five hundred volumes. They embrace books both of ancient and modern times, in all the five principal languages of modern Europe. It is divided into four sections: Poetry, Science, History, Religion.

The principles on what it is framed are these: First, it collects the best in all the great departments of

human thought, so that no part of education shall be wholly wanting. Next, it puts together the greatest books, of universal and permanent value, and the greatest and the most enduring only. Next, it measures the greatness of books not by their brilliancy, or even their learning, but by their power of presenting some typical chapter in thought, some dominant phase of history; or else it measures them by their power of idealising man and nature, or of giving harmony to our moral and intellectual activity. Lastly, the test of the general value of books is the permanent relation they bear to the common civilisation of Europe.

Some such firm foot-hold in the vast and increasing torrent of literature it is certainly urgent to find, unless all that is great in literature is to be borne away in the flood of books. With this, we may avoid an interminable wandering over a pathless waste of waters. Without it, we may read everything and know nothing; we may be curious about anything that chances, and indifferent to everything that profits. Having such a catalogue before our eyes, with its perpetual warning—*non multa sed multum* —we shall see how with our insatiable consumption of print we wander, like unclassed spirits, round the outskirts only of those Elysian fields where the great dead dwell and hold high converse. As it is we hear but in a faint echo that voice which cries :—

> "Onorate l'altissimo Poeta :
> L'ombra sua torna, ch'era dipartita."

We need to be reminded every day, how many are the books of inimitable glory, which, with all our eagerness after reading, we have never taken in our hands. It will astonish most of us to find how much of our very industry is given to the books which leave no mark, how often we rake in the litter of the printing-press, whilst a crown of gold and rubies is offered us in vain.

POSTSCRIPT.—I have elsewhere given, with some explanation and introduction, the library of Auguste Comte, which forms the basis of the whole of the essay above. The catalogue is to be found in many of his publications, as the *Catechism*, Trübner and Co. (translated: London, 1858); and also in the fourth volume of the *Positive Polity* (translated: London, 1877, pp. 362, 483), where its use and meaning are explained. Those who may take an erroneous idea of its purpose, and may think that such a catalogue would serve in the way of an ordinary circulating library, may need to be reminded that it is designed as the basis of a scheme of education, for one particular system of philosophy, and as the manual of an organised form of religion. It is, in fact, the literary resumé of Positivist teaching; and as such alone can it be used. It is, moreover, designed to be of common use to all Western Europe, and to be ultimately extended to all classes. It is essentially a people's library for popular instruction; it is of permanent use only; and it is intended to serve as a type. Taken in connection with the *Calendar*, which contains the names of nearly two hundred and fifty authors, it may serve as a guide of the books "that the world would not willingly let die." But it must be remembered that it has no special relation to current views of education, to English literature, much less to the literature of the day. It was drawn up thirty years ago by a French philosopher, who passed his life in Paris, and who had read no new books for twenty years. And it was designedly limited by him to such a compass that hard-worked men might hope to master it; in

order to give them an *aperçu* of what the ancient and the modern world had left of most great in each language and in each department of thought. To attempt to use it, or to judge it, from any point of view but this, would be entirely to mistake its character and object.

## II.

# CULTURE: A DIALOGUE

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GRAND CHAMBERLAIN (*introducing* ROLAND): "See, sir! No buckles to his shoes!
DUMOURIEZ: Ah, sir! All is lost.

"The sovereign'st thing on earth
Was parmaceti for an inward bruise."

IN the course of my autumn ramble on the Continent it was my fortune to meet a young gentleman from Prussia, in whose bright and cultured mind I soon recognised one who is a great favourite with us, Arminius von Thunder-ten-dronck.[1] We were soon on easy terms, and he spoke often of his friends in England, and especially of the brilliant writer who first made the German known to us here. "Ah!" said I, with enthusiasm, "there is a master of our English tongue, spiritual with true Teutonic *geist*, radiant as the sunniest wit of France. Admit," I cried, "that Heines are of every soil, peculiar or confined to none."

"Yes," said he frankly, "I am glad we are agreed on that; a born poet, a consummate critic. He may

[1] He, whose brilliant and caustic sayings are to be read in *Friendship's Garland* by Matthew Arnold.

yet loosen the yoke of the Philistine from your necks. But they tell me of late that he is but playing with the sling of David, and showing boys and girls how prettily he wields it. Tell me, do you think that in very truth he hates this Goliath who oppresses you, and in his soul desires to slay him?"

"Nay," said I, with a smile, "these serener natures desire neither to hate nor to slay, not even evil itself. It is unmannerly, to say nothing of the Gospel. Thus much have I learned of Sweetness and Light."

"Well," replied Arminius, "but in this same discourse upon Culture with which my friend so gracefully retired from his academic chair, in which from report there must have been fine things as finely said, I am told there were lurking traces of your superlative dandyism, some of your flabby religious phrases, your hash of metaphysical old bones. Was it so indeed, or have they wholly misinformed me?"

"Indeed they have," I rejoined warmly, hurt to hear our first living critic so treated, and feeling that the Teuton would have been the better had he heard it; "it was a discourse of a solemn and even of a devotional kind, subtle in thought and form, with I know not what of antique courtliness and classic grace——"

"What your fine ladies call an air of distinction," cried he abruptly.

"It might have come," said I, "straight from some lost dialogue of Plato, such the ethereal glance of the idea, such the lyric charm of words."

"Yes," muttered he, with one of his learned quips, "τὸ κομψὸν καὶ τὸ καινοτομὸν καὶ τὸ ζητητικόν."

"Culture," said I, not noticing his interruption, of which I hardly followed the drift,—"culture is the moral and social passion for doing good; it is the study and pursuit of perfection, and this perfection is the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality. It teaches us to conceive of perfection as that in which the characters of beauty and intelligence are both present, which unites the two noblest of things, Sweetness and Light."

"Good," said the German, smiling as I warmed over these beautiful words. "Well said, and truly said; now you are coming to the point."

"Ah," I replied, "I thought you would see it aright before long."

"Yes," said he, "a truth which our great Goethe taught all his life, and which the small parasitic fry who follow him have carried abroad far and near. But stay," cried he, as if doubting; "why is all this called culture? I had not so understood the word in your most mysterious insular tongue."

"Well," said I, rather at a loss, "because he tells us it is so."

"Nay," said the German, in his arrogant way instructing me in my own mother tongue. "I thought your word culture implied simply the amenities of education, the training of the taste—*belles lettres*, and æsthetics, in short?"

"True," I answered, a little piqued by his pertinacity, "so it does in dictionaries, in common writing, and in ordinary speech; but a master of style like our teacher may put his own sense on the word, I suppose?"

"Eh!" said Arminius in his biting way, "and carp at those who take it in its usual sense?"

"My friend," I replied in a deprecating tone, "you are in this unjust, and exaggerate the nature of his attack. He a little misconceived the meaning of his opponents. Were it not so there would have been no trace of the slightest irritation."

"Misconception, attack, irritation!" shouted Arminius, with his reckless laugh, "this of your Ithuriel and Ariel in one! His spear-point dipped in aromatic vinegar, I suppose! Well, go on," said he, seeing that I was really hurt by his rough humour; "go on with your account of Sweetness and Light; we seem to be rather wandering from it at present."

"Go on?" I replied seriously; "with what am I to go on?"

"Why, go on," retorted the trenchant German, "and explain to me, as you have undertaken to do, how this perfection, this harmonious expression of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature (to adopt your own words), how, in short, this same sweetness and light is to be attained. You have excellently described, in a vein which indeed recalls to me many a fine bit from Goethe, and even from Plato, a very noble condition or state of

the soul. We can all describe this state in words, though not in words so fine as you have chosen. Let me now ask you to describe the process by which it is attained."

"Attained? got at?" said I drearily, for I felt stunned by this unexpected question.

"Yes," rejoined he in a resolute tone; "how is it got at?" and he waited for my answer.

"I suppose it comes," said I vaguely.

"But if it does not come," he retorted.

"Nay," I rejoined gently, for I was now conscious of my advantage, "forgive me, but you are asking too much. We began by describing (adequately, as you admit) a lofty state of the soul, the goodness and delights of which every tunable spirit is in itself apt to understand. There is no question here of some crabbed system,—it is no mechanical method, no ambitious philosophy, no syllabus of universal education, we are revealing. Culture, my friend, is an inspiration, a glow, an afflatus which steals into the attuned soul, and into no other. O that you had heard him dwell on it himself with that well-bred ardour and in that simple unsystematic way which best suits his tastes and his powers! You ask too much if you look to us for a system of philosophy. 'Tis ours but to cull the finer flowerets, to scent out the hidden perfumes, along the by-paths in the garden of truth;" and I uttered this with some conscious humility, for I confess that I was thinking of Montaigne.

"Ah!" said the German brusquely, "so poodles scent out truffles. But tell me how to find the truffles without myself becoming a poodle."

"Train your soul, then," I cried with spirit, "to feel sweetness and light. Be the καλοκἀγαθός, or if you are not, listen to one who is! Ah! had you but heard with what light keen hand he touched the gross hide of our English Philistinism, as it sat squat like a toad beside our poor dazed countrymen; had you but heard the Olympian scorn with which he lashed our machinery, our wealth, our formalism, the hideous and grotesque illusions of our middle-class liberalism, and Protestantism, and industrialism! Is it not something to have one amongst us before whose touch these creatures cower? Come, tell me, do you then maintain, love, defend these things?" I said, pushing the German by this home-thrust.

"Softly," he replied, steadily enough. "Do you ask if I, Arminius, love these things? Do I love Philistines or the friends of Philistines? Come, we are at one after all. Is not this your Admirable Crichton, my own fast friend and brother in arms? Do I not admire and follow him when he girds on his sword, and grieve to see him lounging with that ineffable haw-haw air of your Rotten Row? But are we not of one bone, or am I then a Philistine?"

"Forgive me," I cried—and as I looked into the clear eyes of the young Teuton I felt that I was doing him a wrong—"but you do now see how noble this love of perfection, this culture is; that it is a state of

spiritual health, an equipoise of the living soul, a harmony of its intellectual and moral faculties?"

"Yes," he replied, "admirably put. Plato has not drawn it better. And now, then, how do you get it? It is very good to tell me how beautiful this is; but if a physician tells me only what a beautiful thing health is, how happy and strong it makes those who possess it, and omits to tell me how I can gain health, or says only, Be healthy, desire, seek after health, I call him no physician, but a quack. So, if I describe in words a very admirable state of the soul, it matters little what I call it. I might say this beautiful and god-like state is such and such, and I call it fiddlestick or sauerkraut, or the like; but what am I profited unless I learn how this same fiddlestick, or sauerkraut, or culture (call it as you please), comes to a man? Men of sense care little for names so long as they get the thing."

"Now, are you serious, my friend?" I rejoined, "that one who can describe culture and its gifts in words like those can have left us no clue how to get culture?"

"Well, what is it, then?" said the downright German.

"Why," replied I earnestly, "temper your soul to feel those impulses towards action, help, and beneficence, the desire for stopping human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing the sum of human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it. Call for more light, more sweetness——"

"Call!" he broke in with his sardonic way; "call spirits from the vasty deep; but will they come when thou dost call them?"

"And then," I went on, without noticing his jest, "attune the soul to a state of harmony; let not the least breath of vulgarity, restlessness, or vehemence disturb its self-possession; temper it to that spirit of inexhaustible indulgence towards all things good or evil, to that repose——"

"Which marks the caste of Vere de Vere," laughed the incorrigible Prussian.

"Lieber Herr," said I, determined to be unruffled, "this is hardly fair. Culture, as I am explaining, is all this, and more than I have said or can say; and that because the moral and social passion for doing good, the noble aspiration to leave the world better, the social idea, I may say, comes in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and primary part. So culture, you must see, includes all these things, and harmonises them. They are but the raw materials, the elements of culture."

"The passion for doing good, then," he said, "is permitted to come into your conception of culture?"

"Certainly," I rejoined; "a most charming ingredient of it, properly subdued and sweetened."

"The butter in your omelette!" cried he, with one of his shocking peals of laughter. "You have read, I suppose," he went on presently, "the letters of your Lord Chesterfield to his son?"

"Yes," I replied; "there was a fine gentleman

indeed, with an inexhaustible indulgence both towards himself and towards others!"

"Good!" said the Prussian. "And you remember the passage in which, in the course of a panegyric on breeding, he breaks forth, or (in fairness to him and to you) I will say glows forth, into the saying that a Frenchman, who possesses the cultivated manner habitual to his countrymen, *and at the same time has a fund* of virtue, education, and good sense, is the first of the human race. Do you see no risk, now, that the *fund* of virtue, education, and good sense may become rather an extra in your finishing academy, and the science of mental deportment may be unduly developed?"

"I really fail to follow you," I answered, for I hardly knew what he would say next. "Culture, as I am showing you, includes in itself these valuable gifts and faculties."

"Good," said he; "this talisman, then, this something, this culture, if that word please you, is a gift yet better than active beneficence?"

"Surely," said I; "for it includes this, and chastens its sallies by good taste."

"And it is yet better," he went on, "than a passionate desire for truth?"

"True!" I replied, with some pathos, "for it belongs to the heart as much as to the head."

"And it is yet better than any social philosophy?" said he.

"Oh!" I answered as humbly as I could say it,

"culture sits in judgment on all philosophies, social as well as natural. This is, indeed, its peculiar function and privilege."

"And it is yet better than religion?" he asked.

"Yes!" I replied, quite boldly; "it coincides with it, and passes beyond it. Only, whereas religion is the voice of the deepest human experience, so culture combines all the voices of human experience,—art, science, poetry, philosophy, history, as well as religion. Culture," said I, with enthusiasm, "is perfection in all things; in everything it fixes standards of perfection, and standards which are real. Perfection in all things! In all things perfection! Ambrosial grace, immortal calm!"

"And your Seraphic Doctor is willing to teach you all this?" cried Arminius, almost fiercely.

"Yes," I replied, suffused with pride as I thought on my teacher.

"And he knows all this?" shouted the excitable German.

"It would indeed appear so," said I calmly, enjoying his manifest confusion.

"Gott im Himmel!" murmured my ungovernable friend; and he was silent as if musing.

"Ah!" he went on after a long pause, "I had never yet done justice then wholly to my friend. What a range of gifts—what a mastery of knowledge!" It was now my turn to triumph. "I have much," he went on," humbly enough, "to learn from you. Tell me, now, in this noble aim of diminishing the sum of

human misery, you do not rest until you see the sources of the poison subtly pervading our social system? You put trust in your diagnosis of its morbid symptoms?"

"Your language savours of the mechanical," I replied, with quiet pride; "but it is surely not we who are content with unintelligent benevolence."

"Right!" he said; "then how do you describe the basis of your social philosophy?"

"Remember, my friend," I rejoined, with a confident smile, "culture knows nothing so finite as a system."

"No!" he answered; "not any system, but you have principles? These principles are of course coherent; they are interdependent, subordinate, and derivative, I presume?"

I was still silent, and smiled as blandly as was courteous.

"They are derived," he went on, "through some definite logical process surely, either from history, or from consciousness, or from experiment, or the like? They agree in part or in whole, or they disagree, with the stated principles of known moralists and thinkers? They can be harmonised with other branches of philosophy as a whole; they can be grasped by the student and imparted to the disciple. Your principles are of this sort, I suppose?" said he, puzzled by my continued silence.

"My friend," I replied, laughing aloud, though, I trust, always within the limits of the courteous and

the graceful, "has Dagon stricken thee, too? Why so, too, say the mere uncircumcised, the creatures of systems and methods. Away with them, my friend, and their abstractions, their limitations, their immaturities. Learn how culture—with that flexibility which sweetness and light give, with that exquisite sensibility to truth which is its note—has no need of these leading-strings and finger-posts. It is possessed ever by its own intelligent eagerness after the things of the mind. It is eternally passing onwards and seeking—seeking and passing onwards eternally. Where the bee sucks, there suck I," I murmured cheerily, as I observed the increasing bewilderment of my philosophical friend.

"Well!" said he, after a long pause for reflection, for, as I expected, this was something undreamt of in his philosophy—if, indeed, it be not in any man's philosophy; "you search and probe and test the schemes of the great thinkers of mankind, making known what therein is best and most fruitful?"

"Certainly!" I replied. "Culture, as I have said, is nourished on the best ideas of the time. It diffuses these ideas, it clarifies them, it attunes them. As I have told you, its function is to humanise *all* knowledge."

"Then you have a clear and intense grasp," he went on, "upon definite doctrines in philosophy?"

"Clear," I replied with rather a sly touch, "if you please, but sweetness knows nothing *intense*, my friend."

"Well!" he cried impatiently, "but you grasp great doctrines of thought?"

"I trust that we do," said I mildly.

"What are they, then?" replied he. But I only smiled, not less softly than before. "Are they, as one may say, *à priori* or *à posteriori*, metaphysical or positive, experimental or intuitional?"

"My dear Arminius," I said, after a pause, "so also ask the Sadducees and publicans. What, again, I say, has culture to do with all these finalities, rigidities, inadequacies, and immaturities? Where be their quiddits, and their quillits, now? Do you ask of culture what are its principles and ideas? The *best* principles, the *best* ideas, the *best* knowledge: the perfect! the ideal! the complete!"

"But how does it recognise these," he asked helplessly, evidently now striking at random, "if it has neither system, method, nor logic?"

"By Insight," I replied triumphantly; "by its own inborn sensibility to beauty, truth, and life."

"But if a man is born without it?" he asked.

"God help him then," I rejoined, "for I cannot;" and as Arminius was still silent, I hummed gaily to myself, "Sordid, unfeeling, reprobate, degraded, spiritless outcast;" and indeed there are but too many in that plight.

"Tell me," said Arminius, at length recovering himself for a last effort, "are you then of the intuitional school?"

"School!" I replied, as contemptuously as was consistent with perfect politeness, "no! nor are we

anything intuitional at all. Culture, I say, questions, studies, ponders. But as in other views study follows set methods, in this view study is guided only by perennial curiosity and an innate sense of refinement. There is thus harmony, but no system ; instinct, but no logic ; eternal growth, and no maturity ; everlasting movement, and nothing acquiesced in ; perpetual opening of all questions, and answering of none ; infinite possibilities of everything ; the becoming all things, the being nothing."

"I am confounded," sighed Arminius, as indeed was but too obvious.

"And now," said he after a long pause, "your passion for doing good moves you to distinguish the noxious and the vile ?"

"Yes," I replied quietly, "but what language about the poor lower intelligences ?"

"And it stirs you to abolish them ?" he asked.

"No," I answered decisively. "Above all things, let us abolish nothing. To desire to abolish is to be fierce, to be fierce is to be unideal, to be unideal is to be sanguinary. It begins in want of tone, and it ends with the guillotine !"

"And your passion for doing good accomplishes its end ?" he said.

"By diffusing an atmosphere of sweetness and light ; by broadening the basis of life and intelligence ; by the children of Thy spirit making their light shine upon the earth," said I, with some unction, easily gliding into my old chant when the college

service was intoned, and reverentially repeating some beautiful words I had once heard there.

This, however, was too much for my poor friend, whose privilege it had never been to know the bent of the old Oxford nature for sweetness.

"Soul of my namesake!" he burst forth with sad, sad vehemence of manner, "must I hear more? Here are we, in this generation, face to face with the passions of fierce men; parties, sects, races glare in each other's eyes before they spring; death, sin, cruelty stalk amongst us, filling their maws with innocence and youth; humanity passes onwards shuddering through the raging crowd of foul and hungry monsters, bearing the destiny of the race like a close-veiled babe in her arms, and over all sits Culture high aloft with a pouncet-box to spare her senses aught unpleasant, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all with infinite serenity, sweetly chanting snatches from graceful sages and ecstatic monks, crying out the most pretty shame upon the vulgarity, the provinciality, the impropriety of it all. Most improper, quotha, most terrible, most maddening. Judge philosophies, but by no fuller philosophy! Social action, without a social faith! Religion, without a doctrine or a creed! A sense of the eternal fitness of things, the eternal judge of all things! Intelligence, curiosity, right reason! Abailard, Montaigne, say you? Abailard of Magazines, Common-room Montaigne! Doctor Subtilissimus! Or Coleridge is it, with his pilfered rags about the reason and

the understanding? 'Ideal of perfection,' 'inexhaustible indulgence,' 'intelligent eagerness,' 'passion of doing good,'" he kept on repeating in a mincing tone, which I summoned all my sweetness to endure without laughing.

"Arminius," I said gravely, after waiting till this absurd ebullition was spent (all emotion is absurd to the eye of true taste), "if you think that Culture is a simple matter of refinement, or that its principles are formed on æsthetic grounds entirely, you were never more thoroughly mistaken. I have shrunk very naturally from pressing into a general discussion the higher spiritual ideas, but it now becomes a duty to tell you that the true and esoteric mission of Culture is this—that 'reason and the will of God prevail,' and this, I may say, is in the very words of no less a person than a mitred bishop of our Church!"

"Culture deals with religion, does it?" he asked carelessly, and not much affected by the authority I had cited.

"Yes," I said; 'as religion is but one sphere of human experience, one side of our manifold activity, Culture turns the light of its guiding beacon calmly in due turn upon that."

"And what may be its function in religion?" he asked, still suffering from his last outburst.

"Chiefly in this," I answered, "that it deprecates any strain upon the nervous system. It eliminates from the well-nurtured soul all that savours of the zealot. Here again it diffuses a chastened atmosphere

of sweetness and light. If one says that this or that is true, Culture steps in and points out the grossness of untempered belief. If one says that this or that is untrue, it shows how little edification consists in opening the eyes of the herd. It tells us the beauty of picturesque untruth, the indelicacy of mere raw fact, the gracefulness of well-bred fervour, the grotesqueness of unmannerly conviction; truth and error have kissed one another in a sweet serener sphere; this becomes that, and that is something else. The harmonious, the suave, the well-bred waft the bright particular being into a peculiar and reserved parterre of paradise, where bloom at once the graces of Pantheism, the simplicities of Deism, the pathos of Catholicism, the romanticism of every cult in every age, where he can sip elegancies and spiritualities from the flowerets of every faith"—I perorated with effusion, thinking of many a transcendental sermon.

"Lieber Gott," cried the incorrigible German, "I know not what this means. In your heathen, sottish, putrid cities" (one saw at once the distempered perversity of the man) "have I seen some *petit maître* preacher passing his white hands through his perfumed curls, and simpering thus about the fringes of a stole. Come," said he, with a sort of fierce sadness, "in the name of human woe, what Gospel does this offer to poor stricken men?"

"The will of God, the will of God," said I, almost sternly, for the man had called up all the spirit of devoutness within me.

"Of God," said the audacious Teuton, "but of which God, for there be many Gods of little family resemblance; the God who spoke from Horeb and Sinai, or the God of the Bull Apis, Moloch, or Juggernaut; the God of Torquemada or Fénelon; of Cromwell or of Hume; of which God, for there be many?" and his eyes flashed with a total want of self-possession.

"What if culture could show you, my friend," said I quite gently, for I really pitied his unsophisticated emotion, "that all of these were in sooth one and the same, manifold phases of one idea?"

"And His will was equally manifest in all?" he asked impatiently.

"The kingdom of God is within you," I said devoutly, gliding again into my old college-chapel tone, "and His will is made manifest——"

"In good taste!" rang forth the ungovernable man.

I am a professed lover of free speech, and do not pass for a literalist, but I confess that my English instincts were too strong for me, and I looked round with real uneasiness to see if the scandalous language of my friend were overheard. I insisted on quitting a topic which he treated with blunt indecorum; nor will I pain the reader by relating his other indiscretions of the kind.

Arminius now felt that he had carried his bluntness too far, and wishing to conciliate me, and to show the admiration he feels for his friend, he began in a

gentler tone. "But I hear that he has done a knight's service in consigning to public odium a sect of blood-thirsty fanatics who were striving to undermine society in your country, and has crushed the sour French pedant by whose writings their crimes were inspired." I felt that this question was a little perplexing, for it partly concerned some youthful indiscretion of my own, and indeed was a phase of Culture which I was hardly prepared to defend.

"A French sciolist was it not," he asked, "who invented some random formulæ from the prejudices current in his clique?"

"I suppose they said the same of Bacon and Leibnitz," I replied, wishing to escape the subject.

"A man, I think it was said, full of furious indignation with the past," he went on.

"Well," I answered, "he is usually charged with preposterous veneration for it; but that, like everything else, is a matter of taste."

"Who proposed a wholesale system of violent renovation, I believe?" he went on.

"No! pardon me," said I: "as I read him, it was just the reverse."

"Who hated all thorough cultivation of the human faculties?" he said.

"I had strangely supposed him its principal apostle," I rejoined.

"With no spark of any moral or social passion?" he asked.

"Well," I replied, "I used to think that he had something of the sort."

"And your Jacobins," said he; "have the police secured them?"

"Oh, it is not so bad as that yet," I answered.

"Well, but I thought," he rejoined, "that one of them had been caught oiling a guillotine in some highly suspicious costume?"

"Oh!" I said, with a smile, "that was only, I believe, what is called a sweet and light practical joke. The truth is, to be frank, my friend," for I felt the necessity of saying something, "I must admit that Culture made some trifling blunder in the matter. Jacobinism, as you say, denounces the past, seeks violent revolutions, and disdains all complex cultivation. The school you speak of, on the contrary, love and take counsel of the past, discard all violent for moral agencies of progress, and preach universal and perfect education. You see that believing in infinite, though peaceful and gradual, progress, to be gained by spiritual methods alone, they exactly contrast with Jacobinism, which imposes its crude type by tyrannical force. They occupy, in a word, the opposite pole of modern politics, except as both dream of an infinite change."

"Why," cried Arminius, whom I had long seen swelling with a new storm, "this was rank misrepresentation then on the part of Culture!"

"My friend, my friend," I urged, pained at this indelicate plainness, "inadequate illumination, partial

observation, misapprehension, hastiness, or rather, say fleetness—anything you please but that; let us say airiness."

"You mean that Culture had not adequately studied the great French thinker whom it travestied?" said Arminius.

"Perhaps it was so," I replied; "but reflect—the bee touches not the root of any tree. His to suck the floweret; ours to sip his honey."

"And yet," he mused, "there seems very much in which the higher Culture may be said to coincide with this philosopher, just as you say it coincides with religion."

"Oh!" said I, figuratively, "of the mighty river of Egypt whole tribes drink and are refreshed, not knowing whence those living waters come, and many cast their bread upon them, and find it after many days!"

"What!" said the German, "then here, too, Culture was at fault?"

I was silent.

"And the higher intelligence blundered?" he cried.

"My friend, my friend——" I entreated.

"And the 'instinct' proved about as real as Jack Falstaff's?" he ran on. "And this bright being——"

"Hush!" I insisted; "have you learned no more of sweetness than this?"

"Why, it is a crucial instance by which to test Culture," he cried, "and this potent and magic gift—

incommunicable as blue blood—the talisman to cure all evil, the touchstone of falsehood, the beautifier of life——" But I refused to hear more, for I saw him pacing the room and murmuring to himself—

> "But I remember when the fight was done—
> . . . . .
> And telling me the sovereign'st thing on earth
> Was parmaceti for an inward bruise;"

and his blue eyes kindled under his fair hair, as of one of his Cimbrian sires.

So I left the untunable man, and walked out to air my soul in the light of a sweet autumn sunset.

# III.

# PAST AND PRESENT

# PAST AND PRESENT.

[A Letter to Professor Ruskin in reply to one addressed to the Writer by Mr. Ruskin, published in *Fors Clavigera* for June 1876.]

YOU encourage me to attempt some answer to the sentence pronounced on me by *Fors* in June; but I am loth to seem impatient under the rebuke of Fate, or to raise an unduteous hand against you. I cannot forget how much I owe you, and how much our age has owed you; and what we owe to those who have taught us is a debt that we never can repay, a claim that never grows stale. There are so few whose lips have been touched as it were with sacred fire, having eyes that see behind the veil, and whose ears can hear the voices to which the rest are deaf; and when the utterances of such do seem to us to wander—I will almost say to mislead—it is better to keep silence even from good words. Yet when I find you publishing to the world things about those whom I honour, very contrary as I think to the fact, I will ask you to consider your judgment again. You can yet stir men of the finer fibre, and your words from time to time make us all pause and think, as men pause when violet flashes of lightning

glance across the sky. Genius, like nobility, has its duties. But to me all blackening of the human race, all outbursts against the generation and its hopes are profoundly painful, born, I should say, of unnatural self-musing and self-torture, sad as those fulminous imprecations on mankind, when Lear bows his head to the storm.

I will try what I can say in mitigation of sentence pronounced by *Fors* on the world in general; an allocution addressed not only *orbi et urbi*, but *contra orbem et urbem*, but I cannot be sure that I always understand it. *Fors* seems to come down from an empyrean of her own and hold converse in an airy form of speech, which we on earth have much ado to follow—a language glancing from grave to gay, in which (as you remind me) I only stammer; so that I have nothing for it but to answer the diapason of her poetry in the flat monotone of prose.

To turn *Fors* into prose, as Mr. Bohn's translators turn Homer and Æschylus, you reprove me for believing with Auguste Comte that the human race is worthy of our regard, that it is growing wiser, stronger, and nobler. You say, on the contrary, that mankind is now very crazy and utterly vile; that beauty, nobility, and truth are all but gone out of the world, though they did flourish once in a date undetermined. You find proof of this in wild roses, in lines from the older poets, and some newspaper cuttings. Those who speak of evolution have nothing to do with ancient times or old forms of beauty, with nature or

things poetic at all; for we are chiefly occupied (you say) with frogs and lice, with clamouring for women's rights, and the noisy apotheosis of liberty and machinery. It is the mark of our tribe to mangle our mother tongue with uncouth terms, and in general we are an unpleasant Gradgrind sort of people; and you finally invoke me to answer you, tracing my birth to a species of slug whom you take to be founder eponymous of our numerous but respectable clan.[1] And in public and in private you call on me to break a lance with you as I am a true man; though mine, as you see, is little better than a reed, and your own is like a weaver's beam.

You begin by asking me "if I think you as handsome as the Elgin Theseus." Well, I must admit that when I saw you last you had not yet developed the thews of the demigod; but still, to take you all round, body, mind, and soul, I do think you a nobler specimen of man than the wrestler who sat to Pheidias. Your argument, I suppose, done into gasteropodic prose, is simply that the human kind have utterly gone backward since the statue was carved. Are you sure of that if you think of man as a whole? Pheidias, if I remember, was the acknowledged lover of Pantarces the athlete; and over the inner history of Greek art we have to draw the veil which it tore so rudely from the unblushing Phryne. Whilst the Parthenon was rising, millions of slaves rotted in the

[1] As I understand the words, "Human Son of Holothurian Harries."

mines, and the idlers who lived upon their labour knew neither home, nor wife, nor work, nor duty, in any sense that is worth counting. One of the grandest of Greek statues recalls to us the city where the entire male population was massacred in cold blood by the fellow-citizens of Pheidias, who besides treated their great sculptor with wanton ingratitude. Indeed, when I remember Aristophanes, and think of Cleon, Alcibiades, ostracism, and another very "peculiar institution," I must say that the radiant medal of Athene has a truly sinister obverse. Theseus was of old my ideal in art, and many a holiday have I spent as a boy, yet under the roof of the paternal zoophyte, in wondering at his immortal calm. But would you say that an athletic form is the whole duty of man, or art the end of life? And, besides, could you not find youths at Oxford to win the parsley from Pantarces himself; and do you think a man in the fleet at Salamis could swim, like Matthew Webb, from England to France? A civilised man can roll over a savage; is bigger, stronger, and lives longer; can bear twice as much, and do twice as much. Men nowadays cannot get into the puny armour of ancient days; and, if a pampered aristocracy in an age of slavery, by giving their whole lives to care of their skins, did reach a special type of beauty, the race as a whole has a higher physical standard. So that, if you are not so handsome as Theseus, and Hamlet is not to be compared to Hercules, you and Hamlet have something to set against the want of muscle, and

you may console yourself by thinking that there are more fine men and women in Europe to-day than there were two thousand years ago.

For further proof of the degeneracy of man you quote Virgil's picture of Camilla in arms, and you beg me to contrast it with the tale of a farcical prize-fight in New York between two dancing girls, so that I shall see and acknowledge the downfall of modern womanhood. But why compare Camilla with an American mime? I suppose there were mimes at Rome in Virgil's day? Indeed, just at the time these clarion-ringing lines about Camilla appeared, a dear friend of the poet wrote some verses beginning, *Ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolæ*, showing an altogether different type of womanhood and manhood in that polished society for which Camilla was imagined. I love my Virgil, and am dumb with awe before the Theseus; but neither Athens nor Rome gives me quite the type of the virtuous life. And frankly I cannot say that Camilla is the finest ideal of woman. A modern poet has drawn for us finer; Cordelia, and Imogen, Desdemona, Ophelia, and the rest; or to come to our own age, there is the homely but true story of Jeannie Deans. Are you thinking of women famous in war? Well, Jeanne d'Arc is a far greater heroine than Camilla, though she lived some twenty centuries later. And as you beg me to compare the ideals of ages, I will ask you to compare the ancient vision of the warrior maid with the modern reality of Florence Nightingale.

Your bit about roses perplexes me. When I said that the flowers of our gardens had been gathered from all parts of the earth, and were greatly changed by man's care, I thought I was saying something familiar to any gardener, and entirely true in fact. And you swear that the flowers and the plants have never been developed at all, that man has never improved one of them (for you can't get a good pippin as you used when a boy), and that all we can do by nature is to leave her alone. Do you mean that the varieties in a modern garden grow wild at Coniston, and that you find pippins amidst the heather? Or do you mean that the gardens and cornfields, the orchards, and the watermeadows of these latter days are deteriorations from the primitive face of nature, and all bear the mark of the beast—man? Tell us the exact point of wildness to which you wish man and the earth to return. Will clothes, wheaten flour, and ploughshares be suffered in the golden age, or will St. George appear amidst moor and brushwood in the garb of Theseus adorned with woad?

I am sorry to be told that, when once we speak of evolution, we may never more meddle with roses; but are warned to keep close to our frogs and our lice. I certainly thought that the theory of evolution was a good deal occupied with the habits of plants. And there is a bit of fortuitous logic in which I require some help. When I said that flowers under man's *cultivation* change greatly from their *wild* forms, I was rebuked by *Fors*, who reminds me that the *wild*

rose of Etruscan art is the *wild* rose of your hills to-day. But is the old wild rose the same as the cultivated rose of our time? Can *Fors* pick *Devoniensis* growing wild on the moors, or do you find it in the British Museum? I agree with your love for the wild rose, and I trust evolution will never extinguish either that or other wild things. But Adam and Eve tended theirs; and if it be wicked to work at our gardens, it is no proof of the degeneracy of man, for it is a form of offence as old as original sin—of which peradventure it was either cause or effect.

And I was a little hurt to be told so peremptorily never again to allude to traceries. Why, all that I did was to make two friends in talk at Oxford speak of some flowers near the gray traceries of Magdalen. And for this rather feeble bit of local colour I am rebuked by *Fors*, "in the name of common sense and common modesty," for "chattering about" traceries. I am only, you say, making a jackdaw of myself, for I don't know a good one from a bad one, and couldn't design a tracery for my life. Now, did I ever presume that I could, for I am neither architect, professor, nor critic? It does happen that I have had a special foible for Gothic churches in my molluscous way for some thirty years, and have crawled, as a gasteropod best may, over many an one, from porch to belfry, and in and out the wavy foliage of the capitals, and round the iridescent mysteries of the rose windows, and so through all the Seven Lamps—

> "Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
> Che m'han fatto cercar lo tuo volume;"

but as to *knowing* anything about it that you would call *knowing*, spare me! Newton might as well ask a schoolboy, stammering out his Asses Bridge, why he was "chattering about" mathematics.

You mean (for your lightest play has a meaning, as all play should have) that the Holothurian and Pedicular tribe to which I have the honour to belong are incapable of a feeling for Gothic art or mediæval life. I will not undertake to answer for the rest of the Echinodermata, but so far as concerns Comte, I suppose no one ever held in such deep honour the genius of the Middle Age at its best, its religion, its chivalry, its poetry, and its art, going to it indeed for the type and ideal of man's spiritual force. As to Gothic architecture, I should like to quote you what he says: "That the ideas and feelings of man's moral nature have never found so perfect expression in form as they found in the noble cathedrals of Catholicism;" and no right mind, he says, "can ever look on them without an exquisite sense of emotion, born of deep sympathy with the spirit that then inspired society." This was said long before the bubble of our Gothic mania, as a bit of history not of art, and before a famous "Graduate" had passed his "Little-go." I do wish that besides punning on Comte's name you would look at his books, at least before making game of him; and I think you would see that he had pierced as truly as you have, and long

before you, into the spiritual meaning of mediæval art, including, by the way, its music, a most important branch of art, about which I think you have been silent. So if I and my fellows are Goths about Gothic architecture, it is no fault of Comte's, but must come from the original sin of the "mere slimy mass of helpless blackness" that we are, our protozoic infirmity of the flesh.

You next take me to task for using the mere word "Humanity," as uncouth English, and you say with a whack of your cane that my terms are as muddled as my head. It was needless to tell me that you know something of organic English whilst I do not, for that is certainly true; and I feel that to reason with you about language is to argue with the master of forty legions. But are you sure that you see what we try to express by "Humanity?" You say that "an aggregate of men is a mob." Surely not always; for an aggregate of men may be a regiment or an army, which is not a mob, or indeed a tribe or a family. Where men work and live together gregariously, in a disciplined and organic way, they are not a mob, as I suppose your own St. George's company is not to be a mob. And if we think of the human race all working together in an organic way, as will be the case if you ever convert the entire world to become "companions of St. George," we should get near our notion of Humanity. We do not mean simply the human race now extant; but the past and the present members who have made it, and those to come who will

inherit its tasks—just as by England we mean our nation, its history, and its future. We call all this Humanity, and though I acknowledge your mastery of organic English, I doubt if you can find a simpler word for this complex notion. Even as a piece of philology, it is surely as good as "Deity," which I see you use.

I thirst as you do for that "well of English undefiled," which you have done much to keep fresh and limpid; but the passion for the stalwart speech of Sir Philip Sidney may grow into affectation; and there is visible in our day that most simpering of all tongues, a sort of archaic Euphuism; so that many a man who has to say "some people are fools," Osricises his remark thus, "There be who are as the wild ass." Human wants cannot always be cribbed within the range of lyric poetry and the native woodnotes of art. Science and organisation must have their vocabulary, to which we shall have to screw our mouths, though it makes us as wry as the wrenching of teeth. The manly course when we need a hard word and cannot find a better, is to bring it out without wincing till it becomes quite natural. "Ganglion" is not pretty, but can you express its meaning in less than a sentence? "Sociology," they tell us, is a barbarous term; but the pedants have never supplied us with a better; and as to objecting to use the words which mankind make current, you might as well decline to endure the west wind, on the ground that you like it south. I could not justify to a purist in grammar the word "locomotive." But I use the word and the thing

without a pish; for I have no time to travel as you do by the road, or to be always saying, "The pieces of steel put together into a frame which run along on iron rails." Nor do I think it mends matters to invent some Biblical trope, and call it "The Pale Horse." I admit that the "precession of the equinoxes" does not go kindly in a sonnet; but if we wish to know something of the law, we can hardly express it in old Saxon or old English. It would be to quarrel with our bread and butter like children, if we refused to eat till we had renamed our bits of daily food. I see that in St. George's schools you have begun to invent new titles for the flowers. But how far do you intend to carry the process? Do you mean to have fresh words for the old ones—truth, modesty, sense, and obedience; and is science to be taught in an *abracadabra*, and religion in a bran-new *fi-fo-fum?* But in this case St. George's company will end like the Tower of Babel; for I assure you that there is one thing which genius itself cannot invent, and that is a language. The Anarchists of '93 tried hard to rename many things, but it never occurred to them to revolutionise the French speech. After all, the first proof of social discipline and manly obedience is to use the language to which we are born as the air in which we live; for it is very certain that no one of us can make either for himself. You see that you cannot mark my place in the animal kingdom without using such a queer term as "Holothurian."

This is not a trifle, this impatience of scientific

words, merely because they are long and will not come well into a stanza. It is only a form for impatience of science—that is, of knowledge. Here are you, and many a man of high poetic sensibility, crying pish at the word "evolution," and hotly denouncing the thing it expresses, because you cannot find it in the Bible or in Shakespeare. You say, and you say it with complete truth, that you know much more than I do of organic Nature and her processes. Well, can you describe for a mammal that process of unfolding from the ovum to birth, without using the words "evolution," "differentiation," or some equally complex synonym? The truth is, that you really forswear "evolution" and all its works, because you find it difficult to square with the poetic and prophetic scheme of life. And thousands, and they are some of the brightest and some of the devoutest natures, nurse themselves into a noble defiance of solid knowledge, on the ground that, because it is solid, it is necessarily hard and dry. And you, and some others I could name, are ready with ample encouragement to ignorance, sometimes it may be with a pathetic kind of Hebrew melody, and sometimes with racy Rabelaisian fun. But "Sartor Resartus" having been edited once for all can never be renewed; and attempts to imitate it are as hopeless as those of a man whom I saw the other day artistically "restoring" a thirteenth-century statue. Leave the inimitable torso in its vast pathos, rugged with the winds and the storm of heaven.

You undertake to say that those who believe in evolution do not study men and women, but frogs and lice; and your warning perchance will inspire a groan round many a decorated tea-table, and in many an early-pointed sermon. But can you say, with your hand on the book, that the advocates of evolution do *not* study men and women? Do you tell the jury that this is true of Comte? Have you read his theory of history? Do you know what he says about religion, family, government, education? How much of his "Polity" is given to frogs and lice, and how much to men and women? Do you deny that ninety out of every hundred pages speak directly of men and women? And yet you tell him to keep to his worshipful Batrachianity, his divine Pediculārity. And you name therewith Mr. Herbert Spencer, Mr. John Stuart Mill; have neither of them ever spoken of men and women, but are both absorbed with reptiles and parasites? You tell the court that Mr. Spencer and Mr. Mill are occupied mostly with frogs and lice; and you tell your pupils of St. George's new schools that if we wish to know about *geese*, we must go to these writers. And by way of a lesson in the manner of Sidney, you speak to them of a lady whom you describe as "Cobbe." Oh, the pity o't! The light of the Seven Lamps is dim, and the music of the choir where they burned comes from afar to us like sweet bells jangled, harsh, and out of tune.

I take shame to myself, that I can note this with anything but a smile, or that I can be drawn into tell-

ing you plainly how little I like it; for all that you press me to tell you something. But what you write is not, and cannot be, the mere wind moaning in the branches. The soul and the eye which have sent a spark through every fibre of this whole generation of Englishmen can never be of no account; and the memory of some memorable teaching still lives in its echoes. Men of science and of the new learning, secure in their logic and academic approval, are but too ready to make light of the Jeremiahs who cry woe! woe! in the streets in the name of tradition and poetry and religion. And the rich and the powerful hear of one complaining of the age of steam, as they would hear of a beggar whining out an old song. But there are some, who are not learned, and not powerful, who do listen and are touched and moved to the core by it—and who have hearts and passions and brains also, that thrill with the finer spiritual motions and forces. These you have often led; these men and women, these poets, priests, artists, these mothers, wives, and daughters you speak for; and all the while science and progress wonder to find a vast silent weight against them, and they are sore that they do not advance. And the strange part of it is that science and progress do not altogether deserve to advance without a halt in that grand triumphant car with patent axles and automatic steam apparatus, which seems to the twin powers the perfection of reason and mechanism. You, and the greater and lesser prophets of the older faith of Israel, are truly

so far right, that science without religion *is* materialist, immoral, inhuman; modern life *is* in many ways chaotic and brutal; industry *is* often cruel; and progress *is* something of a scramble.

And for this very reason it is so urgent that those who, like you, have a heart for the pathos of human nature, and the soul to make even the callous hear its cry, should do nothing to increase the chaos. Human life without knowledge is blind; and you mock at knowledge, or, at least, at the systematic knowledge of disciplined philosophy. The laws of physical and organic nature can only be summed by patient combination of the labour of ages; and you tell us, with the fervour of Peter the Hermit, that we shall find them all in the Bible and a bank of wild flowers. Religion can be nothing unless it be true; and you tell us that truth must all be discovered anew in St. George's schools. So that the only bond of society, a reasonable use of tradition, is to you a more worthless old rag than it is to the wildest communist.

There is one modern philosopher who has felt the evils of which you tempestuously complain, and who works towards the moral ends which you eloquently preach. And you take the opportunity of some words of mine about his teaching to snap your fingers at him and his pupils with lively gestures of contempt. Hence, though I deprecate the snapping of fingers altogether, and regret it for the sake of all who admire you, and not for the sake of Comte, I must ask you to pause before you report of him pre-

cisely the contrary of what he teaches. Your letter to me is employed with Comte's doctrine of evolution; and throughout you imply that its leading feature is the descent of mankind from primitive organisms. Now, it is perfectly notorious that Comte repudiated any theory of the sort, which he declares to be outside science and philosophy altogether. This is one of the crimes brought against him by modern men of science, that he refuses to write a new book of Genesis, and to expound the creation of the Primordial Moneron. It is most untrue that he advocates political and public careers for women; for no one has more earnestly warned us against it. In the range of religious and moral teaching you will find nothing more tender than his ideal of the home, nothing more precious than the shrine which he would keep sacred to women. So far from despising the past and the Middle Age, he makes more use of both than any modern teacher. So far from seeing perfection in modern life, or singing hymns to science, democracy, and steam, neither you, nor our master in all this, the great prophet of hero-worship himself, have so little desire to do anything of the kind.

So, though evolution be indeed the burden of his story, we shall always find in Comte the human, the social, the affectionate, the poetic. The comfort of religion, the grace of chivalry, the fecundity of art, the heroism of discipline, are all inspired with him by devotion to a ruling power, the object of our love and the source of our strength, to whom I am quite ready

to address the sweet verses which you quote from Sir Philip Sidney. You may not like the way in which these motive forces of human life are explained by Comte; but they are just as highly valued and are made as important by him, as by you or by any of the retrograde school. Only, it is most true, you will find them all set in a solid foundation of fact, of proof, and systematised belief. We believe that knowledge is too vast and difficult to be altogether mastered afresh by mystical versions of the psalms, and by quaint secrets seen in shells and flowers, and autumn sunsets. We believe that the world is too old, and on the whole too wise and too good, to be put to its primer again, and birched into sense in the schools of St. George's company, after making a *tabula rasa* of all that men have ever founded or have hitherto learned.

It seems to you to pass belief that any man can see things evil in modern industry, materialist in modern science, disorderly in present society, and lifeless in our actual art; and yet refuse to believe that the human race is now rushing headlong into the sea, like the swine possessed by devils. Yet it is so; and men are found to adopt the paradox of admitting the first and denying the second proposition. The secret of it may be seen partly in *patience*, partly in a *wider survey* of men and things. And it seems to me that you and the author of the system, or rather anti-system whom you follow, hardly make your survey sufficiently wide, or with due coolness of brain. You talk for ever and most beautifully about *truth*. But

truth is a very many-sided thing; and all its sides have to be worked up rightly before the very base of our monument is complete. Do you consider all that has been done, that has to be done, in building up the vast construction of the sciences; of the heavens and the earth, of organic and inorganic nature, and the immense scale of animal life? You say that you know something of these processes of organic nature; but have you applied them in order to man and to society, and sought their bearings on morality, religion, activity, and government? And will you say, on reflection and knowing all about the organic processes of nature, that all which has been done this last hundred years or so therein is so much rubbish and cinder-heaps. Perhaps it may be, that men occupied with huge accumulations of knowledge have seriously neglected to arrange it, as we often observe with the busy ones; for a time they have allowed things to run into disorder, and have thought more of the useful than the beautiful.

But the exact value of the sciences and the primary importance of the processes of nature are subjects too vast to discuss, even were I as competent as you are to assign them their place in the ultimate scheme of the good, the beautiful, and the true. Still there is one mode of measuring the growth of man and the upward or downward career of the race which seems to me somewhat too narrow, though it is one you have largely brought into vogue. I mean the tendency to label the successive epochs of history accord-

ing to our sense of their power in art; indeed, we are often limited to one of the arts of form. A healthy art is a sign undoubtedly of force, and great things in art have usually sprung from great things in life, in society, and in manners. But I find mankind so mysteriously complex, and art so subtle in its sources, that I always incline to caution in connecting the beautiful and the good. They are doubtless in truth but one; but how and wherein they entwine their roots is a matter of some perplexity. Some of the loveliest of the works of man's hand seem to come out of utter foolishness and vileness, just as came honey from the carcase of Samson's lion. Even to exclude the later abominations of Greek sculpture, much of its true work was done in societies putrid to the core in public and private life, at a time when the glorious roll of Hellenic poetry was ending in unmanly affectation. The arts of form often flourish amidst hideous defilement of life; the arts of form are decaying just when the arts of poetry or of music are at their purest and sweetest; and the art of building is often in its decadence, whilst the art of painting is sound and true. I cannot reconcile these contradictions, and I do not find that you help us. Some of the most exquisite bits of Italian painting that you have shown us how to love, uniting, you say, religion and realism, breathing all virtues and all tenderness, were painted in and for a society which is described by Machiavelli and personified in Borgias. Lust, bloodshed, treachery, greed, and all the devils of the

Inferno, played an obscene orgy round the easels, where you say men pictured for ever the very beauty of holiness. And the painters and their friends and brothers were at the same moment engaged in tearing to pieces the mediæval buildings you love, and in perpetuating in stone the Renascence you abhor.

The pit of Tophet, moreover, had hardly yet, as you tell us, yawned over the lowest depths of painting before we hear rising over the ghastly *débris* of visual art the sublime choir of Palestrina, and the Mass of Pope Marcellus. And so things go on. I suppose Shakespeare imagined that the style of Inigo Jones was the acme of art in building; and Milton wrote Comus for a society which exalted Sir Peter Lely. Again, Art, as you say, had long settled down into sordid mummery and utter filthiness, Greuze was the prophet of this carnival, and Europe was employed with a coarse parody of Versailles, when the majesty of Bach was triumphant, and Handel and Mozart raised men into transports of great emotion. And as the whirl of steam grew madder, and to infinite boorishness in architecture, succeeded an era of infinite affectation, more and more the meaning of Beethoven and the rest has grown into our lives; so that since the world began there never was an age when music commanded so many energies and inspired so wide an area of thought. Generations which can feed their souls for beauty on Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven are not even in art contemptible beside the ages which saw Pheidias carve and Titian paint. It has often

been matter for regret that you have never traced out for us, with that insight which you bring to the arts of form, some of the meanings of the history of music, that most pathetic, most social, most pure of the arts. Its bearing on the progress or regress of man is not an inconsiderable question.

Nay, music apart, we are not without rays of hope, even in other arts. I would speak of nothing disputable between us, but accept your judgment as unerring. Yet I can recall many a high tribute to our Modern Painters, to our Reynolds and our Turner, and some lesser men. Nor will I believe that the despised art of architecture itself is dead, when I think how this very generation has rekindled the light within the Seven Lamps. And there comes to me all that you have said so finely about our poets of the latter days, of Walter Scott and Wordsworth, and the rest, and all that we have heard about Goethe, as Mr. Carlyle assures us, the greatest human soul since Shakespeare. No, when I think of all these, and all our poetry and all our music, and our desperate, though often so dismal, efforts to exorcise the demon of ugliness, I will not despair of the human race even in the sphere of art. The times are somewhat out of joint. Steam-engines and beauty do not form a happy match; and the making of the modern omelette does need a most horrible smashing of eggs. But of this we may be sure at least. It is not the artist who can tell us whether the world is going into its grave, or whether the sun is going out in heaven.

Not the artist, but the philosopher. And yet more; it is not art that is going to regenerate life and thought and society. Not so; but it is these which are going to regenerate art.

We will trust to those who have stouter hearts and a somewhat wider outlook. And of all the modes for putting things straight, that most in favour with *petits maîtres* is "art for art," and the making believe that we are in love with beautiful things. Good sense tells us that we shall not get the outside beautiful till we have made the inside beautiful; and the beauty of the outside is not to be daubed on with a brush. The inside is a matter of science, discipline, morality, and religion; and these are things of slow growth and vast range. In the meantime, if we doubt of human kind, because its hand is horny and its raiment dishevelled by its labours, let us turn and take comfort in history. Turn not to our pet anecdotes, and our random pictures of the times which catch our fancy, but to the resounding procession of the ages altogether, the mighty drama of Man's life, from the days of "flint tools" to the days when men at last became conscious of Man. This may give us courage, patience, and faith in the fathers who made us what we are, and trust for the children whom we shall leave behind. But there is one thing which never gave any man strength; and that is Despair, baying, as the poet heard her, in the ruins of old Rome.

I have done, and have said what I can to answer

your formal challenge. To have kept silence might have seemed to admit your sentence of despair. I have not weighed my phrases in saying how much I am scandalised thereby. You do not weigh your phrases when you speak of what you hold to be dangerous teaching, and no one desires that you should. But imprecations upon all that mankind has arrived at do seem to me of all things the least to be hazarded at random. If you think that "the entire system of modern life is corrupted with the ghastliest forms of injustice and untruth," it is strange to me that you can believe in a Providence and an infinite goodness of God, if such be the result after nineteen centuries of the religion taught to men by his own lips. It does seem to me that in denying the goodness and wisdom of man you are necessarily denying the goodness and wisdom of God, unless you suppose that the devil has the best of the long battle. Those who, with modern Catholicism or modern Calvinism, stand by the ancient system of belief and mean by God and his purposes what their churches dogmatically proclaim, have a certain show of reason in maintaining their creeds, and in resisting the progress of thought. They have an intelligible and organic method of life which they think can yet be restored. And so those who with modern Conservatives and men in authority cling to political and social systems have a ground for opposing change. But I cannot find the same good motives for those who repudiate tradition whilst they still defy progress, for those who

with Rousseau make a clean sweep of human things, to build an Utopia with eloquent phrases, who turn the Bible by a Targum of their own into a mere dictionary of metaphors, and who bandy the name of God till it means whatever they vehemently feel.

I have written with a melancholy sense of the beauty of much that you have taught the world, and of the despair to which your teaching is now seeking to lead it; full of admiration and respect for your great qualities and powers, and full of weariness with the gospel of *Fors*, as of all the gospels in our day the most anarchical and hopeless. If I write at all it is because I see that your gospel has behind it a darker theology than yours, and a deeper self-will, a fiercer spirit of impatience, a more untameable mysticism. You give us the flashes of those storm-clouds which are rolling all round us, heavy with ominous forces, and the flashes it is significant to count. And whatever you do and say, I will not believe that it is of small moment; for you have touched some of the finest chords of our generation, and have given us some of its most graceful sayings.

# IV.

# THE ROMANCE OF THE PEERAGE

# THE ROMANCE OF THE PEERAGE.

"Nôsse omnia hæc salus *esset senioribus.*"

"The rest of his dress—a dress always sufficiently tawdry—was overcharged with lace, embroidery, and ornament of every kind; and the plume of feathers which he wore was so high as if intended to sweep the roof of the hall. In short, the usual gaudy splendour of the heraldic attire was caricatured and overdone."

[*See Walter Scott's Quentin Durward—Hayraddin, the Gipsy, goes to the Court of Charles the Bold, disguised as Rouge Sanglier the herald.*]

On the eve of the great Revolution in France, when society was in its most rickety, but not its most corrupt stage, a man of genius painted it to the life in a very diverting play. It was one of the most curious features of that unconscious age, that it delighted in pleasant caricatures of itself. As Carlyle tells us in the opening of his history, "Beaumarchais (or De Beaumarchais, for he got ennobled) had been born poor, but aspiring, esurient, with talents, audacity, adroitness; above all, with a talent for intrigue; a lean, but also a tough, indomitable man." The theme of his plays was Fashion, his hero a valet; and being

a sort of inspired valet or *factotum* himself, he hit off with art the great world as seen from the valet point of view. Figaro, the adventurer, the factotum, the prince of rascals, became quite the rage, and the delicious impudence which he threw into his servility exactly caught the public ear. Men laughed to see the fatuous pomp of the *ancien régime* treated with a kind of fawning mockery by one of its own creatures. But the loudest laughter came from the great people, in whose faces the witty Barber was snapping his fingers.

In the midst of it all the Revolution burst, and swept away play and player, stage, company, scenery, dresses, and all the gorgeous accessories; and our poor friend saw his comedy end in a very grim catastrophe, which he had done not a little to hasten.

History, for all that they say, does not reproduce itself. In the first place, we have no Revolution, nor indeed, with our admirable constitution, are we likely to have. And most certainly we have no Beaumarchais. The humour and the grace of the delightful Sevillard are as much a thing of the past as the *ancienne noblesse*. Still we have, even in our day, a society luxurious and absurd enough, although sadly turned into prose. And we have a man of wit who has studied it from life—one-half Jester, one-half Grand Master of the Ceremonies.

*Lothair* is not a mere novel,[1] and its appearance is not simply a fact for Mr. Mudie. It is a political

[1] *Lothair*, by the Right Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, 1870.

event. When a man whose life has been passed in Parliament, who for a generation has been the real head of a great party, sits down, as he approaches the age of seventy, to embody his view of modern life, it is a matter of interest to the politician, the historian, nay, almost the philosopher. The literary qualities of the book need detain no man. Premiers not uncommonly do write sad stuff; and we should be thankful if the stuff be amusing. But the mature thoughts on life of one who has governed an empire on which the sun never sets, have an inner meaning to the thoughtful mind. Marcus Aurelius, amidst his imperial eagles, thought right to give us his Reflections. The sayings of Napoleon at St. Helena have a strange interest to all men. And Solomon in all his glory was induced to publish some amazing rhapsodies on human nature and the society of his own time.

*Lothair* is indeed amusing. Though we are most concerned with "the social and political significance" of the book, we cannot withhold admiration for the brilliance, and indeed rare wit, of much in the writing. There are epigrams in showers, some of them really delicious. That phrase about the critics is perfect, and as true as it is amusing. The Duke who, as he gives the finishing touch to his consummate toilette, each day thanks Providence that his family are not unworthy of him; St. Aldegonde, a Duke's son and a Duke's son-in-law, proposing to abolish all orders of men but Dukes, and calling for cold meat at Lord—

or rather Mr.—Brancepeth's dinner-party; the professor who during a stroll gives more than one receipt for saving the aristocracy; the comparing our young nobles to the ancient Greeks, who were good athletes, knew no language but their own, and never read; the Hansom cab, "the gondola of London," are the touches of a master. For our author, when not in Court dress, is before everything a wit.

Then the dialogue is quick, bright, and easy. The scenes follow with vivacious variety. St. Aldegonde himself might read it without being bored. Nothing lingers. Our author receives his ideal company like an accomplished host. A word for this one, a happy saying to that, a skilful selection of guests, the mind diverted now with this, now with that, entertainment. The characters even have merit. Not that they are characters in the creative sense, but they are happy satirettes. The fatuous Duke, the goose Lothair, the spiritual Cardinal, are portraits not perhaps of true humour, but of a caustic, albeit rather personal, wit. And all this, which is so rare in an English book, is exceedingly pleasant to find. The wit, the light touch, the movement, are those of an accomplished foreigner—a sort of Mr. Pinto surveying British society from without, and trying to amuse it. The colouring often rises to a high point of art, and society is analysed with something of almost poetic instinct. Not that we wish to exaggerate. We do not pretend that the art is that of Balzac or Sand, or the wit that of the true children of Voltaire. But it is quite as

good as that of a first-rate Parisian feuilleton, and there are few things better.

Nor must one omit another great merit. *Lothair* is clean. Not only is it free from offence in language, but the tone in point of morals is healthy, pure, and sweet. The society painted is, on the whole, that of honest husbands and true wives, pure maidens and ingenuous lads. This is a great point. We hear nothing of those *petit crevé* vices, those pornerastic habits in high places, those Diamond-necklace scandals, those unmentionable gambols of the Porphyro-geniti, which are too often thrust before our eyes in fiction, and indeed in fact. Society owes much to Mr. Disraeli for this. If he is to be believed, it is a society of really happy and healthy homes; and he speaks of them almost as one inspired by some influence that had been the good genius and true pride of his life.

But one must not be blind in praise of this book. The writing, though often brilliant, is curiously loose and false. To speak the truth, there is hardly a page without clumsy phrases, misused words, and even hopelessly bad grammar. Nor is this the worst. Not only do gross solecisms, but absolute cockneyisms abound; the high-polite jargon and the genteel vulgarisms of a hairdresser's man. We do not for a moment attribute this to Mr. Disraeli himself, a master alike of the language of letters and of society; and we believe we are in a position to explain, as we presently shall, this curious phenomenon. But strange

as it may sound the fact remains. And the style of the ex-Premier's romance reminds one not seldom of the style in which ambitious lady's-maids and literary valets write romances for the *Mirror of Fashion* (a publication read in the highest circles).

We think some bits must have been written for and refused by the *Mirror*. For instance, a young lady of rank (of course everybody in the book is of the highest rank; the readers of the *Mirror* expect nothing below earls),—a young lady talks to the hero about their "*mutual ancestors.*" Shade of Macaulay! One used to think that *mutual* friend for *common* friend was rather a cockneyism. But mutual ancestors! Oh, right honourable sir! *mutual*, as Johnson will tell us, means something reciprocal, a giving and taking. How could people have mutual ancestors?—unless, indeed, their great grandparents had exchanged husbands or wives—a horrid thought!

Then we hear of a "gay and festive and *cordial* scene." A festive scene we can understand, and a cordial host. But what is a "cordial" scene? The late Artemus Ward used to speak of "a gay and festive cuss." But a "gay and festive and cordial scene" would beat the showman.

A gentleman (by the way, almost the only commoner in society; but then he is after all but the family solicitor, a superior sort of "retainer"),—a gentleman is spoken of who "had, in her circles, a celebrated wife." How can a man have a wife in her circles? Does it mean a lady of ample skirts and

hoops, or of ample and globular form? Again, we hear that "All the ladies of the house were *fond* and fine horsewomen." Fine women, we can understand, and fine horsewomen, but what is a *fond* horsewoman? Of what are these ladies fond? Mr. Pinto tells us that the English language consists of only four words, "to which some grammarians add fond." We are afraid that Mr. Pinto, though almost naturalised amongst us, has not yet mastered the varieties of the English tongue.

Riding parties linger *amid* a breeze. A lady makes observations cheapening *to* her host, meaning depreciating her host, not, we trust, that she made them to her host. "Bells of prancing ponies, lashed by delicate hands, *gingle* in the laughing air." We think the traditional whipping-boy, the printer, must have been laughing too when he set up *gingle*. "Obstructive dependants *impede the convenience* they were purposed to facilitate." Two great ladies "are the fairies, *which* do" something. The hero holds "his groom's horse, who had dismounted." Who dismounted? Did the groom dismount off the horse, or the horse off the groom? A lady's portrait "makes a fury." Of two lovers it is said, "Then, clinging to him, he induced her to resume her stroll." Who was clinging to whom? Each, doubtless, to each "*mutually*;" but it is horribly suggestive of a third person, and that person a male.

Oh! Editor of the *Mirror of Fashion*, lucky, *tua si bona nôris*, wert thou in a contributor who had carried

the high-polite Euphuism to a point yet unattained in thy peculiar industry. Let us cull some flowers from the garden of the Lady Corisande.

Of a riding party—"Dames and damsels vault on their barbs and genets with airy majesty." Airy majesty is good.

A gentleman bows—"He made a reverence of ceremony." Couldst thou do that, Yellowplush?

One college lad goes to see another—"He becomes a visitor to his domain."

Some servants waiting in a hall—"Half a dozen powdered gentlemen, glowing in crimson liveries, indicate the presence of My Lord's footmen."

Charity boys are brought out with their school flags to meet the squire—"Choirs of enthusiastic children, waving parochial banners, hymned his auspicious approach."

A man gives a girl some lemonade and a wafer, and tells her she is looking in good spirits—"He fed her with cates, as delicate as her lips, and manufactured for her dainty beverages which would not outrage their purity, and at last could not refrain from intimating his sense of her unusual, but charming joyousness." (See the Vademecum of Etiquette.)

Fine rooms are "stately" or "choice saloons." Footmen are "retainers." Men of rank are "paladins of high degree." Cut glass is "fanciful crystal." A dinner-party is a "banquet." A gun-club are "competing confederates." A ball is a "sumptuous festival;" the guests are "wassailers." A carriage is

always an "equipage;" and a horse always a "barb."

All this points to an origin rather to be sought in the species of male serving-man, or, as one should say, "indicates the presence of My Lord's footmen;" but there are traces again which point to a female coadjutor, as of some lady's-maid, with whom said lackey was in love. For instance, a croquet-party "makes up a sparkling and *modish* scene." "Modish" is surely a little out of date, and savours of the housekeeper's room. Of a ballroom supper we hear, "Never was such an elegant clatter." A young lady "is the cynosure of the Empyrean." A youth courting her, "seals, with an embrace, her speechless form." To seal, it is true, in Mormon-land is to marry. When the young lady goes to Court, "Her fair cheek is sealed with the approbation of Majesty" —*sealed* again. When a man speaks of the Court, "He leads the conversation to the majestic theme." Stars and Garters!

Have a care, good Editor, and tone down their style! They are fooling thee with their menial jargon. Be warned, friend, educated Englishmen do not write like this:—

"When the stranger, who had proved so opportune an ally to Lothair at the Fenian meeting, separated from his companion, he proceeded in the direction of Pentonville, and, after pursuing his way through a number of obscure streets, *but* quiet, decent, and monotonous, he stopped at a small house in a row of

many *residences, yet* all of them in form, size, colour, and general character *so* identical, that the number on the door could alone assure the visitor that he was not in error when he *sounded the knocker*."

What is all this jumble of words, with its draggled sentences, and "buts," and "thats," and "yets." "*So* identical!" "So similar," you mean. "So identical" is lady's-maid's English; and why "obscure streets, *but* quiet, decent, etc.?" Can nothing obscure be decent? Why not write like a man, and say—"When the stranger, who had *helped* Lothair at the Fenian meeting, *left* his companion, he *walked towards* Pentonville, making his way through several obscure streets, *which were* quiet, decent, and monotonous. He stopped at a small house in a long row, where the *houses* were *so similar* in form, size, colour, and general character that, but for the number, one might easily *knock at the wrong door*."

But as for grand ceremonies, O Editor! thy contributor out-herods Herod, and beggars all previous description of *haut ton*. The *Court Newsman* grows pale with envy; Jenkyns of the *Morning Plush* is awed. Thy hebdomadal competitors do reverence to their peerless rival.

[*A march.*

"Royalty, followed by the imperial presence of ambassadors, and escorted by a group of dazzling duchesses and paladins of high degree, was ushered with courteous pomp by the host and hostess into

a choice saloon, hung with rose-coloured tapestry and illumined by chandeliers of crystal, where they were served from gold plate."

*Curtain falls, amidst catharine wheels, red and blue fire, electric light, etc. etc. etc.*[1]

Shade of the late George Robins of the Hammer, greatest of auctioneers, here is a greater than thou in unctuous description of all kinds of upholstery! Greatest of all Editors of Trans-atlantic newspapers, here is taller talk than in the wildest of thy dreams, which is to thy best vein as is thy own Niagara to a gutter, or thy *Wellingtonia gigantea* to a gooseberry bush! O tallest of talkers! canst thou match "buncombe" like that? O most superb of auctioneers, didst thou ever appraise and bring to the hammer (without any reserve) the entire British Aristocracy, rose-coloured tapestry, gold plate, and all—nay, the Majestic Theme itself, it would seem—as Lot 1?

As we have said, we do not for a moment pretend that jargon of this kind really comes from Mr. Disraeli. He is a man of genius, a master of language, and has passed his life in refined society. He is incapable of inditing this stuff. Of course, all sorts of rumours are afloat; but we rather gather the truth to be this—Mr. Disraeli, a busy statesman, employed assistance; that assistance he would naturally find in his "people" in attendance. The ideas, the wit, the picture of

[1] See *Lothair*, vol. iii.

society are his own, but we strongly suspect that the actual wording not seldom is that of his valet.

What we imagine to have taken place—we speak with no authority—is something of this kind:—The great orator returns, say, from a debate in which he has exterminated the Liberal party for the twenty-seventh time, and given new hope to his country and his Sovereign. He has an hour of relaxation. Robed, doubtless, in some cashmere dressing-gown which had once graced the throne of the Great Mogul, shod with the jewelled slippers that had haply been worked for him by the daughter of the Emperor of Morocco (an unhappy attachment, it is whispered), and smoking his hookah, with its bowl of solid topaz, and its mouth-piece a single diamond (a trifle from the Sublime Porte), the wondrous orator throws off the dazzling fancies of *Lothair*. Thoughts crowd so fast on that fervid soul, that three stenographers can but imperfectly record them as he speaks. And the valet, or one should say, the first gentleman of the dressing-room, takes forth the burning fragments on golden salvers to cast them into readable volumes for Messrs. Longman, who are waiting in an ante-room. Thus it is that we get the ideas of a true wit and the experience of a profound observer in the language of the servants' hall, and her ladyship's first gentlewoman.

Now without intruding on private affairs—the frank Lothair is free from modesty of that kind—we strongly suspect this first gentleman of the dressing-room to be a person of foreign birth. We know not

how else to account for the use of crude Gallicisms, such as no Englishman could pen. A perplexing use of the word "but;" a lady's portrait "making a fury;" things "being on the carpet;" and a reckless use of the word "distinguished" for fine; phrases like "an alliance of the highest," "high ceremony of manner," "his affairs were great" for his trade, betray the foreign hand. We have no doubt this great creature, the first gentleman in question, is a perfect treasure. But if he continue to be employed as secretary, the ex-Premier should present him with Lindley Murray —of course bound in jewelled vellum, with gilt edges.

But the misplaced confidence which the right honourable gentleman appears to have reposed in his "first gentleman," has led to some more serious errors in taste. We make nothing of a few slips. "*Lancres*" is not the right mode of spelling the painter's name, nor is "*monsignores*" a correct form. And the Pope's guard is the *guardia* (*not guarda*) *nobile*. Perhaps these little blunders in foreign languages are a compliment to the order "which knows no language but its own." We do not like to hear of "costly bindings" in a library. There was an honest man once who cared more for the inside of books than their "costly" backs. But in the midst of the praises which we wish to give to this amusing romance of real life, there is one serious fault which we condemn.

It seems to us that, elegant as the company are, they are painted as if the real object of their respect,

their social standard in fact, were, in plain words, Money. Every one in the book is enormously rich, and no one beside appears to count as a member of society at all. The society is a mere Apotheosis of rich men—the Reign of the Financial Saints—a perfect *Millionairium*. One would think the author were Poet-Laureate to Baron Rothschild. The very attorney is a Six-and-eightpenny Sidonia.

Nowhere perhaps is this so marked as when the Duke himself tells us that he has known Americans who were very good sort of people, and had no end of money (*sic*); that he looks upon one who has large estates in the South as a real aristocrat, and should always treat him with respect—more especially if, like the colonel, his territory is immense, and he has always lived in the highest style (*sic*). This may be satire, or it may be fact, but we venture to think it both gross and untrue. Peers may sometimes be foolish, and possibly proud, but they are usually English gentlemen, and we doubt if they talk with the purse-proud insolence of Tittlebat Titmouse. But a man who has made Dukes ought to know best.

But all this time we are sadly forgetting what our grave Editor calls the "social and political significance" of *Lothair*, and are thinking too much of the many merits and occasional slips of its literary work. As a novel it may be called good, and that is the principal point. The story, if improbable and rambling, is tolerably amusing and not outrageously absurd. The characters, though not creations, are

keen sketches of social types. And the raving about Semitism, Popery, and the Brotherhoods is but a tithe of what one endured in *Tancred* and the *Wondrous Tale*. Indeed, one has heard wilder stuff from the author's lips in grave political speeches in times of excitement. Even the bombast hardly equals that immortal bit about "the elephants of Asia carrying the artillery of Europe over the mountains of Africa through passes which might appal the trapper of the Rocky Mountains." Nor do we compare the plot for sensational power with those of that gorgeous Titan Eugène Sue; nor the *mise-en-scène* for profusion with that of the inexhaustible wizard of *Monte Christo*. Still, the novel, as novels go, is a good one.

But as to the substance of the book, for the Editor grows impatient, it is strange how much opinions differ. There are not wanting some who speak harshly—the men no doubt "who have failed." We believe them to be really unjust. But their reasons are worth considering. "How gross it is," said to us a serious friend of advanced views, a Republican, when we asked his opinion of "the novel." "If snobbishness be," he went on, "as Thackeray defines it, the mean admiration of mean things, was ever book so unutterably snobbish? Was ever the fatuous pomp of grandees, the accident not even of ancient traditions, but of mere conventional rank; was ever the coarsest show of money and what money can buy, the selfish vagaries of a besotted caste, more stupidly and

fawningly belauded? Where find such noisy grovelling before wealth and state? Is not a taste for liveried footmen in themselves, and costly bindings in themselves, essentially a mean taste? Is not the truckling to a rich idiotic boy, and the wanton fooleries of idle wealth, a mean thing? Can these mean things be more meanly admired than in a book every line of which is rank with fulsome grandiloquence?"

"Bah, friend," said we to the serious man, "you take all this in your fierce way, *au grand sérieux*. The object of a novel is to amuse. The artist passes no judgments; his business is to paint persons and scenes. Here we have a picture of a state of society, more or less true to life; there is much that is very diverting, and presents us with human nature. The public likes to hear of the great. No doubt you were interested yourself."

"No," said our serious friend, almost bitterly, and wholly unconscious of our little rap; "I do not judge the book by the standard of the trash in green covers, or of the boyish freaks of a Vivian Grey. It comes from one who has led the governing classes and ruled this country for years, at the close of a long political career. '*Noblesse oblige*,' they say. '*Esprit oblige*,' I say. And if this be the picture of that order, which a man of genius, who has made it his tool, can sit down in his old age to give to his countrymen—if this be the sum of a life of successful ambition and public honour—then, for myself, I should say, society is not likely to hold together long, for the people will not

suffer mere selfishness in power, so soon as they know it to be hollow and weak." And he wanted to turn the conversation on the crisis in France.

"Nay! one moment, son of Danton by Charlotte Corday," we said, with a smile. "What on earth is the situation in France to us? We have no Empire here, and no revolutionists but you! But, as to *Lothair*, do you not see refinement in the life depicted? They are people of taste, there is plenty of wit, a turn for art; in a word, what is happily connoted by Culture!" We knew he would not like the word, but we wanted to "draw" him, as the young bloods do the President of the Board of Trade.

"Culture!" said our friend quickly. "Not in any sense of the word that I know. It is true the external forms of life and the habits of the lounging class are not described with quite the vulgar ignorance of fashionable novelists. There is certainly much social grace, some cultivation of mind, and plenty of wit in the society described. But so there has been in almost every order on the eve of its extinction. All the *belles marquises* and the fascinating *chevaliers* of *Œil-de-Bœuf* did not prevent the Court of the Louis from being utterly rotten and mean. And this is rotten and mean. Is the mind in it cultivated to any intelligible end? Is not the mere external parade of wealth dwelt on till one nauseates? Does not the book reek with the stifling fumes of gold, as when the idiot puts rails of solid gold round the tomb which covers his useless old bones? Is not the life vapid,

aimless, arrogant, as if the world and the human race existed only to gratify its selfish whims? I do not say that its whims are gross; but that they are fatuously selfish."

"Come, come, good fellow, you are losing your sense of a jest," said we. "Much radicalism doth make thee dull. Why! do you suppose now that Lothair is as serious and earnest as yourself? One would fancy all radicals had a ballot-box in place of a skull. Go, and have an operation (under chloroform), and get the joke inserted into your head. Have you never enjoyed a satire or a farce at the play? Do you really think a man of genius, who has fooled British society to the top of its bent, is going down on his knees to his own puppet in his old age? Forbid it, human genius and successful ambition. Can you not see the exquisite fooling of the characters in the comedy? Was ever such fatuous and yet genial self-importance as the Duke's—and from life they say—so racy when you know the facts. And did you miss that touch of the neighbouring gentry and yeomanry escorting the young goose home—goose, who is absolutely nothing but fabulously rich; so artfully prepared, you know, when you have been just shown the very inside of the amiable young jackanapes. Five hundred of the gentry on horseback, many of them 'gentlemen of high degree,' the county squirearchy. And all the high jinks of the county when the lad comes of age, as droll as the kowtowing to the emperor at Pekin. Is there a story about the

Mikado of Japan as good as the games at Muriel? And the croquet match absorbing statesmen, and played exclusively by Dukes and Duchesses, with gold and ivory mallets. And the gold plate at Crecy House; and the reverences of the haughty Catholics to the Cardinal—Cardinal, too, life to the very fringe of his hat strings, a photograph, too absurd; and the pigeon which was proud of being shot by a Duke; and the lad who throws a sovereign to the cabman; and the marshalled retainers and obsequious lackeys moving ever noiselessly but actively in the background. O! friend of the people, or friend of man, if that was lost on you, we must be sorry for you. You are like a deaf man at the Opera. Why, it is like a scene in Japan. Turn it all into Japanese, say 'the Mikado' for 'Majestic Theme;' say 'Daimios' for dukes, put 'two-sworded retainers' for footmen in plush, and lots of male and female Japanese kissing the dust when Satsuma rides forth, and if you like a *hara-kiri* instead of a London ball, and you have Lothair in Japan, and British society, and its mighty aristocracy, and the whole brother-to-the-Sun-and-Moon business under the grotesque etiquette of those absurd Tartars. And do you not see how artfully the fulsome and false style is contrived to heighten the illusion of the whole preposterous system? Why, there is nothing better in Voltaire or Montesquieu. Do you take *Candide* and the *Lettres Persanes* also *au pied de la lettre*, most literal of mankind? What of Beaumarchais and the immortal Barber? Do you suppose Figaro does not see

anything droll in the Count's *ménage?* And when the Count asks him what he, the Count, had done to merit all those felicities, and Figaro says—*Monseigneur, vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître*—do you think Figaro says that, like a solemn fool, or like a man of wit, laughing in his sleeve? What of Beaumarchais' comedies? Are they not one long joke from beginning to end, and a rare joke, too; ay, and one which made men think, and bore fruit? Come and be a good, tame Jacobin, and leave the League for to-night. Go and see Mario and Ronconi in *Il Barbiere;* read Beaumarchais' play before dinner, and you will then see the fun in *Lothair.*

"Pish!" said our serious friend, who really had an appointment at the League. "If it be all a joke, that makes it worse. It is rather a prolonged joke, if it be, and one which plain folk do not readily see through. The world is ready to take all this as a revelation in sober truth, from one who, by his own account, has had special favour from what you call the Majestic Theme. To pander to the public taste is itself a vile thing, even though you scorn them for swallowing your bait. To parade (being a man in authority, whom princes delight to honour)—to parade a worthless type of life, with a wink to the knowing that you are quite of their mind, is not a great part. To worship a great State with the knee and the lip, and sneer at it in your heart, and sneer aloud, and sneering, pocket all its good things, and grasp at its chief seats, is rather worse, I take it, than stupidly

to believe in it. Figaro, no doubt, laughed at his patrons; but he dearly loved their kitchen, and he pocketed their ducats. And therefore he was a rogue, as well as a slave. But I see no Figaro in the matter, and, in truth, I have no time for talking now. I have an appointment at a conference of reformers about the Land Question—the Land Question in England, not in Ireland. Perhaps, indeed, you are all right. I know nothing of literature, and never read a novel. Write a review in praise of *Lothair*, and convert me;" and the stubborn reformer went off to his meeting on the Land Question, and quite forgot *Il Barbiere*, Beaumarchais, and *Lothair*.

"There was much truth in his last remark!" we said to ourselves, as he went off, though it was impossible to avoid laughing at his serious air. But we took his advice about writing the Review, and we shall certainly send him a copy.

. . . . .

When our literal friend was gone off on his mission of pulling to pieces the majestic symmetry of our landed system, we fell into a reverie full of the witty Barber, and many a delightful reminiscence of M. Got at the Français, and Ronconi at the Opera. And then taking up *Lothair* to commence our review, we fell into a light sleep, and dreamt of the Barber.

O Figaro! O most audacious and deft of serving-men, what a wicked wit it is! What a society do you show us! What a sublime unconsciousness of

its approaching end! How the young grandees of Spain work their own mad wills! What indescribable gambols of youth! What engaging liveliness of young blood! Any number of varlets to be had for a few ducats, and what droll puts the citizens seem in it all! A gallant lad gets into a scrape, which brings down Guard and Police. *Ecco! vien qui*, see the insignia of a Grandee. *Scusi Eccellenza*. I see, a thousand pardons. Off hats and up swords. *Le Roi s'amuse*:—make way there for his grace. And all this our ingenious Beaumarchais had the happy idea of presenting to Paris in the last decade of the *ancien régime.*

And the consummate impudence of our Figaro, the exquisite liberties he takes with his great friends: strutting behind their pompous footsteps, mimicking their gait, and laughing back at the audience. O mad wag, they will find thee out! Why Bartolo's self, though thou art thrusting thy lather into his rheumy old eyes, will see thou art mocking. And as for Almaviva, he may be a grandee of Spain, but he is a gentleman, Barber, and may not relish thy menial pranks.

And what a rich and golden kind of life it is in Almaviva's palaces, if you chance to live there; how the power of wealth can create like a conjuror's rod; what extravaganzas of caprice money can produce.

> "O che bel vivere,
> Che bel piacere,
> Per un Barbiere,
> Di qualitá—di qualitá!"

All in good taste, too, from the best makers in the *Puerta del Sol*—solid, real, representing so much human labour, so many consumable things, so much food, clothing, etc., as the dull dogs in political economy make out; and the cream of it is, that each production is more useless and *bizarre* than the last. It is like an Arabian night—Aladdin's lamp, Peribanou's fan. Ask for what you like—there it is. Will his Lordship ride? See a troop of exquisite thoroughbred Barbs, stand pawing the turf, and champing their golden bits whilst inimitable jockeys hold the stirrup. Would his Grace care to sail? Haste! ten thousand labourers, whilst thou art at luncheon, all carefully kept out of sight, shall make thee a spacious lake of artificial water: a gondola of wrought pearl floats on its perfumed breast—its sails are of amber satin. Will your Grace deign to take the trouble to sink into this velvet couch? Does his highness like this prospect? Presto! a majestic palace rises with its stately saloons from out its statued terraces. His Grace's retainers throng its porches in obsequious crowds, and with the plumage of a cockatoo. Will his Lordship enter and deign to pass a day beneath the chaste magnificence of his new home: or will his Excellency condescend to indicate in which of his princely castles he will be served?

And the beauty of it is, that it is all real. It is fact. No Aladdin's palaces vanishing with the dream. But there they stand, built by actual human hands, and fitted up, as we say, by the best purveyors in

Madrid. It is a little prosaic—it wants the romance of Aladdin; but it gains tenfold in being real. One of those economic bores would calculate out for you how much sweat of man went to the making of it all; how many millions of men and women it would support if it were all turned into food; how many lives have been worn out in attaining this stupendous result. And, after all, if your whim so be, you won't let the poor wretches even see you; but will go and hire lodgings in the Champs Elysées, or perhaps, after all, live in a tent on the top of Caucasus. O it beats Crassus and Lucullus, and dims Versailles and Monseigneurs! And the best of it is, that it is all right and good. It is necessary to give a high tone to life. Authors, statesmen, bishops even can prove it. Crassus was a brute, Versailles was a blunder; but this—this is "the cultured magnificence of their stately lives."

What a dream we had! We seemed to see a Magnifico—was it Figaro, Aladdin, Rouge Sanglier, or some Grand Vizier of all the cultured magnificence of these stately lives (by special behest of the Majestic Theme), enter into the Paradise prepared for him of old? We beheld him in a vision, bepalaced for evermore in choice saloons resplendent with ormolu and scagliola. There, as he reclined on couches of ambersatin, dazzling duchesses and paladins of high degree fed him with hatchis, as seraphic as his fancies; and served him from salvers of sapphire, expressly manufactured by Ruby of Bond Street. Farewell! Barber-

Grand-Vizier, in thy day thou hast amused many, apparently thyself also; why shouldest thou not amuse us?

Moral—Retrorsum Tonsor—satis lusisti! Get thee behind the scenes, Barber, and let another speak the epilogue. The historian saith: "Small substance in that Figaro: thin wire-drawn intrigues, thin wire-drawn sentiments and sarcasms; a thing lean, barren; yet which winds and whisks itself as through a wholly mad universe, adroitly, with a high-sniffing air; wherein each, which is the grand secret, may see some image of himself and of his own state and ways. So it runs its hundred nights, and all France runs with it; laughing applause—all men must laugh, and a horse-racing Anglomaniac noblesse loudest of all. . . . Beaumarchais has now culminated, and unites the attributes of several demigods" (Carlyle, *French Revol.*, sub. ann., 1784).

# V.

# FROUDE'S LIFE OF CARLYLE

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THE greatest master of English prose within our generation entrusted the story of his life to one of the most skilful of living writers. There is before us, indeed, ample material for judging Thomas Carlyle: thirty octavo volumes of his own, four volumes by his biographer, two volumes of his *Reminiscences*, three volumes of his wife's; letters, diaries, notes, personal anecdotes, portraits. Never was man—neither Johnson, Voltaire, Goethe, nor Byron—more familiar, more interesting to his immediate generation. We know now, perhaps, all of importance that we are ever likely to know. Sartor stands before us at last as mere man. The philosopher of clothes has stripped off his own, to show us that he stands a son of Adam, assuredly not ashamed, as bare before the world as when he came into it nearly ninety years ago.

Have we gained so very much by all this biographical matter? Do we know Thomas Carlyle really better for it, more truly than we knew him from his books forty years ago, and from the passing glimpses of him and tales about him that we in London used

to have while he was with us? It may be doubted. The man is in substance what we knew him and judged him to be. The biographies and autobiographies, the unroofing of his home and the unveiling of his hearth, the letters, journals, and recorded sayings are intensely interesting. But they have told us things that we would rather not have heard. Those who loved him and those who loved her have been shocked, amazed, ashamed, in turn. Those who love good men and good women, those who honour great intellects, those who reverence human nature, have been wounded to the heart. Foul odours, as from a charnel-house, have been suddenly opened on us. We feel as if, in obedience to a call of duty, which we had never knowingly undertaken, we had been forced to stand beside some *post-mortem* dissection of one we revered; as if the diaries of his very physicians and surgeons had been read to us. They have shown us the very entrails of our dead friend—

> "Expende Hannibalem, quot libras in duce summo
> Invenies?"

And yet, now that we have gone through all this, do we really know him better? Is there anything essential that we did not already know? Of essential, nothing. It is the Thomas Carlyle whom we knew all our lives—great prose-poet, potent inspirer of high purposes, master of literary painting, a type of indomitable courage. His own newly published words are full of the old force, but they add nothing

to our sense of his genius. The anecdotes and the revelations have a ghastly interest that is difficult to resist. He holds us with his glittering eye; we listen like a three-years' child; the mariner hath his will. We must all stand and hear the tale, even if we shudder. But the tale tells us nothing that we did not know.

Nay, perhaps, to the multitude and the thoughtless, the new biographical instrument through which we are bidden to look at our old master may prove a hindrance and a source of error. Those who can use the human microscope understand the exaggeration and distortion it presents. The rugosities of the surface, the anatomical details it reveals, will not disgust them. But the many will be puzzled and misled. Such was the imaginative hypertrophy in which Carlyle's great brain habitually worked, such the Rabelaisian redundancy of his humour, such the punctilious piety of his literary executor, that his memory has been subjected to a wholly abnormal examination.

Jeremy Bentham, in the interest of mankind and to the furtherance of science, left his body to be dealt with by the surgeons, and then to be preserved to the gaze of the world in the museum of University College. Thomas Carlyle has chosen to leave his life and his home, his aches and his sores, his grumblings and his washing-bills, to the impartial verdict of posterity. In Mr. Froude he has found a trustee who is ready to carry out his wishes without flinch-

ing. The Shakespearean wealth of imagery that Carlyle carried about with him into every detail of the supper-table or the wardrobe, the scrupulosity of the disciple, and his abundant power as a colourist, have contrived to present a series of pictures which, to those not accustomed to the methods of psychological portrait-painting, may give the effect of a caricature. It is as if the living body of Thomas Carlyle were subjected to the resources of modern science, and the untrained public were called in to stand at the instruments. The microphone is used to enlarge his speech. The grunt or the pshaw that escapes the best of us at times is heard, by Mr. Froude's scientific appliances, as the roaring of a wounded buffalo. The old man's laugh, which in life was so cheery, comes up to us as out of a phonograph, harsh as the mockery of the devils that Dante heard in Malebolge. The oxy-hydrogen microscope is applied to the pimples on his chin, or the warts on his thumb, and they loom to us as big as wens or cancers. The electric light is thrown upon the bared nerve; the photograph reveals the excoriations or callosities of every inch of skin. Poor Swift suffered something of the kind, and Rousseau; and one cannot but regret that, to a brain so far more sane, to a nature so far more robust than theirs, it has been needful to apply a somewhat similar resource.

As we read these letters and diaries, these tales of Carlyle and of his wife, on which art has thrown a light so dazzling, and a magnifying power so peculiar,

we feel as if we were caught up again into the bewildering realm of Brobdingnag. Husband and wife rail at each other like giants and giantesses in a fairy tale; when they have a tiff, it stuns us like the Tower of Babel. The giant's head is the size of a house, with warts like a camel's hump, and a hide like an elephant's. Bugs as big as hedgehogs crawl over his bed. Cocks and hens as large as ostriches crow and scream with the power of a steam-whistle. The giant clears his throat with the sound of an express train; and if his stomach aches, his groaning is as loud as the roaring of a cow that has lost her calf. We know, if the world does not, that all this is an optical and acoustic effect of the oxy-hydrogen or electric magnifier, of the combination of literary telephone, microphone, and phonograph. But though we know better than to take it all as literal, we are not raised or purified by it. We do not know our fine old master any better, we do not love him more, we do not feel him to be a greater, more creative soul. No, rather contrariwise.

Thomas Carlyle stands out to us in these posthumous volumes substantially the man we found him in the thirty volumes of his works. Somewhat darker, fiercer, more inhuman in his ill moods, perhaps; more cruel in little things than we could suppose; more petulant and unmanly at times, with uglier domestic skeletons than we ever suspected. All this is clear and naked. He and his trustee will have it so. They have forced us to pry into his vitals, one might almost

say into his boils and blains. And the world has turned aside shuddering. But this is not all the man, nor the true man; much of it we see to be morbid anatomy; much of it is mere literary exaggeration.

Let us look calmly at the whole tale, and weigh the whole thirty-nine volumes in the mass, and we see a very great nature; a very noble life, however unlovely; a very memorable work done, though not of the creative kind, which grows ever larger in its issue. But in the end the man stands out, of solid worth and indomitable will; capable of great generosity, of sincere love; faithful, truthful, simple, kindly, in the main, in all the greater duties; and of heroic courage in the task to which his life was so passionately dedicated from his youth. This is the substance, mixed as we now see it, from first to last, with rough ways in smaller things, an egoism hardly sane, and laughable weakness in the petty ills of existence. That imagination of his, as powerful in its sphere as any recorded in our literature, is now seen to be part of his breath and life. The poet's eye rolls in a fine frenzy night and day incessantly, as he tosses on his bed, or eats his porridge, or walks abroad. Carlyle lived in one waking vision; houses, factories, fields, and mountains glared at him like phantoms in Hades; men and women around him gibbered with the hollow voices of ghosts; the ordinary sounds of our daily life—a barking dog, a crowing cock, the rattle of wheels, and the tradesman's call—seemed to him the din of a nightmare. Carlyle walked about London

like Dante in the streets of Verona, gnawing his own heart and dreaming dreams of Inferno. To both the passers-by might have said, See! there goes the man who has seen hell.

And that marvellous gift of language we find in his journals and letters to be the very skin of his body; the style itself part of his very mind, which he could no more put off than he could put off his Annandale accent. We see it shaping every word he uttered or spoke to his wife, his mother, the most trivial phrase, the most solemn records of his heart,—all stand in the irrepressible Carlylese. Carlylese is not a satisfactory, never a pleasing tongue; the finest Carlylese is never equal to the finest English; and yet it is one of the most potent instruments ever used by articulate Englishman. And here we see it growing upon him, mastering him, deforming his very thought at last; becoming in the end a fetish to him, a mannerism or habit, as unpleasant as that of cursing or spitting.

The essential thing, perhaps the only thing, about a writer which concerns the public is how he wrote his books. And in this biography we see Carlyle at work, full of zeal and endurance. He was a great and powerful worker. Yet here let us not exaggerate. Compared with the really great students of the world, Carlyle was almost an amateur. Littré, with his authentic sixteen hours of work each day, an ordinary German professor, scores of scholars and students, much exceeded his utmost limits. Indeed, the book

gives us rather the impression of very frequent holidays and an immense range of social entertainment. It is the same with his material resources. Carlyle lived and worked in poverty, in most honourable poverty, most nobly accepted and even welcomed. There is nothing finer in literary history than the stern resolution with which he clung to a life of simplicity. Here, again, one must not exaggerate. His real difficulties about money lasted at most four or five years. During the greater part of his life he had nearly all that he seriously needed. At no time did his mode of living fall below the standard of comfort to which he had been accustomed to his full manhood. It would have been regarded as luxurious by his father and his mother, his sisters, and his entire family. A man who kept a horse to ride almost all through life; who made annual tours to Scotland, at times to Wales, Ireland, Germany, or the Mediterranean; whose friends gave him horses, wine, books, houses, whenever these were needed; to whom the most delightful homes in England were always open; whom so many persons, both friends and strangers, served freely for love, such a man was never in poverty. To those who recall how many men of genius have laboured in real want, in absolute neglect; sick, friendless, oppressed, and hungry, it is not pleasant to read these cries of despair from a man who was well fed, well housed, well received, married to a noble woman, welcomed by all that is great, powerful, and cultured, surfeited with all that wealth

could offer him, and bored by the attentions of a crowd of devoted friends.

And this miserable tale of his married life is all clear now; neither so sacred and profound as his biographer thinks, nor so evil as some in their first anger declared. That Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh were two people of deep natures, both strong, proud, generous, and sensitive, is most clear; that she had a most acute brain, and he unique genius; that they both vehemently resolved to do their duty in their homes; that both were capable of deep affection; that each had for the other a solid esteem and a keen admiration, deepening perhaps at last into love, and finally, on his side, into a passion of remorse and regret,—all this is clear to all men. Nor is it less clear that their married life from the first day had an unwholesome side; that it was often a kind of torture to one, and sometimes to both; that it was broken by prolonged spasms of jealousy and unhappiness; dimmed by frequent separation in fact, and by lifelong lukewarmness in heart. It is all most plain; he has forced us to stand and listen to his sobs of remorse and pity.

It is a cruel story; why can we not be spared? What right or what duty have we to be called in so long after death to sit in judgment on these full hearts beating with such wrath, and poured out with so much hot indignation, to listen over again to the bitter speech, to watch the tragic misunderstanding growing up between two fine spirits which earnestly

sought to love and to cherish? Why need we be summoned to the castigation of this posthumous penance? Is it the right of every man who may have written some great books to fling into the street the inner sanctities of his hearth; his wife's letters, diaries, clothes, and marriage bed, his pots and his pans, the rag-basket of his sores, and the scribblings of his ill-humours; calling on men, women, and children to take warning in the name of God's truth and man's shame? And can it be the duty of a friend to whom the revolting office is committed to pour forth this mass of domestic lumber and cast clothing in such quantity that an untrue effect is produced on the reader?

Few are the homes without their skeleton, or the lives that have nothing unseemly within. And when the skeleton is made to dance before our eyes with wondrous literary juggling, and the unseemly thing is painted by the hand of Spagnoletto or Goya, a moral wound is inflicted on the conscience of men. Let us correct this impression produced by unwholesome art. We have the most certain witness to prove that the married life of Carlyle was not the failure and wreck which these volumes might incline not a few to believe. If it never reached the highest and most lovely region of married happiness, and at times came perilously close to married misery, it was in the main the worthy effort after happiness of two just spirits, too much resembling each other to be happy in their own marriage, each perhaps too faulty to be

perfectly happy in any marriage. It is a tale of millions of homes, somewhat below the chosen few, far above the actual wrecks—αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπὲ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

What have we to do with this? And yet, perhaps it is as well that now and then the veil should be lifted from the fireside, and from off the human heart of man and wife. It is a mystery that no poem and no romance has ever solved. What depths and infinite windings are there in the heart and life of man! Can we ever hear enough as to the sources of happiness and misery, of love and despair? Do we not learn much when we have the mysteries unbared; when we watch the harsh word and look cutting into the nerves of the other; when we trace the gathering volume of irritation and offence, the wanderings of two hearts, each too proud to speak the little word that would end it all; when we see a good and humane soul blindly groping toward a pit, blundering into undesigned wrong from which certain agony must come? In a book, or on the stage, we follow all this with emotion and almost with delight. In real life it is too horrible, too unfathomable, too humiliating to human nature to suffer us to look on steadily. The real tales of this sort are to be guessed at for the most part. Let us, too, pass reverently, keeping silence even from good words.

Such a drama of real life these volumes reveal to us, true and literal, recorded by one of the greatest dramatists in our language, out of things known only

to him and to one other. The remorse of Thomas Carlyle is a tragedy more painful than many a drama; it is so homely, photographic, realistic in its incidents. Memory is more potent than imagination; and the memory of one of the most imaginative of modern men is an instrument of terrible power. How a great man and a good woman can torture each other and themselves for the lack of certain humanities, and by reason of certain morbid egoisms,—all this has been told us by a master of literary picturing; a tale clearer to his vision than any beheld in the mind's eye of poet. It is not art, this. No, nor truth, nor human nature. It needs must be that offences come, but woe to him by whom they come.

If it be that such an autopsy of the personal and domestic life of our fellow-men is ever desirable, why, we may ask, need the subject be a man who has written famous books? The great writers are seldom great characters; their homes are rarely examples; their surroundings often unworthy. Their mode of existence is usually abnormal, and they do not, as a rule, triumph over its perils. Exaggeration by themselves and by their friends is almost a consequence of their literary distinction. They lead, for the most part, lives unwholesomely stimulated on one side, and these lives are recorded with disproportioned minuteness and needless colouring. It is true that mankind crave for these over-elaborated portraits; but morality and society in no way gain by satisfying the demand for their manufacture.

Truth! truth! what things are done in thy name, as Madame Roland said of liberty. Because a man has written some very extraordinary books, the world craves to know how the writer of them lived. And so they ransack his drawers when he is dead; and every crude word he ever flung upon paper, or growled out in his sulks, is published to mankind. Even the secret thoughts of his wife, the sentences of grief, anger, misunderstanding, wrung from her in tears in the silence of her chamber, become literary property and go through several editions. What right has any man (no leave given) to publish the innermost wailing of a woman's heart, which she herself kept secret from every eye, even from her husband's? And every scurrilous phrase, calumny, or caricature that ever slipped from the eminent writer is to be added to the literature of our country, in the name of truth and to the eternal confusion of cant. Better cant itself than the washings and offscourings of these pots and pans, where the eminent writer flung the orts of his ill-digested meals.

That "a master of gibes and flouts," the greatest, perhaps, in our modern history, should get into the habit of painting caricatures of every man, woman, and child that ever crossed his path, was bad enough. But to publish all these ill-natured scrawls, as soon as he is dead, is hardly a work of moral duty. This man, we read more than once, is a compound of "frog and viper;" that one is an inferior kind of Robespierre; Macaulay is a "squat, low-browed," "com-

monplace" object; Wordsworth is a "small, diluted man," a "contemptibility;" Coleridge, a "weltering, ineffectual being;" Keats' poems are "dead dog;" Keble, author of the *Christian Year*, is a "little ape;" Cardinal Newman has "not the intellect of a moderate-sized rabbit;" *Pickwick* is "lowest trash;" Charles Lamb is a "pitiful tomfool," a "despicable abortion;" the Saturday Reviewer is a "dirty puppy;" Mill is a poor, frozen, mechanical being, a "logic-chopping engine." A memorable thing about Grote is his "spout mouth;" about Bright his "cock-nose." Gladstone is "one of the contemptiblest men," "a spectral kind of phantasm," "nothing in him but forms and ceremonies."

And this is Truth! Say rather, that it is serving round a famous man's spittoon. If this mere spittle were in truth Carlyle's mind, one would hold it as rancid and as false as any on record. But it is not his real mind. Carlyle, one of the greatest caricaturists that ever lived, got into a mental habit like that with which we see persons afflicted who, under nervous excitement, involuntarily gibber and make faces at strangers. Carlyle was incessantly making faces at everybody. The professional caricaturist (poor devil) goes about the world scrawling on his shirt-sleeve grotesque sketches of everything he sees. And so this master of nicknames jots down his buffooneries wholesale. But all this is really cant, a vile habit, a trick that became his master and not a little disfigures his veracity.

And that other trick of cursing and befouling the entire human race—man, woman, and child, horse or dog, cock or hen, all that cross the Carlylean orbit, are bespattered with a torrent of Ernulphus' cursing, which begins by being silly, and ends by becoming sickening. A maid-servant is never spoken of but as a "puddle," a "scandalous randy," a "sluttish harlot;" a man-servant is always a "flunkey." The valet who brings him hot water and brushes his clothes is a "flunkey of the devil." This uniform brutality toward servants is a very evil sign. People who are always quarrelling with those who serve them in their homes have assuredly something wrong with them—are ill-conditioned, we say. The world at large is a "dusty fuliginous chaos;" Europe a "huge suppuration;" society a "festering dung-heap," and so on. "I find emptiness and chagrin," he cries; "I can reverence no existing man." "To how many things is one tempted to say with slow emphasis, *Du galgenaas* ('thou gallows-carrion'). There is some relief to me in a word like that." Alas! what a melancholy cant is here! A noble spirit, in its musings, fretting itself into a temper like nothing in this world but that of the street Arab or hungry costermonger, whose every sentence contains an oath and names that we only express by a blank. That any human soul could sink to the point of finding pleasure in calling men and things "thou gallows-carrion" is pitiful enough. But solemnly to record it and print it as a typical thought. O Thomas, Thomas, thou wert a rugged, stormy soul

in life! But it would be a deep wrong to think this crazy venom, worthy of some literary Quilp, was the truth about thee!

Let us shut up this waste-basket of a great man's spleen; it gives no true picture of his inner nature. As he said himself, "the world will never know my life;" and of his biographer he wrote, "Forbear, poor fool!" For all the talk about truth and scorn of concealment, there are blanks and reticences and material suppression of important fact. Even in this heap of dirty linen there are things kept covered. One wonders what was the line below which outrage, disgust, and public scandal were thought to lie. Thomas Carlyle is strong enough to bear much, and his memory will bear even this. Scores and scores of men who knew him well still walk the earth. They tell us of a generous, hearty, simple man of genius, manly in his bearing, in his happier moods friendly and even dignified. The present writer can remember him in extreme old age, quite a model of courteous and cheery repose, most ready to give, open of access, simple, fatherly, nay, patriarchal. That this venerable and stately elder had had his hours of darkness was indeed most clear. But oh, that, as he said, "his bewildered wrestlings" could have been buried there! We gain nothing new, nothing true in the inner sense. It is like hanging out his old clothes on a waxen image of the man.

These few words are an attempt to weigh the book of Mr. Froude, not the life or the work of Thomas

Carlyle, which latter would be a task far beyond the pretensions of this short essay. Our present purpose is to urge all those who seek to know Thomas Carlyle, to go straight to his books, and not to his biographer, or his own posthumous memorials. Thomas Carlyle was a great spiritual force in his best day; but he long outlived his best day, and the objects whereon his prime force was expended. He was a great writer of history, a fiery kindler of the historical sense in men. He was a wonderful literary artist; and this is the really distinctive note of him, though his art at the best was somewhat abnormal, falling short of the serene level of perfect art. Thinker, prophet, or judge he was not. It was the long mistake of his life to imagine himself thinker, prophet, and judge; to mistake literary mastery for philosophic power. And it is the same mistake in his few devoted followers which exaggerated the value of his latter-day deliverances, and has given to the world those unworthy jottings of his least heroic moods.

Let those who wish to know the man go to his greater works: his *French Revolution*, his *Cromwell*, his *Heroes*, his *Past and Present*, his *Sartor*. They have all grave shortcomings and misleading ideas, but they are sterling books, and in their day did inestimable service. In the period which separates the era of Bentham from the era of Darwin, the influence of Thomas Carlyle was the most potent and the most ennobling. It was an influence somewhat akin to that of Goethe, though neither so wide, so deep, nor

so original. If he did not create the true historic sense of our century (a revival common to Europe, and really a reaction against the fanaticism of the great Revolution), Carlyle did much to plant it firmly in England. He did not form the earnest social interest which marks our generation (an interest which was due to Bentham and the Benthamites, and the social revolutions of 1848), but Carlyle gave to those social aspirations a tone as by a trumpet and the reality of a summons to judgment. He did not originate the religious revival of our generation (a revival also common to Europe, and really an effect of the historic and the social movement combined), but Carlyle has invested it with a passion and an ideal: all the more perhaps that his own ideal was profoundly unsettling and utterly vague. Hence it is that he has had so much to do with the birth of those movements in religion, in socialism, in art, in history, in criticism, and even in poetry, which our own generation is wont to associate with such men as Cardinal Newman, Frederick D. Maurice, John Ruskin, Professor Freeman, Matthew Arnold, and Tennyson. All of them have learnt much of him, even where they have greatly improved on the strong impulse which he first imparted. He himself, however vehemently he disclaimed their teaching, owed much to Coleridge, to Irving, to Bentham, to Mill; more perhaps to Walter Scott, to Goethe, and to Richter; but most of all to that Revolution and the Revolutionary school which he was never weary of cursing. Thomas Carlyle, for

all his German masters, and his Benthamite surroundings, is in spirit a child of the great Revolution of the eighteenth century, as it worked in the soul of a Scotch Puritan peasant of genius.

Puritan he was, Scotch peasant he was, Revolutionist he was to his last breath, with the fierce, uncouth, anarchic spirit of all these untamed in him to the end, bursting out through his really vast culture and a nature saturated with a bright genius. And it is this which so often makes us think of him together with Rousseau. There is in both the same explosive temper, the same passion, the same delirious egoism; and in both the literary genius runs riot in the field of philosophy and politics, where it had no just claim to teach or to guide. But to compare these two singular men is to be unjust to Carlyle, unjust to Rousseau. Carlyle has left us far more solid work than Rousseau; whilst, as an artist and preacher, he is far below the level of the supreme sophist. If both point the moral of the misery and waste to which the solitary rebel against society condemns himself, Carlyle lived a happy and a noble life compared with the craziness, the degradation, the unmanliness of Rousseau. If the great French writer chose but a limited field, he reached perfection in that, and is quite incapable of the clumsy ribaldry which Carlyle could never shake off. Carlyle had many more truths to utter than Rousseau; but he has not left behind him that burning and increasing faith in the future of the People, which is the positive Gospel of Rousseau, and which

lifts all the memories of insurrection, folly, and vanity from off the dishonoured bones, the resting-place of which no man can tell.

Carlyle is one whose great work we have to use, not one whom we have to follow; who suggested many things to the last generation, who will leave little enough to the next. Even in history, where his true mission was, and where he has left such noble monuments, we cannot trust ourselves to him. His estimates are too often extravagant or misleading. Outrageous over-praise is to be found with no less wanton disparagement. To call good old Johnson "the last of the Romans;" poor Burns "the thunder-god;" to single out Mirabeau as the man who might have saved France in the Revolution, and Napoleon as the man who closed it, is hardly less extravagant than to pour a torrent of contempt on the philosophers, the economists, the statesmen, the movements of the Eighteenth Century and the Nineteenth—indeed, on almost all men and all women in these luckless eras, except the two or three who are saved in the Universal Deluge and are taken up in the Carlylean ark. And the memory of Carlyle is heavily weighted by all that he has said about military tyranny, slavery, and the negro. Three words, three ideas form the saving faith of our times—Evolution, the People, Humanity: and these three ideas were ever to Thomas Carlyle what a red flag is to a bull.

What then, in sooth, is the meaning of these strange contradictions? What is the riddle of a nature which

seems to have poured forth its last drop only to puzzle us more? Here is a man with poetic gifts of the first rank, a born artist, yet whose art is a perpetual torment to him, having to the last something uncouth and abortive in all its creations. Here is a man with an insight that at times touches that of Tacitus, Bacon, or Goethe, yet whose gift ends in a wearisome knack of caricature. Here is one of the great masters of the English tongue, who finally settles into a tiresome mannerism. A man, one would think, of really religious nature, whose religion it is hardly possible to put into words, who with "God," "devil," "hell," and "damnation" as often on his lips as on a carter's, appears now to have denied that any of these had practical effect on human affairs in any literal sense. And so one who has written some of the most powerful books of this century, and deeply stirred the mind of the last generation, has passed away without leaving more than a chapter in the history of literature, without founding anything, leaving behind him to carry on his work two or three men who have just learned to mimic his cloudy jeremiads.

We can all see now that he really, in his heart, believed in nothing. All beliefs, demonstrations, certainties of other people he swept away. There were hundreds and thousands, he thinks, of "greater men than Newton." Everything like a system, a set of doctrines, even a few coherent principles, was all mere cant, windbags, shams, inanities. The old Hebrew belief was "Houndsditch;" the modern belief in

realities was atheism. Carlyle, like Descartes, made a *tabula rasa* of all belief. He then interpreted *cogito ergo sum* to mean, "I think, therefore I am; no one else thinks, therefore all others are shams." But Carlyle, being not a philosopher, but a prose poet, could get no further. Having come out of Houndsditch himself, he hugged the rags of Houndsditch to his dying day round his brawny limbs. The Bible continued to serve him with horrible expletives and apocalyptic tropes. Calvinism had bred in him the moody, dogged, mystical temper of the Cameronian peasant. He flung off the creed, but he kept the temper. Metaphysics, of the Kantian or Hegelian kind, he rejected also, retaining, unluckily, the key to the cloudland, the *Ich* and the *Nicht-Ich*, the bare idea of absolute and transcendental. Hence Carlyle, rejecting at once all theologies, all philosophies, all syntheses alike, and bound by his very ideal to ridicule the possibility of any theology, any philosophy, any synthesis, was forced into a creed that at last got stereotyped into the simple words, "I believe in Thomas Carlyle; which faith, unless a man keep, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

And so it was that a man, by nature of noble sincerity and unselfishness, of keen vision and profound yearning after goodness and truth, came, by the power of a gloomy superstition, to reach such heights of maniacal egoism, such depths of corrosive inhumanity, as he and his friends have scattered through these posthumous volumes. And with all this raving about

atheists and unbelievers, Thomas Carlyle stands pilloried on the pedestal which he so laboriously framed for himself, as of all modern Englishmen the one most utterly naked of any intelligible belief. For neither he nor his biographer can get any further in any definite proposition than that this earth was tophet, and Thomas Carlyle the only wise man in it. There is not in these volumes one philosophic, religious, or social doctrine—nothing constructive, directing, or fruitful. There is railing, mockery, and imprecation of a truly Gargantuan kind; but what of real, humane, positive, or systematic? Words, words, pictures, tropes, sublimities enough to make the major and the minor prophets; but nothing to hold by, to work with, or to teach.

It comes out that this flux of talk about devil, hell, tophet, and heaven, is all allegory or image. Thomas Carlyle never believed that the devil really made the cocks to crow or spoiled his porridge, or that his good friends and neighbours would end in everlasting fire. No! nor that God specially interposed for him to enable him to finish his chapter or digest his dinner, or that all the petty trifles of his life were the peculiar work of "His unspeakable mercy." All this was cant, trick of irreverent speech, habit of bilious self-absorption, nothing else. The Immensities and Unspeakabilities come at last to this. One might as well say the Brutalities, and the Self-idolatries, and the Utter Nonsensicalities. For at the close of his long life Carlyle found out at last that God "does nothing."

An otiose God, then, surveying unmoved "this dusty, fuliginous chaos," is the residuum of all this furious apostrophising.

Wreck, failure, hopelessness: these are the words which the faithful disciple inscribes on his master's grave. The greatest will and courage cannot help the man who obstinately defies his fellow-men. The grandest literary genius will enable no man to solve *de novo* by his own single insight the problems of philosophy and life. The most passionate yearning after right will not suffice to him who resolves to seek right by the light of his own unaided conscience. And thus the great brain and the fine nature of Carlyle end in an egoism that comes perilously near to mania. No "thinker" indeed he, if by thinking we mean the coherent working out of complex questions to practical results. None but a few literary dreamers even call him thinker. And it is not given to poets or to prophets to teach us philosophy, nor duty, nor truth. Nay, the sons of the prophet can do little now but show us how hopelessly their master ended, when he pretended to teach as well as to picture, to astonish, or to stimulate.

What a pitiful tale is this so-called life! A grand imagination stinging itself to death, like a scorpion, in its frenzy of self-absorption; a generous heart turned to gall because it had lost its way, lost all hope of finding a way; an "influence," a master of speech, a glorious inciter to great things; an "influence," deeper doubtless than Coleridge, higher than Johnson, but

how much lower than the mighty Burke! Let us think of him sadly and kindly, lying amongst the Annandale peasants from whom he came forth and of whom he was ever one. Compare the cruel storms in the life of this lost soul with the serene humanity of those whom he nicknamed atheists. Read the autobiography of Hume, and see how a really great thinker could die, with sweetness, hope, and love in every tone. Or read the memoirs of Gibbon, or the life of Turgot, of Adam Smith, of Condorcet. Or, lastly, compare these fuliginous railings and wailings with the manly, self-possessed, simple story told by the magnanimous spirit of John Mill. They found peace; while the wild spirit who in life covered them with his mockery, went tossing down to his last rest in scorn, hate, and despair. "Wa, wa," he tells us the dying Frankish King cried, "who is this mighty power which pulls down the strongest?" "Wa, wa," wails Thomas Carlyle, recognising a power too strong to be resisted. That power is humanity, the human race, which his long life was devoted to deriding, and which now, in his death, still honours him as a brother of rare genius and mighty purpose.

VI.

# THE LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT

# THE LIFE OF GEORGE ELIOT.[1]

It is pleasant to think that of one of our great English writers we at last have a truly faithful picture—one wherein no man can find offence, and with which her spirit may rest in peace undisturbed. The Life which her husband has given to the world is worthy of George Eliot; it is such a life as she, with her instinctive dread of biographies, would have chosen to leave behind her, and it recalls with curious fidelity the mind and spirit of the original.

Loving reverence has drawn a likeness which no literary art could have produced, and which the more familiar kinds of literary art would have cruelly spoiled. In form the book is new, so new and so successful in its method as perhaps to promise a new type of biography. It is an autobiography, not composed by the biographer herself, but put together out of letters, diaries, and notes extending over forty-two years, connected by so much narrative as the editor

[1] *George Eliot's Life, as related in her Letters and Journals.* Arranged and edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross. Blackwood. 3 vols. crown 8vo. 1885.

thought needful to give unity to the whole. But of the entire work of some fourteen hundred pages, there are hardly fifty by the editor himself, and these are in the same type and quietly blended with the journals and letters. The letters again appear, not in the too familiar way, in small type, solemnly copied from "Dear Sir," to "Yours truly," looking for all the world like fossil shells in the chalk cliff of the editorial big print, but they appear as fragments of autobiography, duly pruned of mere frivolities, the margin alone disclosing the date, the occasion, and the person addressed.

The Life so composed is in every sense an autobiography, yet it is free from the defects natural to all autobiographies. When a man writes his own life he is *ex hypothesi* posing before posterity, and even if he has the humane serenity of Hume, or the Spartan simplicity of Mill, he will be just a little conscious, though it be but to add one touch more to his habitual *insouciance* or to his constitutional reticence. And then an autobiography has always the serious defect of describing events and impressions at a great distance as seen through memory alone, when the interests of the years gone by are pale and the very character has changed. An autobiography is the tale of his youth that an old man tells to his descendants. There is something a little artificial in the effort of memory to recollect the past; something a little artificial in the effort to present his reputation to the future. And none but the finest natures have succeeded in

the task. A journal is too often a thin and jerky instrument to use, and is seldom that wherein men present their best thoughts in their happiest tones. It is too often a receptacle of wayward ideas which the writer half trusts may never be read, and half hopes will look mellow if seen through the softening effect of time.

Cart-ropes and wild horses would never have drawn out of George Eliot a deliberate autobiography. Her journal is a simple record of facts, without any profusion of thought or careful recording of feeling. Yet in these pages we have after all a real autobiography, of which she has been the unconscious author. The letters, journals, and notes record the growth of the mind from month to month during forty years, and that without any sense of secrecy in the writing on the one hand, or any idea of publication on the other. It is a process which one would hardly wish to see generally applied to the letters of famous persons. No one would like to have Byron's letters so woven into consecutive narrative, nor could Scott's life be duly written by means of his private correspondence. George Eliot's can be, and thus the book before us is a strangely realistic presentation of herself. Not perchance of herself within, as she and some one or two may have known all that lay underneath the reticent self-communion of her heart, but of that outward self which the world saw. Of all that even her intimate friends saw this book is, I think, the true and sufficient record.

So faithful a record that to many of her friends it will have the effect of illusion. One can almost fancy that it is a posthumous work of her own, that she is not only the subject, but the sole author of the Life. The very form of the page, the symmetry, the care and exceeding thoughtfulness, the felicitous citation of a motto or a phrase, the no less felicitous illustrations of face and home, all curiously recall the inexhaustible thirst after perfection which gave us *Romola*. What art did there, love in a sense has done here, and in the measured chastened pages of her familiar letters, in the ever-meditating mood, in the unflinching grasp upon philosophy and science, in the almost oppressive spirit of conscientious work, in the almost morbid dislike of scandal, unkindness, mere babble and mere fashion, the book is her book, not a book about her. We who knew her can hear it in her very tones, recall the gesture with which she spoke this or that sentence. Her shadowy hand seems to have guided the pen of the compiler, and her spirit to have informed his judgment, as the heap of time-discoloured writings, treasured by many a friend and unknown to the world without, grew beneath his hand into a clear and continuous Life.

Those who have been accustomed to lively anecdotes, interspersed with cutting bits of personal satire, may possibly find these volumes wanting in amusement. As was happily said the other day, some readers like *Truth* better than the truth. They are certainly not good reading for those who are surfeited

on the memoirs of court favourites or party politicians. They are like her books, like herself, "sober, steadfast, and demure." The true note of *Penseroso* is heard in them throughout: "o'erlaid with black, staid wisdom's hue," "with even step, and musing gait." So she was in life, so in her letters, so also in her tales, the thought almost overpowering the expression; the expression finished, and right in art, but withal not wholly spontaneous, often wanting in *brio*, in rapidity of *scherzo* passages, not seldom in the mood of Beethoven in his least effective manner. And yet, like the master, how weighty, full, and satisfying to the thoughtful mind!

These letters are the record of a purely literary life, as her life was, and such is the only record which as a rule the public have a right to ask about famous writers. As a record of mental growth, methods of work, canons of art, the book is complete. Those who expect to find in it passion, storm, romance, and all the maze of antipathies, loves, quarrels, and struggles which make up so much of many famous literary memoirs, are likely to suffer disappointment. It may be doubted if there ever was much of these things woven in the life of George Eliot, and certainly it may be doubted if even her most intimate friends have anything thereon that they could faithfully record. There is little enough of such a sort to be gleaned from the letters. Nor need we suppose that any written line of hers survives which would tell us more. All letters to Mr. George Lewes she deliberately burnt

after his death. They were meant for one eye, and the world had no business with them. But of the sobs and the spasms which so often fill the lives of men of letters how little is there here! The sobs and the spasms are perhaps for the most part of the subjective order, wonderfully magnified by the literary sensibility, and coloured by that egoism of romance which besets the masters of the pen. It may be a useful lesson to those who are prone to admire the Confessions and the Autobiographical Musings of some men of genius to see how a woman, in genius their equal, in sensibility their superior, measures out her words from the "fixéd mind" to her intimate friends and alike in her private diary, neither cursing fate, nor her acquaintances, scorning random slander, too proud to exhibit her heart in a glass case, her mind so busy with the greater things that there is but small room for the personal and the trivial.

As enjoyable letters, tried by the highest literary type, there is too little perhaps of the personal and the trivial. They want the idyllic simplicity of Cowper, the wicked wit of Charles Lamb, the abounding vitality of Byron; nor have they the whispering charm of the letters of some women far her inferiors. But they are fine letters; full of goodness, truthfulness, thought, originality; very carefully written, without an idle or an evil word. George Eliot did not disdain either the personal or the trivial; she dealt with both in the same patient and dutiful temper she brought to greater things. Only she found

personalities and trivialities too sorry subjects to be dignified with paper and pen. *Perituræ parcere chartæ* was her motto in their case; she would not waste paper and ink in recording them. And the giddy world which likes nothing better than these flies in amber is far from pleased. George Eliot, it turns out, was a much more accomplished housewife than Jane Austen, but she does not gossip on in Jane's delicious way about cookmaids and village match-making, the neighbours' frocks, and young Frank's awkwardness at a ball. There is plenty of the kind in George Eliot's novels; but this is the observant imagination of the artist. It does not enter into her life, colour her private correspondence, or supply salt and seasoning to her literary Remains.

It is not a little curious also how very small a part of the correspondence has literature as its subject or is exchanged with men of letters. Except a complimentary letter or two from Dickens, Bulwer, and one or two letters to Miss Martineau and Mrs. Stowe, there is in these three volumes hardly any correspondence whatever with authors. And this is the more remarkable as George Eliot was in social relations with almost every well-known name of her time in literature, science, and art. Almost all her letters are addressed to intimate friends, not to companions in letters; with very few exceptions to women, and most of them friends of very long standing. The subject of them is in the main such things as a very thoughtful woman finds most interesting to the women she

loves—the happiness of friends, the duties of friendship performed or planned for the future, the moral problems of life, the new knowledge acquired, the progress of the family, the influence of scenes, books, or characters on the spirit, the yearning after rest and some clearer insight into the tangle of destiny. George Eliot's are not the letters of the critic, of the humourist, of the wit, of the painter of manners, or the painter of character. The substance of them is the serious outpouring of heart common in close friendship, home affections, home cares, conscientious work; all rendered solemn by moral and philosophic flashes such as strike us, like the forked lightning, in *Silas Marner*, or *Romola*, or the *Spanish Gypsy*.

What a record of unflinching mental training do these volumes present! How touching is the little inscription in *The Linnet's Life*, "the first book that George Eliot read." "It made me very happy," she wrote, "when I held it in my little hand, and read it over and over again." The child of five, who began the art of reading over and over again with the *Linnet's Life*, persevered in study through life, till the whole range of the best literature, both ancient and modern, was hers. With a scientific knowledge of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, the four continental languages, and a complete familiarity with all that is best in our own literature, she combined not a little science; some mathematics, some astronomy, physics, botany, and biology. In the higher philosophy she spent some twelve years in the opening of her literary life. She

only took up the pen to write a novel when she was already one of the most accomplished minds of her time. In these new volumes we have a sufficient record of the gradual acquisition of this great learning. It differs indeed from the casual reading of the omnivorous bookman. It has none of that restless consumption of print which too often is mistaken for learning. It is rather the systematic study of subjects. There go to form it a careful selection of the best; exclusion of the trivial; and an admirable balance of art, science, and philosophy.

How different this from the critic's sipping of new books as they come all fresh from the binder! It is rather the older than the new books which George Eliot reads. She reads more to complete a certain branch of knowledge than to *savourer* a particular writer. Her studies are not so eclectic but what they are controlled by a deep philosophy; and we see them all falling into their due place in an orderly scheme of knowledge. Art holds its true place as the interpreter of Truth, but not her guide. Science is not shunned as if it were a skeleton on wires, something unseemly in the home of the beautiful. And in her wise and far-reaching vision philosophy is the constant guide of life and knowledge. In this completeness of range and solid harmony of culture George Eliot represented to our age something of that gospel of which Goethe was the older prophet.

Real culture such as hers is a far more solid thing than those airy acquirements which often usurp the

name. George Eliot's culture was knowledge harmonised by artistic instinct, and deepened by an abiding moral glow. Culture is too often supposed to be attainable by fine critical taste, and a curious felicity in pirouetting around many things. To her science, philosophy, social ideals were the substance of culture; the graceful form and the critical judgment were the instrument by which it speaks. "Her gratitude," she writes, "increases continually for the illumination contributed to her life,"—by one whom, strangely enough, the higher criticism pronounces after all to be "a grotesque old French pedant." But Culture and Criticism too often see men and things in a very different light. Just so, Bossuet saw things differently from those charming *abbés* of the Regency who taught *belles lettres*, and many other matters, to the "*belles marquises*" of the day. On the whole we shall most of us prefer the Culture of George Eliot, with its ordered scheme of knowledge, its hold on moral life and scientific philosophy, to that Culture which finds Science and Philosophy too hard to understand.

After all that has been written about George Eliot's place as an artist, it may be doubted if attention has been properly directed to her one unique quality. Whatever be her rank amongst the creators of romance (and perhaps the tendency now is to place it too high rather than too low), there can be no doubt that she stands entirely apart and above all writers of fiction, at any rate in England, by her philosophic power and general mental calibre. No other English novelist

has ever stood in the foremost rank of the thinkers of his time. Or to put it the other way, no English thinker of the higher quality has ever used romance as an instrument of thought. Our greatest novelists could not be named beside her off the field of novel-writing. Though some of them have been men of wide reading, and even of special learning, they had none of them pretensions to the best philosophy and science of their age. Fielding and Goldsmith, Scott and Thackeray, with all their inexhaustible fertility of mind, were never in the higher philosophy compeers of Hume, Adam Smith, Burke, and Bentham. But George Eliot, before she wrote a tale at all, in mental equipment stood side by side with Mill, Spencer, Lewes, and Carlyle. If she produced nothing in philosophy, moral or mental, quite equal to theirs, she was of their kith and kin, of the same intellectual quality. Her conception of Sociology was quite as profound as that of Mill, and in some ways keener in insight; if Lewes knew more of psychology or biology, she could teach him much in history and in morals. There are in *Silas Marner*, *Adam Bede*, and the *Spanish Gypsy*, volcanic bursts of prophetic teaching which Teufelsdröckh never surpassed. That is to say, George Eliot, who at her death left no living novelist to be mentioned beside her, was all her life in intellectual fellowship with the first philosophic minds of her day.

Turn it the other way. None of our English thinkers of the first, second, or even third rank, have

resorted to romance as a vehicle of thought. The only possible exceptions that occur to me are Swift, Dr. Johnson, and Miss Martineau; but *Gulliver*, *Rasselas*, and *Deerbrook* are romances only by courtesy for their authors. Abroad there have been examples of men of foremost intellectual force who have written novels. Of these one only—Goethe—has written a true novel in a vein worthy of himself. And it is to *Wilhelm Meister* that we may most aptly go for analogues to the George Eliot cycle of novels. Of course, as poet, as a secular force of European rank, Goethe himself stands apart. But in his *Wilhelm Meister* we have those meditations upon life, human nature, and society, that supreme culture, and a certain Shakespearean way of looking down upon the world as from a vantage-ground afar, which again and again recur in George Eliot and give her the unique impression of tragic mystery amongst modern novelists.

Then again Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot wrote prose fictions which may by a stretch of language be called novels. But the wit of *Candide*, the pathos of the *Religieuse*, the passion of *Héloïse* do not make up a tale fit to be placed beside *Silas Marner*, as a complete gem of art in the true field of romance. Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Goethe, Victor Hugo, Carlyle, obviously take rank above George Eliot in the sum of the intellectual impulse they gave to their time. But none of them, unless it be the author of the *Misérables*, can be said to be her equal in the painting of real life and actual manners.

And here we may find at once the strength and the weakness of George Eliot. With a mental equipment of the first order, her principal instrument was art. And so she played a double part—as the most philosophic artist, or the most artistic philosopher in recent literature. It has been well said that there are flashes of hers which recall Pascal, Dante, Tacitus. There are certainly some which are worthy of Burke, Condorcet, or Vauvenargues. There are single passages which Bacon might have conceived, and others which Montaigne might have written. And again there are thoughts which Coleridge and De Maistre have never surpassed. One need not compare her in the sum with any of these famous thinkers. It is plain that in philosophy she has not produced work that can weigh with theirs. But it is the sustained commerce with men like these, the continually recurring sense that we are in contact with a mind of their order, of the same intellectual family, which rouses in us so intense a delight in her novels that we are apt to indulge in hyperbolic language.

But the question comes in, and it must be answered, "Could she play the double part perfectly?" Did her philosophy, culture, moral earnestness, overweight her art? or was her art the complete and easy instrument for interpreting all that her brain and her soul contained? Few are now convinced that her art was always equal to so great a demand. For that reason it may be doubted whether it will ultimately take the very first rank. A few of the greatest sons of men

have combined all that their age had attained with supreme creative ease. Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, and Virgil seem to use their vast intellectual power as if poetry were their mother-tongue, their natural organ of thought. Alone of the moderns, Goethe wields his panoply of learning with perfect ease, bounding in his full suit of mail on to his charger like some paladin, and careering in it over the field as if it were a robe of tissue. But it is given only to the one or two of the greatest to interpret the profoundest thought, to embody the ripest knowledge, in the inimitable mystery of art.

And thus it comes about that we so often feel the art of George Eliot to be short of perfect. The canvas of laborious culture is too often visible through the colouring of the picture. We find so much to think about that we crave a little rest for simple enjoyment. The chorus is very majestic; we are amazed by forked flashes of wisdom, sonorous gnomes, prophetic strains worthy of the immortal Trilogy; but the Chorus is often a little slow; and sometimes slightly senile, goody, prolix. We have come to a tragedy, we know; but we crave more business, incident, light, and air. I confess that, for my part, I feel in the George Eliot cycle something of that which I am Goth enough to experience when I hear Beethoven's *Fidelio*. *Fidelio* is undoubtedly one of the most glorious creations of modern music, with an almost matchless overture, a noble chorus, a high moral in its plot, and a finale which seems heroism

transfigured into song. And yet—the entire scene passing in prison, the darkened stage, the slow movement, the monotony of minor key, to speak figuratively, the want of contrast, colour, buoyancy fill me with a certain involuntary sensation of gloom. I go home purified and thrilled by a noble work of art resounding with high moral purpose—but a little lowered in nervous vitality. Something of the kind I feel when I read *Romola.*

For my part, I would choose *Silas Marner* as the best type. It is the complete working out of one pathetic idea in a single melody. That sustained minor key could hardly be borne through a long piece in several volumes, and the idea is one which breadth, brilliancy, variety, and movement would impair. But in a miniature such as this it produces a profound impression. It may be classed along with the *Mare au Diable, François le Champi,* and *Eugénie Grandet*—more pure, more thoughtful than any of these, but hardly to be named beside such an immortal idyl as the *Vicar of Wakefield.*

Let us who love the art of George Eliot abstain, if only in obedience to her teaching, from all extravagance of eulogy. Certain that she belongs to the foremost intellectual forces of our time, and seeing that she is a novelist (for neither poems nor essays express her genius truly), some are apt to decide that she stands in the very front rank of the artists of the modern world. That is surely to claim a great deal too much. Cervantes, Fielding, Scott, of course,

stand immeasurably apart and above, by virtue of their wealth of imagination, their range of insight into manners, and sympathy with character of every type. Goldsmith, Defoe, Richardson, I think too Sterne and Lesage, stand again in another class by virtue of their consummate art in producing, in some more limited field, images of pathos, humour, naïveté, or vitality, worthy in their own sphere of the mightiest master's hand.

The place of George Eliot will doubtless ultimately be found in the group where we set George Sand, Balzac, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontés. Judging her purely as artist, we can hardly hope that her ultimate popularity will equal theirs. That she is superior to them all as thinker, teacher, inspirer of thought, and purifier of soul will perhaps be little disputed. As facile creator of types, painter of varied character, veracious chronicler of manners, she has not their range, vivacity, irrepressible energy. In art very much must be given to mass of impression, vividness of enjoyment, fertility of creation. The inexhaustible charm of George Sand, the microscopic vivacity of Jane Austen, the pathetic oddities of Charles Dickens, the terrible Hogarthian pencil of Balzac and Thackeray were all deliberately foregone by a novelist who read so deeply, who looked on life so profoundly, and who meditated so conscientiously as George Eliot.

These letters show us the conditions under which her genius worked, and enable us curiously to watch

the limits which she so carefully set upon herself. Though she disdains to vent such wails and groans as *Friedrich* or the *Revolution* wring from the much-tried soul of Carlyle, George Eliot sets about a new tale with all the conscientious *gründlichkeit* which Sartor brought to his task. Just as he pounds over the battle-fields of his hero, and wades through the *Moniteur* or Puritan sermons, so she begins *Romola* or *Felix Holt* by getting up Florence and Chartism. There are scientific similes and moral reflections in *Middlemarch* which a man might well spend an hour in working out in all their connotations. And there is as much hard thinking and analytic psychology in any chapter of the *Mill on the Floss* or *Daniel Deronda* as would have driven little Jane Austen silly so much as to comprehend. But these are not precisely the conditions of perfect art. Scott did not get up the Crusades when he wrote *Ivanhoe* or read articles on "Cavaliers," "Covenant," and so forth when he wrote *Old Mortality*. Scott was bursting with all he knew about Malignants and Cropped heads; he was bursting with his story, and brimful of his characters. If you had stopped him in his ride he would have rattled on about it; and at supper with the young ones he would sing Bothwell's songs and repeat Burley's curses. Jane Austen would write little romancelets to her girl correspondents, and she photographed her partners in the midst of a ball. George Sand, amidst sonatas from Chopin and songs by Madame Viardot, would pour out her prose lyrics as the lark empties

her soul; and Dickens or Thackeray cared more for a queer name or a whimsical expression than for all the psychology in Kant or Hegel.

But if this knowledge, philosophic power, and moral seriousness, are in one sense a weakness, closing to George Eliot the highest circle of art, in another sense they are her strength and the source of her real influence. English literature has only one weak side. It has abundant examples of almost every type of literary art. But it is curiously poor in those thoughts in which the literature of France and Greece abound; those *Pensées* wherein Descartes, Pascal, Vauvenargues, Voltaire, Diderot embodied philosophy in some memorable phrase which is worth a volume, or those golden words of wisdom—κτῆμα ἐὶς ἀεὶ—which Plato, Thucydides, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius made current coin for ever. Now the novels of George Eliot are rich with such apophthegms wherein ripe meditations on morals and men are embodied in words of poetic concentration and beauty.

These letters (and it is their chief interest) show us this cast of mind in its growth and activity. Almost every feature of the novels is abundantly traceable as part of her daily life and mental habit. In her familiar letters, in her casual reading and least serious occupation, we find that dominant tone of moral analysis, the undertone of steadfast sobriety almost, but not quite, passing into melancholy, the strenuous trust in a better time to come, with the resolute facing of the darker problems of life. It is

curious to note that the very style and phrase so familiar in the novels was part of her mental constitution. The good people who trace everything of well or ill in human character to the degree in which one accepts or rejects the miracles in the Old Testament, and who ascribe what they are pleased to call the sadness of George Eliot's novels to her want of adequate hold on verbal inspiration, will be surprised to find in these letters that the sadness is principally visible in her Calvinistic and Biblical period, that it almost disappears from her soul when theology had become to her a merely interesting experience.

The love of scientific illustrations, what one might more truly call the analogies of physical and moral laws, seems to possess her more strongly as a girl, even than in after life when she lived amongst men of science. At the age of nineteen she perpetrated a simile wherein her mind is likened to "a stratum of conglomerated fragments," perhaps more complicated than any to be found in later writings (vol. i. p. 59). It is obvious too that her style grows simpler as she became a great writer. There is (vol. i. p. 76) a single sentence with upwards of two hundred words in it, and eighteen stops before we get to the pause. And a few lines farther on, there is a beautiful but most elaborate parallel between organic development in sociologic and in biologic types. "Sewing," she writes, "is my staple article of commerce with the hard trader Time." And all this by a girl of twenty, living in a quiet farm-house, in 1840, when Sociology

and most of the other "ologies" had not been heard of! She reads a book on the battles of Condé and Turenne, and cries out, "Such a conflict between *individual* and *moral* influence is no novelty."

The Life enables us to answer the question, if George Eliot was a pessimist of confirmed melancholy type? Assuredly not. She was throughout life very serious, constitutionally of low animal spirits, liable to nervous depression, and with a certain unconquerable shyness. But she is not melancholy—at least not after she had shaken off the cruel burden of Calvinism. Towards middle life and onwards to its end she is, as she happily said, a *meliorist;* facing the world with clear vision in all its evil, but confident in its progress towards the *better*. In all this we see the complete correspondence between her belief and her general temper. In girlhood a devout Evangelical Christian, in youth a somewhat sceptical Agnostic, in maturity she settles into a deep religious earnestness, where the evolution of man's destiny is the inspiration and the ideal. We see this grand conception of man's progress towards the better entirely possessing her soul. It colours her letters, words, and conduct. We see it giving her life rest, fulness, cheerfulness, and purpose. It nerves her with self-control in sickness, disappointment, and weariness. It gives a moral glow to her intercourse with friends, to her consideration for all who come near her, to her plans for work and art. It makes her reticent, resigned, contented, full of merciful feeling, and slow to give offence or to

take it. In all these letters there is not a spiteful word, not an outburst of egoism, nothing fretful, sordid, jealous, or malicious. It is the affectionate, self-possessed, humanising life of a high-souled woman; devoted to her art, but ever keeping room in her thoughts for the few whom she chose as her friends.

The letters prove, what no intelligent reader of her books could doubt, that George Eliot was womanly in the true sense of the term. She even took a curious pride in her skill in all the accomplishments of the housewife; and her experience, which ranged from the management of a dairy farm to that of a crowded drawing-room, was indeed unusually large. Her interest in the education of women was not only very keen, but very practical. She was naturally the centre of all those movements which aimed at the realisation of women's best future. Yet of women's rights we find not a word in these volumes, not a word even of disdain. It glanced off her unheeded. And it is noteworthy that a woman who in brain, in culture, in aspirations, in knowledge of the world o'ertopped all the women of her time, gave no public support to the agitation for recognising political rights of women.

The publication of these letters and the witness of her husband will confirm the unmistakable impression produced by her books with respect to her religious and philosophical opinions. Obviously, as all the world could see, she formally accepted no church and no school as an absolute adherent. At

the age of twenty-two she passed gently and gradually from orthodox piety into a vague deism, which in middle life, in the attacks on Young and Cumming, developed a negative side, and at last she adopted a conscious belief in the force of humanity and its future. It is most striking that in all this history of mental progress there is no perceptible break. One phase grows out of the other without storm or interruption; and throughout the same religious earnestness remains and deepens, even whilst the bases of belief are changed. There is here no story of conversion, no infidelity, no surrender of one religion or adoption of another. It is a true religious evolution: the profound religious feelings of her reverent spirit continuing always in unimpaired fulness, as her knowledge ripened and as her vision of truth grew clear. George Eliot nourished from childhood to the grave the same religious nature which had dawned in the church of Griff, when she read the *Pilgrim's Progress* as a girl, and talked of the soul's awakening with her aunt Dinah, and which was fuller and deeper at the last year of life, when with her husband she read Isaiah, St. Paul, and the *General View of Positivism.*

What, it will be asked, was her general attitude towards Positivism? It is stated with entire accuracy by Mr. Cross in his Life (vol. iii. p. 419): "For all Comte's writing she had a feeling of high admiration, intense interest, and very deep sympathy." Much of his system she wholly refused to accept. With the Positivist movement generally she was in active rela-

tion, and she even had contemplated a poetic embodiment of Positivist aspirations (vol. iii. p. 311). But there was no reason to suppose that she would ever have entered into formal communion with that or any other religious body or with any philosophical school. It is very different when we come to speak of her sympathies and general tendencies. With the cardinal ideas of Positivism—the cherishing and extension of all true religious sentiment, and the direction of that sentiment towards the collective wellbeing of mankind—not only was George Eliot in profound sympathy, but no one else in our time has expressed those ideas with such power. In that sense, vigorously rejecting as she did much of Comte's system, and with a constitutional repugnance for systems and codes of life, she may be said to be the greatest believer in humanity as a religious inspiration whom our country and time have produced. Throughout her novels, in the *Spanish Gypsy*, in the poem on Immortality there glows the idea, that in the destinies of the human race the future will find the object alike of Reverence and of Duty.

Here one would be glad to end. But the publication of these letters has aroused discussion on a moral problem, whereon to keep silence is to be misunderstood. It is the duty of those who have cause to speak at all to make clear their canons of right and wrong; but it can never be a duty to pass public judgment on the lives of our departed friends. Now the present writer during many years was the friend

of George Eliot, the friend of George Lewes. It is but a few years since he followed first one, and then the other, to the united graves where they lie side by side. He owed to them both very much in many ways. He is still the friend of those whom he and she left behind. He was a witness of the unbroken happiness of their joint life; of their affectionate performance of every domestic duty; of their scrupulous observance of all that they recognised as belonging to a pure and refined home; of his devoted love for her till death; of her honour of his memory whilst life remained.[1]

On the general law of moral duty our position is clear. The cause to which some of us have pledged our lives (would that he and she had done so!) is labouring in every way to fortify the marriage bond; would teach the future to make it indissoluble by law, and indissoluble even by death. In the chaos which has followed the loosening of old moral and religious canons, strange and unwholesome doctrines are put forth in the name of society and moral duty; and whilst opinion and religion still sanction divorce, the unsettlement of ideas will still be profound. But, we trust, the future will recognise that responsibility in marriage and happiness in marriage alike depend on its irrevocable nature. The future will know nothing of degrees of marriage or of any honourable union

[1] A few months before her death she wrote (21st May 1880): "I would still give up my own life willingly if he could have the happiness instead of me" (vol. iii. p. 396).

but that of the inflexible law of the land. In this welter of opinion, we hesitate to judge the act of those who sacrifice their lives to what they hold to be honour and duty. But it is the essence of marriage to be above the field of individual exceptions, to stand supreme, high beyond all personal opinions, miseries, or joys. The happiness of individuals would be dearly bought if it dimmed, by one passing shadow of suspicion, the inviolable institution whereon the happiness of all depends. *Il est indigne des grands cœurs de répandre le trouble qu'ils ressentent.* It is meet sometimes that some suffer for the people. The moral law is infinitely more precious than the personal happiness of any; and the sufferings of exceptional cases must be borne with resignation, lest harm befall the sanctity of every home, and "the moral currency be debased."

In the "General View" of the "grotesque French pedant" aforesaid, by whose intellectual impulse the genius of George Eliot was saturated, there is a beautiful picture of the art which the future will open to women, an art of which George Eliot herself furnishes a most suggestive type. For women, he says, is reserved the foremost place in the poetry of private life, and by poetry, as usual, he means the whole field of creative art in letters. He doubts if they will equally succeed in the epic and dramatic poetry concerned with public life, or ever give to mankind an Iliad or a Lear. But for all poetic composition which does not involve this intense and

prolonged effort (after all, imagination depends on mass of nerve power), women of genius, he thinks, are better qualified than men. To them belongs the poetry of the heart and the home. There is an exquisite saying of the philosopher, one of those immortal words where wit, truth, and pathos are blended in a phrase: "If the Kingdom of Heaven belong to the poor in spirit, the Kingdom of Earth will belong to the rich in heart." And to women is given the crown of that poetry which seeks to idealise domestic life and the mystery of feeling. Miss Edgeworth, Jane Austen, the Brontés, George Sand, Eugénie de Guérin, to say nothing of a crowd of minor lights, have given us visions into character and feeling which are each in their way of unrivalled beauty. And now George Eliot, the latest of this choir of women-poets, has given us high promise of even greater yet to come.

For, even if we doubt whether George Eliot could always bend the bow of Ulysses with the perfect ease of the demi-gods, as Goethe, Milton, and Dante, to whom profound thought and knowledge add a fresh grace, even if her very moral and intellectual depth diminish the spontaneous charm of her work, there is in that very depth a promise of the type of the art to be, even higher than any we have reached. Fiction, with the intricacy of its moral problems, the subtlety of its spiritual analysis, is the special creation of modern literature. It is the art in which, with music, our age has utterly surpassed the ages before, and

wherein we may yet look forward to unbounded triumphs to come. Yet fiction is still in its infancy, in its tentative, unconscious, uninspired stage. All great art, from the beginning of the world, has been the child of corresponding religion, philosophy, and manners. Greek drama, Roman epic, mediæval poetry, architecture, and painting: Aeschylus, Pheidias, Virgil, Dante, Giotto, Shakespeare, Calderon, Raffaelle, Milton, were but interpreters of a civilisation which rested ultimately on profound religious and social ideas.

The romance has grown up as the special art of the modern world; but where are its religious and social ideals? Its religious and social ideals are various and unstable as the opinions of modern men. Romance in some sort is the expression of those various opinions, the casting hither and thither of many minds and moods in many changing situations. To this romance owes much of its vivacity, its inexhaustible variety, its fascinating interest for men and women who think and feel. It teaches us mysteries of the heart that were hidden from the gaze of Aristotle and Bacon, from Pascal and Kant. It has myriads of subtle problems of life which escaped the vision of Shakespeare and Molière. Yet does any one doubt that romance, too, like other arts, will be greatest when it has its religious and social ideals? Such ideals it will have when they are finally revealed to the fuller conscience of some nobler age. What a vision of the romancer's art is unfolded to us if we

believe in a religious future, where the human heart itself shall furnish the religious ideal, and the march of civilisation be the source of creed, the fountain of all reverence! How glorious, even above his actual glory, would have been our English Homer, Walter Scott, if behind his pictures of human history he had seen his religious ideals transfigured as clearly as Homer saw them! What would Fielding have been had his moral and religious development equalled his human sympathy? What would George Sand have given us had her passion known purity, as the passion of Shakespeare, Dante, and Calderon ever does? Scott, Fielding, Sand, gave us glorious things; but greater are to come when romance has grown to be the artistic form of religion and philosophy. George Eliot, by no means the first amongst the founders of modern romance, yet stands apart from all by a deeper quality of her own. And, by virtue of her spiritual conception of her art, she points the way to a type far greater than she reached herself, even greater than any which has gone before.

# VII.

# HISTORIC LONDON

# HISTORIC LONDON.

As I walk about the streets of this most mighty, most wonderful, most unwieldy, and yet most memorable of cities, my mind is torn by a tumult of emotions and thoughts. What a record of power and life in those eighteen centuries since the Roman historian spoke of it as "especially famous for the crowd of its merchants and their wares." What a world of associations cling to the very stones and names and sites of it still! Can any city show so great an array of buildings and scenes identified with poetry and literature, and with the memories of poets and thinkers of so high an order? In its parks, in its river, in its matchless group of buildings at Westminster, in the peculiar beauty of some sunset effects, it has still certain elements of charm which no northern city surpasses. And then, with these superb elements of interest and beauty, what endless tracts of ugliness, squalor, and meanness! What a prison house, or workhouse, is it to some three millions at least of the four millions who dwell here! What a puzzle without hope does it offer, this ever-growing wen,

in which we seem to be madly trampling life out of each other as a mob in a panic! And it is within the lifetime of some of us that this extreme monstrosity of bulk has been piled upon our poor city; but a few years since some of its most memorable and beautiful buildings have been destroyed; improvements and restoration have wrought their worst under our own eyes. More real ruin has been done to old London within my own memory than in the two centuries which preceded it. More old spots disappear now every ten years than in any century of an earlier time. The Great Fire itself was hardly more destructive than are the railways; and the "boards" are more terrible to such a city than armies of foreign invaders. At times I could almost wish that if the New Zealander is ever to sit on the broken arches of London Bridge and muse upon the ruins of this city, the ruin might take place before London consists of nothing but American hotels, railway stations, and stucco terraces. In a few years London will be only a grimy Chicago, or stuffy New York. The poet will cry again—"Etiam periere ruinae."

Let us put aside the darker, more discouraging side of this strange city; its monotony, its meanness, its horrors, the huge areas of ugliness, and portentous piles of brick and iron which modern ideas of progress have given it. Within this century about a dozen American cities of the fourth class have been dropped down over a large part of the counties of Middlesex and Surrey; and within the same period the river-side has

been covered from Putney to Woolwich with some twenty miles of city of the iron and cotton country type. Within twenty years the river has been crossed and the city pierced by enormous railroads. But all this is not London. Let us think of London as many of us can remember it—a very big city, but neither a county covered with bricks nor a huge terminus; before avenues, American hotels, and mammoth warehouses were invented.

This London, I make bold to say, is of all cities north of the Alps the most rich in local interest. In certain elements of historical interest it surpasses, indeed, Rome itself, Athens, Jerusalem, Venice, or Paris. There is no single spot in London so memorable as the Forum and the Acropolis, or the Mount of Olives; none so romantic as the Piazza of San Marco; and Paris has a history almost more fascinating than London. But the historic buildings of Paris have suffered even more than those of London from destruction and restoration. Paris has no Tower, no Westminster Hall, no Temple, and no Guildhall. The history of Venice is at most that of some four or five centuries; that of Jerusalem is made up of broken fragments; that of Athens is but the history of some two centuries. Nay, even the majestic memories of Rome are broken by vast gulfs and blanks; it wants any true continuity, and there is no monumental continuity at all.

That which gives London its supreme claim as a historic city is made up of many concurrent qualities.

In the first place stands the continuity in the local history of London. To put all probabilities and uncertain origins aside, there is a definite record of London as a city for 1823 years. During that period there is a continuous history (not more broken than that of England), and a constant succession of local and visible traces. Though London was never a Roman city of the first order, the general scheme of Roman London can still be traced; there is an adequate body of Roman remains; there are Roman bricks in the fragments of the city walls; and the White Tower stands on the foundations of a Roman bastion. For the thousand years which separate us from the days of Alfred the history of London is complete, and that history can be traced in an almost continuous series of local associations, and for the last eight centuries it exists in an almost regular series of monuments or fragments. Some few of the cities of Europe have an even longer historic record. Some few of them have a more perfect monumental record. But such cities as Treves, Lyons, Milan, or York, obviously belong to the second class of cities, whatever their antiquarian interest. To rank with the four or five great historic cities of the world, we must look to mass, unbroken sequence of local association, and dominant place in the history of the world over a long course of centuries. Marseilles, Florence, Venice, Genoa, Rouen, Cordova, and Cologne —even Athens, Naples, Moscow, and Prague fail before this test. And of European cities four

only can be counted in the first rank of great historic capitals—Rome, Constantinople, Paris, and London.

Now I do not hesitate to say that no one of these surpasses London (I doubt if any one of them equals London) in the degree in which existing buildings and recognised sites can be identified with history, literature, and the human interest of mankind, in so great a volume, and over so vast an unbroken period. Even at Rome all the greater remnants of the ancient world belong to the later empire and the age of decay. The Colosseum, the vastest of the ruins, tells of no great age or man, of nothing but abomination. No great Roman that we know of can be certainly connected with the arch of Constantine, or the baths of Caracalla, or the walls of Aurelian. The very site of the Capitol, the plan of the Forum, are disputed. There is hardly a vestige of the city of Coriolanus, of Scipio, and of Julius; hardly any trace of the mediæval church; little anywhere but the monuments of pride, rapacity, tyranny, and luxury. The same is true of Constantinople in a far greater degree; and of almost all the historic cities of the world. This want of continuity is pre-eminently true of Paris. What we see there to-day, the spots that we can verify precisely, are not those of their greatest memories, are not exactly identified with great men, and do not form one immense continuous series. Even Paris has not played, until within three or four centuries, that dominant part in French history, which London has

played in the history of England for six or seven centuries. Paris has fewer records of the feudal ages than London; and it is hopelessly Haussmannised. Nor is old Paris identified as old London is with so great a mass of poetic associations.

London has been, since the Conquest, the real centre of government, of the thought, the growth, the culture, and the life of the nation. No other city in Europe has kept that prerogative unbroken for eight centuries until our own day. At the very utmost, Paris has possessed it for not more than four centuries, and in an incomplete manner for at least half of these four. The capitals of Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Spain are merely the artificial work of recent ages, and the capitals of Italy and Greece are mere antiquarian revivals. England was centralised earlier than any other European nation; and thus the congeries of towns that we now call London has formed, from the early days of our monarchy, the essential seat of government, the military headquarters, the permanent home of the law, the connecting link between England and the Continent, and one of the great centres of the commerce of Europe. Hence it has come about that the life of England has been concentrated on the banks of the Thames more completely and for a longer period than the life of any great nation has been concentrated in any single modern city. When we add to that fact the happy circumstance that at least down to the memory of living men, London retained a more complete series of public

monuments, a more varied set of local associations, more noble buildings bound up with the memory of more great events and more great men than any single city in Europe (except perhaps Rome itself), we come to the conclusion that London is a city unsurpassed in historic interest.

The true historic spirit, I hold, looks on the history, at least of Europe, as a living whole, and as a complete organic life. I know it is the fashion to pick and choose epochs as supreme, to back races as favourites, to find intense beauty here, and utter abomination there. But the real historic interest lies in the succession of all the ages, in the variety, the mass, the human vitality of the record. The peculiar glory of London is to possess this local monumental record in a more complete and continuous way than any city perhaps in Europe. We can trace it when the Fort of the Lake, the original Llyn-din, was one of two or three knolls rising out of fens, salt estuaries, and tidal swamps. We can make out the plan of the Roman city; we have still the Roman milestone, fragments of Roman walls and of Roman houses, and the line of Roman streets. From thence to the Conquest we can identify the sites of a series of buildings civil and ecclesiastical, we have scores of local names which remain to this day. From the eleventh century downwards we have a continuous series of remains in the foundations of the Abbey, in the White Tower, in the Temple Church, St. Bartholomew's, St. Saviour's, and the other city churches; and so all through the

Feudal period we have some record in the Tower, the Guildhall, the magnificent group of buildings at Westminster, the remnants of the Savoy, Crosby Hall, and Lambeth Palace. Of the Tudor and Jacobean age we have, or we have seen the tower gateways of St. James', of Lincoln's Inn, and St. John's, Clerkenwell, the Middle Temple Hall, the banqueting hall at Whitehall, Holland House, many of the halls of city companies and of lawyers, old Northumberland House, Fulham Palace, and many a house and tavern frequented by the poets, wits, and statesmen of the seventeenth century. Thence, from the fire downwards, the record is complete and ample, with St. Paul's and the other churches of Wren, Temple Bar, and the Monument, and scores of houses and buildings which are identified with the literature, the statesmanship, and the movement of the eighteenth century from Newton and Dryden down to Byron and Lamb.

There is no city in the world (not Rome or Athens itself) which has been inhabited, and loved, and celebrated by so glorious a roll of poets extending over so long a period. Through all the five centuries from the days of Chaucer and Longland to our own time, a succession of poets and thinkers have lived in London, have spoken of its aspect, and can be traced to this day in their homes and haunts. We can follow Chaucer, Piers Ploughman, Froissart, Caxton, More, Bacon, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton, Raleigh, Cromwell, Pope, Dryden, Newton, Wren, Addison, Swift, Goldsmith, Johnson, Chatham, and Burke;

we can look on the houses they dwelt in, on the scenes they frequented, see what they saw, and stand where they trod. The London of Shakespeare alone would fill a volume with the history of the localities where he can be traced, the buildings which he describes, and the local colour which warms so many of his dramas. If we gather up in memory all the scenes that he paints in the Tower, in the city, on the river, in the Abbey or the abbot's house, in the Jerusalem room, in the Temple Gardens, in Crosby Hall, in Guildhall, and remember that *Twelfth Night* was performed in the Middle Temple Hall as we have it, we shall get some notion of the stamp which the genius of the greatest of poets has set upon the stones of the greatest of cities.

Next to Shakespeare himself comes Milton, a more thorough Londoner, and whose many homes, birthplace, and burial-place we have or lately had. So, too, Spenser, Dryden, Pope, Handel, Addison, Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Richardson, Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, Garrick, Hogarth, Reynolds, Turner, Byron, Lamb, Dickens, Thackeray, and De Quincey—strike out of our literature, our history, our law, our art, all that is locally associated with definite spots of London, London sights, London life, and London monuments, and the gap would be huge. With the exception of Wordsworth and Shelley, all our principal poets were either born in London, or made it their home. It is true that Mr. Carlyle, who made London his home for nearly fifty years, has left it on record (*Life in London*,

vol. i. p. 25) that, "it is next to an impossibility that a *London-born man should not be a stunted one.*" The long catalogue of the "stunted ones" includes Chaucer, Milton, Ben Jonson, Spenser, Pope, Byron, Keats, Bacon, Sir T. More, Bentham, Gibbon, Lamb, Turner, Disraeli.

The features of London are themselves so vast, their local history is so rich, that they each have a history of their own. No city in Europe possesses a river like the Thames with its leagues of historic buildings along its course, its mighty ports and bridges and docks; nor have the Rhine, the Seine, or the Tiber, a closer association with poetry, literature, and art. Our history and our literature abound with memories of the river. Nor has any city of Europe so great an array of parks associated as much with poetry, literature, and art, each with a long history, and endless traditions of its own. The parks of Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, or New York are modern pleasure-grounds of yesterday without the secular avenues, the ancient names, and the famous sites of ours.

In influence upon art, no one would compare the Seine with the Thames, or in immemorial charm contrast Longchamps with Kensington Gardens. In no capital in the world can we find a fortress such as the Tower, so ancient, so vast, so rich in centuries of historic memories, and so closely allied with splendid poetry. No other city possesses two such cathedrals as the Abbey and St. Paul's, each in the front rank of their respective forms of art, and both consecrated by an army of buried worthies and countless historic scenes.

How comes it that our city, which has, in five or six of the elements of a great historic capital, qualities so supreme; which possesses the most venerable cathedral, the most historic castle, the most famous hall which still remain upon the earth; which has most noble remnants of all forms of Gothic art, both civil and religious, of all forms of Tudor art, of the classical Renaissance, and of the modern rococo art; a city whose monuments and localities are enshrined in ten thousand pages of our literature; where we can even yet trace the footsteps of the larger half of all our famous men; a city where in a summer's day you may pass across the record of eighteen centuries in stone, or in name, or in plan—how comes it that this city which has been the stage for so large a part of English history, and the delight of so glorious a roll of English genius—is to some of us a place of weariness and gloom?

It is only, I think, within this nineteenth century that London has ceased to be loved and honoured. As I walk about its streets, and try to forget the monotonous range of stucco palaces and dismal streets we see, and recall the look of it when silver Thames flowed between gardens, towers, and spires, the music of a hundred lines is wont to ring in my ears. I fancy I can see the pilgrims setting forth from the "Tabard" in Southwark, or with Shakespeare can

> "Stand in Temple Gardens, and behold,
> London herself on her proud stream afloat,"

and walk about with old Stow, or visit the tombs

with Sir Roger, or so musing I go and see Goldie's grave, and Johnson's house in Gough Square, and the fountain in the Temple dear to Lamb, to Dickens, and to Thackeray.

London within this century has grown to be four times what it was at the end of the last century; and perhaps it is this portentous bulk which prevents us from seeing, or knowing, London at all. We cannot be persuaded that our city still possesses works of incomparable beauty and historic interest, and that the mass and sequence of them and their literary associations have hardly any equal in the world. We undervalue our city when we talk so continually of its smoke, its horrors, and its ugliness. Historic interest is not the same thing as artistic beauty; and picturesque elements may still manage to survive in a wilderness of grimy brick. London is not one, but ten or twelve great cities; it is the only city in the world which is at once the centre of a vast empire, the port of the commerce of the world, the seat of the finance of the world, the home of the oldest monarchy, of the oldest parliament, and some of the oldest foundations, religious, legal, and municipal, to be found in Europe. Though it has no palaces to compare with those of Paris, it has fragments of palaces even older, and parks which have even more beauty, and as much historic interest as palaces. As the Thames is a commercial port which has no rival but the Mersey, as London is a larger manufacturing centre than Birmingham or Leeds, as the historic

buildings of London are in foundation, at least, older than those of Florence, Venice, or Pisa, as its parks exceed in varied beauty any other open spaces in Europe, London has over and above its huge and melancholy bulk, at least four elements, each one of which would make a city of the first class.

There are in London three great buildings, or groups of buildings, which, in their combination of artistic and historic interest, are absolutely without a rival in Europe. These, of course, are the Tower, the Abbey and its surroundings, and Westminster Hall and the other remnants of the Old Palace. If to these we were to add two other buildings of a very different kind, I mean the Temple and Holland House, we have those buildings, of all others, it may be, in Europe of a private, and not a public kind, where rare beauty is to be found in connection with an immense record of association with literature and with history.

Each of the three great monuments is of its kind amongst the noblest in the world; each of them has been for centuries an organ of our national life. That life has never been interrupted in any of them. They still survive in all their essential character. They still belong to the dynasty which built them, and they still serve the uses for which they were originally designed. They are all associated with our history and our literature as hardly any buildings now extant are. In their combination, in the continuity of their record, and in their own separate interest,

they give London a character which no living city in the world retains.

Of the three buildings, the Tower is the oldest and, in some ways, the most striking. It shares with the castles of Windsor, Avignon, the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Kremlin the rare peculiarity of being a mediæval fortress of the first class which has not become a ruin or a fragment. But the Tower in its central part is far older than them all. It is neither a ruin, nor a museum, nor a site. It is still in the nineteenth century what it was in the eleventh—the central fortress of the kingdom which the Normans founded; it still guards the crown of Alfred, the Confessor, the Conqueror; it is still a martial camp, and guard to this day is changed day and night in the name of the descendant of King Willelm. And its towers recall more passages in the history and the poetry of our nation than perhaps any other building in the world records those of any other nation. It is the one civil building which has stood for eight centuries serving the same dynasty and the same national life, in unbroken continuity of service; and in those eight centuries it has known no period of degradation or decay, but rather has witnessed a splendid series of great men and memorable deeds.

In the Abbey, Englishmen have a building which has become to them the typical shrine of their history and national glory, which fires the imagination and makes their heart throb, as no extant building in Europe affects any other people. To some degree the

Kremlin exerts the same spell over the Russian; but the *genius loci* is less concentrated, it is incomparably lower and coarser in its power, and has a far less ancient and splendid record. France has no such monumental centre of its national memory; nor has Italy, nor Germany, nor Spain. But the Abbey is still to Englishmen what the Temple of Solomon was to the Hebrew, and the tomb of the Prophet to the Arab, and the shrines of Olympia to the Greek, or that of Jupiter on the Capitol to the Roman; and not to Englishmen only, but to some sixty millions of English-speaking people in so many parts of this planet. To all of them the Abbey is grown to be a glorified Kaaba, a splendid and poetic Fetich in stone, which seems to them the emblem of our English spirit and the resting-place of whatever England has ever held most venerable. It is no longer church, no longer cemetery—the tombs and the throne of kings are but part of its possession; no museum holds things so precious; no historical building has so vast a record of associations. Its very name has passed into our language as the synonym for national honour. St. Denis is to-day a whited sepulchre, where spruce revivalism is still scraping and bedecking in loathsome gaudiness the empty and ruined tombs. Rheims, too, once even more beautiful than the Abbey, is being scraped and trimmed like an American corpse prepared by the embalmers for the undertaker's show. Its historical memories have little power over modern Frenchmen. The magic and the mystery have left

Notre Dame; the Campo Santo of Pisa, and the Duomo of Florence or of Venice are not national at all, but provincial; and the Cathedral of Cologne is an academic product of German Geist and Teutonic Kunst. But the Abbey is a building which has an inimitable power over the imagination and the sympathies of a great race.

The Abbey is so vast a pile, and its associations are so far-reaching, that like London itself we fail to grasp its dignity as a whole. It is not one building, but a great assemblage of buildings, each one of which has a story that would put it in the front of the secular monuments of Europe. With its history that reaches back for eleven centuries, and with remains still visible which go back to the Confessor, it is one of the oldest foundations in England, and one of the most perfect remnants of pure mediæval work. Since the walls that we see rest in part on foundations anterior to the Conquest, and the history of the church has been unbroken since the time of the Confessor, we may properly speak of the Abbey as one and the same monument. In that sense no church in the West can show so long a succession of historical scenes. It is possible, but doubtful, that some other mediæval work has an equal assemblage of various groups of beauty; but none other, assuredly, has such inexhaustible sources of interest and pathos. How they crowd on the memory at once! The tombs of saints which have become shrines and gather pilgrimages; the long succession of ceremonials of state: corona-

tions, marriages, funerals, and national manifestations of joy and grief; the rows of tombs from the majestic simplicity of that of the first great Edward; the helmet and saddle of Henry; the exquisite art of Henry Tudor's, and the desecrated vault where Cromwell lay; the historic throne, and the legendary stone—

> "The base foul stone, made precious by the foil
> Of England's chair."

"The monumental sword that conquer'd France," the shield of state, the banners and helmets over the tombs, the quaint history of the Order of the Bath with its five centuries of fantastic mediævalism, the rare and suggestive paintings on the walls, the vast city of tombs and monuments—philosophers, artists, statesmen, soldiers—the scenes of Shakespeare which every corner of it recalls, the memorable passages in history, the exquisite prattle of Sir Roger, the talk of Johnson and Goldsmith, the wit of Pope, the verses of Wordsworth and Scott, the prose of Irving and Lamb —the echo of a thousand pages in our literature and our history—all these make up a charm which in mass and in beauty invest no other building in the world.

I am not myself very greatly interested in public ceremonials, as such, be they royal coronations or the burial of celebrities, and I leave it to heralds and courtiers and newsmen to gloat over these things as they please. Nor do I care overmuch about mediæval saints. But the historic spirit cannot forget that the

annals of the Abbey have a very different significance. In these various occasions of public ceremonial there took part, we may remember, all the men recorded in our history—the statesmen, the soldiers, the lawyers, the poets, the men of every department of greatness. All of these from time to time for eight centuries have been gathered in that building to open or to close a new reign or a new dynasty, to celebrate some national festival, to bury some national hero, to muse upon the relics of the past, to weep over the body of some inimitable genius as the thrice-sacred dust was piled upon the dust of him they had loved. Yes! there is no building in the world where human sympathy has poured forth in such torrents, in ways so great and various, and over so vast an epoch of time.

The Abbey, as I say, is not one building, but an assemblage of buildings; and each one has a history of itself. The remnants of the old Benedictine Abbey are in themselves extraordinarily beautiful, and charged with memories and associations. The conventual edifices still left in Europe undestroyed and undesecrated are not so many but what these stand in the front rank. The Cloisters, the Abbot's House, and the Refectory, the Muniment Room, the Chapel of the Pyx, the Jewel House, the room called Jerusalem, the remnants of the other abbey buildings, and above all the Chapter House, are so rich in associations with our history, our poetry, and our literature, that if they existed alone in any foreign city, we should make special journeys to see them. What a

history in the five centuries of "Jerusalem" alone, which is perhaps the most venerable private chamber now extant in Europe. But of all these relics of the past surely the Chapter House is supreme. Built six hundred and thirty years ago in the zenith of the pointed style, it is one of the most exquisite examples of its class. Here six centuries ago, from the day when the House of Commons existed as a separate chamber, it met and continued for the most part to meet for nearly three centuries till the death of Henry VIII. Here was matured the infant strength of that Parliament which now rules 300,000,000 of souls, and which has served as the undoubted model of all the parliaments of Europe, America, and Australia. This house is in fact the germ and origin of all that is known as the "House" where the English tongue is heard; it is the true cradle of the mother of parliaments, where that mother was nursed into childhood. For two centuries and a half it has been the school of English statesmen, and has witnessed some memorable struggles of our feudal history. I never enter it but I think what were the feelings of a Roman of the age of the Antonines, who, standing on the hill of Romulus, looked down on the Rostra beneath, and thought of the days when Licinius and Valerius, Virginius and Camillus addressed a few hundreds of herdsmen and farmers, when Rome was but a hill fort by the Tiber, and the Republic was but one of the tribes of Italy.

If with this Chapter House by the Abbey we take in with our mind's eye the remnant of St. Stephen's

Chapel close by, and are willing to think of that exquisite fragment as standing for the chapel itself, we get, in the two together, the seat of the House of Commons for nearly five centuries and a half, from Edward I. to our own memory. I doubt if any buildings still extant convey to any people in the world so great a suggestion of the course of their whole political history. And of the crimes which architecture has wrought on history, the most unpardonable, I think, was done when the monotonous heap of feeble masonry which they call the New Palace of Westminster disguised Westminster Hall, decked out St. Stephen's crypt like a toy Bambino in a Jesuit church, and swept away the burnt ruins of the Plantagenet palace—to make Tudor corridors and symmetrical galleries for the comfort of my lords and honourable members.

Of the Hall of Westminster, the third of the matchless remnants of Old London, I can hardly bear to speak. Though it is not, as we see it, the hall of Rufus, still it stands upon and represents the hall of Rufus, and is thus in a sense as ancient almost as the Tower or the Abbey. But call it what it is, the Hall of Richard II., what a history lies wrapped in those five hundred years. It stands still, to my eyes, the grandest hall of its class in Europe. Let us forget the modern statues, and the strange transformation of it, and the Gothic restorations, and be insensible to everything but its mass, its dignity, its glorious roof, and its inexhaustible memories. The mind calls up cen-

turies of court pageants and state trials, speeches and judgments of famous men, scenes and sayings which are embedded in our literature; let us think of the tragedies, the agonies, the crimes, the passions, the crises in our history; what glorious words, what gatherings of learning, wit, beauty, ambition, and despair have the old walls witnessed from Oldcastle to Warren Hastings, Sir Thomas More and the Protector Somerset, Strafford and Charles, the Seven Bishops and the great Proconsul. Of all trials in our history, those two of Charles and of Hastings have perhaps most exerted the historic imagination, by the intense passion with which they aroused the interest of the nation, by their concentration of historic characters round one great issue, by the dignity and world-wide importance of the proceedings, and by the place that they hold in our national literature. I ask myself sometimes which I would rather have beheld, the faultless dignity of Charles in presence of Cromwell, or the molten passion of Burke in the assembly of all that was famous in the nation, and I find it impossible to decide. And when we add to these memories all the other scenes the Hall has witnessed, the great judges who have sat there and built up the slow growth of English law, unrivalled in the modern world, the illustrious lawyers who have argued, the memorable decisions that it has heard, it is beyond doubt the most historic hall in the world.

We, then, who have in these three incomparable

relics the most historic castle, the most venerable church and burial-place, the most memorable hall of justice now extant on the earth, are even thereby citizens of no mean city. Neither the pall of smoke, nor the defilement of our noble river, nor the weary wilderness of brick and plaster, nor the hideous abominations of shed, viaduct, and caravanserai which the steam devil has brought with him—nothing but our own folly can destroy the historic grandeur of London. Nor is it wholly in memory that its glories live. There is still something for the eye. As I watch some autumn sunset through the groves of Kensington that the great William of Orange so loved, or across the reaches of Chelsea that Turner so loved; as I watch the Pool from the Tower terrace, and the ducks and the children at play in the park of Charles; as I prowl about the remnants of the old Gothic churches in the city which the Fire has spared, and which the blighting hand of the improver has forgot to destroy; as I sit by the fountain in the Temple, or listen to the rooks in Lincoln's Inn; as I grub up some quaint old fragment of a street, or a tavern, or a house, or a shop, or tomb, or burial-ground, which has still survived in the deluge; as I stray through the multitudinous windings of the city, and out of the old names rebuild again as in a vision the city of the Romans, and of Alfred, and of the Conqueror, of the Fitz-Aylwins, and the Bukerels, and the Poulteneys, the Whittingtons, the Walworths, and the Greshams; as I see the golden cross of Wren rising

out of a white October fog into the sunlit blue, there is yet something left for the eye as well as for memory.

And what a pang does it give us to remember also that it is doomed. Bit by bit the old London sinks before our eyes into the gulf of modern improvement, or beneath the monkey-like tricks of the restorer. We who have lived to see the remnants of St. Stephen's carted away, and a mammoth caravanserai take the place of Northumberland House, the last link of modern Charing Cross with the Charing Cross before the Commonwealth; we who have seen the tavern dear to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson disappear, and the houses of Milton go and leave not a wrack behind; who have seen the "Tabard" and the "George" disappear, and the Savoy and the Watergate swallowed up in the torrent—we must brace ourselves up for the rest. Villas will soon cover the site of Holland House. The Temple will be wanted for a new restaurant. The Underground Railway will pull down the Abbey, and a limited company will start a new "Hotel de la Tour de Londres" on the site of the Tower. It is melancholy to think that the stones which eight centuries of national history have raised, that the roofs which have rung with the mirth of Shakespeare and the organ of Milton, on which such beauty has been lavished and where so much genius has been reared, are to be swept away in a few years.

It is eighty-two years since our great poet of

nature cried as he looked from Westminster Bridge in the dawn—

> "Earth has not anything to show more fair;
> Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in its majesty."

No poet could say it now; no poet will ever say it again. But they cannot rob us of memory. And let us who care for our national glory at least cherish the story of these sites when the very stones are gone. That will always be most "touching in its majesty."

# VIII.

# THE NEW COURTS OF JUSTICE

# OPENING OF
# THE COURTS OF JUSTICE.

4TH DECEMBER 1882.

THE occasion which brings to Temple Bar the Queen and chief officials of the realm is more than the simple opening of a building; it is more than the transfer of a great function of State to a more commodious home. It is the opening of a new era in the history of our English Justice, that civil institution which, of all others in the entire range of the modern world, has had the longest life in the past, whilst its splendid maturity promises it yet an almost incalculable future. On Monday next, for the first time since the rule of the Plantagenets, or rather of the early Angevins, the country will see consolidated in living and visible unity the heterogeneous mass of judicial bodies, each of which for so many centuries has had its own divergent history, and every link of which is bound up with the history of the State.

For the first time since the Norman Kings, the Sovereign will hold State in the Royal Court, not

only as the fountain of justice in person, but as manifest head of the judicial system, of the executive force, and of the legislative authority in these islands. So that, in some sort, the ceremony will have a character of its own that modern England has never witnessed before. There has been no lack of pomp and splendour on many occasions when the Legislature, the civil and military officers, the corporations and the like, have been duly represented. But the occasion of Monday, in reality and historic meaning, stands quite by itself. It is not only the beginning of a new era in the oldest of our living institutions, but it will be the embodiment in visible form of that ancient order which carries back the imagination to the very origins of this realm. It was a fine thought to convert the dedication to the public of a new building, in itself so often a barren form, into a symbolic memorial of that primitive Curia Regis, out of which Parliament, Council, Ministry, Cabinet, and Law Courts, all alike, have issued; but from which the Law Courts were the first to develop into clear and organic life.

Of all the institutions and offices which will be duly represented in the hall, the Courts of Justice go the farthest back into the past. Our judicial system was a thing of antiquity when the House of Commons first emerges into view; it was full grown before the Great Charter; nor is it clear that the Conquest did more than recast it. The Privy Council and the Garter, the Speaker and the Lord Mayor, dukes and princes, dignities and offices, which seem to the laymen

so ancient, are things of yesterday to the legal antiquary beside the historic offices of the law. There were Chancellors and Masters of the Rolls in the time of the Conqueror; and the Barons of the Exchequer are heard of as early as his youngest son. Seven centuries ago the predecessor of Mr. Gladstone in the Treasurership of the Exchequer tells us how, in the twenty-third year of King Henry II., "he sat by the window in the watch-tower near the river Thames," and resolved to record his learning in the duties of the Exchequer and its offices. And so he describes the duties which tradition and long experience had taught him, just as Sir Erskine May records the ancient custom of Parliament, as a thing even then of almost venerable age. We may recognise Mr. Gladstone on Monday, not in the new-fangled style of Premier, but in the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer—an office, indeed, that was not created till the Exchequer had been centuries old, but which still is anterior to the House of Commons. His episcopal predecessor, who wrote the famous Dialogue, takes us back to the whole apparatus of the Court—to the oblong table with its checkered cloth to count the money withal, and the melter, and the tallies, and the clerks, and the method of accounts (here you must have the eyes of a lynx, says he). And then he goes on to tell us of the Chancellor, and his clerks, and his office, and the Marshal, and then of the Court of Exchequer and its officers, and how men traced up the functions of the Exchequer to the English kings before

the Conquest, and how "the King in the Royal Court himself decrees right by law sitting in his own person."

The Great Charter affected, but in no way remodelled, the Courts of Justice; but, since its 17th section required the Common Pleas "to be held in some certain place," the causes between subject and subject were henceforth fixed at Westminster; and so began that system of disintegration in our administration of justice, which has gone on increasing for nearly seven centuries down to the re-integration of our own time, the visible result of which we are about to install. How often do we notice in those vast transformations of some persistent force in nature or society, where through long epochs the tendency to divergence is counteracted by equal efforts towards union, that the full maturity of the organism reverts to the simple unity of the original germ! That is precisely what we see to-day in the long evolution of our legal system. It began, even before the Conquest, in the primitive single Court. Under the administrative genius of the Norman and Plantagenet Kings and the judicial instinct of our race, it gradually threw out special, local, and anomalous organs. The anomalies at length swelled into an incubus, till the recuperative energy of the system, by a series of vigorous crises, has established at last an organic unity. It is the triumph of civilisation to reduce to orderly working the active powers which in ruder times were held by arbitrary bounds. The unity which, in the days of the Con-

fessor, the Conqueror, Henry Beauclerk, and Henry of Anjou was the simplicity of mere inexperience, is achieved in the days of Victoria, after eight centuries of strong life, by the harmony of mature science. And that judicial organism, after eight centuries, is as much superior to-day to its original germ in vitality and force as it is in flexibility and learning. So that the fusion of its parts, of which Monday will present the outward and visible sign, is no heraldic pageant or mere historic survival; it is the starting-point of a new development with a boundless range for its energies to come. And the era of Victoria will certainly not be the least in the annals of our law, amid that small list of epochs which have seen our administrative system recast, a list that can hardly be extended beyond the names of the Conqueror, the first and the second Henry, the first Edward, and the Restoration.

Few of those who will crowd on Monday to catch a glimpse of the show, or procession, will have any idea that the ceremony of the day is in some sort an act of respect to the Great Charter itself, when viewed in connection with recent Acts. The Common Pleas, by virtue of the Judicature Acts, being merged in the High Court of Justice, have perforce to quit the Hall of Rufus, that "certain place" in which they settled as required by the Charter of John. On the day that they migrate to that other, but new "certain place," by the Temple and the Inns of Court, where they may look for a history as long in times to come, it is due to the conventional respect we all of us pay to the

Act of Runnymede, that the "place" should be proclaimed in the sight of the nation. But the ceremony, if connected with the future through the Judicature Acts of the present reign, goes back in its symbols and suggestions to a time much earlier than the Barons and the Charter. In those days, as now, there was a Chancellor, but no Court of Chancery; then there was an Exchequer, but no Court of Exchequer; there were then, as now, no courts of exclusive law and exclusive equity; there was one supreme court, of which all the judges had a share; there was a Chief Justice, but no special Court of King's Bench.

The ceremony of Monday will gather in one hall the executive and legislative chiefs beside the judicial. And so, when the Sovereign in state installs at length the united Courts of Justice in their new common seat, and there takes her place surrounded by her sons and her family, by the officers of her house and the officers of State, by peers and magnates of various degree, the scene in the great Gothic Hall at St. Clement's will curiously serve to recall one of the gatherings in the dawn of English history—when the King's Court was Parliament, Council, Cabinet, Chancery, King's Bench, Exchequer, and Common Pleas in one, and claimed to be a survival of the old English Gemot which had power to dispose of the throne itself. It is a quaint point of resemblance to the representative character of this rather elastic body of councillors, that in the open court beyond the First Commissioner proposes to place, beside so many

Witan, or Sapientes, a stout contingent from the people.

The scene will strangely remind us of that stubborn continuity in our English law which has few parallels in history. But two institutions of man can be found to surpass it—one in the ancient world, one in the spiritual sphere—the law of Rome, and the Christian Church. And to put aside these, no modern civil institution, unless we count the throne of England, has any such continuous record. The origins of the English law and its principal offices can be traced back in unbroken series to types that are distant nearly a thousand years. And the actual organisation and forms of our own memory have for some seven or eight centuries been in full activity. They were venerable things before the Constitution itself had begun its secular course of development. A man tried for treason to-day must be judged by a law made before the battle of Poitiers was fought, five hundred and thirty years ago; and at this hour the greatest of all authorities in law is he who once was Attorney-General to Queen Elizabeth. No man can understand how an acre of land is transferred till he goes back to the laws of the first Edward; and the art of conveyancing arose out of innovations which, in things spiritual, are called the Reformation.

A case tried two hundred years ago, but for trivial verbal differences, might easily be taken to be argued but yesterday; and as to the reports of one hundred years back, there are scores of cases where every turn

of expression and argument may be heard any day in term. The apparatus of the Great Seal and its body-guard, the Hanaper Office, and the Petty Bag, and the quaint offices remembered by living men, all descended from ages when great men could not write their names. The noblest hall that remains to us from the great architecture of the Middle Ages has been the Royal Court of Justice, ever since its walls were raised. The most perfect hall of the Renaissance, that exquisite work of the great days of Elizabeth, the only remaining building where a play of Shakespeare's was presented to the Queen, the Court, and his contemporaries, that matchless relic is the hall of an Inn of Court. Three hundred and ten years have mellowed the glow of its blazoned windows and the quaint fancy of its oaken screen, the fretted beams of its roof, and the faces of the kings and sages of the law in the paintings on its walls. A man who is neither a herald nor an æsthete may permit himself a weak corner in his interests for that long roll of lawyers whose arms and portraits people the four Inns of Court. There is no collection of portraits with so high a standard of power, dignity, acuteness, and patience. And the ermine and scarlet of the judges is, perhaps, the one living bit of noble mediæval costume which has survived the storm of modern innovation.

It was no lawyer, but a poet and the friend of Shakespeare, who called the Inns of Court "the noblest nurseries of humanity and liberty in the

kingdom;" and if this were a poetic exaggeration of rare old Ben, it remains most true, that the part they have played in literature and politics is hardly less than their part in law. Strike out of English poetry and prose, out of drama, fiction, and essay, strike out of the history of our Parliament and of our Government, all members of the Inns and the associations of the Inns, and the blank would be serious indeed. A library would hardly tell the tale of those who flourished, and of all that was done, within these precincts of the law. Scores of streets and alleys occupied the site of the present Courts of Justice, and the annals of each single street, and sometimes of a single house, would almost fill a volume. In spite of jests and quarrels, the public has ever taken kindly to the law, and yet more kindly to the lawyers; from Shakespeare to Goldsmith, from Bacon down to Thackeray and Dickens, our literature is saturated with the local colouring of Gray's Inn and the Temple, and of the communities out of which have issued so many of our statesmen, philosophers, teachers, and poets.

And the public instinct is true when it feels that the societies of the law and the institutions of justice, which have in the past a history so rich and great, are about to begin a new life under new and ampler conditions. Vast as the antiquity of English law has now become, it has not yet reached the thirteen centuries of Roman law proper; and the era of Justinian, which seemed at the time to be the end of

that unparalleled growth, was itself, we can see now, but the beginning of another epoch of thirteen centuries, wherein the Roman law has since, with its rival the English, completely encircled the civilised world. There is untold work yet before the English lawyer; whole mountains of obstruction and obsolete matter to level; fields of consolidation to clear, compared to which the task of Tribonian was an every-day thing. But the Roman law had lasted for near a thousand years; it had outlived even all that in government was free, and all that in philosophy and literature was brilliant, whilst it was still in the maturity of its career, rent by anomalies as great as any in our law to-day, as deeply encumbered with antique forms, as much laden with the masses of its own learning, and as far as we are now from its own ideal of symmetry and elegance. But, in spite of its thousand years of life, it had youth enough and strength to spare to complete its task to the end, so that, in the issue, the last years of its mighty career in the old world were the grandest of all; and the work of Justinian has impressed the imagination of mankind more than the work of all preceding legislators or jurists. Few will think that the civilised world and the rising Christianity of the early Middle Ages would ever have perfectly absorbed the Roman law, if they had had it offered them in its primitive instead of in its final form.

The English law has had a career not wholly unlike the Roman. It has cast out its archaisms; it

has built up its equity into a vast but elastic fabric; it has recast its judicial organisation, its procedure, its formulas; it has at length fused its law and equity, and has abolished the conflict of its own technicalities and fictions. At last it has a judicial machinery in full harmony with the times and their practical needs. But it retains some structural anomalies of really crucial importance; it has little that can be called symmetry; and it almost despairs of consolidation. The English law, in fact, is nearly in the same stage of its history that the Roman law was in the epoch of its maturity, but before the great consolidation of Justinian and his immediate predecessors. It is a laughable phrase of the annalists when they speak of our great law-founder, Edward I., as the English Justinian. Even Victoria is not, or is not yet, the English Justinian. The work of final consolidation in our law, where the very fragments of the consolidating material already fill a library, is perhaps too vast a task for any reign, however long and however creative. That great task awaits the Tribonians and Justinians to come. It will be amply enough to place the era of Victoria beyond that of Edward, that it has given organic life to the whole judicial function.

This is, in law, the true boast of this reign; and it is to crown and symbolise this work by her personal authority that the Queen will take her place in the Courts in person. Every layman who has dipped into Blackstone remembers that the Sovereign is the head of the law, present in theory in Court as Judge,

and in early times present in fact. But the King, though present in person, and of right entitled to be present to hear, and to try, is not, by the Constitution (that is, by custom) empowered to determine any cause or motion except by the mouth of his Judges, to whom he has committed his whole judicial authority. Henry Beauclerk, a great king and a great lawyer, would hear causes himself, and he swore dreadfully, "per oculos Dei," when he came to a knotty point—for your Norman King was a soldier of terrible passions. John, Henry, and the four Edwards sat and heard causes in the King's Bench; and Queens Consort did the same when acting as Regent. It was the troublesome learning of James Stuart which drew down on him the rebuke of the Bench when he wished to give judgment in lieu of his Judges. James, who thought he knew more philosophy than Bacon, and more theology than Hooker, was eager to prove that he knew more law than Coke. But the Judges interposed and saved the Constitution. Like the legendary Judge who arrested the heir to the throne for contempt of Court, the Judges interrupted a King when about to infringe on their functions.

If Her Majesty should choose on Monday to sit in Court as Judge, at least so far as to hear some formal motion, it will be in strict accordance with precedent and the habits of some of her most illustrious ancestors. It will give a new force and meaning to that which in these days is of rare and precious value.

The office of Judge in this realm is not only the most ancient office that any subject can hold, but it is independent of prerogative, arbitrary will, suffrage, election, Parliament, or House of Commons. It is far older than any electoral body or function known to us; it is utterly apart from any electoral body or authority; and it is the one great popular institution with which representation has nothing to do and nothing to say. In these days the progress of democracy is a fact; the extension of the representative doctrine and the electoral machine is as certain as the rising sun. Unwise men only will quarrel with it or defy it. But its place is politics, not law. Schemes of extending the suffrage belong to the House of Commons. The judicial system has a wholly different origin, a perfectly separate history. Democracies around us everywhere, in America and France, have cast, or are casting, their judicial, like their political, system into the ever-quickening vortex of the huge electoral mill.

For our English Judges there never was—let us hope there never will be—any *bene placito* as their tenure, whether it be the *placet* of Prince, caucus, or people. The ceremony of Monday will serve to remind us all that our judicial system, at any rate, does not ultimately rest upon a ballot-box. It is a remnant of the Old English polity which should never be mixed up in our modern political strife. It is the oldest civil organisation in our State, and looks on the House of Commons itself as the elder race of gods

used to watch the new. A republican and a puritan, so long as he loves good order, historic permanence, and personal dignity, may feel some stir of sympathy within him as he watches the long line of ermined Judges pace down the storied hall of the Red King for the last time, after so many centuries of continuous and illustrious toil by their forerunners in office within those memorable walls.

# IX

# PLEA FOR THE TOWER OF LONDON

# A PLEA

# FOR THE TOWER OF LONDON.

If the historic interest of London as a city is vastly enhanced by its possessing three great buildings of immense antiquity still after eight hundred years devoted to their original use, it must be allowed that this circumstance adds serious difficulties in the way of their safety and proper preservation. In the Abbey, in Westminster Hall, in the Tower, we have three great piles, which for eight centuries have been, as they still are, the local seats of our national Government. These three great monuments are bound up with each other, and with the entire history of England. But the fact that they still are required for the use of the State makes it exceedingly difficult to treat them as monuments and venerable relics of the past.

The Abbey is overcharged with the ashes of the dead and the increasing crowd of tombs and memorials. It is becoming an urgent question how it is to be maintained as the great burying-place of the nation. Westminster Hall is required as an entrance

to the Houses of Parliament, and it must be dealt with still as a part of another building in continual use. The Tower is, of all three, the one which is most encumbered by practical uses, and most in danger of consequent destruction. The Tower is still a fortress, a barrack, an arsenal; it is inhabited by a population of its own, and is still demanded for various public services. The result is that as a historic monument it is being constantly disfigured, and at times is cruelly defaced; that a very large part of it is closed to inspection altogether; and that it is in continual danger of total destruction by fire.

We have now a Minister of the Crown who conceives it to be a real part of his duty to preserve, cherish, and open to the public our great public monuments. It belongs to our national habits that an English Minister of Public Works should regard his office as a sort of society for the preservation of ancient buildings rather than as a syndicate for the destruction and transformation of ancient cities, which is the fixed idea of the Continental Haussmann. These Attilas and Genghis Khans of modern society, with the aid of the railway and building companies who form their natural allies, are rapidly achieving the Haussmannisation, not only of Paris, but of Rome, Vienna, Milan, Florence, and every mediæval city of Europe. It is a comfort to think that, while prefects, mayors, and town councils everywhere on the Continent are seeking to make their cities a fair imitation of New York, our First Commissioner of Works is

occupied in preserving to us our ancient monuments in the form in which they were built. And it is not a little curious that at the present moment he is busy about the preservation of all three of our great monuments. He has just revealed to us what Westminster Hall was externally, as it was built. He has still before him the cruel problem of refacing the Abbey. And now he is showing us the Tower—not, alas! as it was when it still served the Tudor Kings as a palace, but freed from the eyesore with which the stupid vandalism of the last hundred years had loaded it.

The Tower is the oldest of the three great monuments of London, and assuredly it stands at the head of all buildings of its order in the world. It is the most perfect extant example of a feudal castle of the first class, continuously used as a fortress by the same dynasty, and as a seat of the same Government, since the times of the Crusades. It is, in fact, the civil building in the world which can show the longest and most splendid history. The Pantheon at Rome, a few of the great Basilicas, the Byzantine Church of the Holy Wisdom, and a few religious buildings on the Continent can show a longer life; but there is no civic building, being neither a ruin nor a restored ruin, but still a great seat of Government, which can show so vast a record. The Tower of London has entered upon the ninth century of its continuous life in the service of the English Crown. When the White Tower first rose beside the Thames, as the buttress and symbol of the Conquest, the nations we

call France, Germany, and Spain did not exist. It had already seen centuries of great and memorable things before the oldest of the palaces and halls of Europe had their foundations laid. Men talk of the traditions of the Kremlin, the Vatican, and the Escurial; but the first half of the wild history of the Tower was over before a stone was laid of these vast piles. The races who raised the fantastic domes of Moscow or the minarets of Constantinople were wandering herdsmen and robber tribes in Asia when the Tower was the home of the most powerful kings in Europe. The old Palaces of State of Venice, Florence, Ghent, and Bruges have traditions of great antiquity, and are memorable sources of art, romance, and poetry. But their real life has closed for ages; they are little now but monuments or museums. The Tower, which began so long before them, has outlived them all in permanent vitality. The descendant of the Conqueror is still mistress of the White Tower, which for eight hundred years has guarded the symbols of our national power.

There is now no reason to doubt that the White Tower of the Conqueror and other parts of the fortress cover and rest on buildings which belonged to the Londinium of the Roman Empire. But in its eight hundred years of authentic history the Conqueror's Donjon has hardly any existing rival. There are churches, tombs, and ruins of far greater age. But if they are used still, their use is a mere restoration or adaptation. Priests say mass in the baths of Dio-

cletian; the tomb of Hadrian is converted into a fortress; the square temple of Nemausus is restored as a picture-gallery; and bulls are baited in the amphitheatre of Arles. But in the history of the Tower there has been no interruption.

It is true that in point of picturesque beauty the Tower must yield to some of its younger rivals. It has not the mountain-like grandeur of the Palace of the Popes at Avignon, nor the fairy beauty of the Doge's Palace at Venice, nor the sky-line of the Old Palace at Florence, or of the Castle at Prague; much less has it the weird impressiveness of that skeleton of castles, the upper city of Carcassonne, or the piles of Loches, Chinon, and Angers. The glory of the Tower of London lies in its matchless historical record. Carcassonne has been a ruin now for six centuries; the civic palaces of Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands had a history at most for a few hundred years; and Avignon records but an episode in the career of the Papacy, seventy years of servility, ferocity, and vice. The building of all others which in historic dignity approaches most nearly the Tower is that fragment of the great palace of the Capetian Kings beside the Seine, which now survives under the name of the Conciergerie, of which the Palais de Justice is the transformed Court of Justice, and of which the Sainte Chapelle of St. Louis was the proper Chapel. Behind that screen of brand-new Gothic restorations with which the Viollets-le-Duc have everywhere enveloped the ancient monuments of France, Parisians,

if they only knew it, might still find the fortress of their ancient monarchy worthy to compete in historical importance with the Tower of London itself.

We are far too apt to think of the Tower as a mere prison, and to dwell too long upon its bloody memories. Prison it is, far the most memorable in the world, or at least second only to the Mamertine Prison by the Capitol. But it is not a whit more prison than it is fortress, or palace, or seat of government, or court of judgment, and court of record. It is a prison by accident, or by consequence; not that it was built as a prison, or ever destined to be a prison, but because all Governments seek to have prisoners of State in the most central and secure seat of their power. The Tower is not more bloody than the Crown of England, or the history of England. It has been the home of some of our greatest rulers, the scene of some of the wisest councils, the treasure-house of the most precious things, and the subject of some of the noblest poetry in our language. The Tower has really a fourfold character and a fourfold history. It is palace, fortress, treasure-house, and seat of government; it is only prison as part of the functions of a fortress. Perhaps the reason why we Londoners usually regard the Tower as a prison is that too many of us visit it as children, or in company with children, and then the tales about racks, martyrs, the young Princes, and the Traitor's Gate form the natural staple of the talk.

The antiquity and historical interest of the Tower

belong to it far more as the seat of government of Norman and Plantagenet kings than from its traditions as a Tudor prison-house. From the sons of the Conqueror down to Elizabeth—that is, for a period of almost five centuries—it was from time to time the residence of nearly all of our kings, and consequently the scene of our political history. Without saying that it would be possible to prove it to have been the permanent home of all of those sovereigns, most of whom were in perpetual movement, it was certainly the usual London residence of several, and was occasionally used by all. The Henrys and the Edwards of Plantagenet all inhabited it. From Henry IV. down to James II. the kings left it in state to be crowned in the Abbey. Here two of our kings, four of our queens, and many princes and princesses of the blood met their deaths. Many of the children of the sovereigns were born there. The abdication of Richard II. and the outburst of Richard of Gloucester most certainly took place here, and these are but two of the scenes immortalised in Shakespeare. The Tower seems, indeed, in a peculiar way to have touched the imagination of our great poet, and there is certainly no edifice remaining in which so many of his scenes are placed. Thus the Tower has the halo of poetry around it as much as of history. For no extant building whatever is so much associated as this is with the thoughts of any of the great poets of the world.

To put aside the whole of the executions which have soaked with blood both Tower Hill and the green by St.

Peter's, there is in the traditions of the Tower, in Norman and Plantagenet times alone, enough to make it a relic of perfectly unique importance. As its history begins long before that of Windsor, Whitehall, or St. James', and as all vestiges of the older palaces are gone, except perhaps the crypt of St. Stephen's, it is by far the most memorable survival of Feudalism, either in this country or in any other. The long series of wars in which England conquered Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and twice crushed France, all rested on this fortress as their central headquarters; and from 1244 A.D. for two centuries it was filled by a long succession of royal prisoners, Welsh, Scotch, French. The Scotch princes of the wars of Edward I. and Edward III., and the French princes of the wars of Edward III. and Henry V. lived here for years in captivity, the most illustrious of whom was the poet Duke of Orleans, the prisoner of Agincourt. During the civil wars of the fifteenth century it played a larger and more continuous part than any remaining castle, and in Beauchamp Tower and Wakefield Tower it still retains names which recall the Roses. There is thus no extant building in Europe which has so long a roll of memories of the feudal world from the opening of the Crusades until the final settlement of the modern monarchies in the West.

From another point of view also, which has nothing to do with axes or dungeons, the Tower has a value which places it almost alone. It is, if not the grandest, at any rate the most perfect extant example

of a feudal castle of the first class with its three complete series of defences, all in working condition. Though it has not the imposing mass of Carcassonne, Loches, or Windsor; though in antiquarian details it must yield to Pierrefonds, Langeais, Avignon, Villeneuve, Raby, Berkeley, and some others in England and France; yet the Tower is neither a ruin, nor a restored ruin, nor a modernised palace; it is not a mere baron's stronghold, but a national fortress of the first class, still fit, after a few weeks of labour, to stand a siege against lances, javelins, and bows and arrows. It is said that the portcullis in Bloody Gate is the only example remaining of an ancient portcullis still in working order. Be this as it may, it is certain that the Tower is the only specimen in England of a mediæval fortress of the first rank which has never been destroyed and never structurally "restored." It has been continuously kept as a fortress from the days of Gundulph, the mitred engineer, in 1078, until now. Of its twenty-seven original towers and works, some twenty at least remain; it is the palace and residences which have suffered most; the principal points of defence remain and are structurally almost uninjured. A little study, and some assistance from old plans, views, and surveys, would enable even a holiday sightseer to gain a clear conception of the way in which Plantagenet kings hedged themselves round from their too-loving subjects; to find the uses of the old "Lyons Gate," the moat, the bridge, with its double *tête-de-pont*, the outer ward and its bastions,

the inner ward and its towers, the belfry and the Light Tower, the Water Gate, the Garden Tower, the Hall, the Iron Gate, and the great Donjon of the Conqueror, or, as poetry and tradition with characteristic instinct will have it, the Tower of Cæsar or of Empire.

The two churches of the Tower are each of them worth a visit to London by themselves. St. John's, the original work of the Conqueror, still remains one of the most complete specimens of pure and early Norman work. This church has, perhaps, witnessed more of English history than any other church in England, unless perchance it be the Abbey, or St. George's at Windsor. St. Peter's-on-the-Green, if less valuable in the history of art, is, if possible, even more precious in the history of England. No spot in our island, hardly the choir of the Abbey itself, has such power to touch the heart as the quiet church, under the floor of which lie the bones of so many men and women, great, proud, beautiful, and daring—noble victims of tyranny, and reckless victims of their own passion, during the centuries of civil strife, conspiracy, and war that went to the making of our English State.

A complete record of the State prisoners of the Tower would be nearly an outline of the history of England. It is sad to think how small a part even of these prisons is yet open to the public. The sightseer is taken to the Armoury and the Jewel House, the White Tower, and the Beauchamp Tower, the Green,

and St. Peter's, and then he is assured that he has seen the Tower; and he talks for an hour of Anne Boleyn, Raleigh, and the Princes. But how few of them can see the portcullis apparatus, and the passage and rooms over Bloody Gate, and the prisons of Elizabeth, of Raleigh, of Arabella Stuart, of Fisher of Rochester, and of the Seven Bishops, of the Earl of Essex, and Lady Jane Grey! And even the curious have not seen all the vaulted chambers with their chimneys and embrasures in Byward and Bowyer Towers, and the Roman remains by the old "Queen's Lodgings."

It may be that the Tower is modernised to the eye by continual and coarse restorations. They who know such magnificent ruins as those along the Loire and Rhone, see much that is *mesquin* in the Tower which disappoints them and destroys the charm. The Departments have done their worst; and at a first glance it is difficult to realise that the Tower is older than the machicolated walls of Avignon and Carcassonne. But the Tower is only modernised skin-deep. The blocks of masonry are there behind the wretched rubble facing; plaster-work fit for a tea-garden stands upon the genuine stones of the thirteenth century. The windows and turrets with which Wren "improved" the Tower of the Conqueror have still left 17 feet thickness of magnificent Norman masonry. The Church of St. John within it, though it has been scraped till it looks like a bit of new ritualist mediævalism, is a pure and complete example of the eleventh century, hardly surpassed in the world for its long

historic record. The Church of St. Peter, though in itself as we see it not older than the second Tudor, and pranked out with staring ecclesiologic trumpery, is, as church and burial-place, of rare antiquity and interest. But to the historic eye the Tower is all the greater and more impressive, in that it is not a ruin, not a museum, not a relic of the past, but a living symbol of English history. Is it too much to ask that, in the name of English history, it be henceforth preserved from more wanton disfigurement, and protected from the ruin which a busy "department" infallibly inflicts on an ancient monument which it continues to use?

Truth to say, the fact that the Tower is still, after eight centuries, a working engine of the British Government, though an historical fact without a parallel in modern history, is rather a bar to its use as a mere national monument. The Tower is not, like the Louvre or the Doge's Palace, a museum and a show. It is still a great barrack and military depot. It is still the great treasure-house of the Crown jewels. It was till lately the Mint and the Record House. And it still serves as a residence for many families by the favour of the Crown. It may well be that the time has come when this matchless monument of our national history should be protected from accidents and from that constant injury and modernising process which follow from using it for purposes of residence. These towers, every stone of which is a memory, ought not to be exposed to the daily risk of

fire, and the wear and tear of daily use. It makes one shudder to see a brisk housemaid rattling her pans about the embrasure where Raleigh pondered on the History of the World, or where More thought how little this world is a Utopia. A lover of the past who is tracing out the letters cut by some prisoner of the battles of the Roses has to jostle a scullery-maid cleaning her dishes. The Tower is the priceless possession of the English people, and no question of providing comfortable, or rather uncomfortable, quarters for a few excellent veterans ought to stand in the way of its being carefully protected and fully shown to the public. An adequate force to protect the jewels and to give dignity and life to the noble old pile is all that is needed. But all the inmates of the Fortress should be lodged in the modern buildings, and none should be suffered to crowd and deface the original towers. The White Tower should be cleared of the senseless and cumbrous display of modern weapons, and uncovered to our eyes as the Chapel of St. John's now is. If barracks and ordnance store-houses are required they should be found elsewhere. The First Commissioner has done much; but he has much to do. He has entirely to clear and to protect the grandest feudal relic left in Europe. The towers of Julius would, indeed, be "London's lasting shame" if our indifference or our parsimony were to lead to their destruction, or were to continue to leave some of their most venerable chambers degraded and blocked up by the ignoble uses of a common lodging.

# X.

# THE ÆSTHETE

# THE ÆSTHETE.

It is surely a somewhat hasty assumption that the Æsthete is a wild and impossible ass, at whom we may properly laugh as we please, but with whose affectations we have nothing in common. May it not be that we are all in a way Æsthetes ourselves; or that æsthetic vanity is as common as any other, though few of us push it to the lengths of caricature? Comedies, quadrilles, and operas lead us to think of æstheticism only in its extravagance. We know that we are not Bunthorne, nor have we any taste for buffoonery apart from the stage. It may be, notwithstanding, that we are really Æsthetes at heart.

What is it to be an Æsthete? Is it not to air one's zeal for Art, not out of genuine love of beauty, but out of fashion and love of display, in order to be like our neighbours or to be unlike our neighbours, in the wantonness of a noisy life and a full pocket? And all this is true of many who never wear velvet breeches or attitudinise to a lily. The age in which we live is making some notable efforts to emerge from the slough of ugliness which oppressed the first fifty

years of the present century. But it is too much to expect that the ages of beauty are returned because a great many persons buy old Nankin and have views about Luca Signorelli.

How much of all this new-born zeal for Art is simple delight in beauty? The essence of Art is repose; restful enjoyment of all perennial sources of beauty, in modes that are natural habits of life, under forms of belief that have never known doubt and do not depend on reasoning. But this new æsthetic zeal for Art is a militant, critical, most disputatious affair: a thing of fashion, with a new idol for every season, and a special creed for every coterie. Its votaries will change the cut of their gowns according to the painter in vogue: for the poet, the painter, the critic of the year are forsaken and replaced in the next; and their merits are debated with more than the passion of theology, and even less than its charity.

Zenobia has one of the most brilliant houses in town. Art is the business of her life; the new poem, the last critic, the ultimate fiat of the ruling law-giver of taste occupy the minds of all who frequent her rooms, while the intricate adornments as amply delight their eyes. In a short but brilliant career Zenobia, to my knowledge, has changed her religion and her politics twice, her furniture and her wall-papers thrice. Zenobia, then, is an Æsthete. She has no time to care for the elaborate devices on her walls which puzzle the ignorant and dazzle the elect. Art flourishes not in such a world.

Sir Visto has a princely mansion, which, in a long life of industrious collecting, he has crowded with rare and priceless works. He is no less judicious than lavish; for in his whole career he has never acquired a poor piece or grudged the price of a fine one. As one passes through his stately galleries the eye wanders from tapestry to picture, from niello to enamel, from porcelain to bronze, from fretted ceiling to checkered floor: all is exquisite, of the best; a miracle of skill from the East and from the South, from the arts of old and the art of to-day. The eye wanders seeking rest and finding none. Sir Visto's palace is not a home, but a museum; and a museum where the precious things are stuffed too close to be enjoyed. Everything is beautiful, and yet there is no beauty.

I believe that the camel after all will have passed through the eye of the needle before the rich man shall have found his way to enter the Kingdom of Beauty. It is a hard thing for the rich man to enjoy Art at all: the habits of our age convert him into a patron; and the assiduity of the dealers deprives him of peace. In these days, when everything has a market, the market ultimately decides the destination of everything; so that the boundless power of gratifying a taste is a perilous condition for preserving it pure. To be rich, no doubt, is a relative term. A duke may be poor with ten thousand a year; a young painter may be rich with five hundred. They to whom it is easy to buy whatever they long to possess

are seldom those to whom Beauty has uttered her deepest word.

I know no life on which the spirit of Art has so serenely alighted as it has in the modest home of my friend Trevisano. He is a painter who paints nothing but what he simply enjoys; and, as he cares little to please the world, his friends are few and his earnings small. He lives in a quaint old farm-house in a quiet old county, happy in his work, his thoughts, and his home, happiest of all in a congenial wife. For twenty years no one has seen a new thing in his house, where the stuffs are simple and a little faded, and the tables and chairs have served the forefathers of the village. One of Sir Visto's vases would buy his entire store. An old rug on which generations of Mussulmans have knelt in prayer; one lovely blue bowl, the gift of an old friend; a sunny sketch by his comrade Murano; some drawings of the great Italian age, and a fragment of Greek art are all the "curios" that he owns. Yet we feel that they make him passing rich, and transport him in thought into unknown regions of beauty, where the dealers cease from troubling and Sir Visto cannot follow. Beauty has descended on his quiet home, and she abides there; she has found repose, and has not been scared by gold.

Can it be that these unwearied collectors of beautiful work care so much to make their lives beautiful, or even to surround the mere shell of their lives with beauty? Do they really dwell in mental converse with the great poets and the story of bright and

glorious times? Do they know all that man has done in the way of beauty? When they go to see "Romeo and Juliet," are they stirred by the deathless tale of young love and passion, or by the correct costumes and the sheeny brocades? I think there are incongruities in their lives as I pace along those unlovely vistas of stucco where the names of "gardens" and "terrace" recall, as in some monotonous fugue, the possessions of the house of Grosvenor or the Royal gates of the park. Each third house, methinks, is the chosen abode of an Æsthete. For him the East has rendered up her ancient treasures—gorgeous carpets from the land of Hafiz, porcelains from the Summer Palace, bronzes and enamels for which Daimios have fought, the *stessa mano* of Cellini, and the authentic mark of Leonard of Limoges. But what boots it if these costly gems are contained in a house which to look at from without is little better than a whited sepulchre; if the owner of these treasures finds Chaucer and Dante intolerably dull; if he knows as little of the history of human art as that rascal Melchizedek, of Bond Street?

It has dawned upon a chosen few that there is a certain incongruity in storing these precious works in a pompous builder's barrack; and they have walled themselves in with red brick very dear to the fancy of our great Wren and his Dutch patrons. It is very well; yet no sooner does a clever man draw attention to some forgotten mode of art but æsthetic mobs rush in to copy it with the eagerness of a dressmaker who

has secured the last creation of Worth. And now gables and chimney-stacks in red brick of the same ingenious school threaten to become as monotonous in the 19—, as ever was stucco in the 18—.

These votaries of art, their oracles and circles, have a curiously narrow conception of the business to which they dedicate their lives. "'Tis as easy as lying" to learn how to chatter one deaf about Satsuma and old Lustre, to simper about the early manner of Pietro della Francesca, to be curious in Rhodian vases and Baghdad rugs, the "Liber Studiorum" and Old Crome; and young Abinadab of the Strand can talk about them faster than the glibbest of amateur Æsthetes. One may know the marks of a piece of porcelain or an early engraver, run off the hall-stamp of silver and determine the point of old lace, and yet remain curiously ignorant of everything that is properly art. Art is long and life is brief; and the true history of Art is a free and spacious field, not to be traversed without a brain and a will, and an eye for the glorious faculties of man. He who knows anything solid of the history of Art will know not a little of the history of Man, for it carries him in unbroken circles through every region of the globe and every age of time. The love of beauty is no thing of dilettantism to be cut into snippets and shreds; so that he who loves lace can see nothing in a fresco, and he who loves pictures nothing in a statue; so that the learned in painting may be deaf to a sonata and blind in a Greek temple and hopelessly dull to a noble poem. I know not

what zeal for Art can be save a rational love for all human beauty. He who would narrow it to less proclaims himself an Æsthete.

I knew young Osric at school, and I remember his doings at college. He wrote neat verses enough; but he cruelly mangled Virgil; and when he aimed at honours in history the examiners and he took different views of his epoch. When I next fell in with this watery lad I found him the oracle of an æsthetic sect. And now, if I happen to say that I love the late school of Siena or the decorative fancy of a Persian plate, I see on young Osric's face a stare of surprise, as if it were hardly good manners to talk of such things in his presence. Well! well! my life has had other work, I trow, than to follow the Sangreal of Beauty; and yet withal it has led me to meditate on a thousand forms of art which are not dreamed of, perchance, in the Osrician system of philosophy.

There is a mark by which you shall know your Æsthete at once. He praises a master because few ever heard of him, and he values nothing that the whole world can enjoy. He has a holy of holies, they say, where he strokes the ineffable pot and caresses a manuscript copy of unpublished sonnets by Villon. Sir Walter Scott and Byron, he assures you, were shocking old Philistines; and for ten years he has never set his eyes on the Parthenon marbles in the Museum. Did an Athenian of the age of Plato, or a Florentine of the age of Leonardo, or the men of any

great epoch of beauty and joy house themselves in builders' caravanserais, keep old-world "curios" in secret drawers, and find a new æsthetic religion as soon as the last was divulged?

My last word (and it is the one which mainly concerns us) is simply the thought that our Æsthetes are beginning, after all, at the wrong end: the best of them perhaps like the worst of them, the real lovers of beauty like the mere seekers after fashion. Can Art stand alone, apart from life, thought, manners, work? Art will be beautiful when life is beautiful, and assuredly not till then. When the world finds contentment in congenial habits of work, and no longer treats life as a scramble for places; when it has leisure to be happy, and strength to be simple, we shall find Art again there, without going far to seek it. To fuss about it, where there is neither strength, simplicity, nor peace; to think that money can buy it, or exclusiveness create it—this is not Art, but Æsthetics.

# XI.

# AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

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THE month of May is still, as of old, sacred to art; or rather it is the season when we are most importunately bidden to bargain for *bric-à-brac*, to listen to music, and to view pictures. Like the rest of the world, though I do not make art the business of my life, I can now and then spend an hour with profit at a gallery, or at Christie's. Not that I would give to the world any crude opinions of my own on the works that I happen to see. If I did, young Osric would look at me very much as a Minister might look if I ventured to sound him on the present state of Ireland. But, even to one who is no critic, there is something to think over in the present condition of painting; and chiefly in the way that the painters conceive the sphere and resources of their Art.

To me the real question is not whether we have some very clever masters of the brush, but whether painting as an art is now in a sound, rational, and growing state. Are we to-day in the true path which once led up to Leonardo, Raffaelle, and Titian? What, if we look at it with something of the philo-

sophic eye, is the relation of our art to the art of the brilliant ages? And then this further question, Is the philosophy of Osric strong enough, deep enough, to guide our painters aright? Are they, intellectually, morally, poetically, trained as they should be—as they once were?

How characteristic of modern academies is the part which we now assign to the catalogue. Year after year we have scores of pictures which are mere conundrums till we turn to the answer in the book, or have read the passage of his favourite author that the painter has chosen to present. "Marry, come up!" "Which is it to be?" "The Idiot Boy," and so forth. And the catalogue which contains the answers to these riddles and these centos of verse and prose has grown into that wonderful *olla podrida* which our grand mothers used to call Elegant Extracts—not by any means, as Mr. Leslie Stephen would say, Half-hours in a Library; but rather, Stray Clippings from Common Books. In this, as in all things at Burlington House, the influence of the accomplished president is beginning to tell; and of late this curious budget of scraps has lost its somewhat fatiguing bulk. Yet how often still is the catalogue description an element indispensable to the modern picture! Here lies the matter I so often turn over in my mind.

As I recall those glorious hours which in years gone by I have given to study in the famous galleries of Europe, I can hardly remember a picture which needed to explain its meaning a literary accompani-

ment in words. The great religious ideals, the great historic events, the grand mythological heroes, common to the world and familiar to the people, sufficed to the masters of old. In a gallery of their works we are little concerned about a catalogue; their subjects were the poetry and faith of mankind. But at Burlington House we are as much dependent on the book of the words as if we were of these immortal few who sit unwearied through the mystical Cycles of Wagner's Nibelungs.

Here is the scene we all know so well. A group of eager and intelligent visitors stand before a picture, it may be, of vivid colour and intricate design. They look at it, curious, but hopelessly puzzled. Say that it presents in the foreground a solemn and elderly man in the garb of the fourteenth century, of a feeble but benevolent cast of feature; he is surveying a rather frolicsome donkey to whom he offers a mediæval carrot. Why the donkey? Why the respectable ancient? And still more, why the carrot? Our puzzled friends turn to the catalogue, where they read: "No. 1375—'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.'" Now they all see it. "How good! what a happy thought!" "How cleverly the story is told!" And then they read—

> "Only the Ass, with motion dull,
> Upon the pivot of his skull
> Turns round his long left ear."

The poet and the painter together have created a little comedy, which is found to divert. The picture

without the catalogue is like charcoal without saltpetre: add the verses, and a mild explosion results.

We have a race of painters who seem to ransack the suburbs of literature for a subject that shall remain an enigma till words are added to the canvas. The words may be trivial; they may be full of beauty. But the beauty is that of poetry, not of painting; and the subject is really unpaintable. The arts have all their special fields, and there is no surer sign of anarchy in art than this heedless confusion of their methods. We are told to-day that the multiplication of trumpets can impart to us the profound morality of the German Welt-Geist: so, too, there are men who make bold with the brush alone to make us hear the ring of Shelley's "Skylark," or the wail of Tennyson's "In Memoriam."

Here is one of these enigmas in colour:—A moor and a dyke, a decayed skull, a rusted sword, and two carrion birds. The design is certainly not pleasing; the subject somewhat mysterious. We turn to the catalogue, and a few lines from the "Twa corbies" recall to us a ballad as magnificent as any in our language. But the picture without the poem is a rather repulsive riddle. Does not one very clever painter give us "Ella and the Swans," and another "Auld Robin Gray?" Pretty designs enough, full of grace and tenderness; but exhibit them at Naples or Madrid, and who will decipher them? Andersen apart, what is the meaning of four swans flying through the air with a young woman in a net? And,

but for the old Border ballad, we have nothing but a youth and a girl full of love and full of grief—about something. Nor could the brush of Giotto, Michael Angelo, and Rembrandt combined ever paint the romance of Robin Gray.

Hence it is that so many an ingenious picture is little but a painted rebus. The story, it may be, is skilfully worked out, and the painter elaborately follows his text. But what if we have never heard of the story, or have never met with the anecdote? The printed libretto apart, our patient eye can detect little but incongruous or repulsive images. One thinks of the fate of these works in the future, when catalogues shall be no more and the popular tale is forgotten, while the pictures themselves may survive in some gallery of the twentieth or the twenty-first century. We had once a historic picture by a man of distinction wherein we saw an amiable young lady with a pensive look, just roused, as was but too obvious, from her slumber, and in an utterly indescribable dishabille, hastening to meet two elderly persons, whereof one in a short wig. But why the dishabille of the interesting girl? Why these respectable elders in her ante-chamber? Why thus disturb her in the gray of the morning? And why, above all, the wig?

A passage in the catalogue expounds the conundrum. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Conyngham hurrying at dawn on the 20th of June 1837 to tell the Princess Victoria that she was

a Queen. A momentous hour truly in her life and in ours, on which no little pathos of the literary sort has been fairly expended. But for a painter can history supply a more hopeless subject? On canvas, without a catalogue, at least for a Frenchman or a German, Champollion himself would fail to decipher the hieroglyph. Suppose the picture still extant in the year 2082, and the clue long lost; how will not our descendants be exercised by this mysterious presentment of a young lady *en déshabillé*, whose slumbers have been broken by two elderly persons, one in a short wig

There is now at the Academy a picture of great force and skill. In a Louis Quatorze palace, a youth in ringlets and ribands, his arms bound behind his back, is writhing on the polished floor at the feet of a saturnine grandee. We who have Macaulay at the tips of our fingers recall at once that ghastly scene, where the craven nephew is spurned by the relentless uncle. It pleases us to find that we can identify the story. Yes! We recognise the curls of Monmouth, and the cruel jaw of James. 'Tis a loathsome tale, learnedly studied and deftly painted, perhaps as literally true to the real scene as such things by study can be made. But a hundred years hence —say, in Italy or Spain—who would understand why the silken gallant is licking the dust before his gloomy rival? The essence of the tragedy is this: that it is a nephew wildly begging his life of an uncle; that the uncle is enjoying the death agony of his kinsman; that

he has just resolved he shall die. But no brush can ever tell us that these two are so close of kin, that the curls will to-morrow be soaked in blood, that the king has admitted the boy in mere diabolical love of human pain. All this we must get from Macaulay. Now this is to say that it needs a book as well as a canvas to make this performance a work of art. And, then, is it Art? or, if so, what is the end of Art? Here is a story of all that is abject and malignant in man. Imagine yourself to possess it; hang it in your dining-room; and, for grace before meat and grace after meat, day by day behold that pitiful young rebel cringing for life, and the inhuman uncle gloating over his agony. Study, says the painter, each morn and each evening, two of the vilest of human passions unrelieved in their nakedness! Can it be the task of Art thus to give immortal form to shame, cowardice, and brutality?

Painting is the permanent embodiment in beautiful form and colour of characteristic types of Nature and of Man. It has never grown apart from poetry and thought and habit. In all great ages of Art a picture or a statue was intelligible to every eye, without an extract from a book, or a reference to an anecdote. In an age without a dominant poetry and pervading convictions painting inevitably tends to become a thing of costumiers and *bric-à-brac* dealers. Let the Ruskins and the Ruskinnikins of our day thunder forth or simper forth whole decalogues of laws of painting; there is more to be learned if we

think about the field and object of this Art. We have still enough skill of the brush to keep it in a living state and to make its revival conceivable. There is at the Academy this year at least one picture —and a picture which deepens our insight into the Hellenic religion of beauty. But why these eternal charades on canvas, these *tableaux vivants* of popular anecdote? Why these perpetual arrangements of the ubiquitous cabinet and the indestructible armour, the familiar brocade and the inevitable tapestry, with almost nothing inside the garments, and almost nothing beside the furniture? It might as well be a Shakespearean revival, with all that scenes and stuffs and decorations can do to fill the place of William Shakespeare. We shall never have Art again till a plain man can go into a picture-gallery without a volume of elegant extracts and mild jests to tell him what the pictures mean—till he understands everything he sees, and feels his spirit touch the spirit of the painter on his canvas. No people have ever gone far in Art without religious and poetic ideals, clear beliefs about truth and beauty. In other words, there can be no great painting till there is great thought and great life, and thought and life are both inwoven with beauty.

# XII.

# A TYPE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

## ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

# BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST. BERNARD, ABBOT OF CLAIRVAUX, A.D. 1091-1153. By JAMES COTTER MORISON, M.A., Lincoln College, Oxford, 1863.

THE appearance of a really good book about a truly great man will naturally turn our thoughts to consider the spirit of his age. And one may take the occasion of a new and excellent *Life of St. Bernard* to say something of the place which he holds in the history of civilisation. Mr. Morison's book is as thoughtful in design as it is skilful in execution. The subject stands out as lifelike as it is found in the original sources; and his warm sympathy with the genius of the age has enabled the author to bridge the gulf of seven centuries. He throws himself into the heart of a distant time with an energy worthy of the great teacher to whom this book is dedicated—the biographer of Cromwell and Frederick. The story of St. Bernard's life is so fully made out from his

extant letters that it is almost an autobiography. What the Letters of Cicero are to the later Roman Republic, that the four hundred and forty-four Letters of St. Bernard are to the twelfth century.

Desiring to send every student of history to the book itself, we shall avail ourselves of Mr. Morison's labours, without further acknowledgment, to say a few words about the character of that age and the moral lessons it presents. The day has passed when the Church of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries needed to be defended from the ignorance of Knox or the prejudice of Voltaire. Dean Milman's great work has embodied a judgment as final as that which Carlyle has accomplished for Cromwell. But it may be doubted if justice has yet been fully done to the highest spiritual results of the central mediæval movement. We, who are separated from that age by so vast a gulf in habits and ideas, are now free to judge St. Bernard as dispassionately as we judge Confucius or Bouddha. And if we do so, we must come to the conclusion that the life of St. Bernard and his relation to the spirit of his age show elements of beauty and greatness which, as yet, have not so perfect a type in the whole story of human civilisation.

The time, the place, the circumstances of his birth combined to form a temper of religious enthusiasm. The future soul of Catholicism was a boy of eight years old, when, with a profound thrill of pride and thanksgiving, Europe learned the rescue from the Infidel of the Sepulchre of Christ. He was born in

the heart of that Burgundian country which has been the centre of the religion of France: the country of eloquence, of Bossuet, and Buffon. His father was vassal of that Lord of Burgundy who lost his life in the First Crusade; his mother was herself a saint—the Hannah of a Christian Samuel. The boy grew up, meditative, delicate, and gentle; too weak to become a knight; too spiritual to become a rhetorician; cultivated and eager; pure and austere. It was in his nineteenth year when the inward impulse, common to all religious leaders, spoke to his soul. He was on a journey alone, filled with doubt and heaviness, when a wayside church came in sight. There, says the old Chronicle, "with a torrent of tears he poured out his heart like water, and resolved to renounce the world."

But in this, the first act of his public life, as ever after to the latest, religion was to Bernard a social, not a personal duty; it meant not the saving of his soul, but the regeneration of his age. His first thought, like that of Paul, of Bouddha, and of Luther, was to win others to the truth which had flashed upon himself. And now begins that marvellous career of personal ascendency which, in the annals of human history, is never surpassed; which shrank from no obstacle or difficulty, and never encountered a reverse. He had determined to take refuge from the world in a cloister, but not to enter it alone. He would go there only with his friends and relations around him. The uncle and the five brothers of

Bernard were men of the world; powerful lords, mighty men of valour. The younger brother yielded to his appeal; the eldest made a stout resistance. He had a wife and children; he was a man in years and authority. Sorely he struggled against the young fanatic—the flesh was weak—his young wife was utterly hardened; and the knight wavered long. But affliction opened her eyes; she confessed her hardness of heart; sought forgiveness of Bernard, and went into a convent. The brothers and uncle won, thirty chosen spirits were collected around the new preacher. For six months they gave themselves up to preparation in seclusion. Then they bid adieu to the world; settled their earthly affairs; and the whole band, headed by their young leader of twenty-two, sought a premature tomb in the Abbey of Citeaux.

Having completed this outrage upon nature—an outrage inseparable from his absolute creed, inseparable also in that day from any regeneration of life—Bernard is lost for some years to all human purposes in the mystical monotony of the cloister. But, even in the silence of so ghostlike a gloom, all trace of character and intellect was not quite extinguished. The keen eye of his Abbot, the great Stephen Harding, marked him out to lead the new religious colony which the Abbey had determined to send forth into the forests of Central France. There, in a wild and sombre valley, he and his followers raised a rough shed; toiled with their own hands at their simple cloister; fed on beech-nuts and roots; laboured,

hungered, and prayed; cleared the neighbouring land, gathered round them a scanty population; and the Valley of *Wormwood* brightened into the Valley of Light or *Clairvaux*.

As Abbot of the new community, the practical genius of Bernard began to unfold. His monks, worn out with toil, hunger, and cold, lost heart till they were revived by the fierce enthusiasm of their leader. The monastery was built and established; its fame went forth; its influence spread; industry and cultivation prospered through its example. Its Abbot was the symbol of order and the source of protection, the comforter of the distressed, and the avenger of the oppressed. Civilisation, moral and material, radiated from it through that dark tract, as from a centre of light and warmth. A mysterious sanctity surrounded both Abbey and Abbot. Miracles streamed from him spontaneously. In one day thirty-seven were recorded; though, even in this age, so copious a discharge of thaumaturgic force was looked on as a spiritual excess.

Here, within the walls of his monastery, for fifteen years Bernard passed the life of an Abbot, gradually maturing that influence which by degrees overshadowed all Christendom. The great character, the saintliness of the man, spread in ever-widening waves. The deepest thinkers, the most earnest reformers of their age, in turn were drawn within his sphere. The Bishop of Chalons, the vanquished rival of Abailard; Peter of Cluny, the head of countless abbeys, clung

to him with admiration and love. A brother abbot implores his advice for the restoration of discipline and manners. A brother monk, who has forsaken his vows, has to be aroused to his duty. The fraternity of his order require a mission to a distant country. All difficulties and disputes, moral, religious, and civil, by unanimous consent came to be referred to him, as the common arbitrator, counsellor, and judge. His justice overawed the violent; his persuasiveness convinced those whom he condemned. The distracted abbot, the overburdened monk, the oppressed peasant, the puzzled student, the injured vassal, and the outraged wife came to him for help; and none came in vain.

The door of Clairvaux was always open to the most wretched; its voice was too sacred to be disregarded by the most powerful. The great Lord of Champagne had on a false charge degraded a vassal, confiscated his estate, and put out his eyes. Bernard confronted the oppressor in the full lust of his revenge, pleaded with importunity the case of the innocent victim, and obtained full pardon and restitution. The King of France became entangled in a quarrel with his Bishops. The order of Cistercians, with Bernard at their head, meet him with equal boldness and a greater strength. Monasticism itself receives a stern rebuke in the invective of the Cistercian monk against the corruptions of the most illustrious and most powerful of the Abbeys of Europe. Feudalism, monachy, episcopacy, and monachism were each in turn ad-

dressed. The fiery spirit and touching sympathy of one great heart passed with purifying force through each institution of society, both civil and religious.

It was during this period that the greater portion of that marvellous series of letters was completed, in which the Abbot of Clairvaux pours out the whole energy of his character to persons of every degree, in every part of Europe, on every conceivable subject. Sometimes it is a devotional address wrought up to a high pitch of imaginative mysticism; sometimes it is an answer to a practical question; sometimes a scheme of reform for the government of the Church; sometimes the simplest and gentlest words of affection; sometimes a flood of passionate rebuke. There is perhaps no collection of letters extant which shows in the moral government of men such a range of interest and activity; and none was ever followed by more immediate practical results. Now, in words of intense brotherly interest and love, he recalls an erring monk to his duty. Now, he warns an abbot of the evil which is caused by his absence. Now, he impresses on an archbishop the tremendous responsibility of his see. In another letter he urges on a Pope and his cardinals the measures to be taken in a general council; in another he calls upon a king to close a schism in the Church. Again, he commends to his sovereign lord the petition of the wife of a distressed vassal; in another he meets the King of France in the name of his order. Now, he writes to the Bishop of Lincoln; now to the Chancellor at Rome; soon he

is claiming from the people of Pisa submission to the lawful Pope; next the Emperor is exhorted to a new Crusade.

A large proportion of these letters are addressed to a succession of Popes, and give us a vivid picture of the government of the mediæval Church as seen from its centre. The rest range from every subject; from the appointment of a priest or the recovery of stolen pigs, to a scheme for the regeneration of the Church. The Kings of France, of England, of Portugal, of Sicily; the Emperor and Empress; the Queens of England, and of Jerusalem; the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, of Cologne, Mayence, and Armagh; the Milanese clergy; the people of Toulouse, of Spires, of Milan, of Genoa; the college of cardinals; the patriarch of Jerusalem; the Bishops of Winchester, of Ostia, of Pavia, of Lausanne, of London; the brethren of Ireland; the young monk Fulk; the virgin Sophia —are in turn the recipients of his missives. Nothing gives us so profound a vision of that society in which the spiritual unity of the Church united the men of all mediæval Europe. In the name of their common faith, the Christian priest is the fellow-citizen of distant peoples; the equal and associate of the most distinct classes of society. The humility and personal tenderness of the Abbot bring him down to the level of the most destitute outcast; his lofty enthusiasm raise him far above the level of Emperor or Pope.

If in this vast range of his correspondence there is anything which can surpass the zeal, the penetration,

and overpowering flood of argument and feeling they reveal, it is their simplicity, humility, and tenderness. Bernard never once seems conscious of his power, never appeals to his authority, never approaches to a command. He appeals to no sanction but their common faith; implores instead of threatens; bewails rather than rebukes. When he complains of a sin, he is the fellow-sufferer with the sinner; when he claims an act of justice, it is by appealing to the honour and duty of the wrongdoer. Whether he addresses pope, prince, or penitent, it is as one who is driven to implore, but who is utterly unworthy to command. Thus, from first to last, there is no trace of dictation, no consciousness of self, of any assumption of a right, no pride, anger, or rigour—there is nothing but the spontaneous outburst of a soul, which the sight of evil humiliates and hurts; which, in the presence of oppression, of vice, of indolence, or of anarchy, is wrung with grief, pity, and remorse.

Nor must it be supposed that these letters are the result of an officious and restless temper having a turn for spiritual agitation and intrusive advice. On the contrary, they are but, for the most part, replies to appeals besieging him for help and counsel. In those days, singular to relate, it was not thought contemptible to ask plainly for guidance. It was held rather honourable than otherwise to listen to the judgment of a good man. Men were not ashamed even to state plainly the anxieties of their inmost hearts. Men were in the habit of urging on one another, without

reserve or apology, matters of moment to their common belief. Nay, a priest could rebuke point-blank a flagrant enormity, even a corrupt institution, without assuming a tone either of insolence or hypocrisy; nor was he met by contemptuous defiance. If we make allowance for the gulf which separates their ideas from ours, and remember that we are dealing with a state of society which in these matters was the exact opposite of our own, we may perhaps admit that something may be said even for interference with the right of private judgment as great as this; that, all things considered, it may have been "a wholesome discipline and very suited to those times."

Whether asked or unasked, whether rightly or wrongly, certain it is that the correspondence of Bernard exhibits him as dealing in turn with nearly every institution, movement, and class in Western Europe. He was formally chosen by the Pope to rouse Christendom to resist the Antichrist of an advancing Islam. He was called on by Council and Church to resist the more formidable Antichrist of a new philosophy. Through his mouth a further development of the Catholic doctrine was regulated and defined. The order of the Cistercians was organised, that of the Cluniacs reformed, that of the Templars established, under the influence of his authority or advice. The desperate wars of the feudal barons with each other and with their rivals in the rising towns found him a constant mediator. Suger, the great Minister of France, one of the principal

founders of its monarchy, was his friend through life, and their influence was united to one end. From time to time, over a succession of popes, over two Kings of France, an Emperor in Germany, and a King of England, over the entire clergy and monkhood of France, he seemed to exercise a boundless personal ascendency. The last effort of his life was a comprehensive survey of the entire system of Church government; and there, with prophetic spirit, he sees the evils into which it is hurrying from excessive centralisation, and the lust of arbitrary power; urges on the Pope a plan for saving it from ultimate ruin, and points out most of the dangers, and at least some of the remedies, which appear in the crisis of the Reformation.

The occasion which called Bernard into the world of European politics was the schism of the West, upon the death of Pope Honorius II. Peter Leonis, the grandson of a Jew usurer, whose wealth procured him a strong party in Rome and in the Conclave, aspired to the Papacy; he drove out the regularly elected Pope, Innocent II.; and the Christian world was divided into hostile factions. "In most Abbeys," says the Chronicler, "two Abbots arose; in the bishoprics two rivals contended for the office." The King of France, to meet this formidable danger, called a Council of prelates, bishops, and clergy, at which Bernard was "in a special manner" invited to attend. Mr. Morison tells us how, "Fasting and prayer preceded the opening of the Council, which at once began its deliberations by unanimously agreeing that

a 'business which concerned God should be entrusted to the man of God,' *and that his judgment should decide the views of the Assembly.* He examined the whole question of the double election, the respective merits of the competitors, the life and character of the first elected; and when he opened his mouth the Holy Ghost was supposed to speak through it. Without hesitation or reserve, he pronounced Innocent the legitimate Pope, the only one whom they could accept as such. Acclamations received this opinion; and, amid praises to God, and vows of obedience to Innocent, the Council broke up."

This mode of deciding a great national question, though in strange contrast with the working of ordinary representative parliaments, ancient or modern, lay or clerical, was perhaps after all the wisest, and certainly it was the most speedy way out of an immediate dilemma. That one, who more than any living churchman knew the workings of the Catholic Church, whose character was unapproached in its spotless integrity, whose knowledge of mankind had been attested in a life of successful administration, whose devoutness overawed his generation, should have been called on to choose the best Head of Christendom, and that an assembly of men, desiring to see this point aright, should recognise, adopt, and ratify his judgment, may possibly have been a course which did "violence to the dignity and freedom of the individual man;" but it was certainly justified by the event.

The people of Europe were far from proving themselves as servile, it may perhaps be, as wise, as the clergy of France; and a great work remained before the unity of Christendom could be attained. The work of restoring it fell, by common consent, to Bernard. For seven years the schism raged, and the organisation of the spiritual society was shaken to its foundations. Having won over the Bishops, and then the King of France, having brought him to do profound homage to the exiled Pope, Bernard achieved a greater conquest over the sagacious, powerful, and ambitious Henry of England. Him too the irresistible attraction of Bernard subdued. "Answer, O King," said he, "to God for your other sins yourself: this one I take upon myself." A still more difficult work of persuasion followed. The Emperor himself, full of bitter memories of the secular struggles with the Papacy, was won over; nay more, was reduced to a humble and devoted partisan of the throneless Pope by the magical influence of his lowly champion. But the monk, whose appeals could make Popes and bend Kings, had a longer task to unite the turbulent people of the divided towns of Italy and the jealous lords of feudal France. From one to the other he went; exhorting, imploring, arguing, and denouncing: from Chartres to Liège, from thence to Rheims, to Rome, to Pisa, to Milan; from Flanders to Brittany; from the Rhine to the Pyrenees; from Normandy to Naples.

The Count of Aquitaine still continued to main-

tain the rival Pope, and thrust out the Bishops who adhered to Innocent. The papal legate could make no way with this haughty and independent lord. In his perplexity he did what all men did: he sent for Bernard. Bernard came, and spoke; and, with prostrations and groans, the contrite Lord of Aquitaine sought reunion with the Church. Still, the Antipope maintained a powerful party in the seat of the Papacy. Again Bernard was called to Rome. One by one he overcame the partisans of the Usurper, and they melted away from his cause before the glow of the Abbot's zeal.

But Southern Italy was still in the hands of the Norman ruler, Roger of Sicily; and Roger the Norman had his private grounds for approving of schism. A Council was called to decide on the merits of the rival Popes; and the crafty Norman put forward a famous rhetorician to confound the unlettered monk. But the unlettered monk had a soul of fire, and a passion for truth. And, when he swept away the learning of the professional lawyer, and put the case in his direct and earnest way—"Was the Christian Church of France, England, Spain, and Germany wrong; was the whole religion of the West at fault; was an ambitious Cardinal and his hired advocate alone in possession of right and truth?"—the whole assembly broke forth into cries of detestation against the disturbers of the harmony of Christendom, and joyfully acknowledged the Pontiff of Bernard.

The outward division of Christians was closed;

and, worn in body and sick at heart, the keeper of the conscience of Europe hastened homeward to the peace of his Abbey; to communion with his simple brethren; to the solitude of the Cloister; the solemnity of the Vesper hymn; the ecstasy of midnight prayer; the austerities of the tear-washed cell. Who shall say that these things were as unnatural and false to him as they would undoubtedly be to us? This was no ambitious Faquir or crazy mystic: these are not the ways of priestcraft or the lust of rule. And, when we find the unrivalled champion stealing back from his triumphs to the obscurity of his Cloister, it may strike us that, but for some such haven of rest and meditation, no man could have kept unsullied in so turbulent a world that saint-like singleness of heart, or gathered that contagious energy of will.

But within the bosom of the Church an invisible cause of disunion lay hid: one destined to shake it less deeply at once, but in the end to eat out its heart. For a quarter of a century Europe had been ringing with the name of a man, who, whatever his other qualities, was undoubtedly one of the most dexterous reasoners whom the world has ever seen. Peter Abailard began as a very knight-errant of philosophy. From one school to another he had wandered, overturning the most famous masters of word-fence, winning unbounded glory for his wit, learning, and subtlety. All the world was full of his genius and his successes; his wild adventures, his shame, and his shamelessness. At length, in his biting critical way,

he had taken to theology. A consummate logician had little difficulty in making short work with that. It hardly needed the acumen of Abailard to devise a conception of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement at once more logical and more scriptural than that of the school divines. There was not much philosophy in that feat. It needed only a practised logician, with the unscrupulous cynicism and reckless vanity of Master Peter. At last he had aroused and alarmed the French bishops, then the true depositaries of all that was vigorous and lofty in Catholicism. Again they called upon their guide and champion. Again, after but three years of rest and solitude, they dragged him forth, full of reluctance and distrust to meet the assailant of their faith.

It is impossible here in any sense to enter into the philosophy of Abailard. A character like his, with its falseness, vanity, and meanness, does affect our estimate of his mind. But allowing for his wonderful acuteness and doing justice to the originality, as well as to the vigour of his mind, it is doubtful if he were more than a philosophic sophist. In what sense he is, as some French writers pretend, the father of modern thought, the precursor of Bacon, Descartes, and Leibnitz, it is difficult to see. Modern philosophy arose out of modern science, of which Abailard was as ignorant as Bernard. Descartes and Bacon laboured after truths which would ameliorate human life. Abailard had no other object than to prove the Bishops to be fools. The system of Abailard was not

more demonstrable than the system he attacked. His object was only to replace a hypothetical system of belief, on which rested the civilisation of mankind, by a system just as arbitrary, which was invented to promote the glory of a rhetorician.

Modern thought took its rise from Copernicus and Kepler, of whom Abailard is in no possible sense the precursor. It was not till five centuries later that the Church opposed the development of science. To dissolve its dogmas, whilst science was unborn, was an objectless work of destruction. In Voltaire's time the Church was the enemy of progress; in Abailard's it was its life. In Luther's time the Church was systematically corrupt; in Abailard's it was the chief check upon corruption. Luther attempted some reorganisation of society; Descartes laid the basis of scientific philosophy; Voltaire attacked a persecuting system with courageous humanity; Abailard did none of these. He did nothing to promote science, of which he was ignorant; and he only unhinged society, which he did not understand. His dogmas were as gratuitous as were those of Bernard. If Diogenes be the father of ancient philosophy, Abailard may be the father of modern. There were some logica, truths and many metaphysical theories, in whichl drawing from the vast storehouse of Aristotle, Abailard may have anticipated some of the least valuable results of modern metaphysics. He was possibly the restorer of the metaphysical puzzle. But to connect his name with that of the great founders of real

knowledge, with Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Bacon, and Descartes, is to discredit their honourable labours, as it would be to compare their lives of thought with his career of display.

Whatever be the logical value of his syllogisms in metaphysics, as a theologian, his only work was to paralyse the moral sense of his age, without doing anything to give a true direction to its thought. That part of the Catholic system which it was then quite premature to replace—its dogma—he did much to darken; that part of it which it was then most desirable to elevate—its discipline—he did all he could to undermine. The small residuum of truth he uttered could have had, and was intended to have, no practical effect; the immense falsehood which his teaching popularised was to unchain the spirit of disorder. It was a gain to the world when the Goths succeeded to the effete empire of the Cæsars; but our sympathies are not with the barbarians of Brennus when they burnt the first city of Rome. We honour Cromwell and Hampden; but we do not find a prototype of either in Wat Tyler or Perkin Warbeck. An infinitesimal truth may possibly be true, though to utter it may be a whole falsehood. The man who should amuse himself by teaching a young child that its mother had committed adultery, might perhaps believe that he was disseminating truth, but would be doing the work of the father of lies.

It was Abailard himself who appealed to be heard at a Council of the Church. He came, as to a tourna-

ment, confident of victory, and surrounded by his friends and disciples. Bernard came also, ill, dejected, and distrustful of his powers. The Assembly met in one of the churches at Sens. Bernard commenced his address, whereupon, to the astonishment of all, Abailard rose, appealed to Rome, refused to continue the contest, and left the Council. But, although by this manœuvre all definite decision on the question was deferred, the assembled prelates, carried away by the vehemence and arguments of Bernard, passed a formal condemnation upon Abailard. The question was practically set at rest by an authoritative decision. Abailard was left to follow his own course; he retired to the famous monastery of Cluny. There soon after he died, in repose and honour, envied by logicians in his own and later ages; wept by a noble woman, who has made him at once famous and infamous.

The mediæval Church has so great a load of Persecution, for which it must answer, that we are apt to attribute to it crimes without sufficient proof or reason. It does not appear that there are serious grounds to hold up Abailard as a martyr in the cause of truth. It was not by reviving the phraseology of Greek theologians about the nature of the Trinity that the conscience of Europe fought its way to a clearer sense of right and wrong. It was not by puzzling good and sincere teachers of the people that Luther shook a corrupt hierarchy. Christendom cast off the vices of Romanism by returning to a more honest life, and to the original virtues of the Gospel.

But all these things were what Bernard's life was devoted to promote. These were things which in a very high degree he succeeded in enforcing. For a century and a half his successors maintained the work by miracles of self-denying devotion. Had there been fifty Bernards, the regeneration of society might have been advanced some centuries. There is every reason to suppose that in his age any useful contribution to human knowledge would have been welcomed by the wisest leaders of the Church. At least it can hardly be called persecution, if they sought to discountenance speculations which neutralised the whole of their moral influence.

Bernard had now reached the age of fifty, and for more than fifteen years he had been engaged in public affairs. But from now till the end of his life he is involved in almost every event of which history gives us the record. "The circle of his political and ecclesiastical relations," says Mr. Morison, "was European. He had become a centre, around which the affairs and men of the Church had grown accustomed to revolve." It is impossible to notice these numerous affairs; in all of which the Abbot of Clairvaux, according to his lights, sometimes wisely, sometimes questionably, strove to uphold the unity of the Church. In his eyes this unity was absolutely equivalent with the salvation of mankind, in ours it may appear as relatively essential to their happiness. The principal remaining work of his life was the preaching of the Second Crusade. For years the tale of woe brought

back by the exhausted pilgrims from the East had been growing darker and deeper. The infidel was again threatening Christendom. Now, not only was the sepulchre of Christ defiled, and his birthplace shut out from the faithful, but the Crescent was advancing steadily upon Europe along the southern line of Asia Minor. The great Zenghis was shaking, one after another, the demoralised Frankish kingdoms of the East. At last, the terrible story of the fall of Edessa struck Europe throughout with pity and terror.

The danger was a real one. It was not religious fanaticism or extravagant sentiment—it was profound political wisdom—which called forth the West to meet the coming of the East. Had the capture of Constantinople and the invasion of Europe by the Turks been anticipated by three centuries, it is possible that Europe in its unsettled state might not have been able to resist it. There came a time when crusading was like tourneying, a brilliant folly; but it is the deliberate voice of history that the first three Crusades were essential to the safety of the West. The battle of Tours, the first taking of Jerusalem, the recovery of Spain, and the rescue of Vienna, form bright points in a long struggle of ten centuries between the Eastern and the Western monotheism—of which the Second Crusade, if one of the saddest, is not the least gallant, nor the least important feature.

On the news of the capture of Edessa the King of

France determined to put himself at the head of Christendom. His first thought in this, as always, was to have the sanction and the counsel of Bernard. Bernard referred him to the Pope. But the Pope was Eugenius of Clairvaux, the monastic son and disciple of Bernard, who acted in this as in most matters of importance, under the influence of his spiritual father. The Pope adopted the Crusade and committed to the Abbot of Clairvaux the task of arousing the West.

Again the fiery spirit passed through Christendom, bending it to his will, and elevating it to his level. The voice which had before brought it into unity of communion, which again had led it back to unity of belief, was now raised to awaken it to a common defence. To the assembly of Vezelai vast multitudes thronged. There, before the King and Queen of France, the nobles and prelates, in their degrees, and an immense crowd of people, Bernard rose and preached the duty of a new Crusade. "Crosses, crosses," was the cry on all sides; and the frenzy of Clermont was renewed again. "The very sight of that good man," says the old writer, "persuades men before he has spoken: worn like a hermit, emaciated, and pallid as he is, and reduced to an appearance of unearthly meagreness. To see him, is to become his disciple; to hear him, is to gain wisdom; to obey him, is to become holy." The enthusiasm which his preaching awakened was such, that the assembly of Chartres, with that fanaticism which so often ruined the

Crusaders, elected the monk to be commander-in-chief of their army. He easily escaped from this ridiculous honour, and passed into Germany to continue his more monk-like labours. Along the whole course of the Rhine he went from Cologne to Constance; and in each city that he left few of the male inhabitants had not assumed the Cross.

And now occurs an incident, one of the brightest in the life of Bernard, and one which shows him most in advance of his age; which proves most emphatically that, whilst inflaming Europe into war, he was far from blindly obeying a superior command, or stimulating the intolerant passions of his age. He was the master of the situation, not its tool. He was not the mouthpiece, but the conscience of the men of his day. The Crusades were inseparable from fierce intolerance. To the Jews they were signals for massacre and plunder. As in the First Crusade, so in the Second, the sincerity of the Crusaders was attested by the first fruits of infidel blood—that of the "damned, and ever-to-be damned, Jews." Rodolph, a fanatical monk, was stirring up the people of the Rhine, which ran with the blood of the wealthy and usurious misbeliever.

The true enthusiasm of Bernard rose against this sanguinary imitation of zeal. To each of the persecuting cities he wrote earnest and constant letters; to the Archbishop of Mayence he addressed a passionate appeal. He appeared amongst them in person. The true and the spurious fanatic met face to face—

the type of the good and bad in monkhood—Bernard the tender-hearted enthusiast, Rodolph the sanguinary demagogue. Even here his miraculous personal power succeeded. Rodolph was abashed and confounded, and retired in contrition to his monastery. But the people of Mayence, who had tasted blood and plunder, were not so easily appeased; and Bernard was left to struggle with an infuriated mob. Again the majesty of goodness triumphed. The work of destruction was stopped. We may implicitly believe the Jewish chronicler who writes, "Had not the tender mercy of the Lord sent that priest, none would have survived."

Having succeeded in purging it from a foul stain, Bernard was free to renew the preaching of the Crusade. Long and stubborn was the resistance of the Emperor. The German nation had never shown much willingness in the cause, and its head was its avowed opponent. Personal interviews, negotiations, and arguments had all been used in vain. For once it seemed that Bernard was destined to exhort in vain. The very day before his departure homewards for the last time he preached before the Court. The sermon had come to its conclusion when the monk turning to the Emperor, in his impetuous and trenchant way, pictured him as standing at the judgment seat of Christ, who reproached him with ingratitude in return for so many favours. The Emperor burst into tears, acknowledged his sin, and, amidst the acclamation of his people, took from the hand of his

converter the standard he was to bear at the head of the Crusaders.

The Crusade was opened, and its author lived to witness its utter disaster. The shock to his hopes embittered his last few years of life. He saw in it only a judgment upon men's perversity and sinfulness. He could not see how largely it had contributed to its true object; how the wave of Islam had been checked; its energy exhausted; how Europe had been knit together, and brought into relation with the East; and how the seeds had been gathered for that Science and Industry which were to prove more fatal to the Church than Mohammed, Zenghis, or Saladin.

The danger indeed was even less from without than from within. Hardly was an army of Crusaders despatched to meet the infidel in the field, when it became necessary to meet the infidel at home, in the very offices and high places of the Church. Languedoc was in heretical rebellion; and the Bishop of Poitiers, the most subtle and learned theologian then alive, had propounded a variety of new readings of the Christian verities. Again Bernard was dragged forth from his monastery, now visibly dying, to meet the emergency. Again he went through the cities, stricken as it were with the plague of heresy, and wherever he went the plague was stayed. The chroniclers give us the strangest stories of his success. The heretics avoid him; the people welcome him as a deliverer; miracles surround him. His biographers

speak of him as if he were a sort of Leyden-jar of spiritual force, from which to all that comes in contact with it irradiating glory flashes. The Bishop of Poitiers was condemned, the Pope is appealed to, and a general council summoned. There, by common consent, unlearned as he was, Bernard is confronted with the great theologian. With a secretary to supply a few quotations from the fathers, he analysed, discussed, and contrasted their rival views. That which to his opponent was a metaphysical distinction, to Bernard was the foundation of human life. The directness, simplicity, and fire of Bernard carried away the assembly, and seem to have confounded the philosopher himself. The Bishop was formally condemned, but the Council went still further. The questions at issue were regularly reviewed; a confession of faith was carefully prepared; and the Bishops, amidst the murmurs of the jealous and philosophic Cardinals, put forth upon authority the creed of the Abbot of Clairvaux.

Strangely opposed to our habits as is this method of exterminating heresy and silencing a philosopher, it is not indefensible when we regard the character of the age. The progress of Bernard was not like that of Dominic or Torquemada. We hear of no punishments, no violence, no enforcement of belief by law—by pressure, moral or material. The Bishop of Poitiers, like Abailard, is condemned on authority; but he is neither degraded nor injured. The whole character of the struggle shows us that, at that period,

the orthodox side was socially and morally the true one, and that of the heretic the false. The metaphysics of Gilbert de la Porrée were as unintelligible as those of Bernard. The difference is that the system of Bernard had elevated mankind during a progressive civilisation of ten centuries, whereas that of Gilbert had approved itself only to one puzzled brain. If there was one central idea which might then serve as a basis of a higher morality, it was the conception of the moral government of this world by a benevolent God. A man who had felt this conception through a life of effort, as the one great instrument in his hands for every good and useful thing, might well feel hostility to the man who regarded it only as a thesis for the dexterity of logicians. To proclaim this conviction of his own, to force it on men's minds, to raise in their spirits something of the religious sense which filled his own soul, was all that Bernard sought.

It is not strange that from such a man, and in such an age, the contagious force of his belief should penetrate and subdue the minds of men. They felt that there were matters of deeper meaning than the wrangling of schools; they rose to a sense of the social and moral dignity which had grown round the doctrine, as commonly received. When Bernard entered a heretic town, it was not to force or frighten any man back into his own belief. It was to make men feel the usefulness and goodness of the society they were about to quit, to teach them to see the

moral beauty of their own faith, and to recognise the purity and vitality it still was able to put forth. This is why he is the best, as well as the most successful of inquisitors. This is why his coming was welcomed with popular enthusiasm; and why, to their childlike imaginations, he was shrouded in a wonder-working atmosphere of supernatural holiness.

To pass from the stony cell to the camp of the Crusader, from the council-chamber of theologians to the maze of political negotiation, from popular preaching to profound meditation, was the habit of Bernard's life. The schism of the South of France healed, the unwearied brain on which rested "the care of all the churches," turned from impassioned appeals to the people, to a systematic review of the condition of the Papacy. For his friend, disciple, and spiritual son, Pope Eugenius, Bernard, summing up as it were the experience of his life, drew up in five books a treatise upon the right action of the central authority of the Church. If he of all men, who for twenty years had virtually wielded the power of the Papacy, was tempted above others to exaggerate the good which it conferred in regulating and combining the incoherent fragments of Europe, he was also best able to judge the dangers which beset it, and most earnestly disposed to attempt their removal. There can be no question that the grasping interference and the centralisation of the Papacy was the main cause of the calamities which from the thirteenth century downwards it brought upon Europe. It is a proof of

the sagacity of Bernard that he so early saw the danger; and, whilst his whole life had been one of devotion to the Pope, his last efforts were directed to urge on him moderation in power.

The treatise warns the Pope against the danger of continual appeals, against the intrigues by which he was beset, the corruption of the central authority at Rome, and urges him to abstain from encroaching upon national and temporal authority. If, in a vision, Bernard had seen the course of the Papacy for four centuries, from Innocent III. to Leo X., he could not have struck its abuses with more distinctness and force. If indeed he, or a succession of such teachers, could have overcome the inherent vice of Catholicism, and raised the Papacy into a purely spiritual power, uncontaminated with wealth, ambition, and intrigue, unburdened with corrupting details of government, and not aspiring to temporal command; if he could have taught it to know no other mission than that of being ultimate adviser; to awaken, moderate, and harmonise the conflicting forces of the rising mediæval society, then indeed the course of history might have been different, and Catholicism might even have worked out its part in civilisation, without earning the curses of any section of mankind. That he did not do so was his misfortune: the original weakness of his faith. "Si Pergama dextrâ ——" To have attempted it only is his highest glory, for failure itself in such a task was nobler than success would have been in many another cause.

One more incident, and that a fresh instance of his beneficent power, worthily closes his weary life. Bernard was lying on his bed of sickness at Clairvaux when the Archbishop of Treves came to him to implore of him one last effort in the work of mediation. A ferocious struggle had broken out between the townspeople of Metz and the neighbouring nobles; armies were formed on both sides, desperate battles had been fought, and a war of extermination was begun. He was dragged from his deathbed to the banks of the Moselle; found there both factions in hostile array, resolute in refusing any terms of compromise. The personal ascendency of Bernard was again about to meet with its invariable result, when the nobles broke up their camp and withdrew their army from his dangerous approach.

But the moral effect of his intervention had done its work. It was as though, in heathen or Miltonic mythology, the messenger of a supreme Power had descended into the combats of a lower race of beings, and had rebuked them in the name of their King. The stormy passions abated as though in awe of such superior goodness. The nobles acknowledged their wrong, offered terms of peace, and a general reconciliation ensued. The Abbot of Clairvaux returned to his monastery to die.

There, as the humblest of monks, surrounded by the survivors of that devoted band who had in youth followed him to the cloister, in the same cell which had witnessed so many midnight watchings and

ecstasies, in the secluded valley which his influence had cheered, in all the forms of grim self-denial, with all the tender emotions of friendship which belonged to him through life, Bernard passed away. And when his frail emaciated body was committed to a cell, somewhat narrower and colder than it had occupied when living, and a few poor monks had said over it a simple requiem, men found at last that the ship of the Church had lost its pilot; the Papacy had lost its friend and admonisher; Councils met but without a guiding mind; heretics arose, but were not confronted with an overpowering faith, confusion spread through Church and State, but there was no warning voice to guide and subdue it.

What is the meaning of a life such as this? What does it exhibit in its substance, apart from the individual circumstances which surround it? All theology apart, without reference to any form of belief whatever, what we have here is the fact of a man, by the mere influence of his superior goodness, governing and elevating his generation. It is the work, not so much of superior intellect or energy, as of a lofty example. Hildebrand exhibited an energy even more indomitable than Bernard's. Thomas, Albert, and Roger far outreached him in powers of intellect. Bossuet was at least his equal in eloquence, and St. Francis in mystical fervour. In political sagacity he must yield to Innocent, and in power of fascination to Xavier. Luther possessed a still higher courage, and Fénelon a more gentle spirit of devoutness. What then is it

which clothes with a special halo the life of Bernard, and makes it in many ways a more notable reality than any of these? It is the harmony between the man and his time, between his character and the spirit of his age. What we have here is not the master mind impressing itself upon the world, not so much the iron will bending others to its purpose, not so much the thraldom obtained by the enchanter's tongue or pen. The fact that stares us in the face, and which no satire can disguise, is that in the twelfth century men sought out diligently the purest, justest, and most earnest man they could find, forced him to tell them his opinion, adopted it after judgment as their own, and in all difficulties and perplexities waited for the sanction of their best and clearest mind.

On the other side, the humblest monk of the meanest of convents could from his cell urge, warn, or judge kings, popes, and councils; could fling himself without scruple into the cause of the oppressed or the wretched, and exercised through life unbounded authority, without an ambitious or a selfish thought. If a powerful ruler has done an injustice, Bernard cannot rest till it is redressed. If two neighbours fall to blows, he steps in to force them to terms. If Christendom is in danger, he arouses it to action; if it is divided, he labours to unite it; if it is in doubt, he guides it to certainty. If the spiritual institutions of society are in anarchy, Bernard is expected to reduce them to order; and he is able to do so, because it is expected. If he does this, it is by the most

worthy of all authorities, because his object and his nature are regarded with unquestioning respect, because the innate worth of the man humbles all men before him, because they are so fashioned and taught that they dare not resist his manifest goodness.

Amidst all the prejudices of the Middle Ages about the respective rights and duties of classes and ranks, it is hardly intelligible that the plain monk should have appeared as the visible master of temporal and spiritual princes. That it was so shows a consciousness in them of the value of the individual man which revolutionary enthusiasm itself has never exceeded. For it is most clear, that if he was followed, it was not with the superstitious idolatry with which Easterns adore a Dervish or a Bonze who has tortured himself into holiness. When councils adopted his advice, it was because he had convinced and satisfied their minds. When kings like Henry I. of England and Louis VII. of France submitted to his judgment, it was because their sagacity as well as their conscience beat time to his words. When a bloodthirsty mob, a passionate lord, an obstinate faction, or an excited assembly yielded a slow and painful assent to his appeal, it was neither impulse nor fanaticism that awed them, but the sense that they stood in the presence of a just, wise, spotless, and truthful man.

A phenomenon like this is of a most unusual order. Men by their intellectual eminence have commanded influence; by their energy or skill have acted on their age. But this ascendency of simple goodness is

rare indeed in the annals of history. It would serve to form a measure of the difference which in this matter separated those times from ours, if we conceived a modern sovereign, in the full tide of tyranny, opposed by a Christian priest of his own or another country. We might imagine such things, but we know that it would be but a dream. Now the significance of Bernard's life is that in his day such things as these were a reality. Men of passions fiercer than ours, and with energy still more reckless, were forced to pause in their crimes, and to listen to the voice of mercy and justice. In our day, there is a power also which insensibly checks men. There are moral forces still, as indeed there must always be. Opinion rules over all, and is obeyed at last by those who least are sensible of its strength. But the opinion which now is diffused throughout society, which has no definite expression, and ebbs and flows with the interests of the day, in Bernard's day possessed an organ, a recognised mouthpiece; it assumed the sanction of a right; it was regulated, concentrated, and guided. Opinion, then, that is, the moral sense of mankind, rested on no doubtful basis, but on a groundwork of unquestioned truth. Those who shaped it, and were authorised to express it, were regularly trained to their duty; they exercised it under responsible control; they must give the guarantee of publicity and the tried devotion of a life. There was in a word a Church; that is, in substance, an association of men chosen and trained to teach, to exhort, and to

moderate society around them. There were men whose daily task it was to reform abuses and seek out their remedies, to awaken in men the voice of conscience, to appeal to the higher against the lower nature.

On the other hand, there was in the mass of mankind a consciousness of the existence of a Church, a recognition in some sense of its value and necessity, a willingness to adopt its counsel. There must indeed have been in those rude natures some fibres of gold, which are scarcely visible in our cultivated minds. Ignorant as they were, there were some things that they had well and truly learned. They saw such beauty in mercy, self-denial, and justice, that they visibly humbled themselves before it, and gave it no lip-service of hollow praise; but submitted their acts to its control. The whole moral atmosphere of the age, amidst infinite excesses and crimes, was so filled with a yearning after an ideal type of character, that the fiercest soldier and the craftiest politician could be compelled to recognise and obey it. Pity for the suffering, justice to the oppressed, charity to the wretched, comfort to the afflicted, zeal for the improvement, harmony, and happiness of men, have in all ages been the mark of the loftiest virtues. Those ages could not have been the darkest, in which these qualities secured the unbounded homage of mankind; wherein, notwithstanding institutions and habits most hostile to their exercise, the men in whom they shone most brightly were raised by trusting admiration to practical direction of their age.

It needs few words to point out how utterly separate from our world is such a state of things as this. Not that these noblest of the qualities of man are extinct or slumbering amongst us; not that they do not give some tone to our society. But, though existing, they no longer receive the practical homage of men. We respect them and pass by on the other side. And however diffused and insensibly inwoven in our ideas, they exert no direct influence over our actions. There is no voice by which they can be heard, there is no recognised right that they possess. Not that there are wanting occasions for its exercise, if indeed such a function existed. There are still people upon earth who suffer from the violence of the stronger. There are still persons to be taught. There are still social diseases and some remediable abuses. Europe is still torn from time to time with conflicting interests. Industry has its own crop of dangers, miseries, and injustice. There are sometimes yet seasons of bad blood and selfish greed. From time to time even yet our civil and spiritual institutions will get not a little out of joint.

It is not then from want of material that the mediæval Church, with all its belongings, the influence of its saints, and all their teaching, has come to its inevitable end. We need only to look around us and see the powers which represent it in name—disembodied ghosts, as it were, sitting on the sepulchres and on the thrones of the dead. We need only a moment's thought to recognise the truth that, without an

accepted philosophy, without any disposition towards unity, with a horror of institutions, systems, and authorities, and a jealous repugnance to advice, Europe is in this day incapable of acknowledging any semblance of that mediæval authority, be it in the form of Church, sect, institution, or school, philosopher, moralist, or saint.

The days of such are numbered, but the problem remains to us still—a problem which the story of Bernard's life may force on us anew—whether they are numbered for ever? We may ask ourselves whether a greater engine of civilisation has ever been devised than the moral power of a good man, or a body of good men; whether it is not akin to the deepest recesses of our nature; whether, whilst human society exists, it must not be organised and ordered? Can it be that the progress of civilisation is to diminish the value and usefulness of eminent virtues, and to weaken men's practical submission to finer and more cultivated natures? Is the formation of character and the development of the tenderer instincts a thing which must be left to chance, a thing in which no man can assist or guide his fellow? Is education to be without uniformity or method, and does it mean only instruction in science? Is it the highest gift of human nature to suffer no rebuke; to acknowledge no superior; to ask and to accept no guidance in life? Is it impossible that men should combine and labour consciously to this common end? Is it impossible that throughout Europe men should adopt some

common principles of thought; acknowledge the same standard rules of right and wrong; and invest them with a definite sanction? Is the life of St. Bernard a thing that can never be recovered or renewed? Its renewal is obviously a dim and distant vision.

## XIII.

# A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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THE stormy antipathies of Thomas Carlyle have to answer for many a miscarriage of historical justice; but for none more unfounded than that superior air with which he teaches the nineteenth century to sit in judgment on the eighteenth. "The age of prose, of lying, of sham," said he, "the fraudulent-bankrupt century, the reign of Beelzebub, the peculiar era of Cant." And so growls on our Teufelsdröckh through thirty octavo volumes, from the first philosophy of clothes to the last hour of Friedrich.

Invectives against a century are even more unprofitable than indictments against a nation. We are prepared for them in theology, but they have quite gone out of serious history. Whatever else it may be, we may take it that the nineteenth century is the product of the eighteenth, as that was in turn the product of the seventeenth; and if the Prince of Darkness had so lately a hundred years of rule in Europe, to what fortunate event do we owe our own

deliverance, and, indeed, the nativity of Thomas Carlyle? But surely invectives were never more out of place than when hurled at a century which was simply the turning epoch of the modern world, the age which gave birth to the movements wherein we live, and to all the tasks that we yet labour to solve. Look at the eighteenth century on all sides of its manifold life, free the mind from that lofty pity with which prosperous folk are apt to remember their grandfathers, and we shall find it in achievement the equal of any century since the Middle Ages; in promise and suggestion and preparation, the century which most deeply concerns ourselves.

Though Mr. Carlyle seems to count it the sole merit of the eighteenth century to have provided us the French Revolution (the most glorious bonfire recorded in profane history), it is not a little curious that almost all his heroes in modern times, apart from Oliver Cromwell, are children and representatives of that unspeakable epoch. Such were Friedrich, Mirabeau and Danton, George Washington, Samuel Johnson and Robert Burns, Watt and Arkwright; and, for more than half of the century, and for more than half his work, so was Goethe himself. It sounds strange to accuse of unmitigated grossness and quackery the age which gave us these men; and which produced, beside, *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and the lines "To Mary" and "To my Mother's Picture," Berkeley's Dialogues and Burke's Addresses, Reynolds

and Gainsborough, Flaxman and Stothard, Handel and Mozart. But one remembers that according to the Teufelsdröckhian cosmogony, great men are dropped *ab extra* into their age, much as some philosophers assure us that protoplasm, or the primitive germ of life, was casually dropped upon our planet by a truant aerolite.

A century which opens with the *Rape of the Lock* and closes with the first part of *Faust*, is hardly a century of mere prose, especially if we throw in Gray, Cowper, and Burns, the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Lyrical Ballads*. A century which includes twenty years of the life of Newton, twenty-three of Wren's, and sixteen of Leibnitz, and the whole lives of Hume, Kant, Adam Smith, Gibbon, and Priestley, is not the age of mere shallowness; nor is the century which founded the monarchy of Prussia and the Empire of Britain, which gave birth to the Republic in America and then in France, and which finally recast modern society and formed our actual habits, the peculiar era of quackeries, bonfires, and suicides. Measure it justly by the light of scientific history, and not by the tropes of some Biblical Saga, and it holds its own beside the greatest epochs in the modern world; of all modern eras perhaps the richest, most various, most creative. It raised to the rank of sciences, chemistry, botany, and zoology; it created the conception of social science and laid its foundations; it produced the historical schools and the economic schools of England and of France; the new Meta-

physic of Germany, the new Music of Germany; it gave birth to the new poetic movement in England, to the new romance literature of England and of France, to the true prose literature of Europe; it transformed material life by manifold inventions and arts; it transformed social life no less than political life; it found modern civilisation in a military phase, it left it in an industrial phase; it found modern Europe fatigued, oppressed with worn-out forms, uneasy with the old life, uncertain and hopeless about the new; it left modern Europe recast without and animated with a new soul within; burning with life, hope, and energy.

The habit of treating a century as an organic whole, with a character of its own, is the beaten pathway to superficial comparison. History, after all, is not grouped into natural periods of one hundred years, as different from each other as the life of the son from that of his father. Nor, whatever the makers of chronologies may say, does mankind really turn over a new page in the great Record, so soon as the period of one hundred years is complete. The genius of any time, even though it be in a single country, even in one city, is a thing too marvellously complex to be hit off by epithets from the Minor Prophets or Gargantuan anathemas and nicknames. And as men are not born at the beginning of a century, and do not die at the end of it, but grow, flourish, and decay year by year and hour by hour, we are ever entering on a new epoch and completing an old one, did we

but know it, on the first day of every year we live, nay, at the rising and the setting of every sun.

But, though a century be an arbitrary period, as purely conventional as a yard or a mile, and though every century has a hundred characters of its own, and as many lives and as many results, we must for convenience take note of conventional limits, and fix our attention on special features as the true physiognomy of an epoch. History altogether is a wilderness, till we parcel it out into sections more or less arbitrary, choosing some class of facts out of the myriads that stand recorded, steadily turning our eyes from those which do not concern our immediate purpose. And so, we can think of a century as in some sort a definite whole, in some sense inspired with a definite spirit, and leading to a set of definite results. And we are quite right in so doing, provided we keep a watchful and balanced mind, in no mechanical way, and in no rhetorical or moralising mood, but in order to find what is general, dominant, and central.

If we seek for some note to mark off the eighteenth from all other centuries we shall find it in this: it was the time of final maturing the great Revolution in Europe, the mightiest change in all human history. By revolution we mean, not the blood-stained explosion and struggle in France which was little but one of its symptoms and incidents, but rather that resettlement of modern life common to all parts of the civilised world; which was at once religious, intellectual, scientific, social, moral, political, and indus-

trial; a resettlement whereon the whole fabric of human society in the future is destined to rest. The era as a whole (so far from being trivial, sceptical, fraudulent, or suicidal) was, in all its central and highest moments, an era of hope, enterprise, industry, and humanity; full of humane eagerness for improvement, trusting human nature, and earnestly bent on human good. It sadly miscalculated the difficulties and risks, and it strangely undervalued the problems it attempted to solve with so light a heart. Instead of being really the decrepit impostor amongst the ages, it was rather the *naïf* and confident youngster. The work of political reformation on which it engaged in a spirit of artless benevolence brought down on its head a terrible rebuff; and it left us thereby a heritage of confusion and strife. But the hurly-burly at Versailles and the Reign of Terror are no more the essence of the eighteenth century, than the Irish atrocities and the Commune of Paris are the essence of the nineteenth. Political chaos, rebellions, and wars are at most but a part of a century's activity, and sometimes indeed but a small part.

In the core, the epoch was hearty, manly, humane; second to none in energy, mental, practical, and social; full of sense, work, and good fellowship. Its manliness often fattened into grossness; soon to show new touches of exquisite tenderness. Its genius for enterprise plunged it into changes, and prepared for us evils which it little foresaw. But the work was all undertaken in genuine zeal for the improvement

of human life. If its poetry was not of the highest of all orders, the century created a new order of poetry. If its art was on the whole below the average, in the noble art of music it was certainly supreme. In philosophy, science, moral, and religious truth, it was second to none that went before. In politics it ended in a most portentous catastrophe. But the very catastrophe resulted from its passion for truth and reform. Nor is it easy for us now to see how the catastrophe could have been avoided, even if we see our way to avoid such catastrophes again. And in such a cause it was better to fail in striving after the good than to perish by acquiescing in the evil. If one had to give it a name, I would rather call it the *humane* age (in spite of revolutions, wars, and fashionable corruption); for it was the era when humanity first distinctly perceived the possibilities and conditions of mature human existence.

It would be easy enough to find scores of names, facts, and events to the contrary of all this; but it would be quite as easy to find scores to the contrary of any opinion about any epoch. A century is a mass of contradictions by the necessity of the case; for it is made up of every element to be found in human nature. The various incidents are in no way to be overlooked; neither are they to be exaggerated. To balance the qualities of an epoch, we must analyse them all separately, compare them one by one, and then find the centre of gravity of the mass. England will concern us in the main; but the spirit of the age

can never be strictly confined to its action in any one country. Such movements as the Renascence in the sixteenth, or the Revolution in the eighteenth century, are especially common to Europe. It would be impossible to understand the eighteenth century in England, if we wholly shut our eyes to the movements abroad of which the English phase was the reflex and organ. Nor must we forget how much our judgment of the eighteenth century is warped (it is obvious that Mr. Carlyle's was entirely formed) by literary standards and impressions. Literature has been deluged with the affectations, intrigues, savagery, and uncleanness of the eighteenth century. Other centuries had all this in at least equal degree; but the eighteenth was the first to display it in pungent literary form. Industry, science, invention, and benevolence were less tempting fields for these brilliant penmen. And thus an inordinate share of attention is given to the quarrels of poets, the vices of Courts, and the grimacing of fops. It is the business of serious history to correct the impression which torrents of smart writing have left on the popular mind.

We are all rather prone to dwell on the follies and vices of that era, with which we are more familiar than we are with any other, almost more than we are with our own. It is the first age, since that of Augustus, which ever left inimitable pictures of its own daily home existence. We recall to mind so easily the ladies of quality at the Spectator's routs, the rioters and intriguers of Hervey's memoirs, and

of Walpole's, and of "the little Burney's;' the Squire Westerns, the Wilkeses, and the Queensberrys; the Hell-fire clubs and the Rake's Progresses; the political invectives of Junius and Burke; the Courts of St. James' and Versailles; the prisons, the assizes, the parties of pleasure to Bedlam and to Bridewell; the Wells at Tunbridge, Bath, and Epsom; the masquerades at Vauxhall and Ranelagh; the taverns, the streets, the Mohawks, and the Duellists; the gin-drinking and the bull-baiting, the gambling and the swindling; and a thousand pictures of social life by a crowd of consummate artists. Perhaps we study these piquant miniatures with too lively a gust. The question is not whether such things were, but what else there was also. The pure, the tender, the just, the merciful, is there as well, patiently toiling in the even tenor of its way; and if we look for it honestly, we shall find it a deeper, wider, more effective force in the main, shaping the issue in the end for good.

Addison and Steele were not the greatest of teachers, but they have mingled with banter about fans and monsters something deeper and finer, such as none had touched before, something of which six generations of moralists have never given us the like. "To have loved her was a liberal education." Is there a nobler or profounder sentence in our language? It is a phrase to dignify a nation, and to purify an age; yet it was flung off by "poor Dick," one of the gayest wits, for one of the lightest hours of a most artificial society. Western, be it never forgotten, was

the name not only of a boisterous fox-hunter, but of the most lovable woman in English fiction. What a mass of manly stuff does our English soil seem to breed as we call up the creations of Fielding! What homes of sturdy vigour do we enter as we turn over the pages of Defoe, and Swift, and Smollett, and Goldsmith, and Johnson; or again in the songs of Burns, or the monotonous lines of Crabbe; or in such glimpses of English firesides as we catch in the young life of Miss Edgeworth, or in our old friend *Sandford and Merton*, or the record of Scott's early years, or the life of Adam Smith, or Bishop Berkeley! What a world of hardihood and patience is there in the lives of Captain Cook, and Watt, Brindley, and Arkwright, Metcalfe, and Wedgwood! What spiritual tenderness in the letters of Cowper, and the memoirs of Wesley, Howard, Wilberforce, and scores of hard workers, just spirits and faithful hearts who were the very breath and pulse of the eighteenth century! What a breeze from the uplands plays round those rustic images in all forms of art; the art often thin and tame itself, but the spirit like the fragrance of new hay; in such paintings as Morland's, or such poems as Thomson's, Beattie's, and Somerville's, or such prose as Fielding's, Goldsmith's, and Smollett's!

> How jocund did they drive their team afield!
> How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

If, turning from that mass of toiling, daring, hearty, simple life, we think overmuch of the riot of Fashion

and the gossip of Courts, the fault is perhaps with those who look to Fashion for the keynote, and care more for crowds than they care for homes.

A century is never, we have said, a really organic whole, but a group of various movements taken up and broken off at two arbitrary points. The eighteenth is as little a whole as any other; but we may group it into parts in some degree thus. The first ten or fifteen years are clearly more akin to the seventeenth century than the eighteenth. Locke, Newton, and Leibnitz; Wallis and Wren; Burnet and Somers; James II., Louis XIV., and William III.; Bossuet and Fénelon, lived into the century, and Dryden lived up to it—but none of these belong to it. As in French history it is best to take the age of Louis by itself, so in English history it is best to take the Whig Revolution by itself; for Anne is not easily parted from her sister, nor is Marlborough to be severed from William and Portland. In every sense the reign of Anne was the issue and crown of the movement of 1688, and not the forerunner of that of 1789. For all practical purposes, the eighteenth century in England means the reigns of the first three Georges. This space we must group into three periods of unequal length:—

1. From the accession of the House of Hanover (1714) down to the fall of Walpole (1742). This is the age of Bolingbroke and Walpole; Swift, Defoe, Pope, Addison, Steele, Bishop Berkeley, and Bishop Butler, Halley, Stephen Gray, and Bradley.

2. From the fall of Walpole (1742) to the opening

of the French Revolution (1789). It is the age of Chatham, of Frederick, Washington, and Turgot; of Wolfe, Clive, and Hastings, Rodney, and Anson; of Gibbon and Robertson; of Hume and Adam Smith; of Kant, Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau; of Richardson and Fielding, Sterne and Smollett, Johnson and Goldsmith; of Cowper and Gray, Thomson and Beattie; of Reynolds and Gainsborough, Hogarth and Garrick; of Cook, Watt, Arkwright, Brindley, Herschel, Black, Priestley, Hunter, Franklin, and Cavendish; of Handel, Bach, Haydn, and Mozart; of Wesley, Whitefield, Howard, and Raikes.

This is the central typical period of the eighteenth century, with a note of its own; some fifty years of energy, thought, research, adventure, invention, industry; of good fellowship, a zest for life, and a sense of humanity.

3. Lastly, come some twelve years of the Revolution (1789-1801); a mere fragment of a larger movement that cannot be limited to any country or any century; the passion and the strife, the hope and the foreshadowing of things that were to come and things that are not come. It is the age of Pitt, Fox, Burke, and Grattan; of Cornwallis and Nelson; of Bentham and Romilly, Wilberforce and Clarkson; of Goethe and Burns, Coleridge and Wordsworth; of Telford and Stevenson; of Flaxman, Bewick, Romney, and Stothard; the youth of Sir H. Davy, Scott, Beethoven, and Turner; the boyhood of Byron and Shelley.

It is impossible to omit this critical period of the

century, though we too often forget that it forms an integral part of it, quite as truly as the age of Pope or the age of Johnson. The century is not intelligible if we cast out of it the mighty crisis in which it ended, to which it was leading all along; or if we talk of that New Birth as a bonfire or a suicide. Even in art we are apt to forget that it was the century of Pope and Johnson that gave us *Faust*, the *Ancient Mariner*, *The Task*, the *Lyrical Ballads*, Flaxman, Stothard's and Blake's delicate and weird fancies, Turner's first manner, Beethoven's early sonatas, and Scott's translations from the German. All that we value as specially distinctive of our age lay in embryo in many a quiet home, whilst the struggle raged at its hottest on the banks of the Seine, or on the Rhine, the Po, and the Nile.

When the eighteenth century opened, the supremacy in Europe belonged to England, as it has hardly ever belonged before or since. In William III. she had one of the greatest and most successful of all modern statesmen, the one great ruler she ever had since Cromwell. The Revolution of 1688 had placed her in the van of freedom, industry, and thought. Her armies were led by one of the most consummate soldiers in modern history. Her greatest genius in science, her greatest genius in architecture, and one of her wisest spirits in philosophy, were in full possession of their powers; "glorious John," the recognised chief of the Restoration poets, was but just dead, and his young rival was beginning to unfold his yet more

consummate mastery of rhyme. The founders of English prose were equipping our literature with a new arm, the easy and flexible style of modern prose; Swift, Addison, and Defoe were the first to show its boundless resources, nor has any improvement been added to their art. The nation was full of energy, wealth, and ambition; and it still glowed with the sense of freedom, with all that it shook off in the train of the Stuarts.

We should count the last days of William and the whole reign of Anne rather with the Revolution of 1688, of which they were the fruit, than with the Hanoverian period, for which they paved the way. And thus we may pass the campaigns of Churchill, and the overthrow of Louis, and all else that was the sequel and corollary of the struggle with the Stuarts. On the other hand, when we reach the close of the century, England is struggling with a movement which she had only indirectly created, but which she was equally unable to develop or to guide. The characteristic period of the eighteenth century for England is that between the death of Anne and the great war with the Republic (1714-1793). The first fourteen years of the century belong to the history of the English Revolution: the last years to the history of the French Revolution. The eighty years of comparative non-intervention and rest are for Englishmen at least the typical years of the eighteenth century.

It was an era of peace. Indeed it was the first era of systematic peace. In spite of Fontenoy and

Minden, Belleisle and Quiberon Bay, it was the first period in our history where the internal welfare of the nation took recognised place before the interests of the dynasty, and its prestige in Europe. The industrial prosperity of the nation, and the supreme authority of Parliament, were made, for the first time in our history, the guiding canons of the statesman. Walpole is the statesman of the eighteenth century; a statesman of a solid, albeit a somewhat vulgar type. If history was the digest of pungent anecdote, it would be easy to multiply epigrams about the corruption of Walpole. Yet, however unworthy his method, or gross his nature, Robert Walpole created the modern statesmanship of England. The imperial Chatham in one sense developed, in another sense distorted the policy of Walpole; much as the First Consul developed and distorted the revolutionary defence of France. And so the early career of William Pitt was a mere prolongation of the system of Walpole: purer in method, and more scientific in aim, but less efficient in result. Alas! after ten glorious years as the minister of peace and of reform, Pitt's career and his very nature were transformed by that aristocratic panic which made him the unwilling instrument of reaction. But Walpole has left a name that is a symbol of peace, as that of Chatham and of Pitt is a symbol of war. And thus Walpole remains, with all his imperfections on his head, the veritable founder of our industrial statesmanship, the parliamentary father of Fox, of Peel, of Cobden, of Gladstone.

That industrial organisation of peace by means of a parliamentary government was the true work of our eighteenth century; for the European triumphs of Anne should be counted amongst the fruits of the heroic genius of William, and the Crusade of Pitt against the Republic should be counted as a backward step of reactionary panic. It was not well done by the statesmen of peace, that industrial organisation of England; it was most corruptly and ignobly done: but it was done. And it ended (we must admit) in a monstrous perversion. The expansion of wealth and industry, which the peace-policy of Walpole begot, stimulated the nation to seek new outlets abroad, and led to the conquest of a vast Empire. When the eighteenth century opened, the King of England ruled, outside of these islands, over some two or three millions at the most. When the nineteenth century opened, these two or three had become at least a hundred millions. The colonies and settlements in America and in Australia, the maritime dependencies, the Indies East and West, were mainly added to the Crown during the eighteenth century, and chiefly by the imperial policy of Chatham. So far as they were a genuine expansion of our industrial life, they are a permanent honour of the age; so far as they are the prizes of ambitious adventure, they were the reversal of the system of Walpole. It was Chatham, says his bombastic monument in Guildhall, who made commerce to flourish by war. It is an ignoble epitaph, though Burke himself composed it. But for good or

for evil, it was the policy and the age of the two Pitts which gave England her gigantic colonial and maritime Empire. And whether it be her strength and glory as many think it, or her weakness and burden as I hold it, it was assuredly one of the most momentous crises in the whole of our history.

A change, at least as momentous, was effected at home from within. The latter half of the eighteenth century converted our people from a rural to a town population, made this essentially a manufacturing, not an agricultural country, and established the factory system. No industrial revolution so sudden and so thorough can be found in the history of our island. If we put this transformation of active life beside the formation of the Empire beyond the seas, we shall find England swung round into a new world, as, in so short a time, has hardly ever befallen a nation. The change which in three generations has trebled our population, and made the old kingdom the mere heart of a huge Empire, led to portentous consequences, both moral and material, which were hardly understood till our own day. It is the singular boast of the nineteenth century to have covered this island with vast tracts of continuous cities and works, factories and pits; but it was the eighteenth century which made this possible. Appalling as are many of the forms which the fabulous expansion of industry has taken to-day, it is too late now to deplore or resist it. The best hours of the twentieth century, we all trust, will be given to reform the industrial extrava-

gances of the nineteenth century; but it will be possible only on condition of accepting the industrial revolution which the eighteenth century brought about.

Whatever be the issue of this great change in English life, there can be no question about the sterling qualities of the men to whose genius and energy it was due. The whole history of the English race has no richer page than that which records those hardy mariners who with Cook and Anson girdled the globe; the inventors and workers who made the roads and the canals, the docks and the lighthouses, the furnaces and the mines, the machines and the engines; the art-potters like Wedgwood, inspired spinners like Crompton, roadmakers like the blind Metcalfe, engineers like Smeaton, discoverers like Watt, canalmakers like Bridgewater and Brindley, engravers like Bewick, opticians like Dollond, inventors like Arkwright. Let us follow these men into their homes and their workshops, watch their lives of indefatigable toil, of quenchless vision into things beyond, let us consider their patience, self-denial, and faith before we call their age of all others that of quackery, bankruptcy, and fraud. We may believe it rather the age of science, industry, and invention.

A striking feature of those times was the dispersion of intellectual activity in many local centres, though the entire population of the island was hardly twice that of London to-day. Birmingham, Man-

chester, Derby, Bristol, Norwich, Leeds, Newcastle, and other towns were potent sources of science, art, and culture, and all the more vigorous that they depended little on the capital. A hundred years ago in population and extent Birmingham was hardly one hundredth part of what it is now. But what a wealth of industry, courage, science, and genius in that quiet Midland village lay grouped round Dr. Darwin and his Lunar Society; with James Watt and Matthew Boulton, then at work on their steam-engine, and Murdoch, the inventor of gas-lighting; and Wedgwood, the father of the Potteries; and Hutton the bookseller, and Baskerville the printer, and Thomas Day, and Lovell Edgeworth; a group to whom often came Franklin, and Smeaton, and Black, and in their centre their great philosopher and guide and moving spirit, the noble Joseph Priestley. Little as we think of it now, that group, where the indomitable Boulton kept open house, was a place of pilgrimage to the ardent minds of Europe; it was one of the intellectual cradles of modern civilisation. And it is interesting to remember that our great Charles Darwin is on both sides the grandson of men who were leading members of that Lunar Society, itself a provincial Royal Society. What forces lay within it! What a giant was Watt, fit to stand beside Gutemberg and Columbus, as one of the few whose single discoveries have changed the course of human civilisation! And, if we choose one man as a type of the intellectual energy of the century, we could hardly find a better

than Joseph Priestley, though his was not the greatest mind of the century. His versatility, eagerness, activity, and humanity; the immense range of his curiosity, in all things physical, moral, or social; his place in science, in theology, in philosophy, and in politics; his peculiar relation to the Revolution, and the pathetic story of his unmerited sufferings, may make him the hero of the eighteenth century.

The strength of the century lay neither in politics nor in art; it lay in breadth of understanding. In political genius, in poetry, in art, the eighteenth was inferior to the seventeenth century, and even to the sixteenth; in moral, in social, and in material development it was far inferior to the nineteenth. But in philosophy, in science, in mental versatility, it has hardly any equal in the ages. Here, especially, it is impossible to limit the view to one country. Politics, industry, and art are local. Science and research know nothing of country, have no limitations of tongue, race, or government. In philosophy then the century numbers—Leibnitz, Vico, Berkeley, Montesquieu, Diderot, D'Alembert, Condorcet, Kant, Turgot, Hume, Adam Smith. In science, it counts Buffon, Linnæus, Lavoisier, Laplace, Lamarck, Lagrange, Halley, Herschel, Franklin, Priestley, Black, Cavendish, Volta, Galvani, Bichat, and Hunter. To interpret its ideas, it had such masters of speech as Voltaire, Rousseau, Swift, Johnson, Gibbon, Lessing, Goethe, and Burke. It organised into sciences (crystallising the data till then held in solution) physics, chemistry,

botany, zoology, comparative anatomy, electricity, psychology, and the elements of social science, both in history and in statics. It threw up these three dominant movements: (1) the idea of law in mind and in society, that is, the first postulate of mental and social science; (2) that genius for synthesis of which the work of Buffon, of Linnæus, and the Encyclopædia itself, were all phases; (3) that idea of social reconstruction, of which the New System of '89, the American Republic, and our reformed Parliament are all products. The seventeenth century can show perhaps a list of greater separate names, if we add those in poetry, politics, and art. But for mass, result, multiplicity, and organic power, it may be doubted if any century in modern history has more to show than the eighteenth.

There is this stamp upon every stroke of eighteenth-century work: the habit of regarding things as wholes, bearing on life as a whole. Their thirst for knowledge is a practical, organic, working thing; their minds grasp a subject all round, to turn it to a useful end. The encyclopædic spirit animates all: with a genius for clearness, comprehension, and arrangement. It was for the most part somewhat premature, often impatient, at times shallow, as was much of the work of Voltaire, Diderot, Johnson, and Goldsmith. But the slightest word of such men has to my ear a human ring, a living voice that I recognise as familiar. It awakens me, and I am conscious of being face to face with an interpreter of humanity to men. When they

write histories whole centuries glow with life; we see and we hear the mighty tramp of ages. In twelve moderate octavos, through all which not a sentence could belong to any other book, Gibbon has compressed the history of the world during more than a thousand years. Is there in all prose literature so perfect a book as this? In these days we write histories on far profounder methods; but for the story of ten ordinary years Mr. Freeman and Mr. Froude will require a thousand pages; and Macaulay's brilliant annals, we are told, needed more time to write than the events needed to happen.

I often take up my Buffon. They tell us now that Buffon hardly knew the elements of his subject, and lived in the palæozoic era of science. It may be, but I find in Buffon a commanding thought, the Earth and its living races in orderly relation, and in the centre Man with his touch of them and his contrast to them. What organic thought glows in every line of his majestic scheme! What suggestions in it, what an education it is in itself! And if Buffon is not a man of science, assuredly he is a philosopher. No doubt his ideas of fibres and cells were rudimentary, his embryology weak, and his histology rude; but he had the root of the matter when he treated of animals as living organisms, and not simply as accumulations of microscopic particles. Now Buffon is a typical worker of the eighteenth century, at its high-water mark of industry, variety of range, human interest, and organising life.

We may take Adam Smith, Hume, Priestley, Franklin; they are four of the best types of the century; with its keen hold on moral, social, and physical truth at once; its genius for scientific and for social observation, its inexhaustible curiosity; and its continual sense that Man stands face to face with Nature. They felt the grand dualism of all knowledge in a way that perhaps we fail to grasp it with our infinity of special information, and a certain hankering after spiritualities that we doubt, and infinitesimal analyses which cease to fructify. Adam Smith, the first (alas! perhaps the last) real economist, did not devote his life to polishing up a theory of rent. Astronomy, society, education, government, morals, psychology, language, art, were in turns the subject of his study, and in all he was master; they all moved him alike, as part of man's work on earth. He never would have founded Political Economy if he had been merely an economist. And all this is more true of Hume, with a range even wider, an insight keener, a judgment riper, a creative method even more original. And so, Priestley and Franklin: as keen about gases and electric flashes as about the good of the commonwealth and the foundations of human belief. And when Turgot, himself one of the best of this band of social reformers, said of Franklin—

Eripuit cælo fulmen, sceptrumque tyrannis,

—it is true, in a wide sense, of them all, and especi-

ally of Turgot himself. They all sought to conquer the earth, as the dwelling-place of a reformed society of men.

This encyclopædic, social spirit belongs to all alike. We recognise in all the zeal to make their knowledge fruitful, systematic, common to all, useful to man. Out of fashion as such a thing is to us, every sentence they utter bears its meaning on its face; every book, every voyage, every discovery, is hailed with *eureka* through Europe; the voyages of travellers, or the surgical operation for cataract, instantly affect history, morals, logic, and philosophy. They cannot rest till every corner of the planet is explored, till the races of man are compared, and the products of the earth are stored in museums, classified in orders, grouped into kingdoms. Science and social life, nay, philosophy and morals, were strangely transformed when the limits and the form of Man's Earth were first exactly realised. Cook and Banks, Anson and Bougainville, reveal to Europe the antipodes, and their human, brute, and vegetable worlds; and every science and every art is alive with new ideas; history, philosophy, morals, and social economy, are lit up with new laws. We see the same thing to-day; but the sacred fire perhaps burns with a soberer flame; the wonder and the sympathy are a little dulled by use; and through the mountains of our materials the volcanic shock of a new truth is less distinctly felt.

The universal human interest of these men throbs in every page they write. Defoe is politician, romancer, theologian, economist, pamphleteer, and

philosopher. Swift is all this, verse-maker, and many things beside. Voltaire is poet, historian, critic, moralist, letter-writer, polemist, arbiter in science, philosophy, and art in general; like Virgil's monster, with a hundred tongues and a hundred throats of brass. Diderot was a very encyclopædic Briareus. But the intense social aim comes out in all alike, however different in nature and taste. Cowper himself has it, as he sits beside his tea-urn, watches his hare and his spaniel, or apostrophises his sofa. Fielding clothes it with flesh and blood, hot blood and solid flesh; it lights up the hack-work of Goldsmith, and sheds a fragrance for ever through his lovely idyll of the Vicar's home; Johnson in his arm-chair thunders it out as law to the club; Bentham tears up the old Statute-book by passionate appeals to the greatest happiness of the greatest number; Burns sang for it the songs which will live for ever in English homes; Hogarth, the Fielding of the brush, paints it; Garrick, the most versatile of actors, played it; Mozart, the most sympathetic of all musicians, found its melody; Reynolds caught every smile on its cheek, and the light upon its eye; and Hume, Adam Smith, Priestley, and Burke sounded some of its deepest notes.

Of all in this century, three men stand out, in three countries, as types of its vast range, of its organising genius, of its hold on the reality behind the veil that we see—Kant in Germany, Diderot in France, Hume in England. For us here, Hume is the dominant mind of the age; with his consummate

grasp of human life in all its moral, social, and physical conditions; by his sense, good fellowship, urbanity, and manliness. This was not the age of the lonely thinkers in their studies, as Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, had been. Nor was it the age of Bacon, Pascal, Hobbes, and Locke, when philosophy was shaken by political and religious fanaticism. It was not the age of the wonderful specialists of our own day, when mountains of observation defy all attempts at system. It was an age more like the Revival of thought and learning—but with a notable difference. Its curiosity is as keen, its industry even greater; its mental force as abundant. But it is far less wild; its resources are under command; its genius is constructive; and its ruling spirit is social. It was the second and far greater Revival—that New Birth of time whereof the first line was led by Galileo, Harvey, Descartes, and Bacon; whereof the second line was led by Newton, Leibnitz, Montesquieu, Hume, Diderot, Kant; whereof the third line will be led by those who are to come.

In the progress of Europe, especially in its mental progress, there is an incessant ebb and flow, a continual give and take. The intellectual lead passes from one to the other, qualified and modified by each great individual genius. In the sixteenth century it was Spain and Italy, in the seventeenth it was Holland and England, in the eighteenth it was France, and now perhaps it is Germany, which sets the tone, or fashion, in thought. For the first generation perhaps of the eighteenth century, England had the lead

which Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Harvey, Cromwell, and William had given her in the century preceding. The contemporaries of Newton, Locke, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Defoe, and Addison were a force in combination which the worshippers of Louis XIV. did not immediately perceive, but which was above anything then extant in Europe. The revelation of this great intellectual strength in England was made by Montesquieu and Voltaire. Voltaire, if not exactly a thinker, was the greatest interpreter of ideas whom the world has ever seen, and became the greatest literary power in the whole history of letters. When in 1728 he took back to France his English experience and studies, he carried with him the sacred fire of freedom whereby the supremacy of thought began to pass to France. Within ten years that fire lit up some of the greatest beacons of the modern world. Voltaire wrote his *Essay on Manners* in 1740; Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* appeared in 1748, and its influence was greater than that of any single work of Voltaire. The forty years, 1740-1780, were perhaps the most pregnant epoch in the history of human thought. It contained the works of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, D'Alembert, Vauvenargues, Buffon, Lavoisier, Rousseau, the encyclopædists, Condorcet, and Turgot in France; and, in England, those of Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Gibbon, Robertson, Hume, Adam Smith, Priestley, Johnson, Goldsmith, and Gray. During the last twenty years of the century France was absorbed in

her tremendous Revolution, and again the supremacy in literature passed away from her to give to Germany Kant, Hegel, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven; to give to England Burke, Bentham, Cowper, Burns, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Scott. So sways the battle of ideas from age to age and from shore to shore.

This is not the place to discuss the vast movement of the human mind which is loosely called the Revolution. Our judgment on all this depends on the bent of our minds in theology, philosophy, and politics. One who holds on to his Bible chiefly for its damnatory resources has assured us that this was the Satanic Age. If we look at its achievements, one is tempted to wish that our own age were more often visited by that accomplished gentleman. The century completely transformed all that had previously been known as to heat, gases, metals, electricity, plants, animals, tissues, diseases, geography, geology, the races, products and form of the earth, psychology, chronology, history, political and social and economic science. It would take a volume to enlarge on these. One can but give the names of those departments of knowledge. Compare the anatomical resources of Dr. Radcliffe with those of Hunter, Bichat, and Dupuytren; the chemical and physical notions of Boyle with those of Davy, Volta, and Galvani; the physiology of Boerhaave with that of Lamarck; compare the classificatory notions of Ray with those of Buffon, Linnæus, and Cuvier; take the ideas on society

of Hobbes or Harrington, and compare them with those of Hume, A. Smith, Burke, and Bentham; compare Gibbon's idea of history with that of Raleigh, Bacon, Milton. Compare the psychology of Kant with that of Descartes, or Locke; and we see that the century made a stride, not as we have done by enlarging the sciences, but in creating them or turning their rudiments into mature organisms.

The weak side of the century was certainly in beauty, in poetry, and the arts of form. It was essentially the age of prose; but still it was not prosaic. Its imaginative genius spoke in prose and not in verse. There is more poetry in the *Vicar of Wakefield* than in the *Deserted Village*, in *Tom Jones* than in Pope's Iliad, and the death of Clarissa Harlowe is more like Sophocles than the death of Addison's Cato. The age did not do well in verse; but if its verse tended to prose, its prose ever tended to rise into poetry. We want some word (Mr. Matthew Arnold will not let us use the word poetry) to express the imaginative power at work in prose, saturating it with the fragrance of proportion and form, shedding over the whole that indefinable charm of subtle suggestion, which belongs to rare thoughts clothed in perfect words. For my part I find "the vision and the faculty divine" in the inexhaustible vivacity of *Tom Jones*, in the mysterious realism of *Robinson Crusoe*, in the terrible tension of Clarissa's tragedy, in the idyllic grace of the Vicar's home. This imaginative force has never since been reached in prose save

by Walter Scott himself, and not even by him in such inimitable witchery of words. If it be not poetry, it is quite unlike the prose that we read or write to-day.

Besides, one cannot allow that there is *no* poetry in the century. Let us give a liberal meaning to poetry; and where we find creative fancy, charm of phrase, the vivid tone of a distinct voice that we could recognise in a thousand—there, we are sure, is the poet. For my part, I go so far as to admit that to be poetry which is quite intelligible, even if it have no subtlety, mystery, or inner meaning at all. Much as I prefer Shelley, I will not deny that Pope is a poet. Tennyson perhaps would never have run so near commonplace as do stanzas here and there in the famous "Elegy," but does any one doubt that Gray's Elegy is poetry? And though Wordsworth is a greater man than Cowper, it is possible, had there never been a "Task," that there might never have been an "Excursion." The poetry of the century is below our lofty English average, but it is not contemptible; and when it is good it has some rare qualities indeed.

In the poetry of the century are three distinct types: first, that of Pope; next, that of which the Elegy is the masterpiece; lastly, the songs of Burns. Now the first belongs to the age of Louis XIV. The second is the typical poetry of the century. The third is but the clarion that heralds the revolutionary outburst which gave us Byron, Shelley, Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, and Schiller. Cowper

in part belongs to the three types; he is the connecting link between them all: touching Pope by his easy mastery of rhyme, akin to Gray by his exquisite culture and grace, foretelling Wordsworth and Shelley by his moral and social earnestness. If the century produced little true poetry, it produced some little that is very good, and a good deal which has some very fine qualities. The *Rape of the Lock* is a poem in a class by itself, and Pope wrote other pieces of magical skill and verve. Goldsmith's poems would please us more if he had not bettered them himself in his own prose. Burns wrote the most ringing songs in our literature. Cowper is a true poet of a very rare type, one of the most important in the development of English poetry. And Gray's Elegy is better known and more widely loved than any single poem in our language. All this should be enough to save the age of prose from the charge of being prosaic.

In the best poetry of the century (at least after Pope's death) there is a new power, a new poetic field, a new source of poetry. The new source of poetry is the People; its new field is the home; the new power within it is to serve the cause of humanity. It told the short and simple annals of the poor. It is a field unknown to Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, or Pope. But Goldsmith has it in his heart of hearts; such men as Thomson and Collins and Beattie and Crabbe have it, though they remain on the lower ranges at their best; Burns is the very

prophet of it; and it glows in a gentle hermit-like way in every murmur of Cowper's tender soul. *The Task* is by reason of this one of the landmarks of our literature, though its own nobler progeny may have lessened its charm to us. It is because the original charm is still as fresh as ever, that we may call the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" the central poem of the age. Our young word-mongers and unutterables will tell us to-day that its moralising is as obvious as a tombstone, that its melody is rudimentary and its epithets almost trivial. Yes! and for that reason it has sunk into the soul of all who speak the English tongue; it has created the new poetry of the cottage; its very surrender of brilliancy, subtlety, or novelty is its strength. The sustained undertone of pathos, the magical unity of its thought and its colouring, the simple humanity of it, all these make the "Elegy" the poem of the eighteenth century, the voice of the humane age at its best.

Poetry is the central art; but it is not all art: and the art of the century deserves a word. We may give up architecture at once. People were so much absorbed in making their homes comfortable within, that they seemed blind to ugliness elsewhere; and if Mr. Ruskin is certain that Satan had to do with the Churches of the Georgian era, there is no means of disproving it. But Reynolds remains the greatest English painter; Gainsborough and Romney have not been surpassed in their own line; Hogarth remains still our greatest humorist with the pencil;

Garrick is still our greatest actor; Flaxman is still our greatest sculptor; and it is well to remember that Turner was of the Royal Academy before the century was out. But besides all these, Crome, Stothard, Blake, Bewick, Chippendale, Wedgwood, and Bartolozzi worked in the century—and in their given lines these men have never been surpassed.

There is another art which lies closer to civilisation than any art but poetry. Music is a better test of the moral culture of an age than its painting, or its sculpture, or even its architecture. Music, by its nature, is ubiquitous, as much almost as poetry itself, in one sense more so, for its vernacular tongue is common to mankind. Music in its nature is social, it can enter every home, it is not the privilege of the rich; and thus it belongs to the social and domestic life of a people, as painting and sculpture, the arts of the few, never have done or can do. It touches the heart and the character as the arts of form have never sought to do, at least in the modern world. When we test the civilisation of an age by its art, we should look to its music next to its poetry, and sometimes even more than to its poetry. Critics who talk about the debasement of the age when churchwardens built those mongrel temples must assuredly be deaf. Those churchwardens and the rest of the congregation wept as they listened to Handel and Mozart. One wearies of hearing how grand and precious a time is ours, now that we can draw a cornflower right.

Music is the art of the eighteenth century, the art

wherein it stands supreme in the ages; perfect, complete, and self-created. The whole gamut of music (except the plain song, part song, dance, and mass) is the creation of the eighteenth century: opera, sonata, concerto, symphony, oratorio; and the full uses of instrumentation, harmony, air, chorus, march, and fugue, all belong to that age. If one thinks of the pathos of those great songs, of the majesty of those full quires, of the inexhaustible melody of their operas, and all that Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, and the early years of Beethoven gave us, it is strange to hear that that age was dead to art. Neither the age which gave us the Madonnas and the Sistine, nor the age which gave us Reims and Westminster Abbey, nor even the age which gave us the Parthenon, did more for humanity than the age to which we owe the oratorios, and the operas, the sonatas, symphonies, and masses of the great age of music.

Not merely was music of the highest order produced, not merely did that age create almost all the great orders of music, but the generation gave itself to music with a passion such as marks all ages wherein art reaches its zenith. When Handel and Buononcini, Gluck and Piccinni, Farinelli and Caffarelli, divided the town, it was not with the languid partisanship which amuses our leisure, but with the passions of the Red and Green factions in the Circus of Byzantium. England, it is true, had few musicians of its own; but Handel is for practical purposes an English musician, and the great Italian singers and the great

German masters were never more truly at home than when surrounded by English admirers. Our people bore their fair share in this new Birth of Art, especially if our national anthem was really the product of this age. And not our people only, but the men of culture, of rank, of power, and the Court itself. And the story that the King caused the whole house to rise when the Hallelujah Chorus was heard is a happy symbol of the enthusiasm of the time.

Their music showed that their hearts were in the right place; but they showed it in more practical ways. The age, with all its grossness, laid the seeds of those social reforms which it is the boast of our own time to have matured. It was then that the greatest part of the Hospitals as we know them were founded; the Asylums, Reformatories, Infirmaries, Benefit Societies, Sunday Schools, and the like. It was then, amidst a sea of misery and cruelty, that Howard began what Burke called "his circumnavigation of charity." Then too began that holy war against slavery and the slave trade, against barbarous punishments, foul prisons, against the abuses of justice, the war with ignorance, drunkenness, and vice. Captain Coram, and Jonas Hanway, and John Howard, and Robert Raikes, led the way for those social efforts which have taken such proportions. Jeremy Bentham and Samuel Romilly struck at the abuses of law; Clarkson and Wilberforce and the anti-slavery reformers at slavery and the trade in men. Methodism, or rather religious earnestness,

lies at the heart of the eighteenth century; and the work of Wesley and Whitefield is as much a part of its life as the work of Johnson or Hume or Watt. That great revival of spiritual energy in the midst of a sceptical and jovial society was no accident, nor was it merely the impulse of two great souls. It is the same humanity which breathes through the scepticism of Hume, and the humour of Fielding; and it runs like a silver thread through the whole fabric of that epoch. Cowper is its poet, Wilberforce was its orator, Whitefield was its preacher, Wesley was its legislator, and Priestley himself the philosopher whom it cast forth. The abolition of slavery, a religious respect for the most miserable of human beings as a human soul, is its great work in the world. This was the central result of the eighteenth century; nor can any century in history show a nobler. The new gospel of duty to our neighbour was of the very essence of that age. The French Revolution itself is but the social form of the same spirit. He who misses this will never understand the eighteenth century. It means Howard and Clarkson just as much as it means Fielding and Gibbon; it means Wesley and Whitefield quite as much as it means Hume or Watt. And they who shall see how to reconcile Berkeley with Fielding, Wesley with Hume, and Watt with Cowper, so that all may be brought home to the fold of humanity at last, will not only interpret aright the eighteenth century, but they will anticipate the task of the twentieth.

A few words about the eighteenth century afford no space to touch on the greatest event of it—the Revolutionary crisis itself. The intellectual preparation for it is all that we can here note; and we may hear the rumblings of the great earthquake in every page of Hume, Adam Smith, Priestley, and Bentham; nay, in Cowper and Burns, and Wordsworth and Coleridge. The "Rights of Man," the "Declaration of Independence," "the Negro's Complaint," "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," "A man's a man for a' that," the "new birth" of the Methodists, were all phases of one movement to attain the full conditions of humanity. The Revolution did not happen in 1789 nor in 1793. The Terror was in '93; the Old System collapsed in '89. But the Revolution is continuing still, violent in France, deep and quiet in England. No one of its problems is completely solved; no one of them is removed from solution; no one of its creations has complete possession of the field. The reconstruction begun more than a hundred years ago is doing still. For they see history upside down who look at the Revolution as a conflagration instead of a reconstruction; or who find in the eighteenth century a suicide instead of finding a birth.

XIV.

# HISTORIES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

# HISTORIES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

THE most momentous epoch in all modern history has found, as was natural, a continuous series of historians; but, up to the present time, it has found no one that is finally sufficient. Almost every writer in France, and most of those out of it, who have given us histories of the Revolution, have some theory to maintain, some party to support, or some hero to glorify. A party view or a special view of this complex series of movements is, of necessity, a wrong view. To have a theory about the Revolution is as hopeless a hobby as to have a theory about Shakespeare, the Catholic Church, or the female sex. Parties have not much more to do with the Revolution than they have with the course of civilisation. The drama of it has no hero, no moral, and no definite catastrophe. He who knows the Revolution best will be the last to go to it for heroes, ideals, or examples.

I can remember at college that a foolish youth proposed to discuss at the debating society "If the French Revolution were a justifiable proceeding?"

And thereupon a fantastic, but most acute scholar, asked him if he thought the fall of man a justifiable proceeding? There was a profound meaning in his grim jest. There is about the French Revolution that precise character of portentous moment to the human race, of utter inevitableness, of rash self-confidence, leading us through generations of suffering to a higher life by heroism, just as there is about the old-world myth of the fall of our first parents from Paradise. It launched us, for all ages to come, for better or for worse, on that career of toil, self-improvement, and ultimate regeneration, much as the imagination of Hebrew prophets of old saw man committed to work out the problem of his life in the old books of Moses. The Revolution is the story of man's civilisation in its final problem, just as the fall represented to the first religious thinkers the crisis of man's earliest answer to the first great problem of his life.

What an epoch has that Revolution been in human history! How completely has every form of our social life changed since the famous opening of the States-General in 1789! The pre-revolutionary epoch is not older than some men still living, and yet how distant it is from us morally and socially. The Old System is as far from us as the Middle Ages. Read that brilliant instalment of a life of Fox by Mr. Trevelyan, and reflect on the gulf which separates our society to-day from theirs before the Revolution. How coolly men of rank assume the monopoly of government; how profligate, how unblushing, how reckless is the

career of the high-born and the wealthy! From the fall of the Roman empire till the proclamation of the republic (*i.e.* for twelve centuries) "gentlemen," as they loved to be called, had gone always armed, at least when in full dress. M. Grévy is, perhaps, the only ruler of a great European state who has never worn a sword in his life. An aristocracy was the basis of society; privileges of birth and of landed estates were recognised in all countries of Europe. Law, manners, industry, Church, State, in many things of external form, and in some of internal substance, were mediæval. The interval which separates us from them is like that which divides the world of antiquity from the world of Christendom. Well might Auguste Comte make it in his Calendar the date of a new era.

When we come to see into its depths, the most inadequate view of the Revolution that we can form is, that it is a mere outbreak, an insurrection, a period of anarchy between two regular periods of calm. Again, one of the most favourite and yet shallow ideas is this: That it had some specific cause—that it was caused by the corrupt state of the monarchy or of the aristocracy, or by a vicious system of government, or a vicious land system, or by popular ignorance, or by sceptical philosophy, or by the want of local self-government and of parliamentary institutions. All of these things contributed to it; each formed one of the many causes, as did fifty other things. But no one of them was the single cause.

Next to seeking for a cause, when cause there is none, one of the most popular fallacies is the seeking for a beginning and an end to the Revolution. Some make it begin with the States-General in 1789, others with Louis XV. and Voltaire. Some go back as far as Louis XIV. and the building of Versailles. In truth, the Revolution is the outcome of forces which had been gathering in intensity for centuries, of which the Renascence of the fifteenth century, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and the revolutions and rebellions of the seventeenth century were all parts. M. Michelet, alone among historians, sees this—for he begins his history of the Revolution with Dante and Huss, and the thinkers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. And as the Revolution had no precise beginning any more than modern society had any precise beginning, so the Revolution has had no precise end. Its end is not yet arrived. We who have seen the insurrections in Paris in 1830, in 1848, in 1871, who remember the portentous surging in Europe of 1848 and 1849, who have seen German Socialism, and French Red Republicanism, and Russian Nihilism, who see to-day a sister island of our own people in a state that reminds us of some of the gloomier years of the last century,—how can we believe that the Revolution has yet found its end and its normal issue? There could be, I think, no more instructive page of history than this,—it is a page yet to be written. I mean that whereon should be drawn out the connection between the taking of the Bastile

in 1789, and the European movement of 1848 and the European movement of 1871. It is a page that has yet to be written, but the thought of it and all that it will contain may prevent us from dreaming that the French Revolution is ended.

The true reason why the French Revolution is not ended is this—that it was far more constructive than destructive, that permanent changes grew up amidst all the confusion and bloodshed such as have a large career of development before them. It would be easy to show that the last fifty years of the eighteenth century was a period more fertile in constructive effort, gave us more germs of new social institutions, than any similar period of fifty years in the history of mankind. When we take France, when we take Europe of to-day, and compare them with France and Europe of one hundred years ago, in government, in law, in industrial organisation, in popular education, in religious earnestness, in moral standard, in the whole social system, we find the most amazing contrast. And this new social system did not come haphazard. It has been slowly built up out of thoughts, and efforts, and discoveries that were all carefully worked out some one hundred to one hundred and fifty years and more ago. Truly we may call the Revolution the crisis of modern reconstruction—

> "When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,
> And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,
> Stamped her strong foot, and said she would be free."

And now turn to the question, how, in what books,

is this wonderful epoch to be studied? So much has been written about it that, practically, knowledge is in danger of being darkened instead of enlightened. An immense library might be made out of works relating to the Revolution. There are at least a score of formal histories of it, in more or less repute. Unfortunately, a great many of these histories are written, not so much to teach us the facts as to indoctrinate us with theories, usually very one-sided theories, of politics and society, to puff up or, as it is now the fashion to call it, to "rehabilitate" a bad man, to make a hero, to blacken a party, to defend an institution,—in fact, to do us good in various ways, instead of giving us true information about real events. All of these are necessarily wrong. There is no hero in the French Revolution, and no literary skill can read one into it; there is no party, no institution in it either perfectly black or perfectly white, and the grand lesson of all in the Revolution is, not to surrender ourselves to any party.

We may divide the various accounts of this epoch as follows: (1) real narratives; (2) personal gossip, or recollections (and the recollections are very often inventions of the rememberer); (3) historical poems; (4) historical romances, or political diatribes. Unluckily, the narratives are apt to get dull, the personal memoirs rather scrappy and egotistical, the poems extremely unintelligible, and the romances and diatribes extremely mendacious. The best of the plain narratives, I take, beyond all question, to be the

history of Mignet. Poems, such as the dramas of Mr. Carlyle and of Jules Michelet, are magnificent works of imagination and of description, but they are to most readers perfectly obscure until they are explained by a mass of prose commentary. Again, if we were to believe all that we find in Lamartine, or Louis Blanc, we should get a very distorted view. Lamartine's so-called histories are mere historical novels. It is far too moderate to say that Lamartine never shows any sort of desire for historical truth. His plan is deliberately to prefer melodramatic effect to reality; an epigram to an authority; a fabulous coincidence to a true date.

We want, to begin with, a plain, unvarnished narrative of these great events, and the best, I say, beyond all question, is that by M. Mignet. It is plain, clear, interesting, judicious, and honest. It takes no side and has no hero; in one small volume it covers about thirty or forty years of the most stirring epoch of modern times; it is translated into English; it is one of the commonest of books. Mignet, however, only just gives us the bare outline; it is little more than a summary—but a very good summary. So far as the general history of Europe and the twenty-three years war is concerned, I do not know that we can do better than go to a work quite as well known, I mean Alison's *History of Europe*. We cannot honestly say that Sir Archibald has given us a real history of Europe, nor recommend any but a real glutton in books to go to work on the twenty

octavo volumes. For a clear summary, perhaps we cannot do better than go to the *Epitome of Alison's History of Europe*, so far as we need a clear, succinct, and comprehensive history of the great war. With Mignet and Alison as short handbooks we have, at any rate, a plain and lively sketch of all the principal facts. But this is only the skeleton of the matter.

And as to fuller histories we have them, one may say, by the score, each with its own strong feature, each disfigured by some great defect, most of them excessively long, and many of them requiring a body of other books to make them understood. There are in English, for instance, plenty of histories, of which Sir A. Alison's is the type, which record the Revolution from the point of view of Burke, which with vigorous description and broad colour paint the whole story as a villainous insurrection against a gracious king and queen and a gallant aristocracy. Von Sybel is little more than a German Alison, the laborious tirade of a wrong-headed partisan, in which professorial erudition and *gründlichkeit* are, after all, a poor substitute for the readable narrative of the Scotch Tory. The narrative, again, of the French statesman Thiers is clear, brilliant, coherent. There is always an advantage in getting a history written by a man who has helped to make history; and his six volumes have the merit of taking us down from the time of Maurepas to 1799, or about twenty years. The *History of the Revolution* is not defaced to the same dgree by that deliberate purpose of misrepresentation, by that

passion for glorifying France and making a hero of Bonaparte, which defaces the *History of the Consulate*. But M. Thiers is always more of the politician and the publicist than the pure historian; and we never feel ourselves in the hands of one of the truly patient investigators of facts; nay, we do not always feel in the hands of a man who is seeking to tell us the truth at all. With all this, for the lucidity of its style, the vigour of its pictures, and the practical grasp on the business of politics, M. Thiers' work remains, perhaps, the plainest narrative of the time, and is certainly the one which is most read in France.

A far more really historical work is that by an old political opponent of M. Thiers—the late M. Louis Blanc. In M. Louis Blanc's *History of the Revolution* we have a real investigation of facts, the patience of the born historian, an immense mastery of at least some parts of the problem, and an insight into the popular part in the Revolution which is almost unrivalled. Far inferior to the book of M. Thiers in energy and flow of narrative, inferior also in the living grasp on affairs of a born politician like M. Thiers, inferior in all the elements of mere popularity, M. L. Blanc stands out immeasurably superior to M. Thiers in the qualities of historical truth. In all that concerns the condition of the people, the democratic organisation of Paris in its clubs and the sections, M. Blanc is perhaps unequalled. It is unfortunate that a work of such high merit is on such a vast scale that twelve not very lively volumes are devoted to the

events of five years; and it is far more unfortunate (it is worse than unfortunate) that the whole work is ruined by the deliberate purpose to find the hero of the age in Robespierre, and at last to make the history itself a sort of apotheosis of that sanguinary tyrant, whom M. Blanc would have us believe was a gentle and inspired enthusiast.

Those who will seriously make a study of this epoch will go, of course, to the more detailed histories of special periods, such as Mortimer-Ternaux's *History of the Terror*, Lanfrey's *History of Napoleon*, Taine's and De Tocqueville's account of the Old Society.

A few words as to each of these. Of recent books none, I suppose, has done so much in the way of new investigation as the careful and patient work of Mortimer-Ternaux, *The History of the Terror.* But, after all, few but special students of the Revolution will be able to go to these ponderous octavos for the events of little more than a single year. We lose all sense of perspective if we suffer ourselves to regard the Revolution as a mere apotheosis of the guillotine, as a season of simple terror. Lanfrey, again, in our day has finally demolished the Napoleonic legend, and has torn the mask from the most astounding impostor and unquestionably the biggest liar in modern history, and by his clear and cutting evidence has reduced to its real proportions that orgy of blood and arrogance —the European tyranny of Bonaparte. But his book, intensely interesting and valuable as it is, may easily lead us, if it usurp undue space of our reading, to

look upon the Revolution as the prelude to the European wars and the instrument of Napoleon; when, in fact, it had twenty other sides as important as that of the war, and very many names who deserve study far better than the great soldier.

No one will understand the incredible condition of that Old Society, out of which the Revolution arose, unless he will study it in the sources given by Taine and De Tocqueville. M. Taine has piled up with enormous erudition, and has pieced together with singular skill an array of evidence that brings before us every feature of that old world. But I am not aware that he has substantially added to our knowledge. The business of a true historian is to see and to think, to look into the past with his own eyes, and to make it live to ours by the light of his own imagination. It is a very inferior task to extract statements from a thousand writers, and then to piece them together into a sort of scintillating mosaic.

If M. Taine has reduced his picture of the Old Society to a sort of tabulated commonplace book, M. de Tocqueville, in his *Ancien Régime*, is the Finality Doctrinaire of the Revolution. He is the modern Siéyès, superior to the irrepressible Abbé in learning, in modesty, and in good sense, but still imbued with the same conviction that political science is a subject which he has himself finally completed (*achevée*); that its first and last word is self-government, meaning thereby the judicious rule of all persons of culture.

There are two special sides of the Revolution (and

they are the two most important of any) which have never received their due consideration, and which, for the most part, do not get considered at all. The political side of the Revolution has been well and even abundantly treated. But there are two things which have never been seriously worked out. The first is the relation of the Revolution, as a whole, to the vast achievements of the eighteenth century in philosophy and science; first, to the science of the world—physics and physiology; and secondly, to the science of man and human society. The second of these two things is the relation of the Revolution to industrial reorganisation, to the social incorporation of the workmen in town and country, to what we call, for short, Socialism, whether in its agricultural or in its manufacturing aspect. The first of these two has relation to the thought of the past; the second to the industry of the future.

The best popular sketch of the relations of the Revolution to the philosophy and science of the eighteenth century is to be found at the close of Henri Martin's great *History of France*. In his chapters numbered 96, 99, 100, 101, 103, 105, he has given us a useful *résumé* of the march of thought in religion, politics, physics, and morals. He shows us Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot, and what their influence was on things of the intellect, on the progress of industry, and on the bases of society. Here is the field so little understood by Carlyle. Here we have the soul of the Revolution before us; it is a sketch

which every intelligent reader can work out for himself, and the want of it makes so many histories of the Revolution old almanacs of battle and riot.

The second great *lacuna* that I note—the relation of the Revolution to what we now call socialism—is not so easily filled. I know of no book at all complete and competent. Some materials for it are found in the *Histoire du Socialisme*, by Benoit Malon, Paris, 1882, a crude heap of undigested theories. It is useful, as it contains an immense body of documents and manifestoes on every socialist school for a century. We certainly want a true history of socialism, meaning by that a history of every systematic attempt to provide a new social existence for the mass of the workers. In the meantime, we can pick up some hints in M. Michelet's later volumes and in those of M. Louis Blanc, especially in M. Blanc's *Histoire de Dix Ans*, 1830-1840, where he gives the story of St. Simon and the insurrection of Lyons. His own books on the organisation of labour give the socialist element in the Revolution of 1848, and perhaps M. Lissagaray's work may serve as a popular account of the Commune of 1871. Michelet is the one historian who has given us not only the intellectual and religious elements of the Revolution, but also the heads of its relation to modern socialism. Unfortunately, the later volumes of M. Michelet are so inferior in power to his earlier volumes that we get from him on this head little more than hints and suggestions. The only course left to us is to study the monographs

which exist of Babeuf, St. Simon, Fourier, Cabet, and Owen, L. Blanc, Pierre Leroux.

But if we are to study the socialism, on no account let us forget the conservatism of the Revolution. The worst that we could do would be to take a one-sided view of this great crisis. He will know little of it who has not filled his spirit with the Titanic diatribes of Burke and the prophetic denunciations of De Maistre, quite as much as with the thunders of Mirabeau and Danton. No doubt Burke was wrong, —taking all together, and weighing all together,— utterly, immeasurably wrong, in his general judgment on the Revolution; yet wrong as the solution is, he alone has fully conceived the problem.

What Burke is to England and its aristocratic polity, that De Maistre is to France, her historic monarchy, and the Catholic Church. As lights and guides in this great *mêlée* we need them all: the conservatives and the reformers, the monarchists and the democrats, the believers and the iconoclasts, all have something to tell us worthy of our hearing. We need Burke to show us the horror he felt at anarchy, De Maistre the grief he felt at the destruction of all idea of Church; we need Michelet's magnificent love of the suffering poor, Carlyle's passionate scorn of imposture, Louis Blanc's unalterable fidelity to the future of the people, De Tocqueville's patient unravelling of inveterate oppression.

Of all those who in England and in our day have studied and expounded the Revolution, the most

learned as well as the most enlightened guide is to be found in Mr. John Morley. Scattered through his various studies of Voltaire, of Rousseau, of Diderot, of Turgot, of De Maistre, of Carlyle, and in particular his last life of Burke, we shall find the justest as well as the most candid conception of the Revolution as a whole. He is perhaps the only writer, either in this country or abroad, who is able to do justice to all sides, and to all the leaders in due measure, who profoundly sympathises with the hot tears wrung from the fevered intellect of Burke, and with the hotter tears wrung from the morbid heart of Rousseau, who can honour Voltaire and De Maistre in the same page, and has an enthusiastic conception both of Diderot and of Danton, while not yielding to Michelet or Louis Blanc in zeal for the resurrection of the people, nor to Mr. Carlyle in aversion to pedantry and anarchy.

But no guides, no historians, and no philosophers will avail us much unless we will ourselves read at first hand, and think on what we read. The true way to read the French Revolution is to go for ourselves to the original sources. No doubt, none but professed students will master the vast store-houses that exist in those two monumental works on the Revolution—*The Parliamentary History of Buchez and Roux*, in forty octavo volumes, wherein we have the debates and all the public documents, and then the collection of *Memoirs*, by Berville and Barrière, in some sixty octavo volumes. What power of human

effort, thought, and feeling lies stored up in these one hundred volumes—as in some catacomb or pyramid, where the dead of a great age sleep. All the fury, all the passion, all the folly, all the hubbub of the Assembly and the Convention, of the Jacobins and the Cordeliers, recorded day by day. We can hear the heroic paroxysm of Danton, the trumpet-call of Mirabeau, the biting dogmatism of Robespierre, the generous emotion of Vergniaud, the hissing venom of Marat.

Or turn to the collection of *Memoirs*. We have the wicked wit of Besenval, the courtly gossip of poor old Campan, the wise and keen observation of Bailly, or of De Ferrières, the passionate insight of Madame Roland, the terrific story of the agony in the prisons. No! None but professed students have the leisure to master these. But there are two memoirs which, in part at least, all should know; the two most striking personal records that the Revolution has left us. The first is the Memoir of Madame Roland. 'Tis one of the most memorable fragments extant, with its ghastly picture of old France, its photographic insight into the home of a small shop-keeper in old Paris, with its prophetic notes of the first stirrings of the new time, until, as the movement grows in mass, the great historic characters step across the scene, or gather, as it seems, in quiet groups, rehearsing their parts before the drama opens,—Robespierre, Danton, Marat, Vergniaud, Barbaroux. And then she, the daughter of a poor working-man, becomes the friend

and confidante of statesmen, the rival of dictators, the superior of Marie Antoinette, the wife of a minister of France, the victim of Robespierre, a state prisoner, till the page breaks off abruptly as the guillotine descends on that fair neck, and severs the keen brain from the untamed heart.

The other indispensable work of contemporary record is found in the famous travels of Arthur Young in 1787, 1788, and 1789. Arthur Young was no genius, but he was a highly competent observer, with an instinct for economic conditions,—honest, intelligent, and possessed of singular opportunities. None but regular students will go through the whole of his voluminous observations. But for one who wishes to know what the Revolution has done, I can imagine no more valuable labour than the comparing these travels of a highly trained English agriculturist, in 1789, with the survey which appeared by Wilson, the other day, just ninety years later, of the same country. But all should read at least A. Young's twenty-first chapter on the Revolution. What a picture of the old-world France it is! Read his account of the haggard men and women, bare, shoeless, and stockingless; of the hovels with no glass in the windows, with no light but the door; of the woman whom he talked with near Metz, only twenty-eight, and looking sixty or seventy, crushed by toil and famine. "Ah! monsieur," she said, "les tailles et les corvées nous écrasent!" An Englishman cannot imagine, says honest Arthur, the look of the women in France, all

feminine appearance crushed out of them by toil, misery, and hunger. Read this, and then go and see that country now, and that thriving peasantry to-day. That was ninety-five years ago. Read his account of the rights of the lords, of the *corvées* (forced labour), of the tenant leagues against the payment of rent, of the *droits de seigneur,—droit de silence des grenouilles* (when the lord had a son and heir born, the peasants were obliged to watch all night beating the ponds, so that the frogs should not disturb the baby !) Then, again, how smugglers of salt were flogged, branded, and hung; how weeding and hoeing were forbidden to the peasants for fear of disturbing the young partridges. Read the story of Gordon and Lord Albemarle, and the *Lettres de Cachet.* Read all this, and then turn to the reports of the debates, and read the account of the great sitting of the night of 4th August, when the nobles surrendered these rights,—partridges, frogs, *lettres de cachet,* and all. Read some of Mirabeau's speeches, and Danton's, and Vergniaud's; read a number or two of Camille Desmoulins' *Vieux Cordelier*, and Marat's *Ami de Peuple*, the account of the prisons, the trial of Louis XVI., the death of Vergniaud, of Danton, of Condorcet, of Charlotte Corday, of Robespierre, in the parliamentary debates, and the memoirs of eye-witnesses. Verily, there is nothing out of Shakespeare so tremendous.

I come now to speak of those two books—the histories of the Revolution which, in France and in England, stand out, I think, before all others, different

as they are, but both dramatic poems rather than histories; charged with genius, lit up through and through with burning sympathy for all greatness and all justice—the works of M. Michelet and of Mr. Carlyle. Not to compare them for a moment, both agree in this, that they go to the very soul of things, that they present events to us in a series of living dramas. Of all those historians who have studied the Revolution, M. Michelet has the truest sympathy with it and the profoundest sense of its inner meanings. If his historical learning and his artistic genius had equalled that of Mr. Carlyle, we should have had for once a perfect history.

Who does not know that noble masterpiece of English literature, the poem of Mr. Carlyle? Who has exhausted its infinite humour, pathos, wit, dramatic passion, and tragic terror; its boundless fertility of anecdote and suggestion; its profound earnestness, and almost religious fervour? I believe no history in our language, perhaps no history in any language, quite equals it in poetic richness of dramatic art. The death of Louis XV., with which it opens, may read like an act of Shakespeare, or a romance of Fielding. The taking of the Bastille, the insurrection of women, the death of Mirabeau, the end of Louis, of Marie Antoinette, of Danton, the pictures of Marat, of Charlotte Corday, of Madame Roland, of Camille Desmoulins, surely these will ever live in our literature beside the greatest achievements of historic portraiture. Such portraits are more than history,

for they rank in their realism with the great creations of poetry. They are more than poetry, for those which I have mentioned may take rank with the most authentic and complete records of history.

But great and perhaps lasting as the literary value of this famous book may be, it is as far as any other from being the final and sufficient history of the French Revolution. That great convulsion, as it was said at the time, swallowed up its children like the oldest of the gods. It certainly was fatal to its chief actors; and it has been far beyond the powers of all its historians. Year by year,—and fifty years have passed since its first appearance,—Mr. Carlyle's Revolution is more and more felt to be a literary picture, and less and less a historical explanation. It is based on an idea now recognised to be thoroughly inadequate; it is saturated with doctrines for which the author himself no longer retained any trust or hope; and it leads us to a conclusion which all that is manly and true in our generation rejects with indignation. A generation ago the influence of it was great; it is now seen to be a poem, with the vision, the movement, the exaggeration of poetry, but without the one indispensable quality for history, solid historical science and true social philosophy. Historical science, social philosophy! those great discoveries and resources of our age, the *Novum Organum* of the world to be, these our Seer scorns with a truly Runic scorn, a laughter that grows at last intolerably artificial and senile. The whole work is based on a false

and narrow assumption; for throughout it the Revolution is treated as an insurrection, an outbreak against tyrannies, shams, and lies, a period of anarchy which left nothing behind it but destruction. Now, the history of our entire nineteenth century is precisely the history of all the work that the Revolution did leave. The Revolution was a creating force, even more than a destroying force; it was an inexhaustible source of fertile influences; it not only cleared the ground of the old society, but it manifested all the elements of the new society. If there is one principle in all modern history certain, it is this: That the Revolution did not end with the whiff of grape-shot by which Bonaparte extinguished the dregs of the Convention.

And if the whole story is based on this wrong idea, that in Vendémiaire, year 4, *i.e.* October, 1795, the hour had come and the Man—so the whole tale is saturated with what I make bold to call shallow and cynical ideas. To treat the greatest intellectual, social, religious, industrial movement of all modern history as a mere accompaniment to a barbaric pæan to despotism; to treat the aspirations and resolves of glorious intellects and of a heroic people as a mere target for boisterous mockery; to find in the agony of the purest devotion and in the visions of immortal hopes materials whereby to build up a grotesque phantasmagoria of human folly and impotence, and deride it with a wild ha! ha! of Mephistophelic wit,—all this, alas! is among the perversions of genius. And what is the philosophy or

the gospel in the name of which this is done? That, unluckily, is not so clear. It is the philosophy of one who laughs, like another Rabelais, at all philosophers of every school. It is the gospel of one who once was a Calvinist, and who is still assumed to be a Theist, but whose gospel is, for us forty millions, mostly of fools, still unrevealed, still wrapped in the eternal silences and thirty octavo volumes of wit, eloquence, humour, burlesque, and pathos.

But he who has no philosophy, except to do what his own conscience tells each man is the will of God (*i.e.* for every man to do what he persuades himself he is entitled to do), has little but gibes for the clearest and most fruitful intellects of the world. To Mr. Carlyle, Voltaire, assuredly one of the most powerful, if not the wisest of those who have scattered ideas through their age, is a "trifler" (*persifleur*); so, too, Diderot, one of the giants of philosophy, the most universal mind between Leibnitz and Comte, is a "scoundrel;" and Adam Smith, one of the fathers of social science, nay, one of the fathers of modern society, is a "professor of the dismal science." The eighteenth century is "a fraudulent bankrupt," and the French Revolution is its very appropriate "suicide." This is neither history nor poetry, but the railing of Diogenes in his tub.

Diogenes, we know, was letting men see his own self-love, when he seemed to be showing his own nakedness. And it is a sad thought that to a man of genius, such as Mr. Carlyle, these mighty teachers of

the human race are at best but learned triflers, and that their influence over the great events that closed their century is treated by him as trivial, or simply noxious. The most profound and meaning page in all modern history is the page wherein there is told the relation of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century to the great social and political movement of the century. All this is not to be disposed of by a somewhat strident scorn in the name of a somewhat mysterious gospel, which the prophet himself is not very ready to explain. Humour, imagination, dramatic power, sincerity, enthusiasm, insight, and noble ideals are good and rare gifts for a historian; but they are not all.

Thus, then, Mr. Carlyle has given us a poem, one of the finest in our language; a sermon, one of the most impressive ever preached; a narrative, one of the most picturesque ever told; an appeal, one of the most enthralling ever uttered; but he has not given us a history of the most important movement in all human civilisation. So far as the French Revolution was the simultaneous collapse of an utterly corroded system, so far as it was a wild outbreak of anarchy and confusion, so far as it was the burning up by inextinguishable fire of all the impostors on the earth, —and it is most true that it was all these,—so far, Mr. Carlyle has given us one of the most wonderful creations of historic art. But the Revolution was a great deal more than these; and so far as it was the foundation of a new epoch in philosophy, science,

industry, government, art, morals, and religion,—and it was all this, and more than this; so far as it was constructive as well as destructive; so far as it stimulated realities and truths even by the fire which burnt up shams and falsehood,—in all this Mr. Carlyle is leading us from light into darkness; so far he is himself (to speak it humbly) a wind-bag; his great poem, if taken as historical narrative, is a simulacrum, and it forms one of the most rickety, though showy, gigs in the universe of letters.

The influence of that Gargantuan burlesque is fortunately passing into the region of mere imaginative literature. It is felt to-day that the greatest effort ever made by man to refashion the scheme of his life has not left us nothing but tears and confusion. The eighteenth century, of which it was the product, is felt now to be among the most potent and fruitful of any in history. The French people, out of whose heart and blood it issued, are not the mob of monkeys and tigers which the reactionary terror painted them; but the people charged in Europe with the evolution of all our republican and social ideals. Let us, then, say with our poet—

> "Who ponders national events shall find
> An awful balancing of loss and gain,
> Joy based on sorrow, good with ill combined,
> And proud deliverance issuing out of pain
> And direful throes."

## XV.

# A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

# A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

In one of those delightful tales of Voltaire which nobody reads now (we are occupied in reading books about Voltaire's books, or rather articles on the books about Voltaire's books), I remember how the King of Babylon cured of excessive self-esteem a great satrap called Irax. The moment he awoke in the morning the master of the royal music entered the favourite's chamber with a full chorus and orchestra, and performed in his honour a cantata which lasted two hours; and every third minute there came a refrain to this effect—

"Que son mérite est extrême!
Que de grâces! que de grandeur!
Ah! combien Monseigneur
Doit être content de lui-même!"

The cantata over, a royal chamberlain advanced and pronounced a harangue that lasted three-quarters of an hour, in which he extolled him for possessing all the good qualities which he had not got. At dinner,

which lasted three hours, the same ceremonial was continued. If he opened his mouth to speak, the first chamberlain said, "Hark! we shall hear wisdom!" And before he had uttered four words, the second chamberlain said, "What wisdom do we hear!" Then the third and the fourth chamberlains broke into shouts of laughter over the good things which Irax had said, or rather ought to have said; and after dinner the same cantata was again sung in his honour. On the first day Irax was delighted; the second he found less pleasant; on the third he was bored; on the fourth he said he could bear it no longer; and on the fifth he was cured.

I sometimes think this nineteenth century with its material progress and its mechanical inventions, its steam and electricity, gas, and patents, is being treated by the press, and its other public admirers, much as the chamberlains in *Zadig* treated the satrap. The century is hardly awake of a morning before thousands of newspapers, speeches, lectures, and essays appear at its bedside, or its breakfast table, repeating as in chorus—

> "Que son mérite est extrême!
> Que de grâces! que de grandeur!"

Surely no century in all human history was ever so much praised to its face for its wonderful achievements, its wealth and its power, its unparalleled ingenuity and its miraculous capacity for making itself comfortable and generally enjoying life. British

Associations, and all sorts of associations, economic, scientific, and mechanical, are perpetually executing cantatas in honour of the age of progress, cantatas which (alas!) last much longer than three hours. The gentlemen who perform wonderful and unsavoury feats in crowded lecture halls, always remind us that "Never was such a time as this nineteenth century!" Public men laying the first stones of institutes, museums, or amusing the Royal Academy after dinner, great inventors, who have reaped fortunes and titles, raise up their hands and bless us in the benignity of affluent old age. I often think of Lord Sherbrooke, in his new robes and coronet, as the first chamberlain, bowing and crying out, "What a noble age is this!" The journals perform the part of orchestra, banging big drums and blowing trumpets —penny trumpets, twopenny, threepenny, or sixpenny trumpets—and the speakers before or after dinner, and the gentlemen who read papers in the sections perform the part of chorus, singing in unison—

> "Ah! combien Monseigneur
> Doit être content de lui-même!"

As a mere mite in this magnificent epoch, I ask myself, What have I done, and many plain people around me, who have no mechanical genius at all—what have we done to deserve this perpetual cataract of congratulation? All that I can think of is the assurance that Figaro gives to the count, "our lordships gave ourselves the trouble to be born in it!"

It is worth a few minutes' thought to ask what is the exact effect upon *civilisation*, in the widest and highest sense of that term, of this marvellous multiplication of mechanical appliance to life? This is a very wide question, and takes us to the roots of many matters, social, economic, political, moral, and even religious. Is the universal use of a mechanical process *per se* a great gain to civilisation, an unmixed gain—a gain without dangers or drawback? Is an age which abounds in countless inventions thereby alone placed head and shoulders above all the ages since historical times began? And this brings us to the point that the answer to the question largely depends on what we mean by civilisation. We need not attempt to define *civilisation*. Before any one can fully show the meaning of civilisation, he must see in a very clear way what is his own ideal of a high, social, moral, and religious life, and this is not the place to enter on any such solemn, not to say tremendous topic.

We had better not hope for any very slashing answer to the question, either in one extreme view or the other. We seldom get much from extreme views, but from complex and balanced views; and this is a very compound and balanced subject—this of civilisation and progress and material improvement. I should not ask the question if I thought that mechanical progress were an incalculable and unqualified gain to humanity. And we do not advance matters if, on the other hand, we decry material inventions or

progress of any kind. We all know how at least one of the few living men of genius we still have amongst us, one of whom I can never speak without profound gratitude, honour, and affection, is wont to pour out his stirring, fascinating tirades against this age of steam and all its mechanical works—odes as lyrical, and as little to be reduced to logic as that of Gray's bard defying the Plantagenet King. I am no member myself of the society of St. George, and as a humble son of the nineteenth century I heartily welcome every form of mechanical improvement. The cause of progress is bound up with every principle worth having; and material progress is an indispensable step in general progress. Let us hail the triumphs of steam, and electricity, and gas, and iron; the railways and the commerce; the industry, the appliances, and conveniences of our age. They are all destined to do good service to humanity. But still it is worth asking if the good they do is *quite* so vast, *quite* so unmixed, *quite* so immediate, as the chamberlains and the chorus make out in their perpetual cantata to the nineteenth century.

Let us note some of the mechanical glories of the last hundred years, as they are so often rehearsed. For four thousand years we know, and probably forty thousand years, man has travelled over land as fast as his own legs, or men's legs, or horses' legs could carry him, but no faster: over sea as fast as sails and oars could carry him. Now he goes by steam over both at least at three times the pace. In previous

ages, possibly for twenty centuries, about a hundred miles a day was the outside limit of any long continuous journey. Now we can go four thousand miles by sea in fourteen days, and by land in five days. It used to occupy as many weeks, or sometimes months. We have now instantaneous communication with all parts of the globe. The whole surface of our planet has only been known about a hundred years; and till our own day to get news from all parts of it to one given spot would certainly have required a year. The President of the United States delivers his message, and within three hours newspapers in all parts of the world have printed it word for word. For twenty thousand years every fabric in use has been twisted into thread by human fingers, and woven into stuff by the human hand. Machines and steam-engines now make ten thousand shirts in the time that was formerly occupied by making one. For twenty thousand years man has got no better light than what was given by pitch, tallow, or oil. He now has gas and electricity, each light of which is equal to hundreds and thousands of candles. Where there used to be a few hundred books there are now one hundred thousand; and the London newspapers of a single year consume, I daresay, more type and paper than the printing presses of the whole world produced from the days of Gutemberg to the French Revolution.

You may buy a good watch now for as many shillings as it used to cost pounds, and a knife worth a week's labour is now worth the labour of one or

two hours. The fish eaten in Paris is caught in Torbay; our loaf of bread is grown in California; and a child's penny toy is made in Japan; a servant girl can get a better likeness of herself for sixpence than her mother or her grandmother could have got for sixty pounds; the miners of the north, they say, drink champagne and buy pianos, and travel one hundred miles for a day's holiday. The brigade of the Guards with breech-loaders would now decide the battle of Waterloo, or the battle of Blenheim, in an hour, and the *Devastation* would sink all the navies which fought at Trafalgar and the Nile. In old days if a regiment were needed (say in Delhi or in New Zealand), it could hardly have been summoned from home and placed there within six months or a year. It could now be done in five or six weeks. Queen Elizabeth, they say, ruled over less than five million subjects, and Queen Anne perhaps over less than ten million. Queen Victoria enjoys the loyal devotion of at least two hundred and fifty millions. Bess counted the total revenues of government on one hand (I mean in millions); Anne could do it on two hands. Queen Victoria as Empress, I suppose, disposes of one hundred and fifty millions.

In the last century the capitals of Europe had a population hardly equal to that of Finsbury or Marylebone in our day. London has grown about eight or ten times in a hundred years. Whole districts as large as the entire kingdom of Alfred or St. Louis, which a hundred years ago was moorland and meadow,

are now one continuous factory, where the wealth, the population, the product of one acre is equal to that of a whole county in the days of Queen Anne. I will not continue the tremendous recital any further. Every one can work it out for himself. Take the facts and figures of the days of Queen Anne, which, we are told, was a sort of Golden Age of the Beautiful, and multiply them by 50, 100, or 1000, and we get to our point of modern sublimity. And what Marlborough and Walpole, Swift and Addison, called the impossible is now the commonplace. Every one can state for himself the hyperbolic contrast between the material condition we see to-day, and the material condition in which society managed to live one, two, three centuries ago, nay, ten, or twenty, or a hundred centuries ago. Take it all in all, the merely material, physical, mechanical change in human life in the hundred years, from the days of Watt and Arkwright to our own, is greater than occurred in the thousand years that preceded, perhaps even in two thousand years or twenty thousand years. The external visible life of Horace Walpole and Pope did not essentially differ from that of Chaucer, Boccaccio, or Froissart; nor did it differ very much from that of Horace and Virgil; nor indeed did it utterly contrast with that of Aristophanes and Plato. Are we so *vastly*, so *enormously* the wiser, the nobler, the happier? Is the advance in real civilisation at all to be compared with the incredible "leaps and bounds" of material improvement?

To ask such a question is to answer it. Robert Lowe, the Society of British Engineers, and the British Association itself, hardly ever pretended that this Victorian age is so incalculably wiser, better, more beautiful than any other in recorded history. What they say is that it has incalculably more good things, incredibly greater opportunities than any other. It has a thousand times the resources of any other age. Permit us to ask—Does it use them to a thousand times better purpose? I am no detractor of our own age. I do not know if there is any in which I would rather have lived, take it all round. We all feel, in spite of a want of beauty, of rest, of completeness, which sits heavy on our souls and frets the thoughtful spirit—we all feel a-tiptoe with hope and confidence. We *are* on the threshold of a great time, even if our time is not great itself. In science, in religion, in social organisation, we all know what great things are in the air. "We shall see it, but not *now*"—or rather our children and our children's children will see it. The Vatican with its syllabus, the Mediævalists-at-all-costs, Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Ruskin, the Æsthetes, are all wrong about the nineteenth century. It is *not* the age of money-bags and cant, soot, hubbub, and ugliness. It is the age of great expectation and unwearied striving after better things. Still, is it the Millennium foretold by the prophets, by civil engineers and railway kings?

The last hundred years have seen in England the most sudden change in our material and external life

that is recorded in history. It is curious how many things date from that 1770 or 1780. The use of steam in manufactures and locomotion by sea and land, the textile revolution, the factory system, the enormous growth of population, the change from a rural to a town life, the portentous growth of the Empire, the vast expansion of sea power, of commerce, of manufactures, of wealth, of intercommunication, of the Post; then the use of gas, electricity, telegraphs, telephones, steam presses, sewing machines, air engines, gas engines, electric engines, photographs, tunnels, ship canals, and all the rest. Early in the last century England was one of the lesser kingdoms in Europe, but one-third in size and numbers of France or Germany. Now our Empire is in size twenty times—twenty times—as big as either, and six or seven times as populous as either. London then was only one of a dozen cities in Europe, hardly of the area of Manchester or Leeds. It is now the biggest and most populous city in recorded history, nearly equal, I suppose, in size and population to all the capitals of Europe put together.

One hundred years ago to have lit this theatre, as brightly as it is now lighted, would have cost, I suppose, fifty pounds, and the labour of two or three men for an hour to light and snuff and extinguish the candles. It is now done for a shilling by one man in three minutes. A hundred years ago to have taken us all to our homes to-night would have cost, I suppose, on an average, five shillings a head and two

hours of weary jolting. I trust we may all get home to-night for fourpence or sixpence a head at the most in half an hour. If you wanted an answer from a friend in Dublin or Edinburgh it would have cost you by post (one hundred years ago) about two shillings in money and a fortnight in time. You now get an answer in thirty hours for twopence, or a penny if you are as brief as the Prime Minister. A hundred years ago, if you wanted to go there, it would have taken you a week, and you would have to make your will. You can now go in a day, and come back the next day. And so on—and so on. The chamberlain's refrain still runs in my head. The important point is that this most unparalleled change in material life only began about a hundred years ago.

Is the civilisation of the nineteenth century so incredibly superior to the civilisation of the eighteenth or the seventeenth century? England in 1882 is in many things wiser and stronger, perhaps better, than in 1782. But England in 1782 was wiser, stronger, and certainly better than in 1682. I should not like to compare 1682 with 1582, though many things decidedly open questions in the days of Queen Bess had been well settled in those of the merry monarch; and 1682 was perhaps a time when we should have felt life easier and safer than in 1582. But compare 1582 with 1482, or 1382. It is the difference between modern and mediæval life. Slowly and in the long run the ages do advance in civilisation. But taking England alone, and looking back for five centuries,

do we find such an enormous impetus to civilisation in its high sense in the nineteenth century, as we find in its low sense, in its mere physical, material sense?

Compare England with other countries in Europe. Whilst England in a hundred years has utterly transformed the face of its material life, France has done so in a much smaller degree, Italy and Germany even less, and Spain not at all. None of these countries has changed very much in population, in area, in relation of town and country, in density, in habits of locomotion, in material appliances. Thirty years ago, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Florence, and Madrid were to the eye not much unlike what they were in the days of Louis XV. and Frederick the Great. To this day country life in Brittany, in Auvergne, in Pomerania, Silesia, or Bohemia, in the Romagna, and Grenada, is substantially what it was in the days of the Seven Years' War. In the meantime, life in Surrey and Middlesex, in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Warwickshire, has outwardly changed more than it did between the Conquest and the Revolution. That is to say, England has in a hundred years undergone enormous material change; relatively France and Germany, Italy and Spain (except in one or two places), have undergone small material change. Has the *relative* position of these nations in the scale of true civilisation altered so very much? Not at all! Most persons would say that in the hundred years France had advanced in true civilisation about as fast as England; so too of

Germany. Many persons might think both, or one at least, had advanced relatively faster than England. And yet their material progress has been incredibly less than that of England.

Take science. Science now enjoys a multitude of appliances which it never had before. Early in this century the planet was not even explored. Tens of thousands of important phenomena were unknown, because they lay out of the reach of human observation. Trade, material progress, wealth, and the discoveries have multiplied a thousand times the instruments and materials and opportunities of science. Steam, gas, electricity, telegraphy, photography, telescopes, microscopes, batteries, electric lights, electric casts, electric measures and conductors in forms infinite have given the modern man of science an armoury of incredible variety and power. To place beside the marvellous tools of modern science those with which Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Harvey, and Lavoisier worked is like putting the armoury of a modern ironclad beside that of a Chinese junk. And yet, is our science relatively to its opportunities so enormously superior to the science of any other age? Let us speak of our science with profound respect and honour. We are proud to think it inferior to none in history. Three names at least of the Victorian epoch, Faraday, Darwin, and Thomson, will live in the history of science and mechanics. But great as our time is in science, no competent man will pretend that it is distinctly higher than the age which saw Newton,

Herschel, Black, and Priestley; or the age of Bacon, Harvey, Galileo, Descartes, and Leibnitz; or the age of Buffon, D'Alembert, Lagrange, Lavoisier, and Bichat. You may raise your mechanical apparatus of science a thousandfold, you do not double your scientific genius once.

Or take philosophy. We are all philosophers nowadays in one sense, but is the philosophy of 1882 so vastly grander than the philosophy of 1782, fresh from Hume, and Adam Smith, Montesquieu, Kant, and Diderot? Or is literature? We read one thousand pages now where our forefathers read one. Every day the press turns out in legible type more matter than in Dr. Johnson's day it turned out in a year; more than in Shakespeare's day it turned out in a century. And yet, is the age so far ahead in letters of the age of Voltaire, Rousseau, Burke, Goethe, Goldsmith, Schiller, Alfieri, Lesage, Johnson, Fielding, Richardson, and Sterne? Or to go back another hundred years, we may take the age of Corneille, Molière, Racine, Milton, Locke, and Dryden. There is good music in 1882; but is it so stupendously better than Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, and Beethoven? There are good pictures; but do we do better than Reynolds and Gainsborough, not to talk of Rubens, Vandyke, and Holbein?

Civilisation is a very elastic, impalpable, undefinable thing. But where are we to turn to find the tremendous relative superiority of 1882 over 1782, or 1682, or 1582? We may hunt up and down, and we

shall only find this: Population doubling itself almost with every fresh generation—cities swelling year by year by millions of inhabitants and square miles of area—wealth counted by billions, power to go anywhere, or learn anything, or order anything, counted in seconds of time—miraculous means of locomotion, of transport, of copying anything, of detecting the millionth part of a grain or a hair's breadth, of seeing millions of billions of miles into space and finding more stars, billions of letters carried every year by the Post, billions of men and women whirled everywhere in hardly any time at all; a sort of patent fairy-Peribanou's fan which we can open and flutter, and straightway find everything and anything the planet contains for about half-a-crown; night turned into day; roads cut through the bowels of the earth, and canals across continents; every wish for any material thing gratified in mere conjurer's fashion, by turning a handle or adjusting a pipe—an enchanted world, where everything does what we tell it in perfectly inexplicable ways, as if some good Prospero were waving his wand, and electricity were the willing Ariel—that is what we have—and yet, is this civilisation? Do our philosophy, our science, our art, our manners, our happiness, our morality, overtop the philosophy, the science, the art, the manners, the happiness, the morality of our grandfathers as greatly as those of cultivated Europeans differ from those of savages? We are as much superior in material appliances to the men of Milton's day and Newton's day,

as they were to Afghans or Zulus. Are we equally superior in cultivation of brain, heart, and character, to the contemporaries of Milton and Newton?

Not to dwell on the higher sides of life, we may turn to the lighter side of civilisation—it is an indefinitely complex fact—take the bloom, or dress of social life—was life one hundred or two hundred years ago, before steam, electricity, and photography existed, so cramped and helpless a thing, so *borné*, and ill-provided? Somehow it was not. Take Horace Walpole's delightful letters and memoirs, or Saint Simon's in France, the still more delightful memoirs of Miss Burney; take the history of Johnson's Club, and his life, and his friends, the story of Goldsmith with his fife travelling over Europe, or take Gibbon's memoirs, or Hume's, or Fielding's letters. Take the old *Spectator* and *Tatler*, *Rambler*, and the rest; read the letters of Pope, or Swift, or Dryden. Again, go close into the inner home of Milton, or Sir Philip Sidney, or Raleigh, Sir Thomas Browne, Montaigne, Rabelais, Shakespeare; even Chaucer, Froissart, Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaelle, Buonarotti, or Benvenuto. We know how these men lived, what they thought about, and talked about, and how they passed their time. I institute no barren comparison between the value of their age and ours. They had in all conscience their folly, ignorance, lust, crime. I simply ask, did their want of all the material contrivances we have to-day blunt and cramp their lives so much as we, spoiled sons of the nineteenth century, would expect?

If Fielding went down to his home in Somersetshire, it took him several days to ride through muddy lanes, and we go in four hours; if Swift went to Dublin it might occupy him a fortnight; if Raleigh sailed to the West Indies and the Spanish Main, he would not be heard of at home for a year; and when Shakespeare played *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he had neither limelight, footlights, scenery, costumes, nor stage machinery, and he did not spend five thousand pounds before he drew up the curtain. When Milton went to Italy he did not manage to do the "regular North Italy round" in a fortnight, and he was not personally conducted to Galileo's villa at Arcetri; though I dare say he saw as much there as most of us do; and though even a schoolboy would think Galileo's telescope a clumsy old thing. I believe Gibbon and Montaigne, Montesquieu and Voltaire, had read nearly as much, and knew nearly as much, as Mr. Mark Pattison; although, we are told, almost every subject of learning and science has been reconstructed many times over since their day. I dare say Buffon and Linnæus knew almost as much about animals and plants as Mr. Darwin himself, though they lived, if not in the pre-historic, certainly in the pre-evolution era. Addison and Voltaire wrote essays as good even as Matthew Arnold's, though neither Sweetness nor Light had been patented in those days; and, though the Dublin and the Edinburgh mails now carry more sacks full of letters in a day than they used to carry in a year, I doubt if in a billion letters that Mr.

Fawcett now despatches there is one that is worth a line of Swift's to Vanessa, or one of Hume's to Adam Smith, or one of Gray's to Mason, or Cowper's to Hill, or one of Voltaire's to D'Alembert, or one of Goethe's to Schiller.

A scholar of the old days could hardly get sight of more than a few thousand books. Now he can get to London or Paris in a few hours, and see millions for the mere asking. We can now do, or see, or hear, in twelve hours, what it took our ancestors twelve months to do, or to see, or to hear. A man in Milton's day or Addison's day spent three thousand pounds in three years in travelling over Europe. He may now see as much for two hundred pounds in three months. And a year will show him more than Marco Polo, Captain Cook, and Christopher Columbus saw in their lives of voyaging. In Shakespeare's day a dozen men in a barn played *Lear* and *Othello* to three or four dozen men of leisure. There are now splendid theatres in every town in Europe, with electric lights and real thunder. It would have taken Horace Walpole or Pope three months of letter-writing and of travelling and talking to learn what a man can now learn of the world around him in an hour over his *Times* after breakfast.

Why is it that we don't get any farther? Because we know that Shakespeare got to the root of the matter in tragedy quite as deep as Mr. Irving. No one can call Pope or Addison, Voltaire or Montesquieu, wanting in culture. No one can deny that Milton had a fine style and a fine taste; no one can say that

Johnson, Congreve, Dryden, Pope, Fielding, Reynolds, and Charles James Fox passed narrow, stunted, dull lives. And yet the tools, the appliances, the conveniences of these men's lives were, in comparison with ours, as the tools, appliances, and conveniences of the ancient Britons or the South Sea islanders were to theirs. Why, then, with all this arsenal of appliances, do we not do more? Can it be that we are overwhelmed with our appliances, bewildered by our resources, puzzled with our mass of materials, by the mere opportunities we have of going everywhere, seeing everything, and doing anything?

We have been so much delighted with our new material acquisitions, that we forget what risks and drawbacks and burdens they involve; we are often blind to the evils they in turn introduce, and we imagine that these discoveries enlarge the human *powers*, when they only multiply the human *instruments*. When the books of a year and of a library were counted by hundreds or thousands, learned men could really know what was best to be known, and mastered that best. But when books are counted by hundreds of thousands, and millions, it is almost a matter of chance what a man reads, and still more what he remembers. Enormous multiplication of material necessarily involves great subdivision of work. This system of subdividing every study into special lines grows with strange rapidity. The incalculable accumulation of new material, and the intense competition to gather still more material, drive

students to limit their research to smaller and smaller corners, until it ends often in ludicrous trivialities, and mere mechanical registering of the most obvious facts, instead of thought and mental grip. A hundred years ago a naturalist was a man who, having mastered, say, some millions of observations, had, if he possessed a mind of vigour, some idea of what Nature is. Now, there are millions of billions of possible observations, all in many different sciences, and as no human brain can deal with them, men mark off a small plot, stick up a notice to warn off intruders, and grub for observations there. And so a naturalist now often knows nothing about Nature, but devotes himself say to one hundredth or thousandth part of Nature—say the section of *Annelida*—and of these, often to one particular worm, or he takes the *Gasteropods*, and then he confines himself to a particular kind of snail; and then after twenty years he publishes a gigantic book about the co-ordination of the maculæ on the wings of the extinct *Lepidoptera*, or it may be on the genesis of the tails of the various parasites that inhabited the palæozoic flea. I don't say but what this microscopic, infinitely vast, infinitesimally small work has got to be done. But it has its dangers, and it saps all grip and elasticity of mind, when it is done in a crude, mechanical way by the medal-hunting tribe.

When we multiply the appliances of human life, we do not multiply the years of life, nor the days in the year, nor the hours in the day. Nor do we multi-

ply the powers of thought, or of endurance; much less do we multiply self-restraint, unselfishness, and a good heart. What we really multiply are our difficulties and doubts. Millions of new books hardly help us when we can neither read nor remember a tithe of what we have. Billions of new facts rather confuse men who do not know what to do with the old facts. Culture, thought, art, ease, and grace of manner, a healthy society, and a high standard of life, have often been found without any of our modern resources in a state of very simple material equipment. Read the delightful picture of Athenian life in the Dialogues of Plato, or in the comedies of Aristophanes, or of Roman life in the epistles of Horace, or of Mediæval life in the tales of Boccaccio, or Chaucer, or of Oriental life in the Arabian Nights, or in the books of Confucius and Mencius, or the tales of old Japan, or go back to the old Greek world in the Odyssey of Homer, and the odes of Pindar, Theocritus, and Hesiod. In all of these we get glimpses of societies which are to us ideal in their charm: humane, happy, wise, and bright. No one wishes to return to them. We are better off as we are. These idyllic ages of poetry and story had their own vice, folly, ignorance, narrowness, crime. They wanted things indispensable to civilisation in its highest form. But they had this. They had wisdom, beauty, happiness, though they had none of our material appliances—neither steam, nor railways, nor factories, nor machinery, nor coal, nor gas, nor electricity, nor printing presses, nor newspapers,

nor underground railways, nor penny post, nor even post-cards. And what they fell short of they would not have got by all the steam-engines and telegraphs and post-offices on earth.

Steam and factories, telegraphs, posts, railways, gas, coal, and iron, suddenly discharged upon a country as if by a deluge, have their own evils that they bring in their train. To cover whole counties with squalid buildings, to pile up one hundred thousand factory chimneys, vomiting soot, to fill the air with poisonous vapours till every leaf within ten miles is withered, to choke up rivers with putrid refuse, to turn tracts as big and once as lovely as the New Forest into arid, noisome wastes; cinder-heaps, cesspools, coal-dust, and rubbish—rubbish, coal-dust, cesspools, and cinder-heaps, and overhead by day and by night a murky pall of smoke—all this is not an heroic achievement, if this Black Country is only to serve as a prison yard or workhouse yard for the men, women, and children who dwell there.

To bury Middlesex and Surrey under miles of flimsy houses, crowd into them millions and millions of overworked, underfed, half-taught, and often squalid men and women; to turn the silver Thames into the biggest sewer recorded in history; to leave us all to drink the sewerage water, to breathe the carbonised air; to be closed up in a labyrinth of dull, sooty, unwholesome streets; to leave hundreds and thousands confined there, with gin, and bad air, and hard work, and low wages, breeding contagious diseases, and sinking into

despair of soul and feebler condition of body; and then to sing pæans and shout, because the ground shakes and the air is shrill with the roar of infinite engines and machines, because the blank streets are lit up with garish gas-lamps, and more garish electric lamps, and the Post Office carries billions of letters, and the railways every day carry one hundred thousand persons in and out of the huge factory we call the greatest metropolis of the civilised world—this is surely not the last word in civilisation.

Something like a million of paupers are kept year by year from absolute starvation by doles; at least another million of poor people are on the border-line, fluttering between starvation and health, between pauperism and independence; not one, but two, or three, or four millions of people in these islands are struggling on the minimum pittance of human comfort and the maximum of human labour; something like twenty millions are raised each year by taxation of intoxicating liquors; something like one hundred thousand deaths each year of disease distinctly preventible by care and sufficient food, and sanitary precaution and due self-restraint; infants dying off from want of good nursing, like flies; families herded together like swine, eating, drinking, sleeping, fighting, dying, in the same close and foul den; the kicking to death of wives, the strangling of babies, the drunkenness, the starvation, the mendicancy, the prostitution, the thieving, the cheating, the pollution of our vast cities in masses, waves of misery and vice, chaos and neglect—all this

counted, not here and there in spots and sores (as such things in human society always will be), but in areas larger than the entire London of Elizabeth, masses of population equal to the entire English people of her age. I will sum it up in words not my own, but written the other day by one of our best and most acute living teachers, who says, "Our present type of society is in many respects one of the most horrible that has ever existed in the world's history—boundless luxury and self-indulgence at one end of the scale, and at the other a condition of life as cruel as that of a Roman slave, and more degraded than that of a South Sea islander." Such is another refrain to the cantata of the nineteenth century, and its magnificent achievements in industry, science, and art.

What is the good of carrying millions of people through the bowels of the earth, and at fifty miles an hour, if millions of working people are forced to live in dreary, bleak suburbs, miles and miles away from all the freshness of the country, and away miles and miles even from the life and intelligence of cities? What is the good of ships like moving towns, that cross the Atlantic in a week, and are as gorgeous within as palaces, if they sweep millions of our poor who find nothing but starvation at home? What is the use of electric lamps, and telephones and telegraphs, newspapers by millions, letters by billions, if sempstresses stitching their fingers to the bone can hardly earn fourpence by making a shirt, and many a man and woman is glad of a shilling for twelve hours' work?

What do we all gain if in covering our land with factories and steam-engines we are covering it also with want and wretchedness? And if we can make a shirt for a penny and a coat for sixpence, and bring bread from every market on the planet, what do we gain if they who make the coat and the shirt lead the lives of galley slaves, and eat their bread in tears and despair, disease and filth.

We are all in the habit of measuring success by *products*, whilst the point is, how are the products consumed, and by whom, and what sort of lives are passed by the producers? So far as mechanical improvements pour more wealth into the lap of the wealthy, more luxury into the lives of the luxurious, and give a fresh turn to the screw which presses on the lives of the poor; so far as our inventions double and treble the power of the rich, and double and treble the helplessness of the poor, giving to him that hath, and taking away from him that hath not even that which he has,—so far these great material appliances of life directly tend to lower civilisation, retard it, distort, and deprave it. And they *do* this, so far as we spend the most of our time in extending and enjoying these appliances, and very little time in preparing for the new conditions of life they impose on us, and in remedying the horrors that they bring in their train.

It may be said that there is no necessary connection between great mechanical improvements and these social diseases and horrors. No *necessary* con-

nection, perhaps, but there is a plain historical connection. Fling upon a people at random a mass of mechanical appliances which invite them and force them to transform their entire external existence—to turn home work into factory work, hand work into machine work, man's work into child work, country life into town life, to have movement, mass, concentration, competition, where quiet individual industry had been the habit for twenty generations, and these things follow. Wherever the great steam system, factory system, unlimited coal, iron, gas, and railway system, has claimed a district for its own, there these things are. The Black Country and the Coal Country, the Cotton Country, the central cities, the great ports, seem to grow these things as certainly as they turn their streams into sewers, and their atmosphere into smoke and fog. Read Fielding, or Swift, or Chaucer; and, though we find in the England of the eighteenth century and the fourteenth century plenty of brutality, and ignorance, and cruelty, we do not find these huge mountains of social disease, which seem inevitable the moment we have sudden material changes in life produced by vast mechanical discoveries.

There are thus two ways in which a sudden flood of mechanical inventions embarrasses and endangers civilisation in the very act of advancing it. Science, philosophy, education, become smothered with the volume of materials before they have learned to use them, bewildered by the very multitude of their opportunities. Art, manners, culture, taste, suffer by

the harassing rapidity wherewith life is whirled on from old to new fashion, from old to new interest, until the nervous system of the race itself is agitated and weakened by the never-ending rattle. Suppose that a few more discoveries yet enabled us, as Jules Verne's heroes, to pass at will like gnomes through the centre of the earth, or the depths of the sea, and the regions of space, to make a holiday tour to the volcanoes of the moon, and the fiery whirlpools of the sun, to take soundings in a comet's tail, and to hold scientific meetings in the nebulæ of Orion—we should seem to one another madmen; for we should have no common point of interest or action, of rest or affection. Rest and fixity are essential to thought, to social life, to beauty; and a growing series of mechanical inventions making life a string of dissolving views is a bar to rest and to fixity of any sort.

And if this restless change weakens the thought, the culture, and the habits of those who have leisure or wealth, it degrades and oppresses the life of those who labour and suffer, for their old habits of life are swept away before their new habits of life are duly prepared; and the increased resources of society are found in practice to be increased opportunities for the skilful to make themselves masters of the weak.

But amidst all the dangers of these material appliances flung random upon a society unprepared for them, let us beware how we join in the impatience which protests that we are better without them. Let Mr. Carlyle pronounce anathemas on steam-engines,

and Mr. Ruskin seek by the aid of St. George to abolish factories from England; all this is permitted to a man of genius, for all is permitted to genius, and it is perhaps a grim way of giving us ample warning. But men of practical purpose have a different aim. The railways, the factories, the telegraphs, the gas, the electric wonders of all kinds, are here. No latter-day sermons or societies of St. George can get rid of them, or persuade men to give up what they find so enormously convenient. Nay, the case is far stronger than this. These things are amongst the most precious achievements of the human race, or rather, they will be, when we have learned how to use them without all the evils they bring with them. Man, in his desperate struggle with the forces of nature, is far too slightly armed to dispense with any one of the appliances that the genius of man can discover. He needs them all to get nearer to the mystery of the world, to furnish his material wants, to raise and beautify his personal and social life. There is one way in which they may be made a curse, not a blessing, and that is to exaggerate their value, to think that new material appliances to life form a truly higher life; that a man is *ipso facto* a nobler being because he can travel a thousand miles in twenty-four hours, and hear the words that a man is speaking in New York. What has happened to the nineteenth century is what happens to a country when a gold-field is suddenly discovered. Civilised life for the time seems dancing mad; and though men will give a hundred dollars for

a glass of champagne, degradation and want are commoner even than nuggets. It is significant that the most powerful pictures of degradation which the American continent has produced were drawn in the Western gold-fields, and the most serious scheme of modern communism has been thought out in the same ground. But the nugget (the sudden acquisition of vast material resources) makes havoc in London and Manchester as much as in San Francisco or Melbourne. It does not follow, as some prophets tell us, that gold is not a useful metal, only we may buy gold too dear.

Society, to use Mr. Herbert Spencer's profound suggestion, is a continual action and reaction between the forces that divide it into new forms of life, and those which reunite these new forms in harmony. Or, to use Comte's still more abstract theory, society is the result of the equilibrium between progress and order, or new phases and old types. But in an age of sudden material expansion, the forces that drive on the new phases in special lines are abnormally raised to fever heat, whilst those which in ordinary times are active to preserve the type are routed, abashed, and bewildered. In the long run the course of Order will rally again; but for the moment it is asked to do its work in what is something like an invasion or an earthquake. We have hardly yet got so far as to recognise that the sudden acquisition of vast material resources is not only a great boon to humanity, but also a tremendous moral, social, and even physical and intellectual experiment. Society is a most subtle

organisation; and we are apt to lose sight of the fact that an unlimited supply of steam power, or electric power, is not necessarily pure gain. The progress achieved in the external conditions of life within the last hundred years is no doubt greater than any recorded in human history. It is obvious that other kinds of progress have advanced at no such express speed. But, until all kinds of human energy get into more harmonious proportion, cantatas to the nineteenth century will continue to pall upon the impartial mind.

Socially, morally, and intellectually speaking, an era of extraordinary changes is an age that has cast on it quite exceptional duties. A child might as well play with a steam-engine or an electric machine, as we could prudently accept our material triumphs with a mere "rest and be thankful." To decry steam and electricity, inventions and products, is hardly more foolish than to deny the price which civilisation itself has to pay for the use of them. There are forces at work now, forces more unwearied than steam, and brighter than the electric arc, to rehumanise the dehumanised members of society; to assert the old immutable truths; to appeal to the old indestructible instinct; to recall beauty; forces yearning for rest, grace, and harmony; rallying all that is organic in man's social nature, and proclaiming the value of spiritual life over material life. But there never was a century in human history when these forces had a field so vast before them, or issues so momentous on

their failure or their success. There never was an age when the need was so urgent for synthetic habits of thought, systematic education, and a common moral and religious faith.

There is much to show that our better genius is awakened to the task. Stupefied with smoke, and stunned with steam-whistles, there was a moment when the century listened with equanimity to the vulgarest of its flatterers. But if Machinery were really its last word, we should all be rushing violently down a steep place, like the herd of swine.

THE END.

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