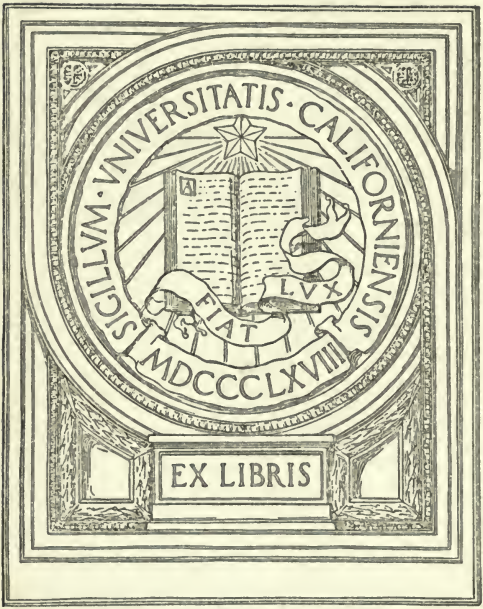
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AGNOSTICISM

AND

OTHER ESSAYS

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT

WITH A PROLOGUE BY

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL

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CONTENTS.

" 'Heaven help us!' said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another."

—GEORGE ELIOT'S LETTERS.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL'S PROLOGUE.

I.

EDGAR FAWCETT.

EDGAR FAWCETT—a great poet, a metaphysician and logician—has been for years engaged in exploring that strange world wherein are supposed to be the springs of human action. He has sought for something back of motives, reasons, fancies, passions, prejudices, and the countless tides and tendencies that constitute the life of man.

He has found some of the limitations of mind, and knows that beginning at that luminous centre called consciousness, a few short steps bring us to the prison wall where vision fails and all light dies. Beyond this wall the eternal darkness broods. This gloom is "the other world" of the

supernaturalist. With him, real vision begins where the sight fails. He reverses the order of nature. Facts become illusions, and illusions the only realities. He believes that the cause of the image, the reality, is behind the mirror.

A few centuries ago the priests said to their followers: The other world is above you; it is just beyond where you see. Afterwards the astronomer with his telescope looked, and asked the priests: Where is the world of which you speak? And the priests replied: It has receded—it is just beyond where you see.

As long as there is "a beyond" there is room for the priests' world. Theology is the geography of this beyond.

Between the Christian and the Agnostic there is the difference of assertion and question—between "There is a God" and "Is there a God?" The Agnostic has the arrogance to admit his ignorance, while the Christian from the depths of humility impudently insists that he knows.

Mr. Fawcett has shown that at the root of religion lies the coiled serpent of fear, and that ceremony, prayer, and worship are ways and means to gain the assistance or soften the heart of a supposed deity.

He also shows that as man advances in knowledge he loses confidence in the watchfulness of Providence and in the efficacy of prayer.

II.

SCIENCE.

THE savage is certain of those things that cannot be known. He is acquainted with origin and destiny, and knows everything except that which is useful. The civilized man, having outgrown the ignorance, the arrogance, and the provincialism of savagery, abandons the vain search for final causes, for the nature and origin of things.

In nearly every department of science man is allowed to investigate, and the discovery of a new fact is welcomed, unless it threatens some creed.

Of course there can be no advance in a religion established by infinite wisdom. The only progress possible is in the comprehension of this religion.

For many generations what is known under a vast number of disguises and behind many masks as the Christian religion has been propagated and preserved by

the sword and bayonet—that is to say, by force. The credulity of man has been bribed and his reason punished. Those who believed without the slightest question, and whose faith held evidence in contempt, were saints; those who investigated were dangerous, and those who denied were destroyed.

Every attack upon this religion has been made in the shadow of human and divine hatred—in defiance of earth and heaven. At one time Christendom was beneath the ignorant feet of one man, and those who denied his infallibility were heretics and atheists. At last a protest was uttered. The right of conscience was proclaimed, to the extent of making a choice between the infallible man and the infallible book. Those who rejected the man and accepted the book became in their turn as merciless, as tyrannical and heartless, as the followers of the infallible man. The Protestants insisted that an infinitely wise and good God would not allow criminals and wretches to act as his infallible agents.

Afterwards a few protested against the infallibility of the book, using the same arguments against the book that had formerly been used against the pope. They

said that an infinitely wise and good God could not be the author of a cruel and ignorant book. But those who protested against the book fell into substantially the same error that had been fallen into by those who had protested against the man. While they denounced the book, and insisted that an infinitely wise and good being could not have been its author, they took the ground that an infinitely wise and good being was the creator and governor of the world.

Then was used against them the same argument that had been used by the Protestants against the pope and by the Deists against the Protestants. Attention was called to the fact that Nature is as cruel as any pope or any book—that it is just as easy to account for the destruction of the Canaanites consistently with the goodness of Jehovah as to account for pestilence, earthquake, and flood consistently with the goodness of the God of Nature.

The Protestant and Deist both used arguments against the Catholic that could in turn be used with equal force against themselves. So that there is no question among intelligent people as to the infallibility of the pope, as to the inspiration of the

book, or as to the existence of the Christian's God—for the conclusion has been reached that the human mind is incapable of deciding as to the origin and destiny of the universe.

For many generations the mind of man has been travelling in a circle. It accepted without question the dogma of a First Cause—of the existence of a Creator—of an Infinite Mind back of matter, and sought in many ways to define its ignorance in this behalf. The most sincere worshippers have declared that this Being is incomprehensible,—that he is "without body, parts, or passions"—that he is infinitely beyond their grasp,—and at the same time have insisted that it was necessary for man not only to believe in the existence of this Being, but to love him with all his heart.

Christianity having always been in partnership with the State,—having controlled kings and nobles, judges and legislators—having been in partnership with armies and with every form of organized destruction,—it was dangerous to discuss the foundation of its authority. To speak lightly of any dogma was a crime punishable by death. Every absurdity has been bastioned and barricaded by the power of

the State. It has been protected by fist, by club, by sword and cannon.

For many years Christianity succeeded in substantially closing the mouths of its enemies, and lived and flourished only where investigation and discussion were prevented by hypocrisy and bigotry. The Church still talks about "evidence," about "reason," about "freedom of conscience" and the "liberty of speech," and yet denounces those who ask for evidence, who appeal to reason, and who honestly express their thoughts.

To-day we know that the miracles of Christianity are as puerile and false as those ascribed to the medicine-men of Central Africa or the Fiji Islanders, and that the "sacred scriptures" have the same claim to inspiration that the Koran has or the Book of Mormon—no less, no more. These questions have been settled and laid aside by free and intelligent people. They have ceased to excite interest; and the man who now really believes in the truth of the Old Testament is regarded with a smile—looked upon as an aged child—still satisfied with the lullabys and toys of the cradle.

III.

MORALITY.

It is contended that without religion—that is to say, without Christianity—all ideas of morality must of necessity perish, and that spirituality and reverence will be lost.

What is morality?

Is it to obey without question, or is it to act in accordance with perceived obligation? Is it something with which intelligence has nothing to do? Must the ignorant child carry out the command of the wise father—the rude peasant rush to death at the request of the prince?

Is it impossible for morality to exist where the brain and heart are in partnership? Is there no foundation for morality except punishment threatened or reward promised by a superior to an inferior? If this be true, how can the superior be virtuous? Cannot the reward and the threat be in the nature of things? Can they not rest in consequences perceived by the intellect? How can the existence or non-existence of a deity change my obligation to keep my hands out of the fire?

The results of all actions are equally certain, but not equally known, not equally perceived. If all men knew with perfect certainty that to steal from another was to rob themselves, larceny would cease. It cannot be said too often that actions are good or bad in the light of consequences, and that a clear perception of consequences would control actions. That which increases the sum of human happiness is moral; that which diminishes the sum of human happiness is immoral. Blind, unreasoning obedience is the enemy of morality. Slavery is not the friend of virtue. Actions are neither right nor wrong by virtue of what men or gods can say; the right or wrong lives in results—in the nature of things, growing out of relations violated or caused.

Accountability lives in the nature of consequences—in their absolute certainty—in the fact that they cannot be placated, avoided, or bribed.

The relations of human life are too complicated to be accurately and clearly understood, and, as a consequence, rules of action vary from age to age. The ideas of right and wrong change with the experience of the race, and this change is

wrought by the gradual ascertaining of consequences—of results. For this reason the religion of one age fails to meet the standard of another, precisely as the laws that satisfied our ancestors are repealed by us; so that, in spite of all efforts, religion itself is subject to gradual and perpetual change.

The miraculous is no longer the basis of morals. Man is a sentient being—he suffers and enjoys. In order to be happy he must preserve the conditions of well-being—must live in accordance with certain facts by which he is surrounded. If he violates these conditions the result is unhappiness, failure, disease, misery.

Man must have food, roof, raiment, fireside, friends—that is to say, prosperity; and this he must earn—this he must deserve. He is no longer satisfied with being a slave, even of the Infinite. He wishes to perceive for himself, to understand, to investigate, to experiment; and he has at last the courage to bear the consequences that he brings upon himself. He has also found that those who are the most religious are not always the kindest, and that those who have been and are the worshippers of God enslave their fellow-men. He has

found that there is no necessary connection between religion and morality.

Morality needs no supernatural assistance —needs neither miracle nor pretence. It has nothing to do with awe, reverence, credulity, or blind, unreasoning faith. Morality is the highway perceived by the soul, the direct road, leading to success, honor, and happiness.

The best thing to do under the circumstances is moral.

The highest possible standard is human. We put ourselves in the places of others. We are made happy by the kindness of others, and we feel that a fair exchange of good actions is the wisest and best commerce. We know that others can make us miserable by acts of hatred and injustice, and we shrink from inflicting the pain upon others that we have felt ourselves : this is the foundation of conscience.

If man could not suffer, the words right and wrong could never have been spoken.

The agnostic, the infidel, clearly perceives the true basis of morals, and, so perceiving, he knows that the religious man, the superstitious man, caring more for God than for his fellows, will sacrifice his fellows, either at the supposed command of

his God, or to win his approbation. He also knows that the religionist has no basis for morals except these supposed commands. The basis of morality with him lies not in the nature of things, but in the caprice of some deity. He seems to think that, had it not been for the Ten Commandments, larceny and murder might have been virtues.

IV.

SPIRITUALITY.

WHAT is it to be spiritual?

Is this fine quality of the mind destroyed by the development of the brain? As the domain wrested by science from ignorance increases—as island after island and continent after continent are discovered—as star after star and constellation after constellation in the intellectual world burst upon the midnight of ignorance, does the spirituality of the mind grow less and less? Like morality, is it only found in the company of ignorance and superstition? Is the spiritual man honest, kind, candid?—or dishonest, cruel, and hypocritical? Does he say what he thinks? Is he guided by reason? Is he the friend of the right?—

the champion of the truth? Must this splendid quality called spirituality be retained through the loss of candor? Can we not truthfully say that absolute candor is the beginning of wisdom?

To recognize the finer harmonies of conduct—to live to the ideal—to separate the incidental, the evanescent, from the perpetual—to be enchanted with the perfect melody of truth—open to the influences of the artistic, the beautiful, the heroic—to shed kindness as the sun sheds light—to recognize the good in others, and to include the world in the idea of self—this is to be spiritual.

There is nothing spiritual in the worship of the unknown and unknowable, in the self-denial of a slave at the command of a master whom he fears. Fastings, prayings, mutilations, kneelings, and mortifications are either the results of, or result in, insanity. This is the spirituality of Bedlam, and is of no kindred with the soul that finds its greatest joy in the discharge of obligation perceived.

V.

REVERENCE.

WHAT is reverence?

It is the feeling produced when we stand in the presence of our ideal, or of that which most nearly approaches it—that which is produced by what we consider the highest degree of excellence.

The highest is reverenced, praised, and admired without qualification. Each man reverences according to his nature, his experience, his intellectual development. He may reverence Nero or Marcus Aurelius, Jehovah or Buddha, the author of Leviticus or Shakespeare. Thousands of men reverence John Calvin, Torquemada, and the Puritan fathers; and some have greater respect for Jonathan Edwards than for Captain Kidd.

A vast number of people have great reverence for anything that is covered by mould, or moss, or mildew. They bow low before rot and rust, and adore the worthless things that have been saved by the negligence of oblivion. They are enchanted with the dull and fading daubs of the old masters, and hold in contempt those mir-

acles of art, the paintings of to-day. They worship the ancient, the shadowy, the mysterious, the wonderful. They doubt the value of anything that they understand.

The creed of Christendom is the enemy of morality. It teaches that the innocent can justly suffer for the guilty, that consequences can be avoided by repentance, and that in the world of mind the great fact known as cause and effect does not apply.

It is the enemy of spirituality, because it teaches that credulity is of more value than conduct, and because it pours contempt upon human love by raising far above it the adoration of a phantom.

It is the enemy of reverence. It makes ignorance the foundation of virtue. It belittles the useful, and cheapens the noblest of the virtues. It teaches man to live on mental alms, and glorifies the intellectual pauper. It holds candor in contempt, and is the malignant foe of mental manhood.

VI.

EXISTENCE OF GOD.

MR. FAWCETT has shown conclusively that it is no easier to establish the existence of an infinitely wise and good being by the

existence of what we call "good" than to establish the existence of an infinitely bad being by what we call "bad."

Nothing can be surer than that the history of this world furnishes no foundation on which to base an inference that it has been governed by infinite wisdom and goodness. So terrible has been the condition of man that religionists in all ages have endeavored to excuse God by accounting for the evils of the world by the wickedness of men. And the Fathers of the Christian Church were forced to take the ground that this world had been filled with briers and thorns, with deadly serpents and with poisonous weeds, with disease and crime and earthquake and pestilence and storm, by the curse of God.

The probability is that no God has cursed, and that no God will bless, this earth. Man suffers and enjoys according to conditions. The sun shines without love, and the lightning blasts without hate. Man is the Providence of man.

Nature gives to our eyes all they can see, to our ears all they can hear, and to the mind what it can comprehend. The human race reaps the fruit of every victory won on the fields of intellectual or physical conflict.

We have no right to expect something for nothing. Man will reap no harvest the seeds of which he has not sown.

The race must be guided by intelligence, must be free to investigate, and must have the courage and the candor not only to state what is known, but to cheerfully admit the limitations of the mind.

No intelligent, honest man can read what Mr. Fawcett has written and then say that he knows the origin and destiny of things—that he knows whether an Infinite Being exists or not, that he knows whether the soul of man is or is not immortal.

In the land of ———, the geography of which is not certainly known, there was for many years a great dispute among the inhabitants as to which road led to the City of Miragia, the capital of their country, and known to be the most delightful city on the earth. For fifty generations the discussion as to which road led to the city had been carried on with the greatest bitterness, until finally the people were divided into a great number of parties, each party claiming that the road leading to the city had been miraculously made known to the founder of that particular sect. The various parties spent most of their time putting up

guide-boards on these roads and tearing down the guide-boards of others. Hundreds of thousands had been killed, prisons were filled, and the fields had been ravaged by the hosts of war.

One day, a wise man, a patriot, wishing to bring peace to his country, met the leaders of the various sects and asked them whether it was absolutely certain that the City of Miragia existed. He called their attention to the facts that no resident of that city had ever visited them and that none of their fellow-men who had started for the capital had ever returned, and modestly asked whether it would not be better to satisfy themselves beyond a doubt that there was such a city, adding that the location of the city would determine which of all the roads was the right one.

The leaders heard these words with amazement. They denounced the speaker as a wretch without morality, spirituality, or reverence, and thereupon he was torn in pieces.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

PART II.

AGNOSTICISM.

RATIONALISM owes a debt of gratitude to him who coined the word "agnostic." Previously there had been only "infidel" and "atheist," and one or two other similar terms, all irate bayonets pointed at the very teeth of orthodoxy. They were words, too, that had attained a kind of rowdy, buccaneering prominence; they appeared to prowl, like verbal guerillas, upon the outskirts of accepted vocabularies. Besides, they failed clearly to express, in many cases, the mental attitudes of those to whom they were applied. A good many sensible and moral people abode in the world who felt as averse to denying the existence of a deity as they did to affirming it. They resembled, to a certain degree, the chancellor in Tennyson's "Sleeping Beauty," who diplomatically

> "Dallied with his golden chain and smiling put the question by."

Still, about the real agnostic spirit there is much more sincerity than diplomacy. It means, in its finest sense, a courageous envisaging of the awful problems of life and death, and an admission of their total insolubility. It might almost, in particular temperaments and personalities, be said to have become a sort of new religion by itself, simpler than that of Comte, with his complex and deliberated apings of Christian forms, and yet capable in some respects of being classed with Positivism. At the same time, a very large majority of agnostics are quite without the reverential sense. "I do not know" precludes in them all tendency to "divine" or to "feel." Nor should they be blamed for this indifference, reluctance, or whatever it may be called. Emotion and reason have an arctic and antarctic divergence.

The average type of agnostic has reached his present position through the help of reason, and therefore he cannot be expected to abandon the power which has made him what he is. That power would not desert him, indeed, even if he should try to exorcise it. He recognizes this truth and so patiently accepts the ally with which destiny has provided him. If he leans

toward absolute atheism—toward a denial of any conscious and intelligent ruler of the universe—he does so because vast weight of evidence impels him in that direction, while a comparatively small influence lures him in another. Not long ago an eminent thinker said to me, in a moment of colloquial confidence: "Truly, the most extraordinary idea which ever entered the brain of man is that of a personal, over-watching deity." Most modern agnostics may be said to hold precisely this amazed view of the case. And yet they will not deny the deity either of ecclesiastic faith or of operative imagination. No one has ever seen the other side of the moon, and if you were to tell an agnostic that you felt sure this concealed lunar hemisphere was blazing with active volcanoes he would not consider himself authorized to deny your statement. He might seriously doubt it, but he would not deny it. His quarrel with the atheist is not bitter, but it is appreciable. The latter declares "There is no god," but the former, firmly as he may believe so, scorns assertion based upon partial proof. "Until I have solved the secret of the universe," says the agnostic, "I shall forbear from stating how, why or by whom it was

created." He realizes just how potent an Œdipus is requisite to make the Sphinx cast herself into the sea.

What, may be asked, are the causes which lead agnosticism to doubt that an almighty, tutelary and merciful power dwells behind the manifestations of nature? In the first place one might almost affirm that the good and evil which we see around us make any kind of conscious beneficent power beyond them a self-contradiction if not a nullity. For it is hard to conceive of a virtuous and omnipotent god permitting misery such as that with which our planet teems, and it is equally hard to conceive of a diabolic and omnipotent god not stamping out the happiness which also certainly abounds upon earth. John Stuart Mill has suggested the possibility of there being two gods forever at war with one another, from whose perpetual contest all admirable and deplorable things result; but this acute English thinker has touched upon the idea of such a celestial antagonism with a delicacy that might be defined as the irony of metaphysics, and no one more clearly apprehended than did he the complete idleness of mere *a priori* speculation. Again, agnosticism has to-day con-

vinced itself that all religions bear the sure evidence of having originated solely in man's intercourse with his fellow-men. At the root of all worship lies one element—that of fear, and the fear-begotten desire to propitiate some hostile though viewless agency. Christianity, and other creeds dependent upon a so-called "revelation," have never produced a single authentic proof of their validity. Waiving members of the Brahmin, the Buddhist, the Mohammedan, the Parsee, and of other noteworthy faiths, no Christian would at the present time accept for an instant as credible any fact so faintly supported by historic *data* as that of the alleged miraculous birth of Christ, not to mention his having turned water into wine, his having caused a dead man to live again, or his having defied the laws of gravitation by floating up into the sky and so disappearing before the gaze of a multitude. But the Christian insists upon accepting as facts these follies redolent of the grossest ignorance and superstition. The Christian unhesitatingly asserts, too, that morality is a product of direct revelation from some sort of anthropomorphic spirit to mankind, instead of having been gradually evolved through slow stages of

civilization, which began at a condition lower than barbarism or cannibalism. The Christian clings to this astonishing tenet in the face of all that science has so ably and amply taught him to the contrary. And yet he by no means rejects the copious and precious teachings of science. He respects them, indeed, with all the practical ardor of an agnostic. If the wind blows harsh from the east he does not content himself with praying to his god that it may fail to inflict pneumonia upon his favorite child. He bids that child button stout wraps about the person and avoid breathing too deeply the icy air. No amount of trust in "providence" would induce him to let a bushel of rotting vegetables pollute his cellar for a single day. When he or any one dear to him is ill, he seeks physician and not parson. Even if he be a Roman Catholic, he gives the calomel or the quinine, the nux vomica or the bismuth, full curative scope, before he welcomes the hollow mummery of extreme unction. In all his goings and comings, among all the details of his daily routine, the Christian is quite as much a servant and devotee of scientific discovery and testimony as the most pronounced agnostic

who ever smiled at the absurdities of an Adam, an Eve and an Eden. He will tell you one minute that a benign tenderness and compassion are forever invisibly befriending him, and he will refer, the next, to having taken passage for Europe on a particular line of steamers because that is notoriously the safest. If his house be insufficiently guarded against lightning and yet be struck some day without injury resulting to any of its occupants, he will fall on his knees, most probably, in heartfelt thanksgiving to a kindly and protective personality whose august will forges the thunderbolt and determines its flight. But on the following day he will be sure, if he can afford it, to have the whole house well-equipped with lightning-rods.

From proofs like these the agnostic finds himself arguing that the Christian does not believe half so implicitly as he is under the impression that he believes. For, if his belief were absolute, he would ignore his natural environment a great deal more than he already does, in a fixed certainty that what was to be would be, and that from first to last his mortal career was under a clement and sympathizing guardianship. Or, if it were really credited by the Christian that

human ills befall the faithful as blessings in disguise, then he would nerve himself to receive such apparent disasters with ten times that stoicism which we now see him exhibit.

That any other than a god of exquisite cruelty should inflict these disasters upon mankind while the centuries continue to roll along, puzzles the agnostic in marked degree. Nothing is more common than to hear, from enthusiastic Christians, words that express passionate encomium of the grandeur and splendor of creation. "How could all this beauty and magnificence exist," they cry, "unless a god of surpassing worth and wisdom produced them?" But they forget that for every agreeable or alluring feature there is one correspondingly odious and repellent. If the rose blooms, the poisonous plant thrives as well. If the sky bends blue and lucid above us, the tempest, with shafts of death and hurricanes of ruin, also has its reign there. If health glows in certain faces, disease ravages others. If sanity is the blessed endowment of many minds, madness is to many a curse and bane. If sexual love finds often its rightful and genial gratification, often it finds a terrible discontent, an

agonizing repulse. If there are the buoyancy and gladness of youth, so are there the decrepitude and pathos of old age. If there is the joy of perfect marriage, so is there the sorrow of the widower and the widow—or, perhaps even worse, the troublous disunion of ill-mated pairs. And thus the chain of contrast might be extended, until we have seen that, link by link, it all means just so much happiness for just so much distress, just so much light for just so much darkness.

Now, if an affectionate god is the author of all that we term good, we cannot deny his accountability for all that we term evil. If he made the lily, in its chaste and odorous loveliness, he made the cancer, a flower of hideous petal and mephitic exhalation. Nor will it serve us to affirm that all baleful things in life are the offspring of a hidden, inscrutable charity toward the race. It is within the limit of every man's imagination to picture himself as realizing, in some *post-mortem* state, that all afflictions poured upon humanity have indeed been "for the best." But even if he were then to concede that this had been wholly true, he could never fairly avoid the declaration that anguish and calamity are, here and

now, persecutions and martyrdoms ruthlessly wreaked upon his living earthly kindred. He must always have that quarrel with any god he might meet outside of the flesh from which he has escaped. To *le grand peutêtre* he must always be ready to present *le grand pourquoi.* At least, he must do so if we can speak of a disembodied soul as an entity to be dealt with by laws of human consciousness. And how else can we possibly deal with such an entity?

But, on the other hand, can we deal with it at all? Do we know, even in the vaguest way, what the words 'a disembodied soul' mean? They, and the melodious polysyllable, 'immortality,' pass glibly enough from the lips. A great many estimable people are quite sure that they know precisely what is meant in the utterance of them. But in reality these expressions are quite wild and void. It will not do to say that the Bible has told us what they mean, for even admitting that the Bible be not a book wrought by excessively ignorant and superstitious men from material in part if not wholly fabulous, the information which it conveys on subjects of a supernatural import is of no more real value than a tale

like that of Leda and the Swan or any of the thousand myths embedded amid other creeds. There is not the slightest reason why we should look upon the chronicle of either Jeremiah or St. Matthew, of either Samuel or St. Mark, as veracious. No historian of the least real repute would, at the present day, affirm them to be so. The very existence of that particular Christ whose life and death are recorded in the New Testament is by no means a proven fact. The ridiculous story that he was born of a virgin is scarcely less to be respected by unbiassed judges than the story that he was ever born at all. He is a figure not a whit more actual than Helen of Sparta, Achilles or Hector, and the entire legend of his crucifixion has no more historic weight than that of the siege of Troy.

But there probably was an Achilles, a siege of Troy, and there probably was a Christ, a crucifixion. No proof that his Messiah was divine seems to the Christian a stronger one than such reported words and deeds as those of the four gospels. Yet here are both words and deeds which often partake rather of the anchorite's austere self-mortification and asceticism than of the liberal and virile philanthropist's

doctrines and axioms. The character of Christ, as his apostles depict it, is that of a sweet-souled, pure-minded communist, yet it is also an individuality filled with impracticable meekness and a tendency toward beautiful yet dangerous kindliness in its dealings with the frailties, crimes and sins of society. The best and purest of modern Christians could not conscientiously endorse the pardoning posture shown by this Christ whom he so adores. It is one thing to worship such an unflawed spirit as an ideal of mildness and compassion; it is another to approve measures of lowlihead and amiability which, if carried out in the government of multitudes by an executive, would entail anarchy of the worst license. We cannot tell hardened culprits to go and sin no more; *they* are always glad enough to "go," but their wrongdoing is not half so easy of dismissal. To be roughly assaulted by some miscreant and to bid him assault us again—to turn the other cheek toward him after he has smitten us upon one—is a personal revelation of self-control commendable only within the limits of Christ's especial disposition:—that of altruistic goodfellowship, equally wide and indulgent

But if we overlook the question of slighted self-respect, how can we approve, in this connection, a course so fatally destructive to all true social order as that of forgiveness for wrong and outrage unaccompanied by the least thought of corrective discipline and punishment? Christ, during the brief period that he is said to have appeared before men, preached a theory which would have flung open the doors of prisons and set loose upon cities and communities the most depraved desperadoes whom iron cages ever sought to detain. And this form of counsel in him his worshippers have admired as a piece of poetic abstraction alone. They have no more made it the actual rule of their lives than they have thus made the socialistic "leave all and follow me" of his other celebrated sayings.

But while agnosticism of to-day recoils from much that Christ has been accredited with stating and desiring as devoid of due dignity for the individual and without proper adhesive effect upon society at large, it still fails to see in surrounding nature even a vague confirmation of the promise which this lovely and smooth-voiced prophet so perpetually gives us of a life

after death. That wittiest and occasionally saddest of writers, Dumas the younger, is said to have inscribed these words in the album of a friend who solicited some sentiment over his autograph: "*L'espoir qu'a l'homme de la vie immortelle lui vient de son désespoir de se trouver mortel dans celui-ci.*" Here, one might say, lies the whole pith and marrow of modern if not ancient religion. Our despair of being mortal in this world prompts us to fabricate for ourselves an eternal duration in some other! And yet the epigram of Dumas has not touched the entire truth. Epigrams rarely do that; they are fire-flies glittering in dark places but not illuminating them, and they show us little except their own transitory brightness. He neglects that impulse of hope in every healthful human breast—that "will to live," which is the one solid grain of truth in Schopenhauer's and Von Hartmann's brilliant though faulty philosophies. The vast majority of mankind cannot help believing in a future existence, because for men not to have hope is either to be the victim of distemper or else to verge upon death itself. Forms of insanity called melancholia and suicidal mania show a complete collapse of this energy; the

skilled physician knows well these symptoms in his demented patient, unless it may be that their sudden manifestation defeats his most wary vigilance. Yet agnosticism, which insists upon regarding facts and rejecting such fanciful ghosts of them as strut in their borrowed robes, has clearly taught itself that our hopes of immortality bear an exact analogous relation to our yearnings and desires in all affairs of a more restricted yet equally pungent kind. Supposing that we are in a state of ordinary health, we wake at a certain hour of the morning after a fairly restful sleep. Our pulse is firm; our liver acts; the machinery of vitality does not falter. Immediately, as soon as we are well awake, we begin plans for the day, we bethink ourselves of engagements made on the day previous, we wish to enter upon one more diurnal routine of employment, duty and diversion. Agnostics or Christians, we have this same quiet, automatic longing. And yet the extreme futility of all human endeavor, the evanescence of all we purpose and perform, may be and often is inexorably clear to the agnostic, while he himself would nevertheless be the first to admit that a strenuous force which he can-

not explain forever lifts and buoys him. But with the ill or ailing man how different it is! A pessimist might maintain that the jaundiced eyes of such a man often behold us as the masque of shadows we really are. To his despondent brain life will sometimes appear as arid and wearisome as a burnt prairie under a sky of slate. The concept of an immortality for the human soul will seem to him like some remote conjecture born of a fanatic's revery.

And such it really deserves to be called. The agnostic, though he may hope to win it or though he may prefer the nepenthean boon of complete annihilation, sees that, for all he can possibly learn to the contrary, it shines the *ignis fatuus* which must perpetually evade philosophic grasp. With wings wrought from rainbows, and eyes from stars, it is but the intangible child of story, song and dream. Like the κλεῖθί μοι of Homeric text, reference to it constantly recurs on page after page of the immense book of life. The tale of no nation could be adequately told without it, and whenever fancy has conspired with faith to achieve the most madcap results of illusion, we are confronted by its Elysiums, Valhal-

las and Nirwanas. But the agnostic well understands that the species of theological ecstasy which has always surrounded it conduces ill toward a proper logical survey. "Refrain," says Herbert Spencer, in his great 'Psychology,' "from rendering your terms into ideas, and you may reach any conclusion whatever. 'The whole is equal to its part' is a proposition that may be quite comfortably entertained, so long as neither wholes nor parts are imagined." It will probably be many centuries before mankind at length abandons all belief in immortality. Resembling not a few similar delusions, it possesses undeniable charm, and has that sort of beauty which the astute Mr. Lecky tells us that religious ideas, like a dying sun, expend their last rays in creating.

Agnosticism finds little rebuff nowadays for its lack of conventional belief. The pulpiteers make "infidelity" their texts, it is true, but it takes a very ardent church-goer, among really intelligent classes of church-goers, not to compare the keen, limpid reasoning of our modern scientific writers with the mystic, turgid, involved utterances of the Bible greatly to the latter's disadvantage. There is more moral

profit in half-a-dozen pages of Herbert Spencer's "Data of Ethics" or "Social Statics" than in all the statements of Paul, vague, problematic, transcendental. And yet the accusation of unmoral apathy and indifference is often brought against agnosticism. "It builds no hospitals," cry its foes; "it endows no charities; it is pagan in its unconcern for the sufferings of humanity. It is so occupied in sneering at Holy Writ that it forgets the sweet lessons of loving-kindness and of devotion to an unstained ideal with which those deathless leaves abound." Now, agnosticism forgets nothing of the sort, and is willing to give the New Testament credit for every line and word of sound ethics contained there, just as it is unsparing in its denunciation and disgust when asked an opinion of those crimes and horrors with which the records of the Old Testament teem, and of that bloody, vengeful Jehovah who makes up for not possessing the sensualism and lust of Jupiter by exhibiting ten times more of his deliberate cruelty and hatred. Agnosticism is very far, moreover, from the callous indifference with which it is so frequently charged. If it has not erected many charitable institutions and has headed

few eleemosynary lists, we must remember that it has not, like Christianity, almost two thousand years behind it. There have been a great many lukewarm Christians, if almsgiving is a test of the finer devotedness. But already agnosticism has made, in this respect, an excellent showing, when we consider its youth as a modern movement—a nineteenth-century wave of tendency — apart from earlier unorthodox growths. Professor Felix Adler has deeply and valuably interested himself in tenement-house reform, and many another New York citizen (to say nothing of those in London) yearly gives large sums to the poor, unstimulated by any expectation of receiving angelic compound interest hereafter upon his earthly loan. Indeed, I learned, not long ago, that the English poet, Mr. William Morris, had expended a large fortune in aiding what he believed to be the cause of the poor against the rich. Mr. Morris's motives may be declared socialistic rather than simply and humanely generous; but they nevertheless afford one more instance of a rationalist and freethinker who does not live in selfish disregard of his fellow-men. In fact this fling at agnosticism as being so cold-blooded-

ly epicurean resembles the absurd rumors which were set afloat after the deaths of Voltaire and Thomas Paine. It is probable that these two famous infidels died very much the same as ordinary mortals die, though a few random, delirious murmurs may have been readily misinterpreted by partisan listeners. Not long ago we had occasion to see with what sweet and sublime courage a freethinker could breathe his last, when Courtlandt Palmer summoned wife and children to his bedside and addressed them in words full of the gentlest and most fearless tranquillity. And yet if Palmer's mind had wandered, at the last, and some grisly hallucination had chanced to usurp it, how probable that there would have been somebody—a servant, perhaps, or one of the country-folk in that quiet Vermont retreat where his death occurred—who would have asserted monstrous things about his final "remorseful agonies"!

As for charitable inclination on the part of agnosticism, it is just as certain to augment with increasing years as frigid avarice is certain to develop. There was never a more preposterous statement than that the religion of Christ brought humanita-

rianism into the world. Man's pity for his fellow-man existed a thousand years previously in India, where hospitals were among the comforts of civilization. Very possibly the standard of physical health in Greece and Rome was far above ours, and hence hospitals were not required in either nation. If it were true, as so often has been affirmed, that the Romans exposed their old people to die on an island in the Tiber, then such action (grossly inconsistent with the splendid morality of the race previous to its downfall) must be explained as the deed perpetrated by a clique rather than a class—and a most depraved and vagabond one at that. And even in the latter case these exposed persons were probably slaves. Both Rome and Greece, the countries that produced Cæsar and Themistocles, Cicero and Aristotle, were cursed by slavery. So was the United States, until a few years ago. Who shall presume to say that in this highly Christian country cruelties have not taken place that might bring envious glitters into the eyes of a Caligula? And if agnosticism had been a prevailing characteristic of the populace south of Mason and Dixon's line, how easy to have held it blamable for the

brutalities of the whipping-post, the drunken overseer, the hideous auction and the pursuant bloodhound! In the days of their real glory Greece and Rome were marked by a phenomenal refinement and a *morale* of surpassing integrity. Christianity, which may be said to have bathed Europe in bloodshed, brought also the impassioned zealot with his dreams of heavenly bliss and the martyr with his unflinching gaze at the fagots which were to consume him. But there are no grander examples in mediæval times of unswerving adherence to duty at the price of absolute self-sacrifice and self-immolation than those given us in ancient times by such men as Brutus and Virginius. And if agnosticism should wish to point toward a man of unparalleled probity, consistency and bravery as its representative, what figure could more sufficiently stand for these qualities than that intrepid and picturesque one of Giordano Bruno? When we consider the superb intellectual heights which were attained by Athens, how nonsensical seems the claim that Christianity bore civilization in its wake, or that what we call European civilization was anything except that evolutional result of cerebral and

climatic conditions indicated so competently by Buckle, Draper and writers of their forceful calibre! Full as many sins as virtues have been committed in the name of the Cross. The Inquisition, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the slaughter of the Albigenses, the appalling persecutions of the Jews, all should now belong to the very alphabet of juvenile instruction. But alas! it is not every child who is permitted to profit by such historic truths in their candid nakedness. Happily, the children of agnostics are always allowed this privilege.

A novel which has for many months been occupying the attention of English and American readers, presumably has won its great vogue from the challenge which its charming though not profound pages have cast at agnosticism. There are few more entertaining stories than "Robert Elsmere," and if it were a trifle more chiselled in style than it already is, it might easily take rank among the masterpieces of fiction. This is said, however, purely from the literary standpoint; from the standpoint of sincere and valid thinking it is a work narrow with all the peculiar and "trimming" narrowness of the late Matthew Arnold, whose influence has been

diffused through its pages and who easily shows himself as the Mentor of its creative Telemachus. Robert Elsmere is a noble and lovable being, and one plainly meant by the author to express liberalism and large-mindedness at the very last limit of their admissible extension. But Mrs. Ward, like her kinsman and posthumous coadjutor, Matthew Arnold, halts at a point plainly within the bounds of conventional thought. Elsmere, though trained as an English clergyman, gives up his living because a belief in the "divinity" of Christ has become to him a void and sham. But instead of allowing full play to his rich gifts of fellowship and helpfulness without further concern for the ghost-worship from which he should now be happily freed, we find him building a new faith upon the ruins of the old. Unitarianism has always been one of the drollest of compromises between Christianity and agnosticism; and although Elsmere does not attempt to walk on this curious bridge that joins two such widely different banks, he nevertheless clearly avoids that boldness and justice of mental demeanor which might have been expected from a man of both his native and cultivated equipments. Mr. Huxley says:

"If a man asks me what the politics of the inhabitants of the moon are, and I reply that I do not know, that neither I nor anyone else have any means of knowing, and that under these circumstances I decline to trouble myself about the subject, I do not think he has any right to call me a skeptic." Robert Elsmere might with consistency and excellent common-sense have taken a stand like this. Yet no; he had renounced Christ, but he must still concern himself with—the politics of the inhabitants of the moon. Precisely as Matthew Arnold was forever doing, he personifies all the good in the world with an actual wantonness of unfortified assumption, calls it by the name of God and insists upon paying it reverence.

There is, Matthew Arnold long ago declared, a "power not ourselves which makes for righteousness," and it has always seemed to me that just such enemies as this talented and facile writer are at once the most polite and most irritating of any with whom agnosticism is called upon to deal. Matthew Arnold belonged to that type of essayist and controversialist who is wrecked and enfeebled by the very "culture" of which he is so impas-

sioned a convert. He diluted his own abilities into feebleness by mixing them with dilettanteism. It might be said of him that his future fame, unlike Keats's, has been written not so much in water as in Arnold-and-water. Born under the Oxonian shadow of episcopacy, possessing a father whom his "Literature and Dogma" must have struck as the riot and carnival of heterodoxy, Matthew Arnold was never able to welcome those honest doubts which his own width of intellect had summoned. The age forced him to weigh, to sift, to investigate reverend things; but he did so *à contre cœur*, and always with vivid memories of how his youth had treasured their sacredness. Agnosticism, pure and simple, had for him a violence of emphasis that set his teeth on edge. It was extremely unfortunate for the gentleman's teeth—rather more so than for agnosticism. He was a man born either too early or too late. Perhaps it had best be said of him that he was born too late, for, taking him all in all, he would have made a much better Church of England dignitary than the agnostic he is sometimes incorrectly called.

To state that there is a "power not our-

selves which makes for righteousness" is to postulate the undemonstrable. It has always been the favorite method of Matthew Arnold and men who resemble him, to let sentiment pose on the pedestals of their overthrown gods. If there be such a power, what is it? Does it really exist outside the consciousness of man? If so, can its existence be proven, or partly proven, or even vaguely revealed? Provided my neighbor and I choose to live an upright and sinless life, what is the power *not ourselves* that leads us to do so? Is not the power essentially of and in ourselves? Is it not a result of our respective relationships with the men and women around us? Imagine that the planet contained but a single human being, and lo, the moral or unmoral acts that he could commit would be reduced to almost a minimum! Even suicide would not be criminal, for in putting an end to his solitary life this lone creature would wound no kinsman or friend, he would break no dear ties, deal grief to no loving hearts, bring shame upon no house or clan. But give this lonely denizen of earth a single companion, and at once new moral and unmoral conditions arise. Say that his companion is feminine, and that the

Adam who now finds himself in the society of an Eve is called upon to perform a hundred little acts of protective kindliness which she in turn reciprocates by gentle sympathies peculiar to her sex. Of necessity a new order of moral conduct has been established. There are acts good and evil which this pair can mutually wreak upon one another. And then, if we increase our duo by one, two, three, or say ten individuals, how complicated the relations will become! We have the beginning of a society; and in a society all virtue and all wrongdoing must depend upon the aidful or deterrent relations between its members.

Here, then, is where the pseudo-liberalism of such thinkers as Matthew Arnold, after leaving the beaten path of Christianity, swings back to its monotheism and its pietism by another route. This is what Robert Elsmere does in the engaging novel of that name. He confuses his desire for a celestial and infinite Friend (whom he has accepted in the place of a lost Christ) with the meagre and insufficient proofs afforded by nature and all ethnologic history that any such occult potency lives outside of space and time. Other men as

brave and fine as he have had the same desire and yet have separated it from the perceptive push of their brains as they would winnow chaff from wheat. Experience is forever teaching us that the gulf between what we want and what we get here below the visiting moon is indeed abysmal. Into that abyss the real agnostic unflinchingly gazes. Elsmere had so gazed as well, but had grown foolishly fascinated by the bodiless and tricksy sprites that seemed to float through its uncharted vacuum.

An objection often made to agnosticism by persons of penetration and scholarship is that it destroys without replacing, and that he only destroys who can replace. In other words, religion, as these excellent people claim, is mutable but ineradicable; you cannot take it away from the human race in one form without substituting it in another. Worship has always been and will always be. Agnosticism is not worship, but simply negation. It can never satisfy the cravings of mortality; it can never be made to stand for the rolling organ, the stately altar, the chanted hymn, the curling incense, the prayerful genuflection. . . . Now, the truth is, all such dissent

is founded upon a single error—that of supposing mankind has any natural tendency to worship at all. In his barbarous conditions his worship is grovelling, and shows clearly the terrorism which has induced it. Afterward fear changes to awe, and with many impressionable persons (these being chiefly women) a kind of love is generated, perfervid, idolatrous, tinged by hysteria. But let us imagine that all religious people in the world could to-morrow become absolutely certain this god whom they venerate was himself but a portion of nature, subject to its laws and powerless to alter them by the least fraction of an infringement. What would then result? Would not all this zealous 'love' depart on the instant? Would not the monk slip off his shirt of serge, and the nun forego her fasts?

'God is love,' say the churchmen. It would be equally true, judging from what life shows us, to declare that 'God is hate.' But truer than either would it be to maintain that 'God is fear.' We cannot really love an incorporeal dream, a fantasy impalpable as moonlight. We may love the idea of loving it, and cultivate in ourselves that delicate or robust sort of frenzy which is to all religion what its greenness is to a

leaf; but the effort of evolution is rather to produce in man a complete discontinuance of prostration before unknowable finalities. A man's home is all the church he needs. Wife and children make charming choristers and acolytes. He can find plenty of spiritual elevation, if so disposed, in ministering to the needs and comforts of his fellows. There is more merit and import in one charitable act than in the hallelujahs and hosannas of a mighty concourse. Prayer is merely a refinement of fetishism. Herbert Spencer says that volumes could be written on the impiety of the pious; he might have added that volumes could also be written on the idiocy of prayer. To call god omniscient, omnipotent, an all-loving and all-merciful father, one moment, and the next, perhaps, implore him to save a treasured child in the agonies of croup or meningitis—who is there that does not see the mockery of such a contradiction?

It would be hard to conceive of a more peaceful state of things for the world at large than that which would result from a cessation to think at all concerning the unknowable and the beginning to accept some pantheistic creed like Spinoza's. Incessant dread of what may be the life to come has

often caused neglect of the concerns and demands of life here. If we knew to-morrow for a certainty that death meant an eternal falling asleep, we should doubtless busy ourselves much more than we do with that term of wakefulness allotted to us. As John Stuart Mill has most tellingly said, there is horror in the idea of dying, solely because our minds insist upon fancying that we should continue conscious after ceasing to breathe—as if any such phase were possible as that of *being dead!* Of course the actuality of death as a dark human ill could never be argued away. It is not so much that we feel the *ego* decaying, weakening, and at last ending, as that we are doomed before our own demise to look on those whom we love or admire while they fade before our sight. Death, howsoever we rationally consider it, is a curse, not alone because it visits us in countless ghastly shapes and because we are never sure what fierce sufferings its visits will entail, but because it constantly tears from us those whom we love under circumstances of the most immature and ill-timed quality. If we could all live to be so old that death would affect us as extreme ripeness affects a fruit, causing it to

drop from its bough after completing a period of progressive and harmonious thrift, the dolor and exaction would be far less apparent. But even then *pallida mors* would not be stripped of its worst repulsion, for there are many old people who yet cling to life after senility has brought them its deepest wrinkles, its most halting footsteps. "Live sanely," say the hygienists, "and you will die happily." But this counsel is the most fallible of apothegms, for there are thousands who must live not only in the sanest way but with the rigidest self-denial in order to live at all, because of inherited maladies. Even agnostics will sometimes tell you that perpetual life on this planet would be wearisome to them; but what man or woman could will to die if health and the companionship of a few loved ones were vouchsafed him? To live on like Zanoni or the Wandering Jew would indeed prove a torment; but provided certain dear existences could be healthfully and vigorously prolonged together with our own, what paradise ever sketched by the most dazzling poetic fancy could equal the loveliness of this orb in which we now dwell? Harsh winters may prevail upon certain tracts of it; angry

tempests may pour their liquid and electric rage upon it; the tumbling domains of its ocean may abound with shipwreck; heat may often parch its meadows, and drouth may turn its rivers to arid hollows of sand; but the glorious beauty of our planet, its charms of rock, sea, field, foliage, landscape, are an unending consolement and delight. The extraordinary reputed visions of John in the isle of Patmos are as nothing to it, nor could our intelligence evolve any conceivable picture in which both colors and lines, howsoever newly commingled, are not borrowed from its own. No; immortality here on earth, under the circumstances just named, could not well fail of enjoyment. The very persons who now shudder at the prospect of its ennui would hardly fail to choose it if given a chance. At any rate, dismay might result to anyone who counted too rashly upon the certainty of their refusal.

Say that some youth were brought up in absolute ignorance of all the bitterness and melancholy with which religion has associated death. Let us suppose that he had grown to regard death simply as a tender peace, a blessed rest after toil, a slumber which indeed "knits up the ravell'd sleave

of care." Then say that sudden tidings came to him, at the age of twenty or thereabouts, which entirely upset all his former deductions. Thus far, perhaps, he had seen a parent or a sister die. Pain had preceded dissolution, making its ultimate repose all the more grateful, and he had joined with others in the relief that such emancipation and exemption produced. But now, abruptly, he learns of the frightful things that man has been for many years believing about death. The ghastliness of Hell, the forlornness of Purgatory, and the tedium of an interminable Heaven all rise before him. Orthodoxy seizes him by one hand, bigotry by the other, and no wonder if he recoils terrified, disgusted, from the contact of each. It would not be strange if he were to go mad from the shock of his discovery, provided he became a convert to any of the creeds it has laid bare. After years of entire mental calm he has been beset by turmoil and vexation. Agnosticism is his only refuge, and if he takes it he may there find at least a similitude of the contentment he knew before.

Of course this instance is only a supposititious one. But the imagination can easily

deal with it, and it might be real enough were any human being educated like the individual whom I have fancied. Agnosticism would sponge the slate clean, and thus wipe away every past impression and prejudice. To state that it must replace what it has destroyed is idle verbiage, for to require that it shall replace one superstition by another would mean that it should bring the recurrence of captivity instead of a new and unique liberation. If I tell my friend that he has in his pocket a counterfeit banknote I am not compelled to give him genuine money as the price of my news. The great mistake of those who condemn and oppose agnosticism is their stubborn insistence that it shall build some sort of new church, establish some sort of new priesthood. This mistake is natural enough, and quite pardonable considering its source. Agnosticism pretends to be nothing in the way of a new religion; you might as well ask it to explain itself as ask the sunshine that pierces a cloud-swathed sky after days of gloom and storm. It is the reasoning faculty of humanity grown an assertion instead of an abnegation, a sound instead of a silence, a courage instead of a cowardice. Such writers as Mr.

Frederic Harrison, Mr. W. H. Mallock, and others of either a sentimental or an infatuated turn, wholly fail to comprehend that the sense of being free from all codes and restrictions invented by human credulity alone, is at once exhilarant and fortifying. It may be said that certain minds cannot do without the religions of churches; if so, there is no objection to the possessors of these minds continuing to thumb prayer-books. But others of hardier mould, of firmer fibre, will prefer the one large republic of rationalism to the little monarchies and duchies of orthodoxy. Professor Huxley has well called this latter "the Bourbon of thought." And he adds: "It learns not, neither can it forget; and though at present bewildered and afraid to move, it is as willing as ever to insist that the first chapter of Genesis contains the beginning and the end of sound science, and to visit with such petty thunderbolts as its half-paralyzed hands can hurl those who refuse to degrade nature to the level of primitive Judaism."

We near the birth of a new century, and it may be true that before the world is a hundred years older marvellous effects will have accrued from the persistent and

undaunted efforts of science. Possibly agnosticism will then almost have changed into a certain kind of gnosticism; before many more centuries have elapsed we are led to trust that it will surely have so changed. If the denizens of Mars were actually signalling to us, as that Italian astronomer is reported not long ago to have claimed that they are, and if anything like interplanetary communication were established between Mars and ourselves, this event would really be no more extraordinary than others brought about by men like Newton, Franklin, Fulton or Edison. If our descendants master the secret of death and wring immortality from nature, these acts will be only analogous to what man is already doing. Toward such a millennial result every loyal agnostic will have given his share. (He who has lifted but a single stone of it still helps to build the pyramid.) What a debt do we owe to the ancestors that freed us from superstition's trammelling tyrannies! A like debt will our successors owe to us in the ages unborn. This realization must content the agnostic. It is a lofty one, and it is chastely unselfish as well. He cannot say that he has no good cause for thanks; he

has been saved from temporizing and makeshift; he has escaped the silliness of Theosophy, "Christian Science," "spiritualism," and like tawdry lures to the fancy and the senses; he has stooped his lips to the crystal waters of pure knowledge and found there a draught far wholesomer and more flavorous than any sacramental wine ever served by foolish priests!

Agnosticism, it might be said, kneels before a mighty door, in whose huge lock is a massive, rusted key. Year after year she bruises her hands trying to turn the key; again and again she has moved it a little—but only a little, always. She does not know what lies beyond the door; she does not profess, she does not even ask, to know. But it is the door of human life, and beyond it is infinity. Though her hands are crimson with blood and their flesh is torn to the bone, she will never desist from her task. She may faint for a time, but she will not die, for her other name is Truth-Seeker, and that means imperishability. And now and then, while she strives with all her power to turn the monstrous key, her teeth will clench themselves and she will defiantly murmur: "Not if it takes ten thousand years will I ever

cease to struggle, until the key has been swung round in its lock and the door has been flung open!"

She does not grow old with the years, either, this obstinate Agnosticism. Time brings her strength instead of weakness, and though she is very old she is yet younger to-day than in the period of Lucretius. Will she fail in her supreme design? It may be. But no matter; she will have striven!

THE ARROGANCE OF OPTIMISM.

Not very long ago the present writer had occasion to examine a criticism in the *New York Times* which dealt with a recent novel by Mr. Edgar Saltus. This novel, as many readers will remember, had attracted attention because of its chiselled phrases and diamond-like epigram. It was not, however, a book which might be expected to please everybody, and perhaps its young author was far from anticipating that it would. But possibly, on the other hand, he was not prepared to hear, as the acid newspaper critic soon informed him, that he had been presenting "in an ugly bouquet the poison-weeds that Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann cultivated." And then, almost immediately afterward, this implacable person went on to declare that Mr. Saltus was "imbued with the most horrible of all human dementia," and that he

had written a work which, "as a romance, drips pessimism."

Such assertions as these are beginning to have a very old ring. It is now a good, appreciable length of time since the genuine agnostic was successfully pulverized by the wrathful pulpiteer. He is not pulverized any more; occasionally he is shrieked at after the style of Mr. Talmage, whose well-known energy in this capacity has long ago become for thousands an amusement as purely national as that of base-ball or roller-skating. Still, the agnostic and the pessimist are not by any means necessarily one. The agnostic may be, and not infrequently is, an optimist of sunny and even roseate outlook. He will tell you that because the roots of all earthly progress are wrapped in obscurity, and because the goal toward which the mighty steps of evolution advance is veiled by unknowableness, that is no reason for despair of the "one far-off divine event" which Tennyson's verses have prophesied so beautifully. He may even inform you of how his own religious uncertainty and insecurity do not forbid him to hope, trust, and at times feel almost confident that the entire vast system of the universe is governed by an intelligence wholly

beneficent and gracious—one whose apparently cruel deeds are disguised mercies and whose seeming enmity hides a love which our future immortality shall both comprehend and applaud. The modern agnostic has a logical and consistent right to this attitude if he can sincerely assume it. But he has not the right to treat with arrogance the opposite views aud opinions of the pessimist, nor is he often found in the employment of any such mischievous and ill-advised tactics. All that he leaves for the religionists, the orthodox believers, the zealots of a "revealed" faith. And it must be admitted that even in this age of toleration the poor pessimist has a rather unpopular and dreary time of it. A rat set upon by a terrier might expect about as much sympathy from unmerciful bystanders as he receives from the majority of his contemporaries. A great many sensible men dismiss his creed with a sneer as silly in the extreme; it is no less a triviality to them than theosophy would be to Mr. Huxley or spiritualism to Mr. Lecky. A great many good and sensible women turn from it with a shudder as "hopeless," "despairing," and "sinful." An enormous number of ignorant or half-educated people, if they

regard it at all, do so with contemptuous aversion. Then there are those of all classes who insist that the pessimist does not believe what he professes to believe—that he is attitudinizing, posing, and that everybody ought to *faire son possible* in the way of frowning him out of such folly. These methods of treatment, when considered without prejudice or bias of any sort, are best defined by a single word—arrogance. They savor of precisely the same spirit as that which was manifested, only a few years ago, toward everybody who presumed to doubt the inspiration of Scripture. Nowadays a man can be an agnostic with some degree of mundane comfort, but the lot of the pessimist has not yet been similarly favored. I have observed that his greatest enemy, as in the case of Mr. Saltus, is the newspaper. This exults in having its fling at the writer or thinker who dares to "look on the dark sides of things" or to "don green spectacles"—both of which idioms flow from the editorialist's pen with a glibness that bespeaks long practice in their use. It is an easy matter, surely, to write down anything in this way, from a political measure to a pot of Récamier Cream, from an execution by electricity to

a new Gilbert-and-Sullivan opera. Very probably, too, the current newspaper has one of its innumerable self-preservative "policies" to uphold, since it would never do for the average citizen so sharply to realize the complete nothingness of things that he cared no longer for his morning and evening journal. And yet the point-of-view taken in every cited instance is an arrogant one. Expediency may prompt, very often, the crushing blows aimed at a gloomy system of philosophy; for there are many people in the world foolish enough to doubt whether the naked truth should ever be looked on by mortality provided its limbs are graceless and its tinges repelling. But by far the larger part of these antagonists whom I have mentioned consider themselves in duty bound to discountenance uncheerful tenets. It is right and godly that they should do so; it would be arrant wickedness to behave otherwise than as the wagers of a vigorous crusade against such vicious notions. "Bah! Stuff and nonsense!" cries irritated society. "This world not a pleasant place to live in? Mankind had far better not have been born? Go, preach your rubbish to the 'cranks' that are not above listening to it!"

All of which has, when coming from the lips of society, a truly impressive sound. That is, at first. But a little later we might find ourselves reflecting that society has had a fashion of being obstinately unconvinced, as regarded the greatest and most vital questions, for a period of several thousand years. All history, it might be stated, is only a vast record of the mistakes made by the masses. Naturally those preachers who succeed in getting the hugest multitudes to hear them are not merely such as thrill their listeners with promises of an abundant and beatific immortality, but who embellish the vistas of that fortunate prospect with a most lavish charm of ornamentation. It might be said of the big public, indeed, that such persons as the Rev. Dr. Talmage have spoiled them for ordinary theological treatment: they are no longer satisfied unless their immortality is served them, so to speak, with a thick layer of icing and a good many plums. Here is the sort of pungent encouragement they need, and the paragraphs containing it are quoted from a sermon delivered by the gentleman already named:

"*Friends, the exit from this world, or death, if you please to call it, to the Christian is glo-*

rious expectation. It is demonstration. It is illumination. It is sunburst. It is the opening of all the windows. It is shutting up the catechism of doubt, and the unrolling of all the scrolls of positive and accurate information. . . . It is the last mystery taken out of botany and astronomy and geology. O, will it not be grand to have all questions answered! . . . The Bible intimates that we will talk with Jesus in heaven just as a brother talks with a brother. Now, what will you ask him first? . . . I shall first want to hear the tragedy of his last hours, and then Luke's account of the crucifixion and then Mark's account of the crucifixion and John's account of the crucifixion will be nothing, while from the living lips of Christ the story shall be told of the gloom that fell, and the devils that arose. . . . All heaven will stop to listen until the story is done, and every harp will be put down, and every lip closed, and all eyes fixed on the Divine narrator, until the story is done; and then, at the tap of the bâton, the eternal orchestra will rouse up; finger on string of harp, and lips to the mouth of trumpet, there shall roll forth the oratorio of the Messiah."

If there were any refined or cultivated people who took this kind of flamboyant materialism at all seriously, they might be pardoned for feeling that an eternity of

such proceedings would prove quite the reverse of celestial. But that people with no refinement or cultivation should discover latent "comfort" in talk of so entirely whimsical a character only serves to illustrate what a particularly small minority of votes the pessimistic person could ever be able to command. On every side he would seem to have the inherent *gaieté de cœur* of humanity against him. This condition of affairs, let it once more be pointed out, clearly exhibits the arrogance of optimism. What that tendency wills to believe, it does believe. It refuses to think that life is not worth living, and it thus refuses in the face of myriad facts indicated by the rigid and unerring finger of science. No assertion is made that this arrogance is one just now to be avoided or lived down; it may, in fact, be inseparable from the race as thus far evolved, and constitute that very "will to live" without which, as Schopenhauer asserts, there would be no organic or even inorganic existence whatever. But viewed from the standpoint of him who opposes it determinedly, it is arrogance, nevertheless. For while the pessimist can give countless proofs that life is a curse, a snare, a bewilderment, a disappointment,

an affliction, the optimist can give no correspondingly valid proofs to the contrary. No design is now proposed either to endorse or condemn optimism, but merely to define it. The optimist may say, and veraciously enough, that under given conditions of happiness or contentment he holds life to be amply worth living. But the pessimist refuses to deal solely with those conditions. He insists upon looking at life as altogether an impersonal, un-individual affair. He weighs its aggregate of unsolicited misery against its aggregate of reaped and garnered joy, and concludes that the former far outbalances the latter.

The pessimist, in his purely unemotional rôle of scientist, can no more be despised than any other dispassionate taker of statistics. If he shouts anathemas against the optimist he at once ranks himself among the great throng of inexact and therefore untrustworthy thinkers. He must either be rational and credible or he swiftly becomes absurd. He has already been called absurd by legions of alert detractors. Can he prove that such vilifiers are mendacious? What are his real *renseignements?* In which avenue of reputable thought or

philosophy can he find his hardy allies of argument?

He will answer you, if he be a pessimist of unblemished and invulnerable honesty, that he finds every known aid in the vivid, austere rank-and-file of human experience. "I am not a believer in any 'revealed' religion," he will tell you. "I set my Bible and my Koran on the same shelf of my library, and if the slightest patrician difference exists between their separate bindings, that is a question which entirely refers itself to the orthodoxy or the liberalism of my bookseller. I observe life with an attentive but unbiassed gaze."

"And you see in life," instantly responds the adverse auditor, "innumerable pleasures, benefits, blessings, mercies. You cannot deny this. You say that life is not worth living, and yet you, this particular pessimist whom I now address,* are rich in worldly goods, unassailed as to reputation, possessed of a wife who not merely adores you but who piques your vanity enjoyably by being the favorite of all whom she meets. You have children who are

* A prosperous member of society is here intentionally specified.

straight and tall and beautiful, and who look on the heaviest task as merest leisure provided you approve its onus and its discipline. Your friends group about you and esteem you. You breakfast with discretion; you sup with sanity. You have learned long ago the wisdom of abstemiousness; you are the despair of your family physician, whose fat income of dollars can secure no augment from your exasperating prudence. The worn and hackneyed interrogatory of *cui bono* has no meaning for your ears; you live without a misfortune; your very sleep is undisturbed by even so much as an agreeable dream. Your exemption from an hour, a minute of distemper, weakness, indisposition, is not the least of all these favors. Can you truthfully tell me that simply with such complete freedom from all physical aches and pains you do not congratulate yourself on being the possessor of a human existence? Can you truthfully assert that you would rather not have been at all than be as you are? Nullity, non-existence, is, I admit, inconceivable to human consciousness in a subjective way. If you had never been born you would never have known even the peaceful serenity of not

having breathed; you would simply have been (if one may presume to say it) a minus quantity in the enormous equation of our terrestrial algebra. But *would you have preferred* extinction to your present sojourn upon the planet named Earth? Are not the loves you have felt worth loving? Is not the music you have heard worth hearing? Are not the paintings and sculptures you have seen worth seeing? Have not the numberless complexities of human character with which circumstance has associated you been worth exploring and scrutinizing? Plainly, candidly, as man to man, do you not think the whole problem of life has been one which you would have chosen to confront, provided you had been a naked spirit on the borders between chaos and order, with volition enough to decide between annihilation or creation, consciousness or cerebral blank?"

"I grant all that you say," answers the pessimist thus directly addressed. "I am a happy husband, a happy father; I am the possessor of wealth; all the pleasures that environment may bestow upon me are mine. My heart beats with an equal stroke; my digestion waits on appetite; I have my book-shelves lined with the masterpieces in

literature of the immortal dead; I cannot complain that I have been visited with a single ill of the many to which flesh is heir. And yet I am miserable. I do not accept life; it has been forced upon me. I go to my bed, I awake from my repose, with one immitigable sensation—despair."

"But why do you despair?" comes the query.

"Why? Can you ask me? I am under a rigid death-sentence. It is true that all my human encompassment shares the same bitter doom of threat. But that is no comfort to me. If I had been a condemned prisoner waiting for execution it would afford me no solace that hundreds of others near me had been similarly treated. Immortality? I know nothing about it. You tell me that a certain book, written centuries ago, abounds in hope and assurance of it. But I reject the evidence of that book. I cannot admit that it is divinely inspired. I know that a man named Polycarp said that it was, and another man named Eusebius, and another man named Irenæus. But I reject the evidence of these witnesses. They were born in an age that was balefully fertile in the most odious of superstitions. I have only the frailest of proofs

that even such a man as Jesus Christ ever existed. But if he did exist I can gain no consolation from legendary statement that he was the son of a benign overruling deity. You speak of the happiness that is afforded me by the society of my wife. It is true that I adore her—that every lineament of her visage, every curve of her form, is unspeakably dear to me. And yet I have never known the untrammelled delight of loving her for the sweet, winsome woman she is. My adoration for her has ever been mingled with terror. I mean the terror of losing her. You, an optimist, would declare this an 'unhealthy' mood. You would affirm it to be the 'borrowing of trouble.' Easy phrases, my friend! And yet I have lain awake at night with the beloved form of my wife near me, and shuddered at the thought of my awful solitude if death should rid me of her priceless company! You remonstrate with me, you of the sunny mind, the imperishable optimism. 'Why,' you ask, 'should I dream of horrors where none are to be found?' Yet pause, my genial-souled friend. A month ago my next-door neighbor would stop me in the street to clasp my hand with eager amity. He was the picture

of ruggedness then—only a month ago! In his cheek health blushed, in his eye health kindled. His wife, who worshipped him, had said to me: 'I am so happy because my husband has no ailment, because he is unharmed by the least bodily ill.' ...Yesterday I saw that wife. Her attire was one blackness of mourning. Her lip trembled as I took her hand. Life to her had suddenly become a torture. Why should it not so become to me, at any hour, at any instant? I fold my arms all the closer about my own wife in realizing the possibility of a like calamity; but my love is none the less mingled with fear. What should I do if she were torn from me? Could I take up again the burden of living? No, no; as I watch her live face it seems impossible that she should be made mute and irresponsive to this devotion I hoard for her, inexhaustible, the sweet miserly accrument of conjugal years! And my children! How I love *them!* They are she; they are even more; the guileless egotism of fatherhood invests their treasured vitality. I press my lips to my daughter's lips, to the lips of my son, with a passion different from yet even more sacred than the ecstasy of manhood's early love.

And yet they, my children, are menaced by the same dreadful threat! Yesterday Agnes told me that her heart pulsated too rapidly; I placed my hand upon her bosom with a sense of unspeakable anxiety. Yesterday Harold said to me, 'Father, I have a headache.' My touch upon his brow seemed so cold to myself that I feared lest he might shrink from it. 'Idle self-tormentings!' cry you, my optimist friend. And yet we both know that Nature is pitiless. My love for my offspring is not so large—immeasurable though I feel it!—as the deadly ambuscaded forces of ever-watchful, ever-treacherous death! My Agnes, my Harold, are well; my worriment was nonsense. Oh, yes, I admit it...but a coffin was lately carried out of a house in the next street to mine, and in it lay a youth of Harold's age, smitten by pneumonia. A few streets further away there was another funeral last week; a young girl, just the age of my Agnes, had died of diphtheria. Oh, it is all mere 'croaking' to speak as I speak now. But what may a human soul do with all its love if it cannot be the guardian and warder of that love's perpetuity? I tell myself that I should go mad if I lost my wife or my son or my

daughter. And yet others, on every side of me, survive disasters as keen and stringent. Perhaps I would survive them, too ...I don't know...I only know that I would infinitely have preferred not being born into this world at all than being born into it with the dear, sweet weight and burden of what I now must bear! Are the joy and satisfaction of possessing kindred as treasured as my own commensurate with the stern and persevering fear of their possible loss? I answer, No. And I answer it not only from the depths of my intellect but from the depths of my love!"

How can the optimist answer a plaint like this? He cannot rationally assert that the pessimist puts forward one illogical claim. He may laugh with as blithe a mirth as Hebe's at the fabled banquets of Jove. He may point to the sun and revel in its golden ardors. But he must accede that night follows, howsoever the jubilance and splendor of day may tarry. The arrogance of optimism must at certain times make itself felt to him, even though he denies that it has been exerted. He, like the pessimist, has loved ones. The stealthy and irreversible advance of age cannot be disputed by him. He does not grow old

half so gracefully as he professes to do. His hair does not turn into the sarcastic silver of decay, his limbs do not secrete a subtle chalk in their joints, his forehead does not develop the immedicable wrinkles and crow's-feet, his teeth do not turn ache-haunted and loose, without his knowledge and sure comprehension of such piteous disintegration. He may "philosophize"; he may don a bold front against the gradual, loitering advance of the sure destroyer; and yet in his inmost heart he recognizes and bitterly appreciates the slow, terrible change.

There is some uplifting force, affirms the disciple of Schopenhauer, which enables us to eat our daily meals (provided we are among the limited though fortunate number of those who can procure them) and bear a comparatively stout heart along with us during the brief passage between cradle and grave. What, you ask, is that peculiar undemonstrated force? "It is," the Schopenhauerite will answer you, "'the will to live,' the undeniable yet mysterious influence that equally causes a violet to spring up by the side of a brook and Saturn to wheel his awful globe about the sun."

"Not so," affirms the Christian, "it is

God, conscious and supremely intelligent, ordering His universe with unrivalled wisdom and ability." The Christian and optimist are, in this case, supposed to be one and the same, though many Christians exist who are thorough pessimists at heart, fighting for dogma with an invincible stubbornness, yet ruling their lives by principles and doctrines which the Galilean would have held forlornly foolish. But the real pessimist will not for a moment hear that the least proof of intelligence is to be found among the workings of Nature. "My great reason," he will tell you, "for holding existence to be a curse and a bore, is my firm conviction that we are, all of us, the mere puppets of some sightless and wholly mindless Process, which moves us, not whithersoever it will, but whithersoever it must. You assure me that above all things there is a presiding and prevailing Consciousness. But I have no such certainty, and the creed to which I cling is in thousands of ways more tenable than yours. You affect to despise me in the arrogance of your optimism, and you hurl sentences of Scripture at me, such as 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' But I am not to be dismissed half so easily as that. My doubts

will *return to haunt you* at many future hours of your life, even though you now profess so valiantly to despise them. For this faith of yours in the complete mercy of your God I fail to find half as thorough as you yourself would have me think it. The arms of optimists like you are not torn away any the more easily, I have observed, from the forms of their beloved dead because of that 'corruptible' which 'must put on incorruption' or that 'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' Your sobs, at times like these, echo none the less drearily than those wrung from the lips of the unbelieving. You say that the intense physical alteration brought about by death is sufficient to create in you this horror, this agony. But I cannot at all agree with you that it would be thus sufficient, provided your faith were as strong as you represent. That is a faith, you yourself say, which passeth understanding; it is rooted in emotions and longings; its promises to you are copious and priceless. But I cannot reconcile your trust with your tears, your heavenly confidence with your very earthly lamentation. What if this friend who has just breathed his last had come to you some day and said: 'I am going into

a beautiful country, where I shall be exquisitely happy and whither you shall one day follow me'? Would you fall on his neck and tremble with suffering? Would you seek to detain him from that delightful sojourn by every means in your power?... Come, now; there is either a grave flaw in your well-jointed, oft-vaunted armor of faith, or you have deceived both yourself and others with regard to its resistance, its durability. For it fails to stand the one needed test. It is impotent in the face of that very calamity which it boasts of underrating. At the door of the tomb it falters and loses courage. If I had it I make bold to say that I would see joy in the dead man's obsequies, and resent as irrelevant the mournful emblem on his door-bell. You are an optimist, yet you have not the due and consistent courage of one when it comes to a question of bearing that very ordeal which you rebuke me for calling crucially severe.... Now, let us see how far this same alleged courage will serve you with relation to the laws of living—those laws, remember, which you name the product of a supreme Benignity, ever watchful for your welfare. How do you really oppose the unpleasant stress of poverty? By ar-

dent prayer? I do not deny that you may pray devoutly, but do you not also take pains to work with industry as well, and to exert all your faculties of unsullied tradesmanship toward the end of gaining a comfortable livelihood? By prayer, too, you may seek to rid yourself of countless other ills; but if you should to-morrow discover that your cellar was filled with stagnant water, would you not instantly resort to the services of a competent drainer? If an earthquake should suddenly shake your house, would you drop on your knees, or would you rush with expedition from the doorway? If your child fell ill to-day of scarlet-fever, would prayer or medicine be first in your parental thought? And yet you would denounce as unpardonably 'godless' the man who should presume to speak with you of the inefficacy of prayer. The arrogance of optimism would swiftly rise in revolt against his theories. I do not, be it borne in mind, deny the assertiveness of my own pessimism. And yet I seldom get even the chance of exploiting it. The large mass of 'civilization' to which you belong will rarely accord me that chance. You are always crying at me from your pulpits, your church-meetings, your popular

assemblages of many sorts. When I point to John Stuart Mill's essay *On Nature* you shudder, and marvel how I can be so 'materialistic.' And yet, practically, you treat Nature as the same implacable foe that I treat her. If a sharp wind rushes from the north, you button your great-coat over your chest. If you read in your sympathizing newspapers that several wretched Italian immigrants have been detained at quarantine, reeking with the microbes of cholera, you have dismal dreams of a horrified Broadway and a demoralized Fifth Avenue. You are, in other words, as much of an active, operative pessimist as I am, and the only positive difference between us is that you orally proclaim an optimism which I will not proclaim at all, since I cannot live up to it, nor take pleasure in flagellating my fellow-creatures with its arrogance—its arrogance, on which I am never tired, in my present arraignment of you, aggrievedly to harp."

There is no doubt that a so-called "healthy" state of the human mind generally, if not always, is allied to one of stupidity. If we think at all of whence we have come, whither we are going, and wherefore we are here, we inevitably recoil from that

trinity of mysteries ; and to let our thoughts dwell habitually upon any subject invested with so much gloomy dissatisfaction and unrest is of course an occupation highly injurious to happiness. There can be no doubt, either, that idiots and animals, when freed from bodily pain, are perfectly happy. Still, on the other hand, it is not denied that contentment is incompatible with brains, for the simple reason that very many persons are as firm-nerved and as fearless in their contemplation of *le grand peut-être* as Napoleon was on the eve of a battle. But there is no excuse for beings thus endowed with perennial fortitude to cast scorn upon others of weaker mould ; for if the manifold ills of life keenly alarm me and do not disconcert my neighbor, the point as to whether my agitation or his imperturbability is most in order must be solely determined by the inimical degree of the assailant agency ; and only fools will persist in saying that life is not pregnant with ills. Wise men may offset these ills with blessings, but the latter still remain convertible at even a moment's notice into their distinct reverse, while many of the former, such as old age, death, sundering of attached souls, bereavement,

the failure of eyesight or hearing, are without cure, consolation, alleviation. Nor do the Latin words, *Pulvis et umbra sumus*, thoroughly convey the surpassing melancholy of human life. Ours is not merely a world where we die. It is one in which heredity exerts an increasing and inexorable mastery. The edicts of heredity, expressed in Biblical phrase by "the sins of the fathers . . visited upon the children," are too often as tyrannous as any that a Nero or a Caligula could devise. Our asylums and hospitals make harshly plain to us the unmerited woes that are visited upon generations of mortals. There we may see diseases transmitted by progenitors to their descendants which entail years of torment that the worst despot history can produce would have been loath to visit upon his guiltless victims. Adults and little children alike quiver beneath the lash of these deplorable inflictions. Inherited rheumatic gout will twist and distort the limbs of an infant from its birth until it has reached nine or ten years, and then kill it in the end, ruthlessly and with perhaps only a slight moribund interval of surcease from excessive pain. Inherited cancer lingeringly slays both saint and sinner with frigid dis-

regard of either desert or innocence. The babe is born to live a week, a month, a year, and then perish with pangs that make us thankful its racked and persecuted little body could cease from breathing when it did. The middle-aged are flung upon beds of misery by some malady which has been slowly, insidiously developing within them while they labored for the peaceful competence which now at last they have just attained, and no more. The old are stricken by the same hideous ailment which destroyed their fathers or mothers at a similar age. Heredity has, in its demoniac quiver, arrows tipped with a poison more baneful than any of which the Borgias ever dreamed.

Nor is this all. The optimist may toss his head as merrily and dissentiently as he will, but that very "spiritual" part of us whose divine origin he is so fond of extolling as indestructible, has its throes to endure, for which no merciful anæsthetic has yet been invented by psychologist or metaphysician. To love and to be loved in this life may present ineffable enjoyment. But to love and to be loved are forever forming the saddest of *non-sequiturs*. It is not always, by any means, that the intervention of caste

and wealth tears two lovers apart from one another. Nature, no less than man, has her Montague and her Capulet, her Abelard and her Heloise. A man adores, worships a certain woman, and finds her cold to him as marble. A woman is stirred by the same unquenchable preferment, and is met by the same stolid indifference. Such passions as these, thwarted in their very births, are at once the marvel and the despair of all whom they besiege. They are like birds with bleeding and shattered wings; they are powerless to fly, and can only crawl along with their smarting burdens. George Eliot (whose morality and charity as a writer are immense, yet whose pessimism is no less a fact to all who have studied her faithfully) touches, in "Daniel Deronda," on this wide, eternal reality of the lover's unrequited affection. Women hide it more than men—and suffer more on this account. Men have larger means for seeking and obtaining forgetfulness. Perhaps very few of either sex fail ultimately to heal their aching wounds. But when such love as theirs has become simply memory, the sting that succeeds its disappearance is sometimes a persistent, if not a poignant one. How could we ever so vehemently have

loved and yet now feel this torpid callousness in a heart that was once so tremulously sensitive? Our love, when we were thralled by it, made us feel a sacred kinship with the stars; we looked into the red bosoms of roses and the balmy chalices of lilies, with new eyes for their richness and chastity; our most prosaic tasks took a halcyon edge upon their very commonness and dulness, like ordinary objects when seen through prisms. We pressed our friends' hands more warmly than had been our wont, because friendship was allied with love, and love was a divine melody that every wind sang to us, every sunbeam laughed to us. ...But, deserted by all that old, delicious exaltation, we ask ourselves what its frenzy could have meant or been? How may we any longer call it ideal and poetic when it has passed away from us with no more ceremony in its quick evanishment than if it were an impulse of hunger or a preference of claret over champagne? Never do we seem more clearly to ourselves the transient shadows of a void and profitless dream than then, in such disillusionized and doubly solitary hours! Shakespeare, held by those highest in critical authority as the greatest poet that mankind has thus

far been called upon to admire, is the author of many a pessimistic verse. Indeed, it is the belief of that fearless and wonderful reasoner, Robert G. Ingersoll (himself a profound Shakespearian scholar), that the author of "Hamlet" was a confirmed agnostic and freethinker. Opponents of this theory will eagerly seize upon the dramatic form of Shakespeare's work as ample justification of every "impious" line he ever wrote. But how about the "Sonnets"? Do they not literally overflow with thought such as this :

"Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence..."

Or again, these meaning verses :

"Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws
And burn the long-liv'd phœnix in her blood...;
But I forbid thee *one most heinous crime :*
O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow..."

Or again :

"When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge state presenteth naught but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment..."

Or again :

" Roses have thorns and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud..."

Or, still once again :

" Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"

Or, still once again, and the last time, though many more similar passages of gloom and despondency could be cited, let us now reproduce the whole of a sonnet which has long been famed as one of the brightest jewels in this very remarkable collection. A more plaintive moan of despairing revolt against the entire earthly scheme was never uttered by any poet, living or dead.

" Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,—
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honor shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right protection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,

And simple truth miscall'd simplicity.
And captive good attending captain ill :
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone."

Such denunciations of life, vented by Shakespeare, are in the poet's own voice, and not that of any portrayed dramatic character. The poet here speaks through his individual lips, and not those of any malign creation like Iago or Macbeth. "This little life is rounded by a sleep," and "All the world's a stage" are but two, as it were, among the multitudinous black pearls of thought which help to make up that other truly royal chaplet. What would the modern newspaper say to ideas like these, if so illustrious an authority had not uttered them? Here are some words of condemnation against pessimism, taken a day or two ago from a New York daily journal of prominence and power:

"An author who depicts life in dreary colors is sure to exert a most undesirable influence over many of his readers. The force of this applies to all kinds of writing. Whether a man pens an epic poem or a newspaper editorial, the tone of his philosophy is sure to leave its ultimate effect on those who peruse his words. Is it not then

incumbent upon an author to shun, as far as possible, that mocking pessimism which in our day serves to cover a vast amount of mental inability? One word in literature by an optimistic thinker is worth ten thousand by a grumbler, even though the latter may adorn his thoughts with the brightest gems of wit and poesy."

The above is a most salient example of the arrogance of optimism. This little group of sentences may be said to contain the same condescension and patronage which mark uncounted pages of our current newspapers. It is always the same *à priori* course of mingled laudation and damnation Why is one word of optimism worth ten thousand of pessimism? If neither manner of surveying life can be set aside as innately false, why should this be upheld and applauded while that is decreed to "cover a vast amount of mental inability"? Do the sonnets of Shakespeare, that mourn so eloquently and untiringly "the wreckful siege of battering days," perpetrate such a flimsy concealment? Was George Eliot a "grumbler" because she wrote that heart-breaking story of "Middlemarch," where destiny rewards hardly a single noble intent or disinterested yearning? Did the shrewd

lips of Voltaire lie when they reminded us that 'we never live, but are always in expectation of living'? If, as Montaigne somewhere axiomates, 'ignorance is the mother of all evils,' why should it exert "an undesirable influence" to depict life in "dreary colors," when those dreary colors are all borrowed from the sure shadows cast by every-day occurrences? Have the stimulating prophecies and warrants of Christianity prevented a million cases of madness, a million acts of suicide? Allowing all the beauty, allurement, pastime, lofty pursuit, glorious intoxication of life to be credible and tangible, why should its ugliness, repulsion, disappointment, failure, overthrow, receive but furtive glances, as though fable had first begotten and fatuity afterward exaggerated them? Is the optimistic fermentation brought about in unenlightened minds by sermons like those of Dr. Talmage and others equal to a tranquil facing of verities—a square and honest confronting of the whole sweet-and-bitter, dark-and-bright enigma, and a frank subsequent confession that both our laughter and our groans are the products of an inscrutable, abysmal, tantalizing source? If I concede your right to say that the Mediterranean breaks

with voluptuous cadences on the shores of the Riviera, why should you refuse me my right to answer that the cyclone is deathfully raging in the wilds of Nebraska? But the arrogance of optimism does refuse me this right. It chides me and frowns upon me when I maintain that Emerson's amiable treatise concerning Nature is but the complement of John Stuart Mill's dolorous one, and that while each may be in its way undeniable, the first only leaves off where the last begins. If optimism could *disprove* the avowals of pessimism it would be quite another affair with her. But she cannot; she can only berate and abuse them. And yet the professedly buoyant members of society are the very ones who tell you that they have had "oh, such a wretched attack of the blues," or that they have heard Brown's book is doleful, and therefore do not want to read it, since *there is such an enormous amount of sadness in life that one cannot escape*, whether he will or no. (It is usually the person impartially observant of life in *all* her phases who has the best time as years crowd upon him.) The present article offers no plea for pessimism, no recommendation of its counsels, no endorsement of its assumptions and prem-

ises. But a plea certainly is offered for the respectful consideration of a doctrine so much of which is irrefutable truth. If it be not too commonplace, I would suggest that the kind of truth we men and women want most of all—the kind to live by and to die by—is midway between these two strenuous extremes. The crown of a perfect education might be defined as a perfect freedom from prejudice. It is extraordinary how much of a peculiar sort of prejudice the optimist of to-day fosters. It would seem as if he were only arrogant with living pessimists, and forgivingly overlooked the sins of all others. We occasionally find him allowing greatness to Voltaire; he has been known to discredit the story that Thomas Paine died in miseries of repentance, imploring the pardon of heaven for his blasphemies. But not to *faire des examples* with too much prolixity, we note that the optimist abides unruffled in his contemplation of what are perhaps the most daring pessimisms ever put into verse. I mean those of Omar Khayyám, the Persian astronomer-poet. When, about thirty years ago, the late Mr. Edward Fitzgerald rendered these astonishing stanzas into admirable English verse, it was curious

to observe the popularity they at once secured. Both here and in England optimism was never weary of praising them. It was so safe to do so; Omar had been born seven hundred years ago; there was nothing sacrilegious in hearing the voice of materialism at that distance away. And so the optimist would smile to himself as he read of the old poet's *vie orageuse* and the epicurean conclusions that he had drawn from it. That book, to half the optimists in the land, was like a "jolly bank-holiday" to a lot of London clerks. They interchanged shocked looks as they read, but with none the less avidity they *did* read—

"What, without asking, hither hurried *whence?*
And, without asking, *whither* hurried hence?
O many a cup of this forbidden wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence!"

Of course, they argued, if any modern human being, such as Col. Ingersoll, should speak in the style of the following quatrain, it would be outrageous to the last degree. But then it sounded so much less abominable (it sounded so fascinatingly quaint, in fact!) when you heard a voice pealing forth from a seven-hundred-year-old past with such words as these:

"Oh, Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with predestined evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin!"

Still, with all the dilettante laxity which the optimist is known to have permitted himself regarding the perusal of Omar Khayyám's Rubáiyát, it is difficult to understand how he could quite have steadied his nervous system sufficiently for a placid consideration of the following—perhaps more scathingly militant against accepted codes than anything in the whole most unconventional poem:

"Oh, Thou, who man of baser earth didst make,
And even with paradise devise the snake,
For all the sin wherewith the face of man
Is blackened, man's forgiveness give—and take!"

I recall that, when Omar Khayyám's little book was first published in this country, a certain gentleman who had been one of its earliest and most enthusiastic readers imparted to me his private suspicions concerning its actual authorship: "I feel convinced," he said, "that this 'astronomer-poet of Persia' is a graceful myth, invented by the Rev. Edward Fitzgerald himself, in order to conceal his own athestic tendencies." I could not help thinking this a

rather singular course and plan by which a clergyman should seek to win his *bâton maréchal* as a poet, and subsequent developments proved my friend's hypothesis to have been a mistaken one. But I have often afterward ruminated upon the general social result of a discovery that the Rubáiyát had really been the work of a Chatterton-like literary impostor. Ah, what recantations and retractions would have poured from the lips of our mortified optimists, if they had been called upon to regard all these acrid and sinister sayings as the outcome of a living, breathing pessimist, and not of one that had been romantically and picturesquely dead for seven long centuries! It is doubtful if Mr. Elihu Vedder would have presumed to make those very imaginative and captivating illustrations of his, which now accompany at least one precious edition of the work, and which, moreover, in all their bitter and often terrible beauty, are treasured by optimists of every sect, from Roman Catholic to Unitarian.

The arrogance of optimism will probably cease to exert itself when it has received from evolution a disclosure of its own hypocrisy. For very few of us can live at

all without being in a measure pessimists. "Theologians have exausted ingenuity," says Ingersoll, "in finding excuses for God." But this is not so bold, after all, as the remark of the Frenchman who said that the sole excuse for the deity was "*qu'il n'existe pas.*" Still, whether we revolt or submit, it is very apt to be one and the same with us: we are what George Eliot has somewhere called "yoked creatures with private opinions." None of us can afford to sneer at him who looks more sombrely than we do at the unutterable wretchedness of the world, or at him who distrusts more thoroughly than ourselves the sinful and selfish races that people it. Advancement in knowledge will bring pessimist and optimist nearer together. If there are any who refuse sunshine its radiance, flowers their bloom and odor, human love its tenderness and majesty, pity its tears and almsgiving, virtue its cleanliness and candor, justice its righteousness and nobility,—if there continue any so partisan and feeble of judgment as this, then optimism may turn didactic to her heart's content, and with an unassailable authority. In the meantime let her use against the "fallacies" of her foe other weapons than

those of idle invective. (Let her imitate the calm methods of science, who condemns nothing, sneers at nothing, but accepts, investigates, analyzes, utilizes all.) You cannot make me think malaria, lightning, earthquake, rattlesnakes, treason, malice, falsehood, meanness are less of the curses I know them, because you cry out at me that I am a malicious fool, and endanger the welfare of life and society by noting too closely such uncanny developments. Neither can I make you think the warble of birds, the murmur of streams, the limpidness of heaven, the flocculence and purity of a summer cloud, the exuberance and delicacy of a rose, the mirth and innocence of childhood, the dignity and strength of honest manhood, the rapture of a maiden's first love, the sanctity of a mother's protective caress, are slighter blessings than I know them, because you cry out at me that I am a mawkish sentimentalist, and endanger the welfare of life and society by dwelling with too much emphasis upon these especially agreeable phenomena. Some day, when their present constituents long have been dust, these two inimical factions of intellectuality, optimism and pessimism, will meet on a common ground—that of mutual concession and conciliation. Some

day? And yet who shall dare to dream what far grander results that future day may accomplish? Science may then have scaled heights which we now hold insuperable for even *her* dauntless foot. The whole order of seeing and believing may be changed. What now seems to us finality, may then have become the rudimentary commonplace of physics. If the twentieth century marches along at the same superb pace as that of the nineteenth, there is no prophesying—there is hardly any fanciful guessing, even—what invaluable certitudes respecting life, death and the human soul *may* be reached! Nor is there anything millennial, utopian, impracticable in such a deduction. Not so very long ago the mere mention of an era in which instantaneous submarine communication between Europe and America was attainable, would have been scoffed at as the wildest of fanatical visions. It may be that in the twentieth or twenty-first century pessimism and optimism will be so welded together into a wider conception of what is now deemed insoluble that the 'arrogance' which this protest has attempted to exhibit will have grown as inconsiderable an issue as many a present optimist, after reading thus far, will feel disposed to pronounce it.

THE BROWNING CRAZE.

CRITICAL surprise has been more than once expressed, of late, that in an age so militant against the development of the poetic spirit, a single man should find himself (and that, too, at an advanced period of his life) surrounded, not to say besieged, by hosts of ardent admirers. Everybody has now heard of the "Browning Craze," and it is quite probable that many had heard of it while Mr. Robert Browning himself was hardly more to them than a meaningless name. And yet to the majority of literary men and women in England and America this cult has long been a familiar one. Not until perhaps a decade ago did it begin to assume its present spacious proportions. I remember meeting devout Browningites at least twenty years ago, when almost a boy. And as boys will, when their thoughts turn toward the letters of their time and land, I soon felt an ambitious craving to graduate into a Browningite myself.

Such a worship then possessed so fascinating an element of rarity! It was so attractive a rôle for one to give a compassionate lifting of the brows and say, "No, really?" when somebody declared himself quite unable to understand the obscure author of "Sordello." You knew perfectly well that any number of his lines were Hindostanee to you, and yet you made use of your patronizing pity and your "No, really?" all the same. There is safety in the assertion that Mr. Browning has driven more pedantic youngsters to unblushing falsehood than any other writer in the language. All sorts of roads lead to fame, and his, oddly indeed, has been the very oblique one of an unpopularity which bore superficial signs that it was preferred and courted. But a deeper glance assures the unbiassed observer that this is by no means fact. Almost every poem of the many which he has written bears evidence that the attitudinarian has been at work, that the conscious trickster has again and again superseded the conscientious artist, and that the notoriety we too often give caprice and whimsicality has been aimed after with a studied zeal. It is in this way that Mr. Browning incessantly betrays what might be called the

frivolity inseparable from his temperament. Take, for example, in "Men and Women," his most coherent collection of dramatic and lyrical poetry, the profusion of rank affectations mingled with their hardy opposites. Indeed, this one book, which is by far the most serene, lucid and endurable that he has ever given to the world, contains much that art cannot fail to find hideous, even repulsive. Scarcely a poem is exempt from some shocking flaw. In "A Lover's Quarrel," which possesses good human touches, if the verse does jerk like a sled on a road filmed meagrely with snow, we read such rhymed crudity as

> See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred—
> Ear, when a straw is heard
> Scratch the brain's coat of curd !

But effects of unpardonable bathos like this abound in "Men and Women." The present essay would exceed all allowable scope if half of them were quoted. Poems which have received rapturous praise fairly teem with them. In "The Statue and the Bust" (a piece of work so often declared faultless) there are obscurities of construction for which a school-boy would be rated by his teacher. "Master Hugues of Saxe-

Gotha" racks and tortures the most ordinary ear. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (another object of devout veneration) has little about it that is metrically slipshod, but affects an impartial reader, after finishing it, as a lyric literally torn from an unwilling talent; its very rhymes have a forced, factitious queerness, and its abrupt ending seems to exclaim, "Look at my wonderful suggestiveness of allegory!" And we look, if our eyes are not bloodshot with the "Browning Craze," only to conclude that the entire poem is on such mystical stilts as to transcend the reach of all sensible interpretation. "Popularity," which endeavors to laud the superiority of genius over mere facile aptitude, ends with two stanzas regarding "Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes, and Nokes," which few living men of taste would have cared to print at all, and none except their creator would have cared to offer his public as poetry. "Old Pictures in Florence" repeatedly massacres what should be a mellifluous anapæstic measure, and leaves you as tired of its eccentric attitudinizing as if you had been button-holed by some loquacious rhapsodist in one of the Arno-fronting streets.

But it would be idle, on the other hand, to deny "Men and Women" both poems and passages of poems glowing with merit. We find there "Evelyn Hope," a bit of passion worth careful heed, though overrated by its lovers because so massively self-satisfied in its transcendentalism. We find "Bishop Blougram's Apology," a brilliant study of a narrow, glib, specious-tongued prelate, and interesting if on no other ground than its dramatic exposition of a meretricious moralist. We find the tender and pathetic "Andrea del Sarto," whose sole objection is the mannered and inharmonious blank verse which Mr. Browning always employs. We find the fervid little "Love among the Ruins," and wish its author, so often insolent in his defiance of art, had chosen to sing many more times like that for the delight of folk unborn. We find "Saul," burning with eloquence and yet perfectly intelligible, notwithstanding its cloying pietism. We find "In a Balcony," perhaps the best piece of drama Mr. Browning has ever written. We find "The Last Ride Together," an ardent episode of love-making, but lyrically spoiled by its far-fetched subtleties of simile and illustration. We find "Any Wife to Any

Husband," which to read over ten times very patiently and studiously is to convince us that it is fine—and what more of critical irony could be heaped on a poem than that? We find "Two in the Campagna," which begins exquisitely and gets labored and befogged toward the end. We find "A Grammarian's Funeral," which makes the blood beat quicker, in parts, and in parts lamentably cools it. We find "A Toccata of Galuppi's," which gives us a laugh or two as excellent Italian comedy. And lastly we find "Fra Lippo Lippi," winsome, sweet, and a poem which Tennyson might have told to us in verse as enchanting as that in which he has embalmed "Tithonus."

It has been the writer's deliberate purpose to deal first with "Men and Women," for this book, in its entirety, faults and virtues both included, will most probably mark the uncrumbling corner-stone of Mr. Browning's future fame. Before this he had written a very sane and splendid poem called "How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix." It is so fine a piece of work, indeed, that I can easily imagine his worshippers despising it. It is no nut to crack; it shows what an artist its parent

might have been. Published originally in the same volume, if I mistake not, was "My Last Duchess," a brief enough thing, which has attained an extraordinary reputation for no apparent cause. It has the *chute de phrase* of a cruel man speaking heartlessly about a wife whom his neglect killed. But, except for the mild shudder it awakens, it is in no sense noteworthy, and the verse drags and hobbles with so much sluggishness that no one save the "professional reader" (a great friend of Mr. Browning's, because elocution helps the latter's frequent disjointed and staccato technics) can ever succeed in rendering it rightly. Among the earlier "Dramatic Lyrics" must be remembered "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," one of the few English poems that have achieved a deserving popularity among the masses. It is a child's poem, and therefore its occasional *bizarre* falsetto may be pardoned. Not so "The Flight of the Duchess," however, in which a charming and most spiritual tale is told somewhat after the style of an Ingoldsby Legend or Bab Ballad. It is filled with such rhymes as "tintacks" and "syntax," "stir-up" and "syrup," "news of her," and "Lucifer," and many others equally un-

suited to a history at once so serious and so exalted. Here we are confronted with that deliberated oddity which might be termed Mr. Browning's most irritating fault, as it certainly is his least honest one. We see that he has planned all these fire-cracker surprises of diction; they bear slight resemblance to that "rough power" by which his artistic laziness has so often been misnamed. For there is a certain class of critics (and, I regret to add, a large one) who only need the evidence of an author's bad rhymes, haphazard rhythms and defective constructions in order to discover that he fairly bristles with "rough power." *Le mot juste*, the polished and accurate utterance, is in severe disrepute with these persons. It has been they who for years have flung their jibes at the unrivalled perfection of Lord Tennyson's verse. Apparently, as they love to put it, the latter had not power because it was not "rough." He was mincing because he never slurred a line; he lacked the higher kind of emotion because he had patiently chiselled his work into a dignity above the frenzies of Byron or the hysteria of Shelley. I sometimes wonder, for my own part, if those cavillers who ring such

wearisome changes on this one theme have ever considered how much great power is often at the root of poetical grace. Even if Tennyson were only felicitous (and he is that besides being a very noble poet as well) he would have accomplished much. All the remarkable poets who ever lived have had as much grace as grandeur. Grace is frequently inseparable from grandeur, but when it is not it is never weakness; it is always strength. The elastic step and flexible form of some delicate maiden may typify an endurance and fortitude not possessed by the sturdiest athlete.

Just as there were thousands of people who would have lost all regard for Carlyle if he had been dowered with a decorous and not an uncouth English idiom, so there are thousands to-day who would consider Mr. Browning's poetry very tame indeed were it not studded with such points of ugliness and idiosyncrasy as those which disfigure "The Flight of the Duchess." But other poems that belong to Mr. Browning's earlier manner, that were published among the two or three collections with which, years ago, he first presented the world, and that deserve deep if not unqualified commendation, are "Soliloquy in

a Spanish Cloister," "The Confessional," and "Holy-Cross Day." All these are alive with vigor, and not always by any means impossible to understand after a second or third reading—which is saying a good deal against them, perhaps, in the opinion of the confirmed Browningite. "Holy-Cross Day" is an especially original and striking presentation of the Jew's degraded condition during the Middle Ages. Nothing can be more trenchant than its incidental sarcasms, nothing more acute than the reproaches it hurls against the bigotries and hypocrisies of its time.

All these better and wiser poems of Mr. Browning appeared many years ago. "Sordello" had, unless I err, preceded them, and from the absurd enigma of that book their comparative clearness was a welcome change. Mr. Browning began to be hailed as a poet emergent from darkness, and in a few quarters bright hopes were entertained of his future. "Sordello," when heeded at all, may have made the cynics jest and the thoughtful look grieved, but we have no record that it had more materially injured the young versifier who had chosen to masquerade in it *en sphinx*. Everybody knows the story of how Barry Cornwall's

wife gave him the book during his convalescence after a great illness, and of how he read the first page bewilderedly, then amazedly, and at length in nervous terror. Handing it a little later to his wife, he asked the tremulous question, "What do you make of this?" And when, some fifteen or twenty minutes afterwards, Mrs. Proctor replied, "I don't understand a word of it," her husband burst forth in delight, "*Thank God I am not mad!*" This tale may or may not be false, but it certainly bears the stamp of probability. I recall, in about my eighteenth year, discrediting the statements I had heard relative to "Sordello's" unintelligibility, and attempting to read the book with a confidence in my own anti-Philistine comprehension of it. But a few pages convinced me that report had not falsified its odious "toughness." Beautiful gleams occur in it, but they are like flying lights over a surface of heavy darkness. Now and then, for twenty lines or so, you feel as if you had smoothly mastered its meaning; again, all is disarray and density. It is like seeing a fine statue reflected in a cracked mirror: here is the curve of a symmetric arm, but you follow it only to meet an abortive bulge of

elbow; there is the outline of a sculpturesque cheek, but you trace below it a repellent deformity of throat; once more you light with joy upon a thigh of faultless moulding, but lower down you are shocked by obese distortion. The whole "poem" resembles a caricature of some Gothic cathedral, in planning which some demented architect has treated his own madness to a riot of gargoyles. The *ensemble* is monstrous, inexcusable. But, like many of Mr. Browning's later modern poems, it strikes you as more of a wilful failure than a feeble one.

All the plays of this author were published by him while he was still a young man. He calls himself, in one of his lyrics, "Robert Browning, you writer of plays," and it is evident, from the dramatic spirit informing a great deal of his verse, that he believed himself with extreme seriousness to be a dramatist of high rank. Eulogy untold has been poured upon him in this capacity. Long before the "Browning Craze" had developed its first febrile symptoms, no less an authority than Dickens was reported to have exclaimed, in a burst of enthusiastic reverence, that he would rather have written "A Blot in the 'Scut-

cheon" than all the novels to which his name was signed! It seems impossible that the creator of "David Copperfield" could ever have made any such wantonly random declaration. And yet, not very long ago, an English writer of some distinction endeavored to prove that "Strafford," "Colombe's Birthday," and "The Return of the Druses" had been successfully performed before London audiences. They may have been performed, but that they were in any degree successful cannot for an instant be credited. They are not dramas at all; they are no more than dialogues divided arbitrarily into acts. And yet they have been compared to the plays of Shakespeare by several inflammable zealots in the Browning cause. Still, after all, writers have existed who rejoiced, during the past two hundred years, in heaping odium upon Shakespeare as a charlatan, and we all recollect the contempt with which Sir Samuel Pepys wrote of him, not to mention Oliver Goldsmith's freely-expressed disdain in the "Vicar of Wakefield." Thus it becomes apparent that human taste has many foibles and vagaries, and that the blare of a few partisan trumpets cannot do much for the establishment of a genuine

literary fame. As for that mightily belauded play, "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," it was accorded an admirable oral chance at the Star Theatre in New York, two or three years ago. Mr. Lawrence Barrett took the part of Tresham, and all the other characters, as the newspapers put it, were "in good hands." Mr. Barrett and all his company did their best for the play. At the end of the third act I heard somebody near me murmur that it was "Oh, immensely fine, don't you know, but a closet-play . . . yes, decidedly a closet-play." I could not help asking myself whether the reputation which it had through years enjoyed were not a sort of closet-reputation as well. For my own part, I had heard it somewhat apathetically and mechanically called "marvellous" and "grand" a great many times, before I attempted to read it, by people who used these epithets as though they were somehow pledged to propriety for their correct delivery. But I realize now that it is a work of talented adroitness and little more. There is something curiously professorial and factitious about it, brought forth more clearly by the footlights than by perusal, and yet perceptible through either medium. Its "psychology"

becomes overburdening, oppressive. Everybody, from the first scene till the last, is on transcendental stilts ; nor is such impression diminished by the blunt, choppy character of Mr. Browning's blank verse. As Tresham is made to fling this forth in sentence after sentence, his character grows more and more unsympathetic. He is meant to be the ideal of honor and nobility, and he gradually becomes to us, during the progress of the piece, more and more of a petulant metaphysician. He says to the seducer of his sister, on finding him at the casement of this lady, about to enter it surreptitiously at night,–

> "We should join hands in frantic sympathy
> If you once taught me the unteachable,
> Explained how you can live so, and so lie.
> With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
> The old belief—a life like yours is still
> Impossible. Now draw."

Could the far-fetched be carried much further than to make a bluff English cavalier talk (and especially under these conditions of anguish and preoccupation) in a strain of such hair-splitting highfalutinism ? As for the killing of Mertoun by Tresham, it becomes, considering his approaching marriage to Mildred, almost ridiculous as

a tragic expedient. We cannot but feel how much safer than a *femme couverte* that sister, married to her imprudent boyish lover, would have remained for the rest of her life. And regarding the way in which Mildred not merely forgives but *blesses* the slayer of him whom she worshipped, I will venture to affirm that there was not a single auditor in the Star Theatre on the night of the performance to which I have alluded, who did not feel that here a note of the very falsest exaggeration had been struck. But the "Browning Craze" was in full fury at that time, and perhaps not a few qualms of natural dislike were loyally repressed. Of the many incontestable merits that belong to "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" I will not speak: for a quarter of a century the world has had these dinned into its ears, and alike the friends and foes of Mr. Browning should by this time be well acquainted with them. They are not, in my own judgment, at all equal to the praise with which they have been so lavishly greeted. The play is at best three acts of inexorable grimness, lit by not one ray of humor. To have compared it with any of Shakespeare's masterpieces was by no means a friendly office to perform toward

it, since time is apt to avenge such mistakes rather harshly. Perhaps the retribution may be quite tardy in coming: it usually is. *La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid.* But in the end it is apt to come. No amount of thrifty bushes may reconcile the daintier palate to inferior wine, though when it is good it may need no bush at all.

"Pippa Passes" deserves mention as the most charming of its writer's plays; but, with the exception of "Paracelsus" (a very voluminous affair, full of untold tedium), it is perhaps the least "actable" of them all. It is, however, a most delightful production, and the only member of its group, I should say, which has not been rated far above its deserts. The others attempt to be plays and are not; they drag; they are over-subtle; they lack freshness or attractiveness of story. But "Pippa Passes," an airy, graceful, and yet deeply significant composition, succeeds, somehow, in being a play without the slightest apparent effort. That it will not act is nothing derogatory to it, for the same view could sensibly be held of "The Tempest."

With these more youthful achievements it might be said that the fame of Mr. Browning passed through its primary

phase. His name, between twenty and thirty years ago, was rarely spoken without an accent of mingled admiration and amusement. Few except silly adulators failed to admit his grave and glaring faults ; few except those whom such faults drove back from an acquaintance with him, failed to perceive that he was dowered with extraordinary natural gifts. By such a poem as "In a Gondola" he had won his right to the highest future recognition. "In a Gondola" was marred by follies of conception and execution, but it seemed to foretell a great deal, and it was a dramatic lyric that now and then pierced and enraptured its reader. Much of it was superb, and other portions were almost puerile in their fantastic heedlessness of performance. There was, up to this point, no doubt that Mr. Browning could sing with a new voice, but at the same time a voice clogged by discordant notes. Would he ever rid himself of those notes through a careful study of what art really meant ? Would he cast aside all his semi-barbarous peculiarities and rise divested of their encumbering mannerisms?

"The Ring and the Book" proved otherwise. Mr. Browning, with an immense

challenge, flung scorn in the face of those who had hoped the brightest things for his poetic future.

At the time "The Ring and the Book" appeared, Tennyson had set the spire upon his cathedral of majestic song. He had written 'Maud," and its novelty of melody had enchanted thousands; he had written "The Princess," and its prismatic yet potent verses were known and loved countless miles past the rainy little isle in which he had conceived them; he had made "In Memoriam" break like a sea upon a thousand shores of thought, throb amid countless caves of speculation and yearning, sob amid unnumbered reaches of passion and regret. Tennyson's fame had already based itself upon undying pediments. Mr. Browning was expected by a few earnest adherents to surpass the Laureate. Another effort came from him, and as "The Ring and the Book" this effort was promptly *obsédé* with flattering bravos.

But what, after all, was it, this "Ring and the Book"? I recall spending a whole summer in trying to make myself believe that it was a great poem. I was then about three-and-twenty years old, and many reviews had counselled me into crediting that

it was something worthy to be put side-and-side with Milton, Dante and Heaven knows whom else in the way of epic splendor. I am tempted to write now with the boyish animus that filled me then, but in doing so I must first record that I respected the reviewers very fervently and wanted to prove I was their mate in funds of devout appreciation. And how I did struggle to bring about this result! How I beat back the promptings of my better judgment! How I insisted upon assuring myself that such and such a line was not brutally obscure! How I strove to convince myself that the telling of the same story over and over again, even though different mouths thus told it, was not a travesty upon analytic poignancy! I was in that servile mood toward the newspaper critics then, which may in a measure account for my persistent distrust during later years. . . . And at last my good angel informed me, toward autumn, that I had wasted my summer, that language was never given us to conceal our thought, and that every artist must either seek to strengthen his expression through the clarification of it or be content to have oblivion punish him for such neglect.

"The Ring and the Book" was *le commencement de la fin* with Mr. Browning. It must have made him somewhat like the hero in his own praiseworthy poem, "A Lost Leader," and cost him many rational devotees. But it gained him others. His final poetic step had been taken. He was going to yield himself to freaks and whims; he intended to despise the artist and cultivate the *poseur*.

He has cultivated the *poseur*, nearly always, ever since.

I do not deny the brilliancy of his mistake in writing "The Ring and the Book." To refuse force to that work would be like refusing force to a cyclone. But a cyclone is not a poem. Perhaps nothing so daringly prolix has ever been perpetrated in the whole range of English literature. Hidden away amid the quartz-like Browningese of text lies many a diamond of thought and song. But reading and mining are two different occupations. One cannot well conceive of "The Ring and the Book" dying. Death will will probably not be its fate, but a protracted oblivion will find it instead. Fashion makes people read it and talk about it now, but fashion is often another name for forgetfulness. Human pa-

tience will not endure its endless repetitions of the same theme, its terribly tiresome presentations of one bloody and unsavory tale at different angles of vision. You can scarcely see in the whole massive bulk and plan of this metrical monstrosity any trace of the humor which Mr. Browning has occasionally shown elsewhere; a keener humorous sense would, I think, have saved him from the attempt to saddle poor posterity with so cumbrous a burden. Nor is Mr. Browning's blank verse, even when most clear of meaning, an agreeable species of invention. It is original enough; its earmarks are not to be confounded with those of any other poet; but when least marred by parentheses, inversions, involutions, *quos egos* and ellipses, it is almost never free from a particular trick or conceit, which grows, after incessant recurrence, as much a monotony as an aggravation. This consists in making one substantive stand for several verbs, each verb being at the root, so to speak, of a new and distinct sentence, but all sentences being huddled together in a way that sometimes renders turbid the simplest thought. Let us try to find an instance or two of this painful pe-

culiarity. Take the following, for example, from "The Ring and the Book:"

> "The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
> To change his garb, retrim his tonsure, tie
> The clerkly silk round every plait correct,
> Make the impressive entry on his place
> Of relegation. . ."

Or this, from a like source:

> "What if he gained thus much,
> Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
> Bore off this rose-bud from the prickly brake
> To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
> And, after all, brought something back from Rome?"

But the illustrations of this most infelicitous tendency could be made to cover pages. And we are now accepting Mr. Browning's blank verse at its best, not at its worst. Its worst is sometimes positively horrifying. Surely the man should have a very wondrous message for humanity who aims to deliver this message as a poet and yet continually scorns to do so as an artist. But, after all, who of us has a hard enough conscience to grant that the artist and the poet are ever separable? Whatever his mentality, his reach of spiritual vision, his command of pungent and illuminative epithet, how shall a writer

presume to disdain form in searching after the expression of truth? *Quand on se bat on ne choisit pas ses armes* may reasonably explain the method of some hot contestant against a political or social wrong. But when the poet fights what he believes to be worst error, are we not justified in expecting from him a well-burnished blade and a wrist whose turns reveal both dexterity and harmonious movement? To the merest beginner in verse-making it is commonly understood that clashes of consonants are the sorriest destruction of melody. He must avoid them if he wishes to write presentable or reputable iambs. And yet Mr. Browning outrages taste in the following lines, taken at random from his works, where remain innumerable other specimens, just as dissonant, strident, and sibilant:

It strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in its nose . . .
Two must discept . . . has distinguished . . .
God's gold just shining its last where that lodges . . .
Billets that blaze substantial and slow . . .
The Knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed . . .
Fear which stings ease . . .
"You are sick, that's sure," they say . . .
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on . . .
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes . . .

Wagner, Dvorak, Liszt . . . to where . . . trumpets, shawms . . .
Adjudges such . . . how canst thou . . . this wise bound . . .

And finally, from "Ferishtah's Fancies:"

When my *lips just touched* your cheek . . .

The italics here are my own; for although the consonantal gruffness in this last quoted line is not so striking as that of many which have preceded it, the contrast between its tender sentiment and its coarsely unmelodic versification affects one like a vulgar slap in the face. Multitudes of other similar lines exist throughout Mr. Browning's copious work. And I cannot see how any vigor of idea can excuse such feebleness of presentation. Surely nature and life, which are so akin to art, do not demand of us an indulgence for such unhappy imperfection. Because a gnarled and blasted tree bears a few sprays of fresh and glossy leaves we do not gaze upon it to the neglect of healthful surrounding growths. Because we know that a child or a woman possesses mental charms we do not tolerate a waspish acerbity of phrase in either. But from art we exact the nearest approach to perfection, not the most

zigzag deviation from it. Poetic fame has no pathway to its temple like that traditional one to a forlorner goal; it is not paved with good intentions; we insist, indeed, upon its being quarried from the very marbles of Pentelicus.

Mr. Browning's published writing since "The Ring and the Book" need not be dwelt upon in this essay. Those loyal maniacs to the "Browning Craze" have their own Bedlamite reasons, no doubt, for admiring "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" and "The Inn Album." And, after all, what (in America, at least) does the "Browning Craze" signify? The spirit of American culture has always been an imitative one, and not seldom to a snobbish degree. It was quite in the order of things that the "Browning Craze" should rise in London, flow a westerly course, and empty into Chicago. But it submerged Boston on its way—or at least partially so. I have no doubt that in both cities the societies which have been its offspring possess many intelligent and sincere members. But it is very improbable that all these members are either intelligent or sincere. One might confidently assert that a great many of them are clouded by dulness and tinctured

with toadyism. It does not require much brains for anybody to perceive that the assumption of a certain taste will produce the appearance of exclusiveness on the part of such an assumer. The jargon of the art-schools, for example, is easily caught, and at almost any exhibition of foreign paintings you will discover that some picture which the general public would turn from as unpardonably quaint, rococo, or audacious will attract a little *côterie* of fervid adorers. Perhaps a few of these may honestly believe that the painter in question is a towering genius; but the majority are yearning to anoint his locks with spikenard and myrrh solely because he is considered "caviare to the general," above the vulgar herd *et id genus omne*. It is doubtful whether the Browning societies of England have gained as many recruits from any other cliques or associations as from those whom Mr. Gilbert has so mercilessly satirized as the Æsthetes. But to be an æsthete is by no means to be a fool. These persons laugh among each other at the caricatures into which they turn themselves, very much as we may believe that any two augurs did of old. Possibly the Browningites laugh now and then among each

other at the solemn importance with which they are supposed to inform the digging out of a poor tortured thought from beneath crushing layers of words. And when they reflect at all seriously upon their undertakings and their achievements, the result certainly cannot be very edifying. To become a Browningite is indeed not to have distinguished one's self for much sense, either common or uncommon. Hero-worship is always an unwholesome occupation, even if the hero shine with a truly glorious light. Yet in the case of Mr. Browning there is no glorious light at all, but one put under a bushel, and put there with not a little of the same insufferable vanity that made Diogenes take up his abode in a tub. There are very few broad-minded and unaffected people who have read Mr. Browning's poetry, or the worthier portion of it, who would not be willing unhesitatingly to tell us that he might have grown a poet of wide and persistent fame. But he has chosen so to mantle himself in the most rash and headlong moods of obscurity, he has so trivialized, cheapened and frittered away the talents which might have made him serve efficiently the magnificent art he professes to revere, that his

laurels will turn dry and brittle long before another century has dealt with his present renown. Meanwhile he has a kind of adulation to-day, but one with which no true artist should be content. Indeed, the author of "Fifine at the Fair" and "Pacchiarotto" is no longer an artist, though he who wrote "Pippa Passes" and "Love among the Ruins" may once have closely approximated to such a distinction. He may not be aware of the biting and discreditable fact, but hundreds of those who now "study" and "cultivate" him are beings of the kind who would rave hysterically over some headless and armless torso, if thoroughly sure that the *leve vulgus* would not presume to join in their pedantic chorus, after so forlorn a fragment of sculpture had been excavated and set up for popular inspection.

That Mr. Browning is a poet representative of the age in which he now so eminently flourishes cannot with any fairness be conceded. His work makes one point plain, though it leaves so many others in darkness. The impetus of rationalistic thought seems hardly to have touched him. He is an orthodox believer of the most acquiescent type, as his "Christmas Eve and Easter

Day " would conclusively reveal, apart from hundreds of other evidences throughout the vast volume of his work. The sinewy scientific push of his time has left him conservatively unaffected. He regards the priceless teachings of such men as Herbert Spencer, Buckle, Tyndall, Huxley and Lecky with as much unconcern as if he were a clergyman sanctified by the most rigid Church-of-England orders. No qualm of doubt regarding the Thirty-Nine Articles appears ever to disturb him. He is just as pious as he is frequently opaque. He refers to God with that familiarity of personal acquaintanceship which might distinguish our own Dr. Talmage. He is perfectly sure and satisfied on the question not only of an anthropomorphic deity but on that of a future immortality, accountability, pardon and punishment. A good deal of his vagueness is like that of the current theological treatise ; to the consistent and logical agnostic of our time it means nearly the same thing. Those who want their modern poets to be men permeated by the so-called materialism of the century will not find a poet after their own heart in a singer to whom the divinity of Christ is romantically indisputable. For some minds

it will seem difficult to accept this kind of poet as great, at an epoch when English philosophy has drawn so sharp a limit before the abyss of the unknowable. Mr. Browning might be inclined to shift the entire burden of ecclesiastic responsibility off his shoulders by declaring that he does not speak for himself but for his countless dramatic characters; and yet he speaks through no lips except his own when he says, with hardy dogmatism:

> God's work, be sure,
> No more spreads wasted than falls scant!
> He filled, did not exceed, man's want
> Of beauty in this life.

And again:

> ——So hapt
> My chance. He stood there. Like the smoke
> Pillared o'er Sodom when day broke,—
> I saw Him. One magnific pall
> Mantled in massive fold and fall
> His dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
> About his feet: night's black, that bathes
> All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
> Against the soul of blackness there.
> A gesture told the mood within—
> That wrapped right hand which based the chin,
> That intense meditation fixed
> On his procedure,—pity mixed

With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, he spoke to me,
Who fell before his feet, a mass,
No man now.

Bugabooism could not go much further than this. There is something Calvinistic in these words, emanent soon afterward from the mouth of a palpable and tangible deity:

In the roll
Of judgment which convinced mankind
Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
Terror must burn the truth into. . . .

These and like passages indicate unmistakably that Mr. Browning accepts Christianity in not a few of its most conventional forms. This may be all well enough; it is quite the gentleman's own business if he goes regularly to church every Sunday and hears a sermon less involved as to meaning than one of his own poems and at times considerably more grammatical. But it would be idle to claim that he who exhibits this theologic passivity, this religious complaisance, can be said to rank at all abreast of his period as a strenuous and catholic thinker. It is true that the most amazing doctrines exist with regard to the right province of poetry and the fitting

equipments of poets, and a multitude of critics, otherwise quite credible, will tell you that it is not half so necessary for the poet to think as to feel. But thinking and feeling, as modern science explains, are pretty nearly one and the same thing. Wordsworthian "inspiration" is not esteemed so highly as it was forty years ago. The canons and requisitions of art, however, remain unaltered. Emotion is still a splendidly reputable factor in all poetry when governed by that self-control which is the secret equally of Shakespeare's best verse as it is of Longfellow's or Lord Tennyson's. License of expression has been so often and imprudently praised in poets that an unfortunate abuse of latitude has become far too manifest among English-speaking circles of them. Who has not heard the contemptuous declaration that "there is more truth than poetry" in such and such a statement? If scientific investigation is the reigning intellectual stimulus of our nineteenth century, that is very far from being a cause why poetry should perish. For poetry, we now perceive, is not to be defined as Milton (a great poet) defined it, or as Poe (a very poor one) also defined it. Poetry is life, as

all literature is life. But it is life in this different way from the rest of literature, that over it is flung the influence of beauty, and so the phases of human experience are made in turn sublimely, tenderly, or pathetically noteworthy. This influence is like a transfiguring light; it is presentment, treatment, in a certain limited meaning, enchantment. The subject itself may be more or less susceptible of elevation. Byron had merely to let this light play over such a subject as Venice, Lake Leman, Petrarch's tomb, the stars of heaven, or a storm in the Jura Alps, and enthralling poetic pictures glowed with vividness before the mind. But Burns, as his admirers assert, made a mouse immortal by precisely the same means. Often you hear it affirmed that this or that subject cannot be dealt with by poetry, that it is too mean, too inferior, too recondite, too coarse, too prosaic. In these cases the transfiguring light has been more difficult to throw, or perhaps the imaginative flame and lenses whence it has taken origin have been ill-fed and ill-managed. The more un-ideal the subject the harder to idealize it, to turn it into poetry. And yet we have seen Shakespeare in his creation of "Caliban," Milton

in his "Satan," Coleridge in his "Ancient Mariner," and Lord Tennyson in his "Vision of Sin," envelop the uncanny and repulsive with a raiment as of magical tissue. Students of French poetry will remember "*La Charogne*" of Baudelaire, a poem which has always struck me with the same effect as if it were a moonlit dung-heap. I do not applaud, or even suggest an approval of, such poetry. But if the dung-heap is there, so, somehow, is the moonlight; and who that has read this thrilling poem can forget the melody and eloquence of its last stanza?—

Alors, O ma beauté, dites à la vermine
Qui te mangera de baisers,
Que je garde la forme et l'essence divine
De mes amours décomposés!

The English have, as Mr. Browning's own famous wife said of them, in her "Aurora Leigh,"

A scornful insular way
Of calling the French light.

But, notwithstanding this alleged Gallic lightness, I do not believe it would be possible for a "Sordello," an "Inn Album," a "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," or even a "Ring and the Book," to have ap-

peared in French without promptly being crushed by the heaviest judicial censure. And what rigid, healthy, uncompromising lessons would Mr. Browning have been taught if he had been born a Frenchman! Not that he could not have learned excellent lessons while still remaining an Englishman. But as a writer of French verse his crimes against style would have suffered condign and relentless punishment. The French would either have long ago made it impossible for him to attain the least celebrity, writing as he has written, or they would have trained and taught him by the simple yet forcible formula, that no great poet can ever achieve greatness through the wilful wrapping up of his meaning. And this is the sin which Mr. Browning has repeatedly, unrepentingly committed. The "craze" which he has succeeded in rousing is one of those inexplicable drifts of literary fashion that mark, both here and in England, our strange passing century. But in England it is not their first similar mistake. They crowned and then discrowned poor Sidney Dobell; they raved over and then flouted Alexander Smith; they lifted Gerald Massey upon a lyric pedestal only to hurl him

downward a little later. For us Americans to catch this curious fever is far less excusable, and a good deal of fatuous, cringing Anglomania is at the bottom of it. To-day we are devoutly imitating British perversity in our genuflection before a very ordinary Russian novelist named Tolstoï, and both writing and speaking of that sketchy, padded, interminable tale, "Anna Karénina," as if it were really a classic masterpiece. But the gods, as everybody knows, are very angry at the idea of an International Copyright, and in their animosity they seem to have made the American reader their diligent abettor. Until the American reader pays less attention to the curiosities of transatlantic literature and more to the honest efforts enshrined within his own, we cannot hope for much chance of his even desiring that Congress shall do her work of reparation and atonement. He might not, after all, find it so very unpalatable to exchange his "Browning Craze" for an Emerson one. Emerson was a great deal more spiritual poet than is Mr. Browning, and yet quite as virile. He had the faculty, also, of conveying his thoughts neither in spasms nor mysticisms. Moreover, he is a wonder-

fully stimulating writer to other minds, and debates and discussions that took either his prose or verse as their text might perhaps bring just as much profit as wading through pages that too often seem but a turbulent brawl and snarl of verbiage.

One of the most distressing features about Mr. Browning's existent reputation —distressing, I mean, to those who discern and measure its basis of humbug—is the way in which his admirers are never tired of saying that it wholly outshines the renown of Lord Tennyson, and that its possessor has touched, thus far in our century, the high-tide mark of English poetry. So, until not very long since, fanatics cried that Carlyle, with his barbarisms, loomed above that most masterly and dignified of writers, Macaulay; but now the brief prejudice of the hour has passed, and the morrows have begun to dole out equity, as they generally do, with no matter how tardy a service.

Never was a greater literary injustice perpetrated than the placing of Mr. Browning above Lord Tennyson. The Laureate has indeed served his art with a profound and lovely fidelity, while it is no

exaggeration to state of Mr. Browning that he has not seldom insulted his as though it were a pickpocket. "In a Gondola" may be a fine love-lyric; but who would compare its halting ruggedness to the fairy music of "The Day-Dream?" Only the people who profess to like the Venus of Milo better without her lost arms than with them – the people to whom deficiency and inadequacy are held dearer than flawlessness and finish. A passion for Mr. Browning's work has frequently been one of the refuges of mediocrity. You are thrown, as it were, with a mixed but rather patrician society of, let us say . . . invalids, in the same asylum. And it is such a mild, elegant sort of lunacy! Nobody is very much in earnest, after all. They have learned, most of them, to look as if they thought "A Pillar at Sebzevat" luminiferous reading and "Jochanan Hakkadosh" a model of perspicuity. If you say to them that Mr. Browning has never produced a poem half so grand as the "Ode on the Duke of Wellington," they appear to feel so sorry for you that you begin to feel sorry, yourself, for having drawn thus largely, if unintentionally, upon the funds of their compassion. And

yet bid them to show you where, throughout all Mr. Browning's dramatic idyls, dramatic lyrics and dramatic everything else, there are poems that so burn with beauty as the monologues of "Œnone," of "Tithonus," of "The Miller's Daughter," of "Maud," of "The Dream of Fair Women," of "The Palace of Art," of "St. Simeon Stylites," of "The Gardener's Daughter," of "Sir Galahad," and they will be apt to give you response as indefinite as if it had been taken from some of their great master's verse. For all these poems just mentioned are monologues; all, in varying degrees, are essentially dramatic. Tennyson chose, until his later life, to ignore the writing of drama; but if he had attempted, in the full flush of his masterly vigor, to produec a "Cup," a "Harold" or a "Queen Mary," there cannot be much real question as to whether he would or would not have eclipsed "Colombe's Birthday" and "King Victor and King Charles." I can ill imagine how any actual artist would not instantly make up his mind to retain "In Memoriam" and "The Princess" (those two inestimable marvels) even if by doing so he were threatened with the loss of everything that Mr. Browning has

ever done, from the murky glooms of "Sordello" down to the recent most indolently scribbled "Parleyings." And as for those four incomparable "Idyls of the King"—"Enid," "Elaine," Vivien" and "Guinevere"—where amid the bristling entanglements of such verse as that published by the author of "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau" shall we reach either their peers or their semblances?

Scientific criticism, which is the only kind meriting both credence and respect, will one day, perhaps, demonstrate much of what I have here only postulated, without aspiring logically to prove. And when such an event occurs it should strike a telling blow at the languor which enervates a large proportion of those readers who have permitted their tastes to play very fantastic tricks with them. There is no objection to the hottest rebellion against purity and sanity of method among iconoclasts who would replace gentle order by dangerous misrule; it is only when anarchy gets into the high places of literature and begins its assaults, mutilations and subversions there that the intemperate are led to exult and the judicious to deplore. Still, progress, that arrives at so many of

her destinations by circuitous paths, may be trusted yet again to set the crooked straight. It deserves to be held as probable that she is at the present date mystically concerning herself with a future demolition of the "Browning Craze;" and that her action may be speedy is a likelihood which all consistent optimists ought to place well up on the list of their rosiest hopes.

Read Kind and Wisdom and Pat
Selected from the Works of
F Sydney Morris
Lippincott & Co Pa
1884

THE TRUTH ABOUT OUIDA.

Died in poverty 1907.

READERS of current literature may have recently observed that two writers of reputation, Miss Harriet W. Preston and Mr. Julian Hawthorne, have been expressing rather pronounced opinions regarding the works of Ouida. Mr. Hawthorne's judgment was brief, and I need only add that it was extremely severe—far more severe, indeed, than any critical statement which I ever remember to have seen expressed by that writer. Miss Preston's decision took a much ampler form, and occupied nearly twelve pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Whatever may have been Miss Preston's intention, she certainly does not appeal to us as one whom the merits of Ouida have more than lukewarmly affected. And yet, at the beginning of her essay, she assumes the attitude of an appreciator rather than a detractor, taking pains to declare that her inquiry regarding the true causes of Ouida's immense popularity shall be "primarily

and chiefly a search for merits rather than a citation of defects." With this excellent resolution fully formed, she at once proceeds to draw comparisons between Ouida and such great writers as Scott, George Sand, and even Victor Hugo. This has an encouraging sound enough ; we have the sensation that a refreshingly new note is to be struck in the general tone of fierce vituperation by which Ouida has been so persistently assailed for twenty years. The truth about Ouida would be a pleasant thing to hear; we have heard so much facile falsehood. But Miss Preston proceeds to invest her theme with a curiously languid and tepid atmosphere. She finally astonishes all the sincere admirers of Ouida—and their number is to-day, among intelligent people, thousands and thousands—by saying that her "imagination, vigorous though it be and prolific, seldom rises to really poetic heights." This is certainly depressing for any one who has taken delight in such exceptional prose-poems as "Ariadne" and "Signa." Still, a proper avoidance of enthusiasm must always form part of the modern critic's equipment ; the fashion is to look at everything imperturbably, from the Sphinx to the Brooklyn

Bridge; we somehow only tolerate the exorbitant and the florid when it takes the shape of disgusted invective. For a long period Ouida has endured the latter (not always quite patiently, if some of her retaliatory newspaper letters are recalled), and I confess that we owe Miss Preston a debt of gratitude for breaking the ice at last. None the less, however, do we own to a feeling that the ice might have been assailed by a little heavier and more efficient cleaver. The *Atlantic* reviewer appears, indeed, to be a trifle afraid, not to say ashamed, of her own pioneership. Tradition would seem to be furtively reminding her that she is heading a revolt against it. And there certainly might well seem a kind of literary defiance in any defence of Ouida. She has stood so long as a pariah that to give her boldly a few credentials of respectabilty, as it were, might in a temperament by no means timid still require some courage. I would not even appear to suggest that Miss Preston has doubted her own assertions concerning this great romancist, whenever they have been of a favorable turn. But it has struck me that she has almost doubted the advisability of her own position as so distinct a non-conformist. One smiles to

remember the ridiculous abuse poured upon Ouida in England ever since somewhere about the year 1863. She has probably afforded more opportunity for the callow undergraduate satirist than any author of the present century. I do not maintain that she was at first the recipient of an undeserved ridicule. But afterward this ridicule, because of the radical change in her work, became pitiably tell-tale; it revealed that aggravating conservatism in those who arraigned her which had its root in either a very unjust, hasty and perfunctory skimming of her later books, or an entire ignorance of their contents. She undoubtedly began all wrong. There are some liberal and high-minded people with whom the follies and faults of such stories as "Granville de Vigne" and "Idalia" have wrought so disastrously that all their future impressions have been colored by these unconquerable associations. It seems to me that Mr. Hawthorne is one of these, and I am certain that the late Bayard Taylor was one. When "Ariadne" appeared, only a year or two before Taylor's lamentably ill-timed death, he wrote concerning that enchanting tale in the New York *Tribune* with a sternness of condemnation most regret-

table, as I thought, in so alert and vigorous an intellect. When I expressed to Taylor my surprise that he should have seen nothing beautiful or poetic in "Ariadne," he frankly declared to me that he saw nothing commendable in any line that Ouida had written. But many of her lovely sketches had already appeared, and that exquisite idyl, "Bébée, or The Two Little Wooden Shoes," with its tearful tenderness and its fiery, gloomy, piercing *finale* of passion, had given proof of its author's wakening force and discipline.

Miss Preston's chief error, I should affirm, has been her somewhat careless huddling together of all Ouida's works and passing criticism upon them *en bloc*, without more than vague indication of the different periods in which they were produced, or the various stages of development which they exhibit. This talented lady, however she is to be praised for taking Ouida seriously (and that is a fine thing to have done at all, when it meant the flinging down of a gauntlet before disparagement no less insensate than cruel), has still failed in taking Ouida half seriously enough. I read with astonishment in the *Atlantic* review, for example, an extended notice of "Idalia,"

while such vastly better work as "Folle-Farine" or "In Maremma" was quietly ignored. Candidly, I hold that Miss Preston's entire consideration of Ouida has been as limited, unsatisfactory and insufficient as, when all circumstantial points are duly recognized, it has been kindly, generous, and honorable.

I have already expressed it as my conviction that Ouida began very badly. She indeed began as badly as any genius did whose early and subsequent accomplishments in English letters are now known to us and may be read side by side with hers. Byron certainly showed far less power at the commencement of his career than she did at the commencement of hers; and those who possess my own deep veneration for the grandeur of Tennyson's poetry at its highest heights may have read some of the deplorable stanzas, modelled on a sort of hideous German-English plan, which have thus far, I believe, escaped the savage exposures of even his most merciless American publishers. I find myself involuntarily tracing a parallel between the young Ouida and the young poets who preceded her by a few decades more or less. But this tendency easily explains itself, since she is pre-

eminently a poet, notwithstanding her great gifts for romantic narration. The rhythmic faculty has been denied her, and for this reason she probably has written so much of that "poetical prose" which the average Englishman has been taught to hold in such phlegmatic contempt. If "Granville de Vigne" had appeared in rhymes as clever and as prolix as Owen Meredith's "Lucile," it would doubtless have won a place far above that bright, hybrid, pseudo-poetic popular favorite. But "Granville de Vigne" has won no place, nor has "Strathmore," nor has "Idalia," nor has "Puck," nor even "Chandos," pronounced as was the dawning change it exhibited. These works all mean a palæozoic age for Ouida: her extraordinary powers were yet struggling for worthier expression. They are valuable alike in their absurdities and their better revelations, though the latter shone fitful, indeterminate, and often distressingly transient. The superabundance of "color," the weight of adjective piled on adjective, the lavish display of an erudition as voluminous as it was sometimes erratic, the meretricious defects of style, the *collet monté* superfluity of rhetoric, the impossible and ludicrous descriptions of luxury—all this

has become with many of us in a manner comically classic. Ouida's early heroes, with their fleet Arabian steeds, their lordly lineage, their fabulous wealth or sentimentally picturesque poverty, their fatal fascinations for women and their deadly muscular developments for men — Ouida's early heroes, I say, have grown as representative of the overwrought in fiction as those of Byron have grown representative of like indiscretion in poetry. Nor are these faults of her youth entirely outlived by Ouida. "Fine writing" is still occasionally her bane, though it becomes less and less so with each new book she now produces. Her vocabulary has always been as copious as the sunlight itself, and her style is at present a direct, flexible and notably elegant one. She has been accused of "cramming," and of making a little knowledge do service for much. But only very illiterate people could believe such a masquerade possible with her. She is indisputably a woman of spacious and most diversified learning, though she has not always known either the art of modestly concealing this fact, or that of letting it speak spontaneously and judiciously for itself. Still, pedantry is not seldom the attribute of a

greatly cultivated mind. We have seen this in the case of George Eliot, whose admirers will perhaps feel like mobbing me when they read that I think her genius in many ways inferior to that of Ouida. And yet I grant that to a very large extent she possesses what Ouida was for a long time almost totally without—taste, artistic patience, and that surest of preservatives, a firm and chiselled style.

"Under Two Flags" may be said to have recorded a turning-point in this unique writer's career. It was full of the same tinselled and lurid hyperboles which had made so many readers of the extraordinary series hold up horrified hands in the past. But its gaudiness and opulence of language were suited to its Algerian *locale*, and the drowsy palms and deep-blue African skies of which it spoke to us accorded with the tropic tendencies of its phrases. It displayed a wondrous acquaintance, also, with military life in Algeria, and for this reason amazed certain observers of an altered *mise en scène* in a novelist whom they had believed only able to misrepresent the patrician circles of England. But "Under Two Flags" amazed by its perusal from still another cause. It contained one of

the most thrillingly dramatic episodes ever introduced into any novel of the school to which such episodes belong, namely, the wild desert journey of Cigarette, the *vivandière*, bearing a pardon for the condemned soldier whom she loves. Cigarette reaches the place of execution just in time to fling herself upon her lover's breast and save him from the bullets of his foes by dying under them. We are apt nowadays to look askance at such heroic incidents, and the word "unnatural" easily rises to our lips as we do so. Perhaps it rises there too easily. Self-sacrifice of the supreme kind has gone out of fashion in modern story-telling, and by a tacit surrender we have given scenes like this, with all their warm-blooded kinships, to the domain of the theatre. That fiction will ever care to resume her slighted prerogative, the thriving influence of Zola and his more moderate American imitators would lead us to believe improbable. Still, the caprices of popular demand lend themselves unwillingly to prophecy. One fact, however, cannot plausibly be contradicted: the theatre has not invested her gift at any very profitable rate of interest, nor justified her present monopoly of all that is stirring in romanticism.

"Tricotrin," if I mistake not, was the first important successor of "Under Two Flags," and here Ouida gave us the noteworthy proof that she had turned her attention toward ideal and poetic models. I fear it must be chronicled that the chaff in "Tricotrin" predominates over the wheat. The whole story is not seldom on stilts, and we often lose patience with the hero as more of a *poseur* than of the demigod he is described. The entire *donnée* is too high-strung for its nineteenth-century concomitance. We feel as if everybody should wear what the managers of theatres would call "shape dresses." Ouida still tempts the parodist; the machinery of her plot, so to speak, almost creaks with age, now and then; her personages attitudinize and are often tiresomely verbose. Tricotrin does so much with the aid of red fire and a calcium that his glaringly melodramatic death becomes almost a relief in the end. And yet the book scintillates with brilliant things, and if it had been written with an equal power in French instead of English, might have passed for the work of Victor Hugo. There is a great deal about it that the passionate and democratic soul of the French poet would have cordially delighted

in. It belongs to the same quality of inspiration that produced "Notre Dame de Paris," "L'Homme Qui Rit," and "Fantine." But there have always been English people who have laughed at Hugo's tales, and in much the same spirit Ouida's countrymen laughed at the itinerant, communistic Tricotrin, with his superb beauty, his pastoral abstemiousness and purity, his altruistic philanthropy, his forsworn birthright of an English earl, his wide *clientèle* of grimy and outcast worshippers, and his astounding range of opportunity to appear just in the nick of time and succor the oppressed. Far more daring license with the manipulation of fact, however, has been taken by the elder Dumas and others. Ouida's book came about thirty or forty years too late for sober critical acceptance in her own country, and it was of a kind that her own country has never permanently accepted. Still, it revealed her perhaps for the first time as an original power in letters. She had struck in it the one note which has always been most positively her own; she had told the world that she was a prose-poet of dauntless imagination and solitary excellence. As an idealist in prose fiction no English writer has thus far

approached her. "Tricotrin" would not alone have made her what she is. It remained for her to improve upon this remarkable effort, and to fling up, like some tract of land under convulsive disturbance, peaks that for height and splendor far outrivalled it. The valleys in her literary landscape are sometimes low indeed; a few even have noxious growths in them, and are haunted by foolish wills-o'-the-wisp. Such, I should say, are her first few sustained works, like "Granville de Vigne" and "Strathmore." Nor has she always clung to the talisman by which she afterward learned to invoke her best creations. At times she has seemed to cast this temporarily away, as in "Friendship" and "A Winter City." I have now reached, as it were, my one sole conclusion regarding her abilities at their finest and securest outlook. She is an idealist, and that she should have determinedly remained. The foibles of modern society are no subjects for either her dissection or her satire. She has never been any more able to become a Thackeray or a Dickens than they, under any conceivable circumstances, could have become Ouidas. It is an immense thing for a writer to recognize just what he is

capable of doing best, and to leave all the rest alone. But Ouida, with a burning uneasiness, has continually misunderstood her own noble gifts. With an eye that could look undimmed at the sun, she has too often grown weary of his beams. Once sure of her wings, white and strong as they proved, she had nothing to seek except the soft welcome of the air for which they were so buoyantly fitted. But no: she has repeatedly folded them and walked instead of flying. Birds that fly with grace do not often walk so. She is a poet, and she has forgotten this truth with a pertinacity which has been a deprivation to the literature of her time. And yet for several years after the publication of "Tricotrin" the idealist was most hopefully paramount in all that she did. If "Folle-Farine" had been her first book instead of her sixth or seventh, it would have made even the English blood that she has more than once declared so sluggish, tingle with glad appreciation of its loveliness. The change in her was for a time absolute and thorough. "Folle-Farine" was the story of a despised outcast girl, ignorant and unlettered, yet with a soul quick to estimate and treasure the worth and meaning of beauty wherever

found. It is all something which the realists would pull long faces or giggle at as hopelessly "highfalutin." But then the realists, when they ride their hobby with a particularly martial air, are inclined quite to trample all poetry below its hoofs. I don't know how well the story of "Folle-Farine" would please some of Balzac's successors, but I am sure that he himself would have delighted in it. The girl's infancy among the gypsies and subsequent fierce persecution at the hands of her grandfather, Claudis Flamma, as one devil-begotten and loathsome, are treated with an intensity bordering on the painful. But through all the youthful anguish and martyrdom of "Folle-Farine" there flows a charming current of idyllic feeling. Such passages as these, stamped with the individuality of Ouida, meet us on every page: "In one of the most fertile and fair districts of Northern France there was a little Norman town, very, very old, and beautiful exceedingly by reason of its ancient streets, its high peaked roofs, its marvellous galleries and carvings, its exquisite grays and browns, its silence and its color, and its rich still life. Its centre was a great cathedral, noble as York or Chartres; a cathedral

whose spire shot to the clouds, and whose innumerable towers and pinnacles were all pierced to the day, so that the blue sky shone and the birds of the air flew all through them. A slow brown river, broad enough for market-boats and for corn-barges, stole through the place to the sea, lapping as it went the wooden piles of the houses, and reflecting the quaint shapes of the carvings, the hues of the signs and the draperies, the dark spaces of the dormer windows, the bright heads of some casement-cluster of carnations, the laughing face of a girl leaning out to smile on her lover."

This certainly is not what we call compact writing; there is none of that neatness and trimness about it which bespeak the deliberative pen or the compunctious eraser. But what a sensuous and winsome poetic effect does it produce! Few writers can afford the loose clauses, the random *laissez-aller*, of Ouida. She sometimes abuses her assumed privilege, even in her most authentic moments—those, I mean, of pure imagination. But it is then that the superabundance of her diction and its careless yet shining fluency hardly ever lose their attractiveness. It is then that the prolixity to which I have before referred is

an attribute we are glad to pardon, and love while we are doing so. The argument of "Folle-Farine" soon ceases to deal with the sufferings of a child. The poor creature's hopeless love for the cold and unconsciously heedless Arslàn, bitter at the world's indifference to those magnificent gods and goddesses that he still goes on painting in his old granary among water-docks and rushes there by the river-side, is portrayed with unnumbered masterly strokes. And afterward, when Folle-Farine tends him as he lies stricken with fever in a Parisian attic, the evil temptings of the unprincipled Sartorian, as they offer life and fame to Arslàn at a price whose infamy cannot be questioned by her who hears them, cloud this whole narrative with a truly terrible gloom. Folle-Farine's immolation of self to save him whom she worships, and her final self-inflicted death amid the peace of the river-reeds, far away from the loud and gilded Paris that she detests, are the very darkest essence of the most absorbing and desolating tragedy. But the poetry of this whole fervid conception is never once lost sight of. We close the book with a shudder, as if we had been passing through the twilight of some magic

forest where the dews are death. But we realize how matchless is the sorcery that can so sombrely enchain us, and long after its woful spell has vanished memory vibrates with the pity and sorrow it roused.

"Ariadne" is another masterpieee, and not unlike the foregoing in the main sources of its excessive melancholy. It is the story of a feminine spirit swayed by an unreciprocated love, as waywardly given as lightly undervalued. The characters are without subtlety, as in all Ouida's prose-poems. They are fascinating or repelling shadows, whom we can name adoration, egotism, fidelity, as we please, but whose eerie juxtapositions, whose pictorial and half-illusory surroundings, may summon sensations not unlike those caused in us by some admirable yet faded fresco. Never was Rome, in all her grandeur and desuetude, made the more majestic background of a heart's forlorn history. We read of "the silver lines of the snow new-fallen on the mountains against the deep rose of dawn;" of how "shadows of the night steal softly from off the city, releasing, one by one, dome and spire and cupola and roof, till all the wide white wonder of the place ennobles itself under the broad brightness of full

day;" of how one can "go down into the dark cool streets, with the pigeons fluttering in the fountains, and the sounds of the morning chants coming from many a church door and convent window, and little scholars and singing-children going by with white clothes on, or scarlet robes, as though walking forth from the canvas of Botticelli or Garofalo." Sculpture forms what one might call the pervading stimulus of this most impassioned story, its young heroine being a sculptor of inspired powers. In the same way music supplies an incessant accompaniment for the glowing words of "Signa." The youth who gives his name to the book is a musician who possesses something more glorious than mere aptitude. Psychologically it is the reverse of "Ariadne," delineating the torment of a man who puts faith in the most shallow and vacant female nature. It is just as plaintive, just as haunting, as its predecessor, but it is simpler, less penetrative and less wide-circling, less Dantesque in its mournful dignity and less astonishing through its scholarship. These three prose-poems, "Folle-Farine," "Ariadne" and "Signa," are the three high alps of Ouida's accomplishment thus far. It is not easy

to praise them with full justice, because unrestrained panegyric is never that, and yet the lyrical spontaneity of the works themselves—their evidence of having won their splendid vitality by having been poured from the writer's inmost heart, as warm as that heart's blood—would tempt one who had fully felt their strength, originality and greatness, to dip his pen in exceedingly rosy ink and then shape with it very ardent encomiums. I am far from calling these memorable undertakings "idyls," as Miss Preston terms them, or in any manner agreeing that "Friendship" "marks a distinct intellectual advance."

Here was a woman who had shown us as no one else, living or dead, ever had shown in precisely the same way, that she could make the sweetest and most impressive poetry do service as the medium for telling the sweetest and most impressive of tales. Mixed with their Gothic fantasy there was something Homeric in these three volumes which I have before named. There were no touches that reminded us at all of the modern novel. Each had its separate æsthetic haze clinging about it, and a golden haze this was, in every case. With only a few changes here and there, the atmosphere

of each story might have been made Greek, or even Egyptian. The delights or horrors of life were put most strikingly under our vision; but the details of life, the routine of things *au jour le jour*, the trifling modes and customs of mortality, as it pursues its whims, its vices, its flirtations, its amours, its divorce-suits, all remained remote and unconsidered. The glamour of dream clung to every character and event. The joys and miseries outrolled before us were as abstract and aloof, when viewed with relation to our morning mail or our menaced butcher's-bill, as the loves of Paris and Helen in the Iliad, or of Ulysses and Calypso in the Odyssey. These three enticing stories no more concerned our bread-and-butter-getting existences of prosaic actuality than they concerned the wash of tides at either pole. We turned their glowing leaves to escape from our own silent quarrel with realities rather than to meet the monotonous recurrence of them either photographed painstakingly or sketched felicitously. In other words, we gave ourselves up to the alternately gentle or stormy wizardries of a poet, contented in the oblivion thus begotten for decorated statistics of the annalist or placid vivisections of the surgeon.

I am aware that all such departure from his cherished modern standards must at once be tyrannously cried down as a bore by that self-satisfied arbiter, the average reader of to-day. Perhaps Ouida felt some necessity of propitiating this multiform custodian of profit and loss. It may have been that her publishers told her, with that sincere sadness born of financial depression, how much handsomer had been the "returns" from "Strathmore" and "Chandos" than from "Ariadne" or "Signa." Be this as it may, Ouida forsook her new gods, and, except in the composition of some exquisite short pieces which recalled the purity, the human breadth and the past star-like radiance of "A Provence Rose," "A Dog of Flanders" and "The Nürnberg Stove," I do not know of her having ever again hewn her statues from the same flawless Pentelic marble.

But the resumption of her old more materialistic task—that of writing novels which should reflect the doings and misdoings of her own century—she was now prepared to undertake with a much firmer hand and with an unquestionably chastened sense of old delinquencies. The tale "Friendship" may be said to commemorate

this unfortunate transition. It marks the third distinct change in Ouida's mental posture toward her public. It is to me a descent and not an elevation, and yet I freely concede that the novelist *rediviva* was in every way superior to the novelist who lived and rhapsodized before. In "Friendship" we see much of the flare and glare once thrown upon every-day occurrences tempered to a far more tolerable light. Deformity often takes the lines of just proportion, and not seldom of amiable symmetry as well. Miss Preston praises "Friendship" as pre-eminently readable in every part, and here I should again differ from her, since in my judgment the book contains a great deal of insufferable tedium. Ouida's worst fault as a stylist is here laid tormentingly bare. She harps with such stress of repetition upon the guilty bondage of Prince Ioris to Lady Joan Challoner that the perpetual circumlocution makes a kind of maëlstrom in which interest becomes at last remorselessly swallowed. It has been stated that incidents and characters in "Friendship" were taken from Ouida's own life, and that Lady Joan Challoner's name conceals one belonging to a foe of the author. Whether this report be true or false,

we resent the almost maliciously periphrastic style in which we are told again and again that Lady Joan was the jailer of Ioris and watched him struggle in vain with the gyves of his own sin. To have a nature of the most detestable selfishness described over and over till we are familiar with its meanest impulse, its narrowest spite, resembles being seated by a person of repulsive physiognomy in a chamber lined with mirrors. The reduplications become unbearable to us; till we take the only feasible course for avoiding them: we go into another apartment. Still, in the present case, I did not go into another apartment; I finished "Friendship," and received from it an impression as vivid as disagreeable. *C'est le ton qui fait la musique*, and this story, notwithstanding its eternity of repetitions, appeared to me told in a querulous, railing voice which robbed it of charm. But it evinces a most undeniable improvement in method. The sentences are terser and crisper than in those other adolescent novels, and the syntax is no longer straggling and hazardous. Of a certain redundancy Ouida has never wholly rid herself. The effort to do so is manifest in her later books, but it still remains a weakness with her to

tell us the same thing a number of times, and with only a comparative alteration of phraseology. Still, no one—not even Balzac himself—has a more succinct, dry, poignant way of putting epigram. It seems to me that she is without humor; her fun inevitably stings as wit alone can do; that soft phosphorescent play of geniality which would try to set its reflex gleam in the stony gaze of a gorgon, appears quite unknown to her. She has been wise, too, in not cultivating humor, for it is something which must fall upon a writer from heaven: he might as well try and train himself into having blue eyes instead of black. But Ouida has trained many of her qualities, and the self-search with which she has done so has betokened the most scourge-like rigors. The novelist in her is to me all a matter of talent vigilantly guarded and nurtured; the poetic part of her—the part to which we are indebted for three supreme achievements—could not have helped delivering its beautiful message. Afterward Ouida remembered that she was somebody quite outside of what one would call a genius—that she was a woman of enormously versatile information, and that the possibility of her writing novels which would excite a

great deal of public attention could scarcely be overestimated. Beyond doubt she had now reached a state of dexterity as regarded mere craftsmanship which thoroughly eclipsed the crudity of former times. But just as she had been raw and experimental in a way quite her own, so was she now adroit, self-restrained and professional with a similar freshness.

"Moths" came next, and was a book sought and commented upon, admired and execrated, from St. Petersburg to San Francisco. Of all her novels, this is perhaps the one which has brought her the greatest number of readers in what may be set down as the third period of her singular celebrity. It is filled with the most drastic interest for even the most jaded and *ennuyé* examiner. The story is the perfection of entertainment, of diversion. Its sarcastic scorn of fashionable frailties and flippancies even surpasses that which made "Friendship" notorious. Social life among the most aristocratic people of Europe is drawn so sumptuously and prismatically that without ever having enjoyed the honor of dining or supping with princes and duchesses, we still own to a secret revolt against the verisimilitude of their recorded pastimes

and dissipations. In "Moths," as in all her purely fictional and unpoetic work, Ouida gives us the belief that she is flying her kite entirely too high, that she is too greatly enamoured of the rank and titles of her dukes and earls, that the European *beau monde*, as an idea, has too bewilderingly intoxicated her fancy. As Balzac delighted in letting us know the exact number of francs per annum possessed by almost every member of his *Comédie Humaine*, so Ouida loves to tell us of her grandees' castles and palaces, of their *fêtes* and *musicales*, of their steam-yachts and their four-in-hands, of their "private physicians" (it is rarely one simple physician with her), of their multitudinous retainers and servants. Her heroines go to their apartments to dress, and in so doing give themselves up to their "women:" it is seldom that any one of them is humbly enough placed to have merely a single *femme de chambre*. All the horses are blooded animals, all the jewels priceless, all the repasts miracles of gastronomy, all the ladies' toilets royally costly. Saloons and boudoirs and bed-chambers are adorned with wonders of modern art, on canvas or in marble, in tapestry or bric-à-brac, in panellings or

frescos. Nearly every new book that she writes is a sort of *édition de luxe* of itself. I am by no means sure that she does not smile at the dazzling glories which she evokes, while continuing to spread them before us with a secret conviction that they will allure hundreds and even thousands, though they repel tens and twenties, of those whom they confront. What to many refined observers may have seemed a streak of trivial childishness in her may be, after all, a shrewder cleverness than these accredit her with. For Ouida is superlatively clever ; indeed, it may be added by those whom none of her sham glitterings have blinded to the genuineness of her actual gold, that she is lamentably clever. Had she thought less of a certain transient applause which writers incomparably beneath her may win, she might much sooner have attained that firm fame during her lifetime which her death alone will now create. In "Moths" the cleverness to which I have alluded is everywhere apparent. She has made it a story that the shop-girl or the dry-goods clerk may read with thrills and tears. Vera's horrible misfortune in having been sold by her mother to the brutish Russian prince admits of no misinterpreta-

tion. The vast command of wealth and the lofty station which now follow for the dreamy and statuesque heroine are skilfully blended with her love for the brilliant marquis-tenor Corrèze and the distressing captivity of her jewelled chains. There is a strong suggestion of the "penny dreadfuls" in the whole *entourage* of the tale, with Vera's anguished heart beating under robes of velvet and her tortured brain throbbing under coronets of gems. But it is immeasurably above the vulgarity of those gaudy and often mawkish serials. Its pathos is intense, and its continuous intervals of pure poetry are undeniable. It is dramatic, too, in the very strictest sense, and its adaptation for the English stage was naturally to be expected. As for what the moralists would call its "lesson," I should affirm that to be exempt from the least chance of misconstruction. Like all these later stories of Ouida's, "Moths" has been denounced as grossly unwholesome for young minds. I do not know about young minds gaining benefit from its perusal; I should imagine that, like many things which minors do not understand, its effect upon them might be harmful, and even noxious. So is the effect of rich

dishes and indigestible fruit upon young stomachs, while stronger gastric juices sustain no hurt from their consumption. It is time that this outcry against what is evil in literature for young minds should be silenced by a sensible consideration of how potent or impotent are the defences reared by educators and guardians. It would surely be unwise to cut down all the apple-orchards because in those days which precede autumn's due ripeness multitudes of foraging children have brought on themselves avoidable colics. If the colics sleep in the undeveloped apples, and mischievous little Adams and Eves *will* taste thereof, a stout wall and an ill-tempered dog behind it are the only trustworthy preventives against their temerity. To claim that Ouida's works are not healthful reading for those whose youth makes the mere mention of evil and vice deleterious because in all their bad meanings unexplainable, is to claim, I think, that any author may be misunderstood provided the mentality of his public is sufficiently meagre for his miscomprehension. The decried "immorality" of Ouida I have never at all been able to perceive. I ignore the question of her immoral purport in the prose-

poems heretofore treated. There such a discussion wears colors of absurdity; it is almost as if some one should assure me Milton's Satan was a matter of shame to his portrayer. But with regard to all Ouida's novels of what I have called her third period, the accusation (and it is a very wide accusation) becomes at least worthy of attention. Ouida has no hesitation in referring to relations between the sexes which common conventionality has reprobated and condemned. A great deal of her more modern work deals frankly with this theme. Sometimes it is dealt with in tones and terms of a most scathing irony; again it is handled with mixed disdain and ridicule; and still again it is openly grieved over and deplored. But I fail to find a single instance of the vileness of adultery being either condoned or alleviated. To choose an uncanny subject is very different from handling the subject with the grosser motive of extenuating what is base in it. I should assert that Ouida never—absolutely never—does the latter. There are one or two scenes in "Moths" which have a shocking nudity of candor. But they are never dwelt upon for the purpose of pandering to any despicable taste in the

reader. They form a link in the dolorous chain-work of the heroine's ills, and they are introduced for the purpose of rendering her final step of rebellion against the world's legally imposed pressure more pardonably consistent with the whole scheme of her unsolicited mishaps. While revealing what she believes to be low and contemptible in society of to-day, Ouida employs merely the weapons which Juvenal himself made use of. She is never sympathetic with wrong-doing, any more than the Latin poet was in fulminating against Roman decadence. Witness, as an example of this impersonal sincerity, her unsparing denunciations hurled at such characters as Lady Joan in "Friendship" and Lady Dolly in "Moths." How cordially she seems to detest the artificiality of every *mauvais sujet* she describes! She lays bare alike the sordid and the sensual aim; she pierces with her shafts of wit and hate the adventurer, the hypocrite, the scandal-monger, the titled voluptuary, the mendacious and guileful male flirt, the modest-visaged and still more deceptive *intrigante*. But through all her *danse macabre* of ill-behaved people there is no revelation which may even faintly indicate that she is in any

way sympathetic with their indiscreet or reckless caperings. For those who shout Ouida down as abominable because she chooses to touch the abominable, I have no answer. All that point of view merely involves the question of whether the abominable can be touched or not in literature, provided it is so approached and so grasped that the author makes its mirk and stain seem nothing but the soilure and grossness which they really are. I am acquainted with several American men of letters who have told me that they deeply regret the broad public distaste for so-called "indecency" in novel-writing. These men have already written novels of merit and force, but they greatly desire to write novels which may express the full scope and depth of life as they see and feel it. They declare themselves, however, debarred from such performance by the stringent edicts of their publishers and editors. It seems to me that Ouida has quietly contemned the inclinations of her publishers and editors. She has chosen to tell the whole truth—not as Zola tells it, but as George Sand (whom she resembles in one way as much as she resembles Victor Hugo in another) always chose uncompromisingly

to tell it. Her gorgeousness of surrounding has made her perfectly pure and reformatory motive dim to those who cannot eliminate from the scum and reek of a stagnant pool the iridescence filmed there. Ouida has seen the rainbow colors close-clinging to such malodorous torpor in human society, and she has striven to report of them as faithfully as of the brackish waters below. But she has intensified their baleful tints. She has made the ermine that wraps her sinful potentates too white and the black spots which indent this ermine too inky. She is and has always been incapable of saying to her muse what Mr. Lowell says in his profound though pietistic poem, "The Cathedral:"

> "Oh, more than half-way turn that Grecian front
> Upon me, while with half-rebuke I spell,
> On the plain fillet that confines thy hair
> In conscious bounds of seeming unconstraint,
> The *Naught in overplus*, thy race's badge!"

No; Ouida determinedly delights in overplus, and when one thinks of her muse at all it is of a harried and overtaxed muse, with feverish imprecations against the wear and tear to which divinity has been heartlessly subjected. When I turn toward the

novels which have succeeded "Moths," I am constrained to declare Ouida a writer more fertile in expedients for disillusioning her most loyal adherents than any other known through the past centuries as one deserving the name of a genius. She is so incontestably a genius, however, that she can go on committing her excesses without alienating her leal devotees. She is like some monarch confident of his subjects' worship while he crowns himself with roses and quaffs wine from gold beakers to the detriment and discontent of throngs waiting at his gates. There are no throngs waiting at Ouida's gates, however; or rather the throngs are her entranced readers, and not by any means those fastidious about the requirements of true royalty. But a few, knowing her grand mind, regret the self-forgetfulness to which it has stooped.

"In Maremma" startled these few, as if it were a pledge of permanent return among the classic idealisms which have made this author's best right to assert herself one of the greatest figures in contemporary literature. And "In Maremma" is a tale of matchless grace and sweetness. We marvel as we read of the Italian girl

who went and dwelt in the Etruscan tomb, loving the dead whom she found buried there, and finally meeting in it, by a most terrible satire of circumstances, him who dealt her a death-wound of passion—we marvel, I say, as we read of this delicious, free-souled, innocent kinswoman to Folle-Farine and Ariadne, how any human brain could be so multiplex and many-shaded as that of Ouida. What gulfs of difference separate this new heroine of hers from the world-encompassed and society-beset beings whom she has so recently pictured! And yet for a time the novelist has dropped her microscope (often so foolishly misemployed) and the poet has resumed her neglected lyre. Their old notes are still struck with dulcet harmony. "In Maremma" is Ouida again at her loftiest and most authentic. She shows in it her old impetuous desire to feel with and for the persecuted and maltreated of the earth. I cannot explain why it should not be ranked with the three great masterpieces to which I have already made such enthusiastic reference. Pehaps it should be so ranked. If there is any excuse for depriving it of a place on this exquisite list, that excuse must be found in its more earthy *raison*

d'être when compared with the almost ethereal spirituality of the other books.

"Wanda," "Princess Napraxine," and "Othmar," coming afterward with a speed of succession that showed the most earnest industry, have given proof of their author's second return to at least relative realism. But "Wanda" is a romance of inexpressible grace and force. It is the purest romance: to speak of it as highly colored is like calling a particularly rich sunset overfraught with glows and tints. Judging it by the modern methods of the "naturalistic" school is to pronounce it a monstrosity of art. But a great many of the elder Dumas's works would suffer in a like way if so considered, and nearly every prose line of Hugo's would fall under the same ban of disfavor. "Wanda" is a great romantic story. Its mode of telling is one protracted intensity. Its fires burn with a raging and heavy-odored flame. But they spring forth, for all that, with no ungoverned madness. They are kindled by a hand desirous of their heat and curl but avoidant of their reckless outflow. It is very easy to denounce such a tale as vulgar. In these final years of our dying century all literary fierceness and eagerness of this kind are so de-

nounced. If romanticism is to fade away forever, this volcanic bit of sensationalism is undoubtedly doomed. But its sensationalism is of the sort we think of when we remind ourselves of "Monte Christo" and "Le Juif Errant." The haughty Austrian countess, with her prestige of stainless pedigree and her imperial self-esteem,—the Russian serf who has concealed his disgraceful birth under a stolen title,—the Hungarian nobleman of almost kingly rank and unblemished honor, who contemptuously lays bare the shameful brand of imposture in his rival,—the ancestral castle in the Tyrol, with obeisant swarms of vassals and its regal household administration,—all these are the old materials and manœuvres of "Strathmore" and "Idalia," but presented with tenfold more adroitness and *savoir faire*. The secret of reading "Wanda" with the keenest relish for its exuberant ardors must lie in complete forgetfulness of life as it is and pious acceptance of life as it might be. But this is the test by which nearly all romance is tried. I have no space to treat at length of "Princess Napraxine" and its sequel, "Othmar;" but if space were broadly allowed me I could state of them no more

and no less than I have already stated of "Wanda." Princess Napraxine herself is a silly and patience-taxing person. Ouida's enemies must have exulted in her as "immoral," which she indeed truly would be were she not so transparently *légère*. The chief pity is that so fine a fellow as Othmar should have done anything except disdain her. But both these two last novels teem with pages of description, reflection, tenderness, sweetness and pathos which make the fact doubly sad that Princess Napraxine (a pedant, a prig and a strutting combination of silliness and bad manners) should ever have been summoned to blot and mar them by her paltry charlatanisms.

The isolated position held by Ouida in an age when principles and theories essentially opposite to her own have seemingly captured the world of letters, would of itself point to endowments both rare and sturdy. That she has pushed her way into renown against obstacles which were often all the more stubborn because they were of her own rearing, is a matter for serious inquiry and reflection; but that she should have forced from certain able contemporaries who originally satirized and flouted her, the respect and homage which we pay to

transcendent competency, is a still more significant truth. It means that Ouida must mount to her place of deserved state in spite of faults which would shape for many another writer stairways with a wholly different direction. But there has seldom been a writer whose virtues and vices were so inextricably blended. For example, the very people, in her stories of fashionable society, who conduct themselves with the least lucid common-sense perpetually spice their repartees and railleries with a most engaging wit. We may not sympathize with what they say, but we are keenly amused by their modes of saying it. Disraeli, whom I believe Ouida sincerely admires as a novelist, possesses all her love for palatial filigree and porphyry; yet he has nothing of her sprightliness, crispness and *verve* when telling us of the bores, the simpletons and the few passably bright people who make up "society."

In more than a single way Ouida is behind her time,—a time over whose rather barren-looking levels of analysis and formulation she flings the one large light of romance now visible. In this latter respect she is, indeed, a kind of glorious anachronism, but from another stand-point her

grooves of thought appear painfully narrow. Occasionally she airs a contempt for her own sex which makes us wish that with all her learning she knew a little more of the dispassionate repose taught by science, and of its hardy feuds against reckless assumptions. Ouida has made declarations about womankind which cause us to wonder how she can possibly have been so unfortunate in her feminine friends, with the thousands of chaste and lovable women now to be met inside the limits of civilization. The *mauvaise langue*, when turned against womanhood, is nowadays classed among effete frivolities. What we forgave at the beginning of the century, on this head, we now simply dismiss as beneath anything like grave heed. The day has passed when such Byronics of misogyny, however gilt with flashing sarcasms, will either delude or solace. We leave "sneers at the sex" to the idleness of otherwise unemployed club-loungers, whose growls are innocuous. Still, in justice to Ouida, I should deny that her hatred of women ever reached anything like an offensive boiling-point except in the early novel "Puck," which has probably done as much to feed the spleen of her enemies as any work to

which she has given her name. In subsequent novels she has created many women of great sweetness and high-mindedness, as Etoile in "Friendship," Vera in "Moths," Wanda in the story of that title, Yseult in "Princess Napraxine," and Damaris in "Othmar." Perhaps a depraved and sinful woman is more execrable than a man of the same perverted traits. This is a question open to debate, though Ouida somehow suggests an opposite judgment. It is true that the majority of her very bad people are not men, though she is capable, at a pinch, of some darkly Mephistophelian types.

On the other hand, her love for the helpless and the unfriended, her profound charity toward the down-trodden and destitute and neglected among humanity, is one of the several bonds between her own genius and that of Hugo—a poet whom she resembles more than I have availed myself of opportunity to indicate.

But I do not claim that these words about Ouida—though I have called them "the truth," and though, as regards my own most sincere faith and equally sincere unfaith, I so insist upon calling them—are in any degree a satisfactory criticism. How

this woman's littleness dies into a shadow beside her imaginative greatness, a real critic will hereafter tell. I have already stated in another essay my fixed belief concerning the scientific method which every critic who at all merits the place of one should infallibly use. For myself, I wish to be thought no more than that purveyor of opinions whom I have previously sentenced with some emphasis. I simply print what I think and believe about Ouida, and I have declared it to be "the truth" only as I see and realize truth. If it be falsehood, I shall welcome with gladness any actual critic who so proves it. But to satisfy me of my own errors he must not by any means deport himself in the same arbitrary and downright fashion as I have done. He must bear in mind that if he desires to convince me of my one-sidedness he must not oppose it with *dicta* as unfoundedly hypothetical as my own. He must not be a man who profusely deals, as I do, in unverified declarations. He must logically elucidate to me where I am wrong and why I am right. It occurs to me, with that vanity of all essayists who temporarily have the field quite to them-

selves, that I am more often right than wrong. But if I am conclusively proved more often wrong than right by that system of acute investigation which only the science-bred critic understands, then I shall still feel that I have been of marked service to the writer thus empirically reviewed; for I shall at least have made myself a means of rousing careful and faithful consideration toward a series of imaginative works thus far either unreasonably contemned or irresponsibly lauded. The scientific tone and poise is so prevailing and favorite a one at the present time in works which a few years ago it rarely invaded, that I cannot help asking myself why the critics, who of all living persons are most easily accredited with the scientific tone and poise, should not more fondly and unhesitatingly employ it. They almost universally fail to employ it, however; and on this account the wandering verbiage of their estimates may be said to be as valueless as the announcements which I now pluck up boldness enough to print. But my boldness has a weak fibre or two of cowardice in it, I fear, after all. I should never have presumed to write of Ouida as I

have written, had I not prized her compositions, frankly and *de bon cœur*, far more than I blame them. For this reason I have given my favorable views publicity. Ouida is so internationally popular that I am confident of friendly endorsements which will mitigate for me the necessary agony of being anathematized as her defender. There my cowardice stops—in a certainty of helpers and supporters. For the rest, if I am called names because I pay to a reigning genius what I hold as her rightful tribute, my stolid resignation will be equal to any martyr's. I shall endure the odium, certain of its ultimate destruction. Times change, and I think the day is not far distant when Ouida will be amazed at the sovereign fame which she herself has builded through all these years of failure and triumph, of weakness and power. But perhaps she will not be astonished at all, being dead. Or perhaps . . . But I leave that point for the religionists and the agnostics to fight out between themselves. One gets immortality of a certain kind, now and then, whether *pallida mors* bring to us posthumous beatitude, brimstone or annihilation. And Ouida, I should insist (with deference to the

coming scientific critic), has secured this terrene kind of immortality. I don't know whether or not she would rank it as a very precious boon. To judge from a good many passages in her abundant writing, I should be inclined to decide negatively.

SHOULD CRITICS BE GENTLEMEN?

Not long ago I received from a lady of much culture and fine natural intelligence a letter whose chief contents chanced to bear upon a recent hostile newspaper notice of a book which she had herself cordially admired. One paragraph of this letter especially struck me. It ran thus:

"The attack upon Mr. ——'s book has served more than ever to convince me that there is something all wrong with modern 'criticism'—so called. Why should not the same courtesy be preserved in writing of a book which accepted usage forces upon us in speaking of one before its author? Reckless personality is condemned in social intercourse as vulgar, and even odious; why should it be held admissible the instant that the reviewer takes up his pen? I remember hearing, as a school-girl, of 'polite literature. Is politeness an imperative requisite of literature alone, or are there similar kindly demands upon the

people who set themselves to consider it? . . . Suppose we put into actual life the same ill-breeding which now exists among the newspaper critics. My husband, as you know, is a Wall Street banker. Imagine that some gentleman strolled of a morning into his office, and instead of the usual decent 'good-day,' began coolly to assure him that his business ability was overrated, that his financial success had been cheaply purchased, that he owed his present prosperity to a mere drift of luck, and that, taken altogether, he was a person of very little real consequence. I am nearly certain that my husband, under such circumstances, would become exceedingly angry. And if he added to his anger a flat request that this same outspoken individual should never again cross his threshold, I am positive in my belief that hundreds of thoughtful and fair-minded outsiders would promptly support the course he had taken. . . . The great difficulty with all you literary people is that you almost wholly waive good manners in your discussions of one another. You pour upon the book of a fellow-writer abuse which you would despise yourselves for venting if it were a question of his ill-cut coat, his

inseparable squint or his hereditary freckles. You draw quite too sharp a line between what you may hold to be good criticism and what your own sense of common propriety has long ago convinced you to be good breeding."

This communication, after I had read and pondered it, struck me as a somewhat lucid view of the whole matter. If not a comprehensive judgment, it is certainly one which contains the true reformatory element. There is perhaps no one of its factors with which civilization could less easily dispense than with that of courtesy. Imagine the horrors of a drawing-room or a dinner-table where everybody said to everybody else precisely what he considered to be deserved or appropriate, regardless of the pain it would cost. In the republic of letters, it might be answered, we are supposed to replace formality by sincerity. That is not unlike the method, take it all in all, adopted by Robespierre in *his* republic. There was a great deal of sincerity about that. Critics and criticism there had it all their own way. It was an incisive way, and one essentially brutal. For the latter reason its admirers were numerous.

Censure would find it hard to adequately discountenance the arrogance and rudeness of the newspaper critic as they exist at the present time. His effort to show mental superiority and notable acumen quite too often makes him forget that he is also expected to appear a gentleman. He may not be one (he is, alas! too frequently the dreary reverse), but he is nevertheless required to seem one by that very standard of high cultivation which he has so emphatically assumed. Even he would admit that there is something in good manners, after all. Only, it is difficult to remember manners while you are being radiantly judicial. The sun has beams that kill. Is it so painful a calamity that you should give some one poor Jones his quietus while you illuminate your entire period and pour consequent benefit on many Joneses?

I know the modern critic to be a very sensitive person,—quite as much so as the most thin-skinned poet who ever bled under his bodkin. I have never been able to explain this peculiarity except through the tremulous effects of an evil conscience. It is constantly manifest, however, and it has more than once led me to realize the

keenness of those shocks which its possessor must find himself called on to sustain when he encounters printed impressions of fellow-critics diametrically different from his own. That he is always finding himself disagreed with there can be no admissible doubt. I don't know what heroic self-reliance buoys up his sense of infallibility under these trying conditions. For my own part, I have more than once examined with amusement the variations between the verdicts passed by "authorities" upon my own humble work. I have read the eulogies of Rhadamanthus in the *Tomahawk* till my cheeks tingled with pleasurable blushes. "How entirely charming of Rhadamanthus!" I have said to myself. "He understands me; he and I are kindred souls, and the next time I meet him on Broadway I hope it will be lunch-time, so that I can ask him to join me somewhere for a chop and a swallow of claret." Then I have taken up the *Hatchet*, and discovered that Minos thinks I have just added new indignity to the persecutions of an over-patient public. I am styleless and flaccid; I am aspiring, but effete; I have blundered into a pseudo-reputation, and am a complex junction of

dulness, falsity and feebleness. This both alarms and depresses me. I ask myself, with the vague and meek ratiocination of one simultaneously petted and persecuted, how I can be, on account of the same piece of literary achievement, at once wise and foolish, profound and shallow, talented and vacuous. But the *Lancet* soon reassures me. I am, according to Æacos, neither large nor small; it is quite explained now: I am simply a nice blending of mediocrity and industry. Here are three mighty judges, all stoutly opposed to one another. They cannot all be right; and if one is right the other two are fatally wrong. But how shattering to my own impulses of reverence! It is like a vulgar family quarrel in the household of Jupiter.

These discordances of opinion are not occasional; they occur every day. They are to my mind the great proof of how absurdly needless are all published comments on books in current newspapers. Many an author might find two or three of his works adorning the "parlor table" of some "flat" in Harlem owned by the reviewer who has hotly abused them all during past months. This gentleman has no doubt

forgotten his own abuse. Perhaps he has really read the books afterward, unprofessionally, as it were, in the quiet of his own home and beneath the light of his evening lamp, enjoying their contents. Most fair and thoughtful criticism is of necessity kindly, and you are very apt to cut a sorry figure in recommending a book which you have not thoroughly read. In nine cases out of ten your praise rings false and silly, for your ignorance of what you are praising betrays itself, like the piece of futile hypocrisy it is. You resemble a maid who rouges her mistress in a dim light; there is danger of the lady's nose getting a little rosy accidental spot on its tip. But the criticism that puts down its head like a bull and "makes" for a book never requires the least preparation, premeditation. Not very long ago I met a critic who engaged me in conversation on the subject of more than one recent book which I myself happened carefully to have read, and which he had presumably read, as he had reviewed each of them. To my surprise, he spoke of one these books in tones of extreme praise. He had forgotten, no doubt, that he had ever denounced it. I could not help feeling that I should

altogether have preferred this gentleman's blame.

Nothing is so easy as to be what we nowadays call a critic. Unless you are mentally unsound, you must have certain opinions regarding the books which may come under your eye. Entertaining such opinions, you are required to express them with moderate ease and glibness, though the integrity demanded of your syntax will, I suppose, vary according to the "tone" of your journal or the liberality of your wage. For my own part, when reflecting that I too possess, in common with the rest of my race, opinions about the literary performances of my contemporaries, I cannot but feel that I would sell almost anything else in the world rather than become a daily—or weekly—vender of these opinions. Oranges, bananas, gentlemen's braces, lead-pencils—you may go through a very long list of salable things (if you will only leave me my good name), and I feel certain that you will hit upon nothing which I should not prefer to sell rather than these inevitably haphazard and often grossly unjust personal opinions. I have not the slightest doubt that some future day will see newspaper criticism as com-

pletely abolished as the whipping-post, the stocks, imprisonment for debt and other exploded nuisances.

The first delicious sense of power in a young writer is always accompanied by a conviction that he can teach others how to write and how not to write. He may himself have done nothing more noteworthy than a few lyrics in the *Waverley Magazine*, that publication which takes pride, I am informed, in asserting that it thrives upon the *cacoëthes* of the would-be Tennysons and Thackerays, and which boasts of never having paid a dollar for any of the extraordinary verses and stories thronging its innumerable pages. He may only have written a vapid little tale for some local journal,—let us say in Brundusium, Ohio, —or a peppery editorial or two in the pages of a sheet eagerly subscribed for by the citizens of Gomorrah, Wyoming Territory. But he will feel himself a critic, just the same. Give him his head, and he will scamper rough-shod over Dante and Robert Louis Stevenson, Milton and Henry James, with the same unsparing ardor of treatment. He will adore, he will hate ; he will dissect, he will generalize ; he will vituperate, he will condone ; he will scorn, he will wor-

ship. In other words, he possesses prejudices *pro* and *con*, for which he desires unrestricted vent. If the editor of the New York *Tribune* were to advertise for a critic to-morrow, I have no doubt that the applicants for such office would swiftly swell into thousands throughout a single day. The one thing that all literary tyros believe themselves capable of doing, and of doing superlatively well, is criticism upon writers of recognized name. They think it, in the words of the old phrase, to be "as easy as lying;" and I regret to add that in other respects they often make it not dissimilar from that wide-spread weakness. Newspaper offices naturally swarm with persons of just this analytic and ambitious turn. The editors will tell you that many more neophytes aspire to do "review work" than to embark upon the mundane reportorial drudgeries. It is chiefly from these very self-sufficient and audacious beings that the author receives his worst assaults. The world appears to perceive that this is true, and yet with regard to the author himself it rather curiously misunderstands and misvalues the whole situation. "Do not notice your critics!" it cries to the indignant victim, about whose ears peas from ambus-

caded shooters may be whizzing, and with some annoyance if with no actual peril. "They are quite beneath you. It is in the worst possible taste for you to show the least consciousness on your part that they exist at all." But meanwhile the injured author, recipient as he so often is of absolute insult, finds himself called upon to observe that the world gives his critics a fair share of respectful attention. My own experiences of this self-contradictory movement have been rather amusing. I have on certain occasions inly smiled as I heard comments delivered to me upon my own works which echoed with a servility that was perhaps unconscious more than a single statement extant in yesterday's newspaper. Whether, indeed, the general reading public does concern itself with these observations is, after all, questionable; but it is true that there are two classes who do peruse them and often study them carefully as well—an author's friends and his enemies. This is a constituency which never fails the most spiteful reviewer, and it is one upon which he counts in the maintenance of his wholly useless position.

I insist that it is in every case a useless position, even when it is charitably rather

than maliciously maintained. Newspaper critics are as little wanted as newspaper advertisements are greatly wanted—and paid for on that account. Publishers send books to the daily or weekly press with but one motive—that they shall be copiously praised. Some three or four volumes of a work are for this reason given away whenever publication occurs. The distribution is made for commercial reasons alone, and the publishers, through slender sales, are often losers because of it. Upon them the loss alone falls; they are so many copies "out." They read adverse notices—too frequently tissues of reckless falsehood when not the product of minds either jaded from underpaid overwork or by nature meagrely equipped for the tasks entered upon—with a bitterness quite as acute as the author's. Hostility that touches a man's pocket irritates him quite as much as that which touches his self-esteem. Publishers are today groaning at the churlish paragraphic treatment which their gratuitous copies receive from newspapers to which they are sent. And yet these gentlemen still continue to send. They recognize the absurdity, the foolhardiness, of the whole system, but, like many another abuse, it obtains because

it has become time-honored, and they still go on practically sanctioning it. A few months ago I received from a publisher of excellent standing and universally accepted shrewdness a declaration that surprised me because of its unexpected frankness. It was distinctly to the effect that he himself would be glad enough to do away with the whole custom of offering books for journalistic attention and discussion, provided three or four houses of similar repute to his own would agree upon a similar course. But there lay the fatal impediment. His *confrères* were always hoping that a book issued by them would have the luck to secure wide approval from the critics, be written about in one homogeneous strain of praise from Vermont to Utah, and hence secure a "boom" that would swell financial receipts afterward. But such a golden *trouvaille* of good fortune is very rarely hit upon. It is nearly always the same order of things with the despots of the many petty provinces. They may be clad with a little brief authority, but they propose to get all the wear procurable out of this flimsy and transient vestment. They are determined to strut about in it, to drape its folds, as might be said, with a becoming

personal dignity. Tompkins would not write of the last novel or poem or biography as Smith has done for even an extra dollar a week added to his pathetic salary; and there are nine chances out of ten that Brown will feel himself equally thrilled by his own individualism and mental importance when examining the decisions of Tompkins or Smith. No; the commercial value of the whole arbitrary and whimsical process is almost always *nil* to the aggrieved publisher. He finds that as a rule his "selling" books are those which the critics treat even more shabbily than usual, or concerning which they disagree with an unwonted ardor. He feels in his heart that the newspaper is to be trusted simply as a medium of information between himself and his public, declaring that certain works have been issued by him, and can be bought just as he has bought the means of so asserting. He has a full perception of the flippancy, the acrimony and the incompetence by which his donations are incessantly rewarded. And he still makes them, notwithstanding. Some day there will be a quiet and effectual revolt against this flagrant injustice. Some day the wrong will right itself, and instead of receiving

bundles of new books by the morning mail or express, that sapient institution, our modern newspaper, will find the avowal of its literary loves and hates alike unsolicited. Such a prophecy may sound millennial; so does that of an international copyright law, whose absence makes us properly the jeer of almost every other civilized nation, and turns all our authors into men without countries. But one day we shall have international copyright, nevertheless, just as one day we shall carelessly and almost unconsciously dispense with all such minor tyrannies as newspaper critics.

As an example of extreme sincerity and honesty among members of this guild, I should like to chronicle a particular incident which befell myself. One evening, about eight years ago, just before the appearance of my first book of poems, "Fantasy and Passion," I went to a reception given at the Lotos Club, in New York. Among the assembled guests was a certain person whom some optimists have seriously stated to be a poet. He had a position, then, upon some evening paper as its literary critic; I am not quite sure whether or no it was the journal which he at present represents, though I think not. He had

been writing with belligerence and not a little clear malignity about certain poems of mine in the *Atlantic Monthly* and elsewhere, and when I received from a mutual acquaintance his request to cross the rooms and speak with him, I felt considerable surprise. After very little hesitation, however, I refused point-blank; and yet I sent no uncivil message, since the whole affair was one of quite too much indifference to me for that. As I subsequently learned, however, he became excessively angry on hearing of my unwillingness, and indeed lost all control of his temper. "I will kill that man!" he exclaimed to my peaceful and astonished emissary, finishing his sentence with a robust oath, and beginning his next sentence with another. "By ——, I've killed bigger men than he is, and I'll kill *him!*" This murderous threat bore no allusion to my own life, but rather to that of my first book of poems, "Fantasy and Passion." On the appearance of that book, the gentleman certainly behaved like a critic with a private graveyard for the corpses of those reputations which he had already wrathfully slain. Whether he succeeded in burying my own there or not I leave his most amiable conscience to decide.

I seem to have somehow risen from my ashes, if this is true; but it may be only one of those delusions born of an author's inextinguishable egotism, even after he himself has been given a permanent quietus.

But I deny that the least egotism has impelled me to record this dramatic little episode. I have merely wished to show what exquisite fidelity to principles, what honorable discharge of responsibility, may exist among these critics of newspapers, from whom we are entitled surely to expect an unbiassed and disinterested expression of their likes and dislikes, if nothing more final and valuable. There is no part of my narration at all doubtful as to fact. The gentleman who was a witness of this critic's fine rageful outburst and an auditor of his anathema, made no mistake in what he saw and heard. Now, let us consider, from an article signed with his own name in a recent issue of his journal, just what philosophic and flawless theories of criticism this reviewer, who vowed he would kill me and who has killed bigger men than I am, fosters enough diverting effrontery to print. "They," writes our Thalaba, alluding to certain other reviewers whom his own rancorous postulates have offended,

"might keep their temper, as I do mine, and *they need not attribute personal motives to me, for I have none. No man who is worthy of the name of a critic ever writes from a personal motive.* His business is not to deal with the author, the artist, the actor, but with his work." Yes, my lusty arch-foe, you are for once wholly right. And you might have added, "His business is also not to growl profane and ridiculous menaces against an author whose book he has not yet even seen, and then to indulge in slanderous comments regarding that author, whenever occasion serves, during a period of eight succeeding years." I can scarcely explain why memory wanders just here to that tragic incident in "Pendennis" where the "Spring Annual" containing poor Pen's verses (and very lovely verses they were, as we all recall in thinking of "The Church Porch") fell into the hands of Mr. Bludyer. "Mr. Bludyer," runs the passage, "who was a man of very considerable talent, . . . had a certain notoriety in his profession, and reputation for savage humor. He smashed and trampled down the poor spring-flowers with no more mercy than a bull would have on a parterre; and, having cut up the volume to his heart's con-

tent, went and sold it at a book-stall, and purchased a pint of brandy with the proceeds of the volume."

I am well aware that it is nowadays the fashion for authors not to "answer" their critics. If Byron should write his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" at the present time, its pungent satire would be denounced as in execrable taste, and all his friends would pull long faces when they met him, in sorrow at his exceeding temerity. The newspapers are now supposed to be omnipotent in crushing a man, and to "fight" them, as the phrase goes, is looked upon as courting sure destruction. But while the law mercifully draws a line at positive libel, I cannot see just why the publicity which they are capable of causing should deter an honest man or an honest woman from resenting outrage. If you are reviled because you have dared to write a book, I fail to understand why you should shrink from a little more abuse for denying false charges against it. You say to me, my friend, that I should hold all critics in contempt. So I will, when the publishers refrain from holding them in respect. So I will, when I cease to find their praise used in advertisements of my

works, like the certificate of a schoolboy's good conduct. So I will, when I know them receiving disregard, and not propitiation. So I will, when society says to me, "It is a very serious and great art, this art of criticism, and it is neither the ruffianly swinging of a bludgeon nor the insecure handling of a scalpel."

It seems to me that if a true critic should arise in the world he would be as worthy of homage and reverence as the noblest philosopher or poet who ever lived. He would be as dispassionate as the law of gravitation and as charitable as the all-dispensing sun. But, alas! when and where have we had a true critic? Emerson? He is as divine in his misjudgments as he is trustworthy in his splendid intuitions. Carlyle? He was a *poseur*, a shrieker, who scolded ostentatiously and made people remark his tempest because it was enclosed in so fantastic a teapot. Besides, these men were not literary critics in any true sense. But Taine, the remarkable and brilliant Taine, is a literary critic; and yet who can forgive him for being so much of a Frenchman as to put De Musset above Tennyson? There is no criticism at all except that which founds itself upon inflexible,

logical science. If beauty, eloquence, poetry, rhythm, harmony, style, taste, insight into human character, sympathy with the phases and subtleties of nature, are not susceptible of scientific definition and classification, they are not truth—for all truth is so susceptible, sooner or later. It will not do for A to tell me that Poe's "Annabel Lee" has an "indefinable melody," an "unfathomable tenderness." B, who does not see with the eyes of A at all, may think "Annabel Lee" a mere sensuous and senseless jingle. Both sides may rave, for and against, over the merits or the shortcomings of these stanzas. But enthusiasm settles no more than vituperation does. *De gustibus non disputandum* is a sword of epigram that simply tries to cut the throat of criticism. I do not mean that he who tells me why a poem is beautiful should explain to me what beauty *is*. He can no more do that than he can tell me what matter is when he states that one mass of it, the earth, moves round another mass of it, the sun. But he can find some living law — as I almost believe the German thinker, Schopenhauer, has done—which governs beauty in all its forms of development and manifestation. All modern crit-

icism is summed up in this: "I, John Smith, declare that John Brown has or has not genius, has or has not ability, is or is not a poet, a philosopher, a historian, a novelist." We are overrun with essays and disquisitions on writers; we are surfeited with *ipse dixi;* we have had enough and more than enough of *a priori* dogmatism. I know that there are a great many people who are prepared to shudder at the thought of science being applied to any of their æsthetic pleasures. Whenever it is a question of their bodily health, of the bread they eat, of the air they breathe, of the clothes they wear, of the colds they catch, of the deaths they are likely to die, they accept the only aid and guidance which their reason assures them to be the potent one. But with literature they must indulge a sentimental acceptance of the inscrutable. It appears to me that newspaper critics and all the numberless foibles which their random *dicta* beget are a result of just this drowsy bigotry. "How," cries the quivering voice of sentimentality, "can you demonstrate to me the fragrance of the rose or the whiteness of the lily?" My answer must be, "I can do neither ultimately, but I can do both relatively. If I were a news-

paper critic, I might assert that the rose was odorless and the lily blood-red. These would be statements quite as unsupported by proof as many which stare at us from the pages of our morning journals, in their 'literary' columns. But I can prove inductively and comparatively, if you will, that *to you* the odor diffused by your rose has a right to be called agreeable, and similarly that the purity of your lily has a right to be called chaste." I am prone to believe that very marvellous things may be done in literature when this abhorred science has begun to investigate it. There must be very powerful radical reasons why we are all so willing to think "Hamlet" a work of genius. Thus far nearly all the writers who have told us why have considered rather too much who is telling it and how it is being told. The paths of the essayist and the analyst are widely divergent. One is full of the pretty buds of rhetoric—the *flosculi sententiarum*—which it is hard not occasionally to stop and pluck. The other is bloomless, and even granitic, with no temptations for the rhapsodist over floriculture, and a very stern method in the recurrence of its mile-stones.

There is a publishing-house in New York

—that of Messrs. Funk & Wagnalls, if I may be permitted to mention its name without bringing on myself the awful accusation of wishing to "puff" it—which has struck me as having hit, in the turmoil and fatuity of newspaper criticism, upon a mode of winning public attention at once legitimate and salutary. This house has conceived the plan of sending to authors of established fame copies of the new books which it has issued, and asking from them a few lines, to be printed as advertisement if thought advisable. Surely this attitude, if persistently perserved, is one which in time could be made stoutly to prevail over all the haphazard treatises of the ordinary reviewers. If the author under consideration, whoever he may be, could look into the columns of a newspaper and find that Tennyson, Mr. Herbert Spencer, Mr. Lecky, Mr. Tyndall or Mr. Froude had not only praised his work, but allowed such praise to be openly published as a help to him against the puerilities and jealousies of the mere empirical bunglers, how thankful he might have good reason to feel! And even if lesser writers could be brought to lend each other their warm, sweet aid, whenever they could truthfully and sin-

cerely do so, what a gentle but telling fight would be waged against those wrangling "professionals" who now swarm about a book like minnows round a freshly-dropped bait! True enough, there would be no real criticism in all this. It would be a compromise, not a settlement; an improvement, not a remedy. Authors are not critics, because all individual talent (or genius, which is precisely the same as talent in kind, though not in degree) presupposes limitation. But authors are in most cases vastly better critics than the so-termed critics themselves. I know with what derision the latter might feel inclined to hail my statement. It would be as extraordinary, if they did not so hail it, as the popularization of agnosticism among the clergy. And yet if you, reader, had written a poem, whom would you choose to have for its eulogist? The Dryasdust who glares at it with a preconceived hatred because the Muses are nine and so are the children whom he has to support by hack-work on the *Saturday Scorpion?* Or would your preference be just one brief sentence from the wise and tender lips of such a man as the late Mr. Longfellow? Whose approval would please you more? Would not the

first, indeed, turn to utter tameness beside the last? Surely yes, I think, although few poets have ever been more infamously assailed in their time than Longfellow was. I remember that once while I was a guest in his lovely home our conversation drifted upon critics. His mild, lucid eye almost flashed as he said to me, "Whenever I have been attacked by one of those fellows I always feel as if I had been blackguarded in the street!" This may prove interesting to a few of "those fellows" who still live; but, whether it does or not, I repeat Longfellow's exact words. A little later, during that same visit, he said to me, "Never notice your critics, under any circumstances." And I have always remembered the little gesture of disdain that went with these words; for Longfellow was by no means the milk-and-water personage whom some of his biographers have painted him, but a man of the world, trained in the choicest niceties and elegances, and with a *savoir-faire* and dignity of demeanor that I have seldom seen equalled. Even if he had not been the true and noble poet he was, he could never have become a critic; his manners were far too good for that. In allusion to Poe's pitiable dirt-throwing,

he spoke with the gentlest reserve; and yet he told me, shaking his head for a moment with evident melancholy, that Poe was in his debt for a considerable sum of money at the period this scurrilous onslaught had been made. Well, time has been the avenger, and Poe's meanness has borne no fruit. The fame of Longfellow will stay luminous for generations to be, while that of Poe, in the poetical sense, is kept feverishly alive by fanatical admirers whom the meretricious tawdriness of his verse (apart from the really astonishing quality of his prose) fails to convince that he was by no means a poet. I have always been able to understand just why Poe was so ferocious, narrow and ungentlemanly a "critic" of other men's writing since I heard the words of a man who had once seen and talked with him. The man was a printer, the head of a reputable printing establishment, and what he communicated to me regarding his single experience of Poe I then had every reason to believe, and still believe implicitly. "I once saw Edgar Poe," declared my informant, "and shall never forget the meeting. He called upon me and made to me a proposition regarding a newspaper which he wished to establish.

His proposition was thoroughly immoral, involving a distinct scheme of fraud, and his condition when he made it was one of the most revolting drunkenness." If Poe had ever succeeded in starting that newspaper, we can easily imagine, from the insolent personalities which some of his miscellanies now contain, how detestable would have been its "critical" posture. What he wrote in it regarding his contemporaries would probably have been as foolish as his poetry, and a great deal more poisonous. As a weaver of wondrous romances his exceptional intellect deserves all honor; but when he attitudinizes as a newspaper critic he almost teaches us to forget "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Cask of Amontillado," while we remember vividly enough the strut and nonsense of "Ulalume" and the verbose, theatrical prolixity of "The Raven." Scientific criticism can make plain enough just why such poems as these are worthless, and a like test will serve, I am very certain, to demolish as equally trivial the volleys poured upon Longfellow and others.

If all the misery, the despondency, the feeling of brutal wrong and the despairing

apathy which has resulted from newspaper criticism could be massed together in one dolorous chapter, such accumulation would form a tragedy horrible past thought. No writer has ever been young and striven who has not passed through stages of needless pain at comments which are sometimes bruited abroad concerning his work by people who might not wish, in the ordinary following of their lives, to injure a fly. Gifford may not have really killed Keats, after all: I hope there never has been a Gifford in the world strong enough to kill, or a Keats weak enough to let him self be killed. But if the free lances of the press really could see the red and vital blood which their calumnious thrusts will sometimes draw from young and sensitive breasts, I am confident that they would blush with shame as red as the blood itself. I have thought a great deal on the subject, and I am wholly unable to understand why a young man who publishes a trashy novel, or a trashy poem, or a trashy anything else, should have it fulminated against in the newspapers. It may be as bad as human intelligence can conceive of, and it may write its author down an ass fifty times

over. But it is nearly always a work of perfectly unconscious absurdity. I have always suspected that the "Sweet Singer of Michigan" was a clever man or woman who played a deliberate part in those apparently well-intentioned stanzas of his or hers. But there are many singers who believe themselves to be sweet and are not, and who have got into print, and yet who possess nerve-centres, capacities for trembling under fierce rebuff, organizations fit to thrill with quite as much emotion as their verses are powerless to express. Why rail against these harmless victims of an illusive will-o'-the-wisp? Why call them names, and stamp upon them, and question Jove himself as to the object of their creation? No service to literature is done by giving them sleepless nights and days of torment. Their feeble books are perfectly sure of dying, without denunciation being hurled at them the moment they are born. Nobody will read them, in any case. Pray do not flatter yourself, fiery-eyed critic, with your furious foot still upon one of their gilt-edged offspring, that you have performed the slightest public benefit by your frenzy of condemnation. You have

simply succeeded in making a fellow-creature's heart suffer—nothing more. Your rodomontade was not at all wanted; society could have done quite as well without it. The world at large has the same reluctance to buy the book of a new author that you or I may have to strike an acquaintance with some plausible person who accosts us on a steamboat or a railway-car. And with the author of fixed position it is very much the same. He has won his spurs, and you critics can neither burnish them brighter nor cast upon them the least film of tarnish. There is more potency in a word or two, favorable or unfavorable, about my last book, delivered by X—— to Z—— over their friendly dinner, than in all the glory of your panegyric or all the darkness of your diatribe. Leave the authors alone, and their destinies are just as certain as though you did not seek to manipulate them. A good book was never yet made unpopular because you contemned it, nor a poor one salable because you shouted in its behalf. The community can find out what they want to read without your multiplex and bewildering counsel. There is one thing that you can do, and I am im-

pressed with an idea that you do it most pertinaciously and relentlessly: you can inflict torture upon the callow authors and sharp annoyance upon the veteran ones. Don't believe any author, though his hair be as white as eighty years can turn it, when he tells you that he doesn't care for your stabs and pin-pricks. Of course he cares. I will warrant you he is a pretty tepid and spineless kind of an author if he does not. Would not you care, messieurs, if you were trying to ford a muddy street, and a troop of vicious roysterers passed you in another direction, splashing the mud farther than your boots—as far even as your eyes? Mud is mud, you know, gentlemen, no matter who throws it at one. It dries easily, and Jane the housemaid or John the valet can quite nicely dust it from one's trousars or waistcoat the next morning. But you have a disagreeable after-thought, nevertheless, of how easy it would have been for those riotous persons who met you yesterday not to have cast it.

I should like for once to see and shake hands with a newspaper critic who had no conscientious belief that he was one of the

guardians at the gates of his national literature. It would be delightful to find so welcome a product of modern intelligence. I should naturally object to him for being a newspaper critic at all, but I should control that objection without difficulty because of gratitude at his charming rarity. If it were in my power to secure him a clerkship in a bank, a position in the custom-house, how gladly I would offer to do so! And I am certain he would accept with alacrity, for he would be so anxious to leave the company of his fellow-critics, who all had convinced themselves that they held, each one, an especial grip upon the wheel that moves public appreciation this way or that. Ah, let such autocrats as these go to their elders, who have passed years in supposably moulding the fates of authors. Let them ask such warriors in a trifling war if they honestly think they have ever either slain or saved an author. I fancy that I know what the answer will be, if it is truly an honest one. And then comes the irreversible question: Why harass and retard and irritate energies which, after all, provided they be energies of the slightest real momentum, must finally

brush away such embarrassments as if they were gnats? Learn your trade, gentlemen (or your art, if it be an art), before you attempt to practise it. Science points you the path, not whim or conceit or vainglory. It is a straight path, but a clear one. And its first foothold, if I mistake not, is humane courtesy.