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ROSEMARY'S  
LETTER BOOK



W. L. Courtney



LONDON: J.M.DENT & SONS LTD.

NEW YORK: E.P.DUTTON & CO.



TO  
ROSEMARY

THESE FEW THOUGHTS.

*How can we offer the Summer  
The heart of the wild rose blown ?  
How can we give to the meadow  
The wealth of the harvest mown ?  
Nay, but 'tis theirs already—  
The fruit of the seed they have sown.*

*Why should I offer the Thinker  
The thoughts that were her's alone ?  
Why should I give to the Giver  
That gift which was always her own ?  
Shall I not kneel as her debtor  
On the lowliest steps of her throne ?*

---

Πέμπω σοι μύρον ἡδύ, μύρω παρέχων χάριν, οὐ σοι  
αὐτὴ γὰρ μυρίσαι καὶ τὸ μύρον δύνασαι.

GREEK ANTHOLOGY.



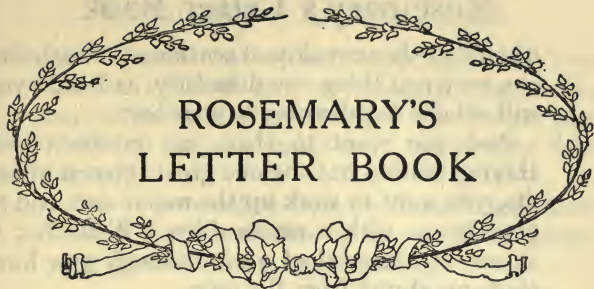
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# ROSEMARY'S LETTER BOOK

## I

*April 7th, 1908.*

So you have found a special niche for me in your life, a niche which I may occupy to your complete satisfaction, if not entirely to my own! I am to keep you conversant with the literature of the day, and with all the hundred and one things that interest you, so that you may not lose touch with them in your exile so far away. Do I reveal my ignorance when I ask if there are gorgeous sunsets in Burmah? For, of course, you remember—ah, forgive me, I mean I remember—the sunset from the cliffs of Cromer, when it came into our heads to talk of Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis, and all the efflorescence of our busy inquiring brains. So I should like to think that there were great sunsets in Burmah, purple and green and gold, like that strange mixture of sky and sea we saw from our Norfolk cliffs. You know how little I care for the Imperial laureate of our times, who gives all sorts of false rhymes to what he calls Empire; well, I caught myself the other day repeating “On the road to Mandalay,” just because that seemed to bring me nearer to you. Pshaw! I can see your lips curl at what you

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dismiss as the unreality of sentiment. Sentiment is a very real thing, my dear lady, as I hope you will not one day discover to your cost.

And you want to share my interests too! Having blotted out the one great interest of my life, you want to work up the minor ones and so provide me with a *raison d'être*. Well, that is almost sentimental of you, although you have made me shrink from the term.

It all seems a little difficult at first, but you have always done as you wished with me, and I suppose you will to the end. There are times when my yoke galls me—bitterly—and yet I suppose I should miss its pressure on my neck. We are such creatures of habit.

But, oh, Nicolette ma mie—you have not forgotten our old readings of Aucassin—why, why did you not let me say good-bye? There was something, I forget what, which marred our last day of meeting, a trick of nerves possibly, a trifling defect of temper, and only a good-bye could have set it right. I think the want of that good-bye will stand between me and death; for these are human things after all, these good-morrows and good-byes! They give a gilt edge to the drab, dun clouds of our every day. And not to say them, not to whisper the last tender adieu, is to have a sense of an unfathomable void. It is not often, is it, dear child, that I lift a corner of my ordinary complacent mood and show you the rough and jarred edges of feeling below? I am not unhappy, as you know. But then I am never really happy, and “the little less and what worlds away!” Scold me, dear, when you answer, for this weakness. It shall not occur again, or at least not often—just once or twice—

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just to show that we once held hands and were friends. "I will but say what all friends may say, or only a thought stronger. I will hold your hand but as long as all may, or so very little longer."

I have been asked to write about Edgar Allan Poe. I forget whether he is numbered among your heroes. Fancy my forgetting!

Among the world's story-tellers Edgar Allan Poe holds a conspicuous place. There are only a few in the first class to which he belongs, a few imaginative and cultivated artists, such as Hawthorne, Gautier, De Maupassant, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Do you know what is the most famous thing about Poe? I believe it is his wonderful feat of anticipating from the opening chapter the plot of *Barnaby Rudge*. But, although Dickens is reported to have been immensely impressed with his daring prognostication, and talked about Poe as if he had been the Devil incarnate, there was, in reality, nothing surprising, if we once assume that Poe's theory of composition is correct. He held, you know, that the man who builds up a story is like the man who constructs a play, and that the wisest fashion is to begin from the end, and finish with the first act, so that all the introductory portion shall be significant in the truest and deepest sense of what is to come. If that is the case, then clearly the opening chapters of a novel must be weighted with a purpose beyond themselves, and a careful, inquisitive, and analytic student might make a very fair guess as to the probable conclusion, if he sedulously estimates the value and pertinence of each sentence of the exordium. Of course, that was the fashion in which Poe himself went to work. For instance, he is writing an essay about Hawthorne, the

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man, above all others, who in his superb short stories could teach him something of the craft which they professed in common. "If a skilful literary artist is wise," he says, "he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but, having conceived with deliberate care a certain unique or single effect to be worked out, he then invents such incidents, he then contrives such events, as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentences tend not to the outbringing of the effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design." That is Edgar Allan Poe's own theory, which may sound a little artificial, but which any literary artist knows to be profoundly true. The slapdash effects, suddenly executed in a moment of inspiration, belong rather to the popular imagination of what a writer does than to his really serious workaday mood. The professional gives no opportunity to chance; the amateur loves the hazard of the game. That is why the professional never falls below a certain standard, while the record of the amateur is absolutely incalculable.

(Are you, my dear, an amateur in life as well as in work?)

Look at any of Poe's introductory sentences and you will see at once how carefully he strikes the right note at the very beginning. There is his mystical account of the Lady Ligeia, a sort of dream-wife, who came to him he knew not how, he knew not whence, who lived with him for a few years, the very incarnation of a passionate will, and murmured on her death-bed some sentences indicating that it is only through weakness of will that a man surrenders himself to



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death. What happens? The Lady Ligeia dies, and when the narrator of the story marries a second wife he is always conscious of another presence which will not leave him. At the last the Lady Ligeia herself returns in a sort of dream-vision, appearing in the very death-chamber where his second wife's body is laid. Now read the first sentences of the story. There is an introduction from the writings of Joseph Glanvill: "Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigour?" And then follow the words, "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia." One sees how the atmosphere is suggested, an atmosphere of strangeness, of romance, incalculable and mysterious, together with the central doctrine that men live in virtue of will and die when the will fails.

(What lover of a flesh-and-blood woman could ever forget! Why, even I. . . .)

Or, again, there is the story of *William Wilson*, a man with a double personality, such as belonged to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. How does Poe begin his story? "Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation." Here is the whole sequel suggested at the very outset. Or, once more, there is the exceedingly melodramatic *Masque of the Red Death*, a nightmare of horror, crude and hideous. This is the way in which Poe begins the story: "The 'Red Death' had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood." We know what we are to expect when an author gives us sentences like these, a sort of phantasmagoria of dimly-realised destruction,

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as a background to a sturdy and dauntless human will. These, you may say, are the tricks of the trade. Doubtless they are; and Poe was one of the first to explain them, without any reserve, to his readers. Having for once told the absolute truth, he was disbelieved, and people said that his *Philosophy of Composition* was a jest such as one would expect from an author fond of mysticism.

Poe, indeed, has not been happy in the comments that have been made upon him; still less has he been fortunate in his biographers. His first historian, a man called Griswold, apparently was concerned to explain the weird and horrible character of much of Poe's imaginative work by a theory that he only wrote when he was intoxicated, or under the influence of drugs. There was, of course, a half-truth in this version of his career. Poe was a real Bohemian, who lived from hand to mouth, who wandered from one profession and calling to another, very much as chance might dictate. He was born in Boston in 1809, the son of a ne'er-do-well father, and a delicate mother, both poor players on the stage. That was hardly a promising beginning. And then, when both his parents died, at the time when he was only two years of age, the boy drifted from one kind of life to another; sometimes, through the kindness of his godfather, Mr. Allan, enjoying the advantage of education at Richmond and Charlottesville, and sometimes, owing to his passion for card-playing, starting an adventurous life by joining the Greeks in their fight for independence. At one moment he is a military cadet at West Point; at another he is a journalist, a *littérateur*, an *Autolycus*, a picker-up of unconsidered trifles, going through long periods of penury, and then suddenly emerging as the winner of a big prize for the best story. But he was by no means a profligate in the

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ordinary sense, as all his recent biographers have been at pains to explain to us. He married a very delicate girl, and her long illness was a tremendous strain upon his nerves. Nevertheless, as long as she existed, his little home at Fordham, where he lived with his wife and her mother, surrounded by pet parrots, and other innocent companions of the simple life, was for him an asylum of rest—a “peaceful, small citadel, held by three friends against the world.” It is as well to remember this, when we hear such stories as of Poe reeling across the Broadway on the day of the publication of *The Raven*, and Poe dying in a polling-booth of delirium tremens, after having been forced, by unconscientious electors, to record his vote several times. Because he wrote strange things, he was generally considered to be a strange man. Assuredly, his was not a healthy mind; but it is rash to deduce his real personality from what a man writes. He was a lonely thinker, keenly sensitive, very imaginative, with a preference for the morbid. And he was also an artist, full of a deep sense of responsibility for everything he wrote, and in his strange fashion, a lover of the beautiful.

Naturally, he was poor through all his life. Think of a man who never could write at the spur of the moment, and yet who always had to write with the wolf at the door. Think of a man whose affections were raked by suspense, owing to the ill-health of the wife he adored, who could not, for the life of him, dash off a piece of improvisation, but had carefully to work out all his effects with enormous labour and conscientiousness. It is not wonderful that such a man should take drugs, or even drink more glasses than were good for him. The great thing is that his work is never drunken. It is extraordinarily serious, every part of it bearing evidence to his clear intelligence,



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and his intense study of the logical sequence of effects on causes. Sometimes with such a man the labour of the file is too obvious. His work smells of the midnight oil. We seem to hear the machinery working. The same thing is equally true of Robert Louis Stevenson, in whose case the art to conceal the art is frequently lacking. But the real tragedy in Poe's life is not his so-called profligacy. It is that as a result of his forty years there is in reality so little to show. There is a great deal of work of no value at all; a great deal of verse, sometimes beautiful, and generally melancholy; a few critical articles, full of rare insight and delicate perception. What is there besides? One extraordinary successful poem, *The Raven*, and some stories, like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *Marie Roget*, *The Descent into the Maelström*, and a few besides, which will always be quoted as among the most perfect of their kind. And even they are not, and cannot be, generally popular. They are, like olives or caviare, a delicacy, a thing which the gourmet will appreciate, but which have little appeal to the general public. What do we learn about life from them? Nothing at all. And yet, strangely enough, they always seem to me to tell us a good deal about ourselves. We suddenly become aware of new corners of consciousness, strange fancies and delusions, odd niches of sensation. Utterly fantastic, they yet preserve for us a strange sense of reality. They are never absurd. We were almost waiting for them, expecting them. Long before the Subliminal Consciousness was ever invented—or, rather, received its characteristic name—Edgar Allan Poe had dived into its depths, and fetched therefrom “rare crystals, oddly-wrought corals, precious jewels, and metal-work of wonderful and horrible design.” And we shall not forget him so long as



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these have power to touch our sense of mystery and awe.

You see I am taking you at your word, telling you of my interests, and accepting the chance that now, as in the past, they will find an echoing interest in you. But I think you will have had enough of me and my dissertation for a long time to come.

Good-bye, my Ladye Rosemary, and good luck go with you. I had almost forgotten the "Ladye" and written "my Rosemary," who stands for ever for remembrance.

"My Rosemary is ever mixed with rue." I wrote that once in a sonnet. Prophetic, wasn't it? By the way, does the embargo on sentiment extend to poetry? As I am ignorant, I will run the risk and enclose my latest effort:—

## THE END OF THE DREAM

*I paced of late the Paphian Isle,  
I saw fair Venus with her doves ;  
Encircled by her wanton loves,  
She made me captive with a smile.*

*I thought I saw the world in truth  
Bathed in the colours of the dawn :  
And through the mists of age forlorn  
There rose the glory of my youth.*

*Alas ! the morning light breaks cold,  
The skies are swept with driving rain :  
From golden dreams of boyhood vain  
I wake—to find that I am old.*

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Old? why, I have the youngest heart in Christendom! Don't you know it? Or do you refuse to realise it? Anyhow, so long as this machine is to him, the bachelor malgré lui is

Always yours.

## II

April 16th.

“ I SHOULD not be surprised if Euripides speaks truly when he says, ‘ Who knows whether life is death and death is life? ’ So that in reality perhaps we are in a state of death. I myself once heard one of the wise men say that in the present life we are dead, and the body is our tomb.” This is more or less of an Orphic doctrine, connected with the well-known phrase *σῶμα σῆμα*—the body regarded as a tomb of the soul. It is capable of many applications, and I have been reminded of it by reading Stopford Brooke's study of *Four Poets*, especially in reference to William Morris. There are people, says Stopford Brooke, who live in a world within a world, who do not care the toss of a farthing for all the triumphs of science, who do not believe in experimental investigation as the only method of knowledge, and are content to withdraw themselves into a sphere to which their imagination furnishes the key, and cultivate their own garden. To such men, of course, life in its commonplace aspects, life lived in the glare of the open daylight, is a strangely unreal thing, compared with the world of fancy, of poetry, of art, in which they forget the trammels of the present, and live royally in a royal demesne. To such men, assuredly, life may be death, and a sort of death a more real form of life.

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Do you know what it is to be a literary man? It is to write about everything and to be interested in something: it is to squander oneself abroad for the public to look at: it is to have many sorrows and just a few joys: it is to read masses of printed matter, and now and again, once in a blue moon, to feel that life is worth living. You know I always try to pay attention to the judgment of the man in the street, for he often in his rough, direct fashion hits a nail on the head. Well, the man in the street would call me a literary grub, and he would mean that I am a bit of a prig. So I am, so I am, for I'm fastidious in my tastes, and to be fastidious is to be guilty of a pose, to be a pedant, to be damned heartily and unreservedly by the Philistine! All these things I will suffer gladly, dear Ladye, if only I can wile away an hour or two of your leisure. If I am fastidious, you are high-fantastical; and I think I see your lip curl sometimes at my comprehensive tastes. It is all a question of the point of view: as you, high-fantastical ladye, are to me, fastidious taster of books, so am I to the ordinary Philistine. And I accept it as my business to keep you amused, as a sort of *jongleur* or Provençal bard, allowed his corner of the fireplace and his use of knife and fork at the board, because, though he sings of many shameful deeds and even dares to sing of love, he is on the whole interesting. It is a pity he is vulgar enough to be romantic, but then we can't be all high-fantastical ladies, surveying the world of common things from the pagodas—are there pagodas?—in Burmah.

Stopford Brooke is considering four poets—Clough,

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Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, William Morris—who fall naturally into two divisions, Clough and Arnold having a good deal in common, but being essentially diverse in nature and aims from Rossetti and Morris. There is real unity in the book, however, because these men were more or less contemporaries, and represent the contrasted ways in which thoughtful men some thirty years ago decided to face the problems of existence. Rossetti and Morris frankly gave up the struggle, and fled for refuge into a realm of beauty of their own. William Morris especially prepared himself by a most diligent discipline to be at home in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and to be an alien and stranger in the nineteenth century. Of course, he was a successful tradesman as well, but we are not concerned, nor is Stopford Brooke concerned, with this particular department of his industry. In his life as a poet he shut himself up within the architecture, the clothing, the manners, the agriculture, the war customs and weapons, the manuscripts, the furniture, the houses, huts, and castles of ancient time. The actual present hurt him like a nightmare. Towards the close of his life, after some painful acquaintance with actual experience, to which pity had called him, he threw his feelings and his heart into an imaginary Utopia in the future, and this sufficed for his needs just as well as the past to which he had hitherto consecrated his efforts. It seems a strange thing that a man should absolutely ignore the one thing that goes on all around him. Indeed, I am not quite sure that the adjective “cowardly” should not be used of any one who so deliberately turns his back on the problems of the day. Still, dreamers are born and not made, and if we put this impulse so clearly manifested in both Rossetti and Morris at its best, we shall discover it to be an honest



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desire to realise shapes of beauty, a frank confession that man does not live by bread alone, an earnest ambition to feed other parts of the human being—fancy, hope, idealism—which are apt to be a little starved by those who rely only on experience and the testimony of their five senses. The religious impulse is, of course, of the same kind. It is equally a longing to get away from the ordinary conditions of the world, and, as St. Paul puts it, “to be with Christ, which is far better.” Also all forms of mysticism throughout the ages, beginning with the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries, right down to the most modern developments of esoteric Buddhism, are inspired with the same spirit to forget the present, and by means of ecstatic states to swoon into another region, which is called that of ultimate reality.

Matthew Arnold and Clough were formed in a different mould. But, as I have so often told you, both poets belong rather to the middle-aged amongst us, and apparently have no message to the young—to you, for instance. Matthew Arnold was especially the philosophic poet for men who took their degrees in the sixties and seventies. So far as I can gather, at the present day the younger men, who follow the lead possibly of William James and the tenets of Humanism or “Pragmatism,” are not inclined to be gloomy at all, have more affinity, apparently, with optimism, and are determined to forget, or at all events to put aside, some of the reasons for that melancholy which invaded their predecessors. But the riddle of this sick earth lay more heavily on the first readers of Matthew Arnold. Clough, as we know, was almost driven to despair; Arnold attained to a level of philosophic resignation, not totally devoid of a certain grim humour. We cannot alter things. Things are what they are, and

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will be what they will be, and the worst of all attitudes is fretfulness. The weary Titan must go staggering along to his unknown goal. We cannot understand what is the design of this Universe, or why there seems to be such a preponderance of suffering in it. But we can at least preserve our mental citadel safe from the assaults of suicidal gloom. We can be the captains of our own souls—patient, tolerant, hoping for the best, accepting the worst, unflinching, fearless, proud. It was somewhat in this tone that Matthew Arnold spoke to the men of his own generation, and his poems were the only message which seemed to have enduring influence. The spirit of them was never weak or cowardly. It came practically to this—“Tasks in hours of insight willed, Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.” It is happy to dream, it is wiser to know. At all events, there are some who must needs face the world as they find it, and not run away to “a world within a world.” Stopford Brooke could not have made the contrast between the two attitudes more striking than by showing us the characteristics, the varying and often contradictory characteristics, of the poets who were gentle and saddened sceptics and the poets who were antiquarians and dreamers.

I prose on to you, dear lady, and wonder whether you will ever have the inclination or the patience to read all I write. But you always clamoured for what you called my schoolmaster mood, and if I bore you, well, you probably will let me know it fast enough. It takes me back months to talk to you again of that Orphic doctrine that the body is the tomb of the soul. Do you remember that wonderful night when we sat by the river—oh, how the gnats bit us!—

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and talked of all things under heaven and earth, and specially of this? I am sending you by this mail a little book which I think may interest you, and may perhaps remind you.

*The Religious Teachers of Greece* was written by a promising scholar, James Adam, who died before he came to the full maturity of his powers. Adam was a Fellow and senior tutor of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and his book contains the Gifford Lectures which he had delivered at Aberdeen. There was nothing very profound, apparently, about Adam's scholarship; and, perhaps, there was less in him of the philosopher and metaphysician than there was of the scholar. His lectures, however, give one a very good general view of that side of Hellenic culture which we are so apt to neglect. The ordinary conception entertained of the Greek, starting from the belief commonly expressed that he was a pagan, makes of him a creature who rejoices in the sunshine and shivers at the shade, who thinks that this life is all, and that he must extract from it as much welfare as he can. This view of the Greek nature is to a large extent derived from the Homeric theology, which, indeed, represents only one side of that kind of culture which the Greek imbibed. The heroes in Homer, whom we take as the everlasting type of the Greek, were beings, without doubt, who thought that this present life of ours, short and uncertain as it might be, was nevertheless something to be glad of, affording, as it does, opportunity for noble actions and chivalric exploits. "One crowded hour of glorious life" is the sort of motto which ran through them all. Death they shrank from quite as much as the heroes of William Morris's Scandinavian myths, or, indeed, quite as much as he did himself when he talked of his



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own poetic mission as "a careless singer of an idle day." If there was another world, at all events it was a world of shadows, a grey, insubstantial region, bereft of those warm colours which made life so enjoyable. "I would rather," said Achilles on a famous occasion, "be a serf working on another man's land than that the whole kingship of the dead were mine." From this point of view the body, with all that it was capable of, was the main fact about human existence, while the soul, if it existed at all, was a thin vapour or breath, which might or might not have its existence hereafter, but, if it did, was not robust enough to extract much joy out of its after-life. That, we are apt to say, was the religion of the Greek, as it is the practical religion, we assume, of those children of the sunny South, whose interests are bound up with the daylight, and who actually shiver at the thought that the night cometh when no man can work.

As a matter of fact, side by side with the ordinary religious worship of the Greeks, that is to say, the prescribed and solemn worship of certain gods whom they especially revered in their Pantheon, there were a set of beliefs which may or may not have come originally from the East or from Egypt, but which were at least as mystical as anything which we connect with Oriental culture and discipline. Does it not often strike you as one of the odd features of the present day, which is always seeking the new prophets who shall show us something both good and new, that a definite attempt is being made to introduce Buddhism as something purer and more satisfying than current or conventional Christianity? Buddhism is, as you know, an ancient faith, which we associate with Tibet or the northern parts of India or Ceylon. But, as I daresay you do not know, there existed in the



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sixth century B.C. in Greece a certain Orphic Brotherhood which possessed many of the features of Buddhism, and indeed some of their definite tenets. This Orphic Brotherhood was very successful, and had very extensive ramifications. We do not know how first they arose, or why they connected themselves with the names of Musæus and Orpheus. One of their great headquarters was in Southern Italy, a part which was called Magna Græcia, especially the town of Croton, the rival of Sybaris. Whether the Orphics invaded Attica from Magna Græcia, or whether their brotherhood sprang up independently, at all events it is certain that both in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and still later on, Athens itself, the home of light and intellectual culture, was permeated through and through with ideas which we certainly should call mystical, and which, in their extreme form, are precisely those common to all mystics—Buddhists or Brahmins, Egyptians or modern followers of Blavatsky.

The root ideas of this Orphic sect were in violent and flagrant opposition to the current thought of their day. The present life of man was of small importance compared with his future life. His body was the tomb, the grave, the sepulchre of the most real thing about him, which was his soul. And the great duty incumbent on any man in this vale of tears is so to order his life as to deliver himself, as far as may be, from his body, and live a life remote, such as William Morris tried to do, in a world within a world. When St. Paul says, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" he is exactly expressing the root idea of all mystics. Pythagoras took up this doctrine. So, too, did Empedocles, and we find traces of it in Pindar. Plato, at a later period, gave it a philosophical basis,

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and made it the foundation of some of his most remarkable dialogues. Here, then, is quite another side of the Greek life which we are apt to ignore. For, observe that some of those ideas which we associate with religious asceticism seem to have been the very basis of the Orphic creed. There was the notion of ante-natal sin—some vague sin committed before a man was born at all. There was, in consequence, the notion of a necessary expiation. Expiation was a lengthy process, which had to occupy many thousands of years; hence the soul was immortal, and passed through a number of migrations, from one body to another, until at the last the long series of purificatory ordeals was passed, and the ransomed soul found blessedness with the gods. But though all this could be paralleled among the Buddhists, there was one very characteristic difference. The eventual state, called Nirvâna, left no room for the differences of one individual soul and another. It was a state of acquiescence and repose, in which the Universal reigned and the Particular ceased to exist. But the Greek, with his instinct for individuality, could hardly accept such a final state of blessedness, in which all personal elements were absorbed into the One. To him the future Elysium was constituted by happy souls retaining their individuality, each enjoying that blessedness of culture or refinement which was appropriate to their nature as well as due to their faith.

Well, this was the religion which many of the poets and prophets taught in Greece, and which, above all, Plato expounded in his fashion in works like the *Phædo* and the later books of the *Republic*. There was, doubtless, a good deal of humbug about some of these Orphic mystics, and Plato reprobates the fantastic rites of the Orphic priests. Neverthe-

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less, in the land which we are inclined to contrast with that of the Hebrews, on the ground that our religious elements come from a Semitic and not from an Aryan source, we yet find most of the ideas which have played their part in all religions all over the world. The soul is divine. It is that part of the Godhead which endures in us. We have all sinned, and we must purify ourselves from the taint of hereditary sin as best we may by religious rites. But the soul is immortal, and its future destiny is determined by the character of the life or lives which a man lives on this earth. Of course, the Orphic Brotherhood occupied to a large extent the place of Dissenters or Independents; but their doctrine attracted the attention of the most profound thinkers of Greece; while Aristotle himself, who was so little of a mystic in most of his theories, leaves it on record that the great duty of man in this world is, so far as possible, to put on immortality—ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν.

The idea of inevitable expiation for sin recurs again and again in the ancient Greek philosophers. One of them even proclaimed that life itself was a sin for which men must pay ransom. In a gloomy mood I tried to put the idea into verse:—

## RANSOM

*How shall we pay the debt we owe  
To the God who ordains the tribute just?  
How can the creatures that are but dust  
Give of their fulness, or out of their woe,  
To the Primal Fate who arranges it so,  
Not as we will it, but as we must?*

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*Ah, there are gifts that all can bring,  
Tributes and offerings, great or small,  
A widow's mite from the humble thrall,  
Or a circlet of gold from the brow of a king :  
'Tis a poem we write, or a song that we sing,  
A flower we prize, or a tear we let fall.*

*How will you pay it, O lover sad ?  
With passionate hope and fancies sweet,  
And joy and fear and memories fleet—  
You shall pay with that moment, divinely mad,  
When all the world—such the joy you had  
In a white maid's lips—lay prone at your feet !*

*How will you pay it, O golden girl ?  
With roses and lilies in breast or hair,  
And the laughing Cupids embosomed there  
Where the gold burns bright in the glossiest curl—  
Yea, pay it with diamond, emerald, pearl,  
With the heart's first sigh and the soul's last prayer !*

*How shall he pay it, old and grey,  
Whose feet just skirt an open grave ?  
Little enough has he managed to save  
From the dolorous toil of every day—  
Little enough ! He can but repay  
His life, his life, to the God who gave.*

Oh, my Golden Girl, may the jealous gods  
spare you your ransom and take, if need be,  
from me a double share!



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## III

April 24th.

I WONDER whether you will be able to keep up your interest in the Stage in the wilds, whither I follow you in spirit. I think I shall send you a book which I chanced upon a few days ago. It is with a curious sense of irritation that I realise we might have read and discussed it together: for it is several months old. It will interest you, though it will not teach you much.

*The English Stage of To-day* is by one Borsa, an Italian. I think that to read a foreign estimate of English work is the nearest approach which we can get to the judgment of posterity, though this dictum is subject to many qualifications, because of the inherent difficulty involved in different racial feelings, sympathies, and prejudices. When Signor Borsa writes about the English stage of to-day he does it, inevitably, from the standpoint of the Latin race. Of course, the Latin form of art long dominated the stage, until it was discovered that the Northern races also had a drama of their own, a drama essentially different from that which had appealed to the nations of Southern Europe. Shakespeare, for instance, availing himself of all the rich intellectual glow of the Renaissance, constructed a drama which, though the Latin races often profess to admire, they are yet curiously unable to understand. And it seems to me that a similar thing happened in our own day in reference to the drama of Henrik Ibsen. Here was a Northern genius who had to be accepted by Europe because his personality

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and his influence were so strong that they could no longer be gainsaid. But how much of the Scandinavian dramatist did Paris, Rome, Madrid comprehend or appreciate? Certainly not so much as either Berlin or London, for the obvious reason that Ibsen's characteristic genius possesses elements, the primary appeal of which is not to the South, but to the North. Borsa writes as a cultivated, intellectual, sympathetic critic; but one can easily discover on which side his predilections lie. His book is very interesting, but, as I have said, it does not tell us a great deal. He is not a profound critic, but an impressionist, desiring to record the various opinions which he has formed in visits to England, and giving us a series of chapters, bright, entertaining, agreeable, partaking rather of the nature of causerie than analysis. It is not quite easy to disentangle from his pages any consistent standpoint or any permanent principles of art criticism.

Borsa begins by falling foul of the English public. Every intelligent foreigner does the same, for it takes a long time to understand the English public, and first impressions in this case are certainly not the best or the most enduring. I always notice that the first thing which strikes a foreign observer is that our English public is wholly devoid of any artistic impulses or instincts, and he proclaims the fact, as Borsa does, with every variety of pitying or scornful phrase, repeating, for all practical purposes, the familiar judgment that the English are a nation of shopkeepers. If our drama is bad, it is not so much the fault of the writers, or even the fault of the theatrical managers—restaurateurs, as Borsa is fond of calling them—but of the public which crowds the theatre, and which insists on having plays adapted to its tastes—idiotic plays, over which the ground-

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lings can laugh and make merry, vacuous exhibitions of dancing or tomfoolery, such as might appeal to those who had dined not wisely but too well. We have heard all this kind of thing over and over again in every variety of strident key, and being a nation which is rather amused than otherwise when people call us names, we take it in good part, and indeed sometimes join in the cry of self-depreciation. A few years ago the English race was declared to be the most unmusical race in Europe, and yet it is a strange thing how the best musicians and the best musical artists find in our metropolis the final and permanent seal to be set on their fame. It is quite false now to say that the English are an unmusical race, and slowly foreign critics have become aware of the fact.

The fact is that there are curious strains in our composite English nature. We derive something from our Norse and Saxon ancestors—a strain of mysticism, as well as an innate love of adventure. Even Puritanism has left its marks upon us, for in England more than elsewhere a didactic piece of work, a serious bit of preachment, often gets an immediate response. Besides, as we know, there are very different theatrical circles in England. When a foreigner comes here he is apt to think that the type which he meets in seeing musical comedy or at the music-hall represents the English public. Or perhaps he supposes that the singular incuriousness which the English upper classes betray towards dramatic work is representative of the nation as a whole. But it is not so. You have only to ask the theatrical managers, and you find that all those who produce works of any seriousness whatsoever are aware that they are not indebted for their success to "society" people at all, but to that vast and heterogeneous population which streams into London by train



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and tram and 'bus from the suburbs—intelligent people, artistic people, with a genuine interest in the drama; a little deficient in education, no doubt, a little inclined to run their heads against brick walls, but full of earnestness and enthusiasm. They have not always got the instinct to distinguish between good work and bad, but they are serious in all conscience. They are genuinely interested.

The main part of Borsa's work—or, at all events, the part which strikes me most—is his diagnosis of the English stage of to-day and his wholesome condemnation of its trivial and conventional character. But when we try to discover what Borsa himself wants, it is not altogether easy to attain to any very definite conclusion. Here is his first statement. He wants a "refined, intellectual, artistic stage," "with a background of ideas and an atmosphere of poetry," a stage which would aim at "providing the powerful and complex æsthetic pleasures of a work of art." Well, I should have thought that the Stage Society had precisely this aim, and that the Vedrenne-Barker management was distinctly inspired by a similar ideal. It might also be supposed that Shaw would be an especial favourite of our Italian author, mainly on the ground of the profusion of ideas which he suggests to an attentive, if slightly bewildered, English public. It is therefore somewhat surprising to find Borsa saying of the Stage Society that it "makes a practice of giving the preference in its repertory to works of a serious, symbolical, philosophical, and social character." We look, naturally, for his blessing, but there is nothing of the sort. He goes on: "This is an antidote which may prove efficacious for a time, but woe to those who abuse it! The society would thereby run the risk of becoming atrophied and sinking to the level of a monotonous and morbid school



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of stage sociology, alienating the goodwill of the public and losing sight of the crowning objects of Art, as well as of the Stage." You would have expected that Shaw would be put upon a pinnacle. But no. Borsa is very much afraid that the influence of Shaw will be exceedingly pernicious. What is the matter with Shaw?

My pen seems to have a grudge against his name, for it invariably breaks down either through scorn or excess of reverence. Perhaps it mistakes him for Shaw the Life Guardsman, "the Life Guardsman spoilt by writing dramas," as Carlyle said of Tennyson in another connection. Cheer up, my stylo! all great things live not by their matter but by their stylo, especially nowadays. Forgive so reckless and so bad a pun, but if you used a fountain pen you would know to what wild lengths it can drive you! Well, what is the matter with Shaw?

He has too many ideas—the very thing, by the way, which Borsa recommended to us in an earlier passage. In Shaw's brain "ideas and fragments of ideas dance and whirl like sparks from red-hot iron when it is beaten on the anvil. The flow is continuous, exhausting, even tedious." Or again: "Shaw is no poet. He who but a short time since was his greatest living rival, Henrik Ibsen, was great because, beyond all other reasons, he was a poet. But where in all the works of Shaw will you find one single throb of poetry? In him sentiment is dumb, and it is only the brain that speaks."

What, then, precisely, does Borsa want? He dislikes our tendency to sentiment and romance, and yet he criticises Shaw because he has no sentiment

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and no romance. He wants a background of ideas, and yet he objects to the Stage Society because it produces serious works with ideas. What he does not altogether understand is that the English public likes seriousness. He seems to think that we are either vacuous or frivolous, or both. Nothing quite so serious as the British public was ever invented in world-history. The main reason why Brieux and Shaw appeal is because they are preachers.

There are other *obiter dicta* of Borsa, which are not quite lucidly explained, and which will amuse you. He proclaims himself a realist—an ambiguous term, which apparently every writer uses in a sense entirely his own. One would suppose that Ibsen, Brieux, Gorky, Tolstoy, were all realists. But our Italian author solemnly warns us that we ought not to revel too much in the pleasures of such realism. On the other hand, Galsworthy is clearly a realist; and here Borsa is full of praise. "Galsworthy," he declares, "is a realist. Or, in other words, he possesses the temperament best calculated to produce good dramatic work." But of course this judgment was based only on Galsworthy's *Silver Box* which, indeed, was a realistic study of no little power. In many respects Shaw himself would be described as a realist, despite his occasional lapses into fantasy. But Borsa, although he praises the disciples, is sincerely afraid of the original apostle. Galsworthy is praised, Barker is praised, St. John Hankin is praised; but the man who set the example, the man who practically made the Stage Society, and certainly gave most of its reputation to the Court Theatre, is pointed at as a danger to the nascent English drama. Borsa may be right, but he goes an odd way about to prove his thesis. Sometimes he seems to wish us to encourage real social and psychological dramas; sometimes he

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turns round and says that we must beware of having too much philosophy. He preaches the virtue of realism as the foundation of dramatic work, and yet his realism must, apparently, include some romantic and even some sentimental elements. I wonder what is an ideal play, from Borsa's standpoint? Would it be one of Sudermann's works, for instance? And what would he think of Granville Barker's *Waste*? He does not altogether approve of Pinero; he has not many words of commendation for Sutro or Henry Arthur Jones, mainly on the ground that at a certain point in the development of their dramatic theme they allow either sentimentality or convention to overpower them. Yet, if we try to be intellectual, we are confronted with the dreadful example of George Bernard Shaw.

The truth is, of course, that every nation must develop the drama which is suitable to its instincts and predilections, and that it is not of the slightest avail for any Latin writer to attempt to impose upon us an ideal based upon the Latin conception. A much more accurate observer than Borsa, Augustin Filon, who knows the English public a great deal better than the Italian writer, produced a book on the English stage which still has its value; albeit that, as Borsa notes, he was much too optimistic, too eager to proclaim the rise of a real national drama. But I know you will find Borsa's work makes very good reading, because it is written in a vivacious style, and is full of that impressionism which is so popular with the present generation. I should, however, imagine that he only knew one side of the English nation, and that when he was over here he lived too much with a particular coterie, and accepted their views of the English stage as though they constituted the last word. Slowly and by degrees, as



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we both believe, the English drama will fashion for itself both form and contents, such as spring naturally and inevitably from the national characteristics. We cannot hurry the process: we cannot violently impose upon it an alien form, or force it to take up a series of subjects which have no wide appeal. At present the English stage suffers from a superfluity of doctors.

All this must seem very far away from you nowadays. I sometimes wonder whether you will have the patience to read it. Will not your quiet vitality have found so many new interests, that the old ones will seem like the snows of yesteryear? It is so different with me that I do not want to think so! For my sluggish and fugitive interest in things needs to be stirred by some quick sympathetic interest of yours. I scorn myself that it should be so, for, you see, you are the creative spark, and I, the mere tinder. We literary folk, God help us! like sometimes to think that we are original, while my "originality" is only a sort of harmless sheet lightning, the pale reflex and photograph of your vivid and forked flame. And you grow tired rather easily, do you not, dearest lady? As I write to you I almost feel you are. There, your quick magnetic sympathy stirs me. I shall, I fear, acquire the habit of skimming the cream of my impressions for you and giving the public only the whey. Don't let me. Shall I hear from you soon, I wonder?

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## TO ROSEMARY WHO IS VERY FAIR

*Lily, that art called a Rose,  
Rose that wert born a lily,—  
Blood-red when summer glows,  
Dead-white when winter blows,  
Blush rose or pale blanch-lily,  
You must I call willy-nilly  
Rose.*

*Happier than is the rose  
Squandering its fragrance fleet,  
Dying when fair summer goes—  
Thy name in memory sweet,  
Rosemary, the fadeless rose,  
Still "for remembrance" grows—  
Rose.*

### IV

TAORMINA, *May 4th.*

You will be surprised to see that I have forsaken England. But you, who know how the sun calls me, will not wonder greatly at my eager response to the possibility of a visit to Sicily. And for a bit I had to get away from the "decent ordered tasks of every day." You do not know me in my mood of revolt. I must send you that sonnet too, one day. Meanwhile, I am at the moment curiously content, although the weather is bitterly disappointing.

Strange tricks are sometimes played on innocent travellers by the vagaries of the seasons, the fickleness



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of the hours. I came here—as probably did the majority of my fellow-travellers—to be warm, to see the great, large, beneficent sunshine, to watch the colours of the Mediterranean, which have all the richness and the changing hues to be found on a peacock's neck. Well, there is no warmth and only occasional sunshine, while the sea, which turns to so wonderful an ultramarine blue under the blessing of Apollo, now is as grey as a Carmelite monk, as grey as the Northern Sea, as grey as the world itself has become “since the pale Galilean conquered.” And they tell us that it was warm and summerlike in February and the beginning of March. Or else, for they are a contented and philosophic folk, they bid us remember that the land and the people want rain, while we, the immigrant population of travellers, are only a small and insignificant section, whose particular desires must give way to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Yet in Taormina, at all events, the bad, cold weather makes them a little anxious. For here is a place—a wonderful little hamlet perched on a hill with a glorious single street, full of life and colour, with dark-skinned inhabitants munching blood-oranges, and sleepy-eyed oxen chewing the cud of bovine reflection—which is rapidly being made, or perhaps I should say unmade, by the English and American tourist. It used to be a microcosm of Sicily. It is now an outlying spur of that great denaturalised Europe which our countrymen and our Transatlantic cousins have converted to their own uses and pleasures, filling it with overgrown hotels and exaggerated expenses and inordinately rapacious natives. The Italians are born beggars. The Sicilians have learnt to better the example.

What does it matter? What does anything matter, if only the sun shines, and Trinacria, the

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beautiful, the beloved, with all her long catalogue of lovers—poets, philosophers, tyrants, Greeks, Phœnicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Saracens—welcomes you with her many-dimpled smile! Here years make no difference, and one can shut one's eyes and dream oneself into antique times. You look up and there is Ætna, for the nonce putting aside her veils and forgetting to be coy. That first sight of Ætna, particularly in this season of clouds and rain, is one of the unforgettable incidents of your day. The long ridges leading to the summit, the beautiful snow cap, or rather snow mantle, surrounding her shoulders, the soft, fleecy vapour which issues from her crater, the calmness, the dignity, the peace of the loftiest volcano in Europe—these are the things which on a still morning of blue sky and radiant sea make you shiver with a new strange joy. But I must not call Ætna on the scene, as though she were honoured, like ships and countries, by being represented in feminine guise. She is no woman, even though she has her shy fits or only half reveals herself to the impatient gaze of the worshippers. No, Mongibello (as the Sicilians name it) is obviously masculine. He is a jolly, rough, tempestuous sort of fellow, a great overgrown Dionysiac reveller, a giant with a hoarse laugh and tremendous jaws. He is Enceladus or Typhœus struggling to get out of prison. He is Vulcan's stithy. He is Empedocles' workshop and doom. Above all, he is pathetic, cumbrous, untidy old Polyphemus, with his single eye looking out over the sea, and now and again cracking rough jokes with his fellow-Cyclopes, each sitting on his own hill and watching his own sheep. Poor, unhappy, misshapen monster! Whenever he looked over the sea and saw something that interested him, it was sure to do him harm. Now it was the saucy charm of Galatea, and now it was the black

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ship of Odysseus. And always it seems his fate to be hurling rocks into the sea, and when the Cyclopes ask him what the matter is that he howls so lamentably, he moans out his foolish plaint that "No man" has hurt him!

I do not know when in his career the Galatea incident occurred, but it must have been a painful experience. He sees a divine form, a beautiful girl, bathing in the sea and then drying her yellow locks in the sun as she sits on the rocks. Why should he not love her? How could any one help loving her, even though he may happen to be boorish and shaggy-chested, with only a single eye? Vision may be as intense, though concentrated in a single orb; love may be as bitter-sweet, even if the patient victim thereof be only an ugly, ponderous thing with a harsh voice. Bottom could love Titania, why not Polyphemus Galatea? And then to find that Galatea would have none of him! And then, by deep searching, by wily ruses and indefatigable spying, to find out the cause! *Cherchez l'homme*, O Polyphemus! Watch what it is that makes the quick blush come and go upon her cheeks, the cheeks which remain so cold and pale when you are talking to her! Do you spy him? There he is, the handsome young Acis, as handsome as Hermes or Adonis or the beardless Apollo, the man who can make Galatea's pulses beat and her face shine with sudden sweet glory. There stands the embodied reason why the lady will have nothing to say to you, why she turns from you so disdainfully, why she laughs at your awkward passion. But you can kill him, you say, and her too, if you have a mind to. You can pelt down the rocks upon the cave where they sit so amorously entwined, and bury them in the ruins of their rocky arbour. Have a care, have a care, Polyphemus. For the gods are



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always on the side of young lovers, and know how to protect their darlings. There, what did I tell you? There is Galatea, now veritably a sea-nymph, safe from your anger; and Acis—Acis has become a tumbling, bright, sparkling little stream whose name is preserved in several little towns and villages on the coast-line, and especially in Aci-reale, which is proud to keep his memory alive. Poor Polyphemus! It is not wise for an ugly giant to woo a pretty maid, and there is no imaginable fool quite so foolish as an amorous old man who forgets the curse of his scanty hair and his many years.

To say nothing of that desperate venture with Odysseus. There, at all events, Polyphemus, you might well think that you had your enemies at a disadvantage, when the Greek sailors were all shut up in your cave and you could at your leisure kill and eat, as the daintiest of morsels, the one that looked the plumpest and the best-favoured. Of course, you did not know whom you were dealing with, when you offered such sorry entertainment to that arch-representative of Levantine cleverness, Odysseus, the man of many wiles. His black ship had been descried creeping up along the eastern coast of Sicily, hugging the shore by the places we now know as Syracuse, and M. Tauro, and Catania. Perhaps it was at Catania that the Greek wanderers beached their ships, or still nearer to Ætna, at Aci-reale. Anyhow, they were in your power now, safely imprisoned with a rock so huge covering the doorway that not twenty of them could have moved it an inch, however lustily they tried. There was hoarse Cyclopean laughter when you tasted their wine, and so good and potent was the strange, unwonted liquor that you did not mark the slow, cunning smile lurking in the corners of Odysseus'



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mouth, and peeping from the subtle, deep-set eyes. It was not a pleasant awakening that you had from that drunken slumber, when the long stake with its hardened point was driven so fiercely into your forehead, murdering all the life of your single eye! Once more, poor Polyphemus, your sufferings draw our pity. It looked any odds on the giant in his war with the Greeks. But there was one point in your enemies' favour which you could know nothing of. You had not made acquaintance with the shrewdest, longest-headed, most audacious specimen of the "Græculus esuriens" known to history. It was your misfortune to be always pitted against cleverer people than yourself. But you never ran up against such nimble versatility, such slippery "slimness," as you were unlucky enough to meet on that occasion. And there you lie prone on your back, maimed, sightless, conquered, beneath the Ætnean mass, and sometimes when you move uneasily in your sleep, the earthquakes and your groans translate themselves into deep reverberating thunder, while Ætna, waking for a moment from its peaceful calm, sends some burning lava down its sides to show that it is still alive.

Only the other day an earthquake was felt in this region where everything testifies to latent volcanic energy. There used to be great woods on the slopes of Mongibello. Now, because the volcanic soil is so fertile, men have pushed their cultivation and build their little huts far up the sides, daring once more as they have always dared, ever keeping at the back of their minds the dread of imminent ruin. As a matter of fact, the lower slopes of Ætna are among the most densely populated agricultural districts in the world. In the triangular area of which the three corners are formed by Catania, Nicolosi, and Aci-reale, there are as many as 3500 per square mile. And if Ætna

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suddenly took it into its head to become active? Well, let us live for the present and not worry ourselves about what may never occur. There will be an eruption sometime; there must be an eruption, because these things happen on an average every nine years. But we must trust to the good God and to the Blessed Virgin and the most holy Saints to save us, as they have saved our fathers before us. Have you heard what happened in 1886? It is a pretty story, showing how faith can not only move mountains but avert the streams of lava that pour out of the mountains. It was in May when the eruption began, and on the 19th of that month a new crater was formed, out of which molten stone and ashes were hurled, with crashes of deafening thunder, only four and a quarter miles above the little town or hamlet of Nicolosi. You can imagine what the inhabitants of Nicolosi felt as they saw molten lava pouring down in their direction at the rate of about 180 feet an hour. But they had faith in Heaven, and did not sit still with folded hands. The pictures of the blessed Saints were taken from the churches and carried in procession, with many supplicatory prayers, upward for a mile to the little building called the Altarelli, which is our protecting shrine. The Bishop of Catania, a brave and pious man, with all proper solemnity displayed the veil of St. Agatha. On May 27 the lava streams reached the eminence on which the Altarelli stands. And then? Ah, then was the miracle! The streams stopped, divided their course, and the Altarelli was spared. But Nicolosi was not yet safe. Another stream on the east of the Monte Rossi seemed to be flowing straight for the unlucky town. Once more there were prayers and entreaties addressed to Heaven, and once more the hand of God stayed the ruin. Just 370 yards from

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the first houses, on June 3, the lava stopped flowing; the eruption was over. That, messieurs, is what faith can do when the true believers turn their hearts to repentance and offer their humble petitions to the throne of grace. Only some twenty years ago, in an age which is called sceptical! "Tantum religio potuit *vetitare* malorum!"

## V

SYRACUSE, *May 12th.*

### IDEALISM

*Do you remember, love, when once I dreamed,  
In a rose sunset by a rosy sea,  
While o'er our heads the changing colours gleamed,—  
Of all that human life, well lived, might be?*

*You laughed. I think I hear your laughter rend  
The sweet illusion of a future age:  
It was not thus, you said, that "that great end,"  
Which we all strive for, "dawns on history's page!"*

*No, "life is earnest, life is real," you  
Had proved it so by many a dreary act;  
And dreams were valueless, and only true  
"Dry, hard, experimental, actual fact."*

*Dear, fond, prosaic babbler! Yet you knew  
The thousand unrehearsed effects of morn  
In twilight grey the inimitable hue,  
In midnight black the mystery forlorn.*



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*You saw the golden glory of the flower,  
You saw the pageantry of heath and tree ;  
What are they ? Visions of a dreaming hour,  
Brain pictures, deftly wrought by you and me.*

*Who paints the rosy tints of sky and sea ?  
Whose is the rapture that the poet dreams ?  
What is the true, save what we think to be ?  
What is the real, other than what seems ?*

And since only what "seems" matters, keep your mind and imagination well in hand, dear friend. I am moved to send you these verses I wrote a few days ago, although I have not, as yet, had your permission to sentimentalise in verse.

Dear lady, why so hard? You know there is such a thing as the beautiful whether we always see it or no. Sometimes we spoil our appreciation by dulness, such as belongs to me; or by angry apprehension of what the cult of the beautiful leads us to, as I think is the case with you. If pity is akin to love, perhaps joy is not far removed from passion, and you are afraid of it therefore,—you who have bound yourself round with such stern restraints. I wonder if I am misunderstanding your mood; but whether I do or no I still repeat my question, Why so hard? When I get bitter I know it is because the burnt child dreads the fire. But you have never singed your wings, my friend. I only wish you had!

Will you want to hear of my adventures or impressions? Impressions, I am certain.

Syracuse, like old Nestor, "a mine of memories," is a city that has woefully declined from its pristine



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magnificence. Bountifully endowed by Nature with a fine harbour and a coast-line so beautiful that its glory of white limestone, fringed by an ultramarine sea, seems like some radiant vision of deathless Hellas, it is now but a tithe of its ancient self—a melancholy fragile, evanescent relic of a wonderful past. “Your land is left unto you desolate”—so might a Hebrew prophet denounce its present insignificance, as he surveyed the long lines of ruined sites on Achradina and Neapolis, and beheld the only city that exists cooped up in the narrow island of Ortygia. How many cities or suburbs did its walls once contain? There were Ortygia, the inner city, a white pearl set in a turquoise sea, and the wonderful series of terraces and porticoes and market-places which so moved Cicero's admiration in his oration against the rapacious proconsul Verres, rising tier above tier up the northern and north-western slopes; Achradina lay on the extreme east; then came Tyche and Epipolæ on the west; and the densely populated Neapolis and the quarter dedicated to Apollo Temenites lying immediately north of the Great Harbour. Syracuse was not only the capital town of Sicily, and by far the most famous in the island, but under some of its tyrants—Gelon, Hiero, Dionysius—it exercised sway even over the cities of Magna Græcia, and threw out its own colonies in Acræ, Casmenæ, Henna, and Camarina. It was a proud and fierce Dorian State, originally founded by Corinthians in the eighth century B.C., and always oscillating between its democratic and its oligarchic rule. When matters were peaceful, and no foreign enemy was hovering on the seascape, the people claimed and maintained their rights. But if Phœnicians or Carthaginians or Romans brought their fearful menace on a city so full of Greek treasure, Dêmos put itself under the protection

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of a single ruler, who became a tyrant, whether beneficent or despotic chance or circumstance might decide. Some of the tyrants bore hateful names—Thrasybulus, Dion, Agathocles; some were as refined and literary in their tastes as the great Italian despots. Think of the galaxy of Greek authors who visited Syracuse as honoured guests. Under Hiero I. came Æschylus, Pindar, Simonides, Bacchylides; Plato seems to have honoured Dionysius II., while a hundred years later Syracuse gave birth not only to the wonderful mathematician and engineer, Archimedes (who for so long baffled the Roman invader), but to the silver-tongued Theocritus, in whom the Greek muse had one of the latest of her incarnations—the father and inventor of bucolic poetry. Even to those who have only a cursory acquaintance with this famous Greek colony, it is obvious that Timoleon is a favourite hero. The reason is plain. Timoleon in the fourth century B.C. was the enemy of tyrants, and the second founder (with fresh colonists from Greece) of the Syracusan Republic.

I sit overlooking Ortygia, jutting out with its crowded buildings, a diminished city, sole heritage of a mighty name; I hear the tinkling of innumerable goats driven out to pasture; perhaps from the heights above you come some echoes of that oaten pipe whereon Thyrsis and Corydon, Daphnis, and Menalcas played such unforgettable music; and if I am lucky, the vast pile of Ætna rises, a veritable dream-mountain, fleecy, romantic, impossible, far away on the northern horizon. But when my eyes rest on the Great Harbour or on the crags of Epipolæ, something clutches at my heart-strings, and my pulses beat with the tumultuous memory of a great tragedy. For here was the scene of that awful catastrophe in which the pride and glory of Athens went down to a

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nameless and unhonoured grave, and the most cultivated people of the world, on whose lips flowered the charm of Euripides, the dignity of Æschylus, and the rhythmic splendour of Homeric verse, were hurled into foul stone-quarries to work out their wretched fate as slaves and captives of the victorious Syracusans. "Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni," and in this matter we, to whom Thucydides has appealed, are all Catos. There can be no doubt on which side our sympathies lie. We are quite aware that Athens came in the vain-glory of her heart to conquer all Sicily, despite the grave warnings of Pericles that she should eschew foreign enterprise so long as the Peloponnesian War lay on her hands. We know how little the inhabitants of that violet-crowned city realised what such an expedition meant—how difficult it was to fight from so far distant a base, how unlikely it was that much help could come from Sicilian towns, Dorian as most of them were, and sympathetic rather with Sparta and Corinth than with the Ionic invaders. Yet the audacity was so splendid, the prize was so dazzling, the victory was so nearly won! When the Athenians had finished their wall of circumvallation from the heights across the plain to the harbour, when Plemmyrium was in their hands and their fleet blockaded the town from the sea—then, if it had not been for that fatal gap in their lines from Fort Labdalum on the northern heights to Trogilus, the little interval of uncompleted wall through which Gylippus forced his way into the beleagured city, Athens would have held Syracuse at her mercy, and the triumph would have been hers. It was not to be, and some Atê must have blinded Nikias' eyes, and made him dilatory and supine. Poor Nikias! Perhaps we blame him too much, as we read the sombre eloquence of Grote's masterly



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

There lies before me the blue expanse of the harbour, and, as I watch, I can almost repeople the busy scene. In answer to Nikias' appeal for assistance, the second fleet of Athens, under the command of Demosthenes, has crossed the sea, swung past Catania, and is now—to the astonishment and consternation of Syracuse—making its way into the bay. They make a brave show, these stately Athenian triremes, as in perfect trim, every oarsman bending to his task in obedience to the *keleustês* (the man who gave them the time), they proudly row in past Plemmyrium and Ortygia, as though the whole place belonged to them. Think what it must have meant to the soldiers of Nikias to see their comrades coming to their succour! Consider what gloomy thoughts must have crossed the mind of Gylippus as he observed this fresh evidence of the indomitable spirit of Athens! But Demosthenes, a competent and spirited commander, was under no illusions, as soon as he had time to grasp the situation of affairs. Things had



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

Alas, alas! who shall tell of those dreadful battle scenes which were enacted on the blue expanse of the harbour itself? It was a sea-fight now, or rather a series of sea-fights. For there was no land to fight for, save the narrow strip which served the Athenians

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as a camp. All their hopes rested on their fleet, which was numerically superior to anything which the Syracusans could send against them, but from special circumstances had by no means the incontestable mastery which ought to belong to a sea-bred race. Half of their ships had become unseaworthy, because there had been no chance of pulling them ashore and refitting them, and, worst of all, there was no room in the harbour for those skilful evolutions in which Ionian mariners excelled. Eurymedon tried one of the accustomed manœuvres in one of the fights which followed, and promptly ran ashore and was disabled. The Athenians wanted sea-room, and it was that which the comparatively narrow limits of the harbour denied. In the final battle there were 194 ships of war engaged, each of them manned with some 200 men, and as you look down on the harbour from Achradina you see that its circuit is not more than five miles—a small area for evolution, and better adapted for a straightforward, hard-hitting, prow to prow contest, such as that which actually ensued. **And** this is a game which uncultivated force can play, and in which nautical art and skill are manifestly inferior. But think what a wonderful sight this final battle must have been for those on the shore! The banks of Ortygia were lined with spectators, and all up the slopes of Achradina and Neapolis were ranged the eager friends of the Syracusan fleet, while only the narrow frontage of the camp yielded sympathetic sightseers for Athens. In the clear Sicilian air every incident could be marked, every cry could be heard, every pæan of victory echoed by a hundred throats, every wail of despair answered by sobs of anguish on the shore. Was there ever a more picturesque spectacle before or since? Or, for the Athenians at all events, an issue more charged with

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tragedy? For the god of battles had decided that Syracuse should triumph, and that the star of Athens should go down in blackest night. Oh, the pity o' it, the pity o' it, Iago! And the appalling scenes which followed—the attempted retreat of the Athenians by land, the vain efforts, the relentless pursuit, the surrender of Nikias following on the disaster that had already overtaken Demosthenes! And then the shameful decree which put the two Athenian Generals to death as though they had been common malefactors! And the miserable death-in-life of the prisoners in the Latomiæ, save when one or two gained release by their ability to sing Euripides' songs in a strange land, softening their captors' hard hearts by the deathless story of Alkestis dying for her husband Admêtus!

To-day the sky is blue; the sea is bluer still. The sun shines with a glory denied to us dwellers in a northern clime. The cicadas are chirping, the bees are humming, the lizards sun themselves on the wall. Afar off some countryman of Theocritus is playing on the pipe:—

*"Ἀρχετὲ βωκολικᾶς, Μῶσαι φίλαι, ἄρχετ' αἰοιδᾶς.*

But the passion of that ancient tragedy drags at the heart, and fills the eyes with tears.



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## VI

TAORMINA, *May 18th.*

ÆTNA has been in eruption, and it is odd to see how the general attitude of the people here is changed. A hasty visit from the ubiquitous German Emperor raised their spirits, as though the final seal had been set on the fame and popularity of their little town. But Ætna has depressed them. The signs of renewed activity in the great sleepy mountain which keeps watch over the whole eastern littoral of Sicily has given a sudden and unpleasant reminder how precarious is the people's tenure of prosperity, what a thin line divides smiling and assured happiness from blackened valleys and the wholesale ruin of lava streams. Not that this particular eruption seems likely to be very serious or destructive. It affords a magnificent spectacle to the German, American, and English visitors, who appear to be never tired of watching the great masses of smoke pouring from a newly-opened crater, and the sudden glow of ruddy light which now and again irradiates the dun-coloured and all-enveloping clouds. To the visitor, of course, an eruption is merely an interesting spectacle, especially if he is at the safe distance of Taormina. But the people who live on the produce of the vine-slopes which crowd all the lower basis of Ætna, from Catania and Aci-reale, are at once sober and saddened. They dread the blind fury of the imprisoned giant, and picture to themselves the ruinous loss of their means of livelihood. And therefore they go about with a certain awe upon their faces, and turn with renewed devotion to their altars and their religious services.



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She is wonderful, Ætna. You see I have gone back to my belief in her femininity. She is far too complex and elusive to claim kinship with my sex. But she is Titanic, a daughter of the gods. Lo! when she lies peaceful and passionless under the calm of the Mediterranean sky, with that strange suggestion of dormant power which could, an it would, take such tremendous shape, she seems more like the mother of gods, the embodiment of Fate herself.

## FATE

*High in the spaces of sky  
Reigns inaccessible Fate :  
Yields she to prayer or to cry ?  
Answers she early or late ?*

*Change and rebirth and decay,  
Dawning and darkness and light—  
Creatures they are of a day  
Lost in a pitiless night.*

*Men are like children who play  
Unknown by an unknown sea ;  
Centuries vanish away ;  
She waits—the eternal She.*

*Nay, but the gods are afraid  
Of the hoary mother's nod :  
They are the things that are made—  
She the original god.*

*They have seen dynasties fall  
In ruin of what has been ;  
Her no upheavals appal,  
Silent, unmoved, and serene.*

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*Silent, unmoved, and serene  
Reigns in a world uncreate,  
Eldest of gods and their Queen,  
Featureless, passionless Fate.*

Then the mood changes, and nothing could be less passionless than the wonderful mountain. She has become capricious, feminine, infinitely untrustworthy. From day to day we speculate on her possible moods. But, like a beautiful woman, she is always adorable, even in her tantrums, which may well turn to uncontrolled passion. And we gaze on, fascinated, spell-bound.

It is a strange thing that Homer has no reference to Ætna, although apparently he was well acquainted with all this coast-line. Theocritus has many allusions, always of a happy and festive character, as if he had no personal experience of the mountain in wrath, but only of her summer and benevolent aspect. Thyrsis, who sings the woes of Daphnis, is described as the man from Ætna, who learnt his tuneful songs on the slopes. Ætna is one of the haunts of the Muses, a sort of watch-tower, whence they could survey the land. And Polyphemus, when he is offering to Galatea all his rustic treasures if only she would come to him and be his love, expressly mentions the water from Ætna—"the cool water which wooded Ætna sends forth for me, a divine drink, out of white snow." There is, in truth, little enough in Theocritus of harsh winter or Nature in an unfriendly mood; as a rule he expresses for us in a thousand ways Nature at her best and kindest,—a landscape irradiated by sunshine, a blue sky, a laughing sea. And that is why Theocritus is the best of all guide-books for us visitors from a northern

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land to what seems a garden of perpetual spring. We understand the subtle colour harmony between the cool, grey olive boughs and the blue sea better when we have read his divine idylls. His pictures (the very word "idyll," you know, means a picture) are precisely those on which our eyes are constantly resting. We see the tall stone-pine under which the shepherds sing and wait for the cones with their sweet fruit to fall into their laps. We see the huge fig trees leaning upon the cottage walls, and the cherry trees and the apricots with their white wealth of spring blossoms. And there is so much more that we recognise at once—the patches of ilex and arbutus on the hills, cytissus (which the goats love) and rosemary nearer the shore, clematis and vine-tendrils, mosses and ferns, myrtle and tamarisk, and even the blue violets on the ground. Above all, perhaps, we hear the sounds which Theocritus heard—the bleating flocks, the murmuring bees, the whispering pines, the chirping cicadas, the soft plash of the waves on the shore.

But Theocritus is not only the singer of the country. Sometimes he gives us the life of the dwellers in towns. It was at Taormina, while we were watching the eruption, that I saw Simætha. You remember Simætha in the second idyll, who is mad with grief because her lover comes to her no more? They pointed out to me a striking woman in the crowd, tall and thin, with masses of black hair and piercing eyes. Her skin was several shades darker than is the wont with her country-women, for, indeed, she had obvious signs of African blood in her veins, derived from some not very remote ancestor. In this island, over the surface of which so many nationalities have passed, the Saracens have left their traces, as the Phœnicians and Carthaginians did before

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them, and my particular Simætha drew her descent, doubtless, from some dark-skinned father or mother who came over the sea from the south. As I saw her passing through the crowd she seemed over-weighted with the need of worship and supplication—a very religious woman, you would say, very eager in her instant prayers to Heaven to avert the calamity of the eruption. But I notice that she keeps a little apart from others, and that others instinctively avoid her. When I asked who she was, they told me that she came from Syracuse, and they were evidently anxious to disown any particular acquaintance with her. Indeed, I saw some furtively make the sign of the cross as she passed, for she bore an unfortunate reputation as a witch, or, at all events, as the possessor of an evil eye. And that is why I call her Simætha, because she seemed to me to represent all that that haughty, vengeful woman stood for in Theocritus' idyll. It is a strange picture which the bucolic singer draws for us, one very unlike those smiling landscapes of which he is so prodigal in his verse. The scene is laid at Syracuse, in the dead of night, and the moon is shining brightly over the waters of the harbour. Simætha, a proud Syracusan lady who has been deserted by her lover, determines to perform an incantation in the stillness of the midnight hour, so that she may bring, by the force of her magic arts, her lover back again into her arms. Simætha does not love as the colder northern maidens do. She is one consuming fire of passion. Love has sucked her life-blood like a leech; her skin is parched with the fever of her longing; her eyes are wild with the madness of those who love not wisely but too well. We see her standing at the magic wheel, turning it round and round before the fire which burns on the hearth, and repeating from time to time the monoto-



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nous invocation, " Magic wheel, draw thou that man to my house! " If she cannot charm him back again, she will kill him, for she knows of poisons. If the incantations fail, some deadly drug shall do its work, and avenge her of the insult done to her proud heart. Her maid, Thestylis, has an anxious time of it, for Simætha scolds her with haughty words at any sign of remissness, and urges her with vehement energy to keep on sprinkling the meal, which typifies the bones of the inconstant Delphis, the wax by which his heart is to be consumed, and the laurel bough, which symbolises his body. As the laurel leaves crackle in the flame and instantly disappear, so may the flesh of Delphis crackle and waste in the flame!

Then when Thestylis, the maid, has gone to smear an ointment on the door of Delphis, this Syracusan Medea, who asks for no sympathy, but broods over her loss with tiger-like ferocity, finds herself alone. What shall she do while her servant is away? How shall she occupy the interval until she knows whether her magic arts have been of any avail? She turns to the moon, whose silver radiance is spread over the water. The surface of the sea is calm; there is no breath of wind. All Nature is in repose. It is only her heart that is never still. It is only the mad human being who, while all the world sleeps, is tortured with the frenzy of desire. " Listen, dread queen," so she addresses the moon; " Listen and hear how my love arose." To the moon she will confide the history of her brief passion, saying how the young Delphis was brought to her home, and how she no sooner saw him than she loved. In her Syracusan home she knew the truth of the dead shepherd's words of might, " He never loved who loved not at first sight." Then she solaces her lonely spirit by repeating to herself the words that passed between her

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lover and herself at the first interview. She remembers his promises, and contrasts with them the base desertion that followed. And now it is twelve days since he last came to her, and she knows not where he may be. But of one thing she is sure, that wherever he is her arts shall find him, and her vengeance shall be fulfilled. "It is twelve days since I saw him, and I fear me that he has some other delight, and has forgotten Simætha. For the present I will compel him by love-charms, but if they should fail, I swear by the dread Fates that he shall knock at the door of Hades; for I have poisons, given to me by an Assyrian stranger, and I know how to use them in my need. Delphis shall know what it is to have played a Syracusan woman false." There is here, observe, no sign of relenting, no weak emotion, no sentimental rhapsody mingled with tears. All is as hard and cold as the moonlight outside. Her last words are addressed to the moon—"Adieu, dread queen! Thou to the ocean turn thy harnessed steeds. Adieu, all you stars that follow on the wheels of night! Ye can go on your way in peace. And I? I will bear my trouble. I will abide and suffer." The odd thing is that sometimes we are inclined to suppose that witchcraft is an invention of the Middle Ages. Yet here in Syracuse, at least two hundred years before the Christian era, we find all those magic rites and spells which we associate with the witches of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Shakespeare has some of the details which Theocritus gives us. Hecate is brought into *Macbeth*, and the "lizard's leg and owlet's wing," which help to make the magic broth, seem to come straight from Simætha's process of enchantment. For she, too, takes a lizard, in order to compound a deadly drink for the faithless Delphis. I do not know how much

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my latter-day Simætha had learnt from her ancestor, but I pity the man who, in her case, loves and rides away. She would not, I am sure, hesitate in her revenge.

Of course, Simætha is an exception, a personality bound to attract attention, or possibly to awaken aversion, whenever and wherever she is seen. The majority of the crowd who pass and repass endlessly through our one street belong to a very different type. There are many Gorgos and Praxinoes, delightful, gossipy women, who seem to have nothing to do but chatter and sit in the doorway of the shops. Gorgo, you will remember, came to see Praxinoe, in order to suggest a visit to the palace. The festival in honour of Adonis was to be celebrated with great pomp at Alexandria, and the two Syracusan women, whose broad Doric speech (something like the Somersetshire dialect in our country) caused so much astonishment, determined to set out with their maids to see the show. Their adventures on the way and in the palace form the most dramatic of Theocritus' idylls, the most humorous, the most racy of the soil. We see them threading their path, and the first thing that appals them is the magnitude of the crowd. "Good gods!" says Praxinoe, "what a crowd! How and when shall we be able to pass through? They are as numberless and measureless as ants. Sweetest Gorgo, what is to become of us? Here are the King's war-horses. My good man, do not trample on me. Take care of that chestnut horse. See how fiery he is! There—my fine summer veil has been torn in two. And my dress—oh, please, sir, will you kindly keep your foot off my dress?" So they prattle on incessantly. A stranger listens to them, and begs them to be quiet and not disfigure the Greek tongue by their broad vowels. Gorgo turns on him in fury,



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“ Mother Earth, where does this man come from? I should like to know what right he has to order us about? We are Syracusan women, Corinthians by descent, as also was Bellerophon. We speak Peloponnese, and I suppose there is no law against Dorians speaking Doric? ” It is all wonderfully animated and lifelike, and the scene can be reconstituted before us modern sightseers in the twentieth century. There, I am sure, is Gorgo, with her animated gestures, “ taking it out ” of some unfortunate man in the crowd, who was imprudent enough to jostle her ladyship. And Praxinoe, with her fine summer veil, sits close by, bringing railing accusations against her lord and master just as she did about two thousand years ago at Alexandria.

## VII

### HEREAFTER (I)

*I pray that when my soul in future age  
Sees once again the passing of the years,—  
If true should be the ancient tale one hears  
In Eastern lore or reads in Plato's page,  
That ever with new form and new visage  
The soul migrates to find fresh hopes and fears  
And pay to utmost farthing the arrears  
Of all Time's bitter never-ending wage—  
I pray that she may drink no more, no less,  
Of Lethe's waves of cold indifference  
Than such as may suffice to keep her true ;  
That she may wisdom keep and passion rue,  
And cherish dearly bought experience,  
And know Life's sorrow and its bitterness.*



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Does the idea of Metempsychosis appeal to you? How one's views of the Hereafter change according to one's mood!

## HEREAFTER (II)

*Each one will fashion Heaven as he may  
Of joy or laughter at his soul's behest—  
Or painless sleep, if painless sleep be best,  
In sweet fruition of God's holiday ;  
Nay, some have dreamt of love and war's array,  
Storm-driven battle, lances set in rest—  
White limbs, white arms, to beating bosoms prest,  
And all that maddens life, prolonged alway.*

*I know not, I. I only crave for peace,  
Peace which this world to our sick hearts denies ;  
When all the baser springs of life which move  
Men's souls to envy, spite, mistrust, may cease :  
When each may be himself without disguise,  
And find his brother worthy of his love.*

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## VIII

BAVENO, *May 25th.*

OH, you very woman! So I may be sentimental in verse, but not in prose: that is to say, I may not wear my heart upon my own sleeve, but if I pin it on to another man's coat, you rather enjoy contemplating it. You women! Do you ever look facts squarely in the face? Or must you forever be masking them and satisfying your imagination, or what you call your conscience, by giving them another name? I call Love Love, and recognise it. But I suppose it is all a question of the point of view.

### A SENTIMENTAL INTERLUDE

#### I

*Said the Star to the Moth :—*

Love is of the Unattainable, the Unrealised. That which is securely won, we criticise; and when Criticism is born, Love dies. Love loves the Unknown.

That is why the Moth loves the Star, the Thinker loves his Ideal, the Hero loves the Forlorn Hope, the Man loves the Woman. Not a woman, but Woman.

Selene had never kissed Endymion nor Endymion Selene. She bathed him in her beams when he was sleeping, but when he awoke, it was Helios—Apollo, the God of Art—looking at him, and not Selene. Apollo—the God of Art—is always the phantasm of a reality, the imitation of a truth, The dream is a

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fact; the sun-glare is the symbol, the Maya, the Illusion.

She had never kissed him save in dreams, nor he her. This was the secret of her mastery. What is the history of Love? Is it not always joy, eagerness, anticipation, in the earlier chapters? Pain only comes in the later—the unutterable pain of the discovered, the explored, the familiar.

But one day, she kissed him. For a moment, he was transfigured into the seventh heaven. And then his wings failed him. He knew now. The dream was over.

Love is of the Unrealised, the Unexperienced. To love is to hope. To know is to cease to love.

## II

*Said the Moth to the Star :—*

Love is not of the bleak uplands. It belongs to the homestead. It is the warmth of encircling arms, the touch of tender hands, the glance of appealing eyes. If I may not draw my love to my side, and know that she irradiates my home, then I must seek her, wherever she may be, even though I dash my head against the cold vault of Heaven. Love is presence, not absence.

Pygmalion did not love the cold marble; he divined the woman in the statue his hands had formed. Only when Galatea felt the inspiring breath of Aphrodite and grew rosy with veritable humanity, did his love bloom like a flower and surround her with passionate leaves.

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. . . . .  
If Helen never went to Ilium and a mere ghost of her lured the Trojan elders to their ruin, then Paris was no lover; his passion was only affectation.

. . . . .  
We only love what we know. A Goddess we worship from afar; we put her on a pedestal; we offer her incense; we raise to her our hands in prayer—with bowed head and on our knees. But worship and reverence are not love. We love a woman—a sinful, erring, inconsistent, fitful, illogical, pitiful, compassionate, forgiving, very human woman. Not Woman, but a woman.

. . . . .  
Until she came to me and held out her arms, I never thought of love. Until her face was close to mine, I never realised what love might be. Until my lips met hers in the kiss that sums up all life, I never knew what love was.

. . . . .  
That is why if she be not mine, she is nothing. And if I attain not to her level, I am nothing. I will win her, I will win her, though my body be lost in flame, and my perished wings flutter down the unending night.

. . . . .  
Dear Lady, am I a moth? You know!  
At all events you are a star.  
“Night hath its sole, supreme, forsaken star.”  
Forsaken?

I promised you my Sonnet of Revolt: here it is. It rather aptly expresses my mood!



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## SONNET OF REVOLT

*Life—what is Life? To do without avail  
The decent ordered tasks of every day :  
Talk with the sober : join the solemn play :  
Tell for the hundredth time the self-same tale  
Told by our grandsires in the self-same vale,  
Where the sun sets with even level ray,  
And nights, eternally the same, make way  
For hueless dawns, intolerably pale.  
And this is Life? Nay, I would rather see  
The man who sells his soul in some wild cause ;  
The fool, who spurns for momentary bliss  
All that he was and all he thought to be ;  
The rebel stark against his country's laws ;  
God's own mad lover, dying on a kiss.*

Dear one, what a pity it is that you never allowed me to be " God's mad lover! "

## IX

BAVENO, May 26th.

FORGIVE me, you who can understand. I wrote bitterly, I cannot make amends.

## CONFESSIO AMANTIS

There was once a man who wished to show his heart to a woman. Now it is a rule of the men-folk that, whether a woman shows her heart to a man, which happens sometimes, or keeps some odd ends or corners for herself, which is the ordinary case, a man should never show more than a half, or at most three-quarters, even to the woman of his choice. Therefore they were very afraid for the man,

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and adjured him under all conceivable circumstances "to keep something up his sleeve," as is the jargon of their caste. But the man was obstinate and went his own way. And first he showed a woman half his heart, and she laughed at him. And then in the second place he showed a woman three-quarters of his heart, and she wept her lost illusions. And then, because the man was impatient and felt that confession was good for his soul, he showed his whole heart to a woman. The third woman neither laughed nor broke her heart. She only tried to understand and not lose her ideals.

Nevertheless, whether he or she were the happier for his self-revelation is a problem which lies on the knees of the jealous gods. For in this world to speak or to live without reserve is only possible for the child, or the genius, or the fool.

## HEREAFTER (III)

"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest."—*Ecclesiastes*, ix. 10.

*I wait for thee, beloved : and my heart,  
Merged in the ocean of infinitude,  
Wherein all thoughts and hopes and passions brood  
In dreamful slumbers mid a world apart,  
Dreams of that mortal sphere where still thou art ;  
There rings no human speech, no human mood  
Stirs, where the All in frozen solitude  
Plays, on a boundless stage, his awful part.  
Yet if thou camest where the unmoving main  
Breaks with no sound upon its ice-girt shore,  
I think thy love, changing the changeless scene,  
Might spread in widening circles more and more,  
Might waken passion's cry for what had been,  
And fire the ancient pulse of joy and pain.*

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## X

LONDON, *June 2nd.*

I HAVE put on my workaday mood again, and said good-bye to holidays and sentiment.

I wonder if you have the slightest idea what internal evidence means. Let me try to explain. If I ever was so foolish as to tear up your letters at night, and, coming down in an agony of remorse in the morning, were feverishly to turn over the contents of the wastepaper basket, in any single fragment that remained I should at once recognise that you were the writer. I know your firm, equable, lucid sentences: I know how energetically you disdain the least suggestion of sentimental rhapsody, so that nothing from beginning to end would jar with that stately, formal finish, "Affectionately yours." And supposing the conditions were reversed, and that you, by some curious instinct of belated mercy, were to save some morsel of my effusions from the everlasting bonfire, the foolish fond termination, "Lovingly yours," would reveal the guilty author. Well, that is internal evidence, my dear, and it is in this way that we poor scholars sometimes try to reconstruct the authorship of a disputed fragment. You see, a man cannot help coining himself in little pieces in all that he writes or does. Think of a picture. Is it necessary for Sargent to put his sign-manual at the bottom of his portraits? Could you ever mistake the rough efficiency of a Hubert Herkomer? Or if ever a single copy of *Punch* travelled on the road to Mandalay and

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you saw a torn piece of a cartoon, would you ever mistake a Linley Sambourne for a Bernard Partridge? All this is internal evidence, the strongest of all evidence, if you have the requisite knowledge—only to be baulked sometimes by an exceedingly happy bit of parody. For there are imitations in literature that are almost better than the original, because they are designedly so typical, so essential.

The value of internal evidence in literature seems to me one of the most difficult things to appreciate. External evidence may be gauged by any competent person, for it merely depends on certain quotable data of time, place, and authority. But when we have to decide about literary work solely on the ground of what it reveals to us about itself, its general spirit, its temper, its method of handling its subject, its prevailing ideas, we enter upon an exceedingly ambiguous domain, wherein a good many different assertions and opinions are possible. I am, of course, at the moment thinking especially of plays attributed to Shakespeare, about which learned critics still argue, either on behalf of the Shakespearean authorship or against it. You take a play like *Arden of Feversham*, for instance. It is an exceedingly powerful bit of tragic work, in which a story is told of murder and adultery with no little strength and lurid picturesqueness. Arden of Feversham knows that his wife Alice is far too intimate with a certain coarse-grained creature called Mosbie. And yet, partly because he has a certain passion for his wife, and partly because he is more greedy for gain than jealous of his own honour, he is prepared to leave things alone, and acquiesce in a situation which any honourable man would find intolerable. Observe one



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curious touch. A tolerably well-educated woman is sometimes infatuated by a man immensely inferior to her, not only in social position, but in mental equipment and culture. Physical vigour and force, as some of us know too well, often captivate a woman much more than either literary or mental accomplishment. It is thus that Mary Queen of Scots was infatuated by Bothwell—a butcher-like sort of character, as far removed as the poles from the lady's delicate and gracious personality. And in this fashion Alice Arden is captured by the plebeian charms of her Mosbie, and agrees with him on some common plan for getting rid of the inconvenient husband. The various steps that are taken, the earlier of which fail, the various instruments made use of in order to accomplish the fell purpose, the various episodes which gradually lead up to the culminating scene, are all pictured for us by a master-hand. Arden must be aware that he is a doomed man, for on one conspicuous occasion he suddenly discovers that his wife is trying to poison him. But he accepts it all with a sort of slothful passivity, because he likes to be comfortable, because he likes to stand well with his wife's relations, and for other and perhaps more ignoble reasons. When his final destiny comes upon him we are not surprised. What we do mark with a certain astonishment is the fact that Alice Arden shows sudden signs of remorse.

Now, as I daresay you do not know, this play is sometimes attributed to Shakespeare. Have you ever even heard of it? As far as external evidence goes, we cannot tell either way. For it was produced quite early in Elizabethan times, and might well have been the work of a youthful dramatist, trying himself and his yet undeveloped strength in various fashions. But the internal evidence is much more

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interesting. First we notice that here is a very different kind of work from what we usually associate with the Elizabethan dramatist. It is a tragedy, if ever there was one, but it is a tragedy carved out of contemporary records—out of Holinshed, to be precise—and dealing with ordinary persons in the upper middle class. Tragedy, according to some of the earlier French critics, ought to deal with kingly or conspicuous personages, and the hero and the heroine ought to have great rank, so that when they show signs of degeneracy their fall is all the greater. But here we have tragedy of a bourgeois type, tragedy such as Ibsen wrote, the pathetic misery, the squalid crime of ordinary persons, whose fate would be chronicled no doubt in the newspapers because their history makes sensational reading, but who are not in themselves of a high or exalted type of character. I pass to another point. Are the characters themselves well drawn? At first sight, certainly not. Arden is a wretched creature, like his friend Francklin. The murderers, Black Will and Shakebag, and the arch-murderer, Mosbie, are just conventional ruffians, no more and no less. But there is one figure which towers above all the rest—Alice Arden; and she is in truth a veritable Clytæmnestra. Nothing moves her from her fell purpose. She is quite ruthless, void of a single spasm of mercy, or even of common gratitude towards the husband of whom she wants to get rid. What is she like? She is obviously a Lady Macbeth. On one occasion, when there are signs of faltering, she asks that the weapons shall be placed in her hands, just as Lady Macbeth demands from her husband, palsied with fear, "Give me the daggers!" And there is another and a subtler touch, which brings this bourgeois heroine into a kind of likeness with the great Lady Macbeth. She is as hard as

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steel until the deed of bloodshed is performed, and then she breaks down. So, too, Lady Macbeth, quite callous before the murder of King Duncan, as compared with the husband, whose nerves failed him over and over again, when once the deed has been done, absolutely loses all her initiative, all her mental strength, and becomes a dream-haunted woman, wringing her hands in vain agony.

Well, here are materials for the critic who goes by internal evidence. On the one hand, we place the fact that, so far as we are aware, Shakespeare wrote no tragedy based on contemporary events, nor yet did he draw his heroes and heroines from the upper middle class. On the other hand, you have a powerfully-drawn character, a woman who reminds us at every turn of such a tragic Queen as was Clytæmnestra for Æschylus and Lady Macbeth for Shakespeare. And here comes in the well-known judgment of Swinburne. In all cases of internal evidence we naturally go by the judgment of a poet on a poet, a dramatist on a dramatist: for the workings of a poetic and dramatic mind are best known to those who in their own fashion have essayed the same literary tasks. What does Swinburne say? He honestly believes that we have in *Arden of Feversham* the work of Shakespeare, because if our great poet did not write this drama, we should have to acknowledge that there was in existence an unknown writer of plays, who was at least as good as, if not better than, Shakespeare himself. It is not a conclusion which commends itself to all minds, first and foremost, because not every one will acknowledge that this *Arden of Feversham* is a tragic masterpiece. The play is undoubtedly constructed with no little skill. There are several exceedingly badly drawn characters, and there is one supremely drawn



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character. The play was produced at a time when Shakespeare was a young man, and it may have been an early work of his. Swinburne is sure that it is. Others assert with equal confidence that it is the work of Kyd, and both base their arguments on the somewhat slippery foundation of internal evidence. If Swinburne thinks of *Macbeth*, others have in their minds plays like *Hieronymo* and *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Now take another instance. In the volume of *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* can be found an historical play on Edward III. We know, at all events, that the so-called "chronicle" plays contributed a good deal to the work of the hitherto obscure dramatist doing his daily tasks at the Globe and the Blackfriars. Shakespeare wrote some masterly historical dramas, such as *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, *Henry IV.*, *Henry V.*, and a fiery young contemporary dramatist, Christopher Marlowe, wrote an extraordinarily good play on Edward II.—perhaps the maturest specimen of his genius. Now did Shakespeare write on Edward III.? There was nothing in the conditions of the time, so far as we are aware, which prevented him from doing so. It was a good subject, full of national spirit, better in some ways than the times of Henry VI. Proceeding by internal evidence, we are again confronted with much the same difficulty as met us in the case of *Arden of Feversham*. We have to set over against each other scenes which are Shakespearean and scenes which are not. In the earlier part of the play there is an admirable episode between Edward III. and the Countess of Salisbury. The latter part of the play is very confused, poorly constructed, devoid of unity. Once more we ask whether Lady Salisbury is a figure such as we expect from the master-hand? And her critics are hope-



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lessly at variance, as they always must be when internal evidence is involved. She is a gracious and dignified lady, a lady who refuses the overtures of Edward in a charming and spirited encounter of wits. She is assuredly not quite the same thing as Portia became in Shakespeare's hand, or Imogen, or Rosalind, or Beatrice; but she is not unworthy of such regal kinship. And the easiest solution of our difficulty is to suppose that Shakespeare had something to do with the earlier portion of the play of *Edward III.*, and that he left the other portion, which is manifestly inferior, to other hands. But it is a difficult matter to decide.

Child, do you know that sometimes my pen absolutely drops from my fingers? Certain things come back with a rush; certain memories which you have forgotten long ago, but which to me are the master-lights of all my being. Shall I tell you why? Let me try to explain. You know in the relationship between two souls there are certain indecisive, elementary incidents which may turn this way or that: they are characterless as yet, and indefinite. But though we did not know it at the time, they are charged with immense possibilities. I go back in memory to some of these. We are at the play, seated in a box; something touched you on the stage, and you put out your hand in a quick gesture, a sort of instinctive craving for sympathetic discernment. If your hand had reached mine then, if my hand had taken yours in a masterful grasp, might not that moment have been to us the sudden revelation of a very paradise of mutual interests? Well "the good moment goes." The chance of a lifetime is lost. And here

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I am writing about Shakespeare and the musical glasses. Oh, the might-have-beens! If it is gratuitous folly to prophesy, it is sheer madness to try to reconstruct imaginatively a future that was never to be. That way madness lies! Come, come, let me return to my Warwickshire muttons and my Swan of Avon.

What really helps us in difficult questions of internal evidence is that we have one notable example of the manner in which a supreme genius will take ordinary materials and construct from them a brilliant, overwhelming masterpiece. "The true chronicle history of King Leir and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella," was acted in 1593, while the story itself of the passionate old monarch who quarrelled with his best-loved daughter is found in various forms, and was obviously one of the current narratives of the day. Did Shakespeare know of this early chronicle play? Did he make use of it? And if so, how did he make use of it? We cannot answer the two first questions, but we can answer the third. It is certainly possible that he might never come across the earlier piece, although the probability is that he knew a good deal about it. But his own version is strikingly different. I will only mention a few items. Every one knows the powerful by-plot of Gloucester and his sons; that is absent from the chronicle history. Edmund, and, above all, the pathetic figure of the Fool, are also absent from the earlier chronicle. Of the character of Kent the germ is perceptible in Perillus, but only the germ. The wooing of Cordelia by the King of France is in the earlier piece carried out at intolerable and wearisome length, and, greatest difference of all, there is none of that subtle psychology which shows how

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Lear's experiences gradually act upon his mind—the growth of that madness which leads up to the climax of terror and pity. These things are Shakespeare's own. And once more the final touch, the death of Cordelia, is apparently Shakespeare's contribution. If we contrast the two versions, what do we find? In the first a remarkable story, in which the whole effort of the author is to narrate the incidents as fully as possible, and let the characters take care of themselves. In the second, the story is only valuable as an exhibition of character. Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, King Lear himself, are the figures on which our attention is fixed; and the development of their various characteristics is obviously the supreme task on which the dramatist is engaged. He throws in an Edgar to contrast with Edmund; Gloucester and Kent are set side by side in order that each personality may come out more strongly by the contrast. Out of the inane jests and clownage of the ordinary fool is eduved the wonderfully pathetic fool whose heart is broken when his mistress, Cordelia, leaves the Court. And, lastly, in the character of the hero we have human misery sounded to its very depths. It is the torture of a distraught and agonising soul. Thus, instead of a bare chronicle, we get first a spiritual drama, and next a world-wide tragedy. For in some fashion, mysterious to us because we do not understand the workings of genius, *King Lear* symbolises a great cosmic catastrophe, in which all the powers of evil in this world are allowed to conspire against goodness, and yet goodness, by its innate sweetness and worth, leaves on us the strongest impression. It is bitter enough to see Cordelia die, yet who would not rather be Cordelia than either of her two sisters? That is a supreme exhibition of Shakespeare's magic touch



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upon his materials, and in the absence of that magical power we can only mark interesting pieces like *Arden* and *Edward III.* as of doubtful authorship. They may have been written by Shakespeare, but they do not bear conclusively upon them the marks of his sovereign hand.

## XI

LONDON, July 1st.

*Why do you turn away,  
Face that was always kind ?  
If Life has gone astray,  
Is nothing left behind ?*

*You ask—must this be true,  
We pass and we forget ?  
With love for what is new,  
For old a bare regret ?*

*Not so : in worlds grown grey,  
New good we shall not find ;  
Why do you turn away,  
Face that was always kind ?*

Cannot you understand and forgive ?



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## XII

LONDON, *July 10th.*

I KISS your hand for the gracious words that came to me. Thank you.

So you are interested in the Tercentenary of Milton. It is not till December, but of course we are all busy considering what we shall have to say when the time comes.

Already the note of preparation has been sounded, both at Cambridge (especially associated with Milton) and throughout the learned societies of Great Britain. It is an occasion in which our Metropolis should feel especially interested, for Milton was a Londoner quite as much as Dr. Johnson, and the early haunts of the great poet are in a very real sense hallowed ground. Doubtless we shall have a good many articles dealing with the man who was admittedly only second to Shakespeare, and who, together with his great admirer—and in some sense his imitator—Wordsworth, is one member of that glorious trinity of poetic achievement, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, which it is impossible to rival in any foreign literature. The odd thing, however, about Milton is that he gave a definition of poetry excluded by his own verse, and that he represents exactly that cast and order of thought in our Commonwealth which stands at the opposite pole to artistic achievement. We call Milton a Puritan, and so he undoubtedly was, not only in virtue of the austerity of his own character and life, but also because he identified himself with Cromwell and the Parliamentary forces. He was a Puritan in a much larger sense of the term than any which was

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applicable to his contemporaries. But during the earlier portion of his life he wrote a Masque, and the writing of Masques is associated either with lawyers or the Court—with the Cavaliers, in short, who designedly encouraged this form of composition, bequeathed to them by the Elizabethan age, as an off-set to the gloom of Calvinism. Milton's *Comus* is quite one of the best pieces in this artificial form of composition; but the remarkable thing is that Milton wrote it, and not a man like Suckling, or Carew, or Ben Jonson.

Or, again, we note another contradiction in the attitude which Milton assumed towards questions of marriage and divorce. Every one knows that he was unhappily married in the case of his first wife; but that he should then and there have written fiery pamphlets suggesting facilities for divorce must have been a sore blow to his Puritan brethren, who certainly were not at all disposed to admit that marriages were easily dissoluble. The later school of Independents, no doubt, went far in this direction, and Milton may be held to have anticipated some of their later tenets. Contrasts like these resolve themselves into the great and flagrant contradiction that here was a man whose whole soul was attuned to poetry, and who, after his journey to Italy, was a humble and earnest devotee of art, nevertheless belonging by nature to the ranks of those who would fain banish art from the sphere of human interests and industry. It looks sometimes as if Milton's original nature was one thing and Milton's developed character another, and as if the final product was only gained by a very severe amount of self-discipline, repressing, and perhaps obliterating, some of the earlier instincts.

Take, for instance, his definition of poetry. According to Milton the essential qualities of poetry are

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that it should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate." Could any one possibly hold that this was a definition of the poetry which appears in *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*? Simplicity in the form of elemental grandeur might, indeed, be retained, even after reading the majestic blank verse of Milton's great epics, but the other attributes do not strike us as especially appropriate. Indeed, they would appear to belong to quite another school of poetry—the school in which Keats, and Shelley, and Byron might find their place much more naturally than the poet of the Commonwealth. Nevertheless it would seem to be true that the sensuous aspect of things did make a primary appeal to Milton, and that much of his poetry is conceived and uttered in moments of intense feeling. His very perception of beauty, which makes of him such an accomplished artist, is one proof of this. The passionateness is, perhaps, a different matter, for we naturally think of his *Samson Agonistes*, the whole moral of which is the repression and subjection of passion to a higher ideal. Yet, as it stands, the definition is so admirable that we accept it, even though we feel its inapplicability to much of Milton's own work. At all events, he has left on record poems like *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, poems belonging more or less to his adolescence, where the highest resources of art are brought to bear on descriptions of Nature, not viewed as Wordsworth would view her, but mainly in her external aspects. By the way, I wonder if you have ever noticed the curious mistake in the title of *Il Penseroso*? It ought, of course, to be *Il Pensieroso*, and as a matter of fact it does not mean "thoughtful," as he suggests, but "melancholy." Curious, is it not, that the mistake has endured. These poems were written at the little village of Horton, situated in an angle of the county of Bucking-



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ham, between Berkshire and Middlesex. And when we see how carefully Milton trained himself for the performance of what he deemed his task in poetry, we feel that rarely has there been in English literature a more determined and more accomplished artist; rarely, also, one who conceived the discipline of the artist in such an austere and rigid form. Devotion was the shaping idea of his life, or as he puts it in the Second Sonnet—

“ All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.”

The first part of his preparation is a preparation of himself. His poetry is not going to flow from him as it did from the youthful Byron, or as Tasso composed his *Gerusalemme* at the age of twenty-one. Listen to his own solemn words:—

“ He who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all which is praiseworthy.”

So he reads deeply and acquires knowledge, not because knowledge in itself is of any value, but because he is going to make use of it, in order to be a poet. Moral development is to go hand in hand with intellectual development. He determines to cherish continually within himself a pure mind in a pure body. And lastly, religion must add its final grace. A poet's thoughts do not come from himself, but from some celestial sphere suggested by God Himself.

“ This is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the life of whom He pleases.”

One would think that it was not so much a poet as



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a prophet who is here training himself for his mission. The language reminds one of Isaiah, and the only wonder is, not that *Paradise Lost* was ultimately written, but that such pieces as *Comus*, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* were ever composed at all. The last piece absolutely touches the highest level of English poetic achievement, and we have to wait from *Lycidas* to Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, a period of a century and a half, before English poetry moves on a similarly high plane. Yet, as a mere matter of fact, the last line on which *Lycidas* closes,

"To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new,"

never had its promise fulfilled. Dr. Mark Pattison, in his monograph on Milton, who makes the remark I have mentioned, curiously enough falls into that common error of quotation which makes Milton guilty of the tautology, "Fresh fields and pastures new," instead of "fresh woods." But what Milton was contemplating—obviously a further extension of the poetry which should be sensuous and passionate—was never accomplished, for his next flight, many years afterwards, belongs to the austere and solemn region in which the epic of *Paradise Lost* was conceived. The reason, no doubt, is to be found in the conditions of the man's life. It falls into three easily distinguished divisions. The first is the calm and peaceful retirement of Horton, up to about 1637. In the second division he is caught up in the stream of contemporary politics, and serenity is lost in the hot atmosphere of party passion and religious hatred. This is the period of his prose pamphlets, full of violent controversy, always eloquent and generally unamiable. Then comes the final stage of solitary grandeur, when the blind poet, very destitute and

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friendless, writes his two epics, together with *Samson Agonistes*, and gives his last testimony for righteousness to a fallen and corrupt world.

Yet whenever and for whatever purpose he took his pen in hand he was always the same accomplished artist, the trained writer, touched with divine fire. We can hardly conceive of him writing with the careless ease of Shakespeare. He assuredly could not have left on record so many bad lines as did the great Elizabethan dramatist. He was never careless, never in a hurry. Everywhere there are signs of constant revision, of a musical grace which is nearly always faultless, and a style founded on the Greeks, with all its noble reserve and self-mastery. Much the same contrast will be found in his sonnets. Shakespeare's sonnets, incorrect in form, breathe the very passion of individual feeling and suffering. Milton's correct and beautiful sonnets are stately structures of chastened and refined expression. No one wrote better sonnets than Milton except Wordsworth, who knew Nature in a way that Milton never knew her, who was, in truth, Nature's prophet much more than Nature's poet. On certain of the expressions of Milton time has stamped its approval, because it has turned them into household words.

" Peace hath her victories  
No less than war."

and the exquisite line—

" They also serve who only stand and wait,"

are instances to the point. If there is any other phrase more often quoted than these let us find it in—

" And the repeated air  
Of sad Electra's poet had the power  
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare."

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No poet is immortal unless the world is content to repeat after him some of the lines which he has fixed in a mould of imperishable felicity.

Once more, an antithesis between what Milton set out to do and what he actually performed is found in *Paradise Lost*. Every one knows that his original design was to write a drama, possibly in its earliest stage a drama based on the Arthurian legend. Time and experience proved to him that his great task was rather to compose an epic than a drama. He may have also discovered that his nature and temperament did not fit him for dramatic work. If he had persisted in his first idea we should have had the irony of a Puritan writing a play, not very long after the time when Prynne's *Histriomastix* scourged the back of all those connected with the theatre. But what is the great success of *Paradise Lost*? Who is the hero of the poem? It is surely Satan himself, a magnificent portraiture of a fallen angel, who towers above the rest of the personages of the poem as a supreme example of Milton's constructive gifts. Once again it may be said that, if Milton did not "build better than he knew," at all events he built differently from what he intended. His original poetic temperament was stronger than his self-conscious design.



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## XIII

LONDON, *August 12th.*

I SOMETIMES wonder if it is ever right to be out of sympathy with the literary fashion of one's time. It is, of course, at his own risk and peril that a critic ventures to show his disagreement with that which appeals to the majority of his contemporaries. We know the old tag as to the absolute security of judgment enjoyed by the world at large. Yet even this judgment is based on a final reconciliation of opinions and theories largely divergent from one another, and the total result survives, not because the opinion of the minority is annihilated, but because it is resolved and transfigured into an universal verdict. So let us disagree bravely whenever we feel it to be our duty, and utter without any reluctance the criticisms which recommend themselves to our own taste. The peril of disagreement is sufficiently obvious. Think of the "classical" dramatists of Elizabethan times, who thought Shakespeare an inferior artist because he belonged to a different school from their own. Think of the Jeffreys of this world who condemn Keats, who lift up their parable against Wordsworth and the poetry of the Lake School, and who say of Tennyson, "This will never do." For, over and over again, the thing which is good has a note of strangeness in it, and the general attitude of the conservative mind is accurately represented by the well-known dictum of the working man—"Here is a stranger; let us heave half a brick at him!"

All this is an exordium, tedious enough, to my own particular dislike of a certain quality which belongs to a great deal of modern letters. The main



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characteristic of that which appeals to the present generation, whether in novels or in poetry—in drama also, and to some extent in essay writing—is a certain crude and harsh violence, a desperate desire to produce an effect, and to produce it in such a masterful fashion that the nerves tingle with the strain. Take the four volumes of the collected works of William Ernest Henley, of which I am mainly interested in the poetic portion. Take the novels of the successful writers—men like Joseph Conrad, Edwin Pugh, Arthur Morrison—the man who wrote *Tales of Mean Streets*—the essays and discussions of Bart Kennedy; some of the writings, too, of H. G. Wells. There is also, over and above these, the work both in poetry and prose of Rudyard Kipling—the swash-buckler of genius. Heaven knows how much these writers differ from one another in their ideals, in the quality of their writing, in the nature of their talents, as well, doubtless, as in their popularity. But I think they exhibit one common quality. They are rough and passionate; they strike masterful blows; they exhibit unrestrained emotion; they paint with a big brush. I cannot imagine any of them writing with a quill pen; they probably use typewriters and fountain pens—all the modern appliances for saving labour and urging a mad career without stint or pause. The French adjective “criard” represents the effects they produce—gaudy, melodramatic, showy, creating conviction by their unblushing intensity, never winning their way by sweet reasonableness, but forcing us to agree with them at the point of their literary pistols. That is what I mean by the note of violence. At its best it is called “smart” and “spirited.” At its lowest and worst it belongs to that region of “twopence coloured” which everywhere contrasts with the modesty of “penny plain.” And meanwhile

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let us ask ourselves what are the essential attributes of the literary art, such as were fixed once and for all by the classical models we owe to the Greeks. Two things above all. Serenity and reserve—in other words, the quality of restraint, the dislike of the crude and the morbid, the keeping oneself well in hand, the artistic limitation which prevents unreasonable display.

Many of us have read with sincere pleasure the various volumes in which that curious genius, William Ernest Henley, revealed the spirit which was in him. He is perhaps too close to us to enable us to attain to a perfectly dispassionate judgment. His is a personality which many of us knew and loved, because in the midst of many individual disqualifications he did so much that was manly and strong, and, now and again, hit out things which look as if they might be immortal. As we read his verse we are generally thinking of the character of the man who wrote, rather than the value of his work. He is so clever and so insistent, so original in his fashion, that he carries us away captive, especially when we remember the virile nature which underlay his prose and his poetry alike. Richness, alertness, ingenuity, something daring and strong, freshness too in our conventional age, these are his attractive attributes, and we are only too ready to forgive him for his occasional eccentricity and his far-fetched terms of speech. But surely no man was more violent than he. Every one has read *In the Hospital*, just as every one quotes the well-known words, "I am the captain of my soul." Sometimes one is told that these are precisely the gifts which belong to the Elizabethans, but there I venture to dissent. The Elizabethans frequently made us shudder, but they had the keenest sense of beauty. Henley gives us the horror without the

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beauty. When he is describing that undefeated stoicism which enables a man to resist the attacks of fate and circumstance, can any one honestly say that he admires the phrase, "My head is bloody, but unbowed?" The spirit is excellent, but what sort of literature is it which clothes itself in such repellent form? I take up at haphazard his volume entitled *Hawthorne and Lavender*, and I come across the following. It is worth quoting in full for its illustration of the hard, coarse character to which I am alluding:—

"Love, which is lust, is the Lamp in the Tomb.  
Love, which is lust, is the Call from the Gloom.

Love, which is lust, is the Main of Desire.  
Love, which is lust, is the Centric Fire.

So man and woman will keep their trust,  
Till the very Springs of the Sea run dust.

Yea, each with the other will lose and win,  
Till the very Sides of the Grave fall in.

For the strife of Love's the abysmal strife.  
And the word of Love is the word of Life.

And they that go with the Word unsaid,  
Though they seem of the living, are damned and dead."

It is the same with his descriptive pieces, where you have another kind of violence, the violence of the unexpected, the straining after a new point of view, the restlessness which must always be in evidence, as though the man could not be sure that we were attending unless he rammed his meaning home with exaggerated gesture. In *London Volunteers* occurs this description of "Dawn in the City"—

"And did you hear  
That little twitter and cheep,  
Breaking inordinately loud and clear  
On this still, spectral, exquisite atmosphere?"



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'Tis a first nest at Matins! And behold  
A rakehell cat—how furtive and acold!  
A spent witch, homing from some infamous dance—  
Obscene, quick-trotting, see her tip and fade  
Through shadowy railings into a pit of shade!  
And now! a little wind and sky,  
The smell of ships (that earnest of romance),  
A sense of space and water, and thereby  
A lamplit bridge ouching the troubled sky.

There is a certain beauty here, or rather—which is by no means the same thing—there is a distinct freshness and originality of view. The man sees for himself, and sees things which perhaps the majority of us would not observe. But compare it for one moment with the well-known sonnet of Wordsworth, in which the Lake poet is also describing the effect of an early dawn in London, seen from the bridges which span the Thames—"The very houses seem asleep, and all that mighty heart is lying still." How different it is in spirit and temper, how much truer to the real essence of dawn, with its suavity, its gentleness of colour and atmosphere, the suggestion it gives of a world newly washed, meek and simple at the opening of a new period of its existence!

Let me take other examples of what I mean from the novel writers. It is unnecessary perhaps to refer in any detail to Rudyard Kipling, whose very excellence in literature sometimes suggests that there cannot be all the difference we are apt to imagine between the literary and the journalistic spirit. For Kipling, surely, is modern journalism incarnate—with its sensationalism, its terrific headlines, its glaring exhibition of vehemence, its extravagance of superlatives, its incapacity for argument. I am not thinking for the moment of the better side of Rudyard Kipling. He is not only of course the prophet of Imperialism, which in itself may be a good thing, but now and again he suddenly astonishes us with a



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tenderness of his own, the tenderness, for instance, of the beautiful little story entitled *They*, or the modesty of so wonderful a hymn as that which he calls *The Recessional*. But no one can deny the harshness of Kipling, the violent language, the crudity of effect, the melodramatic zeal of a man who, because he has got to say something, shouts it out at the top of his voice. Some people have admired *The Light that Failed*: to me it is a glaring example of the defects of Kipling's method. Its pathos is not persuasive, it makes one ashamed of one's tears, it has none of the beautiful dignity and reserve of the highest tragedy. And sometimes there is sheer brutality in Kipling—brutal love of bloodshed and war, such as came out over and over again in his letters from South Africa, in which he talked of " battues " and " drives " and " bags " as though it were no human life with which he was dealing, but the animal spoils of a hunter. Of course the defence is that all this is manly. Yet every one knows, who has had the privilege of talking to the warriors who have made their name in the world, that for the most part they are tender-hearted, sensitive, merciful men, who only do violent things because they know that weakness in times of crisis is the most cruel thing of all, and leads to the longest chain of suffering. But Kipling has framed himself on Napoleon, a barbarian of genius, who is an exception in this matter, as he is in nearly everything else.

If it were not tedious, I could produce much material as illustration of the particular tendency with which I am dealing. There are, for instance, *The Tales of Mean Streets*, which were received with a chorus of applause, to a large extent well deserved. Everybody is to be praised who refuses to accept the conventional view and tries to look at things for him-

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self. The majority of us of course never see at all; we take for granted—a stupid posture only bred on the dreary levels of conventionality. By all means let Arthur Morrison see for himself, and if he discovers things which make a strong and vivid appeal to him, let him tell us what they are in a language which will make us listen. But what an extraordinary fact it is, that to some minds, especially to those who have made for themselves a considerable reputation in our later days, the only aspect which appeals is sheer ugliness! A young man when he begins to write poetry is nearly always a confirmed pessimist. Pessimism is the privilege of youth, and we smile when some juvenile hierophant of the muses discovers that this is the worst of all possible worlds. But what is forgiven to tender years becomes a more serious thing when it is the settled pose of a novelist writing about a great city. There is probably nothing in the whole of the world which is unredeemably ugly. If that is a paradox, let us put it in a slightly different fashion. No artist can ever see anything without bringing into it something of his own mind, spirit, and temper, which adds to what he sees a grace not its own. We are all secretly worshipping beauty in our different ways, though one man will find it in an unsparing realism and another in a romantic idealism. If a man does not possess the sense of beauty he is something like a monster, and there is only one worse thing that can happen to him—to be devoid of the sense of humour. After all these thousands of years that men have lived on the face of the globe, after all the reckless complaints of the injustice and cruelty of nature, and the obscure despotism of fate, it still remains true that the poet will sing, and the artist will paint, and the man of the widest experience will find that life in itself has a genuine value, exactly

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corresponding to his own quick receptivity of impression and his sensitive realisation of good.

Well, that is precisely what these modern writers never, or rarely, give us. The men who describe our slums—men like Edwin Pugh and Arthur Morrison and many others—apparently want to make our flesh creep. There is no serenity, only frantic impatience; little art, and a great deal of vivid impressionism. And the same thing holds true of that admirable novelist, who is perhaps one of the most conspicuous figures on our modern stage, Joseph Conrad. Does any one forget his *Nigger of the Narcissus*, or *Nostramo*, or *Lord Jim*? Here are vigour, picturesqueness, originality, a convincing earnestness. And what is the general impression that Joseph Conrad in all his works leaves on our minds? It is a little difficult to describe. In general outlines his philosophy seems to resolve itself into an inculcation of the littleness and insignificance of humanity. We make a great fuss about ourselves, but we are in reality only playthings, puppets, dolls in the hands of the overmastering forces outside us—Nature and circumstance. But what I am more especially concerned with is the impression which Conrad gives us of his own personality. He possesses a singular neutrality and detachment. He stands apart from all his creations. Sometimes he does not appear very much interested in them himself; often he seems to suggest that we need not be interested either. After all, if humanity is such a little thing, there is no special reason why we should show excitement in the matter. But then, what sort of artist can he be who is not interested in humanity? Take away the human drama, and the occupation of the literary artist is gone. Or is it that Joseph Conrad also is a prophet of violence, in that he desires to



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show his contempt of the infinitely touching hopes and despairs, loves and hatreds of men and women, and, painting with a full brush, wishes to portray us all as dupes or slaves?

## XIV

LONDON, *August 25th.*

IN a few days His Majesty's Theatre reopens with a version of the immortal legend of *Faust*, prepared for Herbert Tree by Stephen Phillips and J. Comyns Carr. As you know, Wills's *Faust* constituted one of the great successes of Sir Henry Irving's career. Wills's version was by no means the happiest of his dramatic efforts. Indeed, by many scholars it was considered as nothing short of a degradation, Goethe's sublime tragedy being reduced, according to their contention, to the level of a decorative pantomime. It was not altogether fair to pass such criticisms, because a *Faust* intended merely for scholars could never be a success on the English stage, and the scenic elements which the tragedy involves, such as, for instance, the great Brocken scene, the witches' kitchen, and Margaret's agony in the cathedral, were not likely to lose a whit of their picturesque effect on the stage of the old Lyceum Theatre. The Brocken scene is, of course, to be a great feature of Tree's revival of the drama, and I hear that the stage of His Majesty's Theatre has been entirely rebuilt during its lessee's absence from town, in order to render possible some of the daring pieces of mechanism which Tree intends to introduce to his patrons.

We sometimes wonder at the perennial interest and importance of the *Faust* legend; but we must remem-



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ber that, after occupying the sixteenth century in the form of a popular chap-book and puppet-play, it was used in the eighteenth century to illustrate the aspirations of the German people, struggling in masterful fashion to obtain that imperial freedom which only came to them in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It would be difficult to say to how many dramatists the legend has appealed. It will be sufficient, perhaps, to mention the names of Lessing, Klinger, Maler-Müller, and Goethe in Germany; while in England Christopher Marlowe made it into one of the best of his dramas, to be followed in our contemporary era by W. S. Gilbert, Wills, Stephen Phillips, and Carr. The legend has undergone the most curious transformation, or rather the hero has been made to represent very different kinds of forces, spiritual, ethical, philosophical, and national. Perhaps it may interest you to follow some of these changes in order to see how malleable the old legend is, and how many kinds of new wine can be poured into the old bottles. The dramatic framework it provides is so admirably adaptable to new thought that you will the better understand its indestructibility.

In what form do we meet it first in the sixteenth century? It is a parable of the wickedness of free thought. Dr. Johann Faust is a famous necromancer who has abjured the faith of his childhood. He has thrown away the wisdom of earlier ages, and has tried to open a new path towards higher realms of life. His methods are those of dark magic; forbidden sciences, such as astrology, necromancy, all the studies presided over by the devil himself, are recklessly accepted by him as means of a fuller knowledge. He is a sinner who has sold his soul to Mephistopheles, and he has done this because he has not been content

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with the wisdom of the Fathers, nor yet with the wise restraints of the Mediæval Church. Thus we see that the spirit of the Faust book of 1557 is altogether theological, and its hero, as a godless rebel, dies in full sight of all the horrors of hell. The book belongs to an era of reaction against the freedom of the early reformation: it was the official and popular mouth-piece of that spirit which condemned Kepler, the successor of Copernicus, in his struggle against Lutheran and Jesuit fanatics. When Christopher Marlowe saw in the Faust book the materials for a drama which would suit the turbulent Elizabethan audiences, he accepted this version in its main outlines. For his Dr. Faustus, too, is a man who sins against the light, and suffers all the torments of the damned in the immensely powerful last scene with which the play closes. Yet, of course, the Englishman gives to his hero something of his own characteristic spirit and ambitions. Marlowe had *l'amour de l'impossible*, the craving for an ideal greatness, and all his heroes in turn are formed in this mould. His Dr. Faustus is inspired by the lust, partly of the student to obtain universal knowledge, partly of a knight of the English Renaissance to conquer and command wide spaces of the earth. Like a true Englishman, he wants to rule men, to master the elements, to carry out colossal plans. "Had I as many souls as there are stars," is his declaration, "I would give them all for Mephistophilis."

"By him I'll be great Emperor of the world,  
And make a bridge thorough the moving air,  
To pass the ocean with a band of men:  
I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore,  
And make that country continent to Spain,  
And both contributory to my crown:  
The Emperor shall not live but by my leave,  
Nor any potentate of Germany."

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And now we have to leap over a couple of centuries and find ourself in the eighteenth. Clearly the conception of Faust will be much altered when it is taken up by German idealism and sentimentalism. Lessing's Faust has unaccountably disappeared; but from what we hear indirectly concerning it, we know that the sixteenth-century magician was transformed into a champion of eighteenth-century enlightenment. In many ways the idea of Faust as entertained by Lessing was superior to that of Goethe, at all events in its primitive form, for Lessing's Faust was an ideal youth, who only desires to live in order that he may pursue wisdom, and who is superior to all human passions, except the passion for truth. When the devil and his associates tried to ruin him, they could only do so through his ardent yearning, his insatiable ambition for knowledge. And because Faust was wholly on the side of the angels, he of course must be made to prevail in the end. From the very outset we are made to understand that Satan will be defeated and the task of seduction will recoil on the heads of the authors.

It is a misfortune that the best known portion of Goethe's *Faust* should be the first part, and that here we should have a version of the hero's character which is radically altered and transformed in the second part. Faust underwent some of the changes through which Goethe himself passed in the latter years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth. We begin with the narrow individualism of the "Sturm und Drang" period; we end with the exalted and impersonal aims of philosophic collectivism and an unselfish passion for humanity. As a rule, what we see of Faust in its dramatic representation is very inferior to that which we do not see—the monologues, for instance, of Faust



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himself and his relations to his fellow-students. According to the earliest version, there is no question that this university student was brimful of the essentially eighteenth-century notion that a man's primary duty is the cultivation of himself. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin*, said Voltaire in *Candide*, and in the same fashion Faust believes it to be his mission to develop to the utmost all the powers and capacities, and also all the desires and longings, of his individual nature. But there is a higher self and a lower self in most men, and Faust, with his splendid ambition to know, is equally tempted by an ignoble desire to possess. The soaring idealist is, after all, but of the earth earthy, and Mephistopheles knows how to bait his trap when he appeals to the man's sensual nature. Hence we get the tragedy of Gretchen, the ruin of Marguerite, and that is practically all that the ordinary man sees of Goethe's Faust—the foolish and weak compliance of the innocent girl, and the cruel and reckless sacrifice of her life because of the egotism of her seducer.

Later on Goethe modified his conception of Faust in many material ways. We can trace the gradual influence of contemporary thought upon him, as well as the subtle and less-recognised power of the changed circumstances of his life. He had lived for some time in Italy, and the full glory of classic art had dawned upon his vision. As a poet he had found in the love of Frau von Stein a safe harbour for his affections. Above all, he had studied Spinoza, and learnt to assimilate the doctrines of a reasoned pantheism. Now pantheism, the philosophical system which blends all things in the unity of the divine nature, cannot recognise evil as a substantive thing at all; it is only the other side, as it were, of good, the shadow which chequers the sunlight, the negative



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which follows on the footsteps of the positive. If evil be a part of good, a man's sins, shortcomings, crimes, are made to work out a predestined end of goodness, or God; so even Faust's wrong-doing is to find its final consummation in some complete harmony. With thoughts of this kind, vague, unconscious, half-realised, it may be, running through his mind, Goethe in the second part of *Faust* makes a very different kind of drama to that which has been carried out in the first part. Shortly speaking, the change is this: that instead of the rebellious egotist who sacrifices everything on the altar of his own immediate passions, we have a patient worker in the cause of humanity, a representative of human strugglings and strivings, an unselfish apostle of the collective good of men. It is all symbolic, and here and there very enigmatic, but we see, in the contrast of two women, the lower and the higher aim which the thinker puts before himself. Gretchen had been, as it were, the inspiration of Faust's earlier phase. The humble German maiden, the naïve child of the people, tender, simple, loving, had opened before him a world of undoubted beauty and grace; but his stupid and stormy frenzy had destroyed this world, and he has to pass many years of cheerless and lonely struggle. We see him at the beginning of the fourth act in the second part stepping forth from the clouds that have borne him over land and sea, and alighting on a solitary mountain peak. Here the nebulous shapes before his eyes take various forms; one seems to be Gretchen, another takes on the more majestic beauty of Helena, the Greek heroine, the representative of classical culture, the concentrated essence of the highest art, the symbol of a life devoted to freedom and to progress. No blind, unreasoning, selfish love for Marguerite could ever satisfy Faust. Even in her arms he felt upon himself the curse of a

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consuming and never-satisfied desire. But when he rises on the stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things and becomes a worker for humanity, a man who has espoused the cause of human welfare, he discovers that ceaseless endeavour—always upward, always a negation of self—is the true ideal.

“ Yes! to this thought I hold with firm persistence;  
The last result of wisdom stamps it true:  
He only earns his freedom and existence  
Who daily conquers them anew.”

Thus the second part of *Faust* is a triumphant hymn to civilisation. All the best in man, his hopes, his aims, his ambitions, his cultivation, is hallowed through a steady devotion to collective ends. And so the old things fall away and everything becomes new. Homunculus, the type of selfish isolation, is a fraud and a failure. Mephistopheles, the spirit that denies, the cynical prophet of negation, is defeated and overthrown. Faust, the apostle of humanity, becomes a spokesman of the highest liberalism, inspired with great ideas of social reform and expansion. That is the true Faust as it seemed to Goethe in 1831.

I think sometimes we can quite easily pursue a double line of thought. I am writing, for instance, about Goethe. Well, there is going on concurrently in my brain quite a different strain of reflection. I am always face to face with a primal, elemental wonder. Shall I tell you what it is? Yes, though I shall make you angry! Dear, I wonder how *it* all went wrong. You know what I mean by *it*? From out the storehouse of my recollections comes one golden moment. Like other beautiful incidents of life, it suddenly came amid the most commonplace surroundings. We were sitting in a cab, driving,

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if I remember right, to the station, and, for some reason, there was a silence; there was a block in the traffic, and the jaded horse accepted with the utmost complacency an unlooked-for rest. You looked at me with your large luminous eyes, and said just above a whisper, "I think I am beginning to love you." What happened, God in Heaven, what happened afterwards? I do not know. And you could never tell me. But that faint exquisite promise of a roseate dawn, when all the sons of the morning sang for joy, never got beyond the first flush on the hills. You never did love me, as you know. Why, I ask myself, why was it so beautifully near? And then came the black eclipse of hope and life. How did I fail you, my dear? What was it that went wrong? I miserably ask myself the question, to which probably there is no human response. It is a mysterious thing this relationship between human souls, when they almost touch over an abyss. A chance wind drives them apart, and they shrivel like withered leaves, caught up in some fortuitous eddy on the hills of an eternal despair. What becomes of the love which nearly came to the birth? Why does it keep its promise to our ear and break it to our hope?

## A WOMAN'S MOODS

*Sweet, was it only yesterday  
You told me that you loved?  
What was it? The unconscious play  
Of instincts unreprieved?  
An impulse that would have its way—  
Why did you say you loved?*



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*You know not. I can know but this,  
To-day you stand apart.  
Has life so wholly gone amiss?  
So passionless the unmoved heart,  
So cold the unfelt kiss?  
Why must you stand apart?*

## XV

LONDON, *September 2nd.*

IF it were not for George Bernard Shaw I fancy that the contemporary world would know very little about Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>1</sup> It is popularly supposed, however, that the dramatist has founded his plays on the writings of the erratic German philosopher, and that the various views which he holds on the rapacity of women, on the ideals of the age, on the failure of Christianity, and other topics kindred to his muse, are largely derived from the man who wrote *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Of course Shaw himself acknowledges other obligations. He would not be the paradoxical writer he is, if he did not carefully draw his admirers off the scent, and give them a new object of worship other than the gods whom he habitually worships. Therefore Shaw says a great deal about Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*. Samuel Butler was a very able thinker, though of a peculiar type. In the Ideal State which he depicts in *Erewhon* he brings forward the characteristic modern scientific doctrine that ill-health is a crime. In his Ideal State no man would ever dare to make the excuse that he was unwell in order not to fulfil an engagement. He would much rather say that he had been arrested for theft. If a man is a criminal—whether that be due to his ancestry

<sup>1</sup> This is no longer true, since the war of 1914-15.



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or to his own base inclinations—he comes promptly under the treatment of the State, and is imprisoned or punished in whatever way may be deemed suitable. Wrong-doing, acts of felony, crimes of all kinds—these are the definite evils, for which there exist appropriate remedies. But the great and unforgivable offence is to sin against the laws of health. To be a criminal only means that you have a twist in your disposition which must be knocked out of you by severe treatment; so much the State can do with the greatest ease. But to be unhealthy is to strike at the very roots of a civilised and ordered State, to deprive that State of its proper instruments in carrying out its political or social designs, and, in addition, to do wrong, not because you cannot help it, but in defiance of all knowledge and experience. Something of this whimsical and paradoxical notion appears in the plays of George Bernard Shaw, especially, if I remember right, in *Major Barbara*, or, perhaps still more, in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. But, so far as can be discovered, the dramatist's debt to Samuel Butler is relatively small as compared with that which he owes to Friedrich Nietzsche.

A book has just appeared about Friedrich Nietzsche, a book written by a man who is anxious to defend his author against attacks which he thinks unreasonable, but who evidently has in his own mind some qualms as to the doctrines which he so glibly expounds. The book I refer to is called *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, and is written by Henry L. Mencken. It is a useful work, because it conscientiously tries to explain the genesis of the Nietzschean ideas, and to trace their relations towards the various episodes of the philosopher's life. Not that there is very much to say about Nietzsche's existence. He was the son of a pious pastor, brought up in the fear of the Lord—

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a fact which probably explains the violent reaction which he went through in the times of his adolescence. He was a most unpleasant boy, who did not get on very well with his fellows; and he then became a most unpleasant teacher in the University of Basel. He was arrogant and vain, a man whose writings irritate one, because of the constant recurrence of his own personality—"I think," "I say," "I feel." Above all, he was mentally infirm, a victim of nerves, a great taker of drugs, thoroughly morbid in mind, and diseased in body. And at the last he became actually insane. In January 1889, at Turin, he was confined in a private asylum. In the summer of 1890 he recovered sufficiently to be taken to his old home at Naumburg, and when his mother died, in 1897, his devoted sister, Elizabeth, to whom we owe most of the narrative of his life, removed him to Weimar. He never recovered sufficiently to write, or indeed to think, with any clearness, and died on August 25, 1900. It was a melancholy end to a melancholy career.

It may strike you at first sight as strange that a philosopher of this description should have obtained the hold which undoubtedly he has secured on modern thought. But for this there are many explanations. In the first place, he wrote a delightful prose style, having slowly and painfully acquired the gift, and trained it with assiduous care. Even in English his aphorisms are curiously interesting and well put together—obviously the work of an artist in words, and, as some would say, of an original thinker. In the next place, he represents a definite step in the evolution of German philosophical thought. We can trace an affiliation of ideas from Kant onwards. Kant wrote about the Thing-in-itself, which he called the Noumenon—discoverable by reason, though never

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apprehended by the understanding. Then comes Schopenhauer; and what to Kant was the Ding-an-sich now appears as the great principle of all existence—the Will to Live. Schopenhauer was the direct ancestor of Nietzsche, and the will to live becomes for the later thinker the will to be powerful, ruthless, all-conquering. The principle common to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is that in the course of this world's history and evolution the great thing has not been intelligence, but power, energy, will. Intelligence is only a gift or quality belonging to the will to live, developed in the course of progress, and throwing light upon the main stages of the world's advance—but not operative, not one of the main agents. At most, intelligence illustrates the dreary course of the world's history, and takes no active part in the process. A third reason for the popularity of Nietzsche is the most subtle, perhaps the most important of all. He gives a philosophical justification for the crass materialism of the age. We know something of the unlovely features of the period in which we live, in which the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. We know the worship of wealth, the worship of power. We know that though lip service is paid to the doctrines of the Sermon on the Mount, the really guiding principles of a modern man's life may be summed up in the phrase, "Each one for himself, and the devil take the hindermost." Now it is exactly facts like these which Nietzsche appreciates, illustrates, and extols. Instead of being ashamed of a substitution of material principles for the ideal gifts of charity, loving-kindness, and sympathy, Nietzsche glories in the dominion of brute strength. All the ordinary codes of morality are false in his judgment. The effect of Christianity is to produce a set of mental and moral cripples. The



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ultimate goal of all evolution is the production of an ideally strong man, the Superman, who treads down all opposition, who cares nothing for morality as ordinarily understood, who is, in fact, the strong man armed keeping his house in order, preserving his goods in peace. Nietzsche's philosophy is the apotheosis of force, absolutely released from all ethical considerations.

One of the most interesting of the speculations of Nietzsche, the one which first drew upon him the attention of Germany, was his earliest book, which he entitled *The Birth of Tragedy*. It certainly started from a most original idea. Most critics of drama have pointed out that at the basis of tragedy there is always a conflict, the conflict between the hero and his circumstances, the conflict between man in general and an external fate or destiny, weighing upon him and crushing out all opposition; or, more specifically still, a conflict between a clear-eyed man or woman, a Prometheus or an Antigone, against the enslaving conventions of the day, and against all the unworthy rites of a narrow religion. The Greeks delighted in conflicts of this kind, and the moderns, who have followed them, have perpetuated the same idea. To Nietzsche this conflict rests upon a fundamental fact which the Greeks enshrined under the names of two different deities. There was Apollo, the God of art, and there was Dionysus, the god of energy. Dionysus meant life, action, suffering, enjoyment; but Apollo meant the representation of these things in the forms of art—not life itself, but an imitation of life; as Plato said in his *Republic*, "three degrees removed from truth." The worship of Dionysus showed itself, of course, in the choruses of Greek dramas, out of which, indeed, the whole dramatic structure originally sprang. Nietzsche's contention was that Greek art was at first



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Apollonic, but eventually there appeared the Dionysian influence, the result, perhaps, of contact with primitive and barbarous peoples. Here it would seem that our philosopher is inverting the proper historical order, for nothing is clearer than the origin of drama itself in those rustic merry-makings, that love of drinking, dancing, roystering, which was connected with the worship of Dionysus. The more orderly artistic element introduced by Æschylus and his followers—the introduction, that is to say, of a definite hero, of distinct personages, was a later growth, a growth which might well be attributed to the influence of Apollo. But the distinction itself between Apollo and Dionysus is one of which Nietzsche is exceedingly fond, and which he carries through a great deal of his subsequent philosophy. In the book before me, written by Mr. Mencken, there is a characteristic illustration of the difference, in some verses of Rudyard Kipling, which are addressed to Admiral Evans of the United States Navy:—

“ Zogbaum draws with a pencil,  
And I do things with a pen;  
But you sit up in a conning tower,  
Bossing eight hundred men.

To him that hath shall be given,  
And that's why these books are sent  
To the man who has lived more stories  
Than Zogbaum or I could invent.”

Here we have a plain distinction. Zogbaum and Kipling are Apollonic, while Evans is Dionysic. More and more, as Nietzsche thought the matter out, it seemed to him that Dionysius is the god that men ought to worship. It is action, life, vitality, which make men, and the thoroughgoing analysis, subsequently applied to all forms of conventional morality,

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merely carried one step further Nietzsche's belief in the god of being and doing.

Ye gods! how dull all this is! You know I love the things of intellect. But oh, the arid plains of theory and speculation! Men rose in the struggle of existence by subordinating their passions to their reason; and, do you know, I expect some of the finest intellects in the world have at moments hated themselves for their triumphant conquests. It is a great thing to know, because, as old Lucretius says, it is the only way to avoid superstitious fears. But how barren it is merely to know! What matters the doctrine of evolution to me when I just want to be loved? I wonder if this is the survival of the animal in me—the old unregenerate animal which flashes out so disastrously in Nietzsche? I crave to be a great blonde conquering beast sometimes, just as some women I am told—I don't know them—would cheerfully give up their double firsts to be held in a man's arms. Oh dear! oh dear! what is the end of life? Is it to embark on the dubious career of trying to make the world better, such an uncertain thing at the best? As I sit alone I catch myself murmuring, with the French hedonist, "*Je veux embrasser quelque chose.*" Of course I want this written very small; I am thoroughly ashamed of myself.

With his peculiar disposition, Nietzsche was a fighter all his life. His very appearance provided a singular contrast in the University of Basel to the other learned men around him. He had a high forehead, keen, piercing eyes, with great overhanging brows, and an immense untrimmed moustache;

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while the pedagogues and professors around him had bald heads and well-kept beards, with learned spectacles on their noses. This wild creature at their side seemed a being out of another world. He was indeed fond of insisting upon his Polish origin, and, half in irony doubtless, called himself a Polish grandee. He very soon fluttered the dovescots of Basel. He projected a series of pamphlets in order to call all false prophets to order, and to smash the various shams which, in his judgment, had a pernicious vogue in his day. The first head he wanted to smash was that of David Friedrich Strauss, a man who is best known to us as the author of a *Life of Jesus*, which was translated by George Eliot in 1846. Now, Strauss posed as a critic of Christianity. To Nietzsche he seemed to be fighting battles with his kid gloves on. His smug agnosticism was just as bigoted, prejudiced, and therefore as jejune, as any of the religious faiths against which, in a half-hearted manner, he tilted. David Strauss was called a pseudo-sceptic, mainly because he utterly evaded the question—what is the end, purpose, and meaning of life? The religious world had an answer to these questions. They declared that the purpose of life was a preparation for another life, involving the exercise of humility, meekness, and resignation under mundane conditions. Strauss merely assaulted some of the non-essentials of Christianity. Nietzsche wanted to go further. His purpose was to attack the main citadel, to assert that the Christian ideal was itself wrong, that meekness was not a virtue, but a slavish instinct; that self-abnegation, resignation, patience belonged to a kind of slave morality only fitted for beings who went about in chains. Indeed, on this ground, in a subsequent essay, Nietzsche showed his difference from his great teacher Schopenhauer. For



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Schopenhauer's pessimism led by a natural and logical result to abnegation. A man, in order to be happy, should renounce his will to live, and try to enter a kind of moral Nirvâna, so that by cutting off his desires he might free himself from the miseries of life. This was by no means Nietzsche's ideal. Dionysus bids men live, strive, be strong. Struggle is the essence of the problem. But if a successful battle is to be fought, then men must get rid of their weaknesses. They must be quite ruthless in their determination, divest themselves of every trace of human sympathy, and win their conquests at the sword's point. Only in this fashion can the world educe the Superman, who is above all creeds, a veritable king of the world.

Another of Nietzsche's essays throws light on points like these. It is entitled *On the Good and Bad Effects of History upon Human Life*, and in it historians are brought to book, just as in preceding essays sceptics and philosophers have been put on the rack. What was the matter with historians? They prate a great deal about the results of public opinion, the effects of majorities, the influence of governments. To Nietzsche the ideas and actions of people, enshrined either in democracies or constitutional monarchies, seemed infinitely less important than the ideas and actions of great individual men. In this Nietzsche was like Carlyle in his lectures on Heroes. A single man—we will say Napoleon—means more to the future of the world than all the apparatus of kings and politicians arrayed against him throughout Europe. Hannibal was of vastly more importance than all the other Carthaginian generals and most of the Roman generals put together. The exceptional individual is what Nature desires to develop, and the right gospel is a gospel of individualism. In



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one sense we see here something of the same philosophy which Ibsen in his way preached—especially of course in his play, *An Enemy of the People*. A great deal of modern thought seems to be inspired by this doctrine of individualism, and it is not always remembered, as it was by Nietzsche, that the individual whose claims are put forward is a human being of the highest class, the master class, a being capable of clear reasoning, just as he is also capable, in virtue of his physical strength, of making his way in the world.

Richard Wagner was one of the men who suffered under Nietzsche's lash. But of course Nietzsche's relations with Wagner form a subject which demands independent study. Shortly, however, the case stood thus. When Nietzsche met Wagner he instantly made friends with him, and hailed him as a hero with the sacred mission of making drama an epitome of the life unfettered and unbounded, of life defiant and joyful. After a time Nietzsche discovered that Wagner was by no means Dionysic in his tendencies. In *Parsifal*, for instance, he was travelling rather in the direction of St. Francis than Dionysus. And so Nietzsche castigated his previous friend, and pronounced him anathema. This was very unintelligent on the philosopher's part, because Wagner was an artist, not a philosopher; and Christianity, whether true or not, is, at all events, a beautiful thing, which appeals to artistic appreciation. This was precisely, however, what Nietzsche could not understand. It seemed to him to belong to the worship of Apollo rather than of Dionysus. Beauty was not an end in itself; beauty at most was a phase of truth. Quite at the end of his life, however, the strained relations were set right, and the dying Nietzsche spoke lovingly of his old friend Wagner.

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Whether the influence of Nietzsche will or will not be permanent in a modern world is a question which cannot at present be solved. It is so erratic, so mad, in a certain sense, that we cannot imagine that it will make any permanent appeal to the human spirit. But, as has been remarked already, it undoubtedly accords with some prevailing tendencies.<sup>1</sup> That note of violence, of which I spoke in a previous letter, and which I have referred to as characteristic of our literature, is closely allied with the Nietzschean philosophy, culminating, as it does, in the Superman.

For me, as you know, I incline to a very different metaphysic, more akin to that of Schopenhauer, and nearer still perhaps to the philosophies of the wise men of the East. The word "Nirvâna" conjures up dreams to me. Are they sweet dreams? They are at least free from that note of revolt which you sometimes complain of in me.

## NIRVANA

*Oh, weary soul, for ever shalt thou rest,  
For evermore in dreamless slumber lain,  
Nor knowing aught, not caring ; grief and pain  
No more may vex thee, since thou sunderest  
Thy poor frail dream of perfectest and best,  
The fond delusion which thou daredst to feign,  
For ever. Hope and joy and love are slain,  
And life stands bare, in misery confest.*

*What more awaits thee ? Slumber sweet and still,  
And eyes fast closed against the weight of tears,  
And heart that throbs not with imagined fears,  
And folded hands and unresisting will :  
Dead to the weary waste of ceaseless ill,  
And untormented by the passing years.*

<sup>1</sup> And as we have lately discovered with the Prussian character.

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## XVI

*September 16th.*

You are a very wonderful woman to be able to keep up your interest in such trivialities as plays under the very different conditions which prevail in your present life. Of course we have had a large batch for the autumn season; and if to go to a series of new plays is not precisely to experience "the adventures of a sensitive soul among masterpieces," it is, at all events, a very stimulating, and also a very interesting, task. It is a task, because no man can stand more than two plays in the same week, whereas recently we have had as many as seven or eight from Monday to Monday. More and more the autumn is becoming recognised as the time when people return to town with a certain seriousness of mood and intention. In the summer they are frivolous, owing to the exactions of fashion and the season; or else they are musical, owing to the attractions of the opera. In the spring their faculties seem to be benumbed, because winter lasts so long in our climate. But in autumn people have had their holiday. They come back, relatively speaking, healthy and in a sound mind. They have not very much to occupy themselves with, and they turn lightly to books and to plays, just as the poet tells us that at the opposite end of the year the young man turns to ardent emotions for the other sex. Thus publishers are beginning to recognise that the autumn is their only real season. Dramatists and theatrical managers are anxious to catch the first audiences, whether composed of country cousins visiting the Metropolis, or residents returning to their daily metropolitan functions; and are inclined to believe



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that if they have any serious work to propound, the time that gives them the best opportunity is September. The result during the present month has been simply overwhelming. When it has to be said that at such different houses of entertainment as the St. James Theatre, Wyndham's, the Lyric, the Duke of York's, the Aldwych, His Majesty's Theatre, the Adelphi, and the Garrick new pieces are paraded before the eyes of the public, it must be conceded that an alert and unjaded soul, anxious to make acquaintance with current dramatic work, has practically the chance of a lifetime.

I am not concerned to give my impressions of each play in turn. That would, indeed, be a weary task, and would remind me of the piteous cry of Æneas to Dido, "Oh, Queen! you are bidding me recall all my ancient pain!" But one or two reflections occur to me as to the prevalence of certain dramatic forms, and the relative success or failure of these forms in the London world. For instance, I ask myself what is the most successful of all the recent productions? And I think the answer is plain. It is the piece called *What Every Woman Knows*, written by J. M. Barrie, and produced at the Duke of York's Theatre. Now, there are many reasons for this success. Barrie is a very popular writer. He stands on a plane apart from other dramatists. What he writes arrests attention because of its intrinsic qualities. Moreover, he has a real sense of humour, very sly, very incisive, and wholly pleasant. But when we ask what position his new play occupies with regard to the modern social drama in England, the answer must be that it occupies no relation whatsoever, and that therefore the play itself is "a divertissement," an amusement—hardly a dramatic study. No one admires Barrie more than I do, whether as a novelist or as a dramatist; but that



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is not the point that I am considering. What I assume is that there is a definite modern social drama, and what I assert is that Barrie's contribution to it is of no precise value. In order to make these points clear, the very meaning of the modern social drama must be first understood.

Heaven forbid that we should have pedantic rules of criticism in matters like this! I remember that when some admirer said that the value of Ibsen was his power of laying down golden rules for life, George Bernard Shaw wittily declared, in his *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, that the real golden rule of Ibsen was that there was no rule. Yet there is undoubtedly a modern social drama, not a piece of merchandise or money-making, but something quite serious in its way, with definite ideals of its own. It is our nearest equivalent to ancient tragedy. All dramatic action is the clashing of wills, and its essence is the struggle between the individual and something else. In the Greek tragedy it is the struggle of the individual against Fate. In the Shakespearean tragedy it is the struggle of the individual against obscure, masterful tendencies of his own disposition. In either case the essence of the matter is that the individual must fail, because his strength is pitted against a strength greater than his own. *Œdipus* fails because he is a doomed man, a hero condemned by an outside Fate to do evil. *Macbeth* fails because the obscure forces which regulate his being—his cupidity, his ambition, forces which we should relegate in modern psychology to the sub-conscious self, or "subliminal consciousness"—are much too powerful for the faint and slender efforts which he makes to lead a moral life. And the same thing, *mutatis mutandis*, is true of *Othello* or of *King Lear*. Well, in a modern world we write in prose, not in blank verse; and our dramas,

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though not technically tragedies, nevertheless represent the same absorbing and endless struggle of individuals against something outside them. What is the something outside them? It is convention, it is prejudice—if we look at it in the most unfriendly way—or else, if we choose to estimate it aright, it is that body of inherited social laws which constitutes the order and framework of our daily lives. But, as we know, life does not only consist of order and stability; it depends also on progress, and this progress is generally to be resolved into the action of one or two wild individuals who refuse to be coerced by convention. For instance, there are the marriage laws, and a good deal of modern drama consists in the sin of the individual against the marriage laws—his effort, namely, to preserve his own individuality and his own rights against the superincumbent force of old-established ordinances regulating the relations of the sexes.

Where shall we find examples of this social drama which is so clearly a mark of modern times? In France in the work of Alexandre Dumas and Augier; in Norway in the dramas of Ibsen; in England in the plays of Pinero. The individual, on whom our interest is concentrated in the work of these men, is a sinning, erring individual, to some extent an out-cast, in every respect a rebel; and we know what the issue will be, because, to put it in more or less humorous fashion, Mrs. Grundy has taken the place of the old-fashioned Fate of the Greeks. The modern social drama is the struggle between the individual and Mrs. Grundy, and it is a hundred to one on Mrs. Grundy. So we have plays like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, where the individual is a woman with a past; or a man who is in several respects too modern for his times, like Dr. Stockmann in Ibsen's

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*An Enemy of the People*; or else a bastard trying to establish himself in society, like *Le Fils Naturel*; or else a courtesan, like *La Dame aux Camélias*; or somebody who believes in Free Love, as in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. This is the type of modern drama on which the best thoughts of the time are centred. Of course it will be misjudged: it always is being misjudged, because, while the dramatist is dealing with the *special* individual under *special* circumstances, the ordinary critic and a large part of the general public persist in thinking of the *general* individual under *general* or habitual circumstances.

And now, after this long digression, let me return to Barrie. He has tried something of this social drama in one successful and one unsuccessful play. He failed to attract much attention in *The Wedding Guest*, which I do not think you saw; he succeeded in capturing the suffrages of the public in *The Admirable Crichton*. In the last-named play, do you remember, we have the masterful individual, who happens to be a butler. Special circumstances occur which put the victory into his hands, and all the lords and ladies whom he habitually serves become for the nonce his slaves. Then the whirligig of time brings in its revenges. The customary social order is re-established, and our ambitious butler, who quotes Henley's poems, finishes his career by marrying a slavey and keeping a public-house in the Harrow Road. But Mr. Barrie's more recent plays, full of a delightful waggishness of their own, always hover more or less round the type of the Christmas entertainment which we know as *Peter Pan*. There is *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, for instance, a freakish drama; or *Little Mary*, which no one can be persuaded to take quite seriously; or *What Every Woman Knows*, his most recent success at the Duke of York's Theatre.



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These plays revolve round one or two ideas, valuable and true in themselves, but forced to bear a weight of drama which they cannot possibly support. The idea in *Little Mary* and in the latest play is merely that every woman is a born mother. Of course she is; but what then? Besides, there are other types of women. There is the type of which George Bernard Shaw is so fond—woman the huntress. There is the type of which Pinero is occasionally fond—woman the audacious explorer and adventurer, as in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *Iris*. You can make a pretty little play about the maternal instincts of a woman, but the only philosophy you can arrive at is this—that man is naturally a weak child; that man, therefore, wants feminine guidance; that that guidance must never be revealed to him, or else he would resent it; and that woman triumphs because she is both wiser and large-hearted than man.

All these things are no doubt plausible principles; but drama is representative of humanity in general, and these are but petty and inconsiderable types. In *What Every Woman Knows* we have a pretty, engaging, patient, demure heroine, and a stormy, ambitious young man, who really does not know what an ass he is. He does not even know that when he makes good speeches the best things in his speeches are invented by his wife. He does not even know that his real happiness is domestic. Suddenly we discover him engaged in a frantic intrigue—not very likely, from his antecedents—with a fashionable woman. And the wise wife lets him alone, being quite certain that her maternal instincts will win the day. Is it wrong to call this theme a trifling one? Does it ever make us think for a single instant? The play charms us because of its humour, its pretty pathos, its sentimentalism. But



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is there anything else? The truth would seem to be that Mr. Barrie has discovered that people love his sentimentalism, and he is apparently getting more sentimental every day. It was not for nothing that he wrote a novel called *Sentimental Tommy*, nor has he ever got beyond that circle of interests which is to be found in his story of *The Little White Bird*. Wendy, it will be remembered, in *Peter Pan*, is a born mother; and Wendy—to say nothing of Hilda Trevelyan, the actual actress—reappears as the heroine of Barrie's latest play.

I have occupied so much time with Barrie that there is little space left to tell you of other productions of the autumn. Perhaps it is Barrie's greatest triumph that he challenges our interest, whether we agree with him or not. Meanwhile we have evidence of the old dramatic attractiveness in such well-worn types as pantomime and melodrama. *Faust*, at His Majesty's Theatre, has been described as a pantomime. It is not quite certain that Goethe himself did not mean it as a kind of pantomime, a puppet-show raised in quality; the old folk-story of Faust condemned as an impious man, lifted into the category of Faust as an emblem of humanity, justifying himself for his numerous transgressions.<sup>1</sup> And there is melodrama—drawing-room melodrama, as in the play of *Idols*, at the Garrick Theatre, based on one of the stories of W. J. Locke. Or there is outrageous old Surrey-side melodrama, like *The Duke's Motto*, at the Lyric Theatre, or *The Corsican Brothers*, at the Adelphi. Do not misunderstand me. England has always been the home of melodrama. A great deal of Marlowe's work is melodrama pure and simple, and it will always have its fascination so long as we care for

<sup>1</sup> See preceding Essay on Goethe's *Faust*.

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a good, exciting story and do not care very much for character. It is a curious public with which we have to deal. One of the best plays of the lot, an American piece called *Paid in Full*, presented at the Aldwych Theatre, is produced before empty houses! The worst of our melodramatic instinct is that it always makes us want to find the hero a sympathetic person. In *Paid in Full* the hero is a distinctly unsympathetic person, a mean-spirited hound. The actor who plays the part, Mr. Robert Loraine, being an artist, portrays a moral skunk as a skunk. Not for him the pretty-pretty refinements of the fashionable hero. And another character in the play, magnificently enacted by Mr. Calvert, can hardly be called sympathetic. So the sympathy is left entirely in the hands of an actress who is hardly equal to what is demanded of her, and people come away from the theatre with an uncomfortable feeling that in this life of ours it is not always true that virtue is immediately rewarded and vice immediately punished. That is a moral which our public finds it exceedingly difficult to swallow; and when certain broad issues are presented to them without fear or favour, in a direct but absolutely convincing form, they turn away and sigh for the melodramatic flesh-pots, or the scenic garishness of a beautifully staged pantomime. It is to be feared that we are not yet an artistic people!

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## XVII

September 28th.

WOULD you like to hear about Swinburne's volume of critical essays on *The Age of Shakespeare*, which is out at last? It has been almost as long in gestation as was Goethe's *Faust*. Quite thirty years ago there was announced a *Dictionary of English Dramatic Literature*, edited by Theodore Watts-Dunton, to which Swinburne was to contribute a number of studies on Elizabethan dramatists. As that was a project which was never realised, some of the papers appeared amongst *Essays and Studies*, about the time when Swinburne was writing his trilogy round *Mary Stuart*. Others were published in reviews and magazines. Doubtless, the rest have since undergone a certain revision before their presentation to the world in their present shape, with a dedicatory sonnet to Charles Lamb. They are careful pieces of work, full of those characteristic excellences and defects which we connect with the impetuous writer, whose prose was always inferior to his poetry; who tries, in fact, to produce in prose effects which can only be gained by poetical rhythm. The great test of all prose is the facility or difficulty with which we read it aloud. The magnificent diction, for instance, of the English translators of the Bible gains immensely as read by some competent elocutionist. But, judged by a standard like this, Swinburne's prose writing you will find in no small degree cumbrous, and heavy-limbed, and laborious. It has an undoubted rhythm of its own; it has a certain splendour of rhetorical weight and solidity. The adjectives, piled on one another, like Pelion on Ossa—as though it were



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impossible for the author to find the one attribute which serves his purpose—have a luxuriant opulence of their own, and one is rather crushed than persuaded by the arguments enshrined in such overwhelmingly purple passages. But the criticism is none the less valuable because it is embedded in so sumptuous a mould. To read a poet on poets is to catch, as it were, inspiration at its very source. We seem to see how great lines came into being, how great ideas apparelled themselves in gorgeous vesture of their own. When Swinburne writes about the poets and dramatists of the Elizabethan age, we feel, as we sometimes feel in the criticisms of Coleridge and Charles Lamb, the electric sympathy that unites kindred souls.

Of course, Swinburne is often—indeed, generally—extravagant, both in his praise and in his blame. Many of his old antipathies are found in his new volume, repeated over and over again. His intense admiration for Shelley, his ruthless depreciation of Byron—these things we should be almost disappointed if we did not find in each critical study as it appears. So, too, there is the contemptuous repudiation of Euripides, as compared with the elder dramatists of Athens. And another note we find, which is more novel—the stern condemnation of what, in our modern days, we call realism, the ugly thing which excuses its ugliness because it pretends to be an exact transcript of facts. There is no tenderness on Swinburne's part for a writer like Zola, or for those who followed his example; nor can we imagine for a moment that he would sympathise with much of that repulsive Zolaism which betrays itself in some modern English novels of which I spoke to you a week or two ago. But Swinburne can be as magnificently extravagant in his praise as he can be in his depreciation. It is the



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constant quality of his ardent and enthusiastic spirit that if he likes a thing he expresses his admiration in terms of overflowing zeal. And the praise which, in the present volume, he lavishes upon men like Webster, Tourneur, Dekker, Marlowe, and Marston, will to many people appear to go beyond the just measure of careful criticism. Nevertheless, I am for many reasons glad that Swinburne's book should appear at the present moment, in order to redress a balance that unjustly tends to cheapen the great contemporaries and followers of Shakespeare. I open, for instance, Bernard Shaw's recently-issued *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, and I read the following:—

“ I confess to a condescending tolerance for Beaumont and Fletcher. . . . They were saved from the clumsy horseplay and butchery rant of Marlowe as models of wit and eloquence, and from the resourceless tum-tum of his ‘ mighty line ’ as a standard for their verse. When one thinks of the donnish insolence and perpetual thick-skinned swagger of Chapman over his unique achievements in sublime balderdash, and the opacity that prevented Webster, the Tussaud laureate, from appreciating his own stupidity—when one thinks of the whole rabble of dehumanised specialists in elementary blank verse posing as the choice master-spirits of an art that had produced the stories of Chaucer and the old mystery plays, and was even then pregnant with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it is hard to keep one's critical blood cold enough to discriminate in favour of any Elizabethan whatever.”

And there are other references to the “ insane and hideous rhetoric ” which Shakespeare uses, “ in common with Jonson, Webster, and the whole crew of insufferable bunglers and dullards.” If Swinburne errs sometimes in over-appreciation, surely we have, in sentences like these, a far more deplorable extreme

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of cynical insolence. Can Shaw, one sometimes wonders, know much about the Elizabethans? Can he really have read Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*, or Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*?

It is true that one has to possess a certain historical spirit in order to estimate the productions of our lusty forefathers. No doubt, it is not easy to recapture that splendid audacity and enthusiasm, "the first fine, careless rapture" of the men who found writing so easy, and drama so necessary a product of their intellects, that they filled the theatres with wild, chaotic, but always vigorous, and sometimes inspired verse. The temper of discovery, the spirit of enterprise, the reckless indifference to bloodshed, brought with it a kind of careless gluttony for everything that was highly spiced, cruel, fantastic, mediæval. We call this sometimes the spirit of the Renaissance—such a spirit, for instance, as was revealed in many of the despotisms of Italy, and was found over and over again in the ruthless kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. At all events, the English writers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries plunged both hands into the stories, tragedies, romances, and fables with which Southern Europe teemed; and if they served them up hot and strong to the English public of Elizabeth's time, it proved, as John Addington Symonds has declared, that London audiences at that time "had exceedingly tough fibres." They craved for strong sensations. Their sympathies would not respond except to stout strokes and tales of appalling cruelty. It is quite true that the playwrights used every means to stir the passion and excite the feelings of the spectators, glutting them with horrors, cudgelling them into sensitiveness and attention. If we choose to do so, we may brand the

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tragedy of the time, as invented by Thomas Kyd, and passed on to Marlowe, Marston, Webster, and Tourneur, as "a tragedy of blood." Obviously it stands at the opposite pole to the Greek conception of tragedy, with its reserve, its solemnity, its postponement of physical to spiritual anguish, its resolution of moral discords into a serene and self-sufficing stoicism. But the essence of the matter is not reached if we merely look at the character of the stories used in these dramas, nor yet if we examine too closely the obvious theatrical devices by which the sensation of sheer horror was made to pervade the auditorium. Other questions have to be asked, and the answers are clear.

There is real poetry, not mere rhetoric; there is a splendid mastery of blank verse; there is a noble conception of character; above all, especially in Webster and Tourneur, there is a stern love of righteousness and an unbending hatred of iniquity. They are coarse, lewd fellows, these Elizabethans—especially Marston. Sometimes they seem to wallow in scenes and situations which are only tolerable because of the humour with which they are devised, and become intolerable when that humour is absent. But if any reader thinks that the tendency of the writings is immoral, he only proves how little he can disengage the reality of their message from its external trappings. After many of the most horrible scenes we have passages of tender beauty. We are invited to admire the purity of some much-bewildered and distressed heroine; we are asked to watch the latter end of some of the villains, Bosola, for instance, or Flamineo, and see how ingloriously they perish. Swinburne, indeed, in one of the most characteristic of his pages, suggests another and still more valuable point. There is a beauty which a poet can find even in horror. Æschylus, who had a sublime force of tragic horror, knew the



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secret of beauty. So, too, did Dante. So, too, did Shakespeare. So, too, did John Webster and Marlowe. In Webster himself, despite occasional lapses, there is a clear and unfailing sense of that delicate line which divides the impressive and the terrible, full of a lurid beauty, from the horrible and the loathsome. To make out that some of those Elizabethans were immoral realists, in the modern and least reputable sense of the term, is to confuse, as Swinburne himself says, Victor Hugo with Eugène Sue, and Balzac with Zola.

An interval here for a few swear words. With an absurd sense of dignity I was trying to write with an old-fashioned quill pen. Of course it spluttered and dug its unevenly cut points into the paper! Only the romantic hero on the stage can write with a quill pen. No more dignity for me, thank you. Henceforth the humble stylo! And if I am only sufficiently in a black mood I will write an ode to the Fountain pen in the manner of Horace to his Fountain of Bandusia.

“O Fons Bandusiae”—what a pity you don't know Latin!

Perhaps the best of the essays included in this volume are those on Tourneur, Dekker, Marston, and Webster. Christopher Marlowe, as we long since have known, is not likely to suffer evil things at the hands of so warm-hearted and impulsive an admirer of English dramatic literature. Swinburne has, in fact, discovered that he was quite wrong to assume, as he did in his *Study of Shakespeare*, that Marlowe was deficient in a sense of humour. Nevertheless, Marlowe is not praised with the same whole-hearted fervour which the critic gives to some of the other



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companions and followers of Shakespeare. Webster, for instance, is placed on a level with Æschylus, higher than Sophocles (so it would seem), and infinitely superior to Euripides. "There is nobody," says Swinburne, "morally nobler than Webster; nobody ignobler, in the moral sense, than Euripides; while, as a dramatic artist, an artist in character, action, and emotion, the degenerate tragedian of Athens, compared with the second tragic dramatist of England, is as a mutilated monkey to a well-made man." Here is a sentence which may give Shaw, I think you will agree with me, an uncomfortable quarter of an hour. For Shaw, in his dramatic work, clearly belongs to the school of Euripides, as Swinburne himself to the school of Æschylus and Webster. A passage from the essay on Marston proves that Swinburne can stigmatise a defect quite as strongly as he can pick out a virtue. Marston, of course, is an exceedingly unclean writer; "It cannot be denied," says Swinburne, "that Marston seems to have been somewhat inclined to accept the illogical inference which would argue that because some wit is dirty, all dirt must be witty; because humour may sometimes be indecent, indecency must always be humorous." The point could hardly be made in a neater or more epigrammatic form. There is also an interesting suggestion in the essay on Cyril Tourneur. The chief character in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a hero called Vindice. He is a man who has been rendered bitter by injustice and suffering, and who undertakes a sustained and magnificent revenge on all his foes. Swinburne suggests that the character of Vindice was borrowed, in some degree, from that of Hamlet, and that, in its turn, Vindice lent something to the delineation of Timon of Athens. But, as an instance of Swinburne's appreciation, nothing, per-

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haps, is happier than his contrast between Dekker and Marston. The passage is so characteristic that it is worth quoting in full:—

The Muse of this poet (Marston) is no maiden of such pure and august beauty as enthalls us with admiration of Webster's; she has not the gipsy brightness and vagrant charm of Dekker's, her wild soft glances and flashing smiles and fading traces of tears; she is no giddy girl, but a strong woman with fine irregular features, large and luminous eyes, broad, intelligent forehead, eyebrows so thick and close together that detracting might call her beetle-browed, powerful mouth and chin, fine contralto voice (with an occasional stammer), expression alternately repellent and attractive, but always striking and sincere. No one has ever found her lovely; but there are times when she has a fascination of her own, which fairer and more famous singers might envy her; and the friends she makes are as sure to be constant as she, for all her occasional roughness and coarseness, is sure to be loyal in the main to the nobler instincts of her kind and the loftier traditions of her sisterhood.

It is for writing of this sort, fine and delicate appreciation such as one poet can render to another, fearless censure, generous praise, that Swinburne's new volume will be turned to again and again by those who know and enjoy the work of the Elizabethan dramatists.

I rather fancy that your delicate taste is repelled by the Elizabethan virility. Yet you can be trusted to love the highest when you see it. Read this new Swinburne. It will help your judgment.

“Farewell thou art too dear for my possessing—”

You, of course, know that sonnet. I wonder how many forms of love and sorrow Shakespeare knew? Anyhow I am tempted to quote four or five lines, although, believe me, I resent anything like a suggestion of farewell.

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"Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,  
And like enough thou knowest thy estimate:  
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing:  
My bonds in thee are all determinate."

I do not agree, I do not agree! I grant you the charter of your worth, but I fiercely deny that my bonds in thee are all determinate. Still the sad sequel is true, as my waking or dreaming visions will testify.

"Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter;  
In sleep a King, but waking, no such matter."

And the worst of it is that I have to spend most of my life awake.

## XVIII

October 6th.

Do you like theatrical biographies? They seem to belong to a class of their own. I am told that as literature they are not exactly remunerative. The book about the Bancrofts, being one of the earliest to appear in modern times, was also one of the most successful, and the production of a popular edition proved that the public were exceedingly interested in the theatrical details. But I think I am right in saying that no recent book about the stage has had anything like the same success. At present we are deluged with Lives of Sir Henry Irving. One of the first of these, published some years ago and written by Clement Scott in two volumes, fell almost dead-born from the press. I do not know what sort of success Bram Stoker's *Life of Henry Irving* enjoyed. At all events it had the advantage of anticipating some of the others, which were being designed



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directly after the great actor's funeral in Westminster Abbey. Walter Pollock's *Impressions of Henry Irving* is a rather charming little book, but, of course, it has no pretensions. Austin Brereton has put his name to what in some quarters is called an "official" biography, which was produced a few days ago. Sir John Hare is one of those who have recently been publishing reminiscences, which have come out in one of the current magazines. For some reason or other which is not very easy to understand, the public which reads books is not as interested in the details of an actor's life as is the public which devours newspapers; or perhaps the truth is that it is difficult to make a book which shall be interesting, and yet present a faithful picture of the spoilt darlings of the stage. After all, the essence of their art is its immediate personal appeal to eye and ear. The real triumph of an actor or an actress is in front of the footlights. When he or she writes reminiscences, they are cold things, for the living impression of a personality is not very easy to reproduce in print.

Meanwhile one of the books which has astonished some and delighted others, even amongst those who knew the authoress well, is *The Story of My Life*, by Ellen Terry. Let me say at once that it is a delightful book, so delightful that I am sending it to you, full of precisely those vivid touches which most of these works lack. The book is very characteristic and very individual. Miss Terry clearly sees things for herself, and is not the least disturbed by what other people have seen. Like everything else which indicates a distinct and personal angle of vision, Miss Terry's autobiography has a real charm of freshness and originality; and, although it may not be especially a compliment to her to say it, the excellence of her



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book has rather surprised her friends. When some of the chapters appeared in serial form, there were remarks and criticisms found in her pages which did not altogether please or satisfy the reader. But the man would be hard to please who could take up *The Story of My Life*, open it anywhere, and not find himself engrossed in all the evidences which the volume furnishes of a quick, receptive, clever, and extremely original painter of her own times and her manifold experiences.

Most people were afraid of what Ellen Terry might say about Irving. Her criticisms had been by no means indulgent to the great actor's fame when they appeared in magazine form. Now that we have Miss Terry's book in our hands, although we recognise here and there a certain petulance in her remarks (which, after all, only proves that she is an impressionable woman), we yet have to admit that the figure of the great lessee of the Lyceum Theatre emerges with no little splendour. Perhaps the effect is all the greater because Miss Terry does not hesitate to pass certain damaging criticisms. She says, for instance, that Henry Irving as a man possessed many of those qualities which she herself most detested in man. If such a sentence stood alone it would remain as a most hurtful and invidious testimony. But in this case probably all that is meant is that there was an aloofness, a solitariness about Henry Irving, occasionally a want of sympathy, such as a man who lived a remote and somewhat austere life would inevitably suggest to a mercurial, light-hearted, quick-witted Beatrice. The fact is that not only did no one know Irving, but he took an abundance of pains to prevent any one from knowing him. He had his Bohemian side; yet even at lavish moments in his own Beef-steak room, or at the Garrick Club, some sort of

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impassable gulf seemed to divide the man from those who met with him as boon companions. He was in reality a lonely man, and he rather exaggerated this tendency in order to be impressive. Many and many a man and woman have felt almost frightened when first they met the actor. He appeared to be living a life apart, and his silences and his temporary moodiness, combined with an occasional flash of morbid and certainly not always genial satire, contrived to make him alarming.

Another remark of Ellen Terry is that Henry Irving took no real pleasure in the acting of any one else. That may or may not have been true. Personally I do not altogether think it is true. I have rarely heard a warmer tribute to Eleonora Duse than that which on one occasion fell from his lips. But, of course, Duse in no sense entered into competition with him; and it would be absurd to forget that every actor, like every artist, is a jealous man. It seems almost impossible for an actor to look dispassionately upon the work of other men. Consciously or unconsciously, he is always comparing it with his own. And such comparison, in the case of self-centred beings, who are not so much selfish as self-engrossed, is not likely to be marked with much charity. For the rest, Sir Henry's figure "looms," as Miss Terry says, across the history of his time; and while others have been content to say that he was an actor *malgré lui*, or that Nature told him he should not act, and he had answered to Nature "I will," or again that he was a man of considerable talents without any inspiration, Miss Terry says boldly that he was a genius if ever there was one. As she had the opportunity of coming across many of the prominent men of the day—Watts and Tennyson and Browning—her judgment is not to be lightly

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disregarded. She is certainly an admirable raconteur, because her hasty sketches, her thumb-nail portraits, are so excellent. Reflect on this as a description of Sarah Bernhardt:—

She was as transparent as an azalea, only more so: like a cloud, only not so thick. Smoke from a burning paper describes her more nearly.

I open the book at random, and I come across the following sentences about William Terriss:—

He was one of those heaven-born actors who, like kings by divine right, can, up to a certain point, do no wrong. Very often, like Dr. Johnson's "inspired idiot," Mrs. Pritchard, he did not know what he was talking about. Yet he "got there," while many cleverer men stayed behind. He had unbounded impudence, yet so much charm that no one could ever be angry with him. Sometimes he reminded me of a butcher-boy flashing past, whistling, on the high seat of his cart, or of Phaethon driving the chariot of the sun—pretty much the same thing, I imagine! When he was "dressed up" Terriss was spoiled by fine feathers; when he was in rough clothes he looked a prince. . . . To the end he was "Sailor Bill"—a sort of grown-up midshipmite, whose weaknesses provoked no more condemnation than the weaknesses of a child.

Nothing better about the unfortunate actor, who was stabbed at the stage-door of the Adelphi, has ever been written.

## THE BALLADE OF ELLEN TERRY

### I

*Who dares aver that age must bring  
A sullen grief, a vain despair,  
Because young hope has taken wing,  
And summer dreams are thin as air?  
Who deems that life's no longer fair  
When Time has marred life's enterprise?  
He has not seen the lips, the hair,  
The wonder of those tender eyes.*

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## II

*Oh, light and bright and debonair,  
And sweeter than the morning's breath  
When scents of spring are in the air  
And far away the thought of death !  
She hath the secret—each one saith—  
Of youth, eternally her prize :  
No passing years can kill our faith  
In tender lips and tender eyes.*

## III

*It was but yesterday we saw  
The shrinking form of Imogen :  
Heard Portia's lips expound a law  
Beyond the startled Doge's ken :  
Oh, brave it was in Venice then  
To mark Bassanio's wild surmise  
When mercy flowed for stricken men  
From eager lips, from tender eyes !*

## IV

*Sure, 'twas but yesterday we heard  
The voice, caressing as a kiss,  
The carol of the wilful bird  
That haunts the soul of Beatrice ;  
Nay, many a Benedick, I wis,  
Knows there's a magic never dies—  
The stormy smile, the sudden bliss  
Of tender lips, of tender eyes.*

## ENVOI

*Friend, if thy heart on mirth be set,  
Or wisdom woo, in pensive guise,  
Once seen, thou never shalt forget  
The Terry lips, the Terry eyes.*



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It is interesting, but also useless, to compare *The Story of My Life*, by Ellen Terry, with the memoirs of another actress, the Frenchwoman who was known as Mdlle. George. It is interesting, because in both books we find the quick, sudden, intuitive perceptions of an artist, which reveal more than the most laboured descriptions of a literary person. But the comparison is useless, because the memoirs of Mdlle. George could hardly be put into English form in any literal translation.<sup>1</sup> They are too naïve, too frank, much too shameless. Mdlle. George was an actress in the times of the Consulate and the Early Empire, who was exceedingly intimate with Napoleon—whom, indeed, he admired more than any other of the artists of his time. She was a fine, big woman, who excelled in the classical dramas—in Clytæmnestra, for instance, in Iphigenia, and in the heroine of *Cinna*. Her great talent was to represent maternity, the love of the mother rather than the love of the mistress or wife. But she had a long *liaison* with Napoleon, and, as distinct from all others who have written about the great Emperor in his private relations, she describes him as especially kind and indulgent to women, full of delicate consideration. She never forgot all that she owed to the Napoleonic dynasty, and, although in later life she went to the Court at St. Petersburg, her heart remained true and constant to the tyrant of Corsica, and to all the glory and gloom of his comet-like career. In her book one finds delightful sketches of her companions, especially of her beloved Talma, who was exceedingly kind to her.

Here, at all events, we have an artist who is generous to a fault towards those with whom she associates. Listen to the way in which she deploras the inevitable downfall of an actor when he has out-

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, they have recently been translated.

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lived his popularity and lingers superfluous on the stage. She is talking of an actor called Larrive. The public, she says, always forgetful and ungrateful, (how unlike the English public!), treated very badly the talented man, who in his day had been surrounded with homage and flattery. He had not had the wit to retire in time, and nothing could have been more melancholy and pathetic than to hear the hisses which now greeted a once famous hero. "The public," she cries, "does not want you any more. Go away! Disappear, you, who have made us pass such tragic evenings! We do not want to listen to you any more. We have no memories. . . . Go away, with your broken heart, with all your humiliated self-esteem. What do we care? Go away!" Or listen to her again, as she repeats the not unfamiliar complaint of the miseries of the actor's lot:—"We must not have any habits. If you want to have your *déjeuner* at your usual time, you will find a rehearsal called at the exact moment. Would you like to take advantage of a beautiful sunny day and go for a walk? No; you must take a hasty, early dinner. You must be in your dressing-room long before sundown. No sunlight for you; only the glare of the lamps. Do you feel gay and sprightly? Do you want to laugh? The curtain is just going up. You have got to be Lucretia Borgia, or Cleopatra, and not a ghost of a smile must be on your face. And the comedians—they have their troubles, too. I suppose it is more painful to make other people laugh when one is miserable, than to excite men's tears when one is dying to smile. Oh, dear public! Do not envy us our lives. It is sheer slavery!" Here are the confessions of a woman who was not only a great artist, but also exceedingly sensitive, generous, loyal, and sympathetic. She did not live a good life,

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but her memoirs leave on our minds the impression of a woman of real charm and genuine nobility of heart.

Strange enigmatical creature, do you read poetry? Of course you do! Do you play music? Of course you do! Do you know what is at the basis of all the poetry that was ever written and all the music that was ever composed? Are you aware that all art is in flat contradiction with the ten commandments? Oh, of course, I shall shock you, you Puritan nun with the dove-like eyes! You are just like all the exponents of the Nonconformist conscience. You think because you refuse to talk about a thing that it does not exist. You fast during Lent, and think that weakness means saintliness. Dear God! The red blood in all the human beings in all the world cries out against your pale and ascetic virtues! No poetry, no painting, no music, no art, because, forsooth, it is so disturbing! Well, I thank whatever gods presided over my birth that I am a Pagan, "a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn," as old Wordsworth says. Oh dear, I heard you once play Chopin, and you played him divinely well. What did it mean to you? Did it mean anything? Do you know that Chopin was one of the lovers of George Sand? My dear dove-eyed Puritan, life for some of us is intolerable if we cannot feel. Here is a sonnet which you will hate, but I send it you nevertheless. It is the cry of the man to whom Life is a tragedy because he feels, but to whom also, for precisely the same reason, Life is an intoxicating inspiration.

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## TO LOVE UNCONQUERED

*Oh Love, thou art relentless ! Hither come  
The vanished loves, who, dying, never died :  
They press around me, like the sleepless tide  
That grows and ebbs about its ancient home :—  
Loves of my youth and manhood, phantoms some,  
With desperate arms in passion crucified ;  
And happier some, who only smiled and sighed  
Ghost-like and dim above an empty tomb.*

*Why do they haunt me thus ? I never knew  
How sweet a thing was Love until it fled :  
If e'er I gathered blossoms for its head,  
Their fragrance faded with the morning dew :  
My rosemary is ever mixed with rue,  
And unknissed kisses greet me from the dead.*

## XIX

*Oct. 20th.*

So you miss the personal note in my letters, and say you know nothing of what I am doing or thinking. Beware of the personal note, my lady. I thought I was to be guide and philosopher in intellectual matters only.

What am I thinking or doing? Very little of interest I fear.

I had the privilege of attending the publishers' book trade dinner, the first of the kind, which took place the other day. The object of the gathering was to enforce and illustrate the common interests which bind together the three classes of people who deal



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with books—the authors, the publishers, and the booksellers. And, as a matter of fact, a highly representative gathering sat down to dinner, animated, apparently, by the best of feelings towards one another. It was interesting to hear Sir George Trevelyan answering to the toast of “Literature.” He is now an old man of seventy—the nephew of the great Lord Macaulay, and a student of letters, whose first book was issued at the end of his freshman’s year at Cambridge. His lighter work includes pieces like *Horace at the University of Athens*, *Ladies in Parliament*, and *The Competition Wallah*; while the serious work, apart from *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, which was published in 1876, contains *The Early History of Charles James Fox* and three volumes of *The American Revolution*. I suppose he is best known by his biography of his uncle—one of the comparatively few biographies which form a real literary work. If one thinks of it, there are not many modern biographies which fulfil the proper literary conditions. *The Life of Gladstone*, by John Morley, is undoubtedly one; so, perhaps, is Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice’s *Life of Lord Granville*. And there is a charming biography of Sir Leslie Stephen, written by the late Professor Maitland, whose early death so many of us deplore. But a great number of biographies published in this age are too long, too verbose, too crowded with unnecessary letters, too dull, because they simply consist of indiscriminating narratives of year after year, in which we lose interest because we are not helped by any guiding thread. From how few biographies do we rise feeling that we have obtained a clear idea of the subject of the memoir! It is doubtless an art like other arts to be able to reveal the lineaments of a consistent picture. I am afraid we do not get any such good result in the

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*Life of Benjamin Jowett*, for instance, although we are perhaps more fortunate in Mrs. Creighton's work on the late Bishop of London.

Now Sir George Trevelyan was absolutely successful with Lord Macaulay—probably because throughout all his life he has mixed with literary men, and had the advantage of great acquaintanceships. He told us, for instance, the other night what rare privileges he had enjoyed. "I have ridden with Mr. Carlyle a good many of the 30,000 miles which he rode while he was engaged upon *Frederick the Great*. When he was no longer equal to horse exercise, we took long walks together round and round the parks; and on one occasion, all of a sudden, apropos of nothing, he began slowly to repeat for my benefit an extempore biography of Lord Chatham—the most wonderful soliloquy to which I have ever listened. I have been shown over Venice by Mr. Ruskin as cicerone in his own gondola. I was introduced by Mr. Robert Browning to Waring—a sad disenchantment, when the hero of the inimitable poem had become a weary-looking old man, like any other. I was present at a family dinner, where Thackeray discoursed to a delighted audience of young people about *The Virginians*, which he was then writing, and which seemed to fill his mind to the exclusion of everything else. Among other matters, he asked us all round the table what was the widest jump any of us had ever known. And when we agreed upon twenty-one feet, he said—'Then I must make George Washington jump one foot more.'” These were the sort of reminiscences of which Sir George Trevelyan was prodigal, ending, as they did, with the account of a dinner in the hall at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the present year, when the old man of seventy sat next to Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

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By the way, a new edition of *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* has just been issued, a popular edition, in which there are some additional chapters, and one or two interesting appendices. No doubt the work will sell well in this convenient form. And yet it remains true that few great reputations have so failed to maintain their ancient splendour as that of Thomas Babington Macaulay. He was probably the most widely read and most popular author of his generation. For about half of the nineteenth century (Macaulay was born in 1800 and died in 1859) there was no one who represented more completely the idea of the literary genius—very versatile, extremely accomplished and learned, of equal force both as a historian, as an essayist, and as a poet. Of course, Macaulay's rank as a poet is not a matter about which we need dispute. He does not claim a place among the great poets of the world. He had little or no insight into the deeper problems of life. But as a writer of ballads he was certainly extraordinarily gifted, and the reader is absolutely carried away by the easy ring and rattle of his stanzas. I suppose Macaulay's lays are still as popular with schoolboys as they were at least half a century ago. As an essay writer his reputation has been seriously assailed. His style is very diffuse, and exceedingly artificial. He is fond of antitheses, which are often frigid, and which please the ear rather than persuade the understanding. He was a sonorous and telling speaker, very fluent, never at a loss for striking illustrations. But he undoubtedly lacked something—possibly that strange electricity which a really great orator possesses, and which communicates itself to the audience with unmistakable force. I suppose it would be incorrect to call Macaulay an orator at all, except in a restricted sense; unless we use the term in that loose fashion



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which would enable us to include a man like John Redmond. Very few real orators have been heard in recent years in Parliament. It is difficult to think of more than three great names—Bright, Gladstone, and Lord Rathmore, whom everybody knows better as Plunket. In the House of Lords Bishop Magee held an undisputed mastery as an orator. But when we come to John Redmond we find all the apparatus of oratory without that intense and burning conviction, or, to use the same term employed just now, electricity, which carries away the judgment of an audience.

Macaulay's essays are no doubt still presented as school prizes: but it is a question whether they are read, except by those who are preparing themselves for a journalistic career. They were immensely popular in their day, and about twenty of them out of forty-one are likely to endure. But if we are to be critical we find these essays full of a certain metallic resonance. The style is exceedingly elaborate; the rhetorical antithesis are polished; but there is not the higher art to conceal the obvious artifice of the whole performance. Yet of course the style is often both stately and splendid, and nearly always better than the matter which it enshrines. One thing which tends to lessen the value of Macaulay's essays is their inaccuracy, especially of course in the well-known instances of the essays on Bacon and on Warren Hastings. In many respects Macaulay was a glorified journalist. A good deal of his history is journalism. And he had, too, that love of emphasis, which the leader-writer must often betray, in order to push his point home; but which the historian, as such, and the careful critic, would prefer to avoid. He did not hesitate to exaggerate. He could write, for instance, of "the seared consciences of Shaftesbury and



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Buckingham, to whom the death of an innocent man gave no more uneasiness than the death of a partridge." Or, in order to get his picture painted in striking colours, he could say that "the House of Commons was more Royalist than the King and more Episcopalian than the bishops." That is the journalist all over—and Macaulay had not the journalist's excuse. But the great things of Macaulay can be read over and over again. The death of Chatham, for instance, from the essay published in *The Edinburgh Review*; or the great account of the relief of Londonderry, from his *History of England*; or the story of Brave Horatius, from *The Lays of Ancient Rome*—these are surely immortal. Perhaps the great merit of Macaulay was that he was such an unwearied student of literature. His comments on the books he read form the most remarkable collection of *obiter dicta* which can be collected from the notebooks of any literary student. John Morley pronounced Macaulay's marginalia "the most splendid literary *nugæ* that ever were; if, indeed, that be at all the right word for things so stirring, provocative, challenging, and fertile in suggestion."

I read your first letter, the first letter you ever wrote to me, the other day. I am afraid you told me to destroy it—well, I couldn't. It would have been like killing a child. It was a dear letter, so simple, so serious, forgive me if I also add, so humble. You told me that I had been several things to you, father, brother, friend, and—yes, you really added it—lover. The word "lover" was half blotted as if you thought to erase it and changed your mind. And then side by side with this I took up your last letter to me, quite sweet, quite affectionate, and alas, quite

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cold! "As flies to little children are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." Heavens, the interval, the contrast, in range of feeling, between this first fruit of your muse and your latest, most stately creation! You are a fine instrument on which men—some men—might play what melody they chose. But I cannot govern these stops. Was it not worth while to teach me? Or should I always have been too clumsy a scholar? Well, never mind, my serene and beautiful lady, at all events, you keep your serenity. Aspasia has not found her Pericles, that's all. Proud inaccessible Ida! And the world, if you only knew it, is the poorer because of your inaccessibility.

"Come down, oh maid, from yonder mountain height,  
What pleasure is in height?"

### XX

*Nov. 4th.*

ONE of the smaller tragedies of life—but I am not sure that it is not one of the greater—is that sometimes, when we are all eager to do something, our best course is to do nothing. Some lovers know this to their cost; others, and they are the more foolish, never learn it. Long ago you did your best to teach me this lesson—I wonder if I have ever learnt it? It seems so sad a mockery, that with all my desire and all my efforts, the best way I can serve you is to stand far off. I came across some

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lines of Lord Lytton the other day. I wonder if you know them?

“ Since all that I can ever do for thee  
Is to do nothing, this my prayer must be—  
That thou mayest never guess nor ever see  
The all-endured this nothing-done costs me.”

It is a wicked fourth line, and for once I am going to try to be greater than the poet. Those also serve who only stand and wait. And I am content to stand and be patient, if only on the bare chance that some day, somehow, somewhere, I may serve.

## XXI

LONDON, *November 17th.*

THE other day I came across an interview with Sir Theodore Martin, which was published, I believe, in all the newspapers, containing a kind of message from that hale and vigorous old man of over ninety years<sup>1</sup> to the younger generation. Sir Theodore was not very pleased with the condition of things that he saw around him. Few old men can ever accept circumstances and conditions widely different from those prevalent in their youth. But a point which interested me was Sir Theodore Martin's resolute defence of the Victorian Age, in art, in literature, and in life. There are two other writers who inculcate the same point of view. One is Lady Ritchie and the other is J. Comyns Carr, both of whom are authors of works which have just seen the light of day. Lady Ritchie, who is, as of course you know, Thackeray's daughter, has just

<sup>1</sup> Alas! Sir Theodore Martin is now dead.

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published an interesting series of essays under the title of *Blackstick Papers*, containing an allusion to that fairy Blackstick whom Thackeray introduced in his *Rose and the Ring*. In it, besides several references to worthies who flourished when Queen Victoria had not been many years on the Throne, I find a comparison between the women of the twentieth century and the women of the nineteenth. Here is a subject which will interest you, but on which you must listen impartially to both sides. On which side the advantage lies would be, indeed, a difficult matter to settle. The modern young woman is an arduous topic to grapple with, just as the contemporary suffragist is discovered to be somewhat elusive in the hands of the London police. I think she may be described as full of a revolutionary idea, inspired by an eminently sincere determination to secure for her sex chances in every form of active existence, equal to those hitherto conceded to the privileged, although somewhat unambitious male. In this respect, of course, the distinction between her and her elder sister of the nineteenth century is very marked, and it depends on a series of rather complicated causes, literary as well as social.

But what is the twentieth-century young woman in herself? She seems to me to belong a little to the journalistic type—versatile, full of high spirits, easily able to turn her hand to a variety of different employments, firmly persuaded of the fact that hitherto no woman has ever been so daring, so venturesome, so independent, so devoid of prejudice, as herself. Well, the lady of the Victorian Age was never quite sure of herself. If she had wide ambitions, she was apt to keep them within her own breast. She was not proud of her accomplishments, but on the other hand she undoubtedly knew one or two subjects very re-



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markably well. If we listen to a young lady of about twenty-five talking to her mother of forty-five or fifty we become at once aware of a real difference of type. The mother will have one or two subjects—for instance, history, or a special period of literature—in which she knows infinitely more than her daughter. On the other hand, the daughter will have a smattering of many subjects. She is not bred on books; she is, I am afraid, bred on newspapers. And, from the point of view of the emancipation which she desires, she is quite right. For she wants to prove that she can do quite as well as men in all the different lines of an active career; and therefore she is bound to prove herself smart and clever, on the level of all the current information of the day, able to talk on all subjects, from Protectionism to the causes of poverty, from the future of monarchy to the philosophy of Maeterlinck. But Lady Ritchie suggests that the modern woman has not nearly so much personality as belonged to her ancestor. And in some senses this is true. A man who knows one or possibly two subjects thoroughly is always an authority, and the Victorian lady who in her fashion tried to imitate him was also an authoritative exponent of the facts with which she was intimately acquainted. But to be versatile, to have a foible for omniscience, enfeebles rather than strengthens the sense of individuality; and I am afraid that many young women educated at high schools, or trained at Oxford and Cambridge, despite their superficial acquaintance with many things, fail in securing that respect from us which we pay to the expert authority. In his or her intimate character, the being we call a "personality" is more than the sum total of what he or she does, or says, or thinks. There is a reverse to this medal, of course. If happiness and contentment depend on activity and on freedom—as

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every woman will admit that in large measure they do—our contemporary Amazons are far more likely to have “crowded hours of glorious life” than anything that was possible to the thoroughly domesticated woman of the time when Victoria was Queen. She will have her downfalls and her disappointments in due measure. But she will also have her excitements and her pleasurable sense of being thoroughly alive to the finger-tips; and for some temperaments that is a great boon.

It is odd, if we think of it, with what whole-hearted energy we despise the people of the Victorian Era. We find fault with their art, as shown in their drawing-rooms; we find fault with their houses and their fashions and their manners of life, which we stigmatise as provincial or even parochial; we regard them as slaves of convention and prejudice, missing some of the great things of life because they were afraid to reach out their hands and grasp what could easily have been theirs. Nevertheless, if we confine our attention merely to the question of literature, the victory of our ancestors is easy. At the beginning of that long tract of history, when the youthful Victoria was called to the throne—or perhaps still more clearly if we go back to 1800—we discover that the nineteenth century is studded with great names. Byron, and Wordsworth, and Scott, and Keats, and Shelley are enough to commence with. And to them, in due course, we have to add the names of Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne and Matthew Arnold, exhibiting a range and profundity of thought and a brilliancy of literary expression which in this degenerate age we cannot rival. And then come the great novelists, the Thackerays, the Dickenses, the Charles Reades, the Captain Marryats—even, perhaps, the Bulwer Lyttons. And when we turn over the pages of J. Comyns Carr's

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interesting book of reminiscences, which he has entitled *Some Eminent Victorians*, we are reminded of great artists like Turner, and Millais, and Burne-Jones, to say nothing of statesmen like John Bright, Gladstone, and Disraeli. Yes, undoubtedly, the Victorian Age was in most respects the most brilliant since the Elizabethan times, and we who get a sort of fictitious height by standing on the shoulders of our great predecessors must not imagine that it is due to our own inches alone that we secure distinction. If, for instance, an unkind fate banished Tennyson as poetic example and pattern, we should have to go without quite two-thirds of our modern poetry. There is much of Laurence Binyon, and William Watson, and Alfred Noyes which only exists in virtue of a faithful discipleship of Tennyson.

It is natural enough for Sir Theodore Martin to assert that moderns are all wrong. Every old man is naturally tempted to a sort of gentle, but often querulous, pessimism, when he compares the great men of his prime with their puny descendants. But to me, I confess, one of the great heroes who most clearly serve to reconcile modern thoughts and aspirations with the rich heritage of past years, is George Meredith, the novelist. You would call him one of the moderns, and yet he is eighty. You would also call Tolstoy one of the modern authorities, and yet he, too, is far advanced in years. Both these two men,<sup>1</sup> one in Russia and the other in England, have resolutely set their faces towards the rising sun, and have used whatever strength they have derived from a bygone day in order to exhibit and illustrate with full justice and completeness the aims of the younger generation. Meredith, then, we can claim as belonging entirely to ourselves, as also we can claim Thomas Hardy.

<sup>1</sup> Both, alas, dead.



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One is by nature a comedian; the other acknowledges the inspiration of the tragic muse. Yet they stand in the very forefront of the modern army, and the lesson they suggest is assuredly one of hopefulness, both in literature and in art. It is a foolish attitude to deny that any good can come from contemporary Nazareths. The more helpful position is to wait in patience and accept whatever new illumination the coming years may afford. Carr himself is inclined to deny that Ibsen has taught us anything whatsoever in dramatic technique. Few of his younger contemporaries would agree with him. Pinero became quite a different man after he studied Ibsen, and what George Bernard Shaw would be without the example of the great Norwegian dramatist is indeed impossible to say. Ibsen, Tolstoy, and Maeterlinck have all added somewhat, and though we do not know as yet in what forms their contributions will be worked up as the twentieth century moves onward, we feel certain that such men will not have lived in vain. Freedom that degenerates into licence is never a beautiful thing to watch, and we need only think for a moment of the French Revolution to see how terrible can be the movements which convulse and revolutionise a society. Yet out of the French Revolution comes modern history. And also out of the welter of philosophical schemes and moral systems, literary aims and artistic ideals, which drag this way and that the modern mind, will assuredly emerge a new order, which will have something to say for itself, albeit that its message may be entirely different from the Victorian evangel.



# Rosemary's Letter Book

## XXII

LONDON, *December 1st.*

I WRITE to you of books, but I often wonder how much time you have for reading. Do you, for instance, ever read French nowadays? If so, read Anatole France.

There is no literary figure who is more persistently before the reading public at the present moment. He thoroughly deserves his position, because he combines in a single personality a number of different excellences, any of which might make a man remarkable. He is a very learned man; he is a great critic; he is a great scholar; he is an admirable writer and historian; and at one time he threatened also to be a prominent politician. It was all owing to that dreadful Dreyfus affair, which sent so many Frenchmen off their balance. Even now in his case, as in the case of so many others of his contemporaries, the fierce interests aroused by the celebrated trial do not altogether desert him. A long section in one of his last books comes back once more to this detestable affair, of which the world is weary, though apparently some Frenchmen are not yet sated. The episode in *L'Île des Pingouins*, which deals with a sort of parody of the Dreyfus business, is the most tedious part of it, because it is no good raking over the extinct and ineffectual fires of a worn-out controversy.

There could be no stronger contrast, both in character and treatment, than that which separates two recent books which Anatole France has written; and yet, if I am not mistaken, there is a curious link

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connecting the two, so that the one is the necessary sequel of the other. M. France composed his study of Joan of Arc in two large volumes. It was received with pious devotion by his literary following: it was looked at askance by historians. Andrew Lang went so far as to say that the French writer, although constantly appealing to his authorities, as constantly refused to make use of any of them; that his numerous quotations bore no relation towards the actual text; and that therefore the author was either wilfully ignorant or wilfully insincere. As a matter of fact, France's study of Joan of Arc is a singularly beautiful piece of work, if we look at it in the right spirit. But it has one very serious defect. It is the conscious effort of a man who is a sceptic, according to the most modern acceptation of the term, to write a reverent account of the miracles associated with the peasant girl who delivered her country from the enemy. Possibly it is a pity that such a theme appealed to France at all. Clearly he was not quite the right man to attack it. You must either be a simple, unassuming historian sifting the evidence, but also narrating the facts with perfect fidelity; or else you must be a pious believer, who accepts the whole narrative as a singular and incontestible proof of God's mysterious work in the world. But you cannot relate the story with gravity and yet suggest a multiplicity of reasons why the record has been falsified. From this point of view Andrew Lang's recent book on *The Maid of France*, although by no means so accomplished a piece of literary work, is far more satisfactory to the historic intelligence.

But now mark what follows. Anatole France is obviously upset by the criticisms he has received, and, being by nature of an ironical and satirical disposition, he determines to wreak his vengeance on

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his enemies. So he composes a humorous satire, *L'Ile des Pingouins*, in which the history of the French in particular, and all humanity in general, is parodied by a supposed derivation of mankind from penguins. The poor old short-sighted Saint-Maël, carried, through the machinations of the Devil, to the North Seas, comes across a concourse of penguins, and mistakes them—so solemn and fatuous are they in their demeanour—for a congregation of men engaged in some sort of religious rite. So he baptises them in due course, thereby causing a great deal of trouble in heaven. And as in most theologies the form is of very much greater importance than the inner spirit—observe here another point of France's satirical wit—the sacrament of baptism, once bestowed, cannot again be withdrawn, and so the penguins become Christians—become, in point of fact, Frenchmen, whose characteristic defects are shown to flow from their singular origin. If we look, however, a little more closely at the preface, we shall see how the author's resentment against his critics is shown. He describes himself as attempting to write a serious history, and, as he is a modest man, he naturally wishes to ask the learned people whether his study of the penguins is, or is not, worth doing. Whom should he consult? Well, he first turns to the archæologists. But they do not write history at all. They only publish texts. They never try to extract from a text or a document the least parcel of truth or life. No, they abide by the letter. Ideas are fantasies. The texts are the only things that are definitely appreciable; all the rest is moonshine. Discouraged on this side, the author next turns to those who call themselves historians; and he remarks that there are about five or six of them left in the Academy of Moral Science. When he consults one of these



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learned men the answer is still more discouraging. What is the good, he is asked, of giving yourself a lot of trouble, and composing a detailed history, when all you have got to do is to copy those best known? Supposing you have a new point of view, an original idea, you will shock the reader, and no reader likes to be shocked. He only looks into history to discover the follies which he already knows by heart. If you try to instruct him, you will only annoy him. If you try to enlighten him, he will only say that you are insulting his faith. It is easy to see how in these successive interviews Anatole France is venting his spleen against historians and archæologists who refused to accept his *Life of Joan of Arc*. The critics are just in the same evil case. "It is well known," he remarks, "that in France musical critics are deaf, and critics of art are blind. That ensures the necessary remoteness from actualities, in order that they may devote themselves to æsthetic ideas."

But now what does he actually give us in *L'Ile des Pingouins*? Well, a very amusing piece of work to begin with—not always in the best of taste, but always full of brightness, and with a delightful though mordant sense of irony. However, that is not the point which interests me. I imagine that there is no more characteristic representative of modern enlightenment than Anatole France. He represents the last word of sceptical analysis; he also represents a very high level of linguistic and literary attainment, based, in the last resort, on Hellenic and Latin culture. Look at *L'Ile des Pingouins* from this point of view, and you will be almost astonished to observe how absolutely negative and destructive it all is. What is there that makes life worth living in our modern age? Upon my word, France can give us no reason why we should be



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content to live at all! Shall we turn to religion? Well, all religious faiths, quite apart from the fact that they contradict one another in essentials, invariably prefer, as we have already seen, the letter to the spirit, the religious doctrine to the religious temper, dogma to faith, ceremonial to a pious life. All religious faiths when they are strong are cruel. They become tolerant when they are themselves menaced by destruction. Shall we turn to politics? Here indeed the record is melancholy. All the enactments of men since they agreed to establish a definite civil and political life are carried out in defiance of ordinary human instincts, and therefore are in perpetual danger of being upset by periodic revolutions. Property is founded upon usurpation. Patriotism, by leading to war, has desolated the world. Surely, however, we can at least believe in progress. At all events the philosophers of the eighteenth century, albeit that in many respects they agree with France, had faith in a progressive advance of humanity towards presumably higher ends. But here our author parts company with them. Progress really only means a certain movement towards a condition which, when realised, necessitates a fresh beginning. You coop up the people in towns; you add wealth to the wealthy; you build houses higher and higher; and then, thanks especially to those revolutionary movements known as Socialism, the whole structure crumbles, the artificial civilisation gives way—and the whole dreary process has to begin again. Was there ever so destructive, so sceptical a philosopher as Anatole France? Rarely have I ever read so violent an attack on modern civilisation.

If you ask what he himself clings to, what represents for him a sort of ideal in the midst of the horrible refinements of the modern world, I gather

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that he accepts, not so much consciously as unconsciously, and as the natural result of his own culture, a kind of gentle paganism, an epicureanism, a retreat from the actual noisy, insistent world into some garden of isolation and peace, where a Greek sage does not tell him to hate all pleasure, but to indulge it in moderation and with self-control. So much may be gathered from the vision of a certain Marbode, which occupies one of the chapters in *L'Ile des Pingouins*. Marbode is very fond of Virgil, and one day he finds himself transported to the lower regions, and granted an opportunity of an interview with the author of the *Æneid*. Now Virgil was a man whom the Christians tried on two distinct occasions to incorporate into their own religious community. He is supposed in one of his Eclogues to have been an unconscious prophet of Christianity, and, as every one knows, Dante made him his companion when he visited the Christian paradise, purgatory, and hell. Interrogated on some of these points Virgil shows signs of indignation. No, no, he is not an immature Christian; he is only a pagan. He does not like Christianity. As to Dante, it is quite false that he ever saluted the Florentine poet as his disciple. Dante appeared to Virgil to be simply a barbarian who told him fables, which, in Virgil's time in Rome, would have made little children laugh. All this would seem to prove that France, in his satirical disdain for a modern world, tries to content himself with an ancient world of pagan wisdom. If this is the last word of modern enlightenment and culture, it does not open out very alluring horizons. Yet it is all apparently that we can expect from Anatole France.

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XXIII

December 16th.

I KNOW you are not very much interested in politics, but you are immensely interested in human beings and in the expression of personality. So I think you will like a book I am sending you, Wilfrid Ward's *Ten Personal Studies*.

Political judgments made by contemporaries are especially fallacious, and nothing is more curiously illustrative of this than the various opinions which in the last few years have been formed about Arthur James Balfour. Mr. Wilfrid Ward puts the matter in a clear light, owing to the psychological insight and subtlety which he possesses, and which he shows not only in reference to Mr. Balfour, but to men so diverse as Richard Holt Hutton, Delane, Henry Sidgwick, Cardinal Wiseman, Lord Lytton, and the contrasted leaders of Roman Catholic thought, Newman and Manning.

I am chiefly interested for the moment in Mr. Balfour, because here is obviously an elusive personality, a personality so differently interpreted that it is difficult to get two people, especially if they are politicians, to agree in any common opinion. The average man who frequents clubs has a view which is not very distinguishable from that of the man in the street, and on the whole his judgment is dead against Balfour as party leader or inspirer of a policy. Consult, on the other hand, a man who knows the House of Commons, and you will find that Balfour's position in that assembly is quite unlike that of



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any one else. If men outside St. Stephen's—the sort of men who carry on easy conversations after dinner over the walnuts and the wine—persist in thinking Balfour a weak man, members of Parliament, on the other hand, are much more inclined to regard him as a man of almost stubborn obstinacy. If he has made up his mind, he generally persists in carrying it through, sometimes against the wishes of his own supporters. Thus, for instance, his views about University education in Ireland are held so strongly that those who vote on his side nevertheless shrug their shoulders at what they think to be a mistaken view. On the delicate question of votes for women, it is generally supposed that Balfour sees no logical or rational objection to the granting of the suffrage to the female sex. It is not quite clear what is his real view in this matter, but at all events a great many of his supporters find it difficult to agree with him, supposing it to be really true that he desires to give women the vote. But the main point which is disregarded outside, and which is thoroughly appreciated inside the House of Commons, is Balfour's own instinct for leadership based on personal charm and popularity. He is a difficult man to resist, because he wins over opponents by an unfailing tact and graciousness of manner. He is so conspicuously fair-minded that, even when men disagree with him, they recognise that his position is based on solid grounds of reason. He possesses, in fact, one of the great secrets of how to rule men. He stands aloof—by no means unsympathetic, but still a little fastidious and remote. None can be quite certain that they know him thoroughly. They only know that his is a leadership which they are prepared to accept, with a loyalty as conspicuous as the qualities which inspire it.



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All these points are brought out in that curious chapter of political history, which began with the Chamberlainite proclamation of Tariff Reform, and has not yet reached a definite conclusion. Nothing could have been more delicate than the situation in which Balfour found himself as Prime Minister, when a member of his own Cabinet, and one so strong and sincere as Mr. Chamberlain, suddenly commenced a campaign for the revision of our tariffs. Chamberlain and Balfour were well known to be personal friends, enjoying a friendship which was based on difference, but was none the less sincere for that; and, apart from the claims of personal intimacy, there was the possible disruption of the Cabinet, when Balfour, himself exceedingly doubtful on several points of the Chamberlainite policy, found himself deserted by one after another of his colleagues. The departure of the Duke of Devonshire was the greatest blow of all, particularly as it was so nearly averted by Balfour's conciliatory methods. But the years from 1903 to 1906 give the psychologist a splendid chance of determining the different characteristics of the two men who were by general consent leaders of the Unionist party.

Who was, in point of fact, the leader? There is no question what the man in the street thought. He recognised Chamberlain as the leader, and derided Balfour as a man who had capitulated, and had given up his own judgment in deference to that of his friend. And now, looking back over these years, and watching the various fortunes of those who were called "Whole-hoggers," we seem to see that the real leader was Balfour, just because he would not commit himself in a hurry, and adopted the Fabian policy of delay in order to save the Unionist party from political extinction. It would be probably true to say

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that Balfour never was a whole-hogger. He believed, to a large extent, in the necessity for Tariff Reform, and if he returns to power, without doubt he will, in conjunction with Colonial statesmen, attempt some revision of tariffs, with a view to retaliation and the protection of home and Imperial industries. But the Chamberlainite scheme is hardly possible in the naked simplicity with which it was first broached. And, what is especially remarkable, the Unionist party, which appeared to be menaced with something like instant dissolution on this thorny question of free *versus* fair trade, has been saved from ruin by the dilatory tactics of Mr. Balfour. No one but he could have achieved this feat; no one but he possessed that fridity of temperament, that aloofness from party excitement, that temperate consideration of point after point in the thorny problem, which gave him the necessary staying power in times of real crisis. (Forgive me for talking politics. I forgot they are taboo!)

There are many other interesting studies in Wilfrid Ward's book, and I suppose most people will turn to what the author has to say of Leo XIII., Cardinal Wiseman, Cardinal Newman, and Cardinal Manning. For Ward has of course many sympathies with the position of men like these, and he is able to interpret some of their ideas through intimate personal knowledge in a way which is not possible to those who look at their actions from the outside. Certainly the study of Manning is exceedingly interesting, for in Manning's case we have a man, not of very great intellectual ability but of considerable strength of character, who made a number of mistakes at the commencement of his work in London, and afterwards was strong enough and wise enough to admit that he was wrong. I confess that to me, however,

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a still more interesting essay of Wilfrid Ward is concerned with Robert, Earl of Lytton—a man with whom one would not have antecedently supposed that the author had much sympathy. But it is clear that the biography contained in Lady Betty Balfour's book on her father made a great impression on the mind of Wilfrid Ward, and that he saw in the frank confessions of Lord Lytton true psychological material. Robert, Earl of Lytton, was one of those men who appear to have equal facility in a practical and in an imaginative sphere. As every one knows, he was a statesman of considerable importance, a Governor-General of note, an administrator of definite views. And then he was, besides all this, a poet, who might with assiduous cultivation of his gift have attained poetic laurels far higher than those which are generally accorded to him. When a man is both a statesman and a poet, and divides his life in half between his two avocations, he is apt to wonder whether he has not been doing service to both God and Mammon. On reviewing his career it is natural enough for him to think that if he had known more of his own special aptitudes, and had been more consistent in following out his natural propensities, he would not only have done better with himself, but would have secured a higher place in the roll of fame. Lord Lytton was himself full of serious self-criticism. Listen to Ward: "Johnson tells us in *Rasselas* that the attainable gifts of life are grouped on the one side of our path and on the other. We may choose between the groups, but if we try to gain both we shall miss both. Lytton seems to have felt at moments that this fate had befallen him. Had he resolutely withdrawn into the life of imagination, for which his poet's nature fitted him, and put away the prizes which were offered by his openings in official

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life, happiness of one kind might, he thought, have been attained; or if, on the contrary, he had fixed his ambition on the career to which external circumstances pointed, and crushed the poetic and Bohemian nature which accorded with it so imperfectly, his public success might both have been greater and have brought contentment." It is a question whether any single individual can solve for himself doubts of this kind. Probably Lytton's nature had not a single and undivided motive of energy. From the standpoint of his own happiness, perhaps Robert Lytton's life was better spent in competition between practical and imaginative work than it would have been if devoted only to a single pursuit. If he had confined himself to poetry, he might have been a greater Bohemian than he was, and a less efficient politician also; while the importance of the duties he discharged as Governor-General of India was of the greatest value both to his own nature and to the public whom he served. The result is that we need not think of him merely as an official, or merely as a poet of ordinary type. He was a poet who was also a statesman, and he was an official with an interesting, sensitive, and original personality.



# Rosemary's Letter Book

## XXIV

*Christmas Eve.*

How I wish you could have seen the little Queen, you who love children so dearly!

She was undoubtedly the heroine of the play, the little uncrowned Queen of the Fairies, who came and saw and conquered, and carried away the whole audience captive to her elf-like spell—a little tiny child, who looked as if she might be six or seven years of age, and yet spoke with all the confidence of long training and experience, and danced with an exactness of pose and gesture which made everybody talk of Adeline Genée. In the second act of Graham Robertson's fairy play, where this important little personage appears, she is the centre of an acknowledged ring of admirers, and is very jealous of her proprietary rights. If Cinderella seems to occupy too much of the limelight, the Fairy Queen rebukes her—"Cinderella, dear, would you mind not standing in the centre of the stage?"—with a gravity and a dignity which was the most laughable thing in the world. And the kisses she threw to the audience, and the august dignity with which she walked, and the imperative commands she issued to the orchestra as to whether she would or would not accept an encore—these were the things which made Miss Elise Craven (for such was announced to be the diminutive queen's name) a veritable Queen of Hearts. Every one felt that it was only just that at the end of the play when the applause was loudest, Tree, as chief manager of the revels, should come before the footlights hand in hand with this duodecimo edition of a *première*

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*danseuse*—to bow his grateful thanks, and accept the congratulations of the whole house in the name of the Queen of the Fairies.

But, quite apart from the triumph of little Elise Craven, there were a thousand things at His Majesty's Theatre on Saturday night to delight the eye and to gladden the heart. There was a feast of colour, to begin with, a luxurious festival of rose-red and apple-green, and purples such as you see on the skin of a grape, and delicate apricot tints and shimmering, beautiful harebell blue. At the end of the first act, where the fairies are supposed to represent the changing hues of sunset, we thought we had reached a picture which could not easily be surpassed for its appealing beauty. And yet Tree had many other surprises in store for us. The faintly-glimmering fairy woods were for all the world like an illustration of Arthur Rackham, with fantastically-twisted tree-roots, and mossy pools, and the sound of murmuring streams, the whole irradiated with little twinkling lights, and with visions of bright elf-like creatures, glancing hither and thither among the foliage. Cinderella's chariot, ablaze with electric fire, is seen to pass behind the trees, while an almost prettier vision still—after the fatal hour of twelve has struck, and Cinderella has to go away in a chariot which is a veritable pumpkin—we catch a pretty glimpse of white mice, straining to drag along, under the guidance of an old rat's whip, the heroine, who, bride of Prince Peerless as she was, had now become plain Cinderella with her broom. The slow rise of the moonlight on this exquisite forest scene was another memory which we should be sorry to forget; and, as though to match the rose-red radiance at the end of the first act, we had at the opening of the third act a beautiful bank of bluebells, represented by

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fairies, in which the delicate shading of bright blue flowers and green stalks was an artistic joy. Certainly since Tree staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he has not produced a more beautiful setting for a play than this, and whatever other merits Graham Robertson's *Pinkie and the Fairies* may or may not possess, it at least has afforded a wonderful opportunity for a series of tableaux, where everything is subtly suggestive of delicate tints of beauty, quiet and tender and appealing. It is assuredly not the fault of the lessee of His Majesty's Theatre if we do not dream back again our youthtime, and live under the magical dominion of the fairies.

I took your sister and little Eileen with me. The child is growing so like you! It was a wonderful pleasure to watch her sweet serious little face. She was absorbed. And yet I almost believe, for all the spectacular beauty, her pleasure next day in reading the book was almost as great. She has an appreciation of verse extraordinarily rare in a child, and loves it even when she cannot understand it. I wrote the following poem to her and she accepted it with becoming dignity, far more dignity than you ever showed when I wrote verses to you. What a long way off that time is!

### IN FAIRY LAND

*The magic land where fairies dwell,  
And knights and giants wage their fights,  
Where Bertram weds with Rosabel,  
And virtue always wins its rights,  
Where jocund folly has its say  
And happy hearts keep holiday :—*

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'Tis there she dreams and bends her brows  
To hive new riches from the store  
Which Santa Clause in wild carouse,  
Flings from the bookshops at her door—  
Books, red and green and russet, all  
Aflame for Christmas carnival.

Once in the halcyon days of old  
When youth, the locksmith, forged the key,  
We too could pass those gates of gold  
With Innocence for Sesame.  
Ours then was her unclouded brow—  
Alas! we cannot enter now!

We cannot pass the close-shut gate,  
For we have lost the magic word :  
Her Eden is inviolate,  
Held by the angel's flaming sword ;  
We can but wistfully surmise  
Heaven's secret in her dreaming eyes.

For us there is no golden age ;  
We only know an age when gold  
Is preached as life's main appanage,  
Sole end of labours manifold.  
Our hearts fly homeless as the wind—  
We can but seek ; we do not find.

Ah, happy little maid, if we  
Could dream like you the long day through,  
So sweetly, innocently free  
Alike of rosemary and rue,  
Perhaps, perhaps, the books you prize  
Might bring us back our Paradise.

But while I run on, you are wanting to hear about the play.

You would have delighted in every minute of it,



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although I think you would agree with me that while Robertson has a complete philosophy of Fairyland, he has very little story. Indeed, if I were disposed to be critical in the case of a performance which has so many appeals to our imagination and sense of beauty, I should be forced to say that the great defect of *Pinkie and the Fairies* is just this, that it is too insubstantial and vague, with a certain lack of definite construction in its incidents. Pinkie and her brother, Tommy, are living with Aunt Caroline and Aunt Imogen and Uncle Gregory, and to them comes on a visit their cousin Molly, a young lady who has been sent into the country in order to avoid the too flattering attentions of a young gentleman, desirous of running away with her. Now, the whole point of *Pinkie and the Fairies* is the proper imaginative condition for entering into Fairyland; and here we get Robertson's philosophy on the subject. You can write about fairies from the point of view of grown-ups, or you can write about grown-ups from the point of view of fairies. In the first case you get, no doubt, a good deal of accurate science; in the second case you get no science, but sheer fantasy. It is a common observation that children sometimes bore their elders, but the other point of view, which is quite as true, and probably more frequently realised, is that grown-ups bore children to an almost insufferable degree. Robertson's play is, accordingly, written from the second standpoint. The dreams of children are the real thing, and therefore the fairyland which belongs to children is also real. Middle-aged men and women are not realities, but unworthy phantoms, of whom really there is nothing valuable to be said. Uncle Gregory, for instance, walks into the middle of the fairy revels, smoking his cigar, and when the elves tickle his ears with their little wands, he com-

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plains that it is beginning to rain. The comment of the Fairy Queen, when he has passed, sums up the situation. "Now, quite candidly speaking, do you consider him real?" she says, and the answer is obvious. Still more clearly is the illustration afforded by Molly's personality. Molly is a young lady who has got her hair up, and her petticoats down—and very often, we are told, "the last fairy goes with the last tuck." The question is how she will be affected towards that fairyland which is so insistently real to Pinkie and Tommy. Apparently she is veritably a grown-up. She is never quite certain of her vision, and when Cinderella and the Sleeping Beauty come to visit her next day, she has absolutely forgotten all about them, and does not recognise their appearance. On the other hand, she has one romantic claim, for she is in love; and under the rays of the moon she has lived in a world of her own imagination. In the moonlight, at all events, she sees the fairies, and is admitted to the fairy court. In some vague hereafter, when she has married the young man of her choice, she may return again to the mystic groves, and hear that tinkling music which is inaudible to the middle-aged. The little Queen herself remarks that Molly is too old. Yet, just because she has been personally conducted by two well-equipped babies, Molly is admitted on sufferance, and the sprites and elves go out of their way to do her a service, helping her to her elopement with the young man in a motor-car.

All these delicate fancies and imaginings, exquisitely carried out, in a play adorned with beautiful lyrics, make the most charming entertainment as read in a book; but now and again, as seen on the stage, despite the magnificence of the *mise-en-scène*, and the continual festival of music and colour, they are a little wanting in interest, lacking perhaps in that solidity,

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length, breadth, and thickness, which a stage play demands. When Nathaniel Hawthorne was asked about his curiously mystical romances, he replied that they might be read at night, but when seen in daylight they were apt to disappear, as though written in a sort of invisible ink. Something of the same kind may be felt in watching Robertson's fairy play. The first act is perfectly charming. When, in the second act, we are introduced to some childish favourites, such as Jack the Giant Killer, Jack of the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, and the Sleeping Beauty herself, the action seems to drag. Probably a fairy story requires as much logical structure as any other kind of story. In the immortal example of Shakespeare we not only have the quarrel of Titania and Oberon, but we have that solid connection with reality which concerns itself with the love-making of Bottom the Weaver, the infatuation of Titania, and the whole humorous episode of the ass' head. The story of *Pinkie and the Fairies* is thin in the extreme, and for those who want a story, the mere chaotic repetition of fairy episodes may prove a little disappointing. But even as I write the words, I feel that such a criticism does not touch the main essence, or mar, in the slightest degree, the intimate grace and beauty of Graham Robertson's extravaganza. We have learnt very imperfectly the author's own standpoint if we ask for such solid material as the ordinary stage play gives us. Probably, if Uncle Gregory were consulted on the matter, he might be inclined to dismiss the whole thing as sheer moonshine. Moonshine it undoubtedly is, and it depends on ourselves whether a moonshiny romance is interesting or dull. Robertson's fairy domain must be entered, if at all, in the spirit of the child, or, as Robertson phrases it himself:—



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“ He who still would loose the chain,  
Still unbar the Gates of Faerie,  
Needs must stoop and humbly deign  
Seek the tiny path with pain,  
Tread the way that does not vary.  
Back through Babyland it lies,  
To the long-lost Paradise,  
To the Land of Youth again.”

The verse comes out of a pretty explanatory song put into the mouth of the Fairy Queen. But, indeed, all the lyrics throughout have an exquisite charm of their own, especially, perhaps, the invocation to the rising moon in Act 2, and the beautiful song with which the first act ends:—

“ Nightingale, with softest trill,  
Lull him to his long repose,  
To his rest beyond the hill;  
Day was born a daffodil,  
Day dies a rose.”

The last two lines themselves are sufficient to mark out Robertson as a poet.

It was an evening of sheer joy, which brought the right spirit of Christmas with it, although it was a midsummer rather than a Christmas night's dream. I have had my Christmas night's dream, and strung it into rhyme for you.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

*If all the girls were true, love,  
And all the boys were good,  
And life by me and you, love,  
Were always understood ;*



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*If never a word were said, love,  
To give a true heart pain,  
And skies at sunset red, love,  
Never foreshadowed rain ;*

*If earth had only flowers, love,  
And never grew a weed,  
And only happy hours, love,  
Inspired some noble deed ;*

*If we could only dream, love,  
And never wake again ;  
If things were what they seem, love,  
And joy could banish pain ;*

*If all were for the best, love,  
And truth could conquer lies—  
Then we should be at rest, love,  
And sleep in Paradise.*

## XXV

January 1st, 1909.

### NEW YEAR'S DAWN

ἐν μεταίχμιῳ σκότου.—ÆSCH.

*In that dim interspace 'twixt night and day  
Where live the tortured ghosts of vanished years,  
The voiceless dawn, which tells to aching ears  
Each sin which brands man's tenement of clay ;  
When hands are tightly clasped, yet not to pray,  
And lips but quiver, dumb with nameless fears,  
While chill and cold upon day's verge appears  
The sickly promise of the New Year's Day—*

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*'Tis then I see my past days, one by one,  
Like murdered men, who clamour for redress ;  
I hear the flaming angel's vengeful tone  
Proclaim my doom of utter wretchedness ;  
And nearer, nearer seem to surge and swell  
Drear, unrepenting cries of hopeless Hell.*

There you have a New Year's mood. What a host of varying moods New Year's Day engenders, and most of them pessimistic! Here is another, summed up in

## AN APOLOGUE AND AN APOLOGY

ONCE upon a time there was a man who asked much of God and Nature and Fate.

And at last, God asked him: " Will you worship Me by faith alone and without question? " And the man answered, " No. I will question. Why else have you given me the power to reason and understand? "

And God turned away.

And then Nature asked him: " Will you be simple, primitive, animal; taking whatever the day gives you with contentment; doing whatever Chance offers you without remorse? " And the man answered: " No; I will not be animal. Why else have my fathers toiled to raise me from the bestial stage to the stature and responsibilities of the human being? "

And Nature turned away.

Last of all, Fate asked him, and her offers were the most difficult of all. Fate said to him: " Choose; will you be a student, finding the greatest satisfaction of your life in the range and width of what you know and can think? Or will you be sensitive, emotional, receptive, quickly responsive to every shade and turn of Beauty and Art, very human and very weak? " And

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the man answered, " I will be both. Why else have I the two natures? "

And Fate laughed.

Then once more Fate asked him, and her brow grew terrible. " Which will you have—the quiet, domestic love, as of one whose calm affection endures? Or will you for ever seek the mad love, the thing which shifts and changes, which dies and is re-born, now glittering with young passion, and anon shadowed with ancient weariness? " And the man answered: " I will have both: the one for every day and the other for the holiday. Why else have I the two instincts? "

And Fate spurned him as a fool.

Then the man knew that he was from all Eternity doomed to fail.

And he cursed God and Nature and Fate.

---

Is Philosophy one's only hope?

### CIRCUMSTANCE

*Vain is the strife : thou never canst be free !*

*Poor captive, whom the dreary bonds of Fate,*

*Closing in narrower rounds, incarcerate*

*Within the prison-house of Destiny—*

*Fate of thy father's blood, too strong for thee ;*

*Fate of thine acts, repented of too late ;*

*Fate born of joy and grief, and love and hate,*

*Doomed long ago to this catastrophe.*

*O Fate, we weave thee round our piteous lives*

*With our own hands, our foolish hands and light,*

*Not dreaming that thy links are iron gyves,*

*Forged to o'ercrush us in our heart's despite !*

*In each good fortune, in each fresh mischance*

*Is heard the tireless march of Circumstance.*

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Dear lady, my mind is in no New Year's mood. But I wish you from my heart A Happy—or if that is too much to hope, I shall say a contented—New Year.

## XXVI

January 21st.

TO-MORROW is the anniversary of the death of Queen Victoria. Did I ever show you the sonnet I wrote " In memoriam " ? I do not think I did. It was before I knew you,—it seems strange to think there was ever a time before I knew you,—before I had acquired the pernicious habit of craving for your interest in my work and my play. Well, here it is:—

## DEATH

Her Majesty the Queen of England died on Tuesday,  
January 22nd, 1901, at 6.30 p.m.

*Grief and the ache of things that pass and fade.  
The stately pomp, the pall, the open grave,  
These and the solemn thoughts which cannot save  
Our eyes from tears, nor make us less afraid  
Of that dread mystery which God has made :—  
How many thousand thousand men who wave  
Speechless farewells, with hearts forlornly brave,  
Know well the mockery of Death's parade ?*

*This cannot help us to transgress the bounds  
Nor give us wings to overpass the steep  
Ramparts of Heaven, which God's angels keep :  
Wide is " the great gulf fixed." For us the mounds  
Of fresh-turned earth ; above, sweet peace surrounds  
The painless patience of eternal sleep.*



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Eight years! The time has slipped away, and I have grown from a comparatively young man into an old one. I have learned some bitter lessons—lessons I suppose that I ought to have learned in my youth. I have had some wonderful moments. But the wonder of these has past: the sun has set: only grey twilight remains.

## THRENODY

*Death and Sorrow and Sleep :  
Here where the slow waves creep,  
This is the chant I hear,  
The chant of the measureless deep.*

*What was Sorrow to me  
Then, when the young life free  
Thirsted for joys of earth,  
Far from the desolate sea ?*

*What was Sleep but a rest,  
Giving to youth the best  
Dreams from the ivory gate—  
Visions of God manifest ?*

*What was Death but a tale  
Told to faces grown pale,  
Worn and wasted with years—  
A meaningless thing to the hale ?*

*Death and Sorrow and Sleep :  
Now their sad message I keep,  
Tossed on the wet wind's breath,  
The chant of the measureless deep.*

# Rosemary's Letter Book

You will laugh at me as an elderly sentimentalist. But you will laugh tenderly, I hope. Let me talk of other things. Do you know that Rudyard Kipling is having a vogue in Paris?

It seems almost incredible, but it is nevertheless true. There are a number of Frenchmen who have set themselves to the task of translating him—men like Robert D'Humières and Savine and Louis Fabulet. There has just been published in Paris *Œuvres Choiesies de Rudyard Kipling*, under the editorial care of Michel Epyu, a collection of some of the most notable things which Rudyard Kipling has done—not by any means a haphazard collection, but intended to illustrate the different aspects of his genius. So, too, French critics have tried to explain to themselves the mysterious force of a writer so alien from their race in temperament, and one of the best of these critical studies is written by André Chevrillon, in his *Études Anglaises*. They even now do not know how to translate him, for there are phrases in Kipling so racy of the soil in which he was bred that it would, indeed, be a difficult matter to put them in another tongue. For instance, Kipling wrote a curiously imaginative little story, under the title of *They*—"They" meaning vaguely seen and phantom existences, especially the ghosts of little children which haunt the imagination of a spinster. To find in French the word "Eux" (which, indeed, is a literal translation) gives one a certain shock, for somehow it strikes an entirely different note. In a similar fashion we have the well-known anecdotes for children which Kipling called *The Just So Stories*. How is this title to be translated into French? *Contes Comme Ça* does not seem particularly happy. I should imagine that *Contes qui s'Expliquent* is nearer to the

## Rosemary's Letter Book

sense of the original—stories which cannot help being what they are, stories which every child would accept in their entirety; as, for instance, the humorous account of the cat that walked by himself, to whom all places and times were alike, and who was cleverer than all the other beasts of the field. Here are facts about the feline nature which must be accepted as they stand, and I hardly think the suggestion of fancy or modishness which comes into the title, *Contes Comme Ça*, is quite appropriate to the occasion. And all the while that I am driving my pen to write of the things that may interest you, I am thinking of other matters.

Angry? Yes, I knew you would be angry. And I stop in the middle of what I am writing, to argue in one little detail, with your anger. No, do not think that I am anxious to prove to you that I have been right and that you are wrong. That is not so, my dear; I say to myself over and over again that you have been right, entirely and utterly justified in all you have said and done, because you are you, and I, alas! am I. *Ich grolle nicht*. Only there is one thing I will ask you not to say. Do not put down these sentimental outbursts, as you phrase them, to the fact that I am neurotic, and that I am having a severe attack of nerves. Child, wise as you are, you do not always understand. When the fountains of the great deep are broken up in a man's nature, when he is like a rudderless ship floating at the mercy of winds and waves because his compass is lost and the captain of his soul is no longer on the quarter-deck, for God's sake, don't tell him that he is suffering from an attack of nerves! You mistake the effect for the cause, dear friend. Cer-



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tainly he is suffering from nerves! But why? A great star has been blotted out from his sky, and he was wont to guide his course by that star—yes, and pray to it sometimes as the divinity of his waking or dreaming sense. A man I knew who went through the earthquake at San Francisco had his nerves shattered; but when his hand shook and his breath came fast and the perspiration stood out on his brow, as he told me his experiences, I did not explain his condition by the hypothesis that he was naturally hysterical. No, he had been through an earthquake. That was the sole adequate explanation. May you never know what a soul-shaking catastrophe is the bankruptcy of a hope, the apostasy of an ideal!

But now we come back to the astonishing fact that Rudyard Kipling is popular in Paris. Why should he not be popular? Well, the reasons are manifold. First of all, he is a savage Imperialist, an intense believer in the virtues of the Englishman as such; and that particular exhibition of ferocious insularity is not a thing which recommends any writer to foreign readers. In the next place, as an artist there is a note of violence in him, of crude barbarity sometimes, which offends the delicate critical perceptions of the Frenchman. He cannot understand the merciless directness with which Kipling paints his pictures, omitting no detail, however coarse, emphasising rather the coarser elements, making his people talk in a barbarous and savage tongue. Of course this quality is obvious throughout Kipling's work. You find it in the *Plain Tales from the Hills*; you find it abundantly illustrated in the poems; you find it even in the nearest approach to a novel which Kipling ever



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made, *The Light that Failed*. He is a realist, and that at least every Frenchman can understand. He is a realist in the sense that he describes exactly that which he sees before him, in all its minute and sometimes unsavoury detail. But he has not always the cold neutrality of the artist in these matters. He sometimes seems to have a preference for what is ugly and coarse and revolting. The artist in the French nature rebels against the reckless ugliness of Kipling. Probably the French critic often doubts whether Kipling could possibly be described as an artist in the sense in which we attribute the term to Robert Louis Stevenson. Kipling is rather a journalist, fond of glaring headlines and obvious sensationalism—a journalist because he gets his high lights with such immediate intuition that all the softer details of his composition are sacrificed to the strong and salient elements. There is more of the "twopence coloured" about Rudyard Kipling than there is of the "penny plain," as I think I have remarked on a previous occasion, and if we who read him in England resent it, how much more will the Frenchman feel that here is something which is crude, and barbarous, and unfriendly?

André Chevrillon, in a very characteristic passage, falls foul of Kipling's great hymn, the "Recessional." And that is an interesting point, because it is a little difficult for us to understand why to a foreigner this poem appears *haïssable* (hateful). It is hateful because Kipling consciously uses phrases from Scripture in order to produce an effect upon his reader wholly dependent on the associations evoked by familiar and sacred passages. So at least the Frenchman thinks, who knows that in England our whole imagination is carried away, not as we should say by the majestic rhythm of the Bible, but by its Puritani-

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cal suggestions. The "Recessional" is described as an intensely egoistic poem, for it exhibits the pharisaic Englishman accommodating himself to a passing mood of modesty which in reality he does not feel. And so the "Recessional" is dismissed as a kind of temporary reaction against the worship of force—a fine thing, of course, written with dignity and strength, but still enshrining all the characteristic self-righteousness of the average Englishman. It is a curious criticism from our point of view, and illustrates how practically impossible it is that the two races, the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon, should understand one another. The extraordinary thing to us about the "Recessional," when we have once got over our surprise that Kipling should have written it at all, is that it is so simple, so utterly devoid of self-consciousness. Some voice belonging to the times, it might be, of Cromwell, is telling us in grave and noble accents to beware of national pride. I once heard a dissenting minister preach on this subject. He thanked God that a testimony had come down from some ancient and original elements of the great, simple Englishmen who had, amongst other things, founded the American Republic—traversing all the ordinary materialistic conceptions of the day, and upbraiding the degrading reverence which we extend to money and militarism. How such a miracle should have happened in our present day the Nonconformist minister could not explain. How Kipling, the apostle of Imperialism, could have written it, seemed a still greater marvel. "The spirit bloweth where it listeth" was the only solution of the enigma. It is odd to contrast a judgment of this kind with the criticism of the Frenchman, starting from such different standpoints, issuing in such different conclusions.

How, then, does Rudyard Kipling appeal to the

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foreigner? The answer is, that in Kipling there are two quite different selves, and that though from one point of view he is an impressionist, a realist, a journalist, from another point of view he is endowed with the most remarkable imagination and the acutest faculty of interpreting other civilisations, which we have witnessed in the present age. There is a dreamer in Kipling, a sympathetic artist, a nature which thrills at the sights and sounds of the East, a sensibility which is inspired by a truly Northern imagination, romantic and mystical. I take it that the clever Frenchman understands Kipling by his knowledge, partly of Pierre Loti, partly of Guy de Maupassant. Loti revealed to Frenchmen a strange love for, and sympathy with, alien countries and civilisations. He is full of what they call *exotisme*, the passion for the foreign. And something of the same kind the Frenchman found also in Kipling when he wrote of India—a keen sense of the novel conditions, an intimate sympathy with alien thoughts and ideas. Broadly, however, there is a clear difference between Kipling and Loti. Loti lays his whole nature open to the spell of the new, old, strange, familiar land in which he finds himself. He is entirely receptive to the impressions which crowd upon his sensitive mind. In his wonderful little study, *The Romance of a Spahi*, we have the very picture of the West African coast. Kipling is equally sensitive, equally impressionable; and yet over and over again he reacts on his impressions. He is not wholly subjective, not wholly receptive. He is taking in a large stock of the things which have passed before his eye and ear and mind, and then he creates something out of the stock, something that belongs to himself alone.

Maupassant also helps to make the foreigner



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understand Kipling. Take, for instance, *The Light that Failed*. Here is a novel which probably would always be praised more by the foreign critics than by ourselves. The subject appeals to them: the treatment appeals to them. It has all the hard, vigorous intensity of one of Maupassant's pieces, truthful, sincere, and absolutely devoid of commiseration. What is the theme which Kipling portrays in *The Light that Failed*? Perhaps we should be inclined to say that his subject was the joys and sorrows, the temptations, the anguish, the despair of an artist. We are thinking, observe, of the hero, the unhappy Dick, who makes such a singular shipwreck of his life. But with Maupassant in his hand—especially his book *Notre Cœur*—the Frenchman picks out for sympathetic praise the figure of Maisie, the heroine, a woman incapable of love. For there are such women, as every French writer knows, and most psychologists in every country—women who would like to love, to whom love would come as a completion of their nature, and who yet are prevented by a certain narrowness of disposition and temperament, a certain ingrained selfishness, from ever being capable of that instinctive sacrifice of self on the altar of a larger passion which love demands. Maisie, no doubt, ruined Dick, and it is that side of the tragedy, engineered by the character of the heroine, which appeals to the French reader.

Or, if we want another explanation, we discover that the *Jungle Book* is one of those great artistic creations which belong to no one country, but appeal equally to all. The life-history of little Mowgli has, I think, been translated more than once into French. The charm of the book is that it reads as though it were an ancient genealogical record of something belonging to the primitive life of human-kind, rather than the work of a modern, whose powerful imagination can embody



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for him ancestral forces. The *Jungle Book* has, I venture to assert, a universal appeal, for the wonderful range of characters developed in the course of the story and belonging to the brute creation are interpreted not so much as a man might interpret them, but as a very clever and eloquent animal might be able to interpret itself. Nothing seems wrong in the record; there are no false notes. Mowgli, the little human boy, saved from the appetite of Shere Khan, the tiger, holds his own amongst all the animals owing to the mysterious law which makes no animal able to resist the power of the human eye. But there comes a time when Nature, which for the nonce had favoured a certain infraction of those laws which separate human beings from animals, repossesses herself, as it were, of her old secrets. The spring comes, passing like a breath over the whole jungle, and in that universal passion which in spring-time transforms the brute creation into something quite alien from their normal selves, little Mowgli finds himself alone. He is an unhappy, lost, solitary, little individual, while all round him the universal shudder of love engrosses the world like a mysterious dream. And then Mowgli must needs return to his kith and kin, for he is conscious that he belongs to another level of thought and idea. "There is, perhaps, in the English language no more beautiful page," says the enthusiastic M. Epyu, the latest editor of Kipling in French, of the *Jungle Book*. In it Rudyard Kipling is no longer an Englishman and writer of talent; he is an artist of genius belonging to the whole civilised world.

# Rosemary's Letter Book

## XXVII

LONDON, *February 2nd.*

"HARPER'S Library of Living Thought" is the suggestive and ambitious title of a new series of books which you ought to have. The first three volumes have been published,<sup>1</sup> and, as they contain original contributions by Swinburne, Tolstoy, and Professor William Flinders Petrie, they are certain to attract a good deal of attention. But it is the idea of the series which arrests the mind. One of the most peculiar aspects of contemporary letters is a continuous and progressive abbreviation, so to speak, of material for thought. We have not got the time to read long books. We have not got the time to read even long articles. How many people have the patience to get through such contributions as appear in the *Edinburgh* or *Quarterly Reviews*? And indeed why should they, if the general results can be summarised with as much facility as appears in the notices of various newspapers? A volume of essays is, as every publisher knows, an almost unsaleable product. And the process is going further still. From the book we come down to the essay; from the essay, written on those large and liberal lines to which Macaulay accustomed us, we come down to a short paper of some ten or twelve pages; thence we go to the still shorter article in the daily press; then we discover that paragraphs are better than articles, and that an article, say, which occupies a column, had better be broken up under its respective headings, so that the dilettante

<sup>1</sup> And several others since.

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reader may see exactly what he is incited to read, and may be enable to pick and choose.

At this stage "Harper's Library of Living Thought" comes to respond to what the advertisers call a "felt want." It will amuse you to see what the promoters of the series have to say for themselves. Here it is, in the publishers' preface, and it would be a pity not to reproduce it in the actual words of Harper:—

"Harper's Library of Living Thought" is intended as a response to what appears to be the special demand of the century now opening. Just as in the organic world every organism is, we are told, a growth of cells springing from the parent cell, so every good book is nothing more than a synthetic expansion of a single, central, living thought. . . . The twentieth century is and must needs be in a hurry, and what it asks for is the central living thought of every intellectual movement without delay. Its energies are so enormously active that new living thoughts are jostling each other daily. The consequence is that when a writer feels that he has a new living thought to express he does not wait to develop it fully—he does not pause to write a book, as he would have done in times past—he sends the suggestive article to one of the great reviews or magazines. Before getting into permanent form this suggestive article has to wait until the creator of the thought has the opportunity of developing it, of expanding it into a book, or else until he republishes it in a collection of miscellaneous essays upon all kinds of other subjects. This is why it is no uncommon thing to see in the careful student's library single numbers of a review or magazine preserved; while in libraries of other careful students we see a single article cut out of a review and made by the binder into a queer-looking little volume. Now it is our purpose to furnish such students as these with the living central thought in permanent book form as soon as it is born, and at a low price.

It does not really matter very much whether "Harper's Library of Living Thought" is or is not recommended by allusions to the growth of cells springing from the parent cell. What is of importance is that the publishers imagine that short "live" books by great authorities on the subjects which they have made their own, will feed the intellects of our con-



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temporaries without exhausting them on too voluminous material. A single central living thought—that is the notion: a drastic pillule, if you like, administered to a patient who cannot stand old-fashioned draughts and boluses. And so we come to the volumes themselves. Perhaps they do not altogether accommodate themselves to the standard set forth in the publishers' preface. One certainly does so; for if Tolstoy writes a short book on *The Teaching of Jesus*, then we do indeed get a definite single principle applied by the great Russian thinker to modern society. But Professor Petrie's *Personal Religion in Egypt before Christianity* is something more than an essay, although it perhaps may fall short of an actual book. It is a discussion of those ancient forms of religious faith which served so admirably as receptacles for the new and living faith introduced by Christ. It is an examination of the old bottles into which the new wine was poured, and of course contains admirable examples of the erudition and thoroughness of the great Egyptologist. It is when we come to the first of the series, and also in some senses the most interesting, that we feel that the Harper definition of their library is not wholly adequate. For in this first volume it is Swinburne discussing three plays of Shakespeare with his usual punctilious and literary acumen.

Apparently the essays are new, although they repeat and enforce the general estimate of Shakespeare's tragic work, with which we are quite familiar in Swinburne's other published essays. You know, for I have told you, the literary gods whom Swinburne worships. One is Æschylus, another is Victor Hugo, and the third and the greatest is William Shakespeare. We take, for instance, a tragedy like that of *King Lear*, and we compare it with other great creations



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which have shown the human mind working on the ultimate problems of life and fate. Here is Æschylus, with his Oresteian Trilogy, occupied with such grave questions as the right of retribution; the innocence or guilt of a son slaughtering his mother at the behest of an Oracle; the transmigration, as it were, of a curse down the whole of a fated line; the impersonation of conscience in the form of the terrible Furies; the final appeasement and reconciliation by that Council of supreme wisdom and old age, the Areopagus at Athens. Now, how does *King Lear* stand in relation to a colossal work of this description? In sheer poetic imagination and an extraordinary grasp of the mysterious superhuman forces which surround our mortal span, possibly Æschylus is the greater; for, though he has not the rhetoric of a Hebrew prophet, he has his moral indignation, his high poetic impulse. Nevertheless, it remains true that no one has gone so deeply into the subject of sin and suffering as Shakespeare; no one has drawn such extraordinary types of character; no one has exhibited so mysterious and intimate a knowledge of the recesses of the human heart. *King Lear* is an awful drama, because, without hesitation or remorse, it sets before us in letters of fire the appalling consequences of sin. But the point which Swinburne makes in connection with this tragedy is a peculiar one. He asks us to consider the extraordinary value, in the times of Elizabeth and James, of a resolute assertion of the equality of all human beings, together with the inefficiency of kingship. The weakest man in the whole realm is King Lear himself, who happened to be its king. When the hero ceases to be a king and becomes a suffering individual he has his rights. He wins his way, not in virtue of any adventitious pomp of royalty, but solely as a man. I confess that to me it seems exceedingly

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doubtful whether Shakespeare had any such republican, or rather socialistic, idea in his head, when he wrote *King Lear*. But it is an interesting and suggestive point to raise.

We may pass over the little essay on *Richard II.*, with the remark that it illustrates, in Swinburne's opinion, the struggle in the mind of Shakespeare between the influence of Marlowe and the influence of Robert Greene. But when we come to *Othello* there is again a most interesting sidelight thrown on the construction of the drama. As every one knows, Shakespeare took the story from Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*. The contrast between the original tale and the version which the great Elizabethan dramatist produced is always an instructive lesson in the highest forms of adaptation. For Shakespeare thinks his characters out anew, and creates even where he imitates. There is one odd little detail in Cinthio which at first sight strikes us as far better than the corresponding incident in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Some part of Desdemona's ruin was due to the loss of a mysterious handkerchief, given by the Moor to his bride, and evidently considered by him to have some rare medicinal value. In Shakespeare Desdemona applies the handkerchief to Othello's head, and, in a fitful and distracted mood, the handkerchief is dropped, picked up by Emilia, and subsequently given to Iago, who makes the basest uses of it. But what is the original story? It strikes one as far more pathetic. Desdemona goes on a visit to Emilia's house, for she is very fond of a child of Iago. Iago gives her the child to fondle, and at the same time abstracts her handkerchief, thus deriving from a pure act of benevolence on the part of the heroine materials for his deadly stratagem. Now, why did not Shakespeare copy this? It has real pathos, and strikes one as much

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better than his more clumsy manipulation of the loss of the handkerchief. I do not know whether Swinburne's answer will satisfy all students, but it is certainly curious and striking. Shakespeare rejected the incident because it involved the recognition that Iago had a child. Now it was the poet's theory that all horrible and abnormal creatures could not possibly propagate their kind. It would be too terrible for the world if monsters of intelligence and iniquity could have some one after them to carry on their diabolic game. No, wickedness is sterile, and ends with itself. Therefore no incident must be introduced which assumes that in the home of the arch-villain and his wife there existed a babe to win the devotion of Desdemona. A little fanciful, you say? Yes, but Swinburne's remarks on Shakespeare are often a little fanciful, and perhaps more than a little exaggerated in the intensity of their hero-worship. But no one can say that the first of "Harper's Library of Living Thought" is an insignificant work. It contains criticisms of the deepest significance, because made by a dramatic poet on a dramatic poet.

"I had a dream which was not all a dream" the other night. Whatever else you may be to me, or fail to be, you are always kind, and it might easily be part of your kindness that you might shrink from telling me something that you knew would pain me. Let us suppose that you had decided to marry. You might shrink from telling me this; you might think it wiser to confront me with a *fait accompli*, so that the aching tooth—forgive the unsavoury parallel—might be dragged out once and for all with one sharp shock of pain. I dreamt you were married, Rosemary, and that though you did not bid me to come, I was



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there far off, remote in a corner of the organ loft, watching the final severance of lifelong ties. And so I shaped the thing into verse—not good verse, Heaven knows, nor even true verse, for the sight of your bridals did not bring me back to paradise or innocence. I felt rather as Tennyson felt, perched in an uncomfortable gallery, seeing far below him a tawdry French comedy—I felt as if I were “stuck on a spike over hell.” Of course you will not find this feeling in my commonplace lines.

### ON A WEDDING DAY

*As one who strives to summon from the past  
Forgotten shapes that once he knew full well—  
The lips, the hair, the eyes that forged the spell  
Which held his heart in sternest bondage fast—  
Although they seem to him as though Time cast  
Mere shadows of his youth athwart the dell  
Wherein his unripe fancy yearned to tell  
To ears beloved the love that might not last :*

*So I upon this happy bridal morn  
Seek to unloose the load of ill-spent hours,  
The miserable waste of glorious days,  
God's moments spurned, or used in shameful ways ;  
And in the innocence of youth, new born,  
Gaze on the virgin sweetness of white flowers.*



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## XXVIII

February 31st.

I ALWAYS told you that there are curious lacunæ in your education. How is it that you, who love Omar Khayyam, have never had the curiosity to inquire more about the author of the English version? And now you demand to know "all about him"! You might have waited another month and read all about him in the newspapers; for, as you know, and I suppose this is the reason of your sudden desire for increased knowledge, we celebrate his centenary on March 31st.

Well, March 31st, 1809 was the birthday of Edward Fitzgerald, poet, dilettante, literary artist, translator, who is known in the modern world for one reason above all others—because he wrote the brilliant and spirited English version of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*. It was, by the way, merely a curious piece of luck which first directed Fitzgerald's attention to Persian literature, for his earlier love was not Persian, but Spanish. At the instance of Professor Cowell, who was an intimate friend, Fitzgerald was introduced to Spanish, and especially to Calderon's plays. Six of Calderon's dramas were issued with Edward Fitzgerald's name attached, and there is no question that his success in this translation made him aware of his peculiar gifts in reproducing a foreign author, with all the delicacies and nuances of the original style. Then, a little later, Professor Cowell interested Fitzgerald in Persian. Sa'di's *Gulistan* early attracted him by its quaint stories, and in 1856

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he published an anonymous version of Jami's *Salaman and Absal*. Then came the decisive moment when Fitzgerald first saw, in manuscript in the Bodleian Library, the Persian poet whose verses absolutely captivated him—Omar Khayyam, the astronomer-poet of the eleventh century. As a matter of fact, these poems were hardly known before. There were a few current quotations, due to a version published in Paris in 1857 by Monsieur Nicholas; but it was Fitzgerald who, through his curious power of reproducing on the reader the effect of the original, made Omar Khayyam a household word in English literature. The tribute by Lord Tennyson to this translation is well known. It occurs in the dedication to *Tiresias* :—

“ But none can say  
That Lenten fare makes Lenten thought,  
Who reads your golden Eastern lay,  
Than which I know no version done  
In English more divinely well;  
A planet equal to the sun  
Which cast it, that large infidel,  
Your Omar.”

But Swinburne also used a memorable phrase. “ His daring genius gave Omar Khayyam a place for ever among the greatest English poets.”

Fitzgerald was born at Woodbridge, Suffolk, and was the third son of John Purcell, who on the death of his wife's father took the name and arms of Fitzgerald. He was sent to King Edward VI.'s School at Bury St. Edmunds, under the charge of Dr. Malkin, and there James Spedding and J. M. Kemble were among his schoolfellows. At the age of seventeen he made his appearance at Trinity College, Cambridge, and just as his school friendships with James Spedding and W. B. Donne were lasting, so, too, his college

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contemporaries, W. M. Thackeray, W. H. Thompson, afterwards Master of Trinity, and John Allen, afterwards Archdeacon of Salop, were revered by him with an enduring affection. Fitzgerald obtained his degree in January 1830, and then took up his residence in Suffolk, occupying his time with gardening and reading, and leading a life of almost sylvan quiet and repose. In the neighbourhood of Woodbridge his chief friends were the Rev. George Crabbe, who was vicar of Bredfield, and son of the poet Crabbe—to whose poems, by the way, Fitzgerald was devoted,—Archdeacon Groome, and Bernard Barton, the Quaker-poet of Woodbridge. The latter friendship led to one of the most remarkable episodes in a career which is not distinguished for startling events. In 1856, when Fitzgerald was nearly fifty, he suddenly determined to marry Lucy Barton, Bernard Barton's daughter—an unfortunate union, which was soon destined to terminate, because husband and wife were in no sense suited to each other. Why Fitzgerald drifted into this marriage is by no means easy to explain, and his sudden decision was somewhat of a puzzle to his friends. For he was a predestined bachelor, with ways and customs which would sadly afflict any well-ordered feminine mind. But the probable reason is that, as her father had entrusted Lucy to his care, and had left her poorly provided for, Fitzgerald thought it was his duty to marry her. The couple soon separated by mutual consent.

Although the brothers Tennyson were at Cambridge at the same time as Fitzgerald, he did not make their acquaintance till a later period. Every spring it was his custom to make a long visit to London, where he constantly met Spedding and Thackeray, and was a frequent visitor of the Carlyles. It was in London that the friendship with the Tennysons



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was first begun. With Frederic, the eldest, Fitzgerald kept up a correspondence for several years, and the warm appreciation which the Poet Laureate had for him is sufficiently attested by his touching allusion to the version of Omar Khayyam. The greater part of Fitzgerald's life was spent in Suffolk, and not in the capital. In 1853 he settled at Farlingay Hall, near Woodbridge, and subsequently lived in the town itself. Later on he removed to Little Grange, a house he had built for himself. Of course, he was not a sociable man in the ordinary sense of the term, for he had no liking for the conventional usages of society, and might justly be described as somewhat of a recluse. Those whom he admitted to his intimacy found in him the most delightful companion. He had a tender and affectionate nature, and his charities were large and generous. But the very simplicity of his character often led him into strange mistakes.

One such mistake—for we can characterise it by no other word—was his curious friendship with the sailor, Fletcher, who went by the name of "Posh." From his sixtieth year onward his great outdoor amusement was yachting. Every summer was spent in cruising about the Suffolk coast, especially near Lowestoft and Aldeburgh, the latter locality endeared to him as the birthplace of his favourite Crabbe. It was thus that he formed a close intimacy with his sailor friend, becoming partner with him in a fishing-smack; but Posh, as might have been expected, hardly came up to the standard exacted by Fitzgerald. The friendship, however, lasted for nearly eight years, and then the sea lost its attraction. His sailor friend had disappointed him: his little schooner, the *Scandal*, was sold, and he had to find consolation in his garden, where his favourite walk was called "the quarter-deck." On June 14th, 1883, he died



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suddenly at Merton Rectory, Norfolk, during his annual visit to his friend Crabbe, and was buried at Boulge. One of the most charming of his characteristics was the steadfastness of his friendships; for, under an external manner of some reserve, and with modes of behaviour which must certainly be described as wayward and petulant, he possessed a very tender heart, a keen, sensitive imagination, and a genuine love of letters. His petulance often led him into mischief, and a remark of his about Mrs. Browning's poetry, made after her death, and reported to her husband, provoked Browning to a bitter sonnet, which appeared in *The Athenæum*.

Have you ever noticed how sometimes, by a rare combination of a fortunate mood, a congenial subject, and favourable circumstances, a writer can do something which stands out of all relation to his ordinary self, or to the customary activities of his intellect? Edward Fitzgerald, as a matter of fact, wrote a good deal. There is a dialogue on youth, published in 1851, entitled *Euphranor*; followed, in the next year, by *Polonius: A Collection of Wise Saws and Modern Instances*. There is the translation of Calderon's plays already alluded to, and, at a later period of his career, translations from his favourite Greek poets, the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, and Sophocles's two great dramas, *Ædipus Tyrannus* and *Ædipus Coloneus*. He was also a letter-writer, in a period which certainly was not favourable to this form of composition. About the middle of the nineteenth century letter-writing as an art had almost disappeared. But Fitzgerald had some remarkable qualities in this line, and his letters to Fanny Kemble, to Frederic Tennyson, and to Professor C. E. Norton, are pre-eminent in their kind—easy, unforced, garrulous, interesting contributions on the part of a dilettante thinker and student of

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literature to some of the questions of the day. You may remember that Fitzgerald's letters were edited some years ago by Aldis Wright. No, I forgot. Your interest in Fitzgerald is quite recent. But despite all his other work, it remains true that his popular reputation rests solely on one single achievement, and that his success here was of so startlingly decisive a kind that it has put the author on a higher level of eminence than probably he deserves. No one can call Edward Fitzgerald a man of absolutely first-rate intellect; still less can he be described as a genius. And yet *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, as translated and adapted by him, is a work which the world will unwillingly let die—which seems, indeed, assured of immortality.

What is the precise charm, what is the exact value, of an achievement like this? At a given moment in his life Fitzgerald comes across the writings of an Eastern poet, which exactly correspond with his own instinctive sympathies and predilections. The age was one in which religious faiths were losing their definite outlines and contours. The spirit of scepticism was abroad. Men were perpetually asking that idle and unprofitable question, Who will show us any good? The ordinary problems that beset humanity: Why am I here? What purpose do I serve? Why am I given my faith, my reason, my intellect, if these things are to disappear in an unending death?—had begun to confront not only the philosopher in his study, but all thinking men, who preserved, even throughout the various businesses which occupied their time, a yearning for truth, and some desire for its realisation. There are some men to whom the solution of problems of this kind is a stern death-and-life struggle. There are others to whom they present themselves in a certain sentimental aspect,

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with a good deal of picturesque melancholy, combined, at bottom, with a real scepticism as to whether such questions should be propounded at all; whether, in fact, we should not be content with everlasting nescience. Probably Fitzgerald belonged to the latter type, and he certainly found in Omar Khayyam an echo of the same sentimental regrets, the same passionate querulousness, the same fundamental despair. Now, if the "quatrains" of Omar Khayyam had been a real philosophic attempt to grapple with problems of tremendous import to humanity, they, of course, would never have attained the same popularity. It is because they possess other elements—a pensive sadness, a kind of tragic Epicureanism, and also a certain fierce disdain of the very questions which come up for consideration—that the *Rubaiyat* has become one of the things which young men and young women of promise must accept as a chapter in their intellectual progress. Very likely Omar himself was no more serious in his recommendations to his contemporaries that they should "eat and drink, for to-morrow they die," than are those blameless members of the Omar Khayyam Club, who meet at Frascati's, and pledge each other in red wine. But, whatever the Oriental poet was, whether he was really a drunkard, or really a sceptic, or whether he was a victim of his own poetic moods, at all events his poem made an appeal at the right moment to precisely the right kind of temperament in Fitzgerald. He, too, was a victim of his æsthetic tendencies. He, too, did not possess the strength of mind to direct his own course according to his own lights—whether the universe fell in fragments around him or not. He, too, in his fashion, was a disillusioned voluptuary, a man who tried to find, in a life remote from the public gaze, a happiness which only comes as the last reward of



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strenuous endeavour in the world's most populous marts. So Omar and Fitzgerald clasped hands across the centuries, and—much to the surprise, no doubt, of both, could they be aware of the sequel—the youth of both sexes in the suburbs of London accept the *Rubaiyat* as a test of their literary culture.

It is interesting to note how freely Fitzgerald dealt with his original. Clearly his version is no translation. It is an adaptation, an exceedingly free rendering, which makes use of hints and suggestions rather than actual words in the original. Let us take one or two of the best-known passages:—

“ Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same door as in I went.

With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,  
And with my own hand labour'd it to grow:  
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—  
' I came like Water, and like Wind I go.' ”

Now this is how they appear in the earliest known text, the Ousely Manuscript of A.D. 1460, in the Bodleian Library:—

“ For a while, when young, we frequented a teacher;  
For a while we were contented with our proficiency;  
Behold the foundation of the discourse!—what happened  
to us?  
We came in like Water, and we depart like Wind.”

Let us take another example:—

“ The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on; nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.”



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Literally, the verse would run thus:—

“ From the Beginning was written what shall be;  
Unhaltingly the Pen writes, and is heedless of good and bad;  
On the First Day He appointed everything that must be,  
Our grief and our efforts are vain.”

Here are other interesting examples. Nothing is better known than the following:—

“ With me along some Strip of Herbage strown  
That just divides the desert from the sown,  
Where name of Slave and Sultan scarce is known,  
We pity Sultan Mahmud on his Throne.

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,  
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
Oh, Wilderness is Paradise enow! ”

The suggestion in the original is contained in the following lines:—

“ Forsake not the book, the lover's lips, and the green bank  
of the field,  
Ere that the earth enfold thee in its bosom.”

Take once more a very characteristic instance of Fitzgerald's free handling. We find in the Ousely Manuscript the following lines:—

“ In a thousand places on the road I walk, thou placest snares.  
Thou sayest: ' I will catch thee if thou steppest into them,'  
In no smallest thing is the world independent of thee,  
Thou orderest all things—and callest me rebellious! ”

But in what fine form do these lines appear in Fitzgerald's version!

“ Oh Thou, who didst with Pitfall and with Gin  
Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with Predestination round  
Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin?

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Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,  
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;  
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give—and take! ”

Fitzgerald's treatment of his original is a lesson—perhaps a somewhat dangerous lesson—to all adaptors.

Do you know the difference between prose and poetry? I wonder if you do. Of course the distinction is difficult to make, for many a dull day of prose ends, as it were, with a certain shame, in a pink flush of poetry, while nights which should be throbbing with emotion never lift themselves above the level of flat prose. Perhaps you know the difference; perhaps you have discovered that poetry will never do for ourd aily bread. But, dear, you are wrong! The select children of grace are not fed with bread alone, but with the celestial manna, coming they know not whence, whenever the need for sustenance is upon them. Some of us sometimes in golden moments charged with infinite issues have drunk the milk of paradise. I wonder why you refused that chalice when it was offered to your lips! Well, you elected to satisfy yourself with prose. You will have your reward. You will always be so sane, so self-controlled, so much the Captain of your Soul. Captain of your Soul! No, that you will never be. You have starved your soul: it is easy to be the captain of a bloodless thing. But oh the pity, the pity of it, Iago! In some matters other than the purely religious, the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. In your trim and ordered existence, in which you have put away from yourself, as an accursed thing, the sacred wine of human feeling, you will experience neither thirst

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nor hunger, you will not strive nor cry, your voice will not be heard about the streets. You will never make a fool of yourself, Rosemary, and the man or the woman who does not make mistakes, makes nothing. Prose, prose, prose; so safe, so conventional, so undistinguished! And the agonising thought is that, perchance, if you had come across another bard, you might have turned each day as it comes, each sorrow, joy, love, and friendship, into the divinest melody. Was it my fault, or yours? When I am dead they will find that question engraved on my heart.

But I am forgetting Fitzgerald. Since you want to know all about him, I suppose that includes his letters. I have only time for a very few extracts.

From a letter written to Professor C. E. Norton, in 1876, is taken the following:—

What Mr. Lowell says of him (Dante) recalled to me what Tennyson said to me some thirty-five or forty years ago. We were stopping before a shop in Regent Street, where were two figures of Dante and Goethe. I (I suppose) said, "What is there in old Dante's face that is missing in Goethe's?" And Tennyson (whose profile then had certainly a remarkable likeness to Dante's) said: "The Divine." Then Milton; I don't think I've read him these forty years—the whole scheme of the poem, and certain parts of it, looming as grand as anything in my memory; but I never could read ten lines together without stumbling at some pedantry that tipped me at once out of paradise, or even hell, into the schoolroom, worse than either. . . . Then, old "Daddy Wordsworth," as he was sometimes called, I am afraid, from my christening; he is now, I suppose, passing under the eclipse consequent on the glory which followed his obscure rise. I remember fifty years ago at our Cambridge, when the battle was fighting for him by the few against the many of us who only laughed at "Louisa in the Shade," etc. His brother was then master of Trinity College; like all Wordsworths (unless the drowned sailor), pompous and priggish. He used to draw out the chapel responses so that we called him the "Meeserable Sinner," and his brother the



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"Meeserable Poet." Poor fun enough; but I never can forgive the Lakers who first despised, and then patronised, "Walter Scott," as they loftily called him; and he, dear, noble fellow, thought they were quite justified. Well, your Emerson has done him far more justice than his own countryman Carlyle, who won't allow him to be a hero in any way, but sets up such a cantankerous, narrow-minded bigot as John Knox in his stead. I did go to worship at Abbotsford, as to Stratford-on-Avon; and saw that it was good to have so done. If you, if Mr. Lowell, have not lately read it, pray read Lockhart's account of his journey to Douglas Dale on (I think) July 18 or 19, 1831. It is a piece of Tragedy, even to the muttering thunder, like the Lammermuir, which does not look very small beside Peter Bell and Co.

To Fanny Kemble, in 1879, Fitzgerald wrote the following, an equally lively specimen of his epistolary pen:—

Parlons d'autres choses, as my dear Sévigné says. I—we—have finished all Sir Walter's Scotch novels; but I thought I would try an English one: *Kenilworth*—a wonderful drama, which theatre, opera, and ballet (as I once saw it represented) may well reproduce. The scene at Greenwich, where Elizabeth "interviews" Sussex and Leicester, seemed to me as fine as what is called (I am told, wrongly) Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. Of course, plenty of melodrama in most other parts—the plot wonderful.

Then—after Sir Walter—Dickens's *Copperfield*, which came to an end last night because I would not let my reader read the last chapter. What a touch when Peggotty—the man—at last finds the lost girl, and—throws a handkerchief over her face when he takes her to his arms—never to leave her! I maintain it—a little Shakespeare—a Cockney Shakespeare, if you will; but as distinct, if not so great, a piece of pure genius as was born at Stratford. Oh, I am quite sure of that, had I to choose but one of them, I would choose Dickens's hundred delightful caricatures rather than Thackeray's half-dozen terrible photographs. . . . D'autres choses encore. You may judge, I suppose, by the N.E. wind in London what it has been hereabout. Scarce a tinge of green on the hedgerows; scarce a bird singing (only once the nightingale, with broken voice), and no flowers in the garden but the brave old daffydowndilly and hyacinth—which I scarce knew was so hardy. I am quite pleased to find how comfortably they do in my garden, and look so Chinese gay. Two of my dear blackbirds have I found dead—of cold and hunger, I suppose; but one is even now singing—across that funeral bell.



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There is hardly any question that the letters of Edward Fitzgerald can be put side by side with some of the best letters in our English tongue—those of Charles Lamb, for instance, or of Ruskin. Let us add a final remark. Fitzgerald was a master of style—at all events, according to his own definition, which is by no means one of the worst that could be mentioned. According to Fitzgerald, a good literary style is “the saying, in the most perspicuous and succinct way, what one thoroughly understands, and saying it so naturally that no effort is apparent.” It would not be easy to better that definition.

And now, my dear lady, I feel you will not want to hear the name of Fitzgerald or catch sight of my handwriting for a very long while.

You must forgive me. I forget the length to which my letters expand when I am writing to you. And in extenuation, I must plead that you are a veritable Oliver in your demands for more.

### XXIX

LONDON, *March 11th.*

THERE is no lack of interesting books just now, either published or promised, and there is no reason for supposing that the present publishing season will be in any sense inferior to any of its predecessors. Let me mention some of the books that have lately interested me. There is a new *Life of the diarist Samuel Pepys*, written, oddly enough, by a lady, Miss E. Hallam Moorhouse, who also, I am assured, is quite young. Now there are certain authors who one would say

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off-hand should never be written about by a woman. I should have been inclined to say, until I read Miss Moorhouse's book, that Samuel Pepys was one, for the obvious reason that the feminine judgment is apt to be a little unjust and hard on a man who avows his moral delinquencies with the charming frankness of such a *bonhomme* as Pepys. But I am bound to say that no feeling of the kind is left in my mind after perusing the recent work, for a very just estimate is formed of the literary qualities of the man, quite apart from his curiously vacillating and inconsistent character. Did I say curiously vacillating? The adverb is undoubtedly wrong. Nothing strange or unusual meets us in an individuality like this. A man may be a good administrator and an unfaithful husband. You can have an author who appeals by the charm of his writing, albeit that the subject of his narrative may reveal some of the baseness, or at all events the littleness, of human nature. There is nothing surprising about all this. The only surprising thing is that so many years had to elapse after Pepys' death before his Diary was published, and that it has been left to a woman to give one of the best versions of his career.

Ruskin is another of those giants of the nineteenth century whose work is more safely entrusted to male than female editors. A very interesting collection of Ruskin's letters to various people has just seen the light of day, edited with their usual accuracy and care by Alexander Wedderburn and E. T. Cook. If a woman begins to write about Ruskin, she is apt to expatiate on just that element of his style which makes him a perilous model for a younger generation. If he had been a journalist, he would have been described as an admirable descriptive writer. He spreads himself out, as it were, over luxuriant paragraphs of eloquent prose. And he can do the thing magnificently,

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because sometimes—though not always—he knew when to stop. He knew when the fluent narrative, with its wealth of gorgeous phraseology, should be interrupted by a real bit of intellectual criticism.

Ruskin in his letters was a very different kind of being from what he was in his well-known prose writings. He was familiar, and intimate, and captious, and partial. Never was there such a good critic; and never also was there such a bad one. He was a mass of prejudice, but he retained the acute discernment of an original thinker. He was an emotional man, often a sentimentalist, as is abundantly exemplified in this collection of his letters. But he loved beautiful things, and he knew how to describe them in beautiful language. Because he was also one of those forces in our national life which make for things spiritual rather than things material, because he everywhere cared more for the inner graces of character than he did for the external trappings of wealthy success, Ruskin, bad economist, imperfect critic, literary genius, is yet a name to conjure with. And yet I often wonder whether the rising generation knows very much about him!

It is always a constant marvel to us middle-aged men to discover what young people read. Are they really satisfied with their H. G. Wells and *Tono-Bungay*; with the social economy, let us say, of Bart Kennedy; with the romance of Conan Doyle; with the psychology of Robert Hichens and Maurice Hewlett? It is not their fault that they do not read much poetry, because they are too young to know the age which nursed itself on Tennyson and Browning and Matthew Arnold. But I wonder how many of them appreciate the fact that the biggest poetic thing in our day, enshrining the truest poetry, has a mocking outward vesture of prose and an equally delusive



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dramatic form. I mean, of course, *The Dynasts*, by Thomas Hardy. I doubt if our young barbarians read much Ruskin. Perhaps many of them have forgotten to immerse themselves in Robert Louis Stevenson. There is certainly one old worthy, the crabbed, sour, strong-hearted, indignant Carlyle, whom they absolutely refuse to read. Ask a young man about *Sartor Resartus*, and he will probably ask you if you understand the real philosophy of *Dorian Gray*. Well I, for one, do not want to understand the philosophy of *Dorian Gray*, and I regret the passing of that virile Chelsea prophet who thundered and lightnined with such magnificent and, fortunately, inimitable rhetoric over his one or two ideas—the greatness of the human hero and the majesty of work.

There is yet another man about whom no woman should be allowed to write, and that is Swift. Quite lately there have been one or two volumes about Dean Swift, under the editorship of Mr. Temple Scott, and various new solutions have been propounded for the relations between Swift and Stella and her rival. It is a theme of considerable human interest, though perhaps we shall never know whether Swift was really married or not. But I am thinking more of the character of the Dean than anything else—the character in the largest sense, including the material personality as well as the spiritual content—when I say that no woman, not even Mrs. Woods in her charming novel, *Esther Vanhomrigh*, should be allowed to write about Swift. He was a bitter man, an arid, masterful spirit, a cynic in the largest sense of the term, wandering in a desert where no water is, and where the only food is locusts and wild honey. Magnificently sombre and strong, he was a satirist of a type of which there have been few examples, and the melancholy asperity of the man, combined with his tremendous intellectual

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gifts, appeal, I think, more to the masculine than to the feminine intellect.

The whole question of the satirist is rather an interesting one. He is assuredly not a high type of writer, and he is far nearer to being a rhetorician than a poet. Moral indignation is the satirist's excuse, but it does not cover or apologise for the squalor of the themes and the coarseness of the language which seem often to appeal to him. Roman literature gives us three types of the satirist. In the first place, we have Horace, an amiable Epicurean; a man of the world, who cannot probe very deeply into the morals of the society amidst which he finds himself; first, because it would be bad taste to do so, and next, because it would hurt his own good temper. One can laugh with well-bred contempt at vulgar foibles, but one need not get into a passion about them. The world is a queer place, and you must accept at their surface value a number of the oddities and paradoxes that you see before you.

Next you come to a different type, a really good man. Persius, whose satires are a terrible example of linguistic obscurity, wrote as a young man, felt as a young man, with a sincere love of what is good, and honest, and true, and a sincere distaste for all the dreadful and pitiable things which were going on around him. Nothing more beautiful than the adoration for his teacher, Cornutus, is on record; nor yet will any one find in verse finer illustrations of that real sanction of the moral law, the rebukes of conscience, and the agony of remorse. There is only one punishment for the wicked, Persius cries. It is the consciousness of the enormous interval which separates them from goodness. And so we get his memorable line, "Virtutem videant, intabescantque relictæ." (Let them look upon virtue, and pine that they have lost her for ever.) And

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those almost equally fine lines relating to that voice which whispers to the heart:—

“ ‘ Imus

Imus præcipites ' quam si sibi dicat, et intus  
Palleat infelix quod proxima nesciat uxor.”

(The voice which whispers to the heart, “ We are going, going down a precipice,” and the ghastly inward paleness, which is a mystery even to the wife of our heart.)

And so we come to the third type of satirist, the one whom Swift most nearly resembles, Juvenal. He is a much better writer than Persius. He has a stately eloquence which carries one off one's feet. He is a learned rhetorician, having worked hard in the schools of rhetoric, a man who wields his hexameters in a fashion not unworthy of Lucretius and Virgil. He says of himself that it is stern moral indignation, “ *sæva indignatio*,” which drives him to his work. One cannot but let one's words go forth, however much worldly prudence might bid one to be cautious. But Juvenal has not got the pure heart of Persius. Sometimes he almost riots in things evil. In his case, surely, there is, now and again, the terrible suspicion that he lashes forms of vice with something like a liking for the things he decries. It is difficult to be sure of this, of course; but a man who steepes his soul in rhetorical declamation on the horrors of the age in which he lives can easily end by exhibiting a sort of fascinated interest in corruption. At all events, after a time Juvenal is very tedious to read, despite the excellence of his rhetoric. He does not always ring true; he never attains to the moral dignity of Persius, any more than he could ever compass so majestic a single line as that which I have already quoted,

“ *Virtutem videant, intabescantque relicta.*”



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## XXX

March 20th.

I OFTEN think that in order to understand a book the reader must contribute something of his own. Do you agree with me? Some pieces of literary work seem to require this contribution from ourselves to a larger degree than others, especially if they happen to have a certain fancifulness or whimsicality of form, which obscures—or sometimes injures—the real meaning of the subject-matter. Miss Macaulay, the clever author of *Abbots Verney*, has just written a new book in a very difficult genre. It is vague, mystical, full of half-lights, suggestive more than positive, indicating lines of thought which can be carried out to greater lengths than the author chooses to give us. *The Secret River* is, as it were, the autobiography of a soul; and this introspective kind of literature—like the confessions of “Amiel,” or the life-history of “Eugénie de Guerin,” or the “Confessions” of that arch-sentimentalist, Rousseau himself—will be very differently interpreted by different minds. If we try to stand at the point of view of the author, and attune our own spirits to her thoughts, we may arrive at something which is helpful and interpretative. But in this case, as in all others, sympathy is the beginning and end of criticism. “We receive but what we give,” said the Lake poet, “and in our life alone does Nature live.” He was referring to that philosophy of Nature which resolves it into a phantasmagoria evolved out of our own brains. But there is a sense in which it holds true of all works of art. They live their life in virtue

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of what the spectator or the critic sees in them, and, apart from such interpretative insight, they remain blanched and colourless ghosts, sometimes even irritating pieces of nonsense.

I should like you to read Miss Macaulay's book. But you would find you must give her a good deal. You must give her, for instance, your understanding of and acquiescence in the character of her hero. Michael Travis is a man of very infirm bodily strength, who has lived a life of sensuous impressionism. He has loved the shapes of beauty which the clouds of the sky have given him; he has loved the changing aspects of the earth, at morn, and at noon, and in the evening hour. But, above all, he has loved the panorama of colour, the orchestra of sound, which he has learnt and appreciated on the river. For the river speaks to him as nothing else does, and he understands its language. He knows the little people of the river, the ancient, primitive earth-things, who are not to be separated from Nature herself—little embodiments of Nature's ways, old as the world is old, asking no questions, troubled by no problems. In contrast with these little people of the river, the new race, which is that of man, is indeed an uncomfortable population. For they are not one with Nature; they arrest her, and question her, and torture her with investigation and doubt. They do not live Nature's life, for they are perpetually asking the why of things; and no one can be happy who wants to know why. Does all this sound a little mystical? It only comes to this: that the hero, Michael Travis, is a beauty-loving, Nature-adoring pagan, an æsthetic philosopher—if, indeed, that be not too august a description to give him—a man who drinks in through his senses the messages of the things around him, and never seeks to correct them by processes of reasoning.

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He is not a mystic or a symbolist, because the symbolical view of Nature is a dull matter, perpetually trying to find meanings, and lessons, and signs; whereas the mind which is not tainted with allegory goes its own way in blissful acquiescence in things as they are. So the first thing we have to give to Miss Macaulay's little book is some knowledge of the pagan æsthetic spirit of pure sensuous delight in the beautiful things which Nature prodigally bestows on her worshippers.

And now comes another point. We witness a certain evolution and development from this primitive state of bliss. Of course, like all other progress, this can only be accomplished through pain. Only through disaster and despair can a man discover that the pagan and æsthetic view of the world does not represent an attitude which will give him lasting content. Alas! I have discovered it. And so, I think, have you. But how is Michael's education begun? In a moment of rapture he asks the little people of the river what is the meaning of Love: and, like all ardent people who have made up their minds as to the proper reply, he gets the answer which suits his own frame of mind. What is Love? It is "the delight of the eyes," the joy in things beautiful, the shivering rapture of seeing and touching shapes of infinite loveliness. That is the æsthetic point of view. But even the little people of the river know better. In their quaint fashion they suggest another ideal: "The same reed corner for both. Tales told together, pipes played in tune; music that one shall make and the other hear." That is quite another story; for, observe, while the æsthetic philosopher only desires to prostrate himself in adoration of beauty, the man who knows what love should mean suggests that it is the harmony of two beings, the union of two natures, each contributing



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something; the mutual response of kindred souls, the joy of a life lived in common, where each shall tell the other something that both want to hear. Now Michael, like all others of his kind, is inclined to regard this as a somewhat commonplace definition, a middle-class interpretation bordering on the dreadful solecism of domesticity. Hence comes his ruin. Hence come, also, the first steps in his education. For the Cecilia that bends over him, the Cecilia whose beauty he adores, has nothing to give him, and, indeed, betrays him with his friend when the chance comes. Jim is a great, strapping, Apollo-like creature, strong and self-reliant, whereas Michael is a sensitive, shrinking, infirm human being. And the agony of the situation is that it is Jim, his own beloved friend, who tears away from him the jewel on which his heart is set.

Now we go down the dim ways which lead to horror and despair, the roads that are marshalled by hate, and pain, and ugliness, and all kind of evil things, waiting to torture and destroy the man who has suffered his first great crushing shock in life. There is no real story in Miss Macaulay's book. We piece it together from hints and suggestions. But we know vaguely that her hero, after a frantic and impotent effort to kill his successful rival, sinks lower and lower, drinks and takes drugs, to shield himself from the agony of thought. Despite what men say of him, that he is a lost soul, Michael is growing all the time, and as he sinks into what seems to be the inescapable Slough of Despond, he suddenly wakes to the comprehension of another view of Nature and the world than that which satisfied his unthinking youth. The æsthetic standpoint was shattered into fragments at the first passion. And now despair leads him by the hand to the discovery of a new standpoint—the spiritual, the sacramental view of life, in which this world and all

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that belongs to it represent a series of veils hiding the eternal glory of the true and the real. But poor Michael is not strong enough to attain to such a vision of the Platonic beauty, the Platonic truth, as is here suggested. He cannot arrive at the idea of Good, because accident, or Fate, or his own weakness of character, stand in his way. Cecilia comes back once more, a penitent, transformed Cecilia, who asks him if they cannot begin all over again, and who assumes that love, when once engendered, cannot die. It is utterly false, of course. Love can be slain for ever by one crushing and appalling experience, and those who seek to resume the old ties, or knot up the old frayed edges, are bringing on themselves a disaster whose issue will inevitably be fatal. So Michael Travis finds, when, instead of telling Cecilia that the romance is over and done with, he weakly assents to an attempted patching up of old sores, and, in consequence, enters the doors of a new prison-house. Even here he can grow, for, though he has at last discovered that love is not adoration, but the communion of two minds and two natures—an ideal which he is never to achieve—he yet realises that fellowship and sympathy with human beings, all alike imprisoned within the same narrow gates of hopeless inefficiency, bring with them a solace and encouragement, widen the horizons of life, contribute new points of interest and activity. If only our authoress would consent to leave him with that latest discovery! But, alas, she remembers that her hero is a frail, bloodless creature, who has more intuitions than thoughts, and better intentions than accomplishment. So she leads him at last back again to the river, where he sinks into the waters, in voluntary death. And Cecilia, looking at him after his suicide, makes the ironical comment, "I made him very happy, my poor boy. I must have made him

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extraordinarily happy, that he should die looking like that."

Such is the vague, elusive, mystical romance which Miss Macaulay has woven, under the title of *The Secret River*. I do not know whether, on my part, I have contributed to it what she and every other author requires—sympathetic discernment of the objects at which she aims. To me it seems that she has many ideas vaguely floating through her book, like the stream which, with a multiplicity of little waves and eddies, circles round every bend and corner of her *Secret River*. She desires to draw the psychology of a weak soul. She wishes to show the beauty, and yet the inadequacy, of the pagan outlook. She knows that men, though a part of Nature, possess elements which Nature herself could never have educed, because they are perpetually in revolt against, and are for ever trying to dominate, Nature. She suggests that there are many standpoints from which one may interpret the world in which we live. You can make life mystical and symbolic, always supposing that you live in a convent. You can make life the portico of the eternal, on the sole condition that you have within your mind the perception of spiritual truths. Or, if you accept the common burden of humanity with that tendency to compromise which is so dear to every human being; if you must needs enter the prison-house of the daily common life, marrying a wife and begetting children, founding a family, and going for so many hours on business into the city, you can at least educate your sympathies, and hold out helping hands to all others who are in prison like yourself—either knowing it to be a prison, or thinking it to be a palace. For men and women are naturally sociable beings, and they must live together and help each other as best they can in order to procure an anodyne against too much think-



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ing. Such, at all events, is the tribute I venture to offer to Miss Macaulay's elusive but beautiful little book, which stirs the pulses of many thoughts, and paints for us vistas to far-reaching ideals.

You will wonder that I have written you at such length about a novel. You will see that it appealed to me very strongly, touching many chords in my heart and my imagination.

The character of Cecilia and her relations with Michael interested me; and set me thinking. How strange it is that we can live in closest intimacy with another human being and know so little of their inner life! And so I wove a metrical romance with Matthew Arnold's "each in our own strict line we move" for its keynote.

### IMPASSE

*I know not why I hold you true ;  
You are not all I once have loved ;  
What youth has prized and time has proved  
I know it well : it is not you.*

*I cannot call you all my own ;  
Strange thoughts and fancies in you rise,  
Strange lights are seen in those still eyes,  
Which have their sense for you alone.*

*What is the hidden life you lead ?  
What strange old-world survival dwells  
In that unconscious sigh which tells  
Of some deep home where sorrows breed ?*

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*Or is it I who cannot move  
The heart which yearns for bolder hands,  
For stronger fetters, sterner bands,  
To hold in check the thoughts that rove—*

*To bind them all in one sweet chain,  
In bountiful obedience due  
To that one power whom erst they knew,  
Whom once they loved—ere love was slain ?*

*And yet you are so dear to me !  
I know not why, I cannot tell ;  
Some strange delusions often dwell  
Even in the heart from passions free.*

*We think we love the better part,  
The purer motive, nobler deed ;  
And yet what makes us love indeed  
Is some chance fancy of the heart,*

*Some chance impression once acquired  
From acts fortuitous and slight,  
A fever caught in some mad night,  
Once felt, and ever more desired.*

*And so perchance I wrong you, dear,  
I ask for what must be denied ;  
It is not love, it is my pride  
Which fain would keep you ever near,*

*Which fain would have you always true,  
With not a look which does not turn,  
With not a thought which does not burn  
For us alone—for me and you.*

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*I live a life apart, and you,  
You too preserve a hidden life ;  
No loving hands can heal the strife  
Which parts two souls and keeps them two.*

*Only, at times, in happier mood,  
A voice as from some distant land,  
A kiss, a touch of tender hand,  
Deludes our dreary solitude.*

*Yes, we are two. Keep back the sigh.  
No heart can feel another's pain ;  
Alone we lose, alone we gain,  
Alone we live, alone we die.*

*Live out thy life and lonely be ;  
Know well the bounds by Nature set ;  
No wild despair, no mad regret  
Can bridge the gulf of destiny.*

### XXXI

LONDON, *March 31st.*

It is odd to notice how suddenly some reputations grow. At the present moment our most interesting dramatist is not Granville Barker, nor yet Somerset Maugham, nor even George Bernard Shaw. It is John Galsworthy. For the present both Barker and Shaw are resting on their laurels, though rumours have been heard of a new play by the author of *Getting Married*. Somerset Maugham, alas! is doing a good deal to lessen his reputation by producing plays like *The Noble*



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*Spaniard* and *Penelope*. He wrote two undoubtedly good plays, one at a very early stage in his career, entitled *A Man of Honour*, and another in which Miss Ethel Irving acted so finely, *Lady Frederick*. Since then he has really done nothing, and no one would maintain that either *Jack Straw*, or *Mrs. Dot*, or *The Explorer*, or *Penelope*, or *The Noble Spaniard*—the last, it is true, an adaptation—are in any sense worthy of the pen which wrote *Lady Frederick*. And so I come back to my original proposition, that the most interesting dramatist at the present moment is John Galsworthy. He is curiously successful in his latest play, which is called *Strife*, so successful that, though the piece originally appeared in matinées at the Duke of York's Theatre, it was then transferred to the Haymarket Theatre, and promoted into the evening bill, and a final transference is to take place shortly into the Adelphi Theatre, all these changes having no effect, apparently, on the success of the drama. I notice that people talk about *Strife* just as they did about *John Bull's Other Island*, that is to say, that a number of people who as a rule are not much interested in the theatre go to see something which bears a distinct relation to the existing difficulties and social problems of the day. Politicians especially have shown the keenest interest in Galsworthy. These things spell success, as they did in the case of Shaw's piece. The ordinary theatrical public is not quite large enough to ensure prosperity. There must be a wider appeal, an appeal to a public which does not always concern itself with the affairs of the theatre, and which is only moved to visit a play on the distinct recommendation of some one who calls it an interesting and valuable piece of work. *Strife* answers to this description admirably. It is precisely an interesting and valuable piece of work.

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So Galsworthy, the author, is a man who is talked about. And, indeed, in many ways he is worth his reputation. He has written one or two excellent novels, especially *The Man of Property* and *The Country House*. Recently, as I expect you have seen, he has appeared before the public with a novel entitled *Fraternity*, which has been very largely noticed. It is not a great novel, dealing in masterful ways with large human issues, like, for instance, *Tono-Bungay* by H. G. Wells; but it is a characteristic novel, revealing some of the qualities and characteristics of its author. *The Silver Box* enjoyed a great reputation at the Court Theatre, and deservedly so. It is quite one of the best modern plays which have been seen on the boards. Then came a temporary setback to Galsworthy's fortunes. He produced a piece called *Joy* at the Savoy Theatre, which unfortunately turned out to be a most melancholy business. But *Strife* sets him once more in the front rank of contemporary dramatists.

One or two of Galsworthy's little traits I must tell you. He is undoubtedly a pessimist. In one sense every young man of promise is a pessimist. It is a sort of literary measles he has to go through. Indeed, pessimism is the privilege of youth, sometimes as an engaging and harmless pose, sometimes as a serious indication that youthful imagination has discovered the inevitable boundaries which limit the sphere of goodness. Now, Galsworthy is a pessimist in the latter sense. He is a young man, who left the University of Oxford not so many years ago, without any of his contemporaries suspecting the depth of his nature or the range of his abilities. His contact with actual life has produced in him a certain shock to his susceptibilities and sympathies. So far as he can see, the various and different ranks of society—the upper, the middle, the

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lower classes—are not only divided from each other, but are generally in active hostility to one another. Similarly when we come to the division between employer and employed, capitalist and workman. It is one of the commonplaces of platform rhetoric that commerce and trade depend upon the equal participation of labour and capital, both contributing to the salutary result of national prosperity. But, as a matter of fact (so, at least, Galsworthy thinks), these two co-efficients in a joint result are bitter enemies. That is the hopelessness of the present situation. The ideals of the Labour party can only be achieved by the demolition or supersession of the capitalist class. The ideals of the capitalist—if he has ideals, which some people doubt—can only, in their turn, be secured if the working classes are thoroughly dominated, controlled, kept under by a tyrannical exercise of the power of wealth. From this point of view all the attempts at compromise are foredoomed to failure. That is the despairing note which one observes in John Galsworthy, and especially in his latest play, *Strife*.

The hopelessness of these struggles, the despair with which the disinterested observer looks on at the progress of a strike, are illustrated in another way. Weeks and months are spent in the struggle. Money is squandered on the one side, while on the other starvation stares the labourer in the face. Women and children are suffering all the time, and some of the women die of actual hunger. And now what is the end of this internecine struggle? It ends in a compromise, of course—for compromise is dear to the British mind, and, indeed, is the only practical solution of some difficulties. But the compromise eventually attained turns out to be precisely the very thing which was suggested weeks and months before,



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and indignantly repudiated by both sides. That is what happens in Galsworthy's play. Tench, who is a secretary to the directors of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, remarks to Harness, a trade union official, just before the fall of the last curtain, "Do you know, sir, these terms; they are the very same we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began. All this, all this, and what for?" And Harness replies, in a slow, grim voice, "That's where the fun comes in"—a cruel bit of farcical irony, which, however, is very characteristic of Galsworthy. Meanwhile Annie Roberts, wife of one of the most pugnacious of the workmen, had died, and the best men on each side had both been broken and got rid of. And here is yet another point where the pessimism of Galsworthy is shown. Struggles of this kind absolutely destroy the best personalities on either side. There is a fine, stalwart, old Conservative, an obstinate, resolute champion of the rights of the capitalist, John Anthony; and there is the firebrand of the workmen's committee, David Roberts, whose nerves are like steel, who when he has begun a fight is not going to stop till he gets his way. At the end of the play the directors of the Tin Plate Works, in order to secure a compromise, have to throw over their chairman, John Anthony; and the workmen, in their turn, have to throw over David Roberts. These were the antagonists worthy of each other's steel, and both are broken men when the final issue comes.

So the picture drawn for us by the dramatist is hopeless and desolate indeed. There is waste everywhere, criminal waste—waste of time, waste of energy, waste of human lives. An obstinate struggle results in the victory of neither party, and meanwhile the best men, the keenest intellects, the most logical champions on this side and the other, are rendered per-

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fectly useless—partly, no doubt, because of their own faults, still more owing to the fruitlessness of these labour wars. And what is to be done? In the long run one side or the other must win, and meanwhile it is folly to suppose that they have any common interests. On the contrary, they are sworn enemies. A fine speech is put into the mouth of Anthony, representing the uncompromising attitude of the capitalist. "It has been said masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. It has been said that the board is only part of a machine. Cant! We are the machine, its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear or favour. . . . Masters are masters, men are men! Yield one demand, and they will make it six. They are like Oliver Twist, asking for more. If I were in their place I should be the same. But I am not in their place. Mark my words: one fine morning, when you have given way here and given way there, you will find you have parted with the ground beneath your feet, and are deep in the bog of bankruptcy; and with you, floundering in that bog, will be the very men you have given way to." That is the last expression of a determined and also of a logical capitalist. Only, as we happen to be governed by a democracy in this country, and not by an oligarchy, there is about as much chance of these views prevailing as there is of our bringing back the Heptarchy.

# Rosemary's Letter Book

## XXXII

April 8th.

It was nice of you to be so enthusiastic in your appreciation of what I told you about *Pinkie and the Fairies*. You say you love fairy plays, so I am going to tell you about another, which will make a further appeal to you, because it happens to be by an author you greatly admire. At present we only have it in book form, but perhaps it is to be produced later on by the Repertory Theatre at the Haymarket.

It would be difficult to say with any certainty what are the precise conditions of a successful fairy play. There must be fancy, and imagination, a certain knowledge of and sympathy with childhood: above all, there must be a graceful inventiveness, designing new and unexpected effects. A certain amount of humour must be added, or, at all events, a touch of the quaint and the grotesque, such as Barrie has taught us to appreciate in his *Peter Pan*. There must be reminiscences of old fairy tales, something familiar, which the childish mind can get hold of; and suggestions, also, that there are new realms which imagination can explore, beyond the range of the old fairy tales. But now comes another point, about which there may reasonably be some doubt. Ought the fairy tale or the fairy play to be not only suitable to the tender years of childhood, but contain something by way of allegory or parable, to appeal to children of a larger growth? On the whole, looking back through Grimm, and Andersen, and Perrault, we find



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more often than not a suggestion of some more or less recondite lesson. Possibly, Barrie's *Peter Pan* is devoid of this element, as also is Graham Robertson's *Pinkie and the Fairies*. But Kingsley's well-known work, *The Water Babies*, had something more than met the childish eye, while Maurice Maeterlinck's latest production, *The Blue Bird*, is nothing if not mystical and allegorical. It is not, of course, surprising in the latter case, for Maeterlinck is a symbolist; that is to say, the things which he sees are emblems or shadows of something which is not in the forefront of vision—some dim, mysterious background of meditative philosophy or mystical psychology. Sometimes recent discoveries or hypotheses of science are woven into the texture of the story or essay in imaginative guise. No one can read Maurice Maeterlinck with any pleasure unless he is aware that his books are, in one aspect of them at least, such stuff as dreams are made of, while they also contain hints of some dimly discerned truth or flashes of intuitive insight into spheres to which exact science is inapplicable.

*The Blue Bird*, then, Maeterlinck's new fairy play in five acts, is intended both for children and grown-ups. Like every other great man, the author has in him much of the child, and, therefore, he is able to devise incidents and characters which every child will understand. But the details of the dream-journey which his little hero and heroine, Tytyl and Mytyl, undertake have in them an unmistakable didactic import. They indicate vaguely, but still with tolerable clearness, the thoughts which the author entertains on various subjects. The very name of the piece is allegory. For what is the "blue bird" which the Fairy Bérylune wants for her little girl, and which she asks Tytyl and Mytyl to find for her in the course of their wanderings? It is a shy denizen of the forest,

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or of darkness, a thing which changes colour under different lights, which cannot always live in broad daylight, and which seems to vary with the appreciation of each individual. Tytyl once and again catches it, and puts it in a cage; but, instead of being blue, it turns black, or some other colour. Even at the very end, when it seems that he has really won his treasure, and presents it to the fairy's little girl, it escapes and flies away. Well, it is not so very difficult to understand what this means. It is, of course, Happiness—that elusive phantom of men's desires, which presents to us so many shapes; which has one colour when we are ardent and hopeful, and a different colour when we are despondent; which sometimes cannot live in daylight at all—is apt to disappear amid the hard, insistent realities of practical life; but which, nevertheless, haunts our waking or dreaming fancies as an ideal which somehow must be attained, an ideal never to be surrendered, even after manifold experiences of disillusion and despair. And that is why, when the bird flies away at the end of the play, the little hero, Tytyl, steps to the front of the stage, and addresses his audience. "If any of you," he says, "should find the bird, would you be so very kind as to give him back to us? We need him later on." And it might be added that we only know his value when he has left us.

You will see that to begin with, Maurice Maeterlinck, by his very title, is weaving an allegory. The Fairy Berylune comes to two little children, Tytyl and Mytyl, of course in a kind of dream, and gives them as companions Light (who is a real friend), Bread, Sugar, Fire, Water, Milk (who do not always remain very staunch), Tylô, the dog (who is a hero-worshipper), and Tylette, the cat (who is a born cynic and sceptic). And then the two children, with their somewhat strangely assorted companions, go forth on

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their expedition, and see and learn many strange things. Tytyl is furnished with a diamond in his cap, and when he turns it all inanimate things are endowed with life, and are able to express what they think in understandable speech. And what is one of the earliest of their discoveries? They go to the Land of Memory, where they find their grandfather and grandmother, and their dead brothers and sisters. But are they dead? It would seem not. When Tytyl turns his diamond, there they are, in their habit as they lived, enjoying the old existence, immersed in the same cares, the same pleasures. Are the dead really dead? Oh, no. They live as often as we remember them. We can call them back, though without us they are powerless and inert. Or, indeed—and here we touch on a later experience of our little hero and heroine—is there such a thing as death at all? Tytyl and Mytyl go into a graveyard, where they have before them numerous tombstones, grassy mounds, wooden crosses, stone slabs, and all the other melancholy adjuncts of the grave. Tytyl turns his diamond, and, after a terrifying minute of silence, the crosses totter, the mounds open, the slabs rise up. Then from all the gaping tombs there rises an efflorescence, at first frail and timid, like steam, then white and virginal, more plentiful and marvellous. And the effect on the graveyard is significant. It is transformed into a sort of fairylike and nuptial garden. The dew glitters, flowers open their blooms, the wind murmurs in the leaves, the bees hum, the birds wake and flood the air with the first raptures of their hymns to the sun and to life. "Where are the dead?" asks Mytyl, looking in the grass. And Tytyl answers, "There are no dead." Here is an apt example, then, of Maeterlinck's allegory. There is no death for the human spirit.



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Throughout the fairy play we find evidences of the same symbolical, mystical intelligence. We visit the animal world in a forest, where we discover the trees speaking with human tongues, and the Sheep, and the Ass, and the Horse, and the Pig endowed for the nonce with the power of expressing their thoughts. And when they speak it is a terrible revelation they make. For through centuries and centuries of wrong they nourish the most implacable hatred of man, their conqueror. "I have done you no harm," says Tytyl. "Nothing at all, my little man," answers the Sheep. "You have only eaten my little brother, my two sisters, my three uncles, my aunt, my grandpapa, and my grandmamma. Wait, wait. When you are down you shall see that I have teeth also." "And I hoofs," adds the Ass; while the Horse, haughtily pawing the ground, asks satirically, "Would you rather that I tore you with my teeth or knocked you down with a kick?" If a scene like this suggests a serious vegetarian moral, we have something equally graphic and more humorous when we visit the Realms of Light. Night is the guardian of various fearsome things, which Tytyl and Mytyl are privileged to see. But they are not all equally formidable. There are the ghosts, for instance. But they have felt bored ever since men ceased to take them seriously. There are the sicknesses. They, too, are not happy. Man has been waging a determined war against them, especially since the discovery of the microbes. Only cold in the head survives. It is one of those sicknesses which are least persecuted, and it enjoys the best health. On the other hand, wars are more terrible and powerful than ever. "Heaven knows," says Night, "what would happen if one of them escaped. Fortunately they are heavy and slow-moving."

But of one of the most graceful of Maeterlinck's

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imaginings, I have still to tell you. It is the Realm of the Unborn, guarded by Time—the kingdom of the future, where the blue-clad children play, waiting till the fatal moment arrives when they must be sent to earth. And there is the strangest discord between these little children clad in blue. Some of them are longing with a fierce intensity to begin their existence on earth, and when Time arrives on his periodical visits, they do their best to slip by him into the galley, with its white and gold sails, which is to waft them to the world. But Time is quite relentless. To the impetuous he ordains patience. The laggard he incites to speed. They must needs be born, if their time has come, whether they will it or no. And they must take with them all that their destiny involves—their sicknesses, or their crimes, their great inventions, or their poor futile follies. Tylyl finds a child who is going to be his brother or his sister next year on Palm Sunday, and who, after bringing three illnesses,—scarlatina, whooping-cough, and measles,—is going to depart again. There are two child lovers, who cannot bear to be separated; but one of them must needs commence his terrestrial existence, while the other has to wait and hope. At last the galley is packed with children, and as they set forth on their memorable journey there comes to meet them a song of gladness and expectation. “What is that?” asks Tylyl. “It is not they who are singing. It sounds like other voices.” “Yes,” answers Light, “it is the song of the mothers coming out to meet them.” So tender and beautiful is the fancy with which Maeterlinck has surrounded his fairy play. It is full of strange, unexpected things,—things which one does not understand at first sight, though some of them explain themselves later. But imagination guides the author's hand from beginning to end; and, though the moral

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may sleep in the ear of the children for whom the play is primarily designed, it will appeal with a strange charm to those who, though their childhood is past, still allow themselves to dream over the world's mysteries.

I am sending you the book. I wonder whether Time and Fate will perchance be kind and let us see the play together. Do you realise that a year has gone by since you went away? Do you not begin to think of a possible return?

### XXXIII

LONDON, *April 16th.*

It is said that nowhere does taste and fashion alter so quickly as on the stage. Over and over again the spectator is aware that when some old comedy or serious play, which carried its message to the generation for which it was composed, is reproduced at a later date, lo and behold! all the charm and spirit have gone out of it. Of course, this happens more frequently to a comedy than anything else. Henry Arthur Jones's *The Dancing Girl* was called a comedy. It was revived the other day by Tree, and struck the audience as entirely old-fashioned and, indeed, absurd. Such humour as it possessed seemed to be far-fetched; the sentiment was extravagant; the story had lost its appeal. And this, too, although the idea of the dancing girl, whom Jones anticipated so many years ago, is now firmly fixed in the public mind as a not unnecessary part of its culture. Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* was reproduced in similar fashion not so very long ago, and the general verdict



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on it was no more flattering than that bestowed on Jones's play. One wonders what would happen if Pinero's *The Benefit of the Doubt* were revived. Although nothing could hurt the earlier portion of the play, it is probable that the conclusion would strike us as more frigid and unconvincing than before. Still, there are immortal things, and Sheridan's comedy *The School for Scandal* is one of them. Tree has very fitly chosen it as a welcome revival, just for the reason that its wit, its mordant satire, its brilliant character-drawing, its polished style, are likely to appeal to the present generation quite as much as to the eighteenth century. And so, indeed, it proved, when on Wednesday night *The School for Scandal* was received from beginning to end with tumultuous applause. It is an odd thing how *The School for Scandal* can always be reproduced and always found interesting. Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* certainly does not seem to possess the same durable elements. We always look upon *She Stoops to Conquer* as a sort of curiosity in the theatrical world—the figure of Kate Hardcastle being one which attracts the comedy actress, and the character of Marlow being one which apparently is congenial to some actors. But the humours of old Hardcastle and his servants, Diggory and the rest—even the famous scene in which Marlow pursues Kate round the table, mistaking her for a barmaid—strike one as a little preposterous; while the most artificial modishness of Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room in Sheridan's play strikes no jarring note in the twentieth century. Scandal still lives and flourishes, slanders are circulated in club smoking-rooms and ladies' boudoirs, old men marry young wives, prodigal young men squander their money and are helped by a kindly fate to recover their fortunes. Only perhaps the villain of

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the piece, Joseph Surface, appears somewhat unreal. The sketch is, of course, somewhat of a caricature. So wonderful a mixture of pious sentiments and impious actions, while attractive doubtless to the actor because of the very difficulty of the conception, leaves the spectator unmoved because of the unreality of the nature.

It is a tremendous lesson to those who write for the stage to discover how many times even so brilliant an author as Sheridan rewrote his famous piece and altered the conceptions with which he had begun. In the original draft the play is something of a melodrama and decidedly sentimental. Sheridan himself had suffered from lying and scandalous tongues, and he wanted to have his revenge on these clacking ladies of fashionable society who tore reputations to pieces as an afternoon diversion. In all probability one of his ideas was to demonstrate how scandal will bring about the very evils which it falsely proclaims to be true; how scandal, for instance, will ultimately drive Lady Teazle into the arms of her lover, notwithstanding the original purity of her character. In later versions, of course, the comedy of the play is more emphasised, the moral being indeed the same, but not bitten into the mind of the spectator with so much acid. Sheridan was always very fastidious about the names that he gave to his characters. His first intention was to give old Teazle the Christian name of Solomon. Trip was originally called Sponge. The name of Snake was in the earlier sketch Spatter, while Charles Surface and his brother Joseph had their Christian names frequently altered. Clerimont, Florival, Captain Harry Plausible—such were the suggestions that passed through Sheridan's mind before he finally decided on Charles; while his elder brother was successively Plausible, Pliable, Young Pliant, and Tom. It is, by

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the way, obvious that the name Surface was invented because it seemed appropriate to the character of Joseph. There is nothing very superficial about Charles, to whom the surname does not apply with the same satiric intention.

It was a curious and interesting event at His Majesty's, which attracted one as much by the artistic care of its *mise en scène* as it occasionally disappointed one by the slowness of the acting. The pace was undoubtedly slow, and in a comedy that is a worse fault than almost any other. The Georgian interiors were exquisite, the scheme of colour brilliant in the extreme, the taste and skill of Percy Macquoid, who was responsible for the scenic arrangement, were conspicuous everywhere. But sometimes the actors spoke with all the deliberateness of men and women who were saying their sentences for the first time—and it is no good treating Sheridan so. For all his choice sayings are as familiar to us as household words. What is the good of ladling out “a rivulet of text meandering through a meadow of margin,” as though we had never heard it before, and required to have every word impressed upon our minds? Who does not know the famous “True wit is more nearly allied to good nature than your ladyship is aware of?” Who does not remember “Don't you think we had better leave honour out of the argument?” or “The malice of a good thing is the barb that makes it stick?” These glittering jewels should be allowed just to flash on the stage in order to remind us of their existence, not to be slowly laid bare before our eyes with the portentous drawl of the actor. It is a conspicuous fault of our English acting that it tends to slowness; and we never feel it so acutely as when we have just seen a French comedy on the Parisian stage. I paid a flying business visit to Paris a week or two ago and I saw



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*L'Ane de Buridan*—Buridan's ass, with his famous dilemma, being represented by an invertebrate lover, who cannot choose between his lady-loves. I also saw an incredible Palais Royal piece, quite untranslatable into English, called *Monsieur Zero*. In each case the rapidity of utterance on the part of the performers was as remarkable as the clearness of their enunciation. "Glissez, mortels, mais n'appuyez point" is the motto most applicable to comedians. In English, if you hurry, you are apt to slur: if you drawl you will certainly bore. French people use their lips much more than English people do—you need only watch them to be aware of it; and English actors, in order to be modern and up to date, sometimes clip their words and their sentences. I heard very well indeed at His Majesty's the other night. Good heavens! How could one help doing so when each word was made to carry more weight than it could bear? The scintillating cleverness of Sheridan's conversation loses much when it is spoken too slowly. Even fascinating little Miss Löhr said, "Don't you think we had better leave honour out of the argument?" as though she were intoning a sentence at a funeral!

She was undoubtedly fascinating, this extremely youthful Lady Teazle, who has taken the stage by storm. Wiseacres shook their heads when they learnt that Marie Löhr was to be the heroine of *The School for Scandal*. Where was her experience, where her knowledge of the world? Where was the long and assiduous practice, without which the actress, flying at the highest game, could not hope to succeed? Well, you cannot lay down rules for genius, and Marie Löhr is a bit of a genius. First of all, she won all hearts by her triumphant youthfulness; next, she retained our homage not only by her charm, but by her skill. She is either very imitative and can be easily taught, or

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else she has an intuitive grasp of what a situation requires. I fancy that some critics, who believe in stage traditions, still proclaim that Tree was wrong in entrusting Lady Teazle to such youthful hands. I am sure, however, that the majority of spectators were delighted with Miss Löhr; and the applause with which she was welcomed at the fall of each curtain was sufficient evidence of her undoubted popularity.

### XXXIV

LONDON, *April 27th.*

I READ the other day some criticisms of Milton's *Paradise Lost* which interested me on several grounds. The critic was dealing with the well-known and generally accepted judgment that the hero of *Paradise Lost* is Satan, and he was deploring the fact from the point of view of the Nonconformist conscience. Milton, he suggested, had a great opportunity, when he was describing the Fall of Man, of having as protagonist the Divine Author of existence. If we consider Milton's influence with the Christian body, and especially that portion of it which belongs to the dissenting side, it might indeed seem a lamentable thing that instead of consecrating his hero by making him the Deity Himself, he should have been so interested in the forces arrayed against goodness that he painted even Satan with a certain sympathy, and made the majority of readers remember best of all the Archangel who was struggling to ruin mankind. The judgment is perfectly reasonable from one point of view, and I only wonder that it has not been oftener set

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forth by those who are interested in Milton's faith. But Milton was a curious man in some ways, even in his religious beliefs. He was an Arian, and the Arian attitude was probably not common amongst his fellow-believers. He proclaimed at large the necessity for divorce; and that again was a doctrine which must have run counter to a good deal of the religious intelligence of the time. But the particular criticism with which I am dealing is singularly foolish from any other point of view than the strictly doctrinal. Most people are aware that before Milton settled on the form of an epic, he had devised his great theme, the Fall of Man, as a drama. Now the essence of the dramatist is that he should be neutral towards the successive creations of his imagination, that he should not take sides, that he should bestow as much trouble on painting his wicked people as on delineating his good people. If, therefore, the arch-enemy of mankind was to be portrayed from a dramatic standpoint it certainly was not wrong—it was abundantly right—that his figure should stand forth with his various characteristics as accurately distinguished and illustrated as any other of the *dramatis personæ*.

That point, however, does not touch the main contention that whatever Milton may himself have designed, he unconsciously made Satan not only the hero of his poem, but a figure in whom we cannot fail to have the liveliest interest. The essence of dramatic narration depends on the turbulence of human passions. Unless men were swayed this side and that side by the onrush of emotional feelings which they can only imperfectly control, there would be no drama; there would be no tragedy; there would be none of that conflict between the human individual and surrounding circumstances which is the keynote of the old Attic tragedians. Now a good man *ex hypothesi* is a



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man who does not allow his passions to get the better of him. He is full of a wise and prudent self-control. He leads his life according to the dictates of reasonable intelligence. He sees others making fools of themselves; in himself he is planted rigidly on his own virtue—four square to all the stormy winds that blow. For this very reason he is dramatically uninteresting. He is colourless, wanting in light and shade. And the better citizen he is and the better man he is, the less is he adaptable for purposes of drama. Milton was many things, all of them reputable and praiseworthy; but he was by instinct and nature a poet, and he had in him no small measure of the dramatic genius. Probably he did not mean to make his Satan so sympathetic, but he could not help it. A fallen angel is precisely the character which lends itself to drama. Do not therefore let us blame Milton, or bring to bear upon him a criticism which is quite inapplicable in regions of poetry and art. It is all very well to say that if he had made goodness heroic, his influence would have been greater on Christians. Goodness is heroic, but it is the goodness which surmounts temptation, not the goodness which is never tried. In other words, it is the goodness of a sinful, erring man, who struggles and fails, and eventually succeeds—a human being, in short, with all his numerous imperfections.

A curious reflection which I think can be illustrated out of literature is that the way in which the devil is painted is eloquent of the character of the man who paints him. It is perhaps strange that it should be so; but if we take three representative devils—the devil of Marlowe, the devil of Milton, the devil of Goethe—we shall see in each case how accurately they seem to correspond with the general character of the artist and author. Milton's is a majestic devil, full of a noble melancholy. A very great creation it is, which only a

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very great poet could have designed. For what Milton enables us to see in a flash is that that principle of evil which is everywhere and always the opponent of the good principle, must have a certain dignified power of its own in order to make the conflict real and vital. Supposing that a Persian poet were devising a drama—as indeed doubtless the Persian poets often did—on the contrasted principles Ahriman and Ormuzd, he must make the one as important as the other in order that the unending war may preserve the proper balance. After all, consciously or unconsciously, most of us are dualists in our interpretation of the universe. We talk of evil not as an abstraction, still less as a negation, but as a positive reality. And Milton knew how to make his evil agency a positive reality, adding to his creation all that solemnity and grandeur which is appropriate to his own nature.

And now turn to Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. What kind of creature is Mephistophilis? Well, it would not be altogether wrong to say that Mephistophilis is in a sense Marlowe himself. This brilliant young man of promise, this reckless swaggerer against right and law, this froward and petulant boy, who, coming up from the university, lived his riotous life, endowed with what some of his associates did not possess, a regal facility of sonorous verse—doubtless there were moments when to Marlowe himself his own career, with all its possibilities and all its failures, seemed an illustration of the evil which was always warring against the good. And apparently he could never sin happily. If he had left the paths of virtue he could—to use the immortal phrase of Persius—grow haggard at the thought of what he had forfeited. The inheritance into which he had come was so splendid at its inception, and he had made such a dreadful use of it. And thus his Mephistophilis has an infinite pathos and

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sadness about him. He is not a confident, sneering devil. He knows what he has lost. Dr. Faustus asks him how, if he is the devil, he manages to be out of hell. This is Mephistophilis's reply—

“ Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it:  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
Oh, Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul! ”

No wonder that this pathetic, wistful devil astonishes Dr. Faustus. He answers—

“ What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate  
For being deprived of the joys of heaven?  
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude,  
And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.”

In this scene, at all events, the man who is tempted is a stronger and more resolute villain than his tempter.

The case is just as clear when we turn to Goethe's *Faust*. Every one knows, of course, that *Faust* was commenced and put aside, written and re-written over and over again; but the early drafts, dealing with the Faust and Marguerite episode, contained in them more or less developed the sinister figure of Mephistopheles. And what is Mephistopheles? He is the spirit who denies, the spirit who sneers, the mocking, brilliant, witty devil, who suggests the evil counterpart of whatever good there may be in a man. Is Faust tired of religion and philosophy? Then let him have a taste of life, let him give free rein to his sensual nature, let him drink and make love and ruin an innocent maiden. Now to Goethe, the handsome young Apollo of Weimar, there was always present



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the temptation to squander in sentiment and emotion the powers which ought to find their proper outlet in scientific discovery, in constructive literary work, in drama and romances and poetry. The record of his many love-makings constitutes a formidable list. Frederika, Lotte, Lili, Christiane—who does not know the fascinating names of sirens who successively wound their fetters round Goethe's heart, and nursed him to slumber in a Lotos-land where it was always afternoon? It was the Mephistopheles-nature in him which was always striving to get the upper hand, tempting him to forego the hard intellectual work, to abandon philosophy, to desist from the labour of composition, and live in a fool's paradise of soft breasts and tender eyes. More especially there was a time, before the Switzerland tour and the visit to Italy, when, under the fascination of Lili, Goethe was alternately happy and miserable, conscious of powers that were wasting in idleness, and fretting against silken bonds which his hands seemed nerveless to break. If the spirit of evil came to him in any shape it was in the guise of a perverted Goethe, a Goethe who retained his cleverness, and turned it all to paradox and treachery, a Goethe who was brilliant and reckless, and thought that women's hearts were given him to play with and to break, as Faust broke the heart of Marguerite. Here once more the delineation of the Evil Spirit is after the fashion of the man's character who designs it. The author cannot help but draw some part of himself into the devil that haunts his dreams.

Only the other day a new drama—which, I understand, has had some success in America—was produced under the title of *The Devil* at the Adelphi Theatre. Alas! it has no pretensions either to literary or dramatic value; it is foolish and dull, tawdry and exceedingly unpleasant. I am afraid it is no compli-

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ment to Henry Arthur Jones; but, as I saw it, I could not help thinking of a piece called *The Tempter*, written by the clever author of *The Liars*, and brought out a good many years ago by Tree. In both plays the Evil Spirit does ridiculous things—things of infinitesimal consequence, quite unworthy of his dignity and high lineage. In the one case, if I remember right, he curses Canterbury, and slides down a water-spout. In the other, as we saw at the Adelphi, he presents perfumed and medicated cigarettes, and wears a scarlet pin in his scarf and a red flower in his button-hole. No, no, you must be a big man to draw a real devil; the average man's devil is a puny creature. Neither Molnár, the Hungarian dramatist, nor Jones possesses the muscles and sinews required of the creator of Satan. They lack imagination, the large temperament, and the grand manner.

I am afraid we all of us lack these nowadays. One sees it and feels it in all art.

I was recently at a picture gallery where impressionism ran rampant. What a curious thing that the effort to crystallise or suggest impressions should so often result in ridiculous daubs! The effect in literature is hardly as ridiculous, though it is often very silly. I must plead guilty myself, and since you say you like my rhymes I send you herewith a couple which, following the fashion, I call

### IMPRESSIONIST PICTURES

*There was a kingdom fair to see,  
But pale, so pale, with never a rose;  
The cold wind sweeps across the lea,  
Westward the pale sun goes.*

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*There was a maiden soft and dear,  
But pale, so pale, with never a rose ;  
Each quivering eyelid holds a tear,  
Seaward her sad heart goes.*

### A JESTER'S SONG

*In this mad world where kings are slaves  
And common folk are fools,  
The mitred priest his cross still waves,  
But 'tis the jester rules !*

*Oh, crowns are made of sorry stuff  
Which every huckster sells ;  
Monarchs and monks—we've had enough,  
Long live the cap and bells !*

### XXXV

*May 8th.*

ARE you ever overwhelmed with something akin to physical nausea on the days when nature or convention is calling to you to rejoice? I hope not. It does not make for happiness, I find. I suppose it is one of the signs of middle-aged pessimism. It happened to me a week ago. I was in the country and I could not sleep. Why, I do not know, for I had gone to bed in a more or less normal mood. As the night wore on, the bitterness of life overwhelmed me; I went out into the night, and walked the roads till the day dawned. But sunrise brought no relief, I was bitter all through.



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## MAY MORNING

*Swift change of glow and gloom in dull grey skies ;  
Swift flying drops of rain : a sudden ray  
Of chilly brightness presaging the day :  
Great lowering clouds, like sullen memories  
Haunting the portals, whence the sun will rise :  
And low and faint around the traveller's way  
The half-waked birds, singing to greet the May  
With timid notes their fluttering melodies.*

*This is the first of May, when Love is born,  
And Hope, which fills the Springtime with mad mirth ;  
Love, lightly wooed and lightly left forlorn ;  
Hope, that outwears the promise of its birth ;  
See how the sick Earth shrinks to meet the day !  
The slow dawn breaks—this is the first of May.*

Luckily these moods do not endure very long. Life would be insupportable if they did. The steady grind of London is an almost infallible cure to these seasons of revolt and disgust: the constant ache of life is easier to bear. One gets used to everything. And there are always compensations. It is pleasant to think how alive and feverishly enthusiastic people can be, and one has only to turn to the people who take their theatre seriously to realise how alive they are.

The modern developments of drama are very interesting and a little baffling. One phenomenon is that it rains Repertory Theatres just now. Charles Frohman, whose versatile activities on both sides of the Atlantic are always filling us with amazement, declares his intention of having a Repertory Theatre at the Duke of York's; while Herbert Trench, working in conjunction with Frederick Harrison, of the

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Haymarket Theatre, and supported, it is said, by Lord Howard de Walden, is also starting operations in the autumn with a theatre devoted to all the higher flights of drama. Now one cause which has started these movements is the project for a National Shakespeare Theatre, which gently simmers on in the public mind, and every now and then shows signs of feverish activity, followed by periods of quiescence. At the present moment a rock on which negotiations are splitting is the undoubtedly serious question whether the National Theatre, whenever it comes into being, is to be controlled by an actor or not. There is a good deal to be said on both sides. It strikes one as absurd that a movement intended to raise the status of the actor by raising the level of dramatic performance, should exclude the actor from his proper rights of control. On the other hand, the actor-manager is a figure which has not commended itself to a modern generation—for one reason above all others, that, as he desires to exhibit his own personality on the stage, he is apt to select plays which suit himself rather than those whose merits rest on general grounds. Meanwhile Frohman's idea is confined entirely to modern plays, as is shown by the list of the dramatists whose names he has put in his front window, so to speak. There is, of course, George Bernard Shaw, to begin with; Granville Barker and Galsworthy to go on with; and doubtless every one else who will be sufficiently realistic and modern, outspoken, cynical, and even pessimistic, to voice the aspirations—if such a word can be permitted in such a connection—of modern dramatic feeling. The worst of it is that the names which I have cited constitute, after all, a *côterie*, although an eminent one; and it is a question whether *côteries* are ever long-lived or whether indeed their action is beneficial. One remembers the

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famous little coterie which in France at one time followed the banner of Emile Zola. Is there not a record of their clan feeling in the little book *Les Soirées de Médan*? It possesses rather a pathetic interest, for of the notorious group of writers who contributed to *Les Soirées de Médan* every one in turn started off on his own line, ending indeed in strange places—as J. K. Huysmans did when he became a convert to Catholicism, and Guy de Maupassant also, when, though he remained a kind of Realist, he lost so much of mental grasp and intellectual vigour. Suppose we take George Bernard Shaw as a sort of Emile Zola in this connection, how long will Granville Barker, Galsworthy, and perhaps Arnold Bennett care to serve under his directing bâton? Barker is, above all, a producer of modern plays; but Galsworthy—he is as likely as not to start off on quite a different line of work; while as for Arnold Bennett, when he has learned to be a dramatist he may develop in ways we dream not of. Bennett has written one novel which will take its place among the best of our contemporary work—*The Old Wives' Tale*. If he pursues his ambitions on the stage we hardly know what manner of man he may become.

How easy it seems to have been, half a century ago, to provide plays which the public wanted, and to coin many golden sovereigns by pleasing the popular taste! That reflection is suggested by the recently published volume on the Bancrofts, which recounts what looks like an easily-won triumph. Probably it was just as hard at that time to gauge what the public wanted as it is now. Some hardihood, some cleverness, some bold challenge of fate, went to make the success of the Bancrofts at the little Prince of Wales's Theatre; and it was not altogether certain when they began, that



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the "society play," which Robertson could turn out in such quantities, was the popular fare which would bring handsome receipts to the treasury. Robertson indeed was a facile and accomplished dramatist. His plays appear very thin to us, but they had a naturalness, a sort of well-bred *savoir-faire*, about them half a century ago; and the Bancrofts, who availed themselves of the Robertson boom, deserved their prosperity, having also, beside, a decided slice of luck. The luck lay in the personality of the actors and actresses—the fact that under one generalship was occasionally combined so strong a dramatic corps as Miss Marie Wilton, Miss Madge Robertson (now Mrs. Kendal), John Hare, Kendal, and Bancroft. The plays were so well produced, the artists were so clever, that rarely enough did any venture spell failure. And so Bancroft became for all practical purposes a millionaire, owing to the vast amounts which he made both at the Prince of Wales's Theatre and at the old Haymarket. And he remains one of the very few examples of an artist who has a business instinct, and who received his pecuniary reward as well as the reputation of a great dramatic pioneer. Kendal is another example of a successful actor, because he, too, has business instincts. But there are not many besides, for the actor is, as a rule, a Bohemian, who spends royally, never thinks of the morrow, takes his reverses and his successes with philosophic calm, and plunges into vast schemes just at the moment when his finances are low.

Meanwhile the newspaper proprietor is having a very bad time of it at the theatres. It is rather odd that he has been left alone so long by the stage satirist, for as a type of financier he is quite as remarkable and as interesting as other financiers, like the hero, for example, in *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*.

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Both in a play by Bernard Fagan at the Kingsway Theatre and in *What the Public Wants*, which was performed a few nights ago by the Stage Society, the man who controls a number of so-called "organs of public opinion" is handled with a freedom and a merciless irony which make both pieces very popular with a certain class of the public. In each case a particular newspaper proprietor seems to be designed. In the play called *The Earth*, the room of the owner of *The Earth* and other newspapers is absolutely identical with the room owned by an existing newspaper lord; while, by an accidental slip at the first performance of *What the Public Wants*, by Arnold Bennett, on Sunday night, James Hearn, who undertook the principal character, referred to an actually existing halfpenny paper to the immense amusement of the audience. What is the point of the attack? It is quite a legitimate one from the dramatist's point of view. The man who controls a number of newspapers is primarily a business man, and has to use business methods in order to forward his own designs. But because, according to his own boast, newspapers lead the opinions of the people, the proprietor of newspapers has to pretend to a certain intellectual cultivation. He does it with a very uneasy grace. In Arnold Bennett's play Sir Charles Worgan is, frankly, a stupid vulgarian, a man who has never heard of the split infinitive, and who, when he receives an honorary D.C.L. from Oxford, has to have it explained to him what the mystic initials denote. Moreover, not being really educated himself, he both dislikes and fears cultivated people. "Superior persons" are just the very class who make him feel uncomfortable. If we think of the matter rightly, there is of course no reason why the manager of a newspaper should be especially cultivated, and it is one of the commonest

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of experiences that a man who does not know much himself may yet be able to direct those who know, his own special advantage being that he interprets by a sort of intuition what the public is thinking about. The old idea that the newspaper press is an educational force is, I think, rapidly being abandoned amongst those who know the facts. As a political organ without a doubt it follows the opinion of the majority, voices their particular prejudices and interests, gives expression to views which they entertain and have entertained for some time past. But what the skilful manager can do is to disguise this dependence on public opinion under a show of great independence and candour. And he certainly need not be a very clever man to do that.

But of course the satirist is not content with merely representing his hero as a more or less stupid and commonplace individual. There is always the suggestion of blackmail—the suggestion, that is, that in order to secure his purposes he stoops to all sorts of unworthy devices. For instance, the hero in *The Earth* makes use of an accidental discovery of a *liaison* in order to drive a political opponent out of office. That is where the sting comes in, for the mere suggestion of blackmail is abhorrent to the ordinary honest man, and if it were in any sense true that many, or indeed any, of our daily journals resorted to so infamous a practice, their condemnation in the mouths of honest men would be certain. There may or may not be some journals in London who have stooped to blackmail; but with the vast majority such a charge is ridiculously untrue. Bennett avails himself of another plan for making his hero ridiculous. Sir Charles Worgan is not a blackmailing villain, although he rakes up old scandals, and panders to the worst sensationalism of the day. But he is shown to



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be a weak individual in the sense that he falls in love with a woman, and that she rejects him. When Sir Charles Worgan suddenly discovered that he wanted to marry Emily Vernon, widow, of course most of us were quite aware that this was exactly what he would fail to do. A newspaper proprietor in love sounds somewhat ridiculous, merely because we insist on regarding him—and perhaps rightly insist—as a very efficient piece of mechanism, which must be above ordinary human weakness. When Mrs. Vernon thoroughly appreciates the kind of man she has to deal with, although all her pecuniary interests suggest so profitable a marriage, she does not hesitate to give him up, and, indeed, renders him somewhat contemptible by her frank denunciation of his methods. And now comes the extraordinary thing about this play, which so many people have rated so high, and apparently have enjoyed so immensely. So far as it is a clever satire, it is eminently successful; but so far as it is a portrait of human beings, it is quite as decisively a failure. The clever actress, for instance, who impersonated Emily Vernon really could not explain to us how it came to pass that with her considerable acquaintance with the man she was engaging herself to, she managed to shut her eyes for so long to those very methods which afterwards disgusted her. Now a play, above all, ought to deal with human beings, and ought to explain their motives; and when the formidable Sir Charles Worgan is taken to his home in the Potteries and shown in the midst of his relations, we clearly have a right to expect the dramatist to clothe his puppets with that human flesh and blood which will render them really interesting and significant personalities. But that is precisely what he does not do. The domestic elements of his story are poor and weak. He is content with his

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epigrams, his mordant satire of newspaper methods, and, therefore, the earlier part of the play is quite brilliant. Nevertheless it hardly began to be a drama at all. And, despite the cleverness of James Hearn, the hero did not quite succeed in persuading us of his reality.

### XXXVI

*May 16th.*

I HAVE been asked to speak on the relations between Literature and Journalism, and am wondering what I shall say. I wish you were here. I still feel the ever-present want of you. I often wonder whether you realised the assistance you gave in every department of my life. I am rather a solitary soul and do not open out easily, and it was always a help to me to discuss things with you, as it still is a joy to tell you of my interests. So I shall write down my thoughts to you, and trust that even as I write inspiration may be wafted across the vast distance that separates us—that we may in some sense “to each other be brought near, and greet across infinity.”

It seems to me that the relations between Journalism and Literature afford so wide a field for speculative discussion that I must try to confine myself to a few specific points. The only general remark I shall make is what seems to me and will seem to you a platitude—that, without any manner of doubt, Journalism is a conquering force in our modern world, and that it is gradually and steadily encroaching on spheres hitherto considered distinct in nature and essence. Taking the whole body of daily and weekly

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newspapers as constituting Journalism, it seems clear that its destiny is to absorb and swallow up magazines and reviews—to a considerable extent this has already taken place—and, in the minds of the vast majority of readers, to offer a substitute, and an agreeable substitute, for books, whether they come under the head of belles lettres, critical essays, biographies, or histories. I am speaking, you must remember, of a tendency, of the way in which the tide is setting. The fact remains incontestable, that while books are less read and less influential in our modern times, newspapers are more read and exercise a wider influence.

But is there any radical difference between Journalism and Literature? Is there a difference of kind, or only a difference of degree? Many people will tell you that there is no radical difference. Just as, according to some thinkers, Morality, with a touch of Emotion, becomes Religion, so Journalism with a touch of Art becomes Literature. Is that the case? Forgive me if, for clearness' sake and also for the sake of brevity, I am dogmatic. It depends, of course, on what you mean by Literature. But for those who have had a literary training there can be no question, I think, that the interval between these two expressions of the human spirit, Journalism and Literature, is not to be measured by degrees, but is a radical difference. How shall we seek to construe to ourselves the difference? Let me illustrate the matter in another sphere.

On the theatrical boards there is a kind of play which is called melodrama, and another which is called drama. Both are occupied with the same subject. A drama may be a tragedy, a comedy, or a social play, and melodrama also may occupy itself with mournful or joyous subjects, and with the laws and conventions of the social order. The difference is not in subject,



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but in manner. Speaking generally and vaguely, melodrama paints with a broad brush, and drama deals with nicer shades of thought and feeling. Melodrama produces its effect by bold, garish strokes, and drama cares more for psychological analysis and for truth to nature and humanity. It is the manner in which the theme is handled which constitutes the specific difference between the two. And in much the same fashion Journalism paints with a broad brush, while Literature loves the minuter touches. The former impresses, excites, astonishes; the latter suggests, insinuates, appeals. There are a self-control and reserve in the latter which are absent in the former. For Literature is an art, and has to conform to the conditions of art. Is Journalism an art? Is it not rather an industry?

But it is not only the manner of treatment of subjects frequently identical, which constitutes the difference. There is also a difference of mood and motive in the man who attempts the one or the other. May I express it thus? In Journalism we do our best, and, in a way, we succeed. We get where we want to get. We attain to a fairly satisfactory ideal with a certain completeness. But no man who ever tried to write Literature ever succeeded in satisfying himself. No—he is always below his ideal, and is miserably conscious of it. Is it good what he writes? Others may say it is; but only the man who has tried to express himself knows how many of the sides of a complex thing he has omitted, how many of the minuter touches he has missed. That is because Literature is an art, and no artist of the highest type ever managed completely to say out in Literature all that he intended to say. Marlowe expresses this in his *Tamburlaine the Great*. You know the familiar lines:—

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“ If all the pens that poets ever held  
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts.

If these had made one poem's period  
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,  
Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,  
Which into words no virtue can digest.”

The Literary Ideal mocks you from afar: it is inexhaustible like the sea: it is inaccessible like a star.

And now look for one moment at the different effects that the two produce on the mind of the man who works in one or other of the two spheres. I have no time to elaborate the point. I can only put it thus. Literature stimulates the mind, renders it precise, careful; it is a tonic and it braces. But for the habitual and confirmed journalist, the very openness of intelligence necessary for his work, and the constant change of subject which he has to practise, tend to produce a certain colourlessness of mind, a tepid susceptibility to any and every impression. You know the man who is all things to all men, and you know his defects. Well, the Journalist's duty is to be all things to all subjects, and he loses character, just as the versatile actor of many parts ends by having no character of his own. The ancients praised the man of one book—*homo unius libri*. They knew that the intelligence of such a man would be strong, because it was not squandered and diffused.

You will say that considerations of this kind are a little dispiriting to us who have to engage in Journalism. I do not think so. It is wise to know our limitations. It will keep us humble, and prevent us from being too easily satisfied. And the biggest men can always get something into Journalism which is not really there, but which their genius or their talents have imported. That is the point. The best

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men are always raising Journalism, and making it into a better instrument of human thought. So far as I have been able to study the higher exponents of Journalism, there is always one rule they follow. They never write down to the level of their clientèle. They are never afraid of writing above their heads. Whether they write about politics, or music, or painting, or books, or drama, they do not leave their subject quite where they found it. They have keyed it up to a higher tone, a higher expression.

And if the question be asked what department of journalistic work lends itself with least difficulty to such treatment and handling as literature can give, I suppose the answer is obvious. It cannot be the political leader, for that is necessarily a *pièce d'occasion*, in which expediency and opportunism find ample scope. It cannot be the despatches from foreign capitals, for they are subject to all the limitations of telegraphic jerkiness. But in descriptive writing of all sorts, in which the writer paints a scene, or suggests an atmosphere, or gives vivid life to actual experience, bathed in the colour of an ardent—possibly a too ardent—imagination; in biographies or historical memoirs where there is need and necessity for a leisurely pen; and to a large extent also in criticism of books, plays, pictures, and music—criticism as it is understood in modern times—the literary spirit may make itself felt, and give welcome relief from the sharp, practical, insistent realities of the news of the day. I say “criticism as it is understood in modern times,” for we have changed to no small degree the temper of criticism. Time was, as you know, when the critic sat in the seat of the scornful, when with the pen of Jeffrey and Gifford and Macaulay he chastised, not only with whips, but with scorpions. You remember how Macaulay—who was above all a journalist—



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treated the unhappy poet Montgomery. You remember the terrible sentence of the criticism which began with the condemnatory words, from which, apparently, there was no appeal—"This will never do." Well, other times, other manners. We are not so trenchant nowadays: we are more tolerant: we do not regard the man whose work we dislike as a worm. Some people affect to deplore the change: they say that criticism is too mealy-mouthed, too deferential, too full of the watered milk of human kindness. I do not think that is precisely the point. The aim of criticism has altered. It is no longer purely analytic and destructive; it is synthetic, sympathetic, interpretative. The old gibe, that the critic is the man who has failed in literature, has lost its sting, for the critic has become constructive, and therefore a literary artist. He tries to put himself at the point of view of the author of the book, or play, or what not: he desires to see with his eyes, and accept his peculiar angle of vision. That is the preliminary sympathetic attitude (because sympathy is the first attribute of the critic), and when, in the pursuance of his task, he ranges the particular object of his study with others of its class, finding the place it occupies in the scale of excellence and defect; when he applies to it the canons of art, and discovers how far it achieves the purpose of its author, both in matter and form, in subject and style—the critic, the ideal critic, becomes a constructive literary artist. Think, for instance, of that great critic of the nineteenth century, Sainte-Beuve, who did so much, as it seems to me, to revolutionise the accepted rôle of the critic. He was a journalist, first and foremost: but he was surely also a literary man in a true sense of the word. I do not refer to the fact that he wrote a novel and some poetry (neither very considerable achievements, it

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must be confessed), or that he composed a number of volumes on *Port Royal*, which form a standard work of exceptional value. I allude especially to his criticism in his *Causeries du Lundi* and his *Nouveaux Lundis* and its numerous sequels, and I say that his criticism was not analytic merely, but also interpretative and constructive. It painted a picture, it delineated an era, it explained to us a generation, set in its proper atmosphere. And this is creative work, the work of an artist in letters. The qualities Sainte-Beuve possessed are especially those necessary for a critic. Let me summarise them in a last sentence. Sympathy, a fine curiosity and inquisitiveness, a subtle comprehension, interpretative insight, and a keen constructive imagination. Add conscientiousness—and you have the ideal critic.

### XXXVII

May 20th.

MEREDITH is dead. You will know this, even before I write, for the news of his loss will reach to all corners of the earth, and will be flashed to you almost as quickly as it is cried to us. It will be a sorrow to you, and to me the grief is a personal one. I knew him but slightly, but to know him at all was to love him personally.

Eighty years! The mere fact of so long a life links his career alike with the past masters of fiction and the modern period. For when Meredith began to write, the big men of the Victorian era were alive and in the heyday of their prosperity. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, which was published in 1859, came out in the same year as George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Thackeray's *Virginians*, and Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. It is a

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curious matter to reflect why its contemporaries were so successful, and why *Richard Feverel* had to wait so many years for its proper appreciation. At the time when both Tennyson and Browning were giving the world the best of their genius, Swinburne, in answer to a silly criticism of George Meredith's poems, which treated him as a callow amateur, solemnly declared that Meredith was one of the three or four great poets of the century. He had not written very much at that time, but he had produced "Love in the Valley," which was the immediate object of Swinburne's praise, and which, to us, as we read it now, seems brimming over with a music of its own, as delightful as it is rare:

"Happy, happy time, when the white star hovers  
Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,  
Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,  
Threading it with colour, like yewberries the yew.

Thicker crowd the shades as the grey East deepens  
Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.  
Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is; and secret;  
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold seashells."

But poetry of this stamp the world of fifty years ago would have none of. Nor, indeed, did the majority of readers appreciate in any true sense the fact that a great master of literature had come amongst them. *The Shaving of Shagpat*, produced in 1856, when Meredith was twenty-eight years of age, might well be misunderstood, because the ordinary critic, bewildered by the glitter of imagery and the whirl of metaphor, might easily miss the felicitous subtlety of the imitation of an Arabian story-teller. But *Richard Feverel*! It seems wonderful that no one could have seen what a range of truly-observed characters was here—how true, for instance, was the narrow pedantry of Sir Austin; how acute was the analysis of the hero;



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how veritable was the charm of Lucy. Yet I believe only the *Times* critic of the day detected the merits of Meredith's great novel. It is something to remember that at least one man was not blind to the art of Richard's mentor, Adrian Harley, and the Elizabethan humours of Mrs. Berry.

Of course, from a superficial point of view, it is easy for us to say that it was Meredith's own fault if he failed to receive due recognition. He was enigmatic. He was obscure. He revelled in metaphors and images. He was not averse from allegory. His was an elusive spirit, which loved to lurk unseen even in the moments of its highest activity. If for a moment we think of the ordinary French ideas of a novel, the sense of orderly arrangement, the logical nexus between incidents, the imperative duty of telling an agreeable story, we shall more readily understand the failure of his contemporaries in reference to a man who ignored most of the rules of Hellenic and Gallic art. Yet, if I remember right, *Sandra Belloni* was presented to the readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* many years ago; while in the current number of the same French review we find an exhaustive statement of all that George Meredith has done, and all his numerous claims upon the gratitude of the age, written by an able critic, Firmin Roz.

There are, in truth, many ways of telling a story. You may be a born weaver of plots, as was Miss Braddon, and in that case your first office is to tell your story with directness, and as much picturesque detail as possible. Or you may be a psychologist, and then your story only exists for the sake of your characters—exists in order to reveal what your characters are worth, to indicate their merits and demerits, their successes and their failures. If you think, for instance, of Mr. Thomas Hardy, you will

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get a combination of both of these two methods, for the author of *Far from the Madding Crowd* can certainly tell his story in a way which arrests the imagination, while throughout all his novels, and especially in the best of them, like *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, you have an accurate analysis of character. But George Meredith did not work altogether in this fashion. In one sense he is like Thackeray, in that he is always interfering in the course of his narrative, suggesting solutions to the problems he raises, giving hints of the proper attitude to adopt towards incidents and personages, leading the reader, by luminous hint or sarcastic innuendo, to the proper and legitimate standpoint. This is not to tell a story, but to give us a perpetual comment of asides. Then there is the blinding brilliance of his metaphors, which always attract attention on their own account, and therefore lead us away from the proper matter in hand. When a man sprinkles his pages with remarks like, "Solitude is a pasturage for a suspicion" (*Sandra Belloni*), "He was the genius of champagne luncheon incarnate" (*Rhoda Fleming*), "The past lay beside him like a corpse that he had slain" (*Evan Harrington*), "She waited as some grey lake lies, full and smooth, awaiting the star below the twilight" (*Sandra Belloni*)—the ordinary reader cannot help being disturbed, even if his attention is arrested.

In order to understand Meredith's position as a novelist, I think we have first and foremost to appreciate what he calls the Comic Spirit. He himself is the very avatar of this comic spirit, watching over the characters he creates, everywhere contrasting their performance with their intentions, their actions with their professions. To be inspired by the comic spirit is something very different from being a satirist,

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or even a humorist. Here is Meredith's own definition of the difference between the spirit with which he is himself animated and other kindred attitudes:—

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.

If, instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony.

If you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you and yours, to your neighbour, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is the spirit of Humour that is moving you.

The Comic, which is the perceptive, is the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim to those powers of laughter, but it is not to be confounded with them; it enfolds a thinner form of them, differing from satire in not sharply driving into the quivering sensibilities, and from humour, in not comforting them and tucking them up, or indicating a broader than the range of this bustling world to them.

The quotation, you will remember, comes from the well-known *Essay on Comedy*, one of the most brilliant things in the line of æsthetic criticism which has ever been done. But we discover now why the author is not a novelist on ordinary lines. You must not take things too seriously, he tells us; you must not take things too lightly. You must not be an optimist; neither must you be a pessimist. You must laugh with a certain tenderness. You must see the mockery and littleness of human lives, and yet recognise what good there is in them, how pathetically they strive towards their ideal, whatever it may be; how pitifully they often fail, and yet leave the road easier for their successors. This is why Meredith is rightly called a Prophet of Sanity. For such an attitude as this reveals to him all that is good in the past, quite as much as whatever yearning for good there may be in the future. He tells us, for instance,



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that "our civilisation is founded in common sense, and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it." On the other hand, no one more eagerly than Meredith will try all existing institutions by the test of humour and rational insight, to see whether reform be not possible. The same spirit of comedy makes him aware that neither Idealism nor Realism are anything but cold abstractions. No one must shut himself up in these dreary and chilling antitheses. We must see the play of life. We must see how the ideal helps, and how the real often confounds. Above all, we must be aware how the higher, the spiritual elements come by a perfectly natural progression out of the material. Throughout all Meredith's work, whether it be his novels or his poems, we find a constant reference back to Mother Earth, from whose teeming womb we all alike have birth—not some dead, cold thing, which the more ardent spirits must disown, but a lap of tenderness, which nursed our childhood, although our adult manhood may have risen to higher flights. There never was quite so sane a writer as Meredith, so observant of the true limits within which human life is placed. His eccentricities of style, sometimes even his eccentricities of thought, may disguise this essential truth, but soundness and health lie at his heart, which the reverent student of bewildering poems, and still more bewildering romances, can discover, if only he have the patience.

The finest flower of the Comic Spirit is to be found in Meredith's great novel, *The Egoist*. The earlier romances were more boyish, more boisterous. *Evan Harrington*, for instance, is a kind of romantic farce, especially in the character of the Great Melchisedek, in which the author is supposed to have availed himself of some of his father's eccentricities, much as Dickens permitted his father to stand for part of

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the portrait of Mr. Micawber. *Harry Richmond* was almost as youthfully hilarious. But when we get to the later work—for *The Egoist* only appeared in 1879—we find a subtlety of analysis, an accuracy of perception, a mordant criticism, which the earlier work did not admit of. In many ways the portrait of Sir Willoughby Patterne in his relations with Clara Middleton is one of the most merciless pieces of dissection which were ever attempted. It is not altogether unkindly in tone, but it is perfectly deadly in effect. We see before us exposed in a capital instance that which Meredith was inclined to think the great fault of the time, the narrow self-absorption, the splendid selfishness, the genial belief that the world existed in and for the sole personality of the self-conscious hero. Here the Comic Spirit is at work with a vengeance, and we have Meredith at his best.

Of course the air is full of memories of Meredith. More people have talked and written about him in the last few days than the total number of those earnest disciples who for years past have ventured to declare their unflinching faith in him. As a matter of fact, though for the moment we choose to think otherwise, we all know that Meredith has never been a popular writer—has never been, that is to say, a man who can be quoted in the daily intercourse of life, or whose name figures constantly in the public press. A clever and somewhat bitter old lady, who shall be nameless, but who represents the judgment undoubtedly of an early Victorian generation, summed up the prevailing attitude towards the deceased novelist by asking with some scorn the question, "Who is Meredith? He does not belong to us." "He has done nothing which recommends itself to our interests and prejudices except one thing, for which we are loth to forgive him. He gave a version under the name of 'Diana Warwick'

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of what Lady Norton did, or is supposed to have done, in private conference with Delane, the editor of the *Times*." <sup>1</sup> That is the attitude of the older people of the world: they seem quite oblivious of the fact that Meredith was writing contemporaneously with the men and the women with whom they were familiar. *The Tale of Two Cities* had its wide success, *The Virginians* its moderate one, while George Eliot's *Adam Bede* secured a more immediate popularity, because it was considered a daring book, and especially a daring book for a woman to write. With the publication of *Adam Bede* George Eliot stepped from the ranks of the ingenious, the clever, the interesting writers of romance, into the more select class of those whose work will not be forgotten. But poor George Meredith's *Richard Feverel* fell almost still-born from the press. One solitary critic proclaimed that it was a work decidedly above the average! The world at large treated it with disdain, or rather—which was worse—with neglect. And yet the qualities of Meredith are as conspicuous in *Richard Feverel* as they are in any other work of his. Indeed, it contains a chapter of love-making which is of almost unexampled charm. Our octogenarian novelist was a romantic in the true sense of the term, in that he had the most sovereign faith in love. But he knew the difference between the youthful, ingenuous ardour of two human beings upon whom the divine madness has descended for the first time, and the paler, more ineffectual, more calculated philandering of the middle-aged. Here is a quotation from the chapter in *Richard Feverel* :—

The tide of colour has ebbed from the upper sky. In the west the sea of sunken fire draws back, and the stars leap forth and tremble, and retire before the advancing moon, who slips

<sup>1</sup> Of course Meredith publicly disavowed this.



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the silver train of cloud from her shoulders, and, with her foot upon the pine-tops, surveys heaven.

"Lucy, did you never dream of meeting me?"

"O, Richard! yes; for I remembered you."

"Lucy! and did you pray that we might meet?"

"I did."

Young as when she looked upon the lovers in Paradise, the fair Immortal journeys onward. Fronting her, it is not night, but veiled day. Full half the sky is flushed. Not darkness: not day; but the nuptials of the two.

"My own! my own for ever! You are pledged to me? Whisper!"

He hears the delicious music.

"And you are mine?"

A soft beam travels to the fern-covert under the pinewood where they sit, and for answer he has her eyes: turned to him an instant, timidly fluttering over the depths of his, and then downcast; for through her eyes her soul is naked to him.

"Lucy! my bride! my life!"

And now set side by side with this a passage from *The Egoist* :—

"An oath?" she said, and moved her lips to recall what she might have said and forgotten. "To what? What oath?"

"That you will be true to me, dead as well as living! Whisper it."

"Willoughby, I shall be true to my vows at the altar."

"To me! me!"

"It will be to you."

"To my soul. No heaven can be for me—I see none, only torture, unless I have your word, Clara. I trust it. I will trust it implicitly. My confidence in you is absolute."

"Then you need not be troubled."

"It is for you, my love; that you may be armed and strong when I am not by to protect you."

"Our views of the world are opposed, Willoughby."

"Consent; gratify me; swear it. Say, 'Beyond death.' Whisper it. I ask for nothing more. Women think the husband's grave breaks the bond, cuts the tie, sets them loose. They wed the flesh—pah! What I call on you for is nobility—the transcendent nobility of faithfulness beyond death. 'His widow!' let them say; a saint in widowhood."

The contrast could not possibly have been more subtly delineated. The egoism of Sir Willoughby stands bare.

## Rosemary's Letter Book

Every one is debating whether the Dean of Westminster was or was not right in refusing interment in Westminster Abbey. The reason of the refusal is that so many Victorian writers have already been enshrined in the great "temple of reconciliation and silence" that if we add yet another we shall be paying disproportionate reference to one era in our literary history. That is by no means an adequate reason, for if the Victorian era happens to be rich in great names it deserves fuller representation; and it certainly does not look as if the Edwardian era is likely to be equally rich. Nevertheless I am not sure that the Dean of Westminster is not right, in a certain fashion not very easy to explain. Interment in Westminster Abbey means and must mean a world-wide fame, which in its turn is dependent on certain qualities capable of a universal appeal. Now Meredith conspicuously lacked these qualities—not in his own temperament, but in the work he accomplished. And that is one of the odd things about his career. He was himself undoubtedly bigger, more catholic, wider-minded, than anything he wrote. All his novels belong to a class which appeals to the elect, and which undoubtedly is caviare to the general reader. When we say this of a man we do not deny him the possession of great intellect or even genius: we only say that he is not of those whose immediate influence over the age in which he lived is conspicuous. Why did his novels lack the wider appeal? Partly because of their style and the manner in which they were written—for they are often exceedingly difficult to read—and partly because of the nature of their subjects. No keener psychologist ever existed than George Meredith, especially in reference to the psychology of women. Well, a novelist must not be too acute a psychologist—that is to say, if he desires to number his readers by the tens of

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thousands. He must know a great deal, but he must be clever enough to conceal his knowledge. He must not make analytic psychology the be-all and end-all of his romances. Without doubt the Meredithian heroines are the most triumphantly successful of any that have been painted within the last two centuries of English literature. Sandra Belloni, Rhoda Fleming, Clara Middleton, Diana Warwick—these are extraordinary women, so good and so true that they are almost overpowering. But they are not average women. You must almost be as great as they are to understand them. And thus the worship of Meredith is an esoteric cult, and we must not be surprised if the Dean of Westminster, representing in his ecclesiastical fashion the voice of the man in the street, refuses such recognition to the dead novelist as a public interment in Westminster Abbey would imply. Why, even the most extraordinary thing that Meredith ever wrote, *The Egoist*—which is separated by an interval of forty years from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*—does not seem to be rightly apprehended by the majority of readers. It is too intimate, too thorough, too penetrating in its analysis of the egoistic temperament. And its author will not condescend to his readers by giving them a story or a plot in which they can revel. No: unless they are going to be as interested in the selfish nature of Sir Willoughby Patterne as Meredith is, he is not writing for them.

The same thing is true also of his poems. It is quite a question whether Meredith was greater as a novelist or as a poet; but how many people can read his poems? They can read his "Love in the Valley," perhaps, or his "Lark Ascending:" but do they appreciate "The Woods of Westermain?" Are they aware that "Modern Love" is one of the most extraordinary things that have been produced in our age,



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with its merciless analysis of the relation of the sexes? For the majority it is as difficult to read as some of the poems of Browning; but I venture to say that it is greater than most of the poems of Browning, because it is not only as thorough in its psychology but is a good deal more poetical. One wonders whether the succeeding age will do more justice to Meredith than we do. There are writers whom, in the current mode of talking, we describe as being "too previous" for the generation in which they live. Meredith has this extraordinary and unique characteristic, that, although he began to write half a century ago, his works are still too modern for our era. I can imagine a Meredithian cult springing up in the twenty-first century, which shall boldly profess as one of the dogmas of its creed that Meredith is greater than most, if not all, the Victorian writers, and that we must go back to Shakespeare to comprehend the catholicity of his genius.

And here is a sonnet I have written to his memory.

### LIKE SOULS IMMORTAL

*Is God's Hand shortened that He cannot save ?*

*Or sleeps the cry of anguish in His Ear ?*

*Nay, but He sees and hearkens. Have no fear.*

*Ask those who fight and perish, ask the brave*

*Who, unrepining, squander all they have*

*For some high promise, unaccomplished here :*

*God's glorious gates of Paradise shine clear*

*When human hopes are faltering to the grave.*

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*Strange world, in which the triumph does not come  
To those who are most worldly, but to those  
Who muse apart, and wiser than they seem,  
Like souls immortal everywhere at home,  
Learn of the God who sees, the God who knows,  
The hidden truth interpreting their dream.*

Meanwhile there are ways in which Meredith has influenced his own generation. There are many reasons to account for our gratitude and our love. We can sum up the debt in many ways possibly, but in no fashion better than by proclaiming him what I have already suggested, an Apostle of Sanity. Sanity in literature is the most extraordinarily valuable thing that can be mentioned, because cleverness generally shows itself by eccentricity. Half the clever writers, for instance, of the present day are clever just because they are paradoxical, or one-sided, or represent extreme tendencies, or even because they are shocking. What a relief to turn back to George Meredith, with his clear outlook on things, with his appreciation of all the different shades of opinion for and against, with his dislike of mere labels, his refusal to call himself this or that of the current divisions between thinkers! The sane man has a great respect for the past, but he knows also that he has got to live in the present. He will treat with all reverence the particular notions and creeds and social enactments which have been handed down to him; but he will not be a slave to them, because he is aware that he, too, has to hit out his life according to modern conditions and not according to the conditions of the past. But he will be very happy in his present day. He will accept it as his duty to make the best of the age in which he lives. The future is uncertain, and must, after all, be left to take care of itself. He will not be an absurd and unthinking

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optimist: still less will he be a despairing pessimist. Compare for a moment the attitude of Thomas Hardy with that of George Meredith. In the view of Thomas Hardy we live in a world which is the sport of blind Chance, in which men are puppets in the hands of powers neither beneficent nor maleficent, because they are simply irrational. Contrasted with this, Meredith is an absolute optimist. He thinks that men can improve both themselves and the world in which they live. They are not puppets, but within certain limits masters of their fates. They will not erect fetishes. They will not accept on their knees whatever past generations have given them. They will reserve to themselves the right of criticism, and carry out that criticism with the sanest of all qualities that can belong to a human being—humour. Here at least is something that can satisfy. Human ambition is not quelled because it is shown to be useless. On the contrary, it is encouraged, because, in ways we know not of, it works to some far-off issue. Years hence, as I believe, we shall return to George Meredith as, above all, the prophet of a wise, wide-eyed, patient, tolerant sanity, never arresting the work of development, but recognising the duty of every individual to play his part nobly and fearlessly in the sure and certain hope that he is aiding the evolution of humanity.



# Rosemary's Letter Book

## XXXVIII

June 8th.

MY dear, my dear, is it true? Are you really coming home? And am I to see you in a few weeks? It is difficult to believe. And how shall we meet? And what effect will this meeting have on both our destinies? I wonder and I fear! What are you, you inscrutable Sphinx? Are you a being just defined on the borders of the natural, half-spirit and half-air, a beautiful ineffectual angel beating your luminous wings in the void inane? Or shall I see you, rosy with human flesh, a woman whose heart beats and pulses throb, a woman to be wooed, a woman to be won?

*Qui vivra, verra!*







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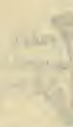
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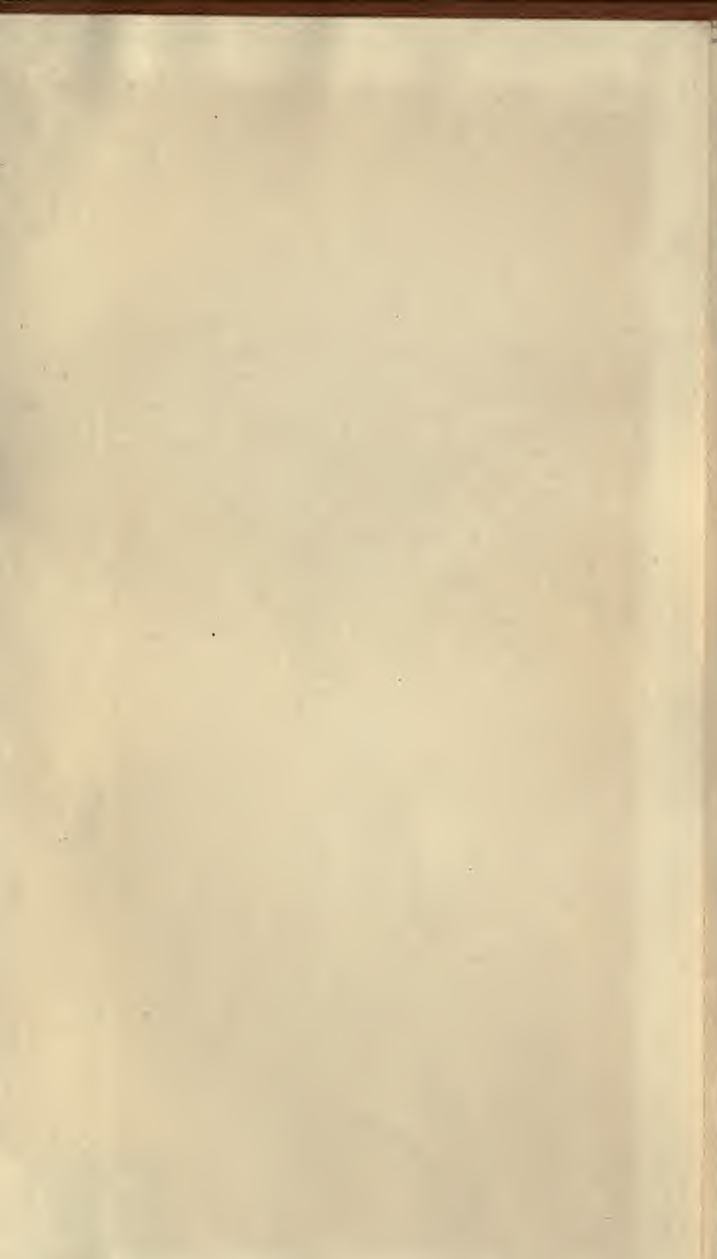


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