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A BOOKMAN'S  
LETTERS

BY

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

FOURTH EDITION

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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TO  
SIR GEORGE RIDDELL

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## P R E F A C E

THIS volume is, in the main, a selection from some hundreds of similar letters contributed to the *British Weekly* under the general title 'The Correspondence of Claudius Clear,' and addressed to a large popular audience interested in books and authors. I am deeply indebted to my colleague in the editorship of the *Bookman*, Mr. A. St. John Adcock, and other friends, for their kindness in helping me to choose from such a mass of material. Some pages are included from contributions to the *North American Review*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and the *Contemporary Review*.

HAMPSTEAD, Nov. 1913.



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## I

### MEMORIES OF MEREDITH (I)

THE beginning of my love for Meredith was on this wise :

My father was a subscriber to a literary journal, long dead, called the *Critic*. He had preserved many of the old numbers, and I found them delightful reading. Some of the most eager and generous spirits of the time were contributors, and there was much about new poets and reformers and the coming dawn, all written in the optimist spirit of the early fifties. Mr. W. M. Rossetti reviewed in the *Critic* Mr. Meredith's first book, the poems of 1851. He had the wisdom to quote 'Love in the Valley,' which he justly called a very charming, rhythmical, and melodious poem. But Mr. Rossetti, if I remember rightly, thought the heroine brainless. Since then a similar objection has been brought against the 'May Queen.' It may frankly be admitted that neither of the girls had been to Girton nor could by any stretch of imagination be described as American. Every boy finds out some lyrics which he takes to his heart, and 'Love in the Valley' was chosen by me, along with Sydney Dobell's 'In the hall the coffin waits and the idle armourer stands,' Alexander Smith's 'The Garden and the Child,' and some of Tennyson's. Tennyson read the lines in the *Critic*, and said he could not get them out of his head, such was their magical music and melody. The poem, in fact, has its sure place in the golden

scriptures of love. It should be reprinted in its original form, with the lines which Meredith added after publication, but never gave to the public. There is a copy of the 1851 book, interleaved with notes and corrections and additions by the author, which ought to be published in its completeness.

The 1851 volume did not miss its mark altogether, but it had no such reception as Alexander Smith's poems were accorded when they were published at the same time in the *Critic*. In the fifties people bought poetry, but they did not buy Meredith. Alexander Smith, as Lowell said, was 'launched as I have seen boys launch their little vessels, with so strong a push as to run wholly under water.' With characteristic generosity and high-heartedness, Meredith swelled the chorus of praise. He did so though he saw his own little craft go down, while his brother poet's were riding prosperously on. There is evidence to show that the 1851 volume was much nearer Meredith's heart than might be imagined.

From that day I watched every allusion to Meredith, and took such means as were at my command to get hold of his books. The 1851 volume escaped me, but I procured for one and sixpence *The Shaving of Shagpat*, and also I got *Modern Love* for two shillings. These books I studied earnestly till I thought I understood them, and I am still of opinion that whoever understands *The Shaving of Shagpat*, *Modern Love*, and *Evan Harrington* knows a great deal of Meredith's inner mind. *The Shaving of Shagpat* had one strong admirer at least. It used to be considered the main business of critics to pursue with their little watering-pots the prairie fire of popularity. They may do little, perhaps they may even pour oil on the flame, but the fire burns

out in due time. There was no need for any one to attempt staying the popularity of *The Shaving of Shagpat*, for it had very little. George Eliot was at that time emerging from the obscurity of a reviewer, and writing her first story, *The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton*. She compared *Shagpat* to Beckford's *Vathek*, which Byron admired so much, and said she had received more pleasure from *The Shaving of Shagpat* than from its popular predecessor. She thought George Meredith's book might have been called 'The Thousand and Second Arabian Night.' Not that it was an imitation. It was a worthy following which came from genuine love and mental affinity. But George Eliot acutely remarked that Meredith had no wish to study the popular mood, and she was right, for the first edition of *Shagpat* was sold as a remainder, and nine years elapsed before a second edition was issued.

The next book of Meredith's I got hold of was *Farina*, a book hideous in its outward appearance, and, on the whole, disappointing in its contents. Then came *Evan Harrington* and *Richard Feverel*. To say that I quite relished the style of these books would be untrue, but *Richard Feverel* amazed me. How that marvellous love story, with the shine of the morning on its dewy pages, took no fewer than nineteen years to get into a second edition is almost inexplicable. Swinburne was the first man to write about Meredith as he deserved to be written about. But I should recall that *Modern Love* was warmly admired by Robert Browning, who had a special care for the verses which gave the book its title. It was slow work, however, to convince the public. Even so late as 1879 that accomplished writer, Miss Arabella Shore, had to say, 'It needs but some great critic to place him even in popular recognition among the



few great writers of the time.' In Aberdeen I found a fellow admirer in William Minto. We often discussed him and the obstacles to his popularity, and his astonishing genius. We proposed a pilgrimage to Box Hill, and I took my journey there one morning many years ago. I went into a bookseller's shop, and asked if he had a photograph of Meredith. A bright child in the shop turned round and said, 'Why, you are speaking about my father.' By this time Meredith was beginning to get a vogue. There is a story of five men meeting and resolving that Meredith should be boomed. These were Grant Allen, and Saintsbury, and Minto, and Henley, and another unnamed. The result of the gathering was that Meredith *was* boomed.

How nobly George Meredith demeaned himself through all this! He never whined, he never uttered even a complaint. It is needless to say that he never lowered the pitch of his writings. He did his very best, adding to the permanent stories of literature one noble book after another without for a moment stooping to the spirit of a hireling. In fact, it might almost be said of him that he became so used to standing alone that he moved away as the world crept up to him, and went further into the wilderness. His life was as noble and stainless and simple as his books. No more august and majestic figure has been seen among us.

We know from the volumes edited by his son the main facts of Meredith's history. He was emphatically a Surrey man. He lived at Weybridge, at Esher in a cottage now thrown down, and at Box Hill for many years. It is the scenery of Surrey that colours all his writing. As Mr. Hardy has said, the man seems still alive beside his green hill. He said once, in answer to



a question, that he thought the most beautiful place in Surrey was Holmbury St. Mary, and that his favourite flower was the pale iris. He was much in London at one time, and he had occasional journeys abroad. But he liked Surrey as William Blake liked it, and made it his dwelling-place.

I had one or two chance meetings with George Meredith, but never really saw and heard him till in the summer of 1895 he was the guest of the Omar Khayyam Club at the Burford Bridge Hotel, close to his house. It was a very warm July day, but the air had cooled by the time we gathered in the charming garden of the hotel, which is the most Italian scene in England. Many interesting men were present. This was the first time I met Theodore Watts-Dunton. Mr. Edmund Gosse brought Mr. Thomas Hardy. Francis Hindes Groome was there, and had travelled from Edinburgh to be present. Mr. E. T. Cook, then editing the *Westminster*, and Mr. Cust, then editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*; Mr. Clement Shorter, then of the *Illustrated London News*; Mr. H. W. Massingham, then of the *Daily Chronicle*; Mr. Henry Norman, L. F. Austin, and many more were present. I was particularly interested in meeting George Gissing, a man who can never be known from his books, and from the particulars of his life that have been published. Gissing told me that his first book, *The Unclassed*, was read by Meredith in his capacity of literary adviser to Messrs. Chapman and Hall. Gissing was invited to meet the reader in Chapman and Hall's offices, and talk over the work. Gissing did not know the reader's name, but was amazed at the extraordinary familiarity which he showed with all the details of the story, using no paper. He went over

these details, suggesting all kinds of alterations, and leaving Gissing impressed with the conviction that he knew the story far better than the writer did himself. By and by Meredith came up and accosted Gissing with marked graciousness and interest. We all felt that we were in a noble and illustrious presence. None of the paintings and photographs of Meredith do him justice. He had a finer head than any of them presents to posterity, and the serene and honoured evening of his life brought to his features an expression of peace and geniality not fully found in any likeness. He was even then somewhat infirm, but moved with much stateliness, and spoke in a loud and cordial voice. When we arranged ourselves for dinner, Meredith found his way to the right hand of the President, Mr. Edward Clodd, and it became evident that something was in the wind. I have seldom been more interested than in gazing upon Meredith and Hardy as they sat near each other. Mr. Hardy's features gave the impression of 'many thought-worn eves and morrows'; Meredith looked as if he had met and mastered life. Two such students of nature and of human nature have seldom been together, and the conclusions to which they had come as to the meaning of it all were as divergent as possible. Our genial President, who was then, and remained to the end, a most intimate friend of George Meredith, made a singularly graceful and touching speech, the badinage of which did not disguise its real feeling. He spoke of Meredith's many claims to admiration and affection, of the regard and honour in which he was held by his brother men of letters, and of the capacity he had shown to understand the East in his *Shaving of Shagpat*. This obviously touched the great novelist, who said quite audibly, 'I had

forgotten that.' When Mr. Clodd concluded, Mr. Meredith with a very good grace got up and said that this was the first time he had ever made a speech. He spoke of Mr. Clodd as 'the most amiable of hosts and the most dastardly of deceivers,' and was evidently in excellent humour. He went on to express his personal gratitude and goodwill to every one there, and altogether made a perfect little speech, exquisite in form and gracious in feeling. Thereafter we had the scarcely smaller privilege of a speech from Mr. Hardy. He expressed his gratitude to Mr. Meredith for reading his first book, which he described as 'very strange and wild.' Meredith here interrupted with the word 'promising.' Mr. Hardy went on to say that if it had not been for the encouragement he then received from Mr. Meredith, he would probably never have adopted the literary career. It was profoundly interesting to see these two men, the most representative in the English literature of their time, conversing together with the picturesque window half covered with green for a background. Afterwards Meredith, in a few rich, strong words, expressed his exalted estimate of Hardy's work.

But the most brilliant speech of that wonderful evening was made by the late L. F. Austin. Austin lived the hard life of a daily journalist. He showed many gifts as a writer, but it was as a speaker that he excelled. That evening he spoke of the gallery of women drawn by Meredith and Hardy. Meredith saw that the highest charm of woman is her womanhood, not her gifts, nor her beauty, nor her virtues, but her womanhood. Who has given us such a gallery of women as Meredith has? Some will prefer the wild sweetness of one, the purity as of fire of another. And others of us will take as our heroine

Cecilia, that pure and proud lily with a heart of gold. Austin had a wonderful way of combining with plenty of humour and wit an occasional exaltation of mood, and he held us hushed that night. Mr. Cust and Mr. Cook, who had been talking amicably all the evening, then spoke, and I remember Mr. Cust closed by parodying a verse of poor John Davidson's, closing with something about

‘Maiden aunt to the North Pole,  
And mother-in-law to the Equator.’

We were so entranced that those of us who wanted to get back to London that night had to make a tremendous rush for the railway station.

## II

### MEMORIES OF MEREDITH (II)

ON July 19, 1900, the members of the Whitefriars Club, with many of their friends, had the rare pleasure and honour of being the guests of George Meredith at Box Hill. We lunched together in the hotel, and afterwards walked to the little cottage up through the smooth gravel path, and straight through the further garden, where the poet sat waiting for us. Admirable was the easy tact with which he managed to greet all the large and varied company of ladies and gentlemen. His quick eyes immediately singled out any one who was in danger of being left out. I think the visitors were impressed by his lofty and gracious bearing. Equally were we struck by his conversation. Every single sentence was pointed and scintillating and characteristic. There was some little trouble in providing enough cups for all the invading party; we had been discussing some trouble then brewing in the East, and Mr. Meredith exclaimed, with a bright look: 'I was just telling you there were troubles in China.' I especially admired the deep and courteous interest he took in the different people who were presented to him. He showed that he knew well even the fugitive and journalistic literature of his time. I remember he discussed with the author a poem that had just appeared in one of the weekly papers.



He seemed quite familiar with names and books which might have seemed not important enough for him to notice. A shy girl, overcome by the honour of actually beholding the author of the wonderful books in their dark blue covers, was beckoned by his imperious hand and told to sit next to him. He graciously gave permission for the party to visit the little summer-house where he wrote so many of his books. The literary pilgrims were made to feel that they were conferring an honour upon him by their presence. The simple dignity of his life amidst some of the most beautiful scenery in England, the magnificent way in which he carried off his infirmity, his bright, glancing talk, and the unwearied keenness of his mind left an ineffaceable impression on all who came near him. Mr. Swinburne at his own table and in his own house was a model of courtesy, but he did not seem to show any special knowledge of his guests. He took them as guests, and therefore entitled to the best that he could give them. Meredith had all Swinburne's courtesy, but he had the graceful and lovable art of making the humblest author feel that he knew him in his works, and was individually interested in him. Swinburne was a great reader of the newspapers, and was aware even of little things in contemporary literature, but I fancy Meredith far surpassed him in this, and he had also the art of recalling his knowledge, and the kindness to use it.

My opportunities of direct conversation with the illustrious writer were few, and I was indebted for them to the kindness of friends. Mr. H. M. Hyndman has written an account of Meredith which is in some respects the best I have seen. There he says that when Meredith talked with his intimate friends, nothing could

exceed the simplicity, charm, and depth of his conversation. 'It was perfect. Not a monologue, but a giving forth in easy, flowing language of brilliant ideas, and beautiful conceptions in response to those who were talking around him. But let even one man or woman he did not know well come in, and he immediately enwrapped himself in his garb of artificiality, and you heard at once the clank of the machinery in the background. I have known this occur with him time after time.' I have heard that he would sometimes let his bright and glancing wit play round one of his guests in a fashion so dazzling and bewildering as to make that guest feel almost as if he were a butt. The habit and the uniform intention of his life, however, were of extreme courtesy. It seemed as if he talked what might be printed without the alteration of a word. So felicitous was his expression that one, while trying to recollect a phrase, was apt to miss the next sentence. A shorthand writer behind the screen in Meredith's company would have accumulated a treasury of beautiful, wonderful, immortal things. But no memory could have been equal to the task, and therefore it is with much hesitation and with full acknowledgment that only his thought is rendered that I venture to put down a few things.

Once I heard him talk much about criticism. He laid great stress on the fact that he had never replied to a critic. Of this he seemed to be very proud. He owned that he had felt the temptation strongly on more occasions than one. He spoke of the sick feeling with which he read Hutton's review of *Modern Love* in the *Spectator*. There was compensation, however, in Swinburne's noble reply. He was distinctly hurt by some remarks made about *One of Our Conquerors*, and he defended a much-criticised

phrase as being the exact expression of the truth—as impossible to express rightly in any other way. But if I am not much mistaken, he afterwards altered the phrase. Meredith was too great and too generous to resent adverse criticism, provided it was honest. William Watson, the poet, wrote an article in the *National Review*, in which, from the classical standpoint, he severely criticised the eccentricities of Meredith's style. But Meredith admired Watson's work, and when Grant Allen lived at Dorking and Watson was his guest, he invited the poet to dine with him and showed him special favour. In fact, he often alluded to the excellence of William Watson's poetry. Of course, I need not say that Watson, in criticising Meredith, had written like a gentleman. I fear, however, that there have been some of our great men who have been known to act less nobly in similar circumstances.

The most important thing I ever heard from him was a panegyric of Tennyson. It was quite long, and full of heart and enthusiasm. Tennyson sought Meredith out after 'Love in the Valley' was printed in the *Critic*. If I remember well, Meredith was then living at Esher. George Gilfillan had printed in the *Critic*, under his signature of 'Apollodorus,' an attack on Tennyson which moved the poet greatly. In reply to Meredith's praises, as they trampled the heather together, Tennyson said, time after time, 'But "Apollodorus" says I am not a poet.' This story Meredith was fond of telling, for I have had it given to me by two of his friends, and I heard it in a shorter version myself.

It will be of interest if I mention the passages which Meredith chose from Tennyson as his favourites. He repeated them in his rich, deep voice with much inten-



sity of feeling. First he placed 'Ænone,' as we now have it:

'There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier  
 Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.  
 The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,  
 Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,  
 And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand  
 The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down  
 Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars  
 The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine  
 In cataract after cataract to the sea.  
 Behind the valley topmost Gargarus  
 Stands up and takes the morning; but in front  
 The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal  
 Troas and Ilion's column'd citadel.  
 The crown of Troas.

\* \* \* \* \*

O mother, hear me yet before I die.  
 They came, they cut away my tallest pines,  
 My tall dark pines, that plumed the craggy ledge  
 High over the blue gorge, and all between  
 The snowy peak and snow-white cataract  
 Foster'd the callow eaglet—from beneath  
 Whose thick mysterious boughs in the dark morn  
 The panther's roar came muffled, while I sat  
 Low in the valley. Never, never more  
 Shall lone Ænone see the morning mist  
 Sweep thro' them; never see them overlaid  
 With narrow moonlit slips of silver cloud,  
 Between the loud stream and the trembling stars.'

The other passage he quoted was from 'In Memoriam,' and I shall never forget the vehement emphasis he laid on the lines which I have italicised:

'Be near me when my light is low,  
 When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick  
 And tingle; and the heart is sick,  
 And all the wheels of Being slow.

Be near me when the sensuous frame  
 Is rack'd with pangs that conquer trust ;  
*And Time, a maniac scattering dust,*  
*And Life, a Fury slinging flame.*

Be near me when my faith is dry,  
 And men the flies of latter spring,  
 That lay their eggs, and sting and sing  
 And weave their petty cells and die.

Be near me when I fade away,  
 To point the term of human strife,  
 And on the low dark verge of life  
 The twilight of eternal day.'

The last quotation led him to talk about personal immortality. 'You believe in it?' he said. 'But for my part I cannot conceive it. Which personality is it which endures? I was one man in youth and another man in middle age.' He then moved his stick in the ground and said, 'I have been this and this and this. Which is it that is immortal?' I ventured to remind him of what John Stuart Mill said about the persistence of the ego. He said, with some vehemence, 'I do not feel it. I have never felt it. I have never felt the unity of personality running through my life. I have been'—this with a smile—'I have been six different men: six at least. No,' he said, 'I cannot conceive personal immortality.' This is the teaching of his writings, though I think there are hints in them of 'a morn beyond mornings,' of something that awaits us better than any of our reasonings—better even than any of our dreams.

He was led to talk of Swinburne once, and smiled in a deprecating way at some extravagances of denunciation into which the poet had been betrayed. He had told us that Swinburne was not to be judged by such things; that

his nature was essentially kind and generous, and that he had been misconceived. He spoke a few strong words, which I cannot recall as he gave them, about Swinburne's genius as a poet and his place among the immortals.

Here there is no harm in mentioning that on one occasion, when Swinburne was in an unusually expansive and communicative mood, I heard him speak freely of Meredith. While affectionate and admiring in his reference, he was also critical. He said, 'I defended him in 1862, but I would not defend the style of his later books. Browning was born with a stammer, but I fear Meredith has cultivated his stammer.' He went on to say that he had read the first draft of Meredith's *Emilia in England*, and that it was written in pure, sweet, Thackerayan English. But when it was published it became apparent that Meredith had translated it into his own peculiar language, and this Swinburne emphatically deprecated. He summed up smilingly at length with the words: 'The style is not of God, and it cannot last.' In fact, he spoke precisely to the same effect as Mr. Hyndman has written: 'He deliberately enshrouded himself in such an atmosphere of artificiality in his writings that it is difficult even for his admirers to feel the full effect of the powerful, and, at bottom, sympathetic intelligence which lay behind the cloud of enigma. He would not talk plainly to the world at large. His defects in this respect grew with his growth and became stronger with his age. . . . Refusing positively from first to last to write for the public, taking as much pains to cover up his real greatness of mind as most writers do to express clearly all the lesser ability that is in them, he nevertheless succeeded in making a deep mark on his day and generation.' On the general question raised I express

no opinion, but much might be said of that philosophy of the comical which runs through all Meredith's works, and which is best expressed in his own phrase, 'thoughtful laughter.' Much also might be said of the vesture of his thoughts, of his extraordinary power of expressing the most subtle and elusive emotions. Mr. Barrie put it in a homely but effective way when he said that Meredith 'turned gas upon everything.' His poetry has been mainly of the joy of earth, and to some of us the most haunting and delicious strain in all his music is 'The Woods of Westermain.'

It is time to bring these scattered notes to a close. I shall not attempt to reproduce what I have heard Meredith say about politics and politicians, and indeed I am not able to reproduce his expression in almost any respect, though I am sure I have given the substance of his views. I heard him deliver one of his whole-souled eulogies of Charles Dickens. He knew Dickens, and there was some little misunderstanding between them when he contributed *Evan Harrington* to *Once a Week*—*Once a Week* being a rival to Dickens' *All the Year Round*. But here again no thought of such things interfered with Meredith's admiration. It seemed to me that Dickens and Tennyson were his favourites among the Victorian writers. Mr. Massingham, who saw Meredith much oftener than I did, confirms me in the impression that the poet's thoughts in later years and his talk turned very much upon death. He was not afraid, but the problem seemed to be with him. He met it in his gallant way, and when the end came the watchers saw 'dead lips smiling at life as in life they had smiled at death.'

### III

#### THE SIX BEST BIOGRAPHIES

BIOGRAPHY is my favourite form of reading, and I have beside me in the room where I am writing at least four thousand biographical works. Was it not Keble's father who said, ' All sermons are good ' ? In the same manner I might say all biographies are good. Never yet have I seen a biography which did not contain something. But great biographies are few from the nature of the case. Let us clear the ground by specifying the necessary attributes of a great biography.

(1) In the first place, the biography must deal with a great man. A great man must be great in character as well as in achievement. It is better—much better—that he should be a good man, but it is not necessary. Napoleon was not a good man, but he was certainly a great man. Turner was a great artist, but in no sense great as a man. He was a poor, sordid creature, and it is quite impossible that under any circumstances a great biography could be written about him.

(2) For a great biography there must be materials of a special kind and value. It is impossible to write a great biography of Homer or of Shakespeare. We know too little. Materials there must be, in the form of letters or diaries or records or recollections, before the great biography can be written.



(3) In the third place, a great biography must be the work of a man with the biographical faculty. I have carefully abstained from saying that the writer of a great biography must himself be great. It may be doubted whether any really great writer has ever written a great biography. But the biographical talent is special. The true biographer must be able to handle his materials. He must have the power of passing them through his mind and transmuting them into a unity. He must know how to complete the portrait, touch by touch. He must avoid all that is irrelevant, and omit nothing that is relevant. He must have an eye for the critical moments in life. He must know the people who enter into the heart and the thought and the action of his subject, and be able to describe and discriminate their influence. He must also be in possession of a good narrative style, and this means that he must write with zest. The connecting passages must be very carefully and skilfully done, even when the material is of surpassing interest.

## I

If these tests are adopted, certain conclusions will follow. A good many years ago that indefatigable and learned reader, Professor Saintsbury, gave a list of the great biographies. He included the following books :

1. Lockhart's *Scott*.
2. Boswell's *Johnson*.
3. Moore's *Byron*.
4. Carlyle's *Sterling*.
5. Sir George Trevelyan's *Macaulay*.

I venture to think that two of these must be rejected. Moore's *Life of Byron* is one. It is undoubtedly an en-

tertaining book, and, when the immense difficulties of the task are considered, it must be admitted that Moore displayed considerable tact and skill. Dr. Richard Garnett used to maintain that Moore was a great man of letters who had never been sufficiently recognised. Professor Saintsbury is of the same opinion, and it cannot be questioned that Moore was ready and clever. But time has judged him. Most of his verse is forgotten, and his prose, with the exception of the *Life of Byron*, is dead. Dr. Saintsbury and a few others may know his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*, and his *Epicurean*, his *Life of Sheridan*, and conceivably his translation (in part) of Sallust. But this knowledge is confined to a few lonely students. I could wish that Moore had written the *Life of Sydney Smith*, as he meant to do; but this purpose was frustrated by death. Besides, Byron was not a great man. Macaulay's judgment will never be reversed. He was 'a bad fellow, and horribly affected.' No doubt he was an excellent letter-writer, but his letters have never found their way to the general heart.

Nor should I admit the claims of Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*. It is a wonderful book, the most pleasing of all Carlyle's works. No praise could be too high for the general management of the memoir, and the felicity of many passages. But it deals with a hopelessly second-rate man. Those who have read Julius Hare's *Memoir* and the writings which follow it cannot but be amazed at the impression Sterling produced. The banality of his verses can hardly be imagined by those who have not examined them. He was a tolerable critic, and a man of undeniable personal charm. But when we have said this we have said all. Carlyle could take some praising,

but I think he would have smiled if any one had called his *Life of Sterling* a great biographical classic. It is, however, infinitely superior to his *Life of Schiller*, a piece of journeyman's work, and I read with amazement in a recent book by a critic of authority a pronouncement in which Carlyle's *Lives of Schiller* and *Sterling* were put on the same level.

These tests would also exclude some special favourites of mine. One of the most delightful biographies I possess is the *Life of George Crabbe*, by his son. Artless in appearance, it shows real artistry. It is full of that simplicity which, according to Bailey, is 'nature's first step and the last of art.' It was nature's first attempt probably in this instance. Another biography which has never received justice is Andrew Lang's *Life of Lockhart*. It ought to be reprinted in an accessible form. Lang understood Lockhart, and has written of him worthily and nobly.

Among religious biographies there is Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, and I should mention the *Life of Principal Cairns*, by Professor MacEwen, and the *Life of M'Cheyne*, by Andrew Bonar. A very high place is due to Dora Greenwell's *Life of Lacordaire*, and to the biography of Cardinal Vaughan by Mr. J. Snead-Cox. The Lives of *John Foster*, of *David Brainerd*, and of *Henry Martyn* are also of an impressive and enduring quality. Many other names might be added, but they are obviously ruled out by the canons. There is, however, one exception at least. Professor Saintsbury has done noble justice to Robert Southey, and I am with him entirely when he praises the Lives of Nelson, of Wesley, and of Cowper. Southey had all the equipment for writing great biographies, but, fortunately



or unfortunately, the books are comparatively brief, and for this reason they cannot be placed with the most splendid achievements of the biographical art. Few events in the history of English literature were more unfortunate than Southey's early engrossment with Portugal. If he had written on English subjects he could hardly have failed to achieve an abiding masterpiece. Mrs. Oliphant might have given us an enduring biography if it were not for the intolerable diffuseness of her style. In Mr. P. G. Hamerton's *Modern Frenchmen*, and in Dean Burgon's *Twelve Good Men*, we have masterpieces in their kind.

## II

It is time I should give my own list, and here it is. I have attempted to place the books in order of merit :

1. Boswell's *Johnson*.
2. Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.
3. Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.
4. Trevelyan's *Macaulay*.
5. Froude's *Carlyle*.
6. Morley's *Life of Gladstone*.

A few words must be added in explanation of the choice. Professor Saintsbury, almost alone among critics, so far as I know, puts Lockhart above Boswell. 'I do not myself pretend to rank in the most ardent section of Boswellians. Full of delightful matter as the book is, it seems to me a book rather for perpetual dips—dips which should leave no part of it unexplored, but interrupted and comparatively short—than for the long, steady swim which the very greatest literary streams invite, sustain, and make

delightful.' He thinks that Lockhart is the prince of all biographers, past, present, and to come, and he has read him often on successive evenings from beginning to end. He has never succeeded in reading Boswell through on the same plan.

There is no doubt something to be said for Dr. Saintsbury's view. It is obvious that Boswell's book lacks proportion. He knew Johnson only for part of his life. For the rest, he collected laboriously and very successfully. But it would be idle to pretend that his collections are of equal value with his recollections. Nevertheless, each man speaks for himself. I have read Boswell through on successive days at least twenty times. I think I must have read Lockhart's *Scott* in the same way at least half a dozen times. While yielding to none in admiration of Lockhart and of Scott, I have had much more pleasure and more profit from my reading of Boswell's *Johnson*. The characters of Johnson and Scott are priceless possessions of the human race. They stand out as heroes among men of letters. But there is something—I do not know how to describe it—in Boswell that is not in Lockhart. Perhaps we come nearest defining it when we say that Boswell has unending gusto. Also, though in this case comparisons are odious, the nature that shines out from Boswell's pages is grander and nobler even than Scott's. Macaulay, in his famous letter to Macvey Napier, and still more Carlyle, in his essay on Scott, have said true words, although I confess I can never read them without irritation. Nor is there in Scott's life the same richness and depth of wisdom as that which abounds in Johnson. When I open Boswell I feel as Aladdin did when he raised the stone without any trouble and laid it by the side of him :

‘The trees of this garden were all full of the most extraordinary fruit. Each tree bore a sort of a different colour. Some were white, others sparkling and transparent, like crystal; some were red, and of different shades; others green, blue, violet; some of a yellowish hue, in short, of almost every colour. The white were pearls; the sparkling and transparent were diamonds; the deep red were rubies, the paler, a particular sort of ruby, called balass; the green, emeralds; the blue, turquoises; the violet, amethysts; those tinged with yellow, sapphires; in the same way, all the other coloured fruits were varieties of precious stones; and the whole of them were of the largest size, and more perfect than were ever seen in the world.’

But I have no quarrel with anyone who prefers Lockhart to Boswell. When the pathetic origins of Lockhart’s book are considered we can never sufficiently honour the nobility of the author. He wrote the biography largely to satisfy the demands of Scott’s creditors. His heart must have bled as he wrote down the details of the heroic and tragic story. It is as if Scott had charged him, in the words of the dying Hamlet :

‘If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story.’

Lockhart could not refuse, but when his task was accomplished his achievement was practically at an end.

Mrs. Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* is in many ways the model for biographers. Only those who have handled her materials—and I have done so—can appreciate the

exquisite skill of her choice, of her ordering, and the insight, deep and true, with which she has interpreted that eventful inner history which made so little outward show.

Nor is it necessary to vindicate the place of Trevelyan's *Macaulay*. It may be in parts somewhat stilted, but, as the record of a joyous and shining pilgrimage, we have hardly any book like it. Macaulay always wrote characteristically. He was at his best in unstudied and hasty letters to his sister. Every line from his pen ought to be put in print. His affectionate, brilliant, varied, steadfast, earnest life has found a chronicler who can appreciate its freshness, its exuberance, its picturesque and dramatic forms. The biography will ever be the delight of all true bookmen. They will read it to the end of time, and be 'awed and touched by Macaulay's wonderful devotion to literature.' I have found it a biography that bears a yearly reading.

The last two books on my list are more doubtful. In the controversy between Froude and Carlyle's representatives my sympathies are entirely with the latter. Carlyle said that it is the duty of every biographer 'to abstain from and leave in oblivion much that is true.' Froude set himself to the discrowning of the old king. 'I for myself,' he wrote, 'conclude, though not till after long hesitation, that there should be no reserve, and therefore I have practised none.'

' But thou, O thou that killest, hadst thou known,  
O thou that stonest, hadst thou understood  
The things belonging to thy peace and ours !'

But whatever may be said of Froude, Carlyle's own letters remain, and I venture to predict that it is by his

letters and not by his books that Carlyle will ultimately be remembered. When the letters are read apart from Froude's editing and interpretations, Carlyle will be more fairly judged, and the true temper of his spirit, his cardinal virtues, his genuine and important notes, will be acknowledged.

Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* I have chosen as a political biography. It is the life of a great man of affairs. It is, so far as I remember, the only good political biography in the English language. It is almost the only book written about our own times which has any literary importance, and we may be allowed to think that, on some points at least, it records the verdict of the historian of the future. Written with gravity, dignity, distinction, and even with solemnity, it must be pronounced a great book.



## IV

### THE CENTENARY OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1903)

It is a hundred years since Emerson was born, and more than twenty years since he died ; but, even now, the time has not come for an estimate of his just place among the literary and spiritual forces of the world. What we may say is, that he gave the first distinctively American impulse in literature, that he exercised an extraordinary influence in stimulating without maddening, and that the force he exerted has so far proved abiding. When Emerson died about the same time as Darwin, it was recognised everywhere that America and England had lost their most potent intellectual forces and their most shining intellectual glories. Emerson, however, was more than an intellectual leader. He was, and is, the spiritual guide of many thousands. It was recorded lately that the most reactionary and powerful of Russian statesmen kept always on the table beside him the *Essays* of Emerson, and referred to them as an oracle. I can testify to the mighty force with which he acted on the minds of young men in Scotland early in the sixties. The absence of a copyright convention between America and Great Britain had some good effects. Many in the old country who could not afford to buy the new books of Carlyle and Tennyson, were able to purchase the innumerable cheap reprints of Lowell,

Longfellow, Emerson, Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe and others. Young men, now in middle life, knew these authors from cover to cover, and lived by them. Very recently, a shilling edition of Emerson's *Essays* was published in England, and twenty thousand copies were sold at once. It is well worth while to review this great and distinctively American man of letters when the most glowing prophecies of American ascendancy in the world are being fulfilled before our eyes.

## I

There was an extraordinary unity and consistency in Emerson's career. He struck the key-note of all his writing in his essay on 'Nature,' when he said : ' The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face ; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe ? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs ? '

This was Emerson's watchword from the beginning to the end. He did not disparage the past. Much of his work was done in making his people familiar with the great men, thoughts and deeds of other times and lands. His ancestors were not only Puritan but clerical, and he derived much from them. The Reverend Peter Bulkeley, Rector of Odell on the Ouse, in the time of Laud, had Mr. Emerson as his direct descendant. He was driven out of the country by Laud for his Nonconformist practices, and in middle life sold all his property and crossed the seas to New England, and founded the town of Concord. He was

pious to the very core, and, like Mr. Emerson, he was a scholar. But with all his affection for the past, Emerson was a man of the new time and the New World, and he did what he could to throw an ideal radiance round his own country. He began by recognising gladly the new facts brought to light by investigation. Indeed, like Tennyson, he anticipated them in a manner. His essay on 'Nature' is prefaced by the significant lines :

' A subtle chain of countless rings  
The next unto the farthest brings ;  
The eye reads omens where it goes,  
And speaks all languages the rose ;  
And, striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.'

It is true that 1830 was the year of the great debate on fixity of type between Cuvier and Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, but there were only few among poets and philosophers who knew what had happened, though Goethe understood it well. Long after, Kingsley's attitude towards the new science was properly described as 'fearless and helpless.' From the start, Emerson turned a fearless and joyful face to every fresh discovery. Though not a scientific observer himself, he asked why America should not have a poetry and philosophy of nature. This attitude brought him the tribute of men like Professor Tyndall, who wrote in his copy of *Nature*, 'Purchased by inspiration.'

But Emerson was loyal to all truth without loss of reverence. He never abandoned his faith in the supremacy of the divine in the world. This was a faith which could watch without dismay, indeed with eager sympathy, the progress of the intellect. For Emerson gave a mystic baptism to science. Said Tyndall : 'Not only is Emerson's



religious sense entirely undaunted by the discoveries of science, but all such discoveries he comprehends and assimilates. By Emerson, scientific conceptions are continually transmuted into the finer forms and warmer hues of an ideal world.'

It was fundamental with him that truth could be comprehended by intuition. The principles of Transcendentalism are to be felt as religious emotions, or grasped by the imagination as a poetic whole. They are not to be proved, neither are they to be set down in proportion as the articles of a creed. The truth comes to us not when we are critical, not when we are working, but when we are receptive and passive. The knowledge thus conveyed does not require to be defined. Its foundation need not be strengthened. If we enter the innermost temple of the Absolute, as Emerson says we can, we shall know that we have been there. To affirm the experience is our business. To affirm it in words that adorn it, was the task to which Emerson triumphantly addressed himself.

Bearing in mind Emerson's intense dislike of creeds in this age of the world, we may state his ruling intuitions. He affirmed the doctrine of the Over-Soul—that under the changing phenomena and below the jarring strife of atoms and men there lies a single First Cause; an infinite, eternal and perfect Substance; a divine noumenon of which earthly phenomena are manifestations. Nature and the soul alike are informed by it, and they are governed by the same laws. These laws are Progress and Righteousness. The whole world is an omen of good. If humanity places itself in right relations with God and nature, it must be purified and elevated. The more complete the surrender, the more perfect will be the peace. So long as man remains

out of harmony with the Over-Soul, all things are hostile and incomprehensible. Emerson declined to affirm the personality of the Divine Substance, but he had no doubt that the nature of things was kind and righteous. Every soul was independent and self-determined, but bound to submit its selfish instincts to the universal law and thus become divine. When the soul opened itself to the Ideal, and admitted the inflowing of the Over-Soul, there was a tide of ecstasy—the human and the divine were merged. Optimism was but the direct inference from these propositions. Accepted frankly, they would result in a serene belief in the nature of things and the hopefulness of man's estate, and in a complete refusal to believe in the indifference and cruelty of the sum of things.

The doctrine of Transcendentalism bored Oliver Wendell Holmes and many others. It has been said that Holmes's monograph on Emerson is 'The Natural History of the Wood Thrush by a Canary Bird.' But it has been claimed for Transcendentalism that it is no American idiosyncrasy, no novel product of a virgin soil, but one of the oldest and proudest of human philosophies. It has been followed from its earliest records through Grecian speculation, through Neoplatonism, through the despairing nobility of Roman Stoicism, through mediæval Mysticism, through the mathematical arguments of Spinoza, through the orthodox shapings of Swedenborg, to the extreme philosophies of German Idealism. In Emerson, however, and in his true followers, there are distinctive notes. The most remarkable is the supremacy given to ethics, these ethics being practically the ethics of Christianity. In debates still carried on between ethical thinkers on practical questions, Emerson's vote would have gone always with the

Christians. Emersonian, also, is the unfaltering and even exalted optimism in which Emerson lived and died. It will be seen that Transcendentalism has much in common with Christianity, especially on the ethical side. But from the Christianity of the Apostles and the Church it is sharply separated by its denial of the supernatural. The special claim of the Christian Religion is the claim to finality. 'God . . . hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son.' 'Once in the end of the world He appeared.' These days are the last days. Christ is the last word of God. But Emerson denies miracle and denies also the finality of any book or any Redeemer. 'That the administration of eternity is final, that the God of revelation has seen cause to repent and botch up the ordinances of the God of nature, I hold it not only irreverent but impious in us to assume.'

To him all religions were alike imperfect and useful, and the wise man keeps his mind open and receptive to everything of good that floats by him from whatever source. It is degrading to depend wholly on the past. 'If a man claims to speak and know all God and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old mouldered nation in another country, in another world, believe him not.'

The fountain of inspiration was still flowing. The soul that kept itself quiet and expectant would receive light. So, better books than the Bible would be written, higher characters than the Christ would appear. 'We, too, must write bibles to unite the heavenly and the earthly worlds.' There can be no final teacher. 'The man has never lived who can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person who shall set any barrier on one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire.'

Christ was one of many gifted spirits with whom the Over-Soul had direct communication. He was to be revered, but one day he would be estimated and set aside for another, while whatever was true in his words and acts would continue to live. Nobler prophets than Christ were yet to come in the eternal progress. Emerson speaks with reticence about Christ, but we may gather that he questioned the accuracy of the Gospel history in many parts, not merely the miracles, but also the record of the words. But even if criticism had accomplished its task in separating between the false and the true, Emerson would by no means have admitted that Christ was infallible. He looked for another.

I think some stress ought to be laid on Emerson's expectation of a Messiah. His attitude was almost Jewish. A Messiah was due from God. He would probably be an American Messiah. Americans must not miss him. Where would the Messiah be found? Emerson's study had convinced him that the Messiah would appear among the 'cranks,' so-called. '*None of the princes of this world knew.*' So he was amazingly tolerant to men like Bronson Alcott and Thoreau, women like Margaret Fuller and experiments like Brook Farm. He viewed them with an open and hopeful mind. The regeneration of the world, in his judgment, would come from some modern seer. And though he was keenly alive to the occasional absurdities in *The Dial* and its contributors, he was tolerant and more than tolerant. He would have smiled at the lady who inquired at a lecture, 'Mr. Alcott, does Omnipotence abnegate attribute?' It is difficult to believe that he was not amused at the words with which *The Dial* ended: 'Energise about the Hecatie sphere.'



But he was loyal for all that. No one valued Alcott so highly. He would listen to him when the rest had fled. Of Thoreau he said, 'Wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty he will find a home.' When Margaret Fuller died, he said, 'My audience is gone.' He made haste to welcome Walt Whitman, though it is said that his admiration of the poet abated. There is nothing more striking in the correspondence between Carlyle and Emerson than their respective attitudes to the mild-eyed Buddhas who appeared from time to time. Carlyle had no patience with men like Alcott. Emerson saw all that Carlyle saw, but he saw deeper and farther. There is no correspondence between men of equal intellectual rank which shows so little intellectual sympathy. In the end of the day, the difference between Carlyle and Emerson was a difference of first principles. Carlyle was so deeply imbued with a belief in the depravity of the human race, that he ceased to have hope. Emerson never weakened in his optimism, neither was he discouraged by the appearance of many false Messiahs. He looked upon them as the inevitable precursors of the true Christ.

It follows that he practically disclaimed all finality, save for some foundation principles. There is nothing in his writing of the intense dogmatism on doubtful matters which has sent so many books on philosophy to the shelf. Those who lived through the period when Huxley and Tyndall seemed to dominate the intellectual world in England, will remember the calm assumption that the ways of thinking among scientific men in the latter part of the nineteenth century would endure forever. Emerson was always looking forward to the long future, and he

knew very well that the centuries would bring innumerable changes. He held fast, however, to the truth of intuition, to the kindness and righteousness of the great First Cause. There was a day when American thinkers became concerned at Emerson's reliance on intuition. They complained that he set it in the place of thought; that he imagined that culture could come without work; that one's own insight could be defended without regard to facts and arguments. While they admitted that under the hands of the master the instrument worked not ill, and recalled Emerson's part in the great struggles of the time, they considered that much of the feeble talk of their own day and much of the lack of thorough, deliberate, careful, exact investigation, was due to the laziness and flimsiness of ill-instructed and slothful disciples. There is now no need to fear for the future of scientific research in America, and it may even seem as if the special work that Emerson did in the enforcement of the spiritual is more needed and more precious than ever before. Emerson warned us not to expect from research what research could never give. The world, he insisted, was too young, by some ages yet, to form a creed. 'Far be from me the impatience which cannot brook the supernatural and the vast. Far be from me the lust of explaining away all that appeals to the imagination and the great presentiments that haunt us. Willingly I, too, say "Hail!" to the unknown, awful powers which transcend the ken of the understanding.'

## II

From Emerson's thought comes his style; they cannot be criticised apart. His friend, Bronson Alcott, in a



sketch of Emerson which shows true insight, says that his is a poet's, not a logician's, power. 'He states, pictures, and sketches, he does not reason.' His style is Runic, Orphic, mystical, aphoristic. He was himself passionately fond of condensation. Letter-writing he disliked as too plain and familiar. He did not marshal his sentences or order his thoughts to reach the desired end. One critic says that he was a lapidary and not an architect; another complains that many of his pages are abracadabra. He is severely condemned by Whately in his preface to Bacon's Essays, for his manifold transgression of rules. We may admit all this without the least compunction. He does sometimes 'cast forth his ice-like morsels.' His utterances must stand or fall by themselves; they cannot be labelled and placed in pigeon-holes. His qualities were excellently defined by Carlyle, as 'brevity, simplicity, softness, homely grace, with such a penetrating meaning, soft enough to be irresistible, going down to the depths and up to the heights, as silent electricity goes.' His phrases are 'rammed with thoughts.' It has been pointed out how he improved Tacitus by translating *Praefulgebant eo ipso quod non visebantur*, into 'They glared through their absences.' His was the power to turn a book into a page, a page into a phrase, and a phrase into a word.

His high imagination and his noble thought were enough to make his style peculiarly impressive and arresting, but it owes its special characteristics to the fact that he did not believe in system. He knew that the system-makers die. Who will ever reprint the whole works of Sir William Hamilton or John Stuart Mill? Are the prose writings of Matthew Arnold really alive? Emerson had no wish to found a school. He would not even accommodate himself

to formulas. He would not narrow the play of his sympathy and the range of his activity. Philosophers who have a living power have won it by something which transcends system and is much more vital than the theories in which it is clothed. The world was too young for system; further, he was avowedly a pioneer. Though books were pleasant companions to him, they were neither counsellors nor intimates. No author was his master: he relied on his intuitions. Though very original, he would never have claimed originality, or tried to assert priority. His readers come to watch his method with the same keen delight with which his hearers watched it. Alcott tells us how in lecturing he would halt at a new paragraph till he contrived to find a key, unlock the drawer, pull it out and display the treasure.

## III

This immediately raises the question of his place as a poet. It is one of the few questions on which the best critical opinion is not perfectly unanimous, the others, perhaps, being whether Lord Lytton was a great novelist ('he is not a genius,' said Emerson), and whether Mrs. Browning was a great poetess. Emerson's ambition was to be a poet. He said himself, in 1835: 'I am born a poet, of a low class, without doubt, yet a poet. It is my nature and my vocation. My singing, to be sure, is very husky and for the most part in prose.'

There should be little difficulty in deciding that his differentia was poetical, and in addition he aspired to verse, because 'we may speak ideal truth in verse that we may not in prose.' His prose passes often into high poetry and even into poetical form. The fine lines,

‘I heard, or seemed to hear, the chiding sea  
Say, “Pilgrim, why so late and slow to come?”’

were originally written in prose, without any thought of their rhythmical character. His own view of expression is instructive. ‘God does not himself speak prose, but communicates with us by hints, omens, inferences, dark resemblances in objects lying around us.’

He says, again, of poetry that : ‘it teaches the enormous force of a few words, and, in proportion to the inspiration, checks loquacity. It requires a splendour of expression which carries with it the proof of great thoughts. The great poets are judged by the frame of mind they induce, and to them, of all men, the severest criticism is due.’

Emerson’s poetry has been criticised with sufficient harshness. Matthew Arnold said that the whole body of Emerson’s verse was not worth Longfellow’s little poem ‘The Bridge.’ This indicated Arnold’s limitations. Another critic has ranked his poetry with Carlyle’s few rough verses, and has spoken of it as the attempt of a seeress to induce in herself the ecstasy which will not spontaneously visit her. But there is little doubt that Emerson is a great and admirable poet, and that this will be increasingly recognised. To compare his work with that of modern English poets is unprofitable. His affinities, as a poet, were Oriental rather than Western. No doubt his poetry is at variance with the ruling canons, but it remains, and they may not remain. He was a poet of the future, showing in their poetic aspect the great generalisations of science. It must be allowed that he fails in the constant felicity and certainty of expression which mark the highest, but many of his stanzas and short pieces are

perfect in their form, and no one has had completer intimacy with nature as the world of beauty and the world of order. His most secret thoughts are expressed under the veil of poetry.

## IV

Emerson's pre-eminent sanity in the midst of cranks is the main secret of his attraction. Many who cannot follow his mysticism are drawn to him by that. He was, on one side of him, one of the shrewdest and coolest of Americans. From his works a book might easily be compiled on the conduct of life, which hard-headed business men would distribute among their employees. For example, what could be more practical than his handling of every-day difficulties in his essay on Power? He takes the case of a man hindered by lack of vital force. He tells him that he must concentrate; he must give mind, soul, heart and body to business. Next, he must have recourse to the power of use and routine. 'Six hours every day at the piano only to give facility of touch, and six hours a day at painting only to give command of the odious materials, oil, ochres and brushes. The masters say that they know a master in music only by seeing the pose of the hands on the keys—so difficult and vital an act is the command of the instrument.'

He never praises the superficial success, the vulgar hero. It would be impossible to exaggerate the stress he lays on conduct, his patient appeal to the nobler imagination, his constant setting forth of the eternal beauty of the Platonic Ideal. 'The next age will behold God in the ethical laws. The eternal creative and informing force is itself moral and ideal. The moral life is not something into which we



drift. It is that whereto we are sent. The moral life is the centre, the genesis and the commanding fact. Morality then, is the conscious adoption of the Universal as the controlling presence of the Universal in the individual.'

' But love me then and only, when you know  
Me for the channel of the rivers of God  
From deep, ideal, fontal heavens that flow.'

He saw in the future a new church based on moral science. It would be at first cold and naked—a babe in a manger again. The church of men would come without shawms or psaltery, or sackbut, but it would have heaven and earth for its beams and rafters, science for symbol and illustration, and it would fast enough gather beauty, music, pictures and poetry. When the mind of man was illuminated, he would throw himself joyfully into the sublime order and become with knowledge what the stones do by structure.

Emerson has been highly and justly valued for the singular insight of his literary judgment. Those who care little for his Transcendentalism, and think that his chin is in the air whenever he speaks of the greater religions, recognise his royal and certain perception of character and genius. Many of his sentences ring like oracles, as when he says of Goethe, ' His affections help him like women employed by Cicero to worm out the secrets of conspirators ' ; and when he says in his *English Traits*, ' The great men of England are singularly ignorant of religion.' He is never rude or scornful or arrogant. A native and inalienable benignity characterises all his judgments, but to the moral idea he is ever faithful. To him genius in man is the God-head in distribution. Genius is religion, and all the great



ages have been ages of faith. 'In the voice of genius I hear invariably the moral tone, even when it is disowned in words.' Of course he is sometimes in error, as when he says that Shelley is never a poet though he is always poetical in mind ; but his lapses are much less frequent than those of Matthew Arnold.

I think it must be admitted that Emerson deliberately shunned the darker aspects of life. He did not face the problem of sin. He has little to say of sorrow, and is far poorer in pathos than his friend Carlyle. Christians may still claim that theirs is the only religion that has effectually measured its strength with sin, sorrow and death. Emerson would have replied to this criticism that he was not a system builder, and that he was not called on to deal with every subject. Perhaps something more may be said. The great griefs of his own life were those of bereavement. His cries after the loss of wife and child, coming from a nature so controlled and calm, are strangely memorable. Other troubles he did not seem to fear. Drudgery, calamity and want, he said, were instructors in eloquence and wisdom ; but he never forgot the loss of his little son, and almost his last words were, 'Oh, that beautiful boy !'

In his last days, like Carlyle, he talked of meeting his dear ones where there is no parting. The approximation to Christianity indicated by such hopes is of the closest kind, and is quite inconsistent with much that Emerson and Carlyle steadfastly taught. As for immortality, he refused to speak clearly. In his youth, writing to John Sterling, then on his death-bed, he said : 'Each of us more readily faces the issue alone than on account of his friend. We find something dishonest in learning to live without friends, while death wears a sublime aspect to each of us.'

Of immortality, the soul, when well employed, was incurious. It was so well that it was sure it would be well. It directed no question to the Supreme Power. The teachings of the High Spirit were abstemious and in regard to particulars negative. But Emerson knew that the soul might be well employed and yet not well, and that for its deepest wound there is but one cure.

## v

The man behind the books, in Emerson's case, was as noble as the noblest of his words. There was no discrepancy between his teaching and his character. From the beginning to the end there is consistent witness to his gracious spiritual charm, his regal suavity, his magnanimity, his patience, his high strain of thought and feeling, his obedience to the heavenly vision. His home life was one of gentle and harmonious peace. 'He was,' said Henry James, Senr., 'a liberal, divine presence in the house.' Harriet Martineau said of him: 'His most transient guests owe to him their experience of what the highest grace of domestic manner may be.' Emerson was nobly faithful to his convictions in the great conflict with slavery. So early as 1844, when the temper of the abolitionists was sufficiently fierce, and they refused even to recognise half converts, they always acknowledged Emerson as their own. In 1864 he wrote: 'I shall always respect the war hereafter. The loss of life, the dreary havoc of comfort and time, are overpaid by the vistas that open to eternal life and eternal law, reconstructing and uplifting society.'

The author of *Mark Rutherford* tells us that, when

Emerson was last in England, he asked him who were his chief friends in America. He replied: 'I find many among the Quakers. I know one simple old lady, in particular, whom I specially honour. She said to me, "I cannot think what you find in me worth notice!" Ah!' continued Mr. Emerson, 'if she had said "yea" and the whole world had thundered "nay" in her ear, she would still have said "yea."''

That was why Mr. Emerson honoured her.

## V

### THE SECRET OF EMERSON

THE attempt to read between the lines is always precarious. The results of such reading ought to be submitted with due modesty, for the secrets of souls are hard to discover. I am convinced, however, that many of our greatest teachers have a doctrine for the initiated which may be called esoteric, and a doctrine for the uninitiated which may be called exoteric. The latter is intended to be understood, and, as a rule, is plainly expressed. The former is for those who understand, and it yields itself only to the most careful and sympathetic study. Sometimes we surprise it when we come upon letters and journals of the dead. Sometimes it is not intended that we should surprise it; that is, the writer is so esoteric that he is content to be understood only of himself and perhaps one other. For example, I am as sure that Shakespeare shuffled his sonnets as if I had caught him in the act. Who is to arrange them and interpret them? Nobody has done so as yet, but some real progress has been made, and it is quite possible that the key may be found which will yet open this lock. The esoteric teaching of Browning is, I venture to think, not so very hard to understand, and, indeed, certain of his interpreters have come very near it. But I am concerned here with the esoteric teaching of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I may be permitted a personal reminiscence. The

foregoing article on Emerson's centenary was written for the *North American Review*. In preparing it I thought I could read with tolerable clearness the esoteric teaching of Emerson and the experiences which lay behind it. But, on the whole, it seemed better to lay that part of the subject aside and to wait for corroboration. Such corroboration has arrived in the handsome volumes published by Messrs. Constable, and containing Emerson's Journals, edited by his son, Edward Waldo Emerson, and his grandson, Waldo Emerson Forbes; and I propose now to say something about Emerson's experience as described by himself and his thinly veiled esoteric teaching.

## I

Emerson was a transcendentalist, but this does not carry us very far. His accomplished biographer, Mr. Cabot, said to me in Boston that no proper definition of transcendentalism has been given. But there are certain characteristics which cannot be mistaken. The transcendentalists desire to call no man master. Emerson said himself: 'The soul is impatient of masters and eager for change. We touch and go and sip the foam of many lives. We cloy of the honey of each peculiar greatness. Every hero becomes a bore at last.' A writer in the *New York Nation* aptly quotes a parallel in Margaret Fuller. (By the way, a complete collection of Margaret Fuller's writings is much to be desired. They are hard to come by.) Margaret used to say that she could keep up no intimacy with books. She loved a book dearly for a while, but as soon as she began to look out a nice morocco cover for her favourite, she was sure to take a disgust to it, to out-



grow it. She had many masters in her time, but even the greatest wearied her. For several years Shakespeare was her very life; then she gave him up.

I think it may also be said that the transcendentalists greatly favoured self-controlled morality, which was, generally speaking, of the Puritan type, simplicity in life, the rule of the will over the emotions; in short, temperance and rigour in every form. This was particularly true of Emerson himself, who set the world an example of high thinking and plain living which must endure. But so great was the restraint with which Emerson expressed emotion that, when he came to this country as a young man, many who had passionately admired his books were repelled by his apparent coldness and distance. There are still undiscerning readers who believe that he had little or no passion. I observe that Dr. Braun, in his *Margaret Fuller and Goethe*, says: 'Emerson was pre-eminently a thinker. He places his greatest emphasis upon the intellect. . . . His was chiefly a life of thought. . . . All this was true, despite (*sic*) his intellectuality and dissent from all traditional formal church creeds. He seldom came into genuine heart-to-heart touch with his fellow-beings, or experienced any real glow of the emotional nature. This fact explains the severe criticisms which he now and then hurled against Goethe.' Nothing could be further from the truth than this. Emerson was a man of vehement affections, so vehement that it took every energy of his will to subdue their manifestations.

## II

But there is a certain apparent truth in the criticisms of Dr. Braun and others. The doctrine of Emerson,

which a careful reader will find in his books, and a reader who is not very careful may easily miss or misinterpret, is that the hazard of passionate love is too great for human life. To risk the whole happiness of existence on a love that may be chilled or withdrawn by death or time is a risk too perilous for a frail and frangible human heart to run. Emerson teaches us that love is great, but that love must not be master. He knows and dreads the devastations wrought by love. He has seen the burnt and bare wildernesses which love made once to rejoice and blossom as the rose, and he would whisper to the young and eager heart: 'Love, but do not love too much. Do not bind up your life and happiness with another life. Be controlled in love as in all else. Friendship is safer a great deal than love, and a friendship between those who are wedded is more tranquil, more safe, than the ardour of a mastering affection.'

I have no space to give more than a very few instances from my proof texts, and for these I go to Emerson's poems, a little book never to be opened without delight. Take, for example, this:

' Leave all for love ;  
 Yet, hear me, yet,  
 One word more thy heart beloved,  
 One pulse more of firm endeavour—  
 Keep thee to-day,  
 To-morrow, forever,  
 Free as an Arab  
 Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid ;  
 But when the surprise,  
 First vague shadow of surmise,  
 Flits across her bosom young,

Of a joy apart from thee,  
 Free be she, fancy free ;  
 Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,  
 Nor the palest rose she flung  
 From her summer diadem.

Though thou loved her as thyself,  
 As a self of purer clay,  
 Though her parting dims the day,  
 Stealing grace from all alive ;  
 Heartily know,  
 When half-gods go,  
 The gods arrive.

Love's hearts are faithful, but not fond,  
 Bound for the just, but not beyond.'

Take these lines, full of infinite meaning :

'Space is ample, east and west,  
 But two cannot go abreast,  
 Cannot travel in it two :'

He repeats himself in the lines :

'Well and wisely said the Greek,  
 Be thou faithful, but not fond :  
 To the altar's foot thy fellow seek,—  
 The Furies wait beyond.'

His deeper heart speaks, however, in these lovely stanzas :

'If my darling should depart,  
 And search the skies for prouder friends,  
 God forbid my angry heart  
 In other love should seek amends.

When the blue horizon's hoop  
 Me a little pinches here,  
 Instant to my grave I stoop,  
 And go find thee in the sphere.'

Take the strange, almost inhuman, loneliness of this :

‘ I have no brothers and no peers,  
And the dearest interferes :  
When I would spend a lonely day,  
Sun and moon are in my way.’

I have purposely chosen passages which represent Emerson as he was in his inmost thought and action, and as he was in his desire. He desired to be a stoic and free. He was, when the hour of bereavement came, more desolate even than the rest.

### III

We know this in part from his lasting sorrow over the death of his little boy, who is made immortal in the grand and tender ‘Threnody.’ But the journal shows us how he passed through the death of his first wife, and with all reverence I take leave to extract a few passages. Emerson’s wife—‘a bright revelation to me of the best nature of woman’—died of consumption at the early age of twenty-one. This is the first entry : ‘Chardon Street, February 13, 1831. Five days are wasted since Ellen went to heaven to see, to know, to worship, to love, to intercede. . . . Reunite us, O Thou Father of our spirits. There is that which passes away and never returns. This miserable apathy, I know, may wear off. I almost fear when it will. Old duties will present themselves with no more repulsive face. I shall go again among my friends with a tranquil countenance. Again I shall be amused. I shall stoop again to little hopes and little fears, and forget the graveyard. But will the dead be restored to me? Will the eye that was closed on Tuesday ever beam again in the fulness of love on me? Shall I ever again be able to connect the

face of outward nature, the mists of the morn, the star of eve, the flowers, and all poetry with the heart and life of an enchanting friend? No. There is one birth, and one baptism, and one first love, and the affections cannot keep their youth any more than men.

'Her end was blessed, and a fit termination to such a career. She prayed that God would speedily release her from her body, and that she might not make this prayer to be rid of her pains, "but because Thy favour is better than life." "Take me, O God, to Thyself," was frequently on her lips. Never anyone spake with greater simplicity or cheerfulness of dying. She said, "I pray for sincerity, and that I may not talk, but may realise what I say." She did not think she had a wish to get well.'

Again: 'Boston, April 4. The dead do not return, and sometimes we are negligent of their image. Not of yours, Ellen. I know too well who is gone from me.'

June 15: 'After a fortnight's wandering to the Green Mountains and Lake Champlain, yet finding you, dear Ellen, nowhere and yet everywhere, I come again to my own place.'

July 6:

'And as the delicate snow

That latest fell, the thieving wind first takes,

So thou, dear wife, must go

As frail, as spotless as those new-fall'n flakes.

Let me not fear to die,

But let me live as well

As to win this mark of death from on high,

That I, with God and thee, dear heart, may dwell.'

July 21: 'When I think of you, sweet friend, wife, angel Ellen, on whom the spirit of knowledge and the spirit



of hope were poured in equal fulness, when I think of you, I am sure we have not said everlasting farewells.'

Then he begins to take comfort, and there is page after page in which he reasons with himself. But in November, 1831, he writes: 'May I not value my griefs, and store them up? I am imprisoned in the forms and uses of every day, and cannot surrender myself to the sweet bitterness of lamenting my beauty, my glory, the life of my life.'

Again: 'December 2. The day is sad, the night is careful, the heart is weighed down with leads. What shall he do who would belong to the universe, "and live with living nature a pure, rejoicing thing"?' And he writes again towards Christmas of 1831: 'It will not do to indulge myself. Philosopher or Christian, whatever faith you teach, live by it.' And so we pass on through discussions on philosophy and war, on poverty and riches, on the best kind of reading, till we come on the amazing, blinding entry: 'March 29, 1832. I visited Ellen's tomb and opened the coffin.'

. . . . .

Such was Emerson's stoicism; such was the innocent secret of his life.

## VI

### WAS THACKERAY A CYNIC ?

WAS Thackeray a cynic? The answer to this question must depend on the definition of the word cynic. Also, the question is twofold. We must look for answer both to his books and his life. It is probable that what an author is in his books he is in his life, but the conclusion is not stringent.

#### I

With the utmost deference to Lady Ritchie, and with a frank admission of the difficulty in which she was placed by her father's express wish, I still think it unfortunate that the biography of Thackeray was not written by her certain and accomplished hand. It is useless to attempt the shrouding of a great literary figure in darkness and in silence. Even when the man seeks and finds seclusion he must be more or less visible and audible. Those who see and hear him will write their impressions, and these impressions may often be misleading. For Lady Ritchie's prefaces we are all deeply grateful, but they are not an entire and perfect substitute for the Memoirs she might have written. However, we know a good deal about Thackeray in one way or another. Lord Rosebery said that in the life of a man of letters his work is the most notable thing, and there is rarely much else to record.

This may be, but it is impossible to sever completely the work and the life. It is out of the life that the work grows, and often we can interpret a book of genius with far more assurance and rightness when we know what was happening to the author at the period during which he wrote it. We can do so with Scott and Shelley, and Charlotte Brontë—to take the first instances that come to my mind; we can do so with Charles Dickens, and perhaps we shall yet be able to do it more fully. In the case of Thackeray there is enough material in the way of biographical facts to help us in understanding a view of life which was to the end unaltered.

## II

It is practically certain that in most instances the bent of life is determined early. I think it is true that men seldom become masters in any department of knowledge unless they have learnt the rudiments of it in their youth. This is the contention of Whitwell Elwin. Taste in literature is acquired before twenty. The superstructure may be carried to any extent in subsequent years, but the foundations must have been laid early. Blomfield, Bishop of London, said to the artist who was a candidate for Orders, and who had not applied himself to the learned languages till he was twenty-five: 'Then your Greek is worth nothing.' Is it not equally true that the earliest and closest intimacies of life determine one's faith or unfaith in God and man and woman? The first experiences of Thackeray were poignantly unfortunate. He was born to a good patrimony, and he lost it, and was obliged to adopt literature as a profession. The money was lost partly by gambling, and partly in newspaper speculations of the

most foolish kind. He exchanged money for experience, and the experience was very bitter. I have read that there is nothing to pity in his early misfortunes. It has been said that he had no valid cause for bitterness except against his own folly, and it is true, no doubt, that his lot was not exceptionally hard in his having to fight an uphill struggle. Most men have to do that, and are the better for it. But Thackeray's was a nature that felt to the last pang the humiliation of his labour. Trollope was inclined to think that Thackeray's early struggles were good for him, better than a sudden elevation to the height of success. But here I venture to differ. It was not good for Thackeray that he was compelled to write so much task work, and it was not good for him that he should come in such close contact with the baser forms of human character. He was cheated, and he was snubbed, and he was impoverished, and in this way a nature originally proud and sensitive was permanently injured.

But, undoubtedly the great calamity of his life was the breaking up of his home by the mental illness of his charming and true wife. She went on living after a fashion many years after her husband was dead. - It was in January 1894 that she passed away at the age of seventy-five. Thackeray died in 1863 at the age of fifty-two. There is a whole world of meaning in all this.

We are treading delicate ground, but the impression left by what we know of young Thackeray is that he was surrounded with a certain zone of chill. He did not find what he might have found, although doubtless he found much that was lovable, and acknowledged it. But did he ever find an angel, or did he ever think he found an angel? The two questions are one. I do not think he

did. Dickens, in spite of the sharp distresses of his boyhood, did not miss the angel. He found her in Mary Hogarth, who died early, and to him she was consecrated for evermore. Dickens in some ways was very hard. When his parents discussed whether they would take him away from the blacking business they were divided, and Dickens records the division in terrible words: 'My father said I should go back no more, and I should go to school. I do not write resentfully or angrily, for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am. But I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget that my mother was warm for my being sent back.' He might have been more pitiful. He might have remembered that his mother had other children who knew the pinch of hunger. But the grand fact remains that Dickens, in one case at least, saw the ideal realised, and thus learned to believe implicitly in the existence of perfect goodness among men and women. It was a belief that brought no difficulties with it. It was a belief that made his sarcasm so hilarious that we cannot help feeling some kindness for its most sharply chastised objects.

Thackeray, I think, had no experience of this kind to carry him through. There was a lacerating sense of wrong, of cheating, of lying, even of villainy. Nobler qualities he saw in abundance, but to his mind they were always more or less associated with weakness, and mostly with weakness of the intellect. He went through life with these convictions, and they are scored and underscored in his books.

I believe that this makes all the difference in the world to the mature view of life. To have known one



saint or angel or hero makes the existence of others credible. To have known none is to miss the best and the truest. An old man said once to me: 'I have never known any one better than myself, and I think very little of myself.' Thackeray would not have adopted this confession in its fulness, but it is not very remote from his creed.

Along with this unfaith went a strange and beautiful melancholy. To many this is the chief attraction of Thackeray—the mild and tranquil sadness which he awakens not by vulgar arts, the manner in which he indicates rather than relates his sparing but sufficient choice of particulars. All these infuse the higher and purer parts of his books with an unfailing charm. Many to whom his satire does not appeal are deeply moved by his true and quiet tenderness. 'He understands the sacredness of sorrow, and never rends away the veil from weeping faces.'

### III

Was he, then, a cynic in his writings? Certainly not a cynic in any proper sense of that word. The word cynic may be variously defined. Dr. Johnson defines it 'of a dog, currish.' That is not Thackeray. Another authority says: 'When we call a man a cynic we mean that he is ill-conditioned and snarling, that he makes savage response to kind advances, that he refuses to believe good of anything or anybody, and that though he is not necessarily malicious if let alone, it is his pleasure and his determination to be let alone.' In that sense assuredly Thackeray was no cynic, either in his books or in himself. He was not a cynic delighting in the evil rather than in the good.

He was not a cynic as Swift was, or Rochefoucauld, or Lord Chesterfield. But can it well be denied that he was a satirist of a severe type? Can it well be denied that he saw more clearly the shortcomings than the attainments of the human heart?

I cannot think so. Henley, who was not an enthusiastic admirer of human nature, would have resented with much bitterness the charge of being genial. He seems to be right when he says: 'Esmond apart, there is scarce a man or woman in Thackeray whom it is possible to love unreservedly or thoroughly respect. That gives the measure of the man, and determines the quality of his influence. He was the average clubman *plus* genius and style. And, if there is any truth in the theory that it is the function of art not to degrade, but to ennoble—not to dishearten, but to encourage—not to deal with things ugly and paltry and mean, but with great things, and beautiful and lofty—then, it is argued, his example is one to deprecate and condemn.' He speaks the mind of those who are smarting under disillusion, mortification, defect, disappointment, envy and malice. *Vanity Fair* we have admitted to be his great book, and it is chiefly great as a satire. Think of Miss Crawley, or Jim or Pitt Crawley, or George Osborne, or Jos Sedley, or Becky, or Lord Steyne. Think of the illustrations. No doubt Thackeray had a certain kindness for Becky, and was proud of her. As he said himself: 'The famous little Becky puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints and lively on the wire.' His insight into what is lovable in human nature is no doubt very deep, but his attention is concentrated on its flaws and blots, and though he can dwell on its disinterestedness, its earnestness, its strength, its purity, its nobler and more

spiritual features, it is not these that he lingers on most lovingly. He has a way of cracking the mirror, or showing some vein of silliness or weakness in characters which we are fain to love with our whole hearts, like Colonel Newcome. What did Charlotte Brontë mean when she said, as she looked at Lawrence's portrait: 'And there came up a lion out of Judah'? Shall we say with Hutton that she thought of that animal transport of retributive passion which the lion symbolises to the imagination, of a generous nobility, and also a destructive fever, of almost animal spite? I do not know, but I think that Thackeray is an author whom in moods of weakness and weariness one does not lightly encounter.

In the passion of her enthusiasm for *Vanity Fair*—the only work of Thackeray which she regarded with unreserved admiration—Charlotte Brontë praised Thackeray for his purity. She contrasted him with Fielding, and said that Fielding was a vulture, while Thackeray was an eagle. It is true that Thackeray wrote with much restraint. He did not stoop on carrion. But was not Bagehot right when he suggested that Thackeray continually came as near as he dared to the border-line that separates the world which may be described in books from the world which it is prohibited so to describe? 'No one,' says Walter Bagehot, 'knows better than this accomplished artist where that line is, and how curious are its windings and turns. The charge against him is that he knows it but too well; that with an anxious care and a wistful eye he is ever approximating to its edge, and hinting with subtle art how thoroughly he is familiar with and how interesting he could make the interdicted region on the other side. He never violates a single conventional rule, but at the same time the shadow

of the immorality that is not seen is scarcely ever wanting to his delineation of the society that is seen—every one may perceive what is passing in his fancy.'

## IV

The man himself was very noble. Lord Rosebery says that he was beloved rather than popular, and this may be true. But he was truly loved by many and by many whose love was precious. 'We know of no death in the world of letters,' said Dr. John Brown, 'since Macaulay's which will make so many mourners—for he was a faithful friend.' No one, we believe, will ever know the amount of true kindness and help, given often at a time when kindness cost much, to nameless, unheard of suffering. A man of spotless honour, of the strongest possible home affections, of the most scrupulous truthfulness of observation and of word, we may use of him his own words of his 'faithful old pen':

'Nor pass the words as idle phrases by;  
Stranger! I never writ a flattery,  
Nor signed the page that registered a lie.'

And to this I need only add the tribute of Tom Taylor as our last thought of the humane and noble Thackeray:

'He was a cynic! By his life all wrought  
Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways;  
His heart wide open to all kindly thought,  
His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!  
He was a cynic! You might read it writ  
In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair,  
In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,  
In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear.  
He was a cynic! By the love that clung  
About him from his children, friends, and kin;  
By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue  
Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within!'



## VII

### ‘THEIR LIGHT ON TERESINA’

YEARS ago, there was a picture shown in London to which the artist gave the name ‘Teresina.’ It was a reminiscence of a pensive, Tyrolese girl, passing along the narrow paths of the ancient village burial-ground, with the memories of the dead and the crosses over their graves crowding upon her sight on every side. The fragrance of flowers was loading the air in the broad sunlight,

‘ And pleasantly, yet mournfully,  
The slanting sunbeams shed  
Their light on Teresina  
And the graveyard of the dead.’

The subject was full of suggestive poetry, which the artist met more than halfway.

The picture and the verses came into my mind in reading *The Journal of Emily Shore*. This I picked up at a Tunbridge Wells bookshop from the sixpenny box. I had never heard of the volume before, but I am glad to have read it. It is entitled simply *Journal of Emily Shore*, and it was published in 1891. It is the story of a girl whose whole span of life did not complete twenty years, and that life budded, blossomed, and faded in the close shade of a quiet English country home. Emily Shore kept the journal regularly for eight years of her teens, and it ended only on her death. It closed in 1839, and the



reader walks throughout in a graveyard not unvisited by the sun, nor unconsolated by the Cross. Said one who examined it : ' She (Emily Shore) will obtain favour with those finer spirits who love what is delicate-textured, exquisite, and unique in human shape, as cognoscenti love a fine bronze, whereof the mould, after serving but once, has been destroyed. She belongs to the order of beings of whom Nature makes no replica.' Emily Shore went to no college ; she passed no examination ; she learned from her parents and for herself. Books attracted her much, and nature even more. She was of a singular maturity even in childhood, a keen observer, a catholic thinker, and the mistress of a pure and simple style. Her father was a clergyman who prepared young men for college, and declined preferment because he could not subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. His daughter regarded him with a devoted affection, which he seems to have deserved. Emily Shore could draw very skilfully, and she wrote little dramas very ingeniously, but perhaps the best of her is in this journal. She died of consumption, and one thinks often in turning over the record of her innocent and pure life, of the French phrase which describes consumption as ' the death of the elect.' Her nobleness and her tenderness seemed to grow as the fell disease progressed, and the end drew near. All over the book is the shadow. ' Teresina ' is sometimes in the sunshine, but she walks in a churchyard, herself stricken for death.

## I

I should like to show the accomplishments of a young lady seventy years ago. There might not have been many

like Emily Shore, but it is quite clear that among her friends there were some. Have we made a great deal of progress ? She writes when she was but seventeen about her studies, October 5, 1837 : ‘ I began regularly to-day the plan of study I intend to pursue for some time. The books I am reading are, *Sketches of Venetian History, India*, in the *Modern Traveller*, and the *History of the United States* in Lardner’s Cabinet Cyclopædia. In the morning, I am up but a short time before breakfast, and am employed in my room in reading the Bible till prayer-time. After breakfast, while my own room is being put to rights, I sit in the drawing-room, employed with the *United States*. I first draw out (from the book) a short chronological abridgment of my preceding day’s lesson ; then I read a fresh portion, of course with maps. Then I go and sit in mamma’s room, painting one or two maps, by way of relaxing my mind sufficiently. Then I go to my own room, and study chronology. This I do by means of my tables of comparative chronology ; I carefully read through a portion of one, and then learn by heart all the dates I think it necessary to remember. This occupies me for some time. Then I take up the Venetian History, doing the same as with that of the United States. I then take up the *India*. As yet I have not got further than the geography, natural history, etc., so I do not yet abridge it. In these readings of history, I make great use both of my chronological tables and of the Society maps, which I take in. All this occupies me till about two or three o’clock ; till tea at eight, I am employed in taking exercise, in desultory reading, in lying down, and in accidental occupations. After tea I read, in the *Biographie Universelle*, the life or lives of one or more distinguished individuals

mentioned in my English studies of the day, which both keeps up my knowledge of French, and impresses the history more strongly on my memory.' Immediately after, she tells us that her desultory reading included Shakespeare and Massinger and Ford. Then she says : ' I find Herodotus (as I can read it quite easily) so very entertaining. It is as easy to me, pretty nearly, as French, only that I have every now and then to look out a word in the dictionary ; and when once I take it up, I find it difficult to lay it down again. Demosthenes is much harder work, and requires close attention.' She found room in her heart for the Bible and for *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet at the time of all these studies she was writing : ' My cough is gradually returning with the approach of winter, more than it did last year. My short breath and palpitations of the heart on moving or lying down are very annoying ; my heart beats so loud at night that it is like the ticking of a clock. I am subject, too, to pains in the chest and side ; and altogether I am very weak and out of health. I feel as if I should never recover the strength of body and unwearied vigour and activity of mind I once possessed. God's will be done, it is meant for the best, though so early in life, when I have but just quitted childhood ; it is a painful prospect, and a severe trial both in endurance and anticipation.'

This marvellous girl had the keenest critical faculty, as is shown by her remarks on *Timon of Athens*. ' I am ill qualified, I know, to pass any opinion on the matter, but if I were to give one, I should say that it was not the work of Shakespeare. Not but that I admire it exceedingly, and think it a noble play, but it seems to me that the style and language are not those of the author of *Hamlet*. The

poetical descriptions, many of which are exceedingly beautiful, seem to me to be written differently; the choice of words, the construction of the sentences, the cast of ideas, are peculiar; the tone of the dialogues between Timon and Apemantus, in particular, is not like that which pervades most of Shakespeare’s scenes. . . .’

Another proof of the justness of her taste is that she detected the genius of Tennyson from the extracts given in an article in the *Quarterly*, intended to turn him into ridicule. ‘These lines,’ she said, quoting the verses,

‘And through damp holts, new flushed with May,  
Ring sudden laughters of the jay,’

‘I am *sure* are good.’ She praised also (though that, too, was laughed at) the image of the river,

‘Which in the middle of the green salt sea,  
Keeps its blue waters fresh for many a mile.’

A writer whom she greatly admired was John Foster.

## II

She had some friends who are still remembered, and she characterised them kindly but acutely. Winthrop Mackworth Praed, the distinguished poet and politician, was her father’s first cousin. She describes him thus: ‘He is a very clever and very agreeable man, about thirty-five years old, as thin as a lath, and almost ghastly in countenance; his pallid forehead, haggard features, and the quick glances of his bright blue eyes are all indications, I fear, of fatal disease. He seems, alas! sinking into a consumption, which his Parliamentary exertions are too likely to hurry forward, if, indeed, he be not in one already. The



profile of Winthrop's face is very like that of Lord Byron, and at times there is a sort of wildness in his look, but the usual expression of his countenance is remarkably sweet.' Praed, I may say, was always delicate. He read classics with Macaulay at Cambridge, and at the Union debates generally took the Radical side in opposition to his teacher. Afterwards, however, he became a Conservative. He died in 1839, two years after Emily Shore met him, leaving poems, which are still in circulation. They show much grace and delicacy, and one of them, at least, 'The Red Fisherman,' shows something more. Emily also met on one occasion the formidable father of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She writes in 1838, when she was on a voyage to Madeira, where she died: 'Captain Jones soon after walked into the dining-cabin where we were sitting, and said, "Mrs. Shore, here is a gentleman who declares he knows you." With these words he produced Mr. Barrett, who was going as far as Gravesend, and who, as we were before aware, had known, or at least had met, mamma when she was a girl at Casterton. He shook hands with us most cordially, and very much pleased us with his frank, good-natured countenance. He resembles the portrait of Porson; and we all stared when Captain Jones said, "Now would you believe it, he had the assurance to tell me the other day that he was turned fifty?" In fact he looks little more than thirty.'

## III

There was a little love idyll in Emily Shore's short life. The pretty, pathetic incidents of the story are told with great reserve. What she had to reveal of actual incident she told only to her mother, and of her own feelings she



never spoke even to her, except in a few slight words on her deathbed. What she had to give in return for love, who can say?

‘It was scarcely her time to love; beside  
Her life had many a hope and aim.’

And in truth her heart was almost as full as it could hold with her strong love for her parents. However, we read that ‘In the evening we met Mr. Henry Warren, who frequently walks over from Torquay. I was very much pleased with what I saw of him; he is decidedly a great improvement on the race of young men of the present day. He is a handsome young man of three-and-twenty, dark and sunburnt, with curly black hair.’ This was a good beginning, and it went on: ‘Mr. W. and I had a great deal of very interesting conversation, chiefly about poetry and natural scenery.’ ‘Mr. H. W. spread his handkerchief for me to sit on, and good naturedly held my parasol over me while I sketched. We returned to Torquay. It was a sweet evening, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Mr. W. and I were behind as before, Maria and R. going on much faster. We conversed as before on all sorts of subjects, and I was quite sorry when the journey was at an end.’ ‘We took up Mr. Henry Warren into the fly at a little distance from Torquay, he having walked on before. I enjoyed conversing with him very much. He talked a great deal about his intended journey to Switzerland, which he means to begin next week. He was continually saying how he longed to have me with him, that we might climb the mountains and enjoy the lovely scenery together. He says that he shall be quite alone, with nobody to talk to who can understand his feelings. He means to corre-

spond with Richard. "I must not write to *you*," he said to me, "so I shall write to your brother." He then begged me to write to him just three lines in a postscript to Richard's answers, saying he should value them so much; but this I am afraid I cannot do.' Then: 'Mr. W. wished me very much to net him a silk purse. I promised to do so if I had time before he went; but now finding that I shall not, having many other things to do, I purpose making him instead several marks for books, of coloured and gilt paper, which will be useful to him in his studies, and will not take me much time in making.' Then: 'He wishes me to send him information on literary subjects, the names of books which I should wish him to read, and the best course of study for him to adopt. He also begged me to write out for him some of my favourite little poems, which I know by heart, that he may learn them too.' 'I imagine he speaks more confidentially to me than to any one else; he says he has told no one so much about himself, his feelings, views and wishes.' The editor tells us that this idyll was stopped with much suffering to at least one of the parties, and some painful correspondence, by paternal prudence. But the name recurs, though at length the shadow of the nearing end fell upon everything. She went to Madeira, which was then a resort of consumptives, but in vain. The last entries of the journal are May 18: 'On the 4th of April I broke a blood-vessel, and am now dying of consumption, in great suffering, and may not live many weeks. God be merciful to me a sinner.

'God be praised for giving me such excellent parents. They are more than any wishes could desire, or than any words can sufficiently praise. Their presence is like sunshine to my illness.

‘I have suffered much with lying long, and have just been put on our hydrostatic bed. Relief wonderful. My portrait has just been taken ; they say excellent.

‘I linger on in the same way, and do not yet sink. Alas ! I can never see Richard again.

‘I feel weaker every morning and I suppose I am beginning to sink ; still I can at times take up my pen. I have had my long black hair cut off. Dear papa wears a chain made from it. Mamma will have one too.’ The portrait was taken by a young artist, and one can see that the sweet, wasted face, which is the frontispiece of the book, was a true likeness. The masses of hair which she had for weeks during her illness persisted in dressing for herself, are cut off, and make her face look like a child’s. The eyes are bright and gentle, and the geranium colour is fixed upon the cheek. She was nineteen years old when she died.

## VIII

### THE CONVERSATION OF EDMUND BURKE

JUDGING by the testimony of his contemporaries, Edmund Burke was one of the very few men who should have had a Boswell. When we revel in the rich feast of Boswell's Johnson we are tempted to forget that the book is as much the work of Johnson as it is the work of Boswell. The Boswell method applied in other directions would probably have failed simply because there are few indeed whose stream of conversation is so full and various as to justify a continual record. One may imagine that if Macaulay had had a Boswell the excellent biography of Sir George Trevelyan would have been surpassed. If any one had been capable of writing down the talk of George Meredith there would have been something for posterity to ponder; the phrasing would have been as striking at least as the thought. Burke unquestionably was a very prince among talkers, and fortunately I am able to give some specimens of his sayings from a book very little known.

#### I

Before doing so I may mention certain references in Boswell. In 1772, when Johnson was sixty-three, he argued that people who disagree on a capital point can live in friendship together by avoiding that point. 'Why,

sir, you must shun the subject as to which you disagree. For instance, I can live very well with Burke : I love his knowledge, his genius, his diffusion, and affluence of conversation ; but I would not talk to him of the Rockingham party.' Boswell himself dissented from Johnson's view that Burke had no wit. Johnson allowed him great variety of knowledge, store of imagery, and copiousness of language, but he refused to say that he ever made a good joke. 'What I most envy Burke for, is his constantly being the same. He is never what we call hum-drum ; never unwilling to begin to talk, nor in haste to leave off.' Boswell said, 'Yet he can listen.' 'No,' said Johnson, 'I cannot say he is good at that. So desirous is he to talk, that, if one is speaking at this end of the table, he'll speak to somebody at the other end. Burke, sir, is such a man, that if you met him for the first time in the street where you were stopped by a drove of oxen, and you and he stepped aside to take shelter but for five minutes, he'd talk to you in such a manner, that, when you parted, you would say, this is an extraordinary man. Now, you may be long enough with me, without finding anything extraordinary.' Boswell was of opinion that Burke had true wit, and gave certain examples, admitting that they failed to do full justice to Burke's lively and brilliant fancies. He thought that wit was one of the many talents which Burke possessed, talents so various and extraordinary that it was very difficult to ascertain precisely the rank and value of each.

Again, Johnson said in 1780 that men might be very eminent in a profession without our perceiving any particular power of mind in them in conversation. 'It seems strange that a man should see so far to the right, who sees



so short a way to the left. Burke is the only man whose common conversation corresponds with the general fame which he has in the world. Take up whatever topic you please, he is ready to meet you.' Sometimes Dr. Johnson was a little grudging. He said of Burke on one occasion that he was not so agreeable as the variety of his knowledge would otherwise make him, because he talked partly from ostentation. Yet he remarked later on: 'Burke's talk is the ebullition of his mind; he does not talk from a desire of distinction, but because his mind is full.'

After all, I have not been able to find many first-rate examples of Burke's talk in Boswell. The best was perhaps his characterisation of Croft's *Life of Dr. Young* in the *Lives of the Poets*. This was revised by Dr. Johnson, who thought it too long. Boswell considered that it had no small share of merit, and displayed a pretty successful imitation of Johnson's style. When he mentioned this to Burke he opposed the judgment vehemently, exclaiming: 'No, no, it is not a good imitation of Johnson; it has all his pomp without his force; it has all the nodosities of the oak without its strength.' This was an image so happy, that one might have thought he would have been satisfied with it; but he was not. And setting his mind again to work, he added, with exquisite felicity, 'It has all the contortions of the Sibyl, without the inspiration.'

I like also Goldsmith's saying when Boswell was enlarging about Johnson's wonderful abilities. He exclaimed, 'Is he like Burke, who winds into a subject like a serpent?' 'But,' said Boswell, with exquisite fatuity, 'Johnson is the Hercules who strangled serpents in his cradle.'

## II

To this I may add some illustrations from a little book, *Extracts from Mr. Burke's Table Talk at Crewe Hall*, written down by Mrs. Crewe, and printed for private circulation in 1863. It was a contribution by the late Lord Houghton to the Miscellanies of the Philobiblion Society. Mrs. Crewe was an intimate friend of Burke. She was cultured and appreciative, and she made notes of Burke's talk when he was a visitor at Crewe Hall. Talking of conversation Burke remarked: 'Dull prozers are preferable to dull jokers. The first require only passive acquiescence; but the last harass the spirits and check their spontaneous action. Common sense should be paid more respect to than uncommon sense, which can seldom improve the happiness of human life. Clumsy satire, such as of late has been called quizzing, ought to be discouraged by leaders in fashions, as it tends to produce equality of mind, quite dangerous to the understanding, which should early be taught respect for truth even in trifles, subordination of mind being as necessary as subordination of rank.' He went on: 'Great disgust at the pedantry of the last age in some of the higher classes produced at last an insipid languor in conversation very distressing now to general society, and very apt to check all social intercourse of mind and goodwill amongst young contemporaries.'

He had a high opinion of anecdotes in conversation, as is shown by the following: 'Mr. Burke, however, was sometimes heard to say that the extreme of rattling (as it was called) often produced much barrenness in discourse, and that the Irish might be said frequently to hold conversations below the par of their understandings. Vulgar-

ness and illiberality of mind infinitely more odious than vulgarness in language or style. He wished that more indulgence should be bestowed upon story-tellers than is common now. A story to be good, said he, should be a little long sometimes, and it is bad policy to reject the stories of many men, because they may have talent for narration and nothing else; and, in general, when a man offers you his story, it is the best part of his conversation he has to give you.'

Speaking of Fox's attachment to France, he said: 'Yes, his attachment has been great and long; for, like a cat, he has continued faithful to the house after the family has left it.' On its being remarked that no persons held together for any long continuance who called themselves democrats, taking the fact at once for granted, he replied, 'Birds of prey are not gregarious.' He said that Mr. Windham 'often reminded him of Eddystone lighthouse dashed at by waves, but continuing steadily to give light to surrounding objects.'

Mrs. Crewe also tells us that Burke was a great admirer of Swift's humour, particularly of his letters to Stella, 'which he praised for their genuine graceful ease; but on some friends observing that many who had cheerful minds, and much taste for humour, could not relish their playful epistles in early life, but had grown to like them afterwards, he said, Early life had generally a serious turn—that it was in youth the reasoning powers were strongest, though the stock was too small to make any show with. That the imagination became strongest after youth, and that the best poetry which men wrote was when they were advanced in life—that imagination, however ready it was to come forward, could not be exercised without a stock of know-

ledge, and that the active faculties of man were at first employed in selecting and rejecting materials for that stock. Referring to the practice of riding, he thought that lounging rides on horseback had been of late one of the great checks to economy in all families among the gentry. Very few younger brothers, said he, are able to keep two horses, and two horses must be kept when they are in the habit of riding every day ; and if they are neat and elegant in their ideas (as all gentlemen ought to be), this expense incurs that of an additional servant, besides necessary accoutrements, such as saddles, bridles, boots, etc., which create endless bills, and will run a man very fast into debt. Few, besides elder brothers, he said, ever thought of riding in the middle of the day, except on particular occasions, till within the last thirty years. Men, indeed, who possessed parks, farms, or other objects to look after out of doors, kept horses in their stalls also for pleasure ; but men who could have no other object but that of sauntering made more use of their own limbs, and found fitter employment for both their time and money.'

He was on the side of Gibson in advocating the use of gilding in architecture. 'Mr. Burke objected much to that false refinement (which he called it) of this age, which had banished gilding from the ornamental parts of buildings, and even sculpture. He said that marbles and other materials of every colour, were blended best by gold ; that gold is the colour of light, and produces in a great degree the same effects as sunshine ; that our very language confesses the pleasure we feel from the gilded objects we behold ; that many years ago Charles Fox and he together lamented the loss of true taste in England on this point. That gilding was so much to the taste of the ancients, that



they ornamented their favourite statues with gold, and that there are remains of it to be seen on the Venus of Medicis—that she was sometimes styled Aurea Venus on that account. That the Romans gilded their ceilings and other parts of their fine buildings more than the Greeks, because they had more gold; but in all former ages gold was used for the purposes of ornament when it could be obtained.'

He deprecated the overthrow of the Church of Rome, saying: 'How is it possible to suppose that, if the Catholic religion were destroyed, the Protestant religion could alone be able to support Christianity! The numbers are on the side of Catholics. Jacobins therefore persecute Catholics more than any other sect; they know that to hew down the trunk out of which the branches shoot is their best policy.'

I may add that Mrs. Piozzi described Burke as a reckless, haphazard talker, troubling himself little about the consequences of what he said. Mrs. Horneck, the mother of the Jessamy Bride, hearing Burke praising an island in the West Indies, invested a large part of her slender income in purchasing land there. She lost it. 'How fatal,' said Mrs. Piozzi, 'has your eloquence proved to poor Mrs. Horneck!' 'How fatal her folly!' replied he. 'Ods! my life, must one swear to the truth of a song?'



## IX

### PROFESSOR DAVID MASSON

DR. DAVID MASSON, Historiographer Royal for Scotland, and Emeritus Professor of English Literature at Edinburgh University, died in Edinburgh on October 6, 1907. He had reached his eighty-sixth year. In him we have lost the last great figure of the mid-Victorian literature, a man great in himself, great also in his works. He was an Aberdonian in the best sense, and in more than the best sense. He had from the beginning an extraordinary strength of constitution, a strong intellect, and, above all, the power of labour, and the love of labour. His thoroughness in everything was marked from his student days. As was natural in an Aberdonian, he had an absorbing interest in history, and biography, and philosophy—indeed, in the whole range of literature. What is not so characteristic of his race was his remarkable and uniform geniality. This was combined with an unmistakable dignity, which made it impossible for the most foolish to take liberties with him. But his good-will and charity were boundless. They displayed themselves in his words and in his actions. He had a singularly tenacious memory, seizing and holding fast whatever interested him. And in conversation he was amazingly rich, never uttering a trivial sentence, and to old age perfectly clear as to facts and dates and impressions. Dr. Masson had also a robust clarity of style, and

no small measure of imagination. His forceful personality thrills through all he wrote. It is not wonderful that such a man should have been successful in everything he undertook. Whatever work fell to his lot was done better than any one else could have done it. As an author, as an editor, and as a professor, he attained easily the foremost rank. But perhaps the most notable thing about him was his grand character. He had a noble love of freedom and of virtue. His zeal for righteousness was a consuming flame, but it never led him into extravagance or folly. It is not wonderful that such a man should have lived and died amid universal love and reverence. None of his contemporaries has left behind him a more splendid and stainless name.

Above all, he was eminently charitable. He would speak with as much cynicism as was possible to him of 'those who are so fond of sorting their fellow creatures accurately beforehand into the two divisions of the sheep and the goats, and who it is pretty certain will find themselves mistaken in not a few instances on both sides when the partition comes to be made by the true authority.' This is a very characteristic utterance.

I shall make no attempt to summarise a literary and public career so long, so diversified, so continually active. David Masson was a man of three cities: Aberdeen his birthplace, Edinburgh, and London. He loved them all, but Edinburgh was the dearest, and it was in Edinburgh that the chief part of his life-work was done.

#### I

Of Aberdeen I shall say little, as he has written the story fully in his *Recollections of Three Cities*. The men who

most impressed him in early years were Dr. James Melvin, the famous Latinist, and Dr. Kidd, the Irish preacher. On these he has written chapters as graphic as any that ever came from his pen. Among his college contemporaries were Alexander Bain, the philosopher, and W. G. Blaikie, who became a minister and professor in the Free Church. Blaikie describes his friend at eighteen: 'He looked even younger; his cheeks were round and his face smooth and hairless; he had a most guileless and unassuming bearing, and a very affectionate heart, and showed a vigour of intellect that soon asserted itself, and won for him a high place in the esteem of his fellow students and professors, particularly Chalmers.' We are anticipating. Masson, after a remarkably brilliant career in Aberdeen, went to Edinburgh to commence his Divinity course. Both Masson and Bain were in the strongest sympathy with the party who ultimately formed the Free Church, and after Masson finished his Divinity course, he was called to fill the editorial chair of the *Aberdeen Banner*, a newspaper started in the interests of the non-intrusion party. Blaikie says: 'He was a very young man to fill such a post, but the courage at least of the youth showed itself in his determination that, whatever his paper might be, it should neither be dull nor tame. Cautious Aberdeen was not prepared for the startling and eminently defiant tone in which he dealt with all and sundry that were against him, *Aberdeen Herald*, Court of Session, and House of Lords included.' With Bain, Masson maintained his association to the last, and he said of him that he was a very true friend.

## II

When Masson first went to Edinburgh as a Divinity student, he came under the most powerful influence of his life, that of Dr. Chalmers. Never was he more eloquent than when he talked of the illustrious divine. Chalmers he thought the greatest Scotsman between Scott and Carlyle. There was such a fire in his nature that one verily believed that when he spoke some physical effluence went out of him. Chalmers's general demeanour was that of a placid humility. He was a most attentive listener, and would say: 'That is a very interesting story.' Dr. Chalmers was not successful in examinations. His idea as a professor was to get his students to study the great books of theology, but he never quite succeeded in this. Of English writers his favourites were Robert Hall, John Foster, and Isaac Taylor. Chalmers was on very friendly terms with Taylor, but he was displeased with the title of one of his books—*The Physical Theory of Another Life*. Said the Doctor, 'Ugh! We can know nothing about that, nothing. Where Scripture ends speculation ought to pause.' Mrs. Chalmers was a comely lady, and made her husband a good wife. When Edward Irving went to London he wished to publish a very eulogistic sketch of Chalmers, which he sent to the subject. Mrs. Chalmers read it, and struck out all the grossly exaggerated passages. Mrs. Chalmers seldom appeared at the students' breakfast, but Dr. Masson remembered that once she came, and Chalmers shouted with joy, 'Come away, Mrs. Chalmers, my dear.' Chalmers was apt to be somewhat silent in conversation, but at times he would become vehemently excited, and he never said anything commonplace. Once,



conversing with Isaac Taylor, he brought his chair nearer and nearer, till Taylor found himself with his back at the wall.

Another notable friend of these days was De Quincey. Masson met him first at the house of Tommy Thomson, the editor of the supplementary volume of Chambers's *Eminent Scotsmen*. He has told, in his monograph on De Quincey, some of his recollections. Once Masson was walking with Bain in a favourite lane leading to Craigmock. They met a little man on the road. Masson nudged Bain and said, 'That 's De Quincey.' They gazed at him, and he hurried past. Then they looked round and found him looking round at them. When he saw them he immediately bolted, thinking perhaps that they were creditors.

Of the young men who were then studying for the ministry in Edinburgh, the most remarkable, in Masson's opinion, was John Cairns. Cairns was a favourite pupil of Sir William Hamilton. Masson admired Hamilton, calling him the greatest of the Scotch philosophers, and the most powerful man of his time in Edinburgh. You could see the grip of his fingers on every strong mind in the city. Cairns was associated with Masson in the Diagnostic Society. He spoke with a mighty intellectual grasp on every subject he took up. But he conceived it his duty to devote himself to preaching, and he had no other ambition. Cairns's book on *Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century* showed, in Masson's opinion, a stronger head than Leslie Stephen's. In these days Cairns was very subject to mesmerism. One of his friends at that time was a very clever man—John Nelson, afterwards of Greenock. Nelson had gone to see a mesmerist, and came back much excited,



showing the company in which Cairns was the passes of the mesmerist, when, to the astonishment of everybody, Cairns came under the influence. They could do anything with him. Once they asked him to throw himself out of the window, and they had difficulty in holding him back. The peculiarity of Cairns was that he remembered on recovering all that had taken place during the mesmeric trance. On one occasion he said: 'Do not waken me, I am in a universe of peacocks' feathers.' Masson noted the striking beauty of the passage in Cairns's life, in which he apostrophises Rome after a visit to it, and he had much to say on the picture of Cairns's father's home, revealing depths of poverty more pathetic than those in the early homes of Burns and Carlyle, but a poverty grandly borne.

Masson never spoke to Macaulay, but twice heard him speak in Edinburgh, and on both occasions heard him surpassed by speakers who followed. The first time was on the hustings at an Edinburgh election in the High Street, which was full of people. Another speaker was a Chartist, who came forward, but did not go to the poll. Macaulay's speech was quite eclipsed by the Chartist's. Answering the charge that the Chartists were Conservative, the orator said: 'The Chartists Conservative! The Chartists Conservative! Many of the Chartists have not a bed to lie on; many of the Chartists have no food to eat. The Chartists Conservative! Merciful God, the Chartists have nothing to conserve!' This produced a tremendous impression. The next time was at the opening of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution. It was a good enough speech. Dr. Guthrie moved the vote of thanks, and hardly uttered six sentences, but they went home as Macaulay's laboured periods did not. Masson had with him Agostino

Ruffini. Ruffini turned to him and said: 'That man *can* speak.' Guthrie's oratory was most effective. Speaking of Andrew Thomson, he said: 'I have never passed Andrew Thomson's tomb. I know not what inscription is written there, but I know what inscription ought to be written there. It should be the inscription the Carthaginians wrote over the grave of Hannibal: "We vehemently desired him in the day of battle."'

Masson remembered always the impression that Edinburgh made upon him when he first came from Aberdeen. The unique beauty of its situation never palled upon him, and he delighted in the larger liberty of the place and the new friends he soon made. The difference in dialect also struck him. Thus in Aberdeen the people said 'fader' for 'father.' In Edinburgh they said 'fayder.' In Aberdeen they said, 'There it is,' and in Edinburgh, 'There is 't.' There were many other points of the same kind.

### III

It was, however, in London that he first came to his own. He was a member of a club called the Museum Club, to which T. K. Hervey, then editor of the *Athenæum*, belonged. Hervey came up to him one day and asked him to do reviewing, and afterwards he was a regular contributor. Hervey said to him, 'If I send you a book by my own brother, and you do not like it, you are to say so frankly.' Then he worked for Chambers. Through John Robertson, editor of the *Westminster Review*, who took his first London lodgings for him, he became acquainted with Carlyle and John Stuart Mill. He became Professor of

English Literature at University College in succession to Clough, whom he described as 'a man of very shy demeanour, of largish build about the head and shoulders, with a bland and rather indolent look, and a notable want of alertness in his movements.' At University College he had good fellowship with some of the professors. De Morgan, Sharpey, and he used to meet regularly in the Combination room and discuss everything. De Morgan he considered a most interesting conversationalist with a keen sense of humour, and eminently successful in teaching attentive students. De Morgan had a great respect for his antagonist, Sir William Hamilton, and gladly received from Masson a portrait of him. Frank Newman was then at the college, a crank, but a thoroughly conscientious crank. Among Masson's students were many who became well known—Lord Herschell, Dr. Clifford, and Dr. Robert Spence Watson. Masson's power of work in these days must have been unique. He edited with signal ability and success *Macmillan's Magazine*, and also for a year or two a weekly review similar to the *Athenæum*, called the *Reader*. To this paper he contributed a literary leader every week, and it very nearly succeeded. Then his friendships were with the best men of the day, Carlyle the first, and the most venerated. Of Carlyle he has written in his most valuable little book published after Froude. He remembered the first meeting with the Carlyles. Mrs. Carlyle asked her husband whether the Plymouth Brethren were orthodox. Carlyle very strongly asserted their orthodoxy. Always a vehement lover of liberty, Masson became associated with Mazzini and Kossuth. Of Mazzini he would say that the word of all others to be applied to him was *tenacity*. He would discuss questions courteously, but

never changed his opinion. If you argued about the merits of Meyerbeer and Beethoven he would hear you to the uttermost, and then quietly reassert his view. He had great intellectual ability; he never could have been a member of a constitutional government; he was too imperious for that. Kossuth never forgot that he had been director of Hungary. He always carried himself with dignity, and he was, what Mazzini was not, a powerful speaker. He remembered him once dwelling on the services of the rank and file. He said that the leaders had their reward and their honour, but the rank and file had none. They had only the approval of their own consciences, and still they were faithful. He closed by saying, 'So they lived and so they died, these nameless demigods.'

But the work by which Masson will mainly be remembered is his *Life of Milton*, which was planned in London. It is a book that can never be superseded. It is based on the most accurate and laborious research. The work was mainly done in the Record Office. He had to go over masses of manuscripts not then arranged. He believed that he went over everything, and missed nothing relevant to the subject. He had also to work among the pamphlets, and at the King's Library in the British Museum. He made immense notebooks often far in advance of the actual volume he was doing, and got on slowly. He gave himself intervals of rest, and when he was working had so many hours a day, though there was more to show at the end of one day than another. This depended on the handling of the materials. He did not grow weary of his task, but he had a distinct feeling of exhilaration when he finished the last volume. The *Life of Milton* is the great history of Puritanism, and it will remain so not merely



on account of the author's profound research, but because of its literary power and splendour, and the vehement passion for religious liberty which inspires it throughout.

The name of Herbert Spencer ought not to be left out in any list of Masson's friends. He had a profound regard for the great philosopher, and described him as a most lovable man, and the very incarnation of integrity. When Spencer died his old associate was much struck by a phrase in the description of his funeral in the *Standard*—'A long spire of white smoke ascended from the crematorium.'

## IV

Dr. Masson found his true sphere when he became Professor of English Literature in Edinburgh University. To the pages of *The British Weekly* long ago Sir J. M. Barrie contributed an imperishable sketch of his beloved and revered teacher. Masson was an ideal professor, and thousands of men bore his mark. In Edinburgh he made a splendid contribution to Scottish history in editing afresh his work in connection with the *Privy Council Register* of Scotland. Fourteen volumes were prepared by him, and those who are qualified to judge place them in the first rank. Dr. Masson loved history. He had an eye for every fact, and could make it live. He was wont to insist that every new dictionary of biography should drop none of the names in previous dictionaries. He suggested that a test for a dictionary of biography would be whether it contained the names of Timothy Tittlebat, who wrote a copy of verses on the occasion of the visit of the Shah of Persia's chief eunuch to Queen Elizabeth's private chaplain, and was supposed to be in connection with Ben Jonson ;



and Captain Runky Snuggles, who led a company of Roundheads at the siege of Drogheda, and probably went afterwards to America to annoy Jonathan Edwards. 'You don't know how these mere dead frogs hung on the iron railings of the past seem to twitch their limbs as I gaze, and what significance I find in their twitchings.'

I should have wished to say much about David Masson's critical work. It is not known as it should be to the present generation. He wholly rejected the style of Jeffrey, who applied to book after book the 'alternate beauty and blemish principle.' From great books he read back to the heart behind them, to the real thoughts that were occupying or besetting the writer. He searched and thought and toiled till he could add a deliberate and distinct picture of the portrait gallery of the dead. Because of this, and because of the power and spirit with which he accomplished his task, many of Dr. Masson's essays must live.

## X

### LETTERS OF SAMUEL BROWN TO GEORGE GILFILLAN

THROUGH the great kindness of a friend in Scotland, I have been allowed to read a little packet of letters addressed by Samuel Brown to George Gilfillan between the years 1844 and 1850. A few extracts which I am permitted to give will, I am sure, interest many. But it may be well that I should preface them by a brief account of Samuel Brown, who, though a prominent man in his day, has a very small niche in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and is quite unknown to the general reader.

The materials at my disposal include first an admirable essay by Gilfillan himself, written after his friend's death, and published in the *Scottish Review* for October, 1857; Reminiscences by Professor David Masson, in *Macmillan's Magazine* for May, 1865; and the volumes published after Brown's death in 1858, entitled *Lectures on the Atomic Theory* and *Essays Scientific and Literary*, by Samuel Brown. These were edited by his widow. An independent tribute was also written by his cousin, Dr. John Brown, the author of *Rab and His Friends*.

From these sources of information we learn that Samuel, a scion of a family already remarkable in the South of Scotland as the Browns of Haddington, entered the University of Edinburgh in the winter of 1832-3 as a

medical student. He never seems to have contemplated the actual practice of the profession, but to have attached himself to it purely as a student of science. Among the students of the time were some notable men, particularly Edward Forbes, who died a Professor in Edinburgh University in his fortieth year. His death disappointed the highest hopes of the scientific world. Brown and Forbes were members of a kind of Rosicrucian fraternity, under the name of the Universal Brotherhood of the Friends of Truth, which was partly festive and partly serious. The members had a certain common property of ideas and speculations. Brown's hobby was chemistry, and from an early date he spent much time over retorts and crucibles, indulging in the boldest speculations. Gilfillan and he became acquainted in 1841. At that time, Gilfillan was a young man of twenty-eight, a Nonconformist minister in Dundee. Both Brown and Gilfillan were attached to the same denomination, and were full of enthusiasm and ambition. Carlyle was then the hero of both. In 1842 Brown took up his residence in Portobello, in an eccentric abode. On the outer door was inscribed the mystic word Hades. There were two apartments up a dark and winding stair, one a sleeping-room, library, and larder all in one, the other the laboratory. There Brown pursued his researches, and after the hours of labour were over, gave himself to friendship and fun. In 1843, when he was twenty-six years old, his chemical speculations assumed a definite form in his mind, and he delivered in Edinburgh a course of four lectures on the Atomic Theory. There was a very brilliant audience, including Chalmers, Jeffrey, Sir William Hamilton, George Combe, Ferrier, Simpson, and others. At the close of the lecture Chalmers, with even

more than his usual glowing earnestness, returned the lecturer, amid acclamations, a vote of thanks, and saluted him as the Coleridge of physicists. In the same year the Chair of Chemistry in the University of Edinburgh became vacant, and there was a general desire in the city that Samuel Brown should be appointed. But his speculations were challenged by the highest authorities in the chemical world, and Brown staked his claim to the Chair, not on his general reputation, but upon these. In the end he went to Dublin to have his experiments tested by Dr. Kane. His failure was total, and he came back to resign his pretensions to the Chair. I am not competent to explain the exact nature of his theory. Anyhow, this was the turning-point of his life. As Dr. Masson says, all faith in his experiments vanished from the world of chemistry.

Brown, however, was undaunted. He came back to Portobello, and wrote articles in the *North British Review*, the *Westminster Review*, the *Eclectic*, and other periodicals, pursuing his studies meantime. He also published a tragedy, *Galileo Galilei*, and in 1849 he married. It was then that the disease which ultimately carried him off began to appear. Illness and disappointment somewhat dulled his pleasure in life, but he showed great courage. Of his later years we are told that they were years of great pain—of much spiritual and mental anxiety, of fitful literary effort, but years during which he seemed 'drawing nearer and nearer to God.' He passed away on Saturday, September 20, 1856. 'He died prematurely, and he died a defeated man; although in an attempt so bold that his very failure in it is fame.'

The first letter I use is dated Haddington, May 3, 1844. Gilfillan had made a beginning in literature by writing his

'Gallery of Literary Portraits' in the *Dumfries Herald*, which was edited by his friend Thomas Aird, the poet. He was naturally anxious to publish these essays in a volume, and had evidently applied to Brown, who had used his influence with Blackwood. The letter runs :

DEAR GILFILLAN,—Ferrier and Wilson have now both had your MSS. in hand. They unite in saying, however, that they will be better able to offer such suggestions as may occur to them when it (the work) is in proof, and accordingly they refrain from saying anything at present. They are of opinion that you are imprudently (if not unjustly) harsh to Lockhart. Meanwhile, Wilson has gone to the country for some weeks, and Ferrier seems to expect *me* to negotiate the publication with the Blackwoods. Accordingly your manuscript will be in Blackwood's hands on Monday, along with a letter from myself setting forth the Professor's wishes and opinion, speaking of Aird and Ferrier, and (with your leave) urging it on my own responsibility. I will not let the matter go to sleep, for I will call at Blackwood's the first day I am in town. . . . I saw much of Kean and his wife, the celebrated Ellen Tree. One night he sat up with me till half-past two relating the whole story of his life. He was very poor, his mother and he living literally on potatoes once ; but now he is rich, with £50 a night. I wish I were in my gossiping mood, that I might paint him to you. You know a man totally and for ever different from one's self is 'an angel unawares' to one ; and that is the secret of my deep interest in Faucit and the Keans. Mrs. Kean is full of womanly judgment and sense of propriety, and a most finished actress.

The next letter is dated Haddington, May 9, 1844, and deals with the same subject :

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have conceived a fear of handing



your MSS. with a letter from this distance to Mr. Blackwood, and deem it better to wait till I get to town, that I may in person wait on him, appoint a day to call on him again, and so have a definite reply, without the hap of delay. I believe it will save time in the end. I trust you approve of this. My brother arrives to-morrow and leaves on Saturday se'en night. I remain behind (to solace my beloved old mother) till the Monday morning, and will go to Blackwood that day. If then you postpone your visit till the week after next, you will see both Mr. Craig and myself, and at the same time learn Blackwood's decision. You and I will go to him together to make the final arrangements. But no fear, for the high reputation you have now achieved will render the publication of your work no difficulty.

Well can I understand your delight in Mr. Robertson's unexpected visit, having enjoyed the like myself. He's a fine fellow. I've heard nothing of the 'tea and turn-in' yet, and do not know whether I will be able to join your 'merrie companie.' I hope so, but hardly expect it, great tho' this pleasure would be.

As for my *Nature and Man*, it is stopped for the present. I have been urgently requested to be a contributor to the *North British Review*, and the *Domi res angustae* compel me to comply. I will have articles in Nos. 2 and 3 both, so that I have work before me. My first article is on *The Whole Progress of Chemistry, from the Greek Physicists down to Dalton*, £16 a sheet.

Mr. Robertson became well known as Dr. W. B. Robertson of Irvine. Then comes a gap. Blackwood had evidently declined the book. It is very interesting to note that two of Blackwood's men, Wilson and Ferrier, advised him to accept it. Considering that a Nonconformist minister was so utterly in the other camp in the Scotland

of these days, it is very significant. Lord Lytton, or as he was then known, Bulwer-Lytton, was anxious at a later date that Gilfillan should be enrolled in the Blackwood list. Brown had gone to William Tait, the publisher of *Tait's Magazine*, which in these days had a great reputation as the organ of Liberalism. My next letter is dated Portobello, November 7, 1844 :

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I send you Tait's two letters, one a reply to my conveyance of your MSS., the other an anticipation of my waiting on him 'in a fortnight.' The latter is the main thing. I think it business-like and just, kind and generous.

My counsel is, accept his offer. He is evidently in earnest. But do not take to a subscription list if possible. Cannot you get seven friends, or six with yourself, to share each an eighth of the risk of £130? Easily. Then the publisher shall find it his interest to urge the sale; so shall each of your six friends; and it will go to a second edition, full of profits, such as they can be, depend on 't. The eighth part of £130 is only £16; and it is only the risk of £16. If 1000 copies get sold, each shall be free. If 500, each shall lose only £8. But 1000 should be sold by dint of recommendation, reviewing, advertising. The idea of lithographs is capital. Many would buy the book for a head of Carlyle. I can give you one. One was done for me last week, of Carlyle, I mean. Jeffrey, I can give you, too. A lithographer I have now in my cohort; so that everything is propitious. Write to your father-in-law, to James Vallentine, to your London brother, to anybody else you can think of. I am immersed in debt yet, and though my way is clear before me even to wealth, yet there is no surety of immediate enough returns; else Craig and I would gladly be two of your eight. Write Crombie, inclosing him Tait's letter, and ask him his advice. He is a good judge, profes-

sionally as well as in the character of your friend. Be speedy. Tait waits your decision. I wait. . . . The abhorrence I have of a subscription list is simply that it is a flag of distress, and enough to damn any book beforehand. This plan I advocate will give an air of confidence and independence.—I am, yours most truly,

SAMUEL BROWN.

P.S.—I spent a delightful evening with Lord Jeffrey on Saturday. What argentine talk! Not deep, but acute; not beautiful, but very pretty; not religious, but exceedingly amiable.

Tait published the book, and it was successful. His conditions, so far as can be judged from Brown's letter, were certainly very severe, but on the whole an impression was made. Brown writes from Haddington, November 7, 1845:

I received your book the other evening. It raised a tumult of pleasure in me. It was as if it had been my own child, and yet I was not to have the responsibility of the rearing, any more than I had had the luxury of begetting it. It is my godchild. I am one of its godfathers. I am reading it with enthusiasm to my keen, grey-eyed, severe old mother and my sisters, one a Calvinist, the other a sceptic; and they are all delighted. I am commending and recommending it right and left. I have got four copies sold already, I mean five. I have not seen De Quincey's notes yet. You are to be reviewed at great length in Lowe's *Edinburgh Magazine*. . . . It is a friend of mine is to do it, that's the way I know. The editor has been advised by me to secure your services for the magazine. The rascal is going to publish an anecdote about you he heard me tell of you at the dinner table! I will force you before a portion of the Glasgow public in the *Sentinel* and the *Citizen*.

And now a word or two about your *finale*. You promised to omit it. Yet, now it is there, I thank you for its generous enthusiasm. It will do me good with many, and harm with none. It will, at all events, stand there as a monument of our friendship.

I do not *all* agree with you about Festus. You must read it altogether, and again and again. You must dwell with it, or rather in it, a long summer first. You must come out again and withdraw from the great forest of poetry it contains, before you judge so vast a work.

Later on, under date February 25, 1846, Brown writes :

I rejoice in your triumphs. But you will never produce your full swing of effect as a lecturer till you quit your MSS., and plunge manfully into the sea of fiery, billowy, extempore discourse. Everybody seems to feel that. Scott and many write me so. But it is as the author you must and shall shine. Do be careful with your second edition. Out with many a little vulgarism of expression. They offend many good judges to the soul, and they add nothing to your effects. Jeffrey was irritated every now and then by these stumbling stones. Wipe them all clean out. There are hundreds of them. If I were you I would also put away the mostly ill-founded and unnecessary anecdotes, which you have sprinkled your pages withal so liberally. These, I am sure, are two sound advices, and they are out of the very core of friendship.

I, too, as well as the American Repository, object and except to your Emerson. I never agreed with that piece. I do not yet. But you can let a friend differ. I do not wish to constrain your opinion, you know. . . .

I am glad you like Scott's portrait. Has Crombie seen it? Did you see much of him? Is he well and happy? I am happy to think that he owes you, Wilson, Cairns, all to me.



I bless him yet. My mark is upon him for ever. God bless him. . . .

By the bye, I had a most enthusiastic letter about you as seen in your book, from Mrs. Sandbach, the accomplished granddaughter of Roscoe, the other day. She is a new sworn ally of mine, you know; young, beautiful, gifted, good, married and childless.

The advice given in the above letter is indeed excellent, but Gilfillan never could take it, infinitely to his loss. Scott is David Scott, the painter. Wilson is Dr. George Wilson, the brilliant scientific writer. In the next letter, probably 1849, there is a graphic little picture of an Edinburgh citizen not quite forgotten:

I actually met a scoundrel in a publisher's shop the other day who was o'er-raving the town with an idea on that point [the salvation of infants]. He could and did demonstrate to every unfortunate button-wearer he could seize, that there are more heathens saved than professing Christians. Thus: infants are saved; a vast majority of infants perish among the heathen; argal the majority of the heathen are saved! Well, that monster cherishes that jewel of thought, that spangle of gold-bright theology—and performs his office as a deacon in the Free Church, as well as once edited *Lowe's Magazine*—Doctor George Bell!!!

The next extract, which is dated June 29, 1850, needs a word of explanation. A Mr. Linwood, long since forgotten, had bought the *Eclectic Review* from Dr. Price. Brown wrote a paper in the journal on Gilfillan's second Gallery of Literary Portraits. The article was accused of heterodoxy, and Linwood, who had been formerly connected with Unitarianism, had to give up his bargain.



Poor Linwood has fairly floored himself. He has been very, very ill ever since the squabble. Buying the *Eclectic* for £700, he has sold it back to Price for £500. I think he has been fleeced. £700 ought to have been paid for it—£500 down, and the other £200 if at the end of a year the *Review* should prove not to have been damaged in circulation. The circulation is everything in a question of this sort. It is very bad to lose the £200 for three months of the organ! I am sorry Price should have had to do with such a transaction. Linwood insists on paying you and me; but he must have time. I urged him not to pay me, and I said I was sure your feelings would be the same as mine; but he insists, and desires me to tell you so.

I print two extracts, giving glimpses of Dickens and De Quincey:

I went to see Dickens' company of amateurs playing the *Merry Wives of Windsor* last week. It was very mediocre playing indeed. For *amateurs*, as the contemptuous saying is, it was creditable; but I detest amateurs and dilettanti. Forster and Lewes absolutely misrepresented Mr. Ford and Sir Hugh Evans, in my opinion. It was a poor affair altogether. Lewes I find to be what I expected; vain, confident, shallow, flippant, ungenial, unlearned, and ugly by reason of the expression in his face of these qualities.

Editors are the Principle of Evil, for Monodevilism has now given place to polydevilism—to believe poor De Quincey (who has been in the Calton jail lately) it has given way to pandevilism! He thinks 'the devil has at last got fairly the upper hand of The Other'!!!

I conclude with an extract from Gilfillan's tribute in the *Scottish Review*: 'We have in the above remarks more or less fully spoken of Brown as a writer, lecturer, conversa-

tionist, chemist, and man ; there is just one other aspect in which we would glance a moment at him ere we close—it is as a correspondent. His letters were delightful outcomes of his mind and genius, free, fluent, easy, varied, funny, riotous even at times ; and yet how eloquent in their earnestness, how bold in their speculations, how vivid in their descriptions, how wise in their counsels, and how warm and friendly in their spirit ! They were just his conversation in its happiest vein, transferred to note-paper, and in looking at these letters of his we possess, we seem to see at our feet annals of a heart which is now cold in the sepulchre, and we cannot refrain from moistening them with our tears.' It ought to be said that evidently only a few of Brown's letters have been preserved, and that parts of these are too intimate for publication.

## XI

### THAT THE BEST LETTERS ARE WRITTEN BY THE MORTALLY WOUNDED

#### I

THE very best and choicest of English letters, at any rate, have been written by men who were mortally wounded. In affirming this I must be allowed to define my terms.

We are all of us under sentence of capital punishment, but it is not in this sense that I use the words 'mortally wounded.' Nor has a mortal wound to be interpreted as one which speedily brings the end. What I mean is that certain strokes of fate disable a man for much of the active work of life, and in due season bring about his death. He knows it, and the knowledge casts its colour over all his ways and all his speech. The strokes may fall on the body or on the soul. They leave something, and it may be much, but they take away a very great deal.

'I see but a narrow thread escape,  
Through the evening country, silent and safe;  
And it suffers no more till it finds the sea.'

What I am driving at is expressed with infinite felicity by Robert Louis Stevenson, of whom Dr. Dawson remarks that he may live by his letters when nearly all the rest of his work is forgotten. Stevenson, in the volume by Mr. Will H. Low, *A Chronicle of Friendship*, thus expresses

himself: 'Low, I wish to live! Life is better than art; to do things is better than to imagine them; yes, or to describe them. And God knows I have not lived all these last years. No one knows, no one can know the tedium of it. I've supported it as I could—I don't think I am apt to whimper—but to be, even as I am now, is not to live. Yes, that's what art is good for, for without my work I suppose that I would have given up long ago, without my work and my friends and all those about me—I am not forgetting them; for, with all the courage I could summon, I would not be here to-day if all their loving care had not added to my courage, and made it my duty to them to fight it out. As long as my father was there I would never think of leaving; all our old troubles were long ago forgotten, and these last years we were much to each other; but when he was laid at rest, I determined to make a new effort to live. Not as we lived at Fontainebleau, for youth was on my side then—remember how you never realised that I was less strong than the other men who were there with us—but to be the rest of my days a decent invalid gentleman. That's not a very wild ambition, is it? But it's a far cry from being bed-ridden. I'm willing to take care of myself, but to keep on my feet, to move about, to mix with other men, to ride a little, to swim a little, to be wary of my enemy, but to get the better of him, that's what I call being a decent invalid gentleman, and that, God willing, I mean to be.'

'A decent invalid gentleman.' That is the best that stricken men can hope for, and it may be something very good. It is especially favourable to the writing of letters. The greatest English letter-writers, as well as I can remember, are William Cowper, Charles Lamb, Edward

FitzGerald, Robert Louis Stevenson, and, so far as personal liking is concerned, I should add James Smetham and Thomas Davidson. It does not require much argument to show that all these were in a manner mortally wounded. Cowper certainly was. The tragedies of Lamb's life pierced his heart. Edward FitzGerald might seem to be an exception, but he certainly was not. He lived a hermit's life; he depended on his favourite authors for society; at least, he would not make new acquaintances, even in books. He worked at translations and adaptations, but he judged them so humbly that he hardly cared whether they were published or not. One of the most characteristic passages in his letters alludes to his condensed version of Crabbe's *Tales of the Hall*. 'I may get my *Tales of the Hall* printed, and shall one day ask you, and three or four besides, whether it had better be published. I think you and those three or four others will like it, but they may also judge that indifferent readers might not, and that you will, all of you, have to tell me when the thing is done. I shall not be in the least disappointed if you tell me to keep it among ourselves, so long as the rest are pleased; for I know well that publication would not carry it much further abroad; and I am very well content to pay my money for the little work which I have long meditated doing. I shall have done "my little owl." Do you know what that means? No? Well, then, my grandfather had several parrots of different sorts and talents: one of them, Billy, I think, could only huff up his feathers in what my grandfather called an owl fashion; so when company were praising the more gifted parrots, he would say, "You will hurt poor Billy's feelings—come, do your little owl, my dear." You are to imagine a hand-



some, hair-powdered gentleman doing this—and his daughter, my mother, telling of it. And so it is I do my little owl.' This was FitzGerald's view of his own work and life, doing his little owl. As for Stevenson, I need say nothing. Smetham's melancholy end is mentioned by his biographer. As for Davidson, he did not live quite thirty-two years, and some four of these he had to pass in the declining stages of consumption. But no one will say that the letters of Cowper, FitzGerald, Stevenson, Smetham, and Davidson would have been what they are if their lives had been granted even the ordinary measure of health and sunshine and activity.

## II

When we begin to search into the reasons, one stands out with eminent distinctness. The stricken man has obtained an honourable release from much. Whatever work he does goes to his credit. He is exempt from the regular periods of labour. Closed to him for ever are many of the strifes and encounters in which men wear out their lives and dull their happiness. The result is a new feeling of kindness for one's fellow mortals, and a new clearness of vision as to the worth or worthlessness of the prizes they struggle for. It is not always easy, even for large and generous natures, to think with uniform justice of a successful competitor. There may lurk, even in a noble mind, the feeling that the adjudication has been unfair. But when one is withdrawn from the field of war he is not fretted thus. Furthermore, the fighters have a kindness for the comrade who, through no fault of his own, has been disabled. Now, the great letters come out of kind hearts, and a gentle kindness is, sometimes at least, the chief result

of an irreversible overthrow. I remember Robertson Smith used to say that there was never such a thing on earth as a complete victory. There were drawbacks to every triumph, and there was always the danger of a renewed battle and a lost prize. But he would have admitted that there are such things as complete defeats. No, he would not have admitted it. He would have said, and said rightly, that no defeat is absolute. There remains something very precious that may still be treasured or still be won. In any case, the peace of defeat has often been more secure and more sweet by far than the peace of victory.

I find this illustrated with much fulness in Thomas Davidson's beautiful letters. He had a close kinship with Stevenson. When death was only a few months off he wrote to a friend: 'I cannot say that I am doing any literary work. I read books almost all the time I am indoors, and when I go out I can't meditate any in those dull days, except miscellaneous and interruptedly, about anything and everything—about politics, about literature, about plants, about scenery, about my sins, about the Christian religion, about agriculture, about the future, about how I am to open my "oyster," about what it will be like to be dead and buried. I used to think a good deal about that last matter a year ago. We must all die, and we know that pretty well. But the feeling I used to have about it, and which I suppose most people have, was that over the hills and far away, and deep down in a certain "dowie howme," sate that Lean One, playing with his dart; and that by the time that I reached him I should be so wearied and so jaded going up hill and down dale that I should take the *coup de grâce* at his hands not ungratefully. But all of a sudden, or comparatively of a sudden, this

idea changed itself into the feeling that he was rising up and coming over the hills swiftly to meet me, and that at the top of the very next ridge or so I should infallibly have my weasand slit and the life let out of me. To speak plainly, during all the earlier part of last winter, I fully expected to be gobbled up quite shortly. Now, this change of feeling (especially if it be a sudden change), about the last incident, is very apt to have a paralysing effect upon some of one's faculties. At any rate, one feels but little inclination to initiate anything—in the writing way, I mean. I therefore procured myself a grammar and dictionary, and sat down to learn the German language, and nothing occurred. I am alive and can read Schiller and Goethe. When the first snowdrop appeared I rose up and made a sonnet to it, to the effect that I was very glad to be still above ground along with it, and then I grew comparatively lyrical.' His very last letter, written a few days before his death, runs thus: 'I don't manage this matter of walking well yet. My limbs have been so stiffened by having sat almost all winter, that I find it no easy matter to supple them again. Of course, practice will do it, but practice requires more pith than I am possessor of at present. So I have been making a paction with my father to take his arm for some time every day, and as he is a swift walker, I shall have to compass greater distances with him than I can possibly manage when left to my own devices and those of my hazel stick. It makes me conscious of a certain mingled and mixed feeling, akin to sorrow and akin to shame, to remember that I am thirty-one and my father seventy years old. In the meantime my mother is improving very fast, or, at least, she is resuming her old busy ways and habits very fast. This I

know principally by her thousand-a-day attentions to myself—nameless little attentions, which are full of comfort, and so soothing that I sometimes imagine that I must be getting babyish again. But if I don't stop this strain of talking, I shall run the risk of making my whole letter a bulletin of health.'

## III

Another explanation of our fact is that the disabled can afford to put their whole intellectual force into writing. They have leisure. In some cases their letters are almost more than themselves. They have the glow and essence of the individual. Men like Matthew Arnold, who are consciously influencing thought and championing causes and making permanent contributions to literature, are nothing as letter-writers. They may be, as Arnold was, pleasant and unaffected, and sometimes lively, but that is all. To the stricken mortal the letter is the event of his day when he is kindled by the living contact of mind with mind. Thomas Davidson was a highly gifted man. He was something of a poet. Perhaps it might be said that he was a poet as Stevenson was a poet, though his medium was in prose. He was not successful as a preacher, and nobody thought less of his sermons than he did himself. He was not greatly interested by the speculative questions of his day, but he had humour and courage and high feeling and tenderness, and these all find a natural, serene, harmonious, refined expression in his letters.

## IV

There is one question which will naturally be put, and to which I can give no full reply. It may be admitted that



I am right in saying that certain persons who had leisure forced upon them attained eminence as letter writers just for that reason, but it may be urged that Stevenson worked very hard, and that he produced what he had to produce, and wrote his letters in addition. I should reply first that Stevenson, though the most diligent of men, had a kind of leisure which he could never have possessed if he had been in full strength and at work in London. Again, it is impossible to tell under what circumstances a man's literary power is best developed. For example, who will undertake to decide whether FitzGerald would have done more or less if he had lived a different life? As it was, he did his version of Omar, his letters, his translations, and paraphrases, and his dialogues. Would his delicate genius have survived the tear and wear of life? He would not have given us what he has given, and on the whole perhaps we should prefer to keep what we have. In Scott's conditions Stevenson might have done as great a work as Scott, but it would not have been the work with which he has enriched us for ever. But to understand Stevenson fully one must first spit a little blood.

Once more, the charm of great letters is that they dwell so much on those familiar and homely themes which continue to interest us so much more than the conflicts which make history.



## XII

### GEORGE AUGUSTUS SIMCOX

IN the summer of 1905, George Augustus Simcox, Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, was mentioned in all the newspapers. He had disappeared from a hotel where he had been staying near Giant's Causeway. He had gone off for a lonely and perilous ramble on the coast, and did not come back. The search for him was continued for weeks, but it yielded nothing. He was seen by an engineer to disappear over the skyline, and that was the last of him so far as human sight went. In due course the Probate Court decided to 'presume his death,' and it thus became permissible to write something about one of the most brilliant, accomplished, and versatile men I ever met. He was one of a distinguished family. There were three—George Augustus, Edith, and William Henry. Edith Simcox was the close friend of George Eliot, a voluminous author, and a very diligent student. William Henry was rector first of Weyhill, near Andover, and then of Harlaxton in Lincolnshire. All three were quite uncommon in their gifts and in their learning, and they were diligent with the pen. But somehow they made little or no impression on the public mind. When Edith Simcox died some years ago, no obituary notice of her appeared save one written by myself. When W. H. Simcox died a good many years before, his brother gave me materials for two

short articles, published in different periodicals, and beyond these I saw no notice of him. The only attempt at a biography of George Augustus Simcox that has come my way was in the *Manchester Guardian*. It was written by an old companion at Oxford, and deals with his Oxford days very brightly. But the author knew so little of Simcox's subsequent career that he says: 'It is to be regretted that George Augustus has left little or nothing to witness to his remarkable gifts and learning. He quitted Oxford and settled in London, intending to read and use his pen. Yet he wrote little, and it is not of a solid character. . . . It is to be feared that Simcox had developed too strongly the old academic habit of perpetual accumulation, frequent schemes of writing, and constant postponement of the pains and perils of authorship. And so his name is only a fading memory.' This is very far from being true. Simcox left behind him a solid body of work. He was ever ready to write whenever he could get the chance. No invitation from an editor was refused, and he would take up almost any subject. He was discouraged by the unpopularity of his books, and publishers were shy of them. If he had been able to find publishers to suggest subjects to him, and to take the risk of issuing what he wrote, I believe he would have been among the most voluminous authors of our time. As it is, he left some things very worthy of remembrance.

## I

My first introduction to Mr. Simcox was through the pages of the *Academy*. When Dr. Appleton commenced that periodical, he meant it to be much more learned, scientific, and dry than the *Athenæum*. Pure literature

had only a subordinate place in the plan. Even that had to be handled in an abstruse and superior fashion, and Appleton found no critics better able to carry out his intentions than George Augustus Simcox and his sister Edith. Those who will look at the early volumes of the *Academy* will find many articles signed 'H. Lawrenny.' 'H. Lawrenny' was Edith Simcox. Her brother wrote under his own name, and between them they had a considerable share in the undertaking. William Henry contributed a good many theological reviews. He was more lucid than the other members of the family, but quite as lofty in his manner. John Morley was at that time editing the *Fortnightly Review*. He engaged Edith Simcox to write the short notices at the end, and G. A. Simcox was a frequent contributor. Then I came to know of a volume entitled *Poems and Romances*, by G. A. Simcox, which Messrs. Strahan published in 1869. Years after, when his brother died, Mr. Simcox gave me a copy of his first book, *Prometheus Unbound*, a tragedy, published by Smith and Elder in 1867. It bears the inscription, 'W. H. Simcox. With the Author's love.' In addition, Simcox published in 1883 a *History of Latin Literature from Ennius to Boethius*. This was in two volumes, and was meant to be popular. It was not successful, and it was sold as a remainder. Simcox made a serious bid for popularity in this work, and was disappointed with the result. In 1873 he published a very queer volume, *Recollections of a Rambler*. It was written round certain illustrations. A publisher having the blocks wanted somebody to supply him with letterpress, and such was Simcox's humility and his readiness to write at all times, that he turned out this book. He cannot fairly be judged by it, but there are good things

in it, and a very singular anticipation of the manner of his death. W. H. Simcox published an edition of *Tacitus*, a book on the Beginnings of the Christian Church, a commentary on Revelation, and two little volumes on New Testament Greek. Edith Simcox wrote an elaborate essay on *Natural Law*, a collection of short stories, and a work on Civilisation. In later years G. A. Simcox published less, but he contributed a good many reviews to the *Guardian* when that paper was edited by Mr. Lathbury, and he also wrote in the *Expositor* and in the *Bookman*. To the *Bookman* he contributed what seemed to me the best of the memorial verses on Tennyson's death. He had another volume of poems ready for the printer, but as nobody seemed to want it, he never published it. I submit that this is not an unworthy tale of literary work.

## II

Having been much interested in Simcox's writings, it was with no ordinary anticipation that I looked forward to meeting him. He was living with his mother, his brother, and his sister, in a small house at Kensington. The mother, who was the widow of a Kidderminster carpet maker, was obviously the queen of the household, and every one deferred to her. She was very able and very sympathetic. William Henry Simcox had lost his wife, and was suffering from the consumptive malady, which very soon proved fatal. Edith Simcox could not be called beautiful, but she was gentle in manner, and very communicative. George Augustus was a striking figure, with his red tie, his coloured shirt, his blue serge suit, and his heavy boots. He was afflicted with a stammer, and as he always seemed to be attempting epigrams, it was very



difficult to understand him. But there was something so plainly sincere about him that the troubles were soon removed. Both brothers were devout Christians, while Miss Simcox was a pronounced and almost an aggressive Agnostic. No attempt was made to slur the differences, but everything was discussed in a thoroughly amicable spirit. When the three were fairly started, their talk was most entertaining. They all aimed at paradox—more or less successfully. I took most to G. A. Simcox, and afterwards saw a good deal of him. He went to live at Tring, and we once walked over the Hampden country together. When he was alone with a companion, his stammer would wear off, and he would talk with vivacity and sometimes with enthusiasm on the subject that untied his mind. The family lived for a time at Mayfield, in Sussex, where they had a pretty house, and there also I visited them. Many recollections come into my mind. When we were at Hampden's house, Mr. Simcox spoke much of Puritanism. His sympathies were with the High Church party, though he doubted whether their claims would be upheld by historical criticism. Puritanism he frankly disliked, though he admitted the good it had done. He said that the great error of Puritanism was its neglect of our Lord's commandment: 'Anoint thy head and wash thy face.' He meant that the sternness of the Puritan was akin to hypocrisy and contrary to Christianity. Of his own feelings he said little, but one day he spoke in praise of stoicism as applied to the ordinary troubles and the inevitable disappointments of life. He condemned those writers on the conduct of life who think that if we take up the little difficulties of life and deal with them, the great difficulties will melt away. He maintained that not much in life is modifiable, while



very much is fixed, and that it is not well to think too much or even at all about many matters on which books are written. On the graver troubles he had something to say. He had a hope that science would lengthen life to the full limit, and argued that if this were so, the chief agony of this mortal sphere, that of bereavement, would be immensely mitigated. As for death, he would not allow that it was to be feared. He wrote: 'On such a subject the authority of Coleridge is as high as Pascal's, and Coleridge, who did not make light of judgment, has left it on record that he did not fear death. True, none who contemplate death, at a distance, with equanimity, can be sure that they will die easily or meekly when their time comes; yet this does not prove that such peace is false while it lasts. Children are often fractious as bedtime draws near, troublesome to themselves and to others, shrinking from the change they need; in some difficult or ill-managed nurseries the trouble comes round night after night, but even there it does not overshadow the day; children learn and play without a thought of the bad half hour which in the worst nurseries does not always come.' Latterly he became very much interested in the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament. He thought at first that it would be possible to answer Wellhausen by the arguments of Dillmann, but on this he modified his view, and said characteristically, 'It does not matter, Dillmann's view is as much against orthodoxy as Wellhausen's.'

## III

But I must pass from this to a word on his writings. The best memorial of him is to be found in *Poems and Romances*.

There he is luminous and musical from first to last. The sweetest, I think, is the 'Song of the Rose,' and I will leave it to speak for itself :

' At the gates of the City of Peace  
There toiled a poor man night and day,  
But his season of mirth and release  
Came round with the roses in May.

He sat and sang by the wine,  
Where the river of fruitfulness flows,  
Till the stars began to shine,  
And he sang the song of the rose.

And the city was full of the fame  
Of the marvellous song of his mirth,  
Till even the Khalifah came,  
Who is lord over Islam on earth.

And the lover of roses and spring  
Beheld him and did not arise,  
Though the princes said, " This is a king,  
And the kings are as dust in his eyes."

He said, " God hath one blessing to give  
Unto all of his sons and his slaves,  
That we each may rejoice while we live,  
That we all shall have rest in our graves.

" We shall both be equal then,  
Now you throw from the Khalifah's towers  
The shadow of God over men,  
And I throw it over the flowers.

" Ere the nations lie down with the dead  
They exult in your fatherly sway,—  
When the bloom of the roses is fled,  
They are glad that I kissed it away."

And he asked and the Khalifah gave  
New wine to his brother in spring,  
As the gift of a slave to a slave,  
The gift of a king to a king.

## A BOOKMAN'S LETTERS

And he sang till his hair was white,  
 In the time when the roses blow,  
 All his life he had great delight,  
 And they buried him long ago.

The desert has drifted again  
 To the gates of the City of Peace,  
 And her citizens labour in vain,  
 Having neither reward nor release.

Now jackals howl over his head  
 Who sang the sweet song of the rose,  
 And the joy of his vineyard is fled,  
 And only Azrael knows

Of the place where his spirit reposes,  
 From the flowery path that it trod,  
 If they carried the lover of roses  
 To the rose garden of God.'

As for his critical writings, I must be content to say that if any one has the patience to study them, they are always rewarding, always entertaining, and not seldom they are very suggestive. But their style was fatal to general acceptance. One specimen will be enough, and I choose it at random. He begins an obituary notice of de Rémusat with this sentence: 'If we desired to find a typical representative of the class of Immortal for whom clever men outside the Academy despise it, and for whom sensible men who value the Academy esteem it, we could hardly wish for a better representative than M. de Rémusat, who was a distinguished man of letters because he was an estimable man of affairs, just as, if it had so happened that M. Thiers had prevailed over M. Guizot before the downfall of the Monarchy of July, he would have been a distinguished man of affairs because he was an estimable man of letters.' This kind of thing led to unseemly expressions of wrath,

but Simcox's obscurity was natural to him. No man took more pains.

## IV

It remains that I should say something about his triumphs at Oxford. He won everything there that could be won by classical scholarship, and was considered the ablest man of his year. But, as the writer in the *Manchester Guardian* says: 'His oddity was unmistakable. He was careless of his appearance, and his mouth frequently relaxed into a curious smile, accompanied by an audible chuckle, such as might have suggested in the case of a less able man a doubt of his sanity.' His temperament did not fit him for the routine work of a tutorship, though the best men enjoyed his teaching. He could be very sarcastic with duller pupils. To one such, in handing him back his copy of prose, he said with his peculiar smile and gurgling chuckle: 'Do you smoke?' 'Yes, sir,' replied the youth, expecting to be offered the opportunity. 'Then you can take this to light your cigar,' replied Simcox with further chucklings. He went back to Oxford in the end, and he was, I fear, a very lonely man, though he kept up his interest in everything. He wrote me from time to time about things that attracted his notice, and I have quite a bundle of his strange but friendly and interesting epistles. I conclude by adopting the words of the *Manchester Guardian* writer: 'A purer soul and a sweeter nature I never knew, and I have seldom encountered a more brilliant mind. He was a good brother and the best of sons.'

### XIII

#### THE TROUBLES OF THE ESSAYIST

MR. ARTHUR C. BENSON, in his book of essays *At Large*, acutely reminds one of the essayist's troubles. He tells us about his own vexations. First he wrote essays anonymously, but he was pulled reluctantly out of his burrow. He published, under his own name, a book, *Beside Still Waters*. Many reviewers received it with considerable disapproval, and even derision. They called it morbid, and indolent, and decadent, and half a hundred ugly adjectives. Then there were some who practically said that the book was simply a collection of amiable platitudes, but that if the people liked to read such stuff they were quite at liberty to do so. Mr. Benson says that he admires these reviewers, partly for their tolerant permission to the public to read what they choose, and still more because he likes to think that there are so many intelligent people in the world who are wearisomely familiar with ideas which have only slowly and gradually dawned upon himself. 'I have no intention of trying to refute or convince my critics, and I beg them with all my heart to say what they think about my books, because only by the frank interchange of ideas can we arrive at the truth.' Mr. Benson has his consolations. The *Upton Letters*, *From a College Window*, *Beside Still Waters*, *The Altar Fire*, have all achieved wide popularity. And yet there are thorns in



his pillow, and I fancy there always will be thorns in the pillow of an essayist if he collects his essays and publishes them in a book.

They say that this is not the time when the essay is particularly popular. There were the great days of Arthur Helps, the author of *Friends in Council*, and A. K. H. B., who wrote *Recreations of a Country Parson*. Neither Helps nor Boyd is much read nowadays, but they had their hour. The *Saturday Review*, at that time the most superior of journals, published middle articles about Friendship, and Worries, and Small Economies, and many other themes. The *Spectator*, too, did much good work in that way. I believe these papers were highly appreciated, but for some reason or another they gradually disappeared, and I do not know that we have anything precisely similar in the periodical literature of to-day. However, when an essayist like Mr. Benson appears, he finds many readers, and my conviction is that the essayist, if he is readable, and if he has got the manner of his own day, and if he has thought of life both humorously and tragically, will find readers in plenty. But I should not like to guarantee him against mockers and scoffers in the Press. If he is sensitive to such things he will soon give up his occupation. Why is it that the critic is the natural enemy of the essayist? It is so even in the not rare cases where the critic is himself an essayist.

## I

The difficulty of the essayist is that he can hardly help falling constantly into platitude. He may lift the platitude a little out of the region of the densest commonplace, but that is all. Now it is quite reasonable to answer that all

life is an education in commonplace, and that every human being who comes into the world has to be taught the meaning of commonplaces one by one. We have all to know the meaning of worry; we have all to ask in our turn what are the best remedies and palliatives for worry. The answers given will be the answers of long ago. Probably if I were to turn to an old book of Sir Arthur Helps I should find that he has practically said all that can be said about worry. The critic feels that he is being bored by repetition, and strikes out angrily at the poor author. All that the essayist can do is to say what has been said with a new accent. He can put something of his own experience into his counsel, and he can also write in the language of his day. He may be able to freshen up the subject by new anecdotes, illustrations and quotations. But there is one thing he must do, no matter how clever he is. He must put in many sentences which, taken out of their context, are the direst and most tedious of platitudes. So I say he is at the mercy of the critic. I venture to say that the critic who chooses to select a certain number of sentences can make any essayist ridiculous—even Emerson, who is one of the most suggestive of essayists.

Here are some sentences taken from an essayist whose name is by no means forgotten :

‘The desire of excellence is the necessary attribute of those who excel.’

‘We work little for a thing unless we wish for it.’

‘Old age has a beauty of its own.’

‘To moral excellence there are two rewards—one in the conscience, one far out of reach beyond the stars.’

‘Time wasted can never conduce to money well managed.’

‘In the drawing-room, as everywhere else, mind in the long run prevails.’

These I take from *Caxtoniana*, by Bulwer Lytton. As they stand they look foolish enough, but in the context they are by no means so foolish. Yet one can understand a critic falling upon them and declaring that they are pure rubbish, prose Tupperisms without a spark of originality, or point, or style. This is not quite true. Nobody will know what Tupperisms are till I publish my selections from the *Proverbial Philosophy*. But they are certainly bad enough as they stand there in their homelessness and in their nakedness.

We have any number of clever young men with an eye for what is called Tupperisms, though they do not know the august Tupper in the original, but I defy any of them to write an essay, say, on ‘Work and Worry’ which shall be readable, intelligent, and helpful, without putting in some sentences as bad in themselves as any of Bulwer Lytton’s.

## II

Another trouble is that the essayist, as a rule, has to write round his subject. A. K. H. B. used to commence his studies with the word ‘Concerning.’ This suggested that he meant to walk round the subject rather than to drive straight to the matter in hand. This peripatetic style pleases many readers, but others are irritated, and even enraged, at what they think wearisome, discursive and pointless. But what is the poor essayist to do? If he treats his subject as a politician or a philosopher would, he ceases to be an essayist, and becomes too difficult for the ordinary public. It is the suggestiveness, the refusal

to follow out trains of thought to their logical issue, the absence, in short, of precision and too much instructiveness, that give charm to an essay. Besides, no one can afford, in his own person, to give his heart away. If he does the daws will peck. You can often see in a good essay that a saying commonplace enough in itself has been passed through the fires of thought and experience. Doubtless it would please some better if the writer simply told his own story of love, or grief, or failure. But this is impossible. If anyone ever honestly tried to do it, it was Rousseau, and I read many articles nowadays which pour contempt on Rousseau. What is much more important is that by the acknowledgment of his best students, Rousseau was not able to compass a complete self-revelation.

Why, even the things that an essayist does tell are apt to trouble him when he sees them in print. He thinks he should not have been so candid. Mr. Benson, in a volume of essays which has all his usual merits, throws off every disguise of fiction and tells a good deal of his own preferences and mortifications and consolations. He describes his homes and his frank pleasure in them : ' The days pass, then, in a delightful monotony ; one reads, writes, sits or paces in the garden, scours the country on still, sunny afternoons. There are many grand churches and houses within a reasonable distance, such as the great churches near Wisbech and Lynn—West Walton, Walpole St. Peter, Tilney, Terrington St. Clement, and a score of others—great cruciform structures, in every conceivable style, with fine woodwork and noble towers, each standing in the centre of a tiny rustic hamlet, built with no idea of prudent proportion to the needs of the places they serve, but out of pure joy and pride. . . . And so the quiet hours tick



themselves away in an almost monastic calm, while one's book grows insensibly day by day, as the bulrush rises on the edge of the dyke. I do not say that it would be a life to live for the whole of a year, and year by year. There is no stir, no eagerness, no brisk interchange of thought about it. But for one who spends six months in a busy and peopled place full of duties and discussions and conflicting interests, it is like a green pasture and waters of comfort.' I like to hear this. It is always pleasant to meet with a contented man if he is not too anxious to give his reasons for contentment. But what do the reviewers say? They say 'Yes, you like to live in a flat country, and you give us books as flat as your homeland.'

### III

The result of all this is that essayists try to veil their identity, either by pen-names, or more commonly, by a slight admixture of fiction. Mr. Benson has done both, as Sir Arthur Helps did before him. Mr. Lucas has also taken to the second plan. Anonymity is no great protection, for any writer nowadays who attracts attention is sure to become known. There is really no secret nowadays in the world of authorship. But the way of fiction is not so simple as it seems. Older readers at least will remember the characters of *Friends in Council*. They met together, and an essay was read on which the members of the circle commented in turn. Thus the author was enabled to disclaim full responsibility, and he tried to give a fair representation to various views. Also he had little love affairs going on all the time in the earlier books. These love affairs, however, were apt to end in marriage, and after that they could not be continued successfully.



It is true that the characters appeared again, but they were all changed. For instance, the sprightly Mildred vanished and rose again in the form of an intelligent, careworn matron, smiling affectionately upon a sickly child. Helps, if I remember rightly, gave it up altogether, and attempted ultimately the regular novel in a book which had no great success, though it was full of his clear sense and gentle wit. The framework of fiction, if it has to be used, must be changed every time, and I am afraid the essayist must in the end choose between the two, and continue as an essayist or commence as a novelist. One cannot help admiring Mr. Benson's easy handling of life and language, the deftness with which he tells stories, and the mingled courage and sympathy with which he surveys the scene of existence. But for some he is too little of a combatant, and too resolutely comfortable. 'I have wandered far enough in my thought, it would seem, from the lonely grange in its wide pastures and the calm expanse of fen ; and I should wish once more to bring my reader back home with me to the sheltered garden, and the orchard knee-deep in grass, and the embowering elms.' This is one point of view, but it is not the point of view from which most of us observe the world.

However, in spite of the critics, the essayist will continue, and even if he is obscured for a time, he will have a revival. If he is commonplace he writes mostly for commonplace people, and it is with the problems of life rather than with literature, or science, or politics that the heart of man is most deeply engaged.

## XIV

### LORD ROSEBERY'S LITERARY METHOD

LORD ROSEBERY'S *Chatham: His Early Life and Connections*, has already been recognised as a work of the first importance by critics with a far better knowledge of political history than I can lay claim to. Lord Rosebery has grounded himself on original material. He has had access to the Holland House papers, and also to Mr. Fortescue's invaluable family collection of papers at Dropmore. With the aid of these he endeavours to illuminate what he calls the early life of Lord Chatham. This period, however, extended over forty-eight years. Lord Rosebery is of opinion that the complete life of Chatham has never been written, and never can be written, because the materials do not exist. On the earlier part of his life the papers at his disposal throw some light, but nothing of any kind exists to reveal the man in his later years. His deliberate scheme of life, adopted partly from policy and partly from considerations of health, was to shroud his inner mind and nature from his contemporaries. The public life can be treated, and has been treated by many, notably by Macaulay. But the real man is not discovered when we know his course as a statesman, his speeches, his achievements. It is not discovered by setting forth the annals of his period, and noticing his contact with events. The private life, which is half or three parts of a

man, is still a mystery. In the case of Chatham there were no intimates ; his wife and his children said nothing, and posterity has but a stern effigy representing what he desired to be seen. But in the Dropmore papers which Lord Rosebery has been able to use there are certain gleams of light falling on Chatham's youth, and Lord Rosebery's object has been to point out these and their significance. Unfortunately, the biographer holds out no hope of completing the work. The conditions of completion are evidently repugnant to him. 'In a word, after 1756, when this book ends, his public life is conspicuous and familiar. But his inner life after that period will never be known ; and so we must be content with a torso.' We are not content, but our discontent is probably vain.

However this may be, Lord Rosebery has given us a book of singular value. In some respects it is his very best production. So keen a judge of literary style could not be unaware of the almost insuperable difficulties which confronted him. Whenever an author has to deal with new material for the biography of a man whose Life has already been written, he may almost despair of achieving a literary success. The ordinary biographer who has to prepare a 'Life and Letters' finds his task hard enough. The result of his labours is likely to be simply a collection of letters with mere narrative tags between them. The arrangement is apt to be vexatious, even when the narrative paragraphs are as brilliant as may be. But when they are, as they usually are, comparatively dull and poor, the book may be a valuable storehouse of material for essayists and for compilers, but it is not in the proper sense a book. Lord Rosebery had an even harder task than that. He had to place new matter of importance along with much already

familiar. In circumstances like these the balance is almost certain to be distorted. The new matter has stress laid upon it simply because it is new. This involves a disproportion which only the highest skill can surmount. It seems to me that Lord Rosebery has been strikingly successful. There is here no dull confusion. We know where we are and with whom we are dealing. Lord Rosebery has much in common with Lord Macaulay, and he has Macaulay's power of setting every man and every place clearly before us. He is capable of very bold and most righteous decisions. Thus he sets aside Pitt's love-letters, classifying them with the terrible correspondence between Burns and Clarinda. I know very few men who would have shown the same courage. The narrative is clear and orderly. We are not shifted about from place to place and from name to name. The biographer stands over his materials, moulds them into form, and guides them to their end. We close the book feeling that what is to be known of the first period of Pitt's life, the period of struggle, is now given us in final form by a man of genius and of heart, who has considered his subject under all lights and with perfect impartiality, who has told us the truth, who has never assumed knowledge where he has been ignorant, or condemned without hearing the defence.

But my object in this letter is not to review a book which needs no praise, a book which is already ranked with the very best of its kind, but to make some notes on Lord Rosebery's literary method. If Lord Rosebery had not been claimed by politics he would undoubtedly have taken a high station among men of letters. Even as it is, he has done so. The comparatively brief and occasional appearances which he has made in literature have commanded



the attention of the world. It seems to me that Lord Rosebery's bent is to estimate great characters, and that he brings to this business a rare combination of qualities.

## I

Estimates in these days are very much to seek. When a notable man dies his career is accorded some brief attention and study. The newspapers publish obituary notices, often extremely good of their kind. Occasionally in leading articles something more is attempted. Then, in due course, we have the biography, the life, the letters, the tributes put together with more or less skill, and always, of course, written from the family point of view. But something more is wanted. A string of dates and facts about a man is not sufficient. It is well to know when he was born, when he died, what sort of thing he did best, and what public and private fortunes befell him. But we want much more. We want an estimate, a weighing up of the whole man. The man should not be a mere name in a crowd of dates. We need the suggestions which give character, substance, colour, and humanity. Sainte-Beuve did this kind of work supremely well. It used to be done to admiration in the *Spectator*, and now and then in the *Saturday Review*. One of the best, if not the best, estimate I ever read was by Sir Charles Bowen on Professor H. J. S. Smith, of Oxford. The old readers of the *Spectator* remember the beautiful and penetrating article which appeared after Cardinal Newman's death. The original title under which Bagehot's essays were published was *Estimates of Some Englishmen and Scotchmen*. It was a clumsy title, but it described the book. Then we have



Harriet Martineau's biographical sketches, the result of careful and skilful scrutiny and very brightly written. We have had appreciations and criticisms of various kinds, but now we have very little in this manner which is of the first rank. Our weekly reviews hardly attempt it. It is to Lord Rosebery that the world looks for the right word when a great man comes out of the shadows for a moment and is revalued, or when some one who has played a conspicuous part in life quits the stage.

## II

First among Lord Rosebery's qualifications for estimating character I should place his extraordinary freedom from prejudice. His attitude to politics has to be discounted. Of politics he thinks and says exactly what London journalists say about journalism. What they say may be discovered easily in any club near Fleet Street. What Lord Rosebery says we can tell from the newspapers. But when he comes to judge the dead, all prejudice seems to leave him. Harriet Martineau spoiled her essays to a considerable extent by her extreme political bitterness. Her estimate of Macaulay, for example, is glaringly unjust and untrue. She speaks of his 'universal failure,' of his 'shallow and insolent character,' and, in fact, never does herself justice save when she is in general sympathy with the character she describes. Lord Rosebery does not shrink from stern judgments, but he has as little bias in these judgments as is possible to humanity. He is equally free from social prejudice. It is life which interests him, and not the trappings of life. Wherever power is strikingly manifested he is drawn to it, and while its surroundings interest him as they ought to, they in no way influence his

reckonings. His attitude is extraordinarily unaffected and simple. The humble cottage of Burns, the bookshop of Samuel Johnson's father, the great houses of England, are attractive each in its way, but all are attractive as the birthplaces and the homes of men who lead their race. Lord Rosebery also possesses the excellent quality of ease. The work of analysis must not be ostentatious if it is to be done successfully. The analyst must not brandish the scalpel like a carver of meat among the ancient Romans. He must study and he must think deeply. He must attain balanced and many-sided views of character. He must train himself to see all round with an eye for proportion and for the quantities in which the various elements and attributes are intermixed. But the labour must be concealed. The result must be presented with grace and lightness and mastery. In his book on Chatham even Lord Rosebery sometimes finds it difficult to avoid dullness and ponderosity. But on the whole he is eminently successful.

He has also another qualification rarely found in conjunction with the others. He spares no pains, neglects no source of information, very rarely, if ever, falls into a blunder. It is very dangerous, as I have found, to contradict him on a matter of fact. It is not often that Lord Rosebery's power of swift motion over subjects is combined with the faculty for laborious penetration into the darker and rockier depths of the theme. But whatever subject Lord Rosebery takes up, he is able to meet the experts upon their own ground. He loves to get at the truth, and the labour does not tire him. On subjects which he has not thoroughly mastered he refuses to say anything.

That Lord Rosebery would gain if he were clothed in the

defensive armour of a little phlegm seems to me certain. But his moderation, temperance, mercy, reserve of statement and argument are generally unflawed. When they are flawed it has to be remembered that the Queen Anne writers, including even Steele, the writers who brought urbanity into criticism and connected literature with life, could be at least as virulent and angry in politics as the hottest of our own contemporaries.

## III

I have only a little space in which to describe Lord Rosebery's method of study when he comes to a character like Chatham or Cromwell or Burns or Johnson. He begins with heredity, and it is easy to see that he attaches more importance to heredity than most of us do. There is a particular zest in the early chapters on Chatham. Accounts of ancestry are usually very dull and unmeaning, but to Lord Rosebery the facts speak loudly. From Pitt's ancestor the Governor he derived the curse of gout, a nervous, violent temper, and some taint of madness. These account for many things, but when we try to account for genius we are baffled. But, says Lord Rosebery, may it not be the result in character of the conflict of violent strains of heredity which clash like flint and steel, and produce the divine spark? The meaning of this may be discerned by a careful reading of the facts. He looks next at the early environment, the home, the schools, the schoolmasters. In Pitt's case the interest lies chiefly in his relations to his sister Ann. Nothing is more striking in Pitt's letters than the two in which he describes himself to his sister, who has charged him, as Sir Joshua Reynolds'

sister charged her brother, with expecting absolute deference and blind submission to his will. It is perhaps in youth that we find the friends who mainly influence us, although it is not always so. Pitt does not seem to have made close friends. But most of us are more fortunate. Perhaps the chief interest of the young is in those who are coming to meet them. Dickens had an extraordinary sense of this. 'Which of the vast multitude of travellers under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and act and react on one another, which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither?' In most lives the supremely important event is marriage. Lord Rosebery handles with great tact and tenderness the marriage of Pitt. When the statesman became engaged to Lady Hester Grenville he was forty-six and she was thirty-three. They had known each other for nineteen years. Why were they so long in understanding one another? The wise answer is, 'It seems inexplicable, but love affairs are often inexplicable.' What is certain is that no man ever had a nobler or a more devoted wife. 'Her appearances are rare, but full of tenderness; she watched over her husband with exquisite devotion; furthering and anticipating his wishes, which were often fanciful and extravagant; shielding his moments of nervous prostration with the wings of an angel.' She took on all his burdens and absorbed herself in her high but harassing duty. There let the curtain fall. We do not and we should not know everything. But many a man has gone through his feats of strength without even a flush because of a flutter of the heart.



‘ When it bounded, not for fame,  
 Not for shouts along the air,  
 But for one soft touch that came  
 For a moment on his hair.’

Like all deep students of human nature, Lord Rosebery knows that there are revealing moments in life, moments in which we win understanding. As Dickens said : ‘ None of us clearly knows to whom or to what we are indebted in this wise, until some marked stop in the whirling wheel of life brings the right perception with it. It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly beloved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity. It came to Clennam in his adversity, strongly and tenderly. “ When I first gathered myself together,” he thought, “ and set something like a purpose before my jaded eyes, whom had I before me, toiling on, for a good object’s sake, without encouragement, without notice, against ignoble obstacles that would have turned an army of received heroes and heroines ? One weak girl ! ” ’

I need not lay stress on what must after all be the main part of any worthy estimate—the value of the individual’s work. The work, however, reveals the character, and the character shapes the work. Lord Rosebery conducts with remarkable spirit and brilliancy the story of Pitt’s long duel with Newcastle. It was a fierce and prolonged fight, and the odds were much against Pitt ; ‘ the magpie cunning of that old caitiff paralysed every arm that might have defended him.’ If Pitt had wavered, his career was at an end. But he did not waver. There are victories and defeats which do not seem to be final at the time, but are nevertheless inexorably final. The oratory of Pitt naturally engages Lord Rosebery, but after a most careful and



penetrating study, he comes to the conclusion that we have no adequate means of judging it. Reports of his speeches do not exist, and even if they did exist, there was that in Pitt, as in every orator, which cannot be transmitted in a report. Is it not true that the orator's secret and mystery are always buried in his grave ?

## XV

### THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

MR. JAMES DOUGLAS' book on Mr. Watts-Dunton (1904) is one of extraordinary interest, and so far as it is open to criticism the defect seems to be attributable to the subject and not to the author. There is too little of Mr. Douglas and too little of Mr. Watts-Dunton. If Mr. Douglas had been given his own way we should have had a representative collection of Mr. Watts-Dunton's critical essays, and an estimate of his whole work by Mr. Douglas. This would have been an ideal arrangement. As it is, we have some biographical particulars, some extracts from the poet's critical work in the *Athenæum*, and an admirable, just, penetrating, but scattered review of the whole from a diligent student and a competent judge. That was all Mr. Watts-Dunton would permit for the present, and we are grateful for so much. Mr. Douglas has eminent qualifications for his task. He writes with the full force of conviction, and with an easy familiarity and a firmness of grasp which are the result of assiduous devotion to his author. Mr. Douglas is best known to the public as a master of what may be termed personal criticism—the only criticism which seems likely to be read in the immediate future. But those who can identify his unsigned articles know that he brings to the task of criticism a wealth of erudition and a keenness of

insight which few contemporaries possess. Mr. Watts-Dunton's reserve is intelligible. After guarding his privacy for many years with something very like ferocity, he has at last found himself on every tongue as a poet and a novelist. He did not know what to make of this fame, for though in one way friendly and approachable, he is in another a detached and separate personality, holding the secret of his inner life, and with his eyes set on some image visible for him alone. I can partly imagine the difficulty with which Mr. Douglas dragged out for the benefit of the public the pleasant and cheerful glimpses of Mr. Watts-Dunton's friendships which are given in his pages.

If I confine myself to discussing Mr. Watts-Dunton as a critic, the fault is his own. I am trying to take deserved vengeance on my own account and that of the public. Mr. Watts-Dunton depreciates his critical work, and would much prefer that it should remain buried in the files of old journals. He refuses even to look at what he calls his forgotten papers. The irksome labour which he thus imposes on his disciples provokes a natural resentment. Further, I object utterly to the antithesis which Mr. Watts-Dunton seems to draw between criticism and creation. His assumption is apparently that his criticism is but a thing by the way. But a really great critic is quite as rare and as precious as a great poet or a great novelist, and is at least equally secure of immortality. Five minutes of recollection will show that this is true. I am quite willing to discuss Mr. Watts-Dunton as a novelist and as a poet when he hands over the key of his criticisms to the public, but meanwhile I am concerned to show that he is creative in his critical work. Mr. Douglas happily has been allowed to quote enough to establish his contention

beyond any cavil, and nothing could be more intelligent than the general course of his selection and his comment.

I read Mr. Watts-Dunton first in the *Examiner* many years ago. The paper was then edited by my friend Minto. He was kind enough to write me in my lonely Northern manse, giving me details of literary life in London. He also allowed me to write in his paper, and every Monday I anticipated its arrival with the keenest joy. The circulation, I fear, was very small. Three years before Minto undertook it, the sale, as we are told in the life of Henry Morley, was reduced to a hundred copies a week. Minto improved on that, but the journal never became successful, and he disliked the work of editing. It had compensations, however. There were three of his reviewers whom he specially valued—Theodore Watts-Dunton, Edmund Gosse, and Richard Garnett. I find in some old letters glowing eulogies of them all. But Theodore Watts soon passed over to the *Athenæum*, of which Mr. Norman Maccoll, then a young and unknown man, had been appointed editor. It was a fortunate day for Maccoll at least, if not for Watts-Dunton, when the latter took his shilling. The *Athenæum* took a great place and prestige under Hepworth Dixon, who was a man of strong personality, and in full command of his team. Nor was the team to be despised. Dr. Doran was a master of anecdote; John Bruce had a sound knowledge of eighteenth century literature; Westland Marston was a poet, and though his reading was limited, he could write with sympathy and sometimes with eloquence, as in his review of Rossetti's poems. De Morgan was the most original and striking of them all. But when Mr. Watts-Dunton came on the scene it was felt by Lowell in America, and by many obscure people over the English-

speaking world, that a new and great critic had appeared. For many years the articles of Watts-Dunton were transcendently the chief attractions of the *Athenæum*, and it was hard to say whether he was happiest in his reviewing or in his personal portraits or in his verses.

I shall try to analyse the elements of this powerful and lasting attraction. Serenity, I think, was the chief spell, but the serenity rested on the combination of various qualities. It was the result of all the rest. The critic showed himself to have tranquil and settled convictions, and he was able without effort to impose these on his readers. He began his work young indeed, but after a long preparation. In his silence he had acquired a knowledge of the literatures of the world, which was at once minute and extensive, and completely at command. He made no claim to significance or importance. He was not dogmatic or pedantic, and he shunned violence. Good manners characterised everything he wrote, though with all his benignity there was an occasional gleam as of sleeping lightning which he would not use. His knowledge was always in service to a direct interest in humanity. A certain benignity and calmness went with astonishing maturity to the writing of everything he produced.

You could not read him long without perceiving that he had a masterly grasp of principles. Gradually a certain system revealed itself to the patient student. The essays were full of thought. They showed that the writer had mastered by anticipation the problems that were later to shake the hearts and minds of reflecting men. Mr. Watts-Dunton seemed equally interested in ideas and in form. He did not merely say that a thing was good or bad. He asked why it was good or bad ; he gave a reason ; he put



the question about every great writer : What does he wish to say ? He perceived what lay behind the definite expression of views. I think he was always least at home when writing about authors whom he did not regard as really important. When he had to deal with these, he tried to escape to some discussion of a great subject or a great man. I do not wonder that Henley was much irritated by a review of his poems in which no unfriendly word could be found. When Mr. Watts-Dunton was dealing with an author that counted, he loved to present his significance, and develop it into a consistent whole. To do this he would study even the most occasional and apparently trivial work of his subject. He was above even such critics as Hazlitt and Matthew Arnold in his quiet contempt for distinctions really trivial. I do not remember him discussing, for example, the political position of an author, as Hazlitt would have done, or as Arnold would have done. He knew that party labels are often the result of circumstances, that among professed Liberals there are many fierce Conservatives, and among professed Conservatives many headlong Radicals. He went to the central question—the difference between a materialistic and a spiritualistic cosmogony. I have ventured to say elsewhere that his own theory of the universe is an optimistic confronting of the new cosmogony of growth. Mr. Watts-Dunton saw the gravity of the issue when nearly all the rest were blind, and as year follows year his prescience has been justified. Almost every problem which confronts the critic has been faced and answered in one or other of the buried series. Nor do I know better and truer answers. In comparison the work of most critics is thin and superficial.

Another characteristic of these essays was their nobly catholic temper. It is little, and yet perhaps it is much to say, that the essays were entirely devoid of envy, spite, and malice. There was never any throwing of mud, never any extravagance of blame. The critic never appeared as a petulant Aristarchus dancing and raving on Parnassus. There was no over statement, and there was no timidity. The critic was never presumptuous, but always perfectly fearless, respectful indeed of old and settled judgment, but never a believer in his own infallibility, or in that of any one else. There was no blare of trumpets in his praise, but a sentence meant as much from him as a light caress from Di Vernon. Challenges and contradictions were received with a quiet courtesy. Mr. Watts-Dunton was never one of those who regard every difference from himself as a sign of deep-seated depravity. He gave attentive ear to writers of all schools, and knew that every school, no matter how despised or unfashionable at the moment, had its own share in universal truth. Indeed, it sometimes seemed as if this impartiality were carried too far. The writer appeared to have neither part nor lot in the literary strife. For himself he made no claim, and seemed to cherish no ambition. He had an unshaken faith in the truth, and in the certainty of its triumph. It was quite enough for him to render that truth as he perceived it, and then leave the matter, heedless whether men followed or not. He came forth as the inhabitant of a larger world, as one who moved familiarly through all the fields of thought, as one to whom the little jealousies of the moment were incredibly trifling.

The style fitted the thought, and was, indeed, singularly beautiful and poetical. Mr. Watts-Dunton never indulged

in what is called prose poetry, but the spirit of poetry pervaded his writing. Those who know his prose only by *Aylwin* know but one side of him. He has there adopted the severely simple form which in his judgment best fits the narrative. But even in his criticism his imagination was nobly bridled and guided. You could never say of him that he was oriental and cloying in his expression. You could not complain of the plague of adjectives in the comparative and in the superlative degree. There was a fine restraint in the most eloquent passages, but the right words were chosen and used. This is essential to great criticism. There may be sound judgment and accurate information, and even delicacy of insight, without the crowning accomplishment of style. But for criticism of the highest rank it is essential that the critic should have the power to express the finer and more subtle shades of difference which mark poetical thought and expression. He must be carefully accurate and precise, and yet have a mastery of the refinements of language. No one can say where Mr. Watts-Dunton found his style. He has lived in close intimacy with men of genius whom he has loved and admired, and they have loved and admired him in return. But I cannot see that he has received anything from them. If Rossetti and Swinburne and Morris had never lived, there would have been no perceptible difference in Mr. Watts-Dunton's work, save that, of course, his subjects would have been so far modified.

The effect of all this labour has been very great, but now that Mr. Watts-Dunton has ceased to write criticism, there is some danger that the new generation may miss the influence. He may be assured, however, that there will be little peace for him till he acquiesces in the reasonable

demand that he should put the vast number of his generalisations upon literature, art, philosophy, and the conduct of life into an accessible form. I have only to add that Mr. Douglas is fully justified in the claim that he has connected Mr. Watts-Dunton's critical system with his imaginative work more thoroughly than has been done by any other writer.

Mr. Douglas says, by the way, that Mr. Watts-Dunton's great treatise on poetry in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was written at the request of Professor Baynes. 'He went to London for the purpose of inviting him to do the work and explaining exactly what was wanted.' If I am not much mistaken Professor Robertson Smith had at least as much to do with this business as Baynes had, and I have heard Mr. Watts-Dunton speak with admiration of the suggestions with which Robertson Smith returned the proof, suggestions which were offered with much diffidence, as Robertson Smith did not think himself at home in the field. It was a field, however, which he had by no means neglected.



## XVI

### MEDICATED LITERATURE: JOHN BROWN AND OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

THE biography of Dr. John Brown by his cousin, John Taylor Brown (1903) is worth reading, but the biographer seems to have been overweighted with his task, and it is impossible to say that he has performed it satisfactorily. Dr. John Taylor Brown had decided parts. He was a thinker and a student, but there was in him something perverse and cross-grained. His faculty of expression was limited, and frequently his thought struggles through his style. Thus in his preface we read: 'It may supply the groundwork and suggestion of what may be better done by some other pen than that of the present writer can be hoped by him to effect.' What could be more awkward? But the great disappointment is that the biography is not a biography. The author tantalises us by referring to letters of John Brown in his possession, but he gives none. There is hardly a fact that is not quite familiar. The most vital pages are those which describe Mrs. John Brown, of whom we have two portraits and a somewhat frank account. Besides her clothes, all that she brought to her husband on her marriage was two or three odd volumes of the *Spectator*. But she brought herself, and the two were completely happy in each other. She was admired for her beauty and her grace, and without being highly



educated or brilliant in conversation, she was decidedly intelligent. Mrs. Brown, however, was not a universal favourite. She did not scruple to show her impatience with those whom she disliked, and could speak rather plainly and bluntly. 'And with all her good qualities, she was not quite destitute of what may be called temper, and her husband once allowed to me that even to him there was now and then a little outbreak. But he characteristically added—good, kind, loving soul as he was—that this was rather an addition, because she was sorry afterwards, and so kind and affectionate to make up for it.' The biography breaks off at this point, and there follows a criticism of Dr. John Brown's literary work. For the most part, it is a laborious and unsuccessful paraphrase, but it does not altogether lack acuteness. The concluding essay, having nothing to do with Dr. John Brown, and being in itself somewhat painful reading, should have been omitted. Altogether the book will not bear comparison with Miss Maclaren's exquisite sketch, and one feels that she should have written the blameless, beautiful, sad story of John Brown's pilgrimage through the world.

It has been said that no man gained a literary reputation so easily as Dr. John Brown did. He wrote no sustained work; the fragments he collected represent practically all his output. They are of very unequal value. They are full of repetitions and of quotations. If all the quoted matter were struck out, not much would be left. Yet they live, and may very well survive much that is more ambitious. They are all tinged by an exquisite individuality. Perhaps their chief characteristic is their benignity, and benignity joined to power is the rarest quality in the world. Let any one try to pick out in a great audience the

faces that are at once benignant and strong, and he will understand what I mean. Pathos, geniality, keen observation, and an uncommon skill in the selection of picturesque subjects, mark Dr. Brown's writings. No man was ever more happy in his themes. His studies of Scottish character and of Scottish history and romance, his anecdotes—for they are often little more than anecdotes—his intensely affectionate sketches of animals, the records of high friendships like those with Thackeray and Leech, win their way irresistibly, and though the touches are few they are never wasted. 'The green silk purse full of gold,' is worthy of Stevenson, and though the materials of *Pet Marjorie* were supplied, no one could have handled them as Brown did. He remembered *Pet Marjorie's* own maxim: 'A great many authors have expressed themselves too sentimentally.' But when all is said and done, it is the benignity that looked from Dr. Brown's face and looks from his writings which is his passport to immortality. He was 'determined not to execute a large order,' and he did not, but much will perish ere he be forgotten.

To say that Dr. John Brown writes from the standpoint of a physician, that his works are medicated, is to pay him a very high compliment. There are few medical men who can lay aside the professional manner in addressing the public. John Brown and Oliver Wendell Holmes succeeded in doing this, and yet the wisdom, the experience, and the pity of the physician appear in all they say. Now and then they become strictly professional, as when Dr. John Brown gives an illustration of the bones of the Black Dwarf. For the most part they avoid technicalities, but they never forget the connection of the mind with the body, and the lessons which long nearness to suffering humanity

teach the merciful and the humble. Literature was more the business of Holmes than of Brown, but both of them were primarily healers. Both were in comparatively mature life when they began to write seriously. John Brown was thirty-six when in reply to a kind request from Hugh Miller, a request reinforced with four five-pound notes, he published some criticisms on art in the *Witness*. They do not show him at his best, and it was not till he was forty-eight that the first volume of his collected essays, containing *Rab and his Friends*, was published by Mr. Constable. His last writing appeared about 1866, his period of literary activity thus extending over twenty years. He lived on till 1882. Holmes was nearly fifty when his *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* was published. His previous essays in the same kind were nearly worthless. Thus both of them had minds richly stored when they caught the ear of the public. Holmes's best work in prose was very soon completed. After the *Guardian Angel* of 1867, he wrote nothing that mattered. They had much in common, but Brown's was the deeper and the sadder nature. Holmes was more pugnacious, and outwardly much more triumphant.

Holmes had a doctrine which he preached directly and indirectly through all his prose writings. He was not a materialist, nor did he believe that man was entirely the creature of circumstances. He believed that within a certain range the will was free, and that human beings were responsible to God. But he held that the limits of freedom and responsibility were much more limited than the theologians think, and that in many of their actions human beings are not really free. It is the physiological side of the character that interests him. Thus the traits of

character which connect the individual with his organisation or with all his ancestors are constantly developed. In *Elsie Venner* he describes the effect of a physical inoculation on the moral nature. A girl takes in some degree the properties of a rattlesnake. A novelist may be justified in adopting any hypothesis that will provide him with the strongest appeals to the imagination. But Holmes was not a mere novelist. He was a theological teacher, and he had no right to use as a weapon against the orthodox theology a pseudo-scientific hypothesis. In the *Guardian Angel*, he describes a heroine in whom no less than eight distinct personalities are said to have tabernacled, and he says that he is building on unimpeachable authority. His thesis is that the body in which we journey in the isthmus between the two oceans is not a private carriage, but an omnibus. While he properly repudiated the charge of materialism, he admitted that he wrote to protest against the tendency to shift the total responsibility of human action from the infinite to the finite. In both his novels, and all the Breakfast Table books, and to some extent in his poetry, he undermines the sense of responsibility. When the facts are brought into the light, it will be seen that Oliver Wendell Holmes had more to do with destroying the sense of sin in the present generation than many novelists whom he would have condemned as utterly immoral. But Holmes had a theology of his own, the theology of the Brothers Cheeryble. He deduced from his theory of limited responsibility an almost unlimited tolerance for human beings. He seized at everything that would falsify or weaken the sense of guilt. To Darwinism in this aspect he gave an eager welcome, but he held firmly to the view that the soul is immortal, that it will escape



from its imprisonment, and have a fair opportunity. He was even a universalist, believing firmly that the Sovereign Love would conform at last all characters, however stained and cramped, to His own. In this way, he escaped much of the burden and the mystery of this unintelligible world. Limitation, bondage, darkness, evil, hate were all of the moment. The spirit on its emancipation from death left them behind for ever. With this faith Holmes did fierce battle with the ruling theology, with the 'cabinet keepers of our doctrinal museums.' His *One-Hoss Shay* is a fierce parable describing the smash of the impregnable logic of Calvinism.

It should be remembered that, like Brown, Holmes was the son of a sturdy Calvinistic leader. Brown, however, accepted his father's faith. One of the most penetrating passages in Dr. Taylor Brown's biography refers to this. He speaks of the mental conflict and disturbance which took such serious forms in the later years of John Brown's life, and gave a painfully morbid turn to his thoughts. 'It has sometimes occurred to me that his early home education may have had something to do with this. His father was not a man to be called illiberal in his style of religious thought, but at least in the earlier part of his life it unquestionably went very much on the lines of strict Calvinism, and John having been in his childhood indoctrinated into the same hard and relentless beliefs, they had sunk so much into the essence of his mind that not being strongly logical or disposed to speculate on such subjects, he never found himself able to do sufficient battle against them, but allowed them to the end to press heavily on his spirit, and perhaps to mar his intelligence. . . . Indifference or cynical scepticism were both too alien to his nature



to bring him any relief, and something of abiding disquietude was the result.' That Brown was overwhelmed at times is too true, but I doubt whether he could ever have agreed with Holmes. If he detested anybody, he detested Dickens, who held the same creed. His idol was Thackeray, and his comment on Thackeray explains himself. Speaking of the 'deep, steady melancholy' of Thackeray's nature, he says: 'This arose in part from temperament, from a quick sense of the littleness and the wretchedness of mankind. His keen perception of the meanness and vulgarity of the realities around him contrasted with the ideal present to his mind could produce no other effect. . . . In part, too, this melancholy was the result of private calamities. He alludes to these often in his writings, and a knowledge that his sorrows were great is necessary to the perfect appreciation of much of his deepest pathos.' John Brown held that *Vanity Fair* was Thackeray's greatest novel, and that it was a true picture of life. 'It was this sense of an all-perfect good, of a strict goodness laid upon each one of us as an unescapable law, it was this glimpse into the Paradise not lost of the lovely and the pure which quickened his fell insight into the vileness, the vanity, the shortcomings, the pitifulness of us all, of himself not less than of any son of time.' Whether John Brown held in all respects by his father's creed I do not know, but I am sure that he never would have been won over to any rose-water theology.

There is another point to be touched lightly. Dr. Taylor Brown, in an interesting note, refers to John Brown's admiration for a novel called *Violet; or, the Danseuse*. 'I remember him speaking of it as a book of noticeable power.' This novel, I believe, was written by a

daughter of Lord Brougham. In an early number of the *Saturday Review*, dated July 4, 1857, there is a remarkable eulogy of the story, from which I take some sentences: 'The story is manifestly written by a person who has the capacity for loving. This is a very rare gift, and it is probably well for the happiness of mankind that it is not more common. But, however, this may be, it is certainly rare. . . . The intense love of deep passion is only a very casual visitor to mankind, and most happy couples go to their graves without having for a moment experienced it.' I think we may understand why John Brown admired the book, and why his own life was so deeply shadowed. There is abundant room in the world for the Holmeses as well as for the Browns. We cannot help admiring the undaunted cheerfulness with which Holmes met everything to the last. When as a very old man he visited Stonehenge, and one of his companions called out, 'Hark, hark, hear the lark singing,' he listened, but not a sound reached his ear. He felt a momentary pang, a very sweet emotion of self-pity which took the sting out of his painful discovery, 'that the orchestra of my pleasing life entertainment was unstringing its instruments.' He was a gallant soul, a nature full of freshness and courage. But Holmes did not see much further into the abyss than Voltaire did. In cleverness, in fertility, in alertness, in flashing wit, he was John Brown's superior. But John Brown's work, simple and unpretending as it is, will live, because it is truly and firmly based on very vivid memories of past feeling and past sorrows. It is the work of a man who knew better than most what it is to love, and what it is to suffer, and it may be wiser to sink under the weight of great enigmas than to solve them falsely.

## XVII

### SIR WALTER BESANT

FOR years Sir Walter Besant was my nearest neighbour, and I received many kindnesses at his hands. I knew too well that for a long time before the end he was a great sufferer. There were intervals of release when he recovered his natural brightness, but the enemies were always there. He suffered from asthma for a good many years—in fact it was this that led him to fix his residence in Hampstead, a place otherwise inconvenient to a man who had so many affairs on hand, and who liked London so well. Gout also was a great trouble, and at intervals he was obliged very reluctantly to become a complete invalid with a trained nurse ministering to his wants. Within a few weeks of his death, he was hoping to get away to the country. It was not to be. He had an attack of gastric catarrh which confined him to bed for three weeks, and the end came very suddenly on June 9, 1901. His old friend Dr. Sprigge of the *Lancet*, who was, if I mistake not, the first secretary of the Society of Authors, attended on him during his last illness. He ultimately died, I believe, from a severe strain on the heart, too severe for him to endure in his condition of depleted vitality. It is needless to say that he fought with great courage against his trouble. His home had been darkened in the latter months by the illness of Lady Besant, and also by the absence of his two sons in

South Africa. The abiding comfort will be that he lived a singularly gallant, tender, unselfish and useful life, and that he did not die without seeing many of his dearest purposes fulfilled.

Those who knew Sir Walter Besant only from his public writings were liable greatly to mistake the man. I doubt whether he appeared to advantage in controversy. He had a most singular reluctance to admit that he had made a mistake, and that he made many mistakes in fighting the battle of the author against the publisher no unprejudiced person with a knowledge of the facts could possibly deny. But the readers of Sir Walter's books and those who noted his public action cannot fail to see that his was a very warm and generous heart, that he had an intense sympathy with humanity, that he was one of those who longed with passion to better the condition of the struggling and the poor. He broke off from the Liberal party when Mr. Gladstone took up Home Rule, but this did not at all check his interest in social movements, and though I have no right to say so, my impression is that he did not make a very good Conservative. However this may be, I know that he devoted himself beyond almost any other I have ever met to the cause of those who were in difficulty. He was a very busy man, very systematic in his habits. He lived very quietly, and did not care to be disturbed. He was always ready for a fight and did his best to win, though I suspect he was at bottom a sensitive man and disliked controversy. But when a forlorn creature with no claim upon him sought his aid everything was put aside. He would do anything, he would endure anything, he would forgive anything. No trouble was too great for him to undertake. I have known him after instances of the most melancholy ingratitude



immediately to resume his thankless labour on behalf of those who had forfeited every right to his favour that they ever possessed. No one will ever know all that Sir Walter Besant did as a helper, but if we are to believe Christ he was a Christian indeed, a Christian tried by the most exacting of tests, one who had that in him which will place him at the Right Hand when men who profess much more may be missing. This is what I should single out as the great characteristic of Sir Walter Besant, and if earth has anything fairer to show I do not know it.

Another feature in his character which went along with this was his strong public spirit. This virtue, which still exists strongly among the British people and will show itself when called, was very manifest in Sir Walter. He fretted very much at the muddling and mismanagement of the South African War, but his two sons—he had but two—were among the fighters at the front. His name will be prominently associated with the People's Palace. That institution has not accomplished all that its founder hoped, but it has not been useless, and it will in time help in bringing about the friendship and reconciliation of the East and the West. For his work in this kind Sir Walter Besant was knighted. I question whether he cared very much for the title so far as he himself was concerned, and I am certain he would have preferred that it should have been given as a literary distinction. But he did not feel free to decline it. He had previously argued that the services of men of letters to their country deserved public acknowledgment of this kind quite as much as the services of provincial mayors, and he was impatient to see how little progress this idea made. But Sir Walter was the very last man to push his way into aristocratic circles. There was



about him a great quiet pride. One very prominent nobleman who admired his works asked him to be his guest. Sir Walter replied that he could not pretend to be on an equal footing with the society he would meet with, and that he preferred to remain among his own people. He may very likely have carried this too far, but his pride was an honourable pride.

Another characteristic closely allied was his extreme generosity to his brother authors. It is not so very difficult to be generous to those beneath you. It is perhaps less easy to be generous to young men who pass one in the race. It was the essence of Sir Walter's nature to be generous. How delightful it was to hear him enlarge about Kipling! I remember him telling me that he read *The Light that Failed* on a long railway journey. No sooner had he finished the book than he began it again, and read it all through a second time. His admiration for Kipling was an enthusiasm, but he was ever the most generous in his welcome to the newcomer. Stevenson and Barrie, to mention but two out of many, were the men he was never weary of praising, though he praised them with certain reserves. I never saw the faintest trace of jealousy in that manly heart. I do not believe that it ever existed for a passing moment. If ever he showed impatience at authors, even at some of his personal friends, it was when they wrote ill-natured criticisms or said bitter clever things. One man of letters he was accustomed to talk with every week, and he would say that he could not help enjoying the conversation, but he was sorry to think of it after he got home—so many unkind things had been said. This partly alienated him from one very brilliant and well-known critic. 'I can never trust him,' he would say.

The two things by which he would have wished to be remembered were probably his discovery of the East End, and his crusade against publishers. I have no intention in a personal tribute like this of entering into any criticism of his works, but it must not be forgotten that *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* was written after the death of his collaborator, Mr. James Rice. He had a singular affection for London, and I suppose no one knew the great city better. His death interrupted the monumental work on which he had been toiling for many years, that great reference book on London which Messrs A. and C. Black have published. But whatever may be said it cannot be denied that he more than any other man fixed the mind of the people on East London, and in that way gave the impulse for what is, if not a regeneration, at least a great reformation. Nor can it be questioned that he did a great deal for authors. The remuneration for literary work has been raised by his endeavours. It was very hard for him to believe that an editor could ever have a good case against a contributor, or a publisher a good case against an author. And though the increase in the payment to authors has been partly justified by the larger sale of books, it has had some serious effects. In business, however, matters tend to right themselves. Sir Walter, as I have hinted, had a great impatience of unfavourable criticism. He abhorred slating. I think if he had been able to have his way there would have been no criticisms that were not favourable. Bad books he would have said should simply be left unnoticed. I do not believe myself that he ever wrote an unkind word of any one's book. I never heard him speak a really unkind word of a book or an author, though one might sometimes infer an un-

favourable opinion from his silence. He hated the clique system which is still a considerable evil in London literary life, though it seems to me that it is diminishing. Sir Walter Besant did not think it was diminishing, however; in fact the last time I saw him he said he feared it was increasing. 'A sneer proves nothing,' I said. 'A sneer,' he replied, 'proves a great deal.'

One very noticeable thing in his life was his deep interest in the Palestine Exploration Fund, of which he was secretary for seventeen years. He received a small income, I think £300 a year, for which he did an exorbitant amount of work. But his labour was really done for love, for half the toil spent on fiction would have given him much more. Some years ago there was an ebb in the popularity of his books, but he was cheered before the end by a reaction. His later works had a large circulation, and were cordially praised. Among the most constant of his readers was Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

Sir Walter in his writings inculcated the necessity of frugality. He thoroughly agreed with the Apostle that the man who did not provide for those of his own house had denied the faith and was worse than an infidel. His large experience had brought home to him the difficulties of penniless women in earning a livelihood, especially after real youth and quasi-youth had gone. It was his firm conviction that every man to whom a daughter was born should begin to save what he could to provide an annuity for her, however small. His own way of living was for many years unostentatious in the extreme, and the pretty home which he built for himself in later years, and in which he died, was ordered in a fashion as simple as it was refined. He would not even abandon his secretaryship of the

Palestine Exploration Fund until he had accumulated enough to make his position safe. He had a great sense of the precariousness of a novelist's popularity, although this might hardly be believed by those who read his contentions as to the sums of money that might be earned by men of letters. But it need hardly be said that Sir Walter was frugal in the noble manner, frugal first in order that he might be just, and then in order that he might be generous. He was also a warm friend—the closest in his circle being Mr. A. P. Watt, the well-known literary agent, whom he appointed his executor.

Sir Walter Besant once contributed to *The British Weekly* an article on 'Books Which Have Influenced Me.' In this he said that he began to read voraciously about the year 1848, and he named a mass of books of which he had the run in his childhood. They included familiar authors, but among them was a great collection of plays, every one of which he read, including those of Wycherley and Congreve; but of all the books the one which most seized his imagination was the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress*.

'It still seems to me the book which has influenced the minds of Englishmen more than any other outside the covers of the Bible. While it survives and is read by our boys and girls, two or three great truths will remain deeply burned into the English soul. The first is the personal responsibility of each man; the next is that Christianity does not want, and cannot have, a priest. I confess that the discovery, by later reading, that the so-called Christian priest is a personage borrowed from surrounding superstition, and that the great ecclesiastical structure is entirely built by human hands, filled me with only a deeper gratitude to John Bunyan. The next book which struck my



imagination was *Nicholas Nickleby*, full of tears and laughter; and Shakespeare's *Tempest*, a play which I was never tired of reading. . . . I began to read Scott at about eleven, and I suppose that I have not read any of the Waverley Novels since I was sixteen, but I seem to remember them all. That is a grand test of a really good book, that you should remember it. For instance, I once read *Silas Marner* at a single sitting; it is five-and-twenty years ago, yet I remember it.' Sir Walter goes on: 'I cannot understand—that is to say, I cannot thoroughly satisfy my own mind—as to the influences upon the present young man of twenty. In my time we had two or three great prophets, and two or three minor prophets. The great prophets were Tennyson, Carlyle and Maurice—perhaps Dickens should be added. The minor prophets were many, but Charles Kingsley was the foremost among them. When the history of the ideas of the nineteenth century comes to be written it will be recognised that Tennyson contributed to form the national mind far more powerfully than young men can now understand. The influence of Carlyle and Maurice was nothing less than socialistic. Those who at twenty-one pored over *Sartor Resartus*, *Past and Present*, and *Chartism* became distinctly socialists, not such gentry as bawl the gospel of destruction and break club windows, but socialists of the higher type to whom nothing of humanity is common or unclean. Charles Kingsley at his best was filled with this spirit, and I have never read him since my undergraduate days lest I should lose anything of my old love for the man who wrote *Hypatia* and *Alton Locke*.'

I close this imperfect tribute by recalling the fact that Portsmouth was the birthplace of Charles Dickens, of



George Meredith, and of Walter Besant. I remember that in a characteristic speech Besant advised parents who saw that their sons were interested in books and newspapers and fond of scribbling to allow them to take to journalism, a profession which he thought then had a great future before it. I am not certain that he continued to retain that opinion. He himself was an admirable journalist. Some of his best work appeared in the *Saturday Review* under the Pollock-Saintsbury régime. He was in the full sense a man of letters, and his books on early French poetry and on Rabelais have a distinct value of their own. Nor should I omit to recall his remarkable biography of that strange personality E. H. Palmer. It reads like a romance, and some people judged it to be a romance. Robertson Smith was of the number, and in his article on Palmer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* he does not even refer to Besant's life as an authority. (He reviewed the book in *Nature*.) However this may be, there is no doubt that Sir Walter wrote in that book as in every other with full and generous conviction. A great English worthy, a true patriot, a firm friend, a man of noble and generous heart, a writer of high and distinctive power, passed from us in Sir Walter Besant.

## XVIII

### GRAVY

THE point I wish to make is not so much that the public are tired of gravy—gravy in literature—as that the best of our writers are very tired of it, and give us almost too little.

#### I

For a proper definition of thick gravy we go to a cookery book.

#### TO THICKEN GRAVY

Rub one piece of butter the size of a walnut in a teaspoon of flour, gradually add a cup of boiling water to it, then some gravy, pouring to and fro to prevent its lumping; boil up with the remainder. The butter and flour depend on the thickness required.

#### II

That our ancestors were very fond of gravy—the real gravy and the metaphorical gravy—requires no proof. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* we have the tribulations of Mrs. Todgers in her celebrated commercial boarding establishment. They were communicated by Mrs. Todgers to the Miss Pecksniffs on the second day of their stay in London. From the particulars of three early disappointments of a tender nature Mrs. Todgers proceeded to a general summary

of the life, conduct, and character of Mr. Todgers, and then to the difficulties of presiding over her establishment :

‘The gravy alone is enough to add twenty years to one’s age, I do assure you.’

‘Lor !’ cried the two Miss Pecksniffs.

‘The anxiety of that one item, my dears,’ said Mrs. Todgers, ‘keeps the mind continually on the stretch. There is no such passion in human nature as the passion for gravy among commercial gentlemen. It’s nothing to say a joint won’t yield—a whole animal wouldn’t yield—the amount of gravy they expect each day at dinner. And what I have undergone in consequence,’ cried Mrs. Todgers, raising her eyes and shaking her head, ‘no one would believe !’

‘Just like Mr. Pinch, Merry !’ cried Charity. ‘We have always noticed it in him, you remember ?’

‘Yes, my dear,’ giggled Merry, ‘but we have never given it him, you know.’

Dickens himself supplied the passion for gravy of the thickest and most savoury character in an eminently liberal manner. He was always ready for outbursts of sentiment. The *Christmas Carol* and some other of his minor productions are nearly all thick gravy. Perhaps the gravy is nowhere thicker than in the account of John Westlock’s wooing of Ruth Pinch :

‘A pleasant place indeed,’ said little Ruth. ‘So shady !’

O wicked little Ruth !

They came to a stop when John began to praise it. The day was exquisite ; and, stopping at all, it was quite natural—nothing could be more so—that they should glance down Garden Court ; because Garden Court ends in the Garden, and the Garden ends in the River, and that glimpse is very bright and fresh and shining on a summer’s day. Then, oh, little Ruth, why not look boldly at it ? Why fit that tiny,

precious, blessed little foot into the cracked corner of an insensible old flagstone in the pavement, and be so very anxious to adjust it to a nicety! . . . They talked, of course. They talked of Tom, and all these changes, and the attachment Mr. Chuzzlewit had conceived for him, and the bright prospects he had in such a friend, and a great deal more to the same purpose. The more they talked, the more afraid this fluttering little Ruth became of any pause; and sooner than have a pause she would say the same things over again; and if she hadn't courage or presence of mind enough for that (to say the truth she very seldom had), she was ten thousand times more charming and irresistible than she had been before. . . . She sat down on the little sofa, and untied her bonnet-strings. He sat down by her side, and very near her; very, very near her. Oh, rapid, swelling, bursting little heart, you knew that it would come to this, and hoped it would. Why beat so wildly, heart?

'Dear Ruth! Sweet Ruth! If I had loved you less, I could have told you that I loved you long ago. I have loved you from the first. There never was a creature in the world more truly loved than you, dear Ruth, by me!'

She clasped her little hands before her face. The gushing tears of joy, and pride, and hope, and innocent affection would not be restrained. Fresh from her full young heart they came to answer him.

'My dear love! If this is—I almost dare to hope it is, now—not painful or distressing to you, you make me happier than I can tell, or you imagine. Darling Ruth! My own good, gentle, winning Ruth! I hope I know the value of your heart, I hope I know the worth of your angel nature. Let me try and show you that I do; and you will make me happier, Ruth.'

'Not happier,' she sobbed, 'than you make me. No one can be happier, John, than you make me.'

Fiery face, provide yourself! The usual wages or the usual

warning. It 's all over, Fiery Face. We needn't trouble you any further.

The little hands could meet each other now, without a rampant horse to urge them. There was no occasion for lions, bears, or mad bulls. It could all be done, and infinitely better, without their assistance. No burly drayman or big butts of beer were wanted for apologies. No apology at all was wanted. The soft light touch fell coyly, but quite naturally, upon the lover's shoulder ; the delicate waist, the drooping head, the blushing cheek, the beautiful eyes, the exquisite mouth itself, were all as natural as possible. If all the horses in Araby had run away at once, they couldn't have improved upon it.

Then it goes on :

' And I will swear it, Ruth, my darling, if you please. Leave Tom ! That would be a strange beginning. Leave Tom, dear ! If Tom and we be not inseparable, and Tom (God bless him) have not all honour and all love in our home, my little wife, may that home never be ! And that 's a strong oath, Ruth.'

Shall it be recorded how she thanked him ? Yes, it shall. In all simplicity and innocence and purity of heart, yet with a timid, graceful, half-determined hesitation, she set a little rosy seal upon the vow, whose colour was reflected in her face, and flashed up to the braiding of her dark brown hair.

And so forth, and so forth. Here is richness, quite enough for the gentlemen in Todgers—enough to make the blood run cold.

The luscious, fruity, and juicy character of Dickens' death-beds need not be spoken of again. It is impossible not to be affected sometimes, even by such glutinous matter, and yet it is an evil thing to nurse and fondle and cultivate



pathos. The pathos of a strong nature comes without any parade of preparation. Also the clumsy voluptuousness of many love scenes is positively nauseous. Sermons used to contain too much gravy. There were days when this kind of thing was admired. It is from a sermon on the Ascension of Elijah, by the Rev. J. W. Boulding :

At last, when the darkness began to fall, and the forms of the prophets faded from their view, suddenly the snorting of horses was heard in the distance, and the rumbling of wheels, like the murmur of a storm, and lo! when they looked, the mountains seemed to burn as in a furnace, and all the sky was red as blood ; for, rising out of the sea, a chariot came, and the breath of its steeds was smokeless flame, and its living wheels were a rolling blaze, and, swift as thought, the whirlwind on which they swept in their pauseless course caught up the prophet into the mantling fire ; while, standing in the midst of the burning car, his own wild heart became the centre of the blaze, fanned by the whirlwind and kindling in the flames, till the lightning's rapture was but the reflection of his own, and, streaming with the trail of a comet through the night, he faded among the stars into the depths of heaven ; while the mantle wearily floating to the earth was the proof that the prophet's recompense was rest, and the whirlwind's history the peace of God.

Does any one wonder that a generation subjected to this sort of stuff became sick of gravy ?

### III

But I am prepared to maintain that our young writers in the reaction are not giving us quite enough gravy, for gravy in measure, and not too thick, is a good thing. I turn to three books by three living writers, for each of whom I have the warmest admiration. They are *Salthaven*, by

W. W. Jacobs ; 69 *Birnam Road*, by W. Pett Ridge ; and *Over Bemerton's*, by E. V. Lucas. The volumes are all admirable specimens of the authors at their best. *Salthaven* seems to me to be quite the finest of Mr. Jacobs' novels. It is a book of genius. He tells me that he specially admired 'Q.'s' short stories in the *Speaker*, and they may have had a slight influence over him, but it is hardly traceable. No writer of our time is more original or more delightful. Mr. Pett Ridge steadily grows alike in subtlety and in grip, while losing nothing of his old charm. Mr. E. V. Lucas is a connoisseur. No one possesses the genius of selection as he possesses it, just because he is not, as anthologists usually are, a compiler. He is a man of original power, with the faculty of adorning whatever subject he touches. One is safe with these writers. They are never dry and wooden, but they are as far as possible from the unctuous, and the qualities that inspire the *horror naturalis*. I admire them because they avoid the heated rapture with which even great writers sometimes regard the mysteries of love and death. But it is a question whether they are not too much restrained. Mr. Lucas, in particular, is very fastidious. He tells us in his own charming way how a more than middle-aged hero fell in love with a heroic and unselfish girl, and troubled himself because he was too old for her. The last chapter I inscribe :

### CHAPTER XXVIII

REACHING A POINT WHERE MY HISTORY BEGINS TO BE  
WORTH RECORDING, I CEASE TO NARRATE IT

'NAOMI,' I said that evening, 'Dear Naomi, shall we go into partnership?'

She gave me her hand.

Mr. Jacobs' heroines are noticeably reserved, but he is a little kinder than Mr. Lucas.

He leant towards her. 'Do you wish you had drunk it?' he asked.

Joan Hartley raised her eyes and looked at him so gravely that the mischief with which he was trying to disguise his nervousness died out of his face and left it as serious as her own. For a moment her eyes, clear and truthful, met his. 'No,' she said, in a low voice.

'It is my firm opinion that we were meant for each other. I cannot imagine marrying anybody else, can you?'

Miss Hartley, still looking down, made no reply.

'Silence gives consent,' said Robert, and leaning forward took her hands again.

Mr. Pett Ridge is a little more generous, but his heroine is not exactly lovable, though she is sometimes winsome. Her letter to her husband, who is abroad for months, has no adipose layer of sentiment, no moral fatness. It begins: 'My dear Husband'; it contains hints on etiquette; it addresses the absent one as 'dear husband of medium height,' and the utmost expression of tenderness is, 'Good-bye, dear, dear Fred. The baby sends you kisses that are rather damp, but very sincere. I want to see you, I want to look at you.'

#### IV

This is how a supreme master has described the supreme moment of a man's life. 'I took out one of my old cards, handed it to her, and said: "Here is a reference which perhaps you may know." She bent over it, turned to me, fixed her eyes intently on mine for one moment, and

then I thought she would have fallen. My arm was around her in an instant. Her head was on my shoulder, and my many wanderings were over. It was broad, high, sunny noon, the most solitary hour of the daylight in those fields.'

## XIX

### JANE AUSTEN

A WARM welcome is due to the lately published *Life of Jane Austen* (1913). The full title is *Jane Austen, Her Life and Letters: A Family Record*, by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh. One of these gentlemen is the son of J. E. Austen-Leigh, who published the authoritative memoir of Jane Austen, his aunt, in 1870. The other is Mr. J. E. Austen-Leigh's grandson. Since the publication of the standard biography we have had the letters from Jane Austen to Cassandra, her favourite sister, edited by Lord Brabourne with many futile and irritating comments. These letters cover only the few periods when the two sisters were separated, and the most interesting were purposely destroyed by the surviving sister. They are valuable all the same. We have besides the book about *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*, by J. H. Hubback and Edith C. Hubback, and the pleasant and informing volume of Miss Constance Hill—*Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends*. Nor must we forget the extremely careful study by Oscar Fay Adams, and the much less satisfactory monograph of Goldwin Smith. The present biographers do not mention the scraps which may be found in occasional articles and reviews.

But they have been able to make certain additions to the store of original material, and they have rightly desired



to lay before the public a more complete chronological account of the novelist's uneventful life. They do full justice to Mr. Austen-Leigh's memoir, with its vivid personal recollection, but they point out that the account given of the aunt by her nephews and nieces was based on personal knowledge only of the last period of her life, and especially the last year of all, when her health was failing. They avoided the emotional and romantic side of her nature, which was a very real one, and they hardly knew how much she had gone into society, or how much, with a certain characteristic aloofness, she had enjoyed it. They admit that Miss Austen's life was quiet, but they argue that it was accompanied by a good deal of stirring incident, and I do not disagree. They have used freely the *Letters* as edited by Lord Brabourne, though they have not been able to consult the originals except in the case of the letters from Jane to Anne Lefroy. But the kindness of Mr. J. G. Nicholson, of Castlefield House, Sturton-by-Scawby, Lincolnshire, has opened a completely new source of information in the letters which passed between the Austens and their kinsmen of the half blood—Walters of Kent and afterwards of Lincolnshire. They have also been able to draw on certain further manuscripts, and they have been allowed by Admiral Ernest Rice to take a special photograph of his Zoffany portrait. They have done their work with great skill and admirable tact, and their book will take a permanent place in English biographical literature.

At the same time they will be the last to say that their book is final. We still need an estimate of Jane Austen from a master hand. If Macaulay had carried out his intention of writing a short biography, we should have had a

portrait that would have fixed itself on the general mind. It must be owned, however, that the brief specific criticisms which have appeared from his pen are by no means convincing. We have the brief comment on her by Sir Walter Scott in the *Quarterly Review* for 1815, and we have the notice of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, by Archbishop Whately, published in the *Quarterly* for 1821. Apart from its authorship, neither paper is very remarkable. Two or three essays appeared in the *Saturday Review*, which showed considerable insight. There are some fine touches in Miss Thackeray's essay in her *Book of Sibyls*. A very ambitious article appeared in the *North British Review* about 1870, which I wrongly attributed to Lord Acton. The writings of Mr. W. H. Helm contain remarks of great acuteness. But one looks in vain for a complete estimate which shall set Jane Austen's novels into relation with the age she lived in and the conditions of her work. To such a book the present biography is a very great contribution, and no book does more to show the pitfalls in the way of the bibliographer. But when the bibliographer's work is done so far as it can be done, there is the world of life beyond it, and it needs not only the patience of the student, but the genius of the man of insight to grasp the significance of all the facts and weave them into a living unity.

For illustration of the difficulties take this. All of us opening the new biography will gaze with delight on the admirable rendering of the Zoffany portrait. This they will say is Jane Austen—our ideal, perfectly and triumphantly realised. Archness is a terrible quality in most women, but in this portrait we have a charming archness. The brightness of the eye, the laughter and love in the mouth, the dark hair over the brow, the whole *tout en-*

*semble* are captivating. But as we look and as we remember the appearance of admired poets and novelists known to us, we begin to fear that this is too good to be true. So the first thing I turned to was the index under Zoffany. It seems to be a good index, and it contains very full information on the subject. Both in Dent's edition and in Brabourne's *Letters* the portrait has already appeared. The biographers say: 'The date 1790 or 1791 must be assigned to the portrait—believed to be of Jane Austen, and believed to be by Zoffany—which has been chosen as the frontispiece for this book, as it was for Lord Brabourne's edition of the *Letters*. We are unable for want of evidence to judge of the likeness of the picture to Jane Austen as a girl; there is, so far as we have heard, no family tradition of her having been painted, and as her subsequent fame could hardly have been predicted, we should not expect that either her great-uncle Frank, or her cousin Francis Motley Austen, would go to the expense of a picture of her by Zoffany. Francis Motley had a daughter of his own, another Jane Austen, who became Mrs. Champion of Danny, and a confusion between the two Janes is a possible explanation.' On the other hand, an old Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, Dr. Newman, a few months before his death, wrote to his friend Dr. Bloxam, sending him a picture as a farewell present, and adding: 'I have another picture that I wish to go to your neighbour, Morland Rice. It is a portrait of Jane Austen, the novelist, by Zoffany. The picture was given to my stepmother by her friend Colonel Austen, of Kippington, Kent, because she was a great admirer of her works.' Our Jane Austen became fifteen on December 16, 1790, and Zoffany returned from India in that year. The date 1790 or 1791 must be

assigned to the portrait. I am persuaded that the portrait is one of a lady older than fifteen, or for that matter than sixteen.

## I

It would be impossible to go over all the intricate family history recorded in this book, and in what follows I shall confine myself to the main points of interest. And first of all I note what is said on the romance of Jane Austen's life. She was born on December 16, 1775, and that most untrustworthy and uncharitable writer, Miss Mitford, tells us that her own mother spent her maiden life in the neighbourhood of the Austens, and knew Jane as 'the prettiest, silliest, most affected husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers.' As a matter of fact, when Mrs. Mitford married and left her home Jane Austen was barely ten years of age. Much has been said about her early friendship with Tom Lefroy, afterwards Chief Justice of Ireland. No doubt there was a flirtation between the two when Jane was twenty, but it came to nothing. A year or two after Lefroy was engaged to the lady whom he married in March 1799. He never forgot Jane Austen till his death at the age of ninety, and when he was an old man he told a young relative that he had been in love with Jane Austen, but it was a boy's love. The opinion of the family was that Jane was slightly disappointed.

More serious was her one real romance, a romance which probably affected her spirits, and disinclined her for literary composition for some time after its occurrence. One summer when the Austen sisters were by the sea, probably in Devonshire, a gentleman was strongly attracted by Jane Austen, and when they had to part he was urgent to know



where they would be the next summer, implying or saying that he would be there also wherever it might be. The impression left on Cassandra was that he had fallen in love with Jane, and was quite in earnest. Soon afterwards they heard of his death. This is all.

In November 1802, when the sisters were in Bath, Jane received an offer of marriage, which she accepted. Her lover was a gentleman of good character, connections, and position in life, but ere many hours had passed Jane repented deeply of her action, and insisted on cancelling her 'yes' the next morning. She found that she was miserable after having accepted him. She was nearly twenty-seven at the time, and well aware that when her father died she would be left but poorly off. After that she acquiesced cheerfully in the gradual disappearance of youth. She did not eschew balls, but was indifferent whether she was asked to dance or not. She retained to the end her freshness and humour and her sympathy with the young. But though the wound was healed the scar remained.

## II

The most curious chapter in the volume refers to a sister of Jane Austen's mother. James Leigh Perrot, who lived with his wife prosperously, had a place called 'Scarlets' on the Bath Road, about thirty miles from London. The Perrots were wealthy, prosperous, and devoted to one another. They paid frequent visits to Bath. When Mr. Perrot was sixty-three and his wife fifty-four they had the experience of their lives. Mrs. Perrot went into a milliner's shop in Bath kept by a certain Mrs. Gregory, and a quarter of an hour after was accused of having stolen a piece of



white lace, which was found in her possession. There was reason to believe that the accusation was the result of a deep-laid plot, and that it was hoped that the Perrots might be blackmailed. Mr. Perrot, however, was resolved to see the matter through, and spent the period before the trial in confinement with his wife. He engaged the best counsel possible, but was prepared for a failure of justice, and arranged that in the case of an adverse verdict, followed by transportation, he would sell his property and accompany his wife across the seas.

The trial took place at Taunton in the presence of a great crowd, and lasted seven hours. The jury returned a verdict of 'not guilty,' and the Perrots were congratulated by a large circle of friends. They seem to have spent their lives in great peace, and Mrs. Perrot lived over thirty-five years after her agitating experience. The incident seems to have touched Jane Austen very closely. Her life, peaceful as it was, did not lie beyond the reach of tragic possibilities. About the same time happened her love story in the West, the trouble of Mrs. Perrot, and the loss of her old home.

## III

The biographers have new light to throw on the publication of *Northanger Abbey*, the earlier of Jane Austen's two posthumous novels. The first version was written when she was about twenty-three, in 1797 and 1798. Jane Austen prepared it for the Press, and sold it in 1803 to Messrs. Crosley and Co., of Stationers' Hall Court, London. It was entitled *Susan*, and it was bought by Messrs. Crosby for £10. They did not publish it, and in 1809 the patient authoress addressed inquiries to the publishers. They

offered it back for £10, and said there was no time stipulated for its publication, and no obligation to publish it. We have always been told that *Northanger Abbey* was sold in 1803 to a publisher in Bath for £10, and this statement is in the memoir. But the novel did not come out till 1816, and it then contained the following prefatory note: 'The little work was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication. It was disposed of to a bookseller, it was even advertised, and why the business proceeded no further, the author has never been able to learn.' That very accurate historian, Mr. Austin Dobson, says in his introduction to Macmillan's edition of *Northanger Abbey*, that the 'advertisement' of the first edition of 1818 tells us that the MS. was disposed of to a Bath bookseller. It will be seen that this is a mistake. There is a tradition that the Bath bookseller who bought it was Lewis Bull, but this appears to be guess-work. I am not, however, certain that the biographers have here entirely made out their case. There is considerable difficulty in believing that *Susan* and *Northanger Abbey* were the same books, but there is probably no likelihood of any assurance on the subject. I will not here enter on the merits of Jane Austen's letters. What I shall say is that with all her charm one finds it possible after reading them to understand the criticism of Madame de Staël on one of Jane Austen's novels. She called it 'vulgaire.'

## XX

### THE ROMANCE OF A STILL LIFE, WITH A NOTE ON JANE AUSTEN

LESLIE STEPHEN once said that every autobiography is interesting, and Leslie Stephen knew. It sometimes happens that the autobiographies of the most obscure are of special value. There could not be a more unpretending book in any way than *The Recollections of a Sussex Parson*, by the late Rev. Edward Boys Ellman, 1912. It is the simple story of an old clergyman in Sussex who was born in 1815, who spent all his working life in a little parish with a total population of one hundred and seventy or less, who never in any way attracted public attention or desired to do so. It is written from notes compiled when the author had reached a great age, and the style is as plain as it may be. In spite of all that, the book is one of real worth, and in many points extremely suggestive.

#### I

Edward Ellman was the son of a gentleman farmer, and he was born in the quiet little village of West Firle, four miles from the county town of Lewes. He entered the world three months after the battle of Waterloo, and he lived till 1906. Only a few days before his death, on hearing a favourite clock outside his bedroom door strike mid-

night, he looked up at his daughter with a smile, and remarked : ' Eighty-seven years ago to-night was the first time I remember hearing midnight strike. I woke up in the old Firle nursery and heard the nursemaid Philly read aloud to the nurse the account of King George III.'s death, which had taken place that day,' and he continued, ' it was not only the same clock that struck midnight, but the nursery fire played upon the brass of that same old chest of drawers that the fire is playing on now.'

Lewes is, to my mind, one of the pleasantest country towns in England. At the beginning of last century it was quite fashionable. Brighton was then only beginning to come into fashion, while Eastbourne and Hastings were both small. Lewes was a place where each winter the good old families had their town houses. To this day one may see up the steep streets and in out-of-the-way lanes many comfortable family mansions. The Ellman family moved into Southover Manor at Lewes for the education of their children, and Edward was sent to the Grammar School. He was the youngest boy there, and his acquirements were the words of the Catechism and the multiplication table. To these acquisitions he had difficulty in adding. He was conscientious and laborious to a degree, but he had little success. When ten years of age he was generally up till ten or eleven o'clock trying to learn his lessons, and he would frequently begin again by four o'clock. But he had the greatest difficulty in learning by heart ; he could not understand ciphering ; and he was so caned and flogged on hands and arms that his handwriting was never good. He often misunderstood the directions he received, and it was only when he was released from working in class and allowed to go his own pace that he got on. His father, who

was a clever man and a brilliant scholar, always regarded him as a very dull and stupid boy, and could not understand why he was always at the bottom of his class. 'I was never fluent or ready of speech, and though I often possessed the information had not the ready words to express my meaning when suddenly asked a question.' Indeed, the story of his childhood is a miserable one. He was caned almost every day when at school, and his holidays were made wretched by the tasks appointed for him. Children generally manage, however, to find consolations, and Edward had some pleasure in the society of Lewes. Characters abounded. There were three Miss Shelleys, one of whom transgressed the code of the family by marrying a Mr. Dalbiac. Her sisters were very indignant, and said that 'it was an unheard-of thing that a lady of the Shelley family should marry.' When the census paper was filled up in 1841 by these spinster ladies, the collector noticed that the ages of the ladies and of their three domestics were all stated to be twenty-five years. When the collector ventured to ask a question, Miss Shelley angrily said that she 'had never in her life met with such impudence as to ask the age of a lady. In that house they were all unmarried females, and she could not think of putting each down as more than twenty-five.' Mr. Barrie, I think, fixes the age at twenty-nine.

Another lady of Lewes, Mrs. Newton, always had a chop at two o'clock, and was waited on by her old butler, who had been in her service upwards of thirty years. One day, as the time approached for the chop being carried in, the old man suddenly dropped down dead. When the other servants were hastily considering how to break the information to their mistress, the bell was violently rung.



On a servant appearing the old lady asked why the butler did not bring in her chop. On being told of his death she merely said, 'That is no reason why I should be kept waiting. Is there not any one else who can bring in my chop?'

The local clergy in these days were extraordinarily careless. Very few of them were resident in their parishes, and most were mere pluralists. Lewes was spoken of as 'The Rookery,' from the number who rode out of Lewes in black coats to their various duties each Sunday. At the time the new turnpike road from Lewes to Eastbourne was made, along the whole distance the only resident clergyman was Capper, of Wilmington. Many of the parsons hunted, and they spent much of their time in playing cards.

Edward Ellman had the chance of seeing at his father's and his grandfather's many notable persons, most of them Tories. Among these were the great Duke of Wellington, George Canning, Lord John Russell, Arthur Young, and nearly all the Royal Dukes. 'William Pitt died before my time; but the last time I saw my eldest aunt, Mrs. Sankey (I think about 1873), I found her reading the *Life of Pitt*, and she then told me that as a girl on one occasion she had to entertain Pitt for two or three hours at her home in Betshanger. Her father was out, and her mother ill.'

## II

After various experiences at Guernsey and elsewhere, Edward Ellman matriculated at Oxford in February 1834. He had difficulty in getting through, but at last he went into residence at Wadham. He read fourteen hours daily,

and convinced himself that one hour's reading in the morning when the head is clear is worth two hours' reading at night by artificial light. He slowly found himself, and was fortunate in getting a good mathematical tutor. He worked for honours, and to the evident amazement of every one he took a First Class in Mathematics, and an Honorary Fourth in Classics. When he heard the news, he was so worn out that he did not write to his father. 'Few men,' he says, 'have passed through Oxford seeing as little of Oxford life as I did.' He seems to have made at Oxford only one friend, and yet these were the days of Pusey and Newman, and with him at Wadham was R. W. Church. His father, without previous consultation, purchased the advowson of the little village of Berwick, with the view to his settling there as a clergyman. Poor Edward had been offered work as a mathematical coach and a Fellowship if he would stay on at Wadham. But his own desire and intention had always been to be a Naval Chaplain and Instructor. With his habitual meekness he made no remonstrance, and, after a long time of waiting for the death of a pluralist, he at last settled down at Berwick. A neighbouring clergyman immediately visited him, and complained that he could not get his daughters off his hands. This clergyman talked to the Bishop of Chichester, Dr. Gilbert, and complained that of his eight daughters only one was off his hands. The Bishop remarked: 'I also have eight daughters, and not one of them off my hands.' The clergy were frank in these days. Another neighbour, a Mr. Smith, pointed out his wife to Ellman, and said: 'Look at Harriet. Isn't she pretty?' The shy young parson, not being struck by the lady's beauty, said nothing. After a pause Mr. Smith observed: 'I married

my first wife for money—my second for love.’ In the middle of one of his sermons this clergyman said : ‘ It is sad to think that out of the whole congregation here present only six will be saved.’ He paused, and then added, ‘ And I could name them too.’

At Berwick Ellman was to remain as rector for sixty years, and there was never a more assiduous and faithful pastor. He scarcely ever left his charge. He did not drive his people, but tried to lead them, and he made it his main business to train up the children of his parish in religion.

And here comes in the romance of this quietest of all lives. When he was but a boy in his ’teens he heard much from a favourite aunt about a London girl, Georgie Plummer, who was tireless in all good works and devoted in nursing her invalid father. ‘ She would just be the wife for you, Edward,’ she once said. Little did she think that the shy lad had fixed on the unknown one as his ideal of womanhood. Many years passed before he saw her. He got to know all her relations ; she knew well all his brothers and sisters. Several times they nearly met, and always just missed. In 1844 he heard that she was in the neighbourhood, and rode over to the house where she was staying. ‘ Walking in unexpectedly, he found his ideal alone in the drawing-room. For years he had pictured to himself a tall, handsome, commanding-looking woman. For the moment he was taken aback, for what he saw was a tiny, slight figure without the least pretension to good looks. But it was, as he said, not her looks that he cared about ; it was the soul within. He returned to Wartling knowing and feeling that she was the one woman in the world for him, and that directly he could afford to marry he would try and win her for his helpmeet.’

But he could not afford to marry, or thought he could not. He had been instituted Rector of Berwick, and he had built a new rectory on the old site. But before the rectory was finished he was asked to give a home to his eldest sister and her three children. He never said anything about his dreams and purposes, but unselfishly surrendered them for the time, and had no communication with Miss Plummer. He went on quietly working his parish for nine years, and then his sister left him to make a home for herself. She had never known the sacrifice he was making. But his opportunity came at last. He invited his favourite sister to bring her friend over to Berwick. It was a lovely hot August day, and he proposed a walk to show the guest the views. His sister became tired and sat on a stile, whilst the two others walked across a field. In a few quiet words he asked her to be his wife. She was so astonished and startled that she turned off the path and nearly walked into the river. He had waited twenty years for his ideal. It was a perfect marriage. Their minds and tastes were harmonious. Neither of them cared for society; both were devoted to good works; and, though they were singularly undemonstrative, their affection was deep and tender. When she died he was almost broken-hearted, and he would sometimes visit her grave two or three times in the day. She seems to have had a stronger and more decided character than his own. He had leant on her, and without her was very lonely, though he always tried to make the best of his loneliness. 'I don't feel loneliness as much as most people would, you know; I was a bachelor so many years that I am used to being alone. It is not so hard for me.'

Mr. Ellman was a model pastor. Every house in Berwick



he visited once a week ; the school two or three times a day. Every child in the parish regularly attended Sunday and day school. If any one was missed at church, the next morning he went to the truant's house, saying, ' I came to see why So-and-so was not in church.' He firmly believed that a house-going parson makes a church-going people, and certainly it was so in his case. Out of a population of one hundred and seventy the morning congregations averaged ninety-five, and the afternoon congregation one hundred and five in the summer six months, and in the winter the attendance was almost as good. He was in the way of recording the numbers attending at each service, week-day as well as Sunday. Lists of parishioners were kept, and lines were marked out, and marks put against each service. Perhaps his father chose wisely for him, for the peaceable, loving, conscientious life was by no means unhappy, and the years increased his love for his home and his people. When he was near the end of his life of ' duty, praise, and prayer,' he talked to his daughter about his parish. Once he said, ' I don't know why, but I can't say that I understand people fearing death. I have never feared it, but I pray to be patient waiting for God's call. I sometimes think I have much to be thankful for in having led this quiet life. I have not had the temptations other men have had. Looking back, I can't remember ever having wilfully committed sin. My great desire was always to do my duty. No, I cannot have had the temptations of other men.'



## III

This account given by Mr. Ellman of the Sussex clergy in his time throws some light on the work of Jane Austen. That great writer was a clergyman's daughter, her father, the Rev. George Austen, being Rector of Steventon, near Basingstoke. Miss Austen published four novels in her lifetime: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1816). She began to write as early as 1796, and she finished *Persuasion* only in 1816. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published after her death, in 1818.

Mr. Ellman, as we have seen, was born in 1815, and he very early took note of the clerical society in which he was living. His recollections remarkably confirm the truth of Jane Austen's clerical portraits. Lord Macaulay once wrote of Jane Austen, 'She has given us a multitude of characters, all in a certain sense commonplace, all such as we meet every day, yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings. There are, for example, four clergymen, none of whom we should be surprised to find in any parsonage in the kingdom—Mr. Edward Ferrars, Mr. Henry Tilney, Mr. Edmund Bertram, and Mr. Elton.' We should, I think, be surprised to meet any one of them in any parsonage to-day. Jane Austen was not unfriendly to the clergy. Two of her brothers, as well as her father, were parsons. Three of the heroes of her six novels were also parsons. Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* and Bertram in *Mansfield Park* were intended to be very favourable specimens of their order; but we are expressly told that

neither wore the clerical dress. Tilney was generally non-resident. He had to go on one occasion to his parish on a Monday to attend a parish meeting, but so long as he provided for the Sunday services there was no necessity for his presence. Bertram is meant to be a model, and is almost Miss Austen's favourite among her characters. He has an excellent living, and it is mentioned, highly to his praise, that he intends to reside, not to be a clergyman every seventh day for three or four hours. But of his religious feelings, of the claims of his sacred office, nothing is said. The night before he leaves his home to be ordained he passes in dancing at a ball. Mr. Edward Ferrars, who is ordained towards the end of the story, is equally unimpressive. I need not speak particularly about Mr. Collins or Mr. Elton, of Dr. Grant, the Rector of Mansfield, who lost his temper for the whole evening through a disappointment about a green goose, and who found pleasure in exercising hospitality because it gave a good excuse for drinking claret every day. Miss Austen was herself a sincere and humble Christian, but obviously the level of clerical life around her was very low, even at its highest.

Mr. Ellman mentions, as I have noted, the only resident clergyman between Lewes and Eastbourne in 1819 was Capper, of Wilmington. Capper, though resident, appears to have been no more in earnest than his neighbours. Mr. Ellman tells us that one Sunday after morning service at Wilmington, Mr. Capper made his way to Hurstmonceux Rectory, where four clergymen met to dine together between the services. It turned out to be a wet afternoon, and so the four clergymen, instead of going out to their various services, spent the whole afternoon in card-playing.

The four were Robert Hare, Vicar of Hurstmonceaux; Edward Raynes, Vicar of Firle, afterwards Archdeacon; Harry West, Vicar of Wartling; and Capper, Vicar of Wilmington. It seems to me that we have here an important sidelight on Jane Austen's work.

## XXI

### EDWARD FITZGERALD AND BERNARD BARTON

THERE is a story of a city gentleman who used to visit the shooting quarters of a friend in Scotland. He was in the way of talking to the men about the place, and especially to the intelligent gardeners. At last he came and missed one of the gardeners. 'Where has your friend gone?' he asked of the other. 'He is deid,' was the reply. 'Deid? What do you mean?' 'Deid.' 'Oh, dead.' 'Yes.' 'Ah, indeed is he dead? So he has joined the great majority.' 'Oh, fie, no,' the gardener answered with passion. 'He has not joined the great majority. He was a good man.' We may say the same of Edward FitzGerald. He has not joined the great majority of the forgotten. There is no sign that he is ever going to join them. He was a good man. Almost all that he has written has a certain life of its own, and this is particularly true of his little-known *Life of Bernard Barton*, one of the earliest of his published writings in book form. My copy is the second edition, dated 1850, and published by Hall, Virtue and Co., 25 Paternoster Row, London. The title is *Selections from the Poems and Letters of Bernard Barton*, edited by his daughter. But the book contains in addition to the selections a Memoir by FitzGerald, and we may be sure that FitzGerald had much to say in the selection of letters and poems which makes the larger part of the

book. As is well known, the daughter was Lucy Barton, who afterwards was married unhappily to Edward FitzGerald. When the book was published the two were on the best of terms. Miss Barton says : 'That feeling which has made the editor entirely unequal to write that part of the volume more directly biographical keeps her silent upon it here. She has entrusted it to one who knew her father well, and on whom she can rely for an impartial relation of his history. It has been more amply detailed than it would have been for the public only, at her request, in order to satisfy many subscribers to whom the account of his life was likely to be especially interesting.' The first edition was sold by subscription for the pecuniary benefit of Miss Barton. We learn from Mr. Wright that FitzGerald took an exceedingly active part in promoting the subscription, and the FitzGerald family among them bought some fifty copies. I do not possess the first edition, which contains a subscription list, including the names of nearly all FitzGerald's friends. Among them was James Spedding, who took ten copies.

Bernard Barton was neither a great letter-writer nor a great poet, but the book is distinctly pleasing throughout. The chief charm of it, however, is that it throws a welcome light on the shy and sweet personality of Edward FitzGerald. A biographer cannot help saying something of himself, of his preferences and his aversions, however much he may try to keep himself in the shade. So I think in the memoir we get a truer idea of FitzGerald's apology for his own life than even in his letters. The little biography is a fine and finished piece of writing. The close is particularly beautiful. FitzGerald is saying what he can say for Bernard Barton's poetry. He writes :



‘ Finally, what Southey said of *one* of Barton’s volumes —“ there are many rich passages and frequent felicity of expression ”—may modestly be said of these selections from ten. Not only is the fundamental thought of many of them very beautiful—as in the poems “ To a Friend in Distress,” “ The Deserted Nest,” “ Thought in a Garden,” etc.—but there are many verses whose melody will linger in the ear, and many images that will abide in the memory. Such surely are those of men’s hearts brightening up at Christmas “ like a fire new stirred ”—of the stream that leaps along over the pebbles “ like happy hearts by holiday made light ”—of the solitary tomb showing from afar like a lamb in the meadow. And in the poem called “ A Dream ”—a dream the poet really had—how beautiful is that chorus of the friends of her youth who surround the central vision of his departed wife, and who, much as the dreamer wonders they do not see she is a spirit, and silent as she remains to their greetings, still with countenances of “ blameless mirth,” like some of Correggio’s angel attendants, press around her without awe or hesitation, repeating “ welcome, welcome ! ” as to one suddenly returned to them from some earthly absence only, and not from beyond the dead—from heaven.’

The justification for a reverent study of FitzGerald’s mind and life will be found in a passage he himself singled out from one of Bernard Barton’s writings : ‘ Many a time when I have been taking a solitary stroll by the seaside the sight of footsteps left when no one was in sight has set me thinking whose they might be.’

## I

The memoir is a defence of the Quiet Life. This was the life which FitzGerald led by choice and Barton by necessity. Both of them chafed at times and reached out to the busy world, but on the whole Barton lived and died content, and the preference of FitzGerald for the peaceful ways of Suffolk was deliberate and final. Bernard Barton was clerk in a bank for forty years. His remuneration was certain, if small, and he was without the anxiety of business. He was generally liked, and was a pleasant and welcome guest at the Hall and the Farm. His sphere was limited in the extreme, bounded by Kersgrave one way and Wickham on the other. He was very rarely more than a few miles out of Woodbridge, and during the forty years of his residence there he was absent from it in all only about eight months. There were links with the older world and the newer. Bernard once visited Mattishall, the home of the Donnes, where he talked with old Mrs. Bodham, the 'Rose' of the poet Cowper—the lady who presented him with his mother's picture. There was an old gentleman to be seen in the streets of Woodbridge who was justly envied for having seen Dr. Johnson at 'The Mitre' tavern. In addition, there were little sails on the river where FitzGerald was Barton's companion. FitzGerald recalls the times when 'after a pleasant picnic on the seashore we drifted homeward up the river, while the breeze died away at sunset, and the heron, at last startled by our gliding boat, slowly rose from the ooze over which the tide was momentarily encroaching.' Both men loved Suffolk farmers, Suffolk labourers, Suffolk fields. They greatly

disliked violent occasions of feeling and manifestations of it, whether in real life or story.

Then there was the invaluable solace of books, but these also were of the quiet kind. They were authors who dealt in humour, good sense, domestic feeling, and pastoral description—Goldsmith, Cowper, Wordsworth in his lowlier moods, and Crabbe. Boswell's *Johnson* was particularly favoured, and the good things in it brightened and enlightened many a country dinner-table. Reading aloud was a favourite occupation, and the novels of Scott were preferred to all other books. But even in Scott the humorous parts were more relished than the pathetic. Bailie Nicol Jarvie's dilemmas at Glennaquoich rather than Fergus MacIvor's trial; and Oldbuck and his sister Grizel rather than the fisherman's funeral. Domestic tragedy was not liked. They had come to the stage when they had quite enough of tragedy and were glad to laugh when they could.

The meals in that favoured land were tea and supper. Dinner was regarded with a certain terror. Edward Fitzgerald himself abhorred the trouble of dressing for dinner, and liked everything to be informal. Tea was the favourite beverage, though we hear occasionally of the snuff-box, 'and a glass of genial wine.' It was at tea-time that friends met most frequently and easily. We get a glimpse in one of Barton's letters dated 1848: 'Libby Jones and E. F. G. dropt in about five and took tea with us; she left us soon after, but Edward stayed till between seven and eight, and then started for a moonlight walk to Boulge.' Supper was a rarer luxury, but very pleasant when it came. First came tea, and afterwards a few chapters from Scott. We read: 'Then was the volume taken down impatiently

from the shelf and dilatory tea-drinkers chided ; and at last, when the room was clear, candles snuffed and fire stirred, he would read out or listen to these fine stories, anticipating with a glance of the eye or an ejaculation of pleasure the good things he knew were coming—which he liked all the better for knowing they were coming—relishing them afresh in the fresh enjoyment of his companion, to whom they were less familiar, until the modest supper coming in closed the book and recalled him to his cheerful hospitality.’

## II

Then there was the pleasure of occasional publishing. Bernard Barton was tolerably active in this way. In 1812 he published his first volume of poems, with the delicious title, *Metrical Effusions*. This started a correspondence with Southey and with James Hogg. James Hogg entrusted to Bernard Barton a tragedy to get it represented in London. The Quaker referred him to Capel Lofft, another of his correspondents, who promised to do all he could. But having already sent to the London managers various tragedies of transcendent merit which had fallen on barren ground, he dissuaded the shepherd from going further. It will be seen that London managers in these days were as blind and foolish as their successors. Bernard followed this with a quarto volume enticingly entitled *Poems by an Amateur*, and by a good many more. FitzGerald admits that his friend was not very fastidious and not very careful ; but he maintains that Bernard was free from envy, being quite as anxious that others should publish as himself, and incapable of believing that there could be too much poetry abroad—a doctrine which



has been partially revived by an eminent Oxford Professor. However, the diligence of Bernard Barton excites some misgivings in the mind of Edward FitzGerald, and he scatters them by what is his own apology for publishing as well as Barton's: 'But apart from all these motives, the preparation of a book was amusement and excitement to one who had little enough of it in the ordinary course of daily life: treaties with publishers—arrangements of printing—correspondence with friends on the subject—and, when the little volume was at last afloat, watching it for a while somewhat as a boy watches a paper boat committed to the sea.' This was FitzGerald's own way. For example, he published in 1851 *Euphranor*. He had become convinced that the ordinary student pored too much over his books, and was in favour of athletic instruction. And he hoped to do something against a training system of which he had seen many bad effects. Spedding, Cowell, and Donne tried to bring the book before the public without much success. So FitzGerald thought his boat had gone down, and spoke of his work as 'a pretty specimen of chiselled cherry stone.' Happily he was not quite daunted, and he published at his own expense in February 1859 the *Rubáiyát*. He sent a copy to his friend Cowell, with the words: 'I hardly know why I print any of these things which nobody buys, but when one has done one's best one likes to make an end of the matter by print. I suppose very few people have ever taken such pains in translation as I have.'

## III

Both Barton and FitzGerald were friendly men, but their friendships were kept up mainly by correspondence.



Barton could not help himself, but FitzGerald was welcome everywhere. Barton was quite remarkable in his perseverance and success as a letter-writer. He seems to have seen Charles Lamb twice at most in London, but Lamb addressed to him some of his very best letters. He only once met Southey, but Southey wrote to him cordially and freely. He knew Dr. Nathan Drake, that excellent bookman of Hadleigh, but seems to have met him very seldom. His closest correspondence was maintained for thirty years with a lady whom he never met. In days when letters were not all curt and businesslike one might easily estimate the unconscious regard which a man had for a correspondent by the quality of the letters he wrote to him. If you like and respect your correspondent you cannot help showing it. You send him your best. The converse is true. Judged by this test Barton comes out very well, for his correspondents sent him decidedly good, frank, confidential letters. They did not write down to him, and they are much beyond the bare limits of civility.

I have seen FitzGerald blamed for allowing himself to see so little of such friends as Tennyson and Thackeray, but he exchanged letters with them, and is it not likely that a shy recluse like FitzGerald would shrink from meeting an old associate after the lapse of years? He would fear to see the result of the wreckful siege of battering days. He would shrink from seeing how roughly the inexorable hand of time had struck them. He would shrink from going back on stony spaces of the road. In his imagination they would remain fair and young, and perhaps he preferred to cherish them so. At all events he shows in his memoir of Barton that this feature of Barton's friendships

is one that has struck him very much, and perhaps helped to soothe his conscience.

Edward FitzGerald lived and moved and had his outer being within narrow limits which he rarely transgressed. But his mind soared and roamed through every field of thought,

‘ North and south and west and east,  
Winds loved best and winds loved least,’

and he brought back spoil. The adventurous daring of his speculation is in strange contrast with his timid, domestic, tea-drinking, Waverley-novel-reading life. But for the one the other was no doubt necessary. Edward FitzGerald could never have been a hustler. Dr. Marigold told us long ago that ‘ you must wake up all the whole family of thoughts you have got and burn their nightcaps, or you won’t do in the cheap-jack business.’ FitzGerald could do nothing in the cheap-jack business. He could not burn the nightcaps of his thoughts and set them all a-rushing. We have the great letters which place him with Cowper and Lamb in the triad of the masters in this kind. All three wrote out of the peace of defeat. We have the poems. Most of us launch our paper boats on a sea of fire ; his have won the shore.

## XXII

### WHY DID SHAKESPEARE RETIRE TO STRATFORD-ON-AVON ?

A RECENT visit to Stratford raised again in my mind the old question, Why did Shakespeare in the prime of his life and activity leave London for his native town? He was born in 1564, and in 1611, when he was only forty-seven, he disposed of his shares in the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. He died in 1616 at the comparatively early age of fifty-two. Mr. Watts-Dunton puts the problem thus: 'Much wonder has been expressed that he—after his great success in London, after having acquired wealth and honour, and enjoyed intercourse with all the genius and all the brilliance of his time; after being the admiration of all, from princes to apprentice boys—should in the heyday of health and fame have left everything to go down to Stratford (which was further from London than Aberdeen is now) to settle among farmers, wool-staplers, and cattle-dealers, and enjoy no better social intercourse than could be found at the Falcon Inn.'

I had the opportunity of stating the case to a celebrated resident in the town. She replied without hesitation. First of all, she declared Shakespeare loved the place as distinguished from the people. In the second place he loved his wife. I started the ordinary objection that Shakespeare's wife might, if she had chosen, have been with him in London. The answer I received was that in all probability Mrs. Shakespeare shared the general Puritan

prejudice against the theatre. There may be force in this. Shakespeare, in spite of all that has been alleged to the contrary, does not seem to have been any more in sympathy with Puritanism than Scott was. Sir Sidney Lee tells us that he could hardly have viewed with unvarying composure the steady progress that Puritanism was making among his fellow-townsmen. Dr. Carter should be heard upon the other side. We know that Shakespeare's son-in-law Hall was in avowed sympathy with Puritanism, and we also know that a Puritan preacher was entertained at Shakespeare's residence after delivering a sermon in the spring of 1614. I have no doubt that to-day many in Stratford-on-Avon think as little of 'play-actors' as Shakespeare's own contemporaries did. Nicholas Rowe says that at Stratford, 'the latter part of Shakespeare's life was spent as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends.' In his striking little book, *Christmas at the Mermaid*, Mr. Watts-Dunton faces the problem. He puts into Ben Jonson's mouth the following :

'That he, the star of revel, bright-eyed Will,  
With life at golden summit, fled the town  
And took from Thames that light to dwindle down  
O'er Stratford farms, doth make me marvel still.'

The following beautiful passage in the same poem cannot be curtailed :

THE EVENING AFTER WILL'S RETURN TO  
STRATFORD-ON-AVON

'As down the bank he strolled through evening dew,  
Pictures (he told me) of remembered eyes  
Mixt with that dream the Avon ever weaves,  
And all his happy childhood came to view ;

He saw a child watching the birds that flew  
 Above a willow, through whose musky leaves  
 A green musk-beetle shone with mail and greaves  
 That shifted in the light to bronze and blue.  
 These dreams, said he, were born of fragrance falling  
 From trees he loved, the scent of musk recalling,  
 With power beyond all power of things beholden  
 Or things reheard, those days when elves of dusk  
 Came, veiled the wings of evening feathered golden,  
 And closed him in from all but willow musk.

And then a child beneath a silver willow—  
 A child who loved the swans, the moorhens' "cheep"—  
 Angled for bream where river holes are deep—  
 For gudgeon where the water glittered shallow,  
 Or ate the "fairy cheeses" of the mallow,  
 And wild fruits gathered where the wavelets creep  
 Round that loved church whose shadow seems to sleep  
 In love upon the stream and bless and hallow ;  
 And then a child to whom the water-fairies  
 Sent fish to "bite" from Avon's holes and shelves,  
 A child to whom, from richest honey-dairies,  
 The flower-sprites sent the bees and "sunshine elves" ;  
 Then, in the shifting vision's sweet vagaries,  
 He saw two lovers walking by themselves—  
 Walking beneath the trees, where drops of rain  
 Wove crowns of sunlit opal to decoy  
 Young love from home ; and one, the happy boy,  
 Knew all the thoughts of birds in every strain—  
 Knew why the cushat breaks his fond refrain  
 By sudden silence, "lest his plaint should cloy"—  
 Knew when the skylark's changing note of joy  
 Saith, "Now will I return to earth again"—  
 Knew every warning of the blackbird's shriek,  
 And every promise of his joyful song—  
 Knew what the magpie's chuckle fain would speak ;  
 And, when a silent cuckoo flew along,  
 Bearing an egg in her felonious beak,  
 Knew every nest threatened with grievous wrong.



He heard her say, "The birds attest our troth!  
 Hark to the mavis, Will, in yonder may  
 Fringing the sward, where many a hawthorn spray  
 Round summer's royal field of golden cloth  
 Shines o'er the buttercups like snowy froth,  
 And that sweet skylark on his azure way,  
 And that wise cuckoo, hark to what they say:  
 'We birds of Avon heard and bless you both.'  
 And, Will, the sunrise, flushing with its glory  
 River and church, grows rosier with our story!  
 This breeze of morn, sweetheart, which moves caressing,  
 Hath told the flowers; they wake to lovelier growth!  
 They breathe—o'er mead and stream they breathe—the  
     blessing,  
 'We flowers of Avon heard and bless you both!'"

Perhaps the true answer is complex. Of Shakespeare's relations to his family, and especially to his wife, we know but little. We must remember, however, that provincial life in the wonderful England of that day was by no means dull. The spirit of the nation was too high for that. This was a period when the people lived royally. In a book, *Shakspeare's England*, published many years ago by the New Shakspeare Society, we read of the great partiality of the people for beef, and there is a long and appetising list of dishes in use. No fewer than eighty-six kinds of wine were generally drunk. Though we are told that 133,000 men constituted the English land forces at the time of the Armada, Harrison informs us that the muster roll of 1574-75 showed a number exceeding 1,100,000. Considering the population of the country at that time, this was an amazing force. The troops may have been raw, but they were available, and in these days when campaigns were long their chances would not have been hopeless even against the formidable veterans who were led by Parma. There

is also the observation of Johnson that every man has a lurking wish to appear considerable in his native town. Shakespeare's purchases made him a leading citizen, and proved to the most sceptical that his career had been materially successful. We may take a step further under the guidance of the great critic. Mr. Watts-Dunton says : ' It was a natural thing to do in an age when men felt that except in the exercise of the most sacred of the affections the highest delight of intellectual man lies in meditation, and that it is among the scenes of one's childhood that the scattered threads of one's own life can be gathered up and contemplated as one woof, that true meditation upon the universal life of man can be fostered with most success. These are profound and weighty comments. There are those who look upon the hills and streams of their childhood as friends rather than in any other aspect and relationship. There are great writers whose genius finds free expression only when they deal with the scenes and the characters that first impress their minds. As life goes on and is enriched by new experiences they come back and see deeper meanings in the familiar landscape and people, but they are never in quest of new subjects. They know that the old subjects will last them while life and invention last, and they never work to so much purpose or find their minds so absorbent as when they contemplate them day by day. Shakespeare appears to have written little in the years of his retirement, though he visited London several times. I cannot think that the proof of his literary productiveness in the last years of his life is convincing. It seems as if he meant his retirement to be a genuine retirement. But it may very well be, Mr. Watts-Dunton says, that he found that meditation was easy, fruitful, and delightful, in the place

where he could gather all the glittering strands of his wonderful days into unity.

That Shakespeare retired to Stratford-on-Avon for love of his fellow-townsmen and their conversation is very hard to believe. If he did he was certainly disappointed. It was said by Coleridge, 'In older times writers were looked up to as intermediate beings between angels and men; afterwards they were regarded as venerable and perhaps inspired teachers; subsequently they descended to the level of learned and instructive friends; but in modern days they are deemed culprits more than benefactors.' If Shakespeare were in Stratford-on-Avon now, or any other English provincial town, many would ignore him, many more would decry him. The county people would consider anxiously whether or not he should be visited. The comrades of his childhood, many of them at least, would resent his rise in life, and depreciate his family. Friends and worshippers he might find, but they would be a small minority. A watchful and jealous curiosity would be turned like a microscope on all his doings. One of the very few things we know about Shakespeare is that he spent much of his last days in litigation. It was pitiful work, and yet one understands how Shakespeare might have been driven into it against his will. Jealousy, envy, malice may have conspired to make his path difficult. Whether he was disappointed or not we cannot tell, but probably he never repented his choice. A great authority on this subject once said to me that there was such a thing as the love of a man for his mother earth, and he would be happy upon it whoever molested him, and never quite happy away from it.

In this connection I cannot but remark that the relations

between Dr. Johnson and Lichfield were in the highest degree honourable to both. The manner in which Johnson found access so early to the best society of the town has never been quite explained. So far as appears, his fellow-citizens were perfectly loyal to him. They were always proud of him, he was always happy among them, and to-day Lichfield stands true to her greatest son.

Shakespeare died at fifty-two, as Thackeray did. It was counted a greater age then than it would be considered now, but Shakespeare must have looked forward to more and ampler years. How did he think of death? On this subject Mr. Watts-Dunton's essay on Hamlet may be read with great profit. It should be added that though it is hazardous to draw inferences from Shakespeare's dramatic utterances, we may be perfectly sure that he had a strong grip of life. The melancholy element is not wanting—how could it be?—but it is not predominant. He was indignant at the 'deep dishonour of death,' and like William Morris, he poured his wrath upon the 'spoiler of life's feast.' Pessimism was utterly foreign to his healthy nature. However he might cultivate 'sweet melancholy' as a fine art, we know that his power was not failing. Coleridge very rightly speaks of the *Tempest* as 'an almost miraculous drama.' How would it have been if Shakespeare had lived to old age? I am not going to examine this question at the end of an essay, but I cannot but quote the profound and beautiful comment of Coleridge on Lear. In Lear, Coleridge says, 'old age is itself a character; any addition of individuality would have been unnecessary and painful, for *thus Lear becomes the open and ample playground of nature's passions.*'



## XXIII

### THE LETTERS OF CHARLES LEVER

*Charles Lever: His Life in his Letters*, by Edmund Downey, is a very welcome and a very readable book, though it is not, and does not profess to be, an adequate record of the author's life. Such a record we shall never find. The materials have hopelessly vanished; and yet if ever there was a man who might have written an autobiography that would endure, that man was Charles Lever.

How many middle-aged and elderly people must rejoice in the recollection of their introduction to Lever's early books! The first I ever read was *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer*. I shall never forget the pure delight with which I raced through it, standing at the skylight of my garret window till the last gleam of light had vanished, so loth was I to lay down the fascinating pages. Once when living in the country I knew a young farmer who was certainly not addicted to reading. He formed a library, and procured, among other books, five of Charles Lever's. My friend used to take them out in regular course, beginning with *Harry Lorrequer*, and proceeding to *Arthur O'Leary*. When I left the place, he was still reading them. Each book lasted him at least a month, and by the time the five were ended, he was ready to start afresh. I have sometimes wondered whether he was still doing the round of Lever. He might be doing worse.



Of Lever's life, the only satisfactory record so far has been the biography published in 1879 by Dr. W. J. Fitzpatrick. Of Fitzpatrick's personality, I know nothing; but his books are highly valuable. He wrote the lives of Bishop Doyle, Lady Morgan, Lord Cloncurry, and he also wrote an excellent book entitled *Irish Wits and Worthies*. Somehow the Irish have been strangely careless in biography. They had in Dublin a band of very brilliant men during Lever's time, but it is most difficult to obtain information about them. The Irish Church never had a more brilliant member than William Archer Butler, but we have nothing about him except the slender biography prefixed to his works. Then of Le Fanu, I know no account that is barely adequate. Long ago, through the kindness of Canon Hayman, of Cork, who knew them both, I obtained some particulars, not in themselves very significant, but valuable to me. Of Archer Butler's work, much lies buried in the volumes of the *Dublin University Magazine*, and I can identify a considerable part of it. Fitzpatrick has obvious faults, but he was careful and industrious, and, on the whole, has done more for Irish biography than any one else I know. In his *Life of Lever* he was hampered by the absence of letters, but no one could have taken more pains than he; and he succeeded in writing two very racy volumes with many facts interesting to the student of life and literature. Turning over these volumes to-night, I came, in the appendix, to a paper on Thackeray and Lever, by Major Dyer. In this, the Major tells us that Thackeray gave him a book of Dumas, of which he had just completed a very sharp critique for the *Foreign Quarterly*. Also he says that Thackeray asked him to join in writing a severe criticism on Miss Pardoe's

*City of the Magyar* for the *Foreign Quarterly*. I wonder whether these references have come under the eye of Mr. Garnett, who has discovered and published some articles of Thackeray which were buried and forgotten in that periodical? I mention this as a specimen of the matter to be found in Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Downey is quite competent to write a sound biography of Lever, but he has satisfied himself with a few connecting and explanatory notes to the letters. His book then must be viewed, not as a substitute for Fitzpatrick, but as a corrective and a supplement—a very agreeable and instructive supplement. It will be read through with great delight by many whose interest in Lever and in biography is not keen enough to make them turn back to the older work. I must content myself with a few impressions.

The most outstanding fact about Lever is that his high spirits ended so soon. He was thirty-four when he began the publication of *Harry Lorrequer*. Between 1840 and 1844 he produced *Charles O'Malley*, *Jack Hinton*, *Tom Burke*, and *Arthur O'Leary*. These were his rollicking books. Towards the end of his career, at the instigation of Anthony Trollope, he wrote an imitation of his early style in *Paul Goslett*. This was when Trollope was engaged in his conscientious, dreary, unsuccessful attempt to edit *St. Paul's Magazine*. The life and savour of the old books were not to be found in *Paul Goslett*, and indeed in *Arthur O'Leary*, published when the author was thirty-eight, they are fast disappearing. Afterwards came a long succession of books. They were all written more or less carelessly, but they are full of ability, and the harvest of a keen wit. Lever was a genuine observer. It is to the *Dodd Family Abroad*, more than any other book, that one must look for

a true idea of the way in which English families used to travel on the Continent before the days of railways. No one describes the entrance into a foreign town with anything like the accuracy of Lever. Very valuable also are his descriptions of such places as old Paris and old Rome. I spoke of the ability of Lever. Irishmen are naturally very apt to be deflected by emotion, and so you are never quite sure of their constancy to the same view. Lever wrote besides his novels many excellent essays in *Blackwood* under the pseudonym *Cornelius O'Dowd*. In these and in his novels he was always prescribing for the evils of Ireland, but the trouble was that he did not stick to the same prescription. He seems to come in the end to the one conclusion in which all Irishmen of all sects, schools, parties, ages, are agreed, that Englishmen can never understand Ireland. The further step remains to be taken.

But the peculiarity of the later books is that they are careworn. They are not passionately sad, but they are depressed. Everywhere there is the atmosphere of anxiety. Scenes of gaiety are depicted with zest, but the skeleton is at the feast, and trouble is hard at hand. The trouble is hardly ever the grand and purifying sorrows of life, but its mean worries, its insistent daily cares, its petty disappointments, its increasing weariness. Of these last Lever had an extraordinary sense—out of all proportion to the truth. He deliberately thought that life after thirty-five was not worth living, and his books bear impressive witness to the fact that this was no saying born in a mood of temper, but his deliberate conviction, and in a manner his true experience.

Nevertheless, how pleasant his books are, and how pure ! His is an unsullied mind. On certain aspects of human life,

Thackeray just glanced in his books, but he did not conceal that he would fain have dealt with them if the English public had allowed him. We know from Dickens' friends that he talked very much about the darker side of city life, and was familiar with its tragedy. But in his books he hardly approaches it, and one can say that he did not think it could be safely approached. With Lever, the impression is that of a sound purity that never dived into the black heart of things. He was most fortunate in his marriage, and although the letters show us that he was burdened by the debts of his son, he was happy in his family life. His great trouble was his extravagance. From first to last he was always in debt and difficulty. A writer in *Blackwood* deals sympathetically with this peculiarity. His income from his writings seems to have been in his best days nearly £3000 a year, and he could generally make about £1200. In addition, he had for a time some £300 a year as Vice-Consul at Spezzia, and latterly twice the amount as Consul at Trieste. But he was always hard up. What wonder? When he was a young doctor, at Brussels, he wrote: 'I had three Earls and two Ambassadors on Tuesday.' And he gave weekly *soirées* to the great guns and Lords and Marquises without number. He boasted that he had a very handsome house, and that the entertaining had been done admirably well. He bought for £50 a new uniform in which to make his bow to the King of the Belgians. When in Rome he spent as much in one day as he usually spent in a week. He was devoted to whist, and frequently lost a good deal more than he could afford. He was constantly victimised by adventurers. On one occasion, he writes that he had been 'walked into by a swindler to the amount of £145.' Thus



he was always writing for money : ' For God's sake, send me some gilt ; I am terribly hard up just now.' In one of his essays he wrote that ever and anon heavy losses and increasing expenses led him to try his hand once more at thrift, but it was of no use, and he at last abandoned the effort as vain. ' There are temperaments,' he writes, ' which thrift disagrees with, just as there are constitutions that cannot take opium or digitalis, or a score of other medicaments that others profit by. Myself—I say it in all humility—is one of them. The agent that acts so favourably with others goes wrong with me. Something or other has been omitted in my temperament, or something has been mixed up with it that ought not to have been there ; I cannot tell which. Whatever it be, it renders me incapable of practising that sage and well-regulated economy by which other men secure themselves against difficulties, and show a surplus in their annual balance-sheet.' Like many such men he got through wonderfully. We read that when he was in great difficulties, his daughter became engaged to a man with £7000 a year. He was extremely fortunate in falling in with John Blackwood at a critical period in his life. That excellent man treated him with the greatest wisdom and generosity, and could give him guidance in life as well as in letters. Another thing that told in his favour was that people in these days bought the three-volume novel and the story published in monthly parts. No doubt this increased his income, although if he were living in these days, and had made a businesslike arrangement about the publication of his early books, they would have supplied him with a fair income to the last. Mrs. Oliphant was, strange to say, as unthriftly as Lever himself. She was at the opposite pole from Lever in many



ways and things. She was a shrewd, cynical Scotswoman, with a bitter tongue, though her heart was kind. Nobody could criticise the folly of her neighbours more severely ; but she herself, with nothing to depend on but her pen, and with many young lives depending upon her, was nearly always a year's income in debt, and did not trouble herself about it. Lever, however, did trouble himself. I am confident that this impecuniosity took the flavour out of his books. He was an expert in depression. Of this many passages are scattered through his novels. One of his observations is that the wretchedness of a depressed man is at its height during the early hours of a cold dawn after a sleepless night. 'Even to the exceptionally healthy there is something unspeakably dreary about the hours immediately preceding sunrise, when they are numbed with cold and sleeplessness ; it is, in very fact, the hour of death, when more souls take their departure from earth than at any other of the twenty-four.' I am afraid that Lever has many followers in these days among literary people, though how it should be so I do not understand. Surely the difficulties and uncertainties of the literary profession are enough, without incurring another addition—the crushing and terrible burden of debt.

The last part of his letters is mainly addressed to Mr. John Blackwood. Mr. Blackwood published in his magazine, and in book form, an anonymous story by Lever, entitled *Tony*. Lever thought well of it, and so did Blackwood ; but when it appeared complete the public did not welcome it. It may be worth while to disinter the review that appeared in the *Athenæum*. That journal described the novel as an unsuccessful attempt to combine the Irish novel of Lever with the later romance

of Lytton: the reader is alternately reminded of *Harry Lorrequer* and the *Caxtons*, but the imitation considered separately did not afford satisfaction, and the combination of the two incongruous styles is an inartistic patchwork. It was suggested that the book was the writer's first attempt in prose fiction. So much for the value of internal evidence.

Lever got through somehow, and not so very ill. He left in insurances something like £4000. He died in a happy moment, for if he had lived much longer his troubles would have increased. He said: 'I am very weary and footsore, and have no desire to remain here.' He dreaded greatly lest he should have to undergo much physical suffering, and, above all, lest his intellect should fail. He said that the old hulk was so strongly put together that he feared it would take a long time going to pieces. He was laid to rest beside his wife in the British cemetery at Trieste, on the dreary Dalmatian coast, near the last resting-place of Winckelmann, who was murdered at Trieste by an Italian. Whatever his difficulties he had his share of the best things in life; he did much for the delight and instruction of readers; he carried an innocent heart through his recklessness and carelessness, and no stain rests upon his memory.

## XXIV

### DR. RICHARD GARNETT

WHEN I woke on Good Friday morning 1906, the first thought that passed through my mind was, 'I shall see Dr. Garnett and talk to him about J. R. Lowell.' He had written in the current *Bookman* a short article on Lowell, and it must have been almost the last thing that came from his pen. Shortly after I opened a paper, and read there that Dr. Garnett was dying—in fact, he was dead. After a short and sharp illness he passed away peacefully about five o'clock on that morning of Good Friday. We lost in him the friendliest, gentlest, kindest, and most accomplished of men. Though I had many dealings with Dr. Garnett, and though these extended over a long period, I never felt that I really knew him. Always accessible and courteous, eager to communicate his knowledge, the readiest of helpers, there was nevertheless about him a singular reserve. He very rarely opened his mind. He did not care to talk about ultimate things, and he shrank from discussing personalities. Even about the dead he was reticent. I find that this is the impression that Dr. Garnett left upon those who saw more of him than I did, though, no doubt, like the rest of us, he had his own circle where he uttered himself without doubt or fear. However, I knew quite enough of him to rank him as one of the

greatest gentlemen I have ever known—perhaps *the* greatest.

## I

Dr. Garnett's life is inseparably associated with the British Museum. Among all the able and diligent men who have worked for that great institution, there could never have been a more faithful and able servant. He went to the Museum as a mere boy. He was only sixteen at the time of his appointment as an assistant in the Printed Books Department. His education was necessarily imperfect, and, such as it was, he received most of it from his father, a clergyman of the Church of England, who preferred the work of the Museum to ministerial duties. It was Panizzi, that hot-tempered and masterful Italian, who put Garnett into the Museum, and a better choice was never made. Dr. Garnett's great friend in the early days was Coventry Patmore, who, like himself, was an assistant. Patmore was then married to his first wife, the famous 'angel in the house,' and lived with her and his growing family at a tiny cottage on Hampstead Heath, which was demolished some years ago. Patmore was not easy to live with; but through all changes Garnett and he held together, and it was Garnett who edited the beautiful selection from his friend's poems which appeared under the title *Florilegium Amantis*. For the rest Garnett had the books in which he never ceased to delight, and he educated himself in the course of years as few men have ever been educated. He was a veritable glutton for books, and none came amiss to him. His tenacious memory enabled him to retain his knowledge to such an extent that he became an oracle. He was an ideal servant of the Museum, though

his promotion was slow, and it was not until 1875 that he was made Superintendent of the Reading Room. As Superintendent every one knew him, and every one consulted him. No labour was too great for him to undertake. You would see him helping readers with the catalogue, bending over them at their desks, putting all his treasures at their disposal, and making himself, as has been said, 'the slave of the slaves of literature.' But I think he himself would have described as the chief work of his life the preparation of the printed catalogue. Of this tremendous undertaking he had the chief charge. I never saw Dr. Garnett ruffled by anything unless it was by any charge made against the catalogue. Such charges always roused him, and he was slow to believe that there could be any error or any deficiency. There were errors and deficiencies, as was inevitable; but the achievement is noble and enduring—one which will put generations of students in Dr. Garnett's debt. He received in 1890 the honourable position of Keeper of the Printed Books, and retired, when his term was finished, to Hampstead. At first he would go to the Museum almost every day; but by degrees he seemed to grow more contented with his surroundings, and employed himself in literary work. The last thing he laboured at was a memoir of the eminent Unitarian preacher, W. J. Fox. Fox had close relations with literature and politics, and no one was better fitted to do him justice in both respects than was Dr. Garnett.

However, it is not as a scholar that his friends best remember him. They think of him as the most generous, the most patient, the most self-sacrificing of men. The Duke of Wellington complained that he was much exposed to authors; but surely no one was ever more exposed to



authors, and very unreasonable authors too, than was Dr. Garnett. George Gissing and many others have written about the eccentric individuals who are to be found from time to time in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Nobody knew them and their histories as Dr. Garnett did, and he was indeed 'of every friendless name the friend.' Nothing daunted him—no shabbiness, no unreasonableness, no grotesqueness. Every one could and did pour his story into Dr. Garnett's ear, and he was indefatigable in his attempts to help and relieve. It was said of him very truly that there were many whose very subsistence often depended on his kindness. 'There are readers now earning a fair living in the room who, if they revealed the secrets of the perilous path that once led them by the edge of the precipice, would confess that it was Dr. Garnett who saved them from ruin.' He would rewrite a piece of doggerel; he would touch-up and correct a poor essay, and send it with a letter of recommendation to an editor. Above all, he was ceaselessly endeavouring to get work for the unemployed. His editorial friends were sometimes embarrassed by his persistence. Dr. Garnett thought that everybody was good for something, and credited every one with the same kind intentions as his own. The time and the labour he must have spent merely in writing letters, on behalf of those who had no claim upon him but their need, are beyond calculation.

This is not the whole. Dr. Garnett never allowed himself to treat contemptuously those who were in difficulty, and no ingratitude wearied him out. On one subject he would never speak—the oddities of the Reading Room. I shall never forget one little experience I had of his behaviour. One day I happened to be with him in his own

room at the Museum. A poor lady came in with a pitiful and embarrassing story. It was almost impossible to avoid a smile at the way in which she told it. Dr. Garnett listened with the utmost courtesy, promised to do what he could, and showed her out. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would at least have exchanged a friendly smile over the interview. Dr. Garnett carefully looked elsewhere, and turned the conversation on to something else. She was a woman and she was destitute—it was enough. More than once I tried to get from him his impressions of Grub Street, but on this subject his lips were locked. What all this means very few can understand; but the better one understands, the more he will admire Dr. Garnett. I had a true reverence for his character.

He could sometimes betray a humorous impatience. Of one cantankerous old fellow, whom we had both tried to help at some cost and trouble, Dr. Garnett said to me, shrugging his shoulders, ‘He is very—very’—then he found his word—‘He is very difficult,’ said he. But this was a rare exception, and the veil which he carefully cast over his countless acts of charity and kindness will never be lifted here.

Dr. Garnett was himself the most grateful of men (I see I am writing in superlatives, but I do so deliberately). I suppose I must have received from him more than fifty letters thanking me for small matters, allusions in articles, or little reviews. Extremely susceptible to kindness, even from the humblest, he made it his business to acknowledge it, and he never forgot it. He was a keen and able critic, but he held himself aloof from the literary controversies and parties of his time. This was, I think, because of his position in the Museum. He was there as the servant of

the State to help everybody. Though he was familiar with nearly every author of the day, I never heard of his having an enemy. This was not because he was blind. Few men had such eyes. I was sitting opposite him at a dinner given in honour of a young author who had achieved a sudden success. The author's head was turned for the time, and he was behaving like an ass. Looking across the table I caught Dr. Garnett's eyes fixed on him with a cynical, mocking expression. In a moment he dropped his eyes and returned to his roast beef. We drove back together that evening, but Dr. Garnett, though he did not conceal his amusement, had no harsh word to say.

## II

Of Dr. Garnett's literary achievements much might be written, but I specially wish to insist on his grand and noble character. During many years of his time at the Museum he was poorly paid, and he increased his income by anonymous journalism. It would probably be impossible to discover full particulars of his labour in this kind, but I remember particularly the admirable magazine causerie which he contributed for a long time to the *Illustrated London News*. It was so pointed, so vivacious, so well informed, that it stood out clearly even in the excellent literary journalism of its period. He also wrote for many years, beginning in the 'sixties, the summary of German literature which was published in the *Saturday Review*. When William Minto was editor of the *Examiner*, Garnett was one of the brightest of his contributors. The paper used to publish at that time articles by Theodore Watts-Dunton, Edmund Gosse, W. A. Hunter, and many

others, but the criticisms signed 'R. G.' were among the best and the most delicate of all. He was also a considerable poet, though his best things are not so well known as they should be. The greatest and most characteristic of his works is, no doubt, his *Twilight of the Gods*, published in 1888. But the most perfect thing he ever did was, I think, his little book on Emerson in the Great Writers' Series. It is written out of such fullness and ripeness of knowledge that those who have studied Emerson longest will be the most enthusiastic in its praise. His works on English literature are well worth reading; but Dr. Garnett's range was too wide to admit of his specialising, and, though he is invariably fresh and interesting, he often needs correction. Still his knowledge was very great. One summer evening he came into my house, and I showed him with pride the volumes of the *Westminster Review* which were published in George Eliot's time. He took them up, turned them over, and supplied the names of the reviewers almost completely out of his marvellous memory. You could never take him aback. To every question he could give you some reply. His critical judgment may have failed at times—thus he unaccountably disparaged Mrs. Oliphant's admirable *History of the House of Blackwood*, but on this subject he allowed that he might have gone wrong. He obstinately refused, however, to see the beauty of Miss Rossetti's devotional poems. He thought them morbid all through.

## III

Dr. Garnett's life was, I think, exceptionally happy. His work was congenial, and he was extremely fortunate in his



family and his friends. Mrs. Garnett was an original, charming, vivacious, and accomplished Irishwoman, keenly interested in her husband's work. Once in my library she looked at the set of the Dictionary of National Biography. 'My husband,' she said, 'has written in every volume of this Dictionary except one,' and, passing her hand over the volumes till it rested on one—'This is the volume.' His son, Mr. Edward Garnett, has shown rare critical faculty and imaginative powers. Another son discovered and edited with great skill the essays on Thackeray in the *Foreign Quarterly*. Dr. Garnett enjoyed to the full the great consolation of the London literary man—the many opportunities for friendly and genial intercourse. He never refused an invitation if he could help it, and everywhere he was welcome. A bookman all his life he had none of the pallid and remote air of the bookman. He had a ruddy, weather-beaten countenance, and his personal appearance has been well described by the German adjective *rüstig*. He never had any difficulty in getting on with his neighbour at the dinner-table, however shy and ill-informed that neighbour might be. He made his way to some subject of common interest, and seemed to receive more than he gave. In the young authors and authoresses of the day he was much interested, and would often be found in their company. After his retirement, he liked to visit in an informal way, and though his talk was by preference on books, he was quite ready to talk about anything else. I cannot think that there has been any one in London of the last fifty years who had a knowledge so intimate and thorough of the personal side of literary history. He knew that as Dr. Johnson knew his own period when he sat down, an old man, to write the *Lives of the Poets*. I once ventured to



make this comparison in Dr. Garnett's presence, and he was not displeased. He had none of the roughness of Dr. Johnson, but he had all his tenderness, and many of his tastes. In particular, like all good men, he was a devoted lover of cats.

## XXV

### LEARNING TO READ

#### I

IN JUNE 1913 I had the honour of addressing the London Branch of the National Book Trade Provident Society in Essex Hall. My subject was 'Learning to Read,' and by request of certain members of the audience I give what I can recollect of my speech.

There are certain delusions which prevail extensively and obstinately. One of them we all share. We all think we have a sense of humour. But when we go outside to the larger world and remember the people we meet there, we are well assured that many of them have no very keen sense of humour, and that some at least have no sense of humour at all. Another mighty delusion is that every one is fond of reading. Almost every one thinks he is. I never heard any one say, 'I do not care for reading; it bores me and worries me.' But I have heard very many say that they regret extremely that they have never been able to read as much as they would like. They never have had sufficient time. As a matter of fact, no one who really cared for reading was ever deterred from it by want of time; in fact, I make bold to say that only a small proportion of people have learned in the proper sense how to read. Our expensive system of education makes it certain

that every one can read in a fashion, and a large number have the power of studying for an object. For example, if they are competing for a University scholarship, they will master the books set for the examination, but I am afraid that those persons who have learned to read in the sense that they can discriminate between what is good and bad, and that they read the best with delight and relish, are few, and this is surely a very great misfortune.

If I may, I should like to utter my own personal testimony, and it is this : Reading has been the chief pleasure of my life. It has given me so much pleasure that I feel that I am in danger of falling into extravagance when I speak of it. The pleasure has gone on increasing, and is stronger now than ever. Of many things we grow weary in the course of years, but nowadays I have a greater happiness in reading than ever I had before, and I am thankful that this is so. For reading is not an expensive nor an unreachable pleasure. It is within the power of all to get the joy of reading, and the independence of reading, for it means a great deal of independence and separation from care. Besides, it is an elevating pleasure if the books are rightly chosen, and ought to brighten and elevate and purify the character. It is always more pleasant to meet with one who is a bookman than with one who is not. I always feel safe and comfortable and happy in the presence of any one who is really fond of reading.

## II

We are all very much influenced by the circumstances of our childhood. My reading began in this manner. I had a nurse who once read a little, but had forgotten the

way, and she subscribed to periodicals then very popular—the *London Journal* and the *Family Herald*. She gave me a penny a week for reading the stories in these papers to her, and so I became familiar with the early work of Miss Braddon, with the novels of Pierce Egan, and with many others. We had also another journal, called *Cassell's Family Paper*, and I remember with some pride the rapture with which I read a story which appeared in its pages. No author's name was given, but many a year after I stopped at a barrow in Farringdon Street and saw some extremely dilapidated volumes. On examining them I found that the favourite novel of my childhood was the first novel of R. D. Blackmore, *Clara Vaughan*, and even now, after knowing *Lorna Doone*, and the other books, I still think that Blackmore never did better than in some chapters of his earliest production.

Another writer who pleased me very much was Captain Mayne Reid. Two stories of his—*Oceola*, which appeared in *Chambers's Journal*, and *The Maroon* in *Cassell's*—first made me conscious of the existence of foreign countries and coloured people. This was a landmark. Mayne Reid galloped through his books in these days, and his readers rushed breathless after him. A cleaner, more cheerful, and more efficient writer for boys I can hardly imagine.

Then I remember during a severe illness being allowed to read in bed. There I made certain great discoveries. First I found in an old volume of *Tait's Magazine*, in a paper by Thomas De Quincey, certain lines of Allan Cunningham which thrilled me with a new and strange gladness. This was my first experience in the appreciation of poetry, my first realised consciousness that there was

such a thing in the world as poetry. The lines as I remember them were :

‘Gane were but the winter cauld,  
And gane were but the snaw,  
I could sleep in the wild woods  
Where primroses blaw.

Cauld ’s the snaw at my heid,  
And cauld, cauld at my feet ;  
And the finger of death ’s at my een  
Closin’ them to sleep.

Let nane tell my father  
Or my mither sae dear ;  
I’ll meet them baith in heaven  
At the spring-time o’ th’ year.’

About the same time I met with Tennyson’s lines :

‘ I have heard  
Time flowing in the middle of the night,  
And all things floating to a day of doom,’

and recognised that I, too, had heard the rushing of time break the silence of midnight, and that thus far I could understand the poet.

The second of these experiences came from the reading of *Quentin Durward*. A passage in that story taught me that the world was beautiful, and that Nature was a minister of happiness. This is the passage :

The moon, which had now extricated herself from the clouds through which she was formerly wading, shed a full sea of glorious light upon a landscape equally glorious. They saw the princely Loire rolling his majestic tide through the richest plain in France, and sweeping along between banks ornamented with towers and terraces, and with olives and vineyards. They saw the walls of the city of Tours, the ancient capital



of Touraine, raising their portal towers and embattlements white in the moonlight, while, from within their circle, rose the immense Gothic mass which the devotion of the sainted Bishop Perpetuus erected as early as the fifth century, and which the zeal of Charlemagne and his successors had enlarged with such architectural splendour as rendered it the most magnificent church in France. The towers of the church of Saint Gatien were also visible, and the gloomy strength of the Castle, which was said to have been, in ancient times, the residence of the Emperor Valentinian.

I had known that there was a moon, but I had not known the enchantment of moonlight. After that I knew it, and have had endless joy in seeing the 'holier day,' as Shelley calls it, on cities and rivers and seas.

James Payn of happy memory wrote an admirable essay against sham admiration in literature, in which he denounced the classics, the works of Thomas Love Peacock, and other respected performances. We are all entitled to choose our favourite, and to say frankly who these favourites are, no matter how stupid may be our choice. Once on a time people used to fill up albums of confessions. To one question, 'Who is your favourite novelist?' I always wrote, with perfect honesty and sincerity, 'The Rev. C. B. Greatrex.' Probably no gentle reader has ever heard of Mr. Greatrex's name. He wrote a novel which went through a magazine called *Hogg's Instructor*, and it was continued for volume after volume. The title of the tale is *Memoranda of a Marine Officer*, and that was my favourite story, and, to be perfectly candid, I think it is my favourite story still. But I have introduced it to various persons, eminent and not eminent, and no one ever could see anything in it. Years ago I discovered where the author was

living. He was rector of a little parish called Hope, near Ludlow, and I went there, and found him old and bent and feeble. Whoever owes him anything, I owe him much, and hope some day to discharge my debt.

## III

These preferences are harmless and useful, but we should never be satisfied without coming into intimate relationships with the approved chiefs of literature. It is not ignoble to desire an entrance into the best society—I mean the very best society in literature. We may have our individual likings, but we are wrong unless we know at least one lord—one lord of the imagination. It is a great thing to be thoroughly and intimately familiar with even one lord of the imagination. ‘How are we to know,’ say some people, ‘who are the great authors?’ There are those who cannot read Scott or Dickens; but there is a way of knowing. Recently I read a paragraph about two oil paintings which were sold the other day. The owner valued them at £10,000 each, and they sold for £2. We should not all know the difference between a £10,000 picture and a £2 picture, and there may be something about the £2 picture which pleases us. But we are wise to take it for granted that the opinion of the best judges is the right opinion. We must accept the verdict of the experts. Only let us frankly confess that nearly all of us are limited in the power of appreciation. There are certain great writers probably with whom we shall never be on the right terms. I have heard people say, ‘I cannot admire Shakespeare.’ If they say it in a humble way like a confession of sin, with contrition and

tears, they are to be pitied, not to be blamed. It would not be right to say such a thing in any other fashion. If we cannot admire the great lords of the imagination, we must be sorry for ourselves, but we may be quite sure that there is at least one whom we have the power of admiring and loving if we only gave ourselves the chance.

May I offer some brief hints about that? What I should strive for is to make friends with a great writer when he is in his brightest mood—that is, we ought not to begin with the inferior work of a great author, but with the most attractive work. Suppose you wish to become intimate with Sir Walter Scott, what books of his should you read first? I think, perhaps, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Ivanhoe*. If when you read these books you find you do not care for them, it is but too probable that you are not going to appreciate Scott, and the only thing to do is to say good-bye, deploring your weakness and your evil behaviour.

How should Charlotte Brontë be approached? For my part, I began with *The Professor*, and this gives us the quintessence of her happier mind. But, no doubt, for the great majority the book to begin with is *Jane Eyre*. If you really dislike *Jane Eyre*, try *Shirley*, and if you like neither there is no help for it.

What is the best book of Dickens to begin with? Well, certainly, not any book of the later period. In some respects the books of Dickens's later years are quite equal to and even greater than his earlier books, but they want something of the life and spirit and courage and humour abounding in his first novels. It is best, I think, to begin with the book which is the middle book of Dickens, making the end of one period and the beginning of another,

the frontier book which he himself avowed to be his favourite among all his books—*David Copperfield*. You will find that most readers of Dickens agree with the author in this choice. Right or wrong, there is no doubt from any point of view that *David Copperfield* contains much of Dickens's best work. In fact, if *David Copperfield* is not relished, I am afraid that no book of Dickens will be relished.

For Thackeray *Vanity Fair* is surely the book of initiation, that 'most brilliant, most heartless, most hateful of modern fictions,' as it has been called. There are few, I hope, who would really endorse this judgment. All the strength of Thackeray and much of his tenderness is to be found in *Vanity Fair*, and no book of his is so well organised, so complete, so consummate. The claims of *Esmond* may be urged, and I am the last to question them, but *Esmond* is not the book to begin with.

George Eliot, in spite of the passing fashion of depreciation, is still among the very first of our novelists, and to me her best books are *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Silas Marner*. But, after various experiments, I am persuaded that the most generally appreciated of all her novels is *Adam Bede*, and a very noble, fine, and true book it is.

To those who can appreciate him, there is much happiness in the company of Anthony Trollope. It is delightful and consoling to remember now and then that there are so many books by Trollope. Some are much inferior to the rest, but every one can be read without difficulty. He would keep most people in good reading for a lifetime. I would have the reader begin with *Framley Parsonage*, because it is one of the author's very best, and also because it is complete and independent in itself.



These are a few names, and if you go through the list of books I have prescribed you will find yourself in love with at least one of its authors. That is, you will want to read another of his works, and then another, till all are finished. Every one is ennobled by an intimate knowledge of the mind of a really great author, and to fall in love with a great author, and to remain in love with him, is one of life's chief blessings.

## IV

You ought to have three kinds of books. There is a verse in one of the Psalms : ' Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into the darkness.' Lover, friend, acquaintance. Your individuality is the centre, round it and near it is the little circle of love—those who are your nearest and dearest. Round that is a larger concentric circle of friends, and then round that is a very large circle of acquaintances. All the people you know are lovers, friends, and acquaintances. I say the same thing about books. Certain books you love, and they are the special books, the books you want to read every year, the books you would not be without, the books which you bind in morocco, the books you would keep at all costs. Find the books that you love, and then find your friends among books. By friends I mean excellent books, though not the books that appeal most immediately and sharply. I love Boswell's *Life of Johnson* ; Lockhart's *Life of Scott* is my friend. That is not to disparage Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. It is simply to say that the one book has certain greater qualities than the other—it is the difference between lover and friend.

Among the lovers you should have at least one poet. I



am told that poetry is coming to something very good in these days, and I am glad to hear it. But it is a comfort that much good poetry has been written already, quite enough to go on with. Find the poet that you love. You can only hope to love a few, but you may have many friends.

Your mental life will be determined by your lovers and your friends ; but, if you have lovers and friends, there is no reason why you should not have a great number of acquaintances. A public man said recently that he had 4000 acquaintances, and one may certainly know 4000 books. In the world of books it is essential to have acquaintances, if it were only for this—that the acquaintanceships help us to appreciate our lovers and our friends. Life, however, is a very poor thing for those who have no lovers and no friends, but only acquaintances. And so the mind is a desert mind that has only acquaintances among books. But when the higher society is made sure it will be very easy and very pleasant to enlarge the circle of our acquaintances even to the end.

## XXVI

### THE PLEASURES AND ADVANTAGES OF REREADING

THERE are many who love to read ; there are comparatively few who love to reread. This is one of the reasons why old books are in jeopardy as they stand upon the library shelves. They are viewed with murderous eyes, and unless they can get themselves reprinted in new and attractive guise they are likely to be summarily disposed of. But there is a great deal to say for rereading, and much pleasure and advantage to be gained in the process.

#### I

The rereader is very often a person who has a passion for books, and who is greatly restricted in his choice of books. This may seem an unfortunate condition, but it is not. Happy is the child born amid a small collection of really valuable volumes. He is likely to learn without teaching the pleasures of reading and the pleasures of rereading.

There are not a few who begin early to devour books, and who learn to prefer reading to all other occupations. Of these was James Payn. He tells us that he was an omnivorous reader as a boy, with a marked distaste for study and sport. His father kept the Berkshire harriers, and the

boy had to go hunting twice a week. This he abhorred, though he had a nice little bay pony and could ride well enough. The proceedings were too protracted for his taste, and he wanted to be at home to finish the *Mysteries of Udolpho* by the fire. He disliked fox-hunting even more than hare-hunting, but all his family had sporting proclivities, and he had to go through with it. Sometimes the waiting about and having nothing to read grew absolutely intolerable. There was then nothing for it but to dismount, put clover or something in his hair, smear his shoulder with mould, and ride home, 'having met with rather a nasty tumble.' It would have been better and cheaper to have let him enjoy *Captain Cook's Voyages* and the *Arabian Nights* all day without the temptation of practising duplicity. When Payn went afterwards to Woolwich Military Academy, his bitter complaint was that there was no time for reading and writing. There are those to whom the having nothing to read is an intense grievance. They instinctively look round for a book wherever they go, and they are often bitterly disappointed. It is a predicament indeed to be landed on a visit where the house is destitute of books, and where no library is near. I have heard of a reader so insatiable that he tried to get squints into odd volumes even during the penitential process of morning calls. This is a length to which few would go, but I am with the same writer when he says that he would rather read a list of hotels or a week-old advertisement sheet than do without reading at all.

Supposing that the craving is developed early, and that there are few books to gratify it. The natural result is that these books are read very frequently. Boys will not read theology and philosophy and history except under

extreme pressure, and it is only a few among them who really care for poetry. It is light reading, or rather fiction, which the boy considers really and genuinely fitted for the intelligent mind. Well, if the fiction is sound, it is not a hard fate to go over the *Waverley Novels* again and again, not hard to read Bulwer Lytton, from *Pelham* and *Eugene Aram* right on to *Kenelm Chillingly*, still less hard to read all that can be reached of Charles Dickens.

## II

It is where the taste for reading is not strong, and the opportunities for gratifying such taste as exists are abundant, that those desirous of keeping up with the times and joining intelligently in conversation never acquire the practice of rereading. Though they might not confess it, they are quite aware of their own deficiencies, and know that the most that they can accomplish is to read such of the new books as are most generally talked of. Be it far from me to condemn the excellent habit of reading new books. The saying, 'When a new book comes out I read an old one,' is sufficiently foolish. A certain rigidity, a certain blindness and hardness of mind are apt to settle on those who in no way keep up with the times. Their minds are fossilised; they fall out of a living language. They lose touch with the progress of thought; they miss the meaning of events. There is no reason why any one should become a mere antiquarian or a pure pedant, but there are many reasons why the practice of rereading should be kept up.

## III

The first advantage of rereading is that it gives one the true possession of a book. Most memories are exceedingly treacherous. Even when the memory is strong in certain directions, it is apt to be weak in others. A powerful verbal memory—the memory by which a man recollects a list of names or learns to repeat a string of verses—is not usually associated with the most serviceable memory of all: the memory which makes a man aware of his own knowledge, or at least the sources from which he can at any time draw inspiration. Professor Flinders Petrie once contended that ‘we are drunken with writing.’ The fetters of writing, he said, hold us back from the living touch with nature. Distrust in writing has plainly deadened the memory of the senses; the flagging thought has by the bonds of writing lost all life and become a mere carcase, senseless and corrupt. When art was most vigorous and original, when neither artists nor patrons could read, and the ornaments and luxuries of life were then more completely finished, the finest skill, the finest taste, the keenest insight, were reached without the use of recorded words. To this it was replied at the time that country actors, who changed their parts so often, and bank clerks in London had as good memories as any Egyptian or Brahmin. This may be so, but I fancy that the habit of recording by letters diminishes the strength of the human memory.

And this is why I am not so sure as to the advantages of copious note-taking. There is much to be said for the practice. It seems as if it ought to impress what one has read upon the mind, and it seems also to provide for us a



store of gathered thoughts to which we can recur. But is it so sure that the copying out of a passage does fix it in the memory, and is it so certain that the passages we select on a particular occasion will continue to interest us? And may it not be that the notebooks supersede the living mind? A man may find himself tongue-tied in conversation for want of a certain fact, being keenly conscious all the while that this fact is recorded and indexed in one of his notebooks at home. However this may be, we want to get as much of the best we read firmly lodged in our minds, and there is nothing that will help us so much as the practice of rereading. Though our powers of memory be very limited, a patient and loving and repeated perusal of a great book will at least win for us something well worth its price.

There is still another advantage. Many of the best books will not yield their secret at a first reading. They demand to be very slowly and carefully and frequently perused. At a dinner-party the other evening we had a discussion about difficult books. I ventured to say that Darwin's *Origin of Species* is one of the most difficult books in the English language. Nobody was more qualified than Huxley to understand it, and Huxley expounded it to the English public. But so late as 1888 Huxley writes: 'I have been reading the *Origin* slowly again for the nth time with the view of picking out the essentials of the argument for the obituary notice. Nothing entertains me more than to hear people call it easy reading.' Another very difficult writer is Bishop Butler. The reason is, that every sentence is a link in an argument, closely welded as with links of iron. If you miss or misunderstand one sentence, you speedily lose the meaning. Browning is undeniably

difficult in many parts, and chiefly perhaps in his earliest and latest books. Whether his obscurity is to be counted sin to him or not, I do not need to discuss ; but I question whether some of his later work has as yet found a true interpreter—especially *Fifine at the Fair*, with its accompaniments. But the mastering of a great writer enriches, fructifies, and expands the mind more than any other discipline.

## IV

The pleasures of rereading once tested cannot willingly be relinquished. A very good essayist compares rereading to a journey through a beautiful and well-known piece of scenery. When we read a book for the first time we are like explorers seeking the charm and excitement of discovery, rushing on with a kind of passion, desiring to mount the hill in front and to see the new landscape spread out at our feet. A hardened explorer is always seeking for fresh woods and pastures new, but to reread is to choose ways known and loved before, and enjoy their beauty afresh. A man goes to the same place autumn by autumn. He takes the same walks, the same drives. In a manner he has seen everything, and he is very glad to see it again. The memory is refreshed by the vision he loves, and the heart is refreshed with it. It is so with rereading. We know the book, but we discover that we do not know it, and that it has fresh felicities and delights disclosing themselves at each perusal. Besides, though the book does not change while it awaits us on the shelf, we keep changing. We bring more experience, more knowledge, more power of appreciation. (I am talking, of course, about the great books.) Suppose a man visits the Alps for the first time, and is

ignorant of botany. He goes back another time, and during the interval he has learned to botanise. That will make a great difference. To compare Dr. Hort's letters on his Alpine journeys with those of the ordinary traveller is instructive. So it is with books. The pages are held to the fire of experience, and the living letters disclose themselves. When we know, not merely by reading or by imagining, what a great phase of life may mean either in joy or in sorrow, we discover new messages and new meanings in familiar pages. Even a small experience adds to the significance of our reading. The other morning I had read some melancholy news about a coal strike. I happened immediately after to take up Sydney Smith's *Rules for a Happy Life*, and came on this, 'Keep up blazing fires.' Turning over several books through the day, I came upon references to fires and coals. These would never have been noticed save for the circumstances of the day. Once I remember getting some teeth extracted, and after it every book I read seemed to have references to teeth, white teeth, gleaming teeth, strong teeth, bad teeth.

I admit that there are books which we do not reread with pleasure because we know them too well. They cannot be many, but there are some. I know *Pickwick* so well that at the end of a page, without turning, I could almost continue the narrative. When that is so it is well to give the book a rest. But, as has been well said, to remember a story is merely to remember the way—to know the walk. You can tell the main turns of the road and of the story, but the intervals between the turns are very pleasant, and all the more pleasant because they are more or less familiar.

## v

How do authors feel when they reread their old books ? How do politicians feel when they read their old speeches ? Wordsworth is said to have possessed about two hundred books, and it is well known that towards the end of life he read nothing but his own poetry. He thought he did this because he wanted to improve it in so far as it could be improved. But who can doubt that he was really happy in his own company ? There is a curious passage in Boswell which bears upon this. Boswell and Johnson started on June 2, 1781, to pay a visit to Southill, in Bedfordshire, at the hospitable mansion of Squire Dilly. Boswell says : ‘ He talked little to us in the carriage, being chiefly occupied in reading Dr. Watson’s second volume of *Chemical Essays*, which he liked very well, and his own *Prince of Abyssinia*, on which he seemed to be intensely fixed ; having told us that he had not looked at it since it was first published. I happened to take it out of my pocket this day, and he seized upon it with avidity. He pointed out to me the following remarkable passage : “ By what means ” (said the prince) “ are the Europeans thus powerful ; or why, since they can so easily visit Asia and Africa for trade or conquest, cannot the Asiaticks and Africans invade their coasts, plant colonies in their ports, and give laws to their natural princes ? The same wind that carries them back would bring us thither.” “ They are more powerful, sir, than we ” (answered Imlac), “ because they are wiser. Knowledge will always predominate over ignorance, as man governs the other animals. But why their knowledge is more than ours, I know not what reason can be given, but

the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being." He said, "This, sir, no man can explain otherwise."

## VI

Apropos of this there is an obscure passage in Boswell on the different meaning between two words commonly used as equivalents. Dr. Johnson said, "'To remember" and "to recollect" are different things. A man has not the power to recollect what is not in his mind; but when a thing is in his mind he may remember it.' Dr. Hill says, 'The first of the definitions given by Johnson of "to remember" is "to bear in mind anything; not to forget."' "To recollect" he defines "to recover to memory."' Dr. Hill also quotes from Horace Walpole, who distinguishes between the two words, on his revisiting his old school, Eton: 'By the way, the clock strikes the old cracked sound—I recollect so much, and remember so little.' In my dictionary 'to remember' is defined 'to recollect,' and 'to recollect' is defined as 'to remember.' But is there not a distinction? I remember *Pickwick*. All is present to me as I read. But I recollect *Esmond*. That is, when I pass from one page to another, I can seldom tell exactly what is coming, but when I read the second page I recollect that I have read it before.



## XXVII

### ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

WITH the tidings of Mr. Swinburne's death came the remembrance of a little poem he published in 1893, which expresses better perhaps than any other the spirit of his later years :

#### HAWTHORN DYKE, WIMBLEDON PARK

' All the golden air is full of balm and bloom  
Where the hawthorn line the shelving dyke with flowers.  
Joyous children born of April's happiest hours,  
High and low they laugh and lighten, knowing their doom  
Bright as brief—to bless and cheer they know not whom,  
Heed not how, but washed and warmed with suns and showers  
Smile, and bid the sweet soft gradual banks and bowers  
Thrill with love of sunlight fire or starry gloom.

All our moors and lawns all round rejoice ; but here  
All the rapturous resurrection of the year —  
Finds the radiant utterance perfect, sees the word  
Spoken, hears the light that speaks it. Far and near,  
All the world is heaven : and man and flower and bird  
Here are one at heart with all things seen and heard.'

In ' the rapturous resurrection of the year ' the great poet has passed away in dignity and in peace. He has completed the round of his years in happiness and in universal honour. He has surmounted all the perils that threatened him, and he never grew to be ' an old man with an old soul.' He was never an old man in any true sense of the

words. To the last he gave the impression of youthful vitality and enjoyment—of one young with the youth of nature, if not with the youth of young years. He grew lonelier as the years went by, and life behind him was a street of tombs, but the noble and sustaining friendship of his later life did not fail him; there remain those to whom he was very dear, those to whom he could open up his inmost soul. His intellectual power was as great and his genius as unique as at any time before. No rival rose to dispute his laurels, and for years his ascendancy has been unquestioned.

Mr. Swinburne's nature broadened and mellowed with the years. There was something childlike about him to the very end. He had a child's joy in simple pleasures. No one could be more courteous and gay than he in the ordinary intercourse of life. He showed his treasures with a child's delight and winsomeness. One of the most sympathetic of his early critics—was it John Morley?—complained that there was no sign in Mr. Swinburne's writing of that great quality without which genius is worth so little to the world. It was suggested that the salt of genius was the enlarged and humane sympathy with all happiness whether of man, or beast, or bird, or creeping thing, the lofty fervent pity for all the pain of body and pain of soul endured amongst sentient creatures, and above all the strong enthusiasm for all that has been done to add to the stock of happiness, and to take away somewhat from the stock of anguish in the world. This spirit of beneficence, this genial breath of life characterised Victor Hugo, who to Swinburne was from the first the pre-eminent poet of his time. 'The greatest of men are neither mere subtle-minded vivacious elves and sprites, frisking about

in the heated places of passion simply for the joy of frisking, nor mere giants, surveying all life indifferently as Epicurean Gods. It would be premature to say that Mr. Swinburne's capacity does not extend thus far, but there is some reason for suspecting that here, in point of beneficence and large human sympathies, there is a weak side.' The criticism may have been justified at the time, but the large and splendid body of work which makes up Mr. Swinburne's achievement contains abundant and unmistakable proof that he was increasingly a man of generous sympathies and tender heart.

While his reputation rests and will continue to rest on the earlier half of his work, it can never be forgotten that he toiled on to the end an ardent student and worker, giving to the world of his very best. While it may be admitted that both in poetry and in prose he suffered from diffuseness, and that the palate sometimes became cloyed and the ear wearied by his magnificent repetitions, it is also true that no book he ever issued is entirely unworthy of him, and that many amongst his later works show such power and splendour and maturity that they cannot be forgotten. There are few English writers of the first rank who have so completely fulfilled their task, who have left behind them a more adequate monument. It was a great part of Mr. Swinburne's happiness that to the end of life his intellect and imagination were characterised by a splendid vigour.

#### I

Of Mr. Swinburne's early years we have glimpses in various memoirs of the time, notably those of William Bell Scott and John Nichol. Scott's autobiography had

the most careful and considerate of editors in the late Professor Minto, and in the exercise of his discretion he left out several passages. But what remained jarred on Swinburne, who wrote one of his fiercest and fieriest articles in criticism of the book and its author. It will be remembered that Swinburne, more than once, gave expression to his admiration and affection for the old poet-painter in his lifetime. But whatever the rights or wrongs of this quarrel may be, Scott's recollections of Swinburne are very interesting. They go back more than fifty years. Scott was painting at Wallington, in Northumberland, and Swinburne was spending his school recess at Capheaton, his grandfather's house, which was not far away. Scott says: 'Very soon I began to recognise a little fellow who used to pass my post-chaise on the road descending from Cambo to Wallington. He was always riding a little long-tailed pony at a good pace towards the village. He had the appearance of a boy, but for a certain mature expression on his handsome high-bred face, which had bright, coarse yellow hair flowing on his shoulders, and flashing out round his head.' Young Swinburne could acquire without trouble, and had a memory enabling him to recite long poems after once reading. He gained at Eton a prize for French. 'A few days after my first meeting him he appeared with the prize-book, entering the saloon where we were all at work hopping on one foot, his favourite expression of extreme delight. It was a large edition of *Notre Dame de Paris* gorgeously bound, with illustrations by Tony Johannot; but the exuberance of his delight was so comical that even Lady Trevelyan could not resist a smile, and Miss Capel-Lofft, a very nervous person, begged him to sit down quietly and show her the prints.

For my part, not yet recognising in this unique youth the greatest rhythmical genius of English poetry, I looked on with wonder as at a spoilt child. The whole forenoon that book was never out of his sight. If it lay on the table his eyes were always wandering to it. The fascination of first love was nothing to this fascination; and when we all adjourned for an interval to the garden, there it was tightly held under his arm, while he ran on before backwards and ran back to us again, and the sharpest of eyes were fixed on him with their amused but maternal expression.' But Scott testifies that Swinburne even then was altogether free from egotism. He loved and admired the excellent qualities of his friends. 'He had the great power of loving his friends and bearing with them. His enthusiasm was measureless.' Later on Scott dedicated a volume of poems to Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne, referring to the last as

'the youngest, with the rainbow wrought  
About his head, a symbol and a dower.'

The moment Swinburne had read the lines he took a cab and drove to Scott's house. "Tell me now, *mon cher*, tell me exactly what you alluded to as the rainbow wrought about my head?" "Well," I said, "you know you are hailing in the new time hopefully; you are assisting the advent of the brighter day; you are writing *Songs Before Sunrise*." "Ah! is that all? I was in hopes you meant the glory of my hair, that used to be so splendid, you know!"

Of his time at Oxford we have glimpses in the biographies of Professor John Nichol, of Glasgow, and Benjamin Jowett. At Oxford Nichol founded an essay reading society called, owing to an accidental joke about



the ill-health of some of its members, the 'Old Mortality.' Among the members were Swinburne, A. V. Dicey, and T. H. Green. The young men met once a week during term, read essays, and discussed many subjects. Swinburne, it is recorded, expressed his decided preference among satirists for Dryden. Swinburne studied logic under Nichol, and wrote: 'No one, I suppose, could be long in the more intimate society of Mr. Nichol without appreciating his steady grasp and comprehension of all matters connected with Mental Science, and his very rare power of imparting knowledge simply, clearly, and thoroughly.' Nichol was a somewhat uncomfortable man, dissatisfied with the measure of success he achieved in life, and abnormally sensitive. But the friendship between him and Swinburne was unaffected by differences of opinion, and remained firm to the end. Under date March 29, 1881, Swinburne wrote to Nichol acknowledging a volume of his poems and praising it. The letter closes with the significant sentence: 'I am delighted to see announced a volume of Critical Essays, and proud to see my name among the subjects; a name like enough, it seems, to be submerged for the present, under a hail of Russo-Radical indignation and spectatorial contempt.' When Nichol died Swinburne said: 'I never met or can meet a more loyal and constant and altogether manlier man. He was the trustiest of friends as we know, and I am certain that none but the meanest of mankind would deny that he was the fairest of fighters and the most gallant of antagonists.' The special importance of Nichol's connection with Swinburne is that the first things published by the poet were in a serial, *Undergraduate Papers*, edited in 1858 by Nichol. Only three numbers appeared, but the contributors were

paid. The numbers are now exceedingly rare. Mr. Swinburne contributed according to his own account 'four "crudities," certainly no more: a paper on Marlow and Webster; some awful doggerel on the subject of Tristram and Iseult; a boyish bit of Burlesque; and a terrific onslaught on the French Empire and its Clerical supporters—which must, no doubt, have contributed in no inconsiderable degree to bring about its ultimate collapse. . . . The article on the Dramatists, as far as I remember, was the only thing of any sort of value (except as showing a youngster's honest impulses, and sympathies, and antipathies)—and that I think must have shown that before leaving Eton I had plunged as deep as a boy could dive into the line of literature which has always been my favourite. But when I think of the marvellous work that Rossetti (whose acquaintance I made just afterwards) had done at the same age, I am abashed at the recollection of my own rubbish.'

Swinburne left the University without a degree, but he took with him the warm friendship of Benjamin Jowett, and he acquired what was better still, the scholarly habit. We have had no such scholar among our poets since Milton, though a few may have been even more widely read. In Mr. Swinburne's critical essays the reader is often astonished at the apparent recklessness of the language, but it is only in the rarest cases that he is able to point out any slip in matters of fact. Once or twice Mr. Swinburne slipped even in his favourite subject. Thus in his Study of Shakespeare he errs in saying that Victor Hugo was the first of Shakespearean students to discover and to prove that the great triad of his Roman plays is not a consecutive work of the same epoch. Mr.

C. Bathurst had anticipated Hugo by several years. Also Swinburne acknowledged an error in his discussion on the date and authorship of 'King Henry VIII,' but it was a comparatively small error. Swinburne knew Greek as Browning did not know it. He was a student rather than a reader of what was great in literature. At the same time he read omnivorously in ephemeral books and articles all the time, and his memory was stored with passages from authors scarcely remembered by any one else.

## II

Mr. Swinburne's book, *The Queen Mother and Rosamond*, was published in 1860, and attracted little attention. In 1864 he reprinted from *Once a Week* a little prose story of fifteen pages entitled, 'Dead Love.' But 'his dawn came up like thunder' with the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon* in 1865, succeeded by *Chastelard* in the same year. It is not easy to describe the sensation caused by *Atalanta* among the youngest spirits of the time. It was not in the ordinary sense of the word a popular book. The first edition in quarto ran to a hundred copies. A second edition appeared in the same year, and the third edition was not published till 1875. In 1878 there was a German translation. But as the obituary notices have shown, the younger generation were carried away by the music and the passion of the story. Cautious reviewers had their say about the modernity of the book, about the want of a master idea and a dominant unity of thought. They said justly enough that Swinburne's mind was cast in a mould most unlike the Greek, and that in the fine choral song upon the dealings of the gods with men, the pious and the impious parts alike

were such as it was impossible for a Greek to write. But they were moved almost in spite of themselves by the originality and splendour of the whole, and the more discerning perceived that the new poet was greatest in his lyrics. Whatever Swinburne received from others he made his own. Once and again the influence of Shelley is suggested, as in the exclamation of Althæa :

‘ Night, a black hound, follows the white fawn Day.’

This may have been a reminiscence of Shelley’s lines :

‘ Once the hungry hours were hounds,  
Which chased the day like a bleeding deer.’

Most readers will agree with the judgment of Mr. James Douglas in the *Athenæum*. Mr. Douglas says that *Atalanta in Calydon* remains Swinburne’s masterpiece. ‘ In it his unique genius culminated. Nothing he has written, and nothing any other poet has written, surpasses the lyrical splendour of its choruses, which are worthy to stand beside the choruses of Sophocles. They possess the universal quality of the greatest poetry. They are flawless masterpieces which rival the Greek poet’s noblest reflections on the destiny of man. Their artistic symmetry sufficed to establish the young poet’s reputation as a master of the pure lyric. It is remarkable that he never surpassed, though he often equalled, the technique which he attained in his youth.’ Beside such an achievement the pallid classicism of *Merope* seemed more tame than ever.

*Chastelard* made much less stir, but it has very great qualities, and if it be true that the greater part of it was written when the author was still an undergraduate, it is a wonderful feat. To begin with it is based on a most thorough study of Queen Mary and her period, and it



announces a view of Mary's character to which Mr. Swinburne adhered after weighing with the most scrupulous care practically all that has been said on the subject. Those who wish to understand his position will find it stated most fully in his *Miscellanies* of 1886. There he deals with Mr. Hosack's defence of Mary. I venture to think that in his article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* Mr. Swinburne lays too little stress on positive testimony, and too much on the probabilities which arise from his conception of her character. In *Chastelard*, a book full of thought and knowledge as well as of feeling, the character of Mary is unravelled with a master hand. Her bright and cruel nature, her ruthlessness, her remorse, her swift transformations, her passing pities, her keen and destructive nature, are exhibited with a power that never flags. The book is not known as it should be, and I quote Chastelard's reply to the Queen's question whether 'Love shall live after life in any man.'

' Most sweet Queen,  
 They say men dying remember, with sharp joy  
 And rapid reluctance of desire,  
 Some old thing, some swift breath of wind, some word,  
 Some sword-stroke or dead lute-strain, some lost sight  
 Some sea-blossom stripped to the sun and burned  
 At naked ebb—some river-flower that breathes  
 Against the stream like a swooned swimmer's mouth—  
 Some tear or laugh ere lip and eye were man's—  
 Sweet stings that struck the blood in riding—nay,  
 Some garment or sky-colour or spice-smell,  
 And die with heart and face shut fast on it  
 And know not why, and weep not ; it may be  
 Men shall hold love fast always in such wise  
 In new fair lives where all are new things else,  
 And know not why, and weep not.'



So far Mr. Swinburne had attracted only the intellectual public. But the time was at hand when he was to shake the nation. Already it was evident to careful readers that he meditated a bolder departure. He had written in a preface to a volume of selections from Byron that neither Byron nor Shelley was content to play with the skirts or battle with the shallows of nature. 'Their passion is perfect, a fierce and blind desire which exalts and impels their verse into the high places of emotion and expression. They feed upon nature with a holy hunger, following her with a divine lust as of gods chasing the daughters of men. Wind and fire, the cadences of thunder and the clamours of the sea, give them no less of sensual pleasure than of spiritual sustenance.' Many who were friendly were not without misgivings. They were ready to admit that there was such a thing as a blithe and pure and liberal enjoyment of the infinitely varied play of human emotion. They acknowledged that a moderating rule and discipline over passion and the main joys of sense was better than their violent extirpation as things pestilent and to be ashamed of. They were willing to admit that on this side human nature had been starved and shrivelled, and that accidental extravagances of the liberalisers should not be too sternly condemned. But they were put to a hard test when in 1866 Mr. Swinburne published his *Poems and Ballads*.

Several of these had appeared in the *Spectator*, then just come into the hands of Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend. Among these, strange to say, was 'Faustine.' 'Laus Veneris' had been printed a few months before in a pamphlet, but very few copies were issued. 'In fact,' said Mr. Swinburne, 'it was more an experiment to ascertain the public taste—and forbearance!—than anything else.'

Moxon I well remember was terribly nervous in those days, and it was only the wishes of mutual good friends coupled with his own liking for the Ballads that finally induced him to publish the book.' Very soon the storm broke, and Moxon, who some twenty years before had been heavily fined for publishing Shelley's 'Queen Mab,' resigned his commission as Mr. Swinburne's publisher. The sheets passed into the hands of Mr. John Camden Hotten. Mr. Swinburne was attacked fiercely, and responded still more fiercely in a pamphlet entitled *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. Mr. Hotten was a clever man, who made some money by pirating popular American books. Mr. Swinburne wrote about him: 'The moral character of the worthy Mr. Hotten was—I was about very inaccurately to say—ambiguous. He was a serviceable sort of fellow in his day, but decidedly what Dr. Johnson would have called "a shady lot," and Lord Chesterfield "a rum customer."' When I heard that he had died of a surfeit of pork chops, I observed that this was a serious argument against my friend Sir Richard Burton's view of cannibalism as a wholesome and natural method of diet.' I believe, however, that Mr. Hotten died of an American author's fury. He had given this gentleman a cheque which was dishonoured at the bank. The infuriated author forced his way into the room where Hotten was lying very ill, and flourished the cheque in his face with the fiercest invectives. The unfortunate publisher collapsed.

The controversy on *Poems and Ballads* is not without its lessons. R. H. Hutton, to whom Swinburne was probably introduced by John Nichol, then a contributor to the *Spectator*, pronounced a judgment, the soundness of which

will now be generally admitted. He did not condemn 'Faustine': 'We cannot help thinking that even Mr. Swinburne, whose volume has been so universally and in general so deservedly blamed for atrocious immorality, succeeds in one of his most bitterly blamed poems, "Faustine," in so completely absorbing the mind in the imaginative conception of a thoroughly hateful figure, a Roman Messalina, that no mind capable of entering into the horror of the picture would be sullied for a moment by the delineation.' But he repelled Mr. Swinburne's apology for 'Anactoria.' Swinburne said that it was an attempt to reproduce freely, as he failed to translate with any satisfaction to himself, the thought and verse of Sappho. Hutton admitted that it was important historically and artistically that the true rottenness at the core of the brilliant Athenian society should be understood; but he affirmed that Swinburne beautified, or tried to beautify, with his own imagination forms of moral deformity which deserve only to be regarded with loathing. And he applied the same criticism to other poems in the volume. Mr. Watts-Dunton, reviewing the subject long after, pointed out that in *Poems and Ballads* Mr. Swinburne's imaginings were set towards theology and ethics. Sappho forgets Anactoria and begins to challenge the ways of God. 'Dolores' is but a wail from the bed of vice, a jeremiad on the misery of pleasure. It would have been admitted, I believe, by Swinburne himself that in *Poems and Ballads* he betook himself into tropical swamps of passion where no free breath could be. He is said to have spoken of his excesses as *péchés de jeunesse*. But his love of forbidden things was intellectual rather than emotional. He lingered for a time dangerously in the poisonous air, but no one

abhorred obscenity more than he did. When Zola's *L'Assommoir* was published in 1876 in the magazine *La République des Lettres*, Swinburne announced that he had ceased to be a contributor, and that to act otherwise would be a gross and hideous outrage on the simplest and deepest instincts of human nature. Repelling the idea that in his protest he was obliquely puffing himself, he wrote characteristically: 'I can desire no heavier punishment for any one whose mind could give entrance to such a shameful and insulting thought than that he should act on it, and read *L'Assommoir* from the first page to the last; a thing which I confess I most certainly have not done, and most assuredly could not do. If he does not find this perusal a most heavy and most loathsome form of judicial retribution, a chastisement comparable to none in Dante's hell but that inflicted on the damned whose scalps were so densely overlaid with something I cannot here mention (as M. Zola would) by name—to borrow a bold phrase from Mr. Browning, so "immortally immerded"—that Dante could not see whether the crown was shorn or unshorn—if he feels otherwise or less than this, he is not one for whose possible opinion or imputation I ever could greatly care.'

His reputation reached its height when, in 1871, he published *Songs Before Sunrise*. Several of these had appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Morning Star*, and elsewhere. But many were printed for the first time, and they were to many young men 'an intoxication, and a passion awakening half-formed desires, hidden longings and impulses, and secret enthusiasms.' Liberty was to Swinburne a religion. He hated tyranny as few have hated it, and his horror and loathing clothed themselves in words at once musical and terrible. It has been said



with truth that he was the last writer living who still felt the impulse of the original ardour of the French Revolution, who carried on the torch which he had received from Byron and Shelley and Landor and the young Wordsworth. It seemed to many of his readers that he changed. He became a vehement Unionist and an ardent advocate of the South African War. I imagine, however, that he would still have claimed to be in the van of human progress. He showed interest in Mr. Hale White's suggestive little book on the *Alleged Apostasy of Wordsworth*, and, *mutatis mutandis*, some part of Mr. Hale White's defence of Wordsworth might be applied to Swinburne.

### III

The limits of space compel me to leave off. There was no growth in Swinburne's fame after the publication of *Songs Before Sunrise*, but he continued to do magnificent work in poetry, to develop new powers, to retain much of his magic, and in particular to show his supreme power as a metricist. Not one book which he wrote can be safely neglected, but I may mention 'Bothwell' as the poem into which he put more labour perhaps than into any other, and with very fine results; 'Erechtheus,' which alone would have placed him amongst the foremost of poets; 'Songs of the Springtide,' which expresses his passion for the sea; 'A Century of Roundels,' which is an unsurpassed feat of metrical skill; and 'A Midsummer Holiday,' in which he developed the ballade with somewhat doubtful success, but unquestionable dexterity and resource.

From these later books I select two examples of Swinburne's metrical feats. In *Astrophel* there appears the



'Palace of Pan,' written in September 1893 in a pine country :

'Ridged pillars that redden aloft and aloof,  
 With never a branch for a nest,  
 Sustain the sublime indivisible roof,  
 To the storm and the sun in his majesty proof,  
 And awful as waters at rest.

A temple whose transepts are measured by miles,  
 Whose chancel has morning for priest,  
 Whose floor-work the foot of no spoiler defiles,  
 Whose musical silence no music beguiles,  
 No festivals limit its feast.'

These stanzas are written in the metre of a poem whose very name provokes a smile : Monk Lewis's 'Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogen.' Swinburne was fond of undertaking a *tour de force* of this kind, but only a very learned reader will be able to track him to his sources.

In *A Midsummer Holiday and Other Poems* he takes these words from Psalm xciv : 'Take heed ye unwise among the people : O ye fools, when will ye understand ?' and he uses them as the basis of a new poetical structure :

'"Take heed, ye unwise among the people :  
 O ye fools, when will ye understand ?"  
 From pulpit or choir beneath the steeple,  
 Though the words be fierce, the tones are bland.

Take heed : for the time of tide is risen :  
 It is full not yet, though now so high  
 That spirits and hopes long pent in prison  
 Feel round them a sense of freedom nigh,  
 And a savour keen and sweet of brine and billow,  
 And a murmur deep and strong of deepening strength.  
 Though the watchman dream, with sloth or pride for pillow,  
 And the night be long, not endless is its length.

From the springs of dawn, from clouds that sever,  
 From the equal heavens and the eastward sea,  
 The witness comes that endures for ever,  
 Till men be brethren and thralls be free.'

Perhaps the most wonderful of all his achievements was his success in the lines :

'Where beyond the extreme sea-wall and between the remote  
 sea-gates,  
 Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep death  
 waits.'

It cannot be denied that these feats sometimes seemed to impair the sincerity of the poet, and his lyrics have not been taken home to the common heart as those of simpler singers have been. Nor can it be questioned that a good deal of his later work is dulled in its effect by monotony and verbosity. He sometimes gives the impression of being no more than a master of words, but it is a thoroughly false impression. His work, even when most perverse and wayward, is full of thought. The author of *Hertha*, whatever else he was, was a very subtle thinker, and only those who follow with close attention the course of his dramas can do justice to the deep study given to the characters and the masculine grip with which they are handled.

No attempt can be made here to estimate Mr. Swinburne's many prose works. It is obvious at first sight that he had no judicial faculty. He saw red rags everywhere, and he never failed to rush at them. In his article on Charles Reade he condemned in a very dignified manner the use of 'sputtering, yelling, and foaming.' But he was always himself; he was an accurate and careful student; his insight when it had fair play was often piercing. His

most important prose work is probably 'A Study of Shakespeare,' and the severest critic cannot deny to that book many pieces of bright, penetrating, and original comment. Unfortunately it appeared at the time when the rhyme theories of Furnivall and F. G. Fleay were the subject of bitter discussion. To Fleay, Swinburne was very unjust. That great but lonely and embittered scholar preceded his old antagonist to the grave by a few weeks. There are those who have grown weary of new books on Shakespeare; who are content to amuse themselves with Nathan Drake's *Shakespeare and His Times*. But Swinburne understood the Elizabethan dramatists as few can hope to understand them. His book on Blake has not been superseded by later researches. Though he has written noble panegyrics on Tennyson, his admiration for that poet was by no means unqualified. He detested the *Idylls of the King*, and in one of his most unjust passages described 'the courteous and loyal Gawain of the old romancers' as 'the very vilest figure in all that cycle of strumpets and scoundrels, broken by, here and there, an imbecile, which Mr. Tennyson has set revolving round the figure of his central wittol.' It is fair to say that this passage was not published, though it was printed; but Mr. Swinburne was by no means ashamed of it. For Browning he had an admiration much less qualified, as is shown in the Sonnet Sequence on Browning's death, and especially in his essay on George Chapman. He singled out two lines from 'Sordello' as the finest in the English language:

'As the king-bird with ages on his plumes  
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms.'

Browning, we are told, used to say that this criticism of

Swinburne afforded him more delight than all the eulogies of his work to which in his later years he became accustomed. The gist of the passage may be found in these sentences :

If there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind, or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure ; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realise with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed ; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway.

On Swinburne's prose we may say what he himself said about Chapman, that the faults ingrained in the work are probably indivisible from the powers which gave that work its worth.

It is pleasant to think that this great man grew spiritually as the years passed. Life became to him not the life of furious Titans and beneficent demigods, but the life of man. His heart became wider in his growing love of nature

and of little children. More and more he looked out upon the world with enjoyment of all its simple good and compassion for its ill. He expanded in the serenities of friendship and affection, and his spirit became steadily more benign, elevated, and calm.



## XXVIII

### STRANGER THAN FICTION

I RECEIVED the other day two little volumes of autobiography in manuscript from a lunatic asylum in a Western state. The writer sent a letter in which she said, 'Will you please place two books written by me, which will be sent you by mail, in some public institution where they will be preserved? I ask nothing for them, and I would not ask such a service but I do not know who else to address. I think my books might be accepted in some prison library. They may in some way be thus a solace to some one who needs the message they bring. Will you do as I request as a kindness to another believer and follower of the Christian faith.' Of the books I shall say no more than this, that they bear the following dedications: 'Dedicated to the memory of M——, only friend of N—— W——, who perished of starvation in her home in —— 1900,' and 'Dedicated to M——, the dumb friend of N—— W——, who perished of starvation at her home in —— 1900.' They set me thinking on the adage that truth is stranger than fiction. Most of us in our monotonous lives feel that this is not so. Little happens that is worthy of record. But perhaps many of us could tell, if we chose, one episode in an otherwise ordinary career which would startle those who listened. Once on a time three men, of whom I was one, were imprisoned by a storm in a London room. We

agreed each to relate the most remarkable experience he had ever passed through, and the result was three tales startling enough, but too intimate and bearing too closely on those who are still living for publication.

Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, because for one thing, in a true story we sometimes get facts without explanations. The novelist is bound to clear things up, and they lose their wonderfulness in the process. For one thing the novelist is bound to make his characters either sane or insane. In ordinary life the line cannot always be drawn sharply. The sanest people sometimes do things that are inexplicable to themselves. It is as if they had for the moment lost their reason. Then besides, there are coincidences so strange that if they were put in fiction they would be dismissed as wildly improbable. A great critic wrote long ago that it was no defence of an incredible episode in a story that it actually happened, for the novelist's business was to give truth as well as fact, and to make his facts appear as truth. But some stories that could not be embodied in fiction are nevertheless true, and I propose to relate a few which have been given on good authority, either in speech or in print.

James Payn, who was one of the best of story tellers, and even more interesting in conversation than in his books, used to say that the most wonderful stories he ever heard were from the lips of Charles Dickens. Dickens would tell him, in his graphic and dramatic way, amazing things about London, a city of which his knowledge was indeed extensive and peculiar. In return Payn told Dickens the following incident, which interested him very much : ' I was returning home one summer night through a fashionable street out of Piccadilly, when there came on

a violent thunderstorm. It was very late, not a cab was to be seen, and I stepped under a portico for shelter. There was a ball going on in one of the great houses in the street; the drawing-room had a huge bow window, which was open, and now and again figures flitted across it, and the dance music made itself heard through the storm. I had been under my shelter some time before I noticed that there was another person in the street also under a portico. He was nearer to the house where the ball was going on than I was, but I could see him quite distinctly. He looked like a beggar, and was dressed in rags. Suddenly he ran across the street in the pouring rain, and stood beneath the open window, at which appeared some lady in a ball dress; she threw out to him her bouquet, the gilt handle of which I saw glitter in the gaslight. He strove to catch it, but it fell, and I heard it clang upon the pavement. He picked it up, nodded twice to the lady at the window, and then ran off at full speed. The whole thing took only a few seconds, but made a picture that I shall never forget. I took it for granted that the man was her lover, and expressed to Dickens my astonishment at the perfection of the man's disguise. "No," he said, as though the facts were all before him, "he was not her lover; he was merely a messenger waiting for the bouquet to be thrown to him, a signal that had been agreed upon beforehand." This conclusion I believe to have been the correct one; but I had forgotten, as usual, the precise date of the occurrence, and was therefore unable to discover from the newspapers whether any "incident in high life" took place about the same time.' James Payn's first success as a writer was won by his novel, *Lost Sir Massingberd*, which appeared in *Chambers's Journal*. It was a book which had

some vitality, for many years after *Punch* gave a fancy portrait of Payn based on it. The letterpress ran :

The Payn, qui vaut la chandelle to sit up and read him by, represented as the Lost Sir Missingbird preserved by his own 'High Spirits.' When he writes a novel, Payn takes a lot of trouble ; and when novel-readers want some books, they take a lot of Payn's.

The story turned on a man being lost and starving in the hollow of a tree. The idea was due to Payn's own imagination. He never knew of any such thing happening, but some years after the story was published it was announced in the *Philadelphia Ledger* that after the hurricane in the Miami Valley, which tore down a number of old trees and among them a large oak, there was found in the hollow of the fallen oak a human skeleton with some brass buttons and shreds of clothing and a pocket-book with a number of papers. The man's name was Roger Vanderberg. He was a captain in the Revolutionary Army, and was captured by the Indians. He managed to effect his escape, but found himself hard pressed by his savage foes, and took refuge in the hollow of the oak. Then came a fearful discovery. He had miscalculated the depth of the hollow, and there was no escape. He chose rather to starve than to surrender to the torture of the stake, and in the uncertain light of the snows wrote entries in a diary. Here is one entry : 'November 10.—Five days without *food*. When I sleep I dream of luscious fruits and *flowing* streams. The stars *laugh* at my misery. It is snowing now. I freeze while I starve. God pity me !' The entries cover a period of eleven days. The readers of *Lost Sir Massingberd* will remember the astonishing



similarity, and yet there is no doubt that Payn came first. In another novel, *Murphy's Master*, Payn got rid of a number of disagreeable characters on an island in the Indian Seas, by the simple though startling device of submerging the island itself. Two years afterwards an island in the Bay of Bengal with the Kinshra lighthouse upon it, with seven scientific assistants, was submerged in a precisely similar manner. The critics who sneered at the absurdity of Payn's device were answered, and yet perhaps they were not answered.

A great friend of James Payn's, Robert Chambers, was highly distinguished in his time for the skill with which he told anecdotes. He was particularly interested in country towns and in the associations of the houses, houses that seemed fortresses in a realm of dulness, but in which extraordinary events had happened. One house in the centre of a Scottish provincial town was inhabited by a lady who never once crossed the threshold for more than fifty years. She was married when a little over twenty, and her husband expired suddenly on the wedding day, just after they had entered their home. The young girl refused to pass through the door which she had entered as a bride, and never yielded to the importunities of her friends. In the course of the years she survived them all. She made no new acquaintance, she received no visitors. The only place where she was to be seen was in her garden. Chambers saw her in her last days clad in the deepest widow's weeds passing up and down the broad gravel walk. She tenanted the back rooms in the house, and the passenger looking through the front windows could see only two tolerably sized parlours exactly alike, with Turkey carpets in the centre of the floor, high-backed



chairs all round, and fire-screens papered up on each side of the grate.

Another house had a still more remarkable tale attached to it. It was tenanted by a widow, the heroine of the story. The husband of this lady was a singular character, and passionately devoted to antiquarian pursuits. He converted the upper part of his house into a museum, and built a special room for himself, lighted and ventilated in a peculiar manner. Among his other curiosities there were two skeletons, which he dusted and brushed himself. The dread of the skeletons was so great that not one of the servants willingly approached the staircase leading to the room in which they were deposited. They all united in declaring that very strange sounds were heard to proceed from the floor. By and by his wife died, and he came into possession of an ample fortune. A great change passed over his appearance. He began to be spruce in his dress, gay and courteous in his manners, and accessible to strangers. By and by he prevailed on a very beautiful young lady, a portionless daughter of a curate, to become his wife. He told her plainly beforehand that if she married him she must submit to some disagreeable restrictions, as he had made up his mind never to leave the town in which he resided ; there would therefore be no bridal tour. The lady agreed, and she was treated with a great deal of kindness, and allowed occasionally to leave the home, though her husband never accompanied her in any of her excursions. In about ten years after the marriage the vault in which the remains of the first wife were deposited was opened in consequence of some necessary repairs. It appeared that the undertaker had abstracted the leaden coffin in which the body had been encased, and the wooden

one fell to pieces disclosing the corpse. The perfect state of the body attracted attention, a face, ghastly it is true, but still undecayed, appeared beneath the mouldering shroud. On examination the supposed corpse proved to be a wax figure, and an outcry arose that murder had been committed. One of the magistrates of the place proceeded to the antiquarian's abode, and bluntly told him the facts. After a few minutes of strong perturbation the man exclaimed: 'Gentlemen, I have a living witness to prove my innocence of the crime imputed to me.' He led the way to the upper floor, opened several doors, and brought out a person who was no other than his first wife. He had contrived to keep her in close confinement during this long portion of her existence. The agitation produced by the discovery and the dread of consequences, brought on an attack which in a few hours carried off her husband. The second wife quietly removed to the Continent with her children, while the first wife, accustomed to confinement, seemed to have lost all enterprise and energy, and was quite content to occupy the part of the house in which she had endured so tedious an imprisonment. Chambers knew her as a quiet old lady, fond of cards and gossip. 'No one, however, ventures to speak to her of her own story; she never alludes to it herself, and seems anxious that it should be forgotten. The curiosities have all been removed from the attics; the skeletons having taken up their quarters at an aspiring surgeon's.'

A writer in *Blackwood* many years ago pledged himself to the truth of the following story. Once upon a time a lady sent her servant, a young man about twenty, to the neighbouring town with a valuable ring, which required some alteration. He was to deliver it into the hands of the

jeweller. The servant was a native of the district, and knew every inch of the road. He went the shortest way across the fields. Coming to a little wooden bridge that crossed a stream, he leaned across the rail and took the ring out of its case to look at it. While he did so it slipped out of his hands and fell into the water. He thought it fell into the hollow of a stump of a tree under the water, but he could not find it. In vain he searched for it till it grew dark. He was afraid to return and tell his story, thinking no one would believe him, and that he would always be suspected of having gamed it away or sold it. So the lad determined never to return. He left wages and clothing, and fairly ran away. For years he was lost to sight, but he went to the West Indies and contrived to accumulate a very fair fortune. At last he resolved to come back to the old home and clear himself with his mistress. Arriving in London he ascertained that she was still alive, and purchased a diamond ring of considerable value, which he determined to present in person. He took the coach to the town of — and then set out to walk the distance of a few miles. He found on alighting a companion in a man who resided in the neighbourhood and was bound for the adjacent village. They walked together, and in conversation this former servant, now a gentleman in manners and appearance, communicated the circumstances that had made him leave the country abruptly years before. As he was telling his story, they came to the very wooden bridge. 'There,' said he, 'it was just here that I dropped the ring, and there is the very bit of old tree into a hole of which it fell—just there.' At the same time he put down the point of his umbrella into a hole in the tree, and drawing it out, there appeared to the

astonishment of both, the very ring on the ferule of the umbrella.

Readers are at liberty to believe or disbelieve these stories, but they are well vouched for, and for my part I believe them. Nor do I doubt that if memories were ransacked a great addition might very easily be made to their number.

## XXIX

### THE TEXT OF POETS: A CORRECTION CORRECTED

IN a very able article on the *Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*, published on the front page of the *Times* Literary Supplement, there was a correction of a quotation made by me in the preliminary essay which I was allowed to contribute to that volume. My critic said I had misquoted Arnold, 'substituting *stirr'd* for *shook*.' The line in question is from the poem 'Haworth Churchyard,' and as I gave it the quotation is 'Stirr'd, like a clarion blast, my soul.' The *Times* reviewer says I should have given it 'Shook, like a clarion blast, my soul.' As a matter of fact, however, I am right and my censor is wrong. In the *Lyric and Elegiac Poems* by Matthew Arnold, published by Macmillan in 1885, the line reads, 'Stirr'd, like a clarion blast, my soul,' p. 186. This represents the final text of the author.

The poem was originally published in *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1855. It was not put into book form till 1877, when it was printed with an epilogue added. In *Fraser's Magazine* the line reads 'Shook, like a clarion blast, my soul.' In the edition of 1877 it reads 'Shook, like a clarion blast, my soul.' In the reprints, *Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 1840-1866, published by J. M. Dent in 1908, and *Poems of*



*Matthew Arnold*, edited by Laurie Magnus, published by Routledge in 1906, the reading is 'Stirr'd.'

I may add that it appears plain from *Arnold's Letters* that the long delay in the republication of 'Haworth Churchyard' was due to the tribute it contains to Harriet Martineau. When Arnold wrote that tribute he had not read any of Harriet Martineau's books. When he did read them, and as her life went on, he disapproved of her more and more.

### I

The matter is trivial, but it opens up some curious questions, and suggests some interesting parallels. We are told in the biography of Tennyson by his son that he specially disliked the raking up of the chips of the workshop. He belonged to those poets who cannot really revise and complete their work till they see it in type. He usually wished that his best should remain without variorum readings. The love of bibliomaniacs for first editions filled him with horror, for the first editions are obviously in many cases the worst editions, and once he said to his biographer: 'Why do they treasure the rubbish I shot from my full finish'd cantos?' For him many passages in Wordsworth and other poets were entirely spoiled by the modern habit of giving every various reading along with the text. Besides, in his case, very often what is published as the latest edition had been the original version in his first manuscript, so that there was no possibility of really tracing the history of what might seem to be a new word or a new passage. For instance, he said, in 'Maud' a line in the first edition was 'I will bury myself in *my* books, and the Devil may pipe to his own,' which was altered afterwards to

' I will bury myself *in myself,*' etc. This was highly commended by the critics as an improvement upon the reading, but it was actually in the first MS. draft of the poem.

## II

The question then rises, Are we bound in all instances to quote the author's final text and none other? It is not easy to reply convincingly. Certainly the author's intention deserves all possible honour and respect, but it may very well be that the author's last reading is no improvement on those that preceded it, and it may even mar the beauty of the line. Examples of this abound. I spent a quiet evening lately in examining the changes made by George Meredith in the last edition of *Richard Feverel*. It would be admitted, I believe, by most critics that upon the whole, and for my part I should say in the great majority of cases, the changes were for the worse. In this case the first edition is more valuable than the final. There need be no surprise at this. When Meredith was 'slashing away,' to use his own phrase, at *Richard Feverel*, he was an old man, and felt the influence of the evening hour. When he wrote his most passionate story he was young. Of all the poets who hacked and hewed at their verses George MacDonald was the most merciless, and in nearly every instance his later reading appears to me less pleasing than the earlier.

Indeed, were it otherwise I should still wish, on the whole, that poets were not permitted to alter their verses. When you have mastered a poem and have grown familiar with its cadences, it is very hard to reject the version which has become part of you for another.

However this may be, I venture to lay it down as a law that no one quoting from a poem shall be corrected and pilloried as a blunderer if he has quoted from any version which the author has published. Within this limit he is free. If I quote George MacDonald from my old editions, or from my magazine cuttings, I am quoting George MacDonald. It is not necessary that I should possess the very latest version which he was pleased to give to the world. But there should be no attempting to meddle with the author's text. It is difficult to apply this principle in the case of hymns. There are instances which will occur to every one where a slight change in certain lines of a great hymn makes it more suitable for congregational use, but in Anthologies for reading, even hymns should be given as they were written by the author. Any other course is presumptuous and unscholarly. There was a bishop who once dared to add a verse to 'Lead, kindly Light' in the lifetime of its author. This was universally perceived to be an outrage, and I rather think the offender came to acknowledge this himself.

### III

Are we to accept Tennyson's view and to abolish variorum readings? Are the passages which a poet chooses to excise to be lost for ever? To say this would be very bold, and Tennyson himself allowed it by his practice. From the volume of 1832, says his son, 'he omitted several stanzas of the "Palace of Art," because he thought that the poem was too full. "The artist is known by his self-limitation," was a favourite adage of his. He allowed me, however, to print some of them in my notes, otherwise I should have hesitated to quote without his

leave lines which he had excised.' My own view is that in the case of really great and classical poetry we should be allowed to have studies of the text. In fact, if this is not permitted we are much the poorer. In the sumptuous volume, a description of the Wordsworth and Coleridge MSS. in possession of Mr. T. Norton Longman, which Mr. Hale White edited some twelve years ago, there is a facsimile of a sheet containing Coleridge's own poem of 'Love.' This version is not the original one. The original one was longer by nine stanzas, and appeared in the *Morning Post*, December 21, 1799, under the title of 'Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie.' Sir Walter Scott greatly preferred the poem in this early shape, and he reprinted it along with Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' in the collection entitled *English Minstrelsy*, published by John Ballantyne and Co. Mr. Dykes Campbell did right when he reprinted this in his edition of *Coleridge's Poems*, p. 612.

I suppose there is no poet whose texts have been so minutely studied as Wordsworth's. Opinions must vary, but I doubt whether any critic of repute wholly trusts Wordsworth's judgments in his many corrections, and certainly few will question the value of fragments recovered here and there from manuscripts corrected by Wordsworth. For example, Wordsworth threw aside the following fragment, which he had originally designed for *Michael*:

' . . . had you then  
Discoursed with him . . .  
Of his own business, and the goings-on  
Of earth and sky, then truly had you seen  
*That in his thoughts there were obscurities,  
Wonder, and admiration, things that wrought  
Not less than a religion in his heart.*

On the manner in which Matthew Arnold dealt with his poems I cannot write at present. Many years ago I co-operated with the late Professor Minto in a study of his various editions. The result, to the best of my belief, appeared in a Scottish art magazine, but I am not able to identify it, and it is not mentioned in the excellent Bibliography of Mr. Smart. But it is well known that Arnold was an exceedingly fastidious judge of his own work, and would at times exclude his poems from current publication for years. One example is very well known, and I may quote it.

In *The Strayed Reveller*, 1849, he printed 'The New Sirens : a Palinode.' This appeared again in *Macmillan's Magazine* for December 1876, with a prefatory note : 'The following poem . . . was published in 1849, in a small volume without my name, was withdrawn along with that volume, and until now has never been reprinted. But the departed poem had the honour of being followed by the regrets of a most distinguished mourner, Mr. Swinburne, who has more than once revived its memory, and asked for its republication. . . . To a work of his youth, a work produced in long-past days of ardour and emotion, an author can never be very hard-hearted ; and after a disappearance of more than twenty-five years "The New Sirens" therefore is here reprinted.'

It appeared in the 1877 edition of his *Poems*.

#### IV

One very important question remains. Admitting that variorum readings are valuable to real students of poetry, and that they should be given in editions appealing to these,



how should they be given? There is something that irritates in variorum readings inserted at the foot of each page. So far one may go with Tennyson. A very learned and industrious critic has said that if we wish to understand the great poets we ought to read them in the successive editions they published when they were alive. He admits that while it is useful to the collector to print useful readings at the foot of the page, it is confusing and disturbs the unity of impression. He thinks that each stage in a poem should be taken by itself, and that in this way we may live with the poet through his poetic life, and mark the textual changes as in some measure a record of his history. 'Undoubtedly we shall read three or four times many verses which have been altered, and this we admit may be a great hardship to the ordinary reader, who considers himself a monument of endurance if he goes through any author from beginning to end.' The obvious objection is that the plan for most of us is quite impracticable. We cannot afford to buy a complete set of the editions of any poet. As a rule, early editions are rare and costly, but the principle of re-reading is excellent. There is much to say for the keeping of notebooks. Some of our best scholars advise that the student should always read with a pen in his hand. Those of us who have never taken this advice are afflicted with occasional pangs of conscience as we rack our heads to remember where we saw this or that. But all that is needed is to make the best literature part of oneself. The danger of keeping notebooks—at least to excess—is that a man may become detached from his notebooks. He may be helpless without them, obliged to consult them before he can speak or read to purpose. It is a poor affair to carry an empty head through the town and

to be satisfied because one possesses a series of well-filled notebooks at home. To read a great book again and yet again is perhaps the better way, and I for one have found myself much refreshed in reading favourite books in new editions. They come in that manner with a delightful freshness to the mind, and even what has seemed dead and withered is renewed again. On the whole, the most satisfactory way of giving variorum notes is to put them at the end, where they may be consulted without continual interruption to the pleasure of reading.

Under this head it is fair to speak a strong word of praise for the admirable and scholarly work done by the Oxford University Press and the Cambridge University Press in printing the best texts of English Classics.

## XXX

### FREDERICK GREENWOOD

FREDERICK GREENWOOD died on December 14, 1909, at 6 Border Crescent, Sydenham, in his eightieth year. There appeared a notice of his career in the *Times* of Friday, December 17th, beginning: 'We regret to record that Mr. Frederick Greenwood, founder and editor successively of the *Pall Mall* and *St. James's Gazette*, died at his house at Sydenham on Tuesday.'

If some secondary politician had passed away the news would have been telegraphed within an hour to every paper in the kingdom, and to many beyond. But the greatest journalist of our time dies, and no newspaper became aware of the fact till two or three days were passed. Such is one of the penalties attaching to the journalistic life. As a rule, the journalist is little known while he is doing his work, and when he retires from it he is soon forgotten, unless, indeed, he finds other ways of sending out his force. Frederick Greenwood belonged to a very great and famous circle of men, among whom he was by no means the least. Thackeray, Maine, Fitzjames-Stephen, Leslie Stephen, W. R. Greg, and Lord Beaconsfield, were among his intimates. As time went on, he kept an open door for young writers, made them famous, and also made them friends. Of all these he regarded with the greatest love and pride J. M. Barrie. It

was on Greenwood's advice that Barrie burnt his boats at Nottingham and ventured on the wider world of London with hardly any assurance of a certain income, and with the determination to work as a free lance. I suppose the last paper which Greenwood superintended was the *Anti-Jacobin*. It was a weekly, published first at twopence, and then at sixpence, and financed largely by the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. It had no great pecuniary success, and Greenwood was seized with influenza while it was struggling. The double depression was too much for him, and he incontinently got rid of the journal. From that time, although he gave a friendly ear to many plans suggested to him, and contributed a good many articles to periodicals, particularly to the *Westminster Gazette* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, he remained comparatively silent, but almost to the end he remained very accessible to his friends and admirers. A few weeks before his death a common friend and I invited Greenwood to lunch with us. He sent a long and masterly letter on another subject, and concluded it with words like these: 'Many thanks for your kind invitation, but no more lunches at the Club for me.' We did not attach any serious importance to this. He was so upstanding and so strenuous that the thought of death hardly came in when his name rose to the surface. But I suppose he must have felt that the day was far spent, as indeed it was.

Unless Sir James Barrie can be induced to take up his pen, there is small hope that any worthy account of Frederick Greenwood will ever appear. Those who might have written it are nearly all dead. He himself was in some ways the proudest and most reticent of men. I should be very much surprised to find that he had kept

his letters to any extent, or would allow their publication even if they had been kept. In his day he was deep in great affairs ; but he knew how to be silent, and so he was trusted. Perhaps I may be allowed to say that for years I laboured with him, endeavouring to induce him to write his autobiography. He gave very friendly and very prolonged consideration to the plan, and at one time it seemed as if it were to take shape. He had a scheme of writing passages of his life to be published in a certain number of monthly parts. One was to be on Thackeray, another on Beaconsfield, another on the Suez Canal, another on Gladstone. I think there were to be twelve in all, at half-a-crown each. But though some fragments appeared in *Blackwood*, he decided at last that he would not carry out his design. The reason he gave was characteristic. He found that in order to make his narrative satisfactory he would be bound to say either too much or too little. He could not say too much ; he could not break lock and seal ; he could not betray the trust ; and at the same time he felt that his narrative stripped of essential particulars might turn out pinched and meagre. Therefore he abstained from writing what would have been a most weighty and illuminating book. I speak of what I know, for I heard from his own lips much that would have been part of it.

Let me try to convey some image of the living man. He was in some ways quite a problem. It is well understood that he was of humble origin, practically self-taught, and with great difficulties to face at first. He began by being a printer's devil, and was afterwards a printer's reader. He found occupation in the fugitive and transient journalism of the time. Those who will look at the contents of



the short-lived periodicals of the early 'fifties will often see his name. His most permanent engagement at the beginning was one on the *Illustrated Times*. The illustrated papers nowadays consist mainly of illustrations; but in the 'fifties they were full of clever literary matter. The *Illustrated Times*, which was founded by Henry Vizetelly, had some very bright contributors—Edmund Yates, W. B. Rands, and Frederick Greenwood. Any one who takes up an old volume will find much to entertain him. From this Greenwood passed rather mysteriously to the employment of the late Mr. George Smith. This came, I think, through his association with Thackeray. Greenwood had the good luck to form early a friendship with that great writer, and one of his cherished plans was to prepare a little book about him. He thought that all the books about Thackeray conveyed more or less a wrong impression. When I came to know Greenwood with a fair degree of intimacy, he had lived through a most eminent career, during which he had mingled freely with the ruling spirits of his time. He had the air and manner of a grand gentleman. In this he closely resembled his friend George Meredith. Both were singularly handsome men in their days of health, very erect and stately, most gracious in their manners, especially to women, but never failing in dignity. Perhaps that type of man belongs essentially to the Regency period. Also, both men were connoisseurs in style. Whatever may be said about Meredith's style, it was certainly elaborated in the highest degree. As for Greenwood, he was in style one of the most severe purists that ever existed. I do not believe that there was any writer on his staff whose work he did not skilfully emend. He belonged to the old school of editors who rewrite the

work of their authors, and pay no attention to susceptibilities. Greenwood used his knife very freely. I have heard some of the victims say ruefully that he often improved their work. This is very likely. But that a man of such aristocratic bearing and taste and aspect, a man so devoted to the highest standards of literature, should have emerged from Fredrick Greenwood's first twenty-five years is amazing. I suppose the one explanation we can give is that he had it in him to be what he became.

When I first met Greenwood he was in his last days as editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, a figure full of dignity and authority. He had lived through more than twenty years' high and gallant journalism. During this long period he had exercised an admitted influence in politics and in literature. But he was one who needed no prestige of history behind him. Wherever you had met him, you would have known him to be a remarkable and powerful man. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, surely the pluckiest newspaper enterprise that ever was made successful, began about 1865. He liked to talk about the beginnings. As a talker, when he was at his best I never heard any one to compare with him. George Meredith was, of course, more brilliant, but one was always two or three sentences behind the master in agonising efforts to understand and remember. Greenwood spoke as he wrote, in a style full of trenchancy, clear, decided, pictorial, with a fair share and no more of surprises in diction. That day he talked of his friend W. B. Rands, known also as Matthew Browne and Henry Holbeach, who had died some time before. He told how he had engaged Rands at the beginning of the *Pall Mall*. After some months the circulation amounted to a figure so exceedingly modest that I hardly venture to

name it. It was to be counted in hundreds. Rands discovered this, and most bitterly upbraided Greenwood for engaging him in work so hopeless. But the work was not hopeless. The strength of Greenwood's staff was such, and his own versatility, courage and initiative so great, that the paper by degrees became a power and actually began to yield profits. The sale could never have been very large, but the influence of the paper was never in proportion to its circulation. Greenwood began as a moderate Liberal, but his distrust for Mr. Gladstone steadily increased, and the paper did as much to overthrow Mr. Gladstone's ascendancy in the country as all the rest of the Conservative journals put together. For the strict party man Mr. Greenwood had very little regard. He was above all things independent. Mark Rutherford once remarked that Greenwood's leaders had this peculiarity, that they hardly ever failed to offend both Tories and Liberals. When he published his novel, *Margaret Denzil's History*, a certain critic said: 'This novel is clever with a sort of cleverness which one sometimes encounters in conversation, which does not bore you, but which you instinctively dislike, talk which leaves an unpleasant taste behind it, in which conclusions have been jumped at apparently beyond contradiction, but which at the same time one knows to be hollow. The book is unpleasant, and apparently designedly so.'

But there was one politician for whom he cherished a passionate devotion. As long as Lord Beaconsfield lived Greenwood was his devoted follower. The friendship was warmly returned, and it may be doubted whether any one enjoyed a closer friendship with Beaconsfield than Greenwood did. There was no man on whom he talked more

willingly or more delightfully. He admitted that there was something mysterious about Beaconsfield, although he held that perhaps two or three men were at home in his mind. Beaconsfield, he would say again and again, worked in absolute detachment, and he laid great stress on his foreign air and manner as repelling Englishmen. But words almost failed him when he spoke of Disraeli's deep insight, long foresight, and indomitable courage.

On one great question in particular Greenwood vehemently and steadfastly supported Disraeli. Years ago, before Japan was much talked of, I was with Greenwood at a hotel in Hastings. After dinner we went into the smoking-room, and Greenwood expounded his views on the inevitable dominance of Russia. I have never heard more eloquent and convincing talk. He argued that Russia must by and by acquire our Indian Empire, and therewith obtain ascendancy in the councils of Europe. Destiny made this inevitable. He suggested possible alternatives and combinations. He took them to pieces one by one. He showed that Russia would be too strong for any of them, and in the not distant future would obtain that for which she was steadily working. The demonstration seemed as cogent and irresistible as if it were taken out of Euclid. According to Greenwood, there was once a possible chance of escape. If Beaconsfield had been followed the catastrophe might at least have been long postponed. But Beaconsfield had not been followed. Lord Salisbury had walked behind him with faltering steps, and had at last abandoned him. There was now nothing for us but to wait for our subjection to Russia. I well remember the depressed feeling with which, utterly unable to encounter Greenwood's argument, I went to bed. Now,



when I look back, I recall that in the whole course of the evening Japan was never mentioned. The lesson is that we should leave political predictions to those who can read the stars. The dark horse turns up, and prophecies are put to shame.

Latterly he was with neither side. Radicalism and Socialism he hated as much as ever, but in his greatest days he had done battle with Mr. Chamberlain, the Radical, and he liked Chamberlain none the better because he had passed over to the other side. 'Chamberlain,' he said, 'will always be an Anarchist whatever party he professes to belong to.' I cannot quote any of his remarks on Mr. Balfour, but with that statesman also he was in imperfect sympathy. This isolated him, no doubt.

It is a pleasure to think that his many friends entertained him in 1905 to a public dinner. His old antagonist in the Press, John Morley, presided. Lord Morley said that the *Pall Mall Gazette* had started as a sort of pleasure yacht, but it soon became an armed cruiser, with guns of heavy calibre, and a captain on the bridge possessed of a gallantry and a martial quality that had never been surpassed in the history of English journalism. In his peroration he spoke of Mr. Greenwood's splendid and unstained disinterestedness, his honourable and upright battle, his great probity, his industry, and his strenuousness for the public good. Mr. Greenwood, in his reply, showed a happy gift for public speech, and was deeply moved by the great reception accorded to him. But the speech of the evening was Mr. Barrie's, and it will never be forgotten by those who heard it.

This was the only public recognition that came to Greenwood. There was a story that he had declined



a baronetcy from his own party, but I do not know. He received no honorary degree from any of the Universities. Those who wish to know him in future must turn over many files of old newspapers, unless, indeed, the right biographer is found. It is true that he has left some books of no mean quality. As long ago as 1860 he wrote along with his brother James a novel called *Under a Cloud*. He wrote also some little books which I possess, *The Path of Roses* being the best. He thought of rewriting *Margaret Denzil's History*, which appeared in the *Cornhill*, and was actually attributed by some sapient persons to Queen Victoria, and I have a letter from him on that subject written no longer than a year before his death. A late book, with the reception of which he was disappointed, was *The Lover's Lexicon*. It is a good book, if not the kind of book we should have expected from him. He also published a little volume on dreams. But the whole strength of his powerful nature was given almost without deduction to the work of journalism, and few men indeed have played a greater or more honourable part in that field.

For the rest, I shall only say that he was the very soul of kindness.

## XXXI

### ON THE TENDERNESS AND COURAGE OF JOHN RUSKIN

THE splendid Library Edition of John Ruskin, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, is enriched by two volumes of Ruskin's letters, the first running from 1827 to 1869; the second from 1870 to 1889. It is quite impossible to over-praise the editing of these volumes. I have examined with great care the notes in them, and can testify that they give us enough and not more than enough. They are just what they should be. Great taste and discretion were called for, and they have never once been lacking. The rare and beautiful devotion which Mr. Cook has shown to Ruskin is almost without a parallel. Considering the uniform and severe self-control which Mr. Cook has always exercised, often in trying circumstances, it is wonderful that he should reverence and love so deeply a fiery and turbulent spirit like Ruskin. Perhaps it is not so wonderful as it seems at first sight.

The general remark to be made on Ruskin's letters is that they are all characteristic. This is the sure mark of a man of genius, though some men of genius have lacked it. The briefest note written by John Ruskin is signed all over. It is with him as it is with Carlyle. Many of Matthew Arnold's letters, let us say, might have been written by anybody, but no one else could have written the

letters of John Ruskin or of Carlyle. A very eminent politician and man of letters, who has had much to do with perpetuating the memory of Gladstone, said to a friend : 'The fact is that all Carlyle's letters are worth publishing, and none of Mr. Gladstone's letters are worth publishing—I speak as an artist.' It is to be noted also that there is no real repetition in Ruskin or in Carlyle. They are not mere phrase-makers ; their thoughts find a spontaneous and original expression.

## I

I have a confession to make which will gratify Mr. Cook more than any laudation of his scholarship and care. The perusal of these volumes completely altered my long-held views of Ruskin's character and Ruskin's life. I had thought him to be wanting in tenderness. Without forgetting some passages of special beauty in his works, without at all ignoring his noble indignation, one has imagined that much in his writing was both arrogant and cruel. Also, one has fancied that he was too apt to murmur, to rebel, to compassionate himself, to whine over his misfortunes, sinning in this respect as Carlyle sinned. When I read his letters, these impressions were quite swept away, and I was most happily made to see that his heart was full of tenderness and full of courage. Then the impression one had of his life was that of prevailing unhappiness, of calamity, and even of tragedy. But the careful reader of the letters from first to last will, I think, come to the conclusion that in spite of all its thwartings, its disappointments, and its confusions, Ruskin's career had its full share of sunshine and of triumph. The feeling with which one lays down those volumes is best expressed in

the words : ' Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' At all events, this is the impression of one reader, who has since been able to turn back to Ruskin's great books and read them with an untroubled heart. I shall try to illustrate these points from the letters.

## II

The tenderness of his heart is beautifully and convincingly exhibited in his references to bereavement. Some of these are quite singular in their loveliness. They are proud, swift, broken, great sentences, such as we find only in the very chiefest of writers. They are full of reality. Here is one on the death of his mother, written to George Richmond, R.A., and dated December 6, 1871 :

MY DEAR RICHMOND,—I believe Joan has written to you—but I intended to write myself. Your other of the two old friends of that Christmastime in Rome went on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land yesterday.

She looks very pretty and young. It is just possible you might like to come and see her—please do if you would. In *any* case I know she had no more faithful friend. So mind you don't come merely for fear I should think you did not care about her—I know perfectly well what you care about.—  
Ever your affectionate

JOHN RUSKIN.

The great grief of Ruskin's life was the death of Rose La Touche. It was one of those griefs which are hardly distinguishable from dying. Miss La Touche died in May 1875, and Ruskin wrote to Carlyle June 4 :

DEAREST PAPA,—I have had so little to say of myself pleasing to a papa's ear that I neither wrote nor came when I was last in London. For the rest the Academy work involved much

weariness. I had just got it done with other worldliness and was away into the meadows to see buttercup and clover and bean blossom, when the news came that the little story of my wild Rose was ended, and the hawthorn blossoms, this year, would fall—over her.

Then I must quote a letter to George Richmond on the death of Mrs. Richmond :

BRANTWOOD, 11th January 1881.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I would fain have written before now—but had no words in my tongue, no strength in my heart. I have not myself since my mother's death (except one which was rather death to myself than to another) sustained so intimate and irreparable—may I say to *me* also domestic loss?—and my personal sorrow is haggard with terror for the future to you, and a cruel sense of the departure of all things that you loved in this the Head of them—and I do not know how far you will be able, in the knowledge of your own dear-ness to your children and your friends, to take from them what they may yet be able to give you of twilight gladness and peace in waiting for the day of restoration—of all things—and her.

Men say the time is near—a day is near at least of such trial of the spirits of all flesh as may well be called one of Judgment. I thank God that I am able still—with you—to be among those that Watch for the Morning—and am still able to be thankful, beside the places of rest of those whom I have loved, to whom Christ has said, 'Arise thou, My fair one—come away.'—Ever your loving

JOHN RUSKIN.

### III

I may as well make a clean breast of it and confess that I had intended to entitle this letter 'Ay De Mi.' I had seen some extracts which misled me. But here is an ex-



tract from a letter to C. E. Norton, on the correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, which Norton had edited. It is worth observing that dearly as Ruskin loved Norton, he took Froude's side in the Carlyle controversy. Here is the extract :

'The Emerson letters are infinitely sweet and wise ; here and there, as in p. 30, vol. ii., unintelligible to me. C.'s, like all the words of him published since his death, have vexed me, and partly angered, with their perpetual "me miserum"—never seeming to feel the extreme ill manners of this perpetual whine ; and, to what one dares not call an affected, but a quite unconsciously false extent, hiding the more or less of pleasure which a strong man must have in using his strength, be it but in heaving aside dustheaps.

'What in my own personal way I chiefly regret and wonder at in him is, the perception in all nature of nothing between the stars and his stomach—his going, for instance, into North Wales for two months, and noting absolutely no Cambrian thing or event, but only increase of Carlylian bile.

'Not that I am with you in thinking Froude wrong about the Reminiscences. They are to me full of his strong insight, and in their distress far more pathetic than these howlings of his earlier life about Cromwell and others of his quite best works. But I am vexed for want of a proper epilogue of your own. . . .

'How much better right than C. have I to say "Ay de mi !"'

## IV

No human judge can pronounce exactly on the happiness or misery of any life ; but most men, I think, would choose

to be Carlyle rather than to be Ruskin. It is true that Ruskin was always well off, and never knew poverty and the struggle of Carlyle, but there fell upon him some of the hardest blows that fate can deal. Mr. Cook very wisely gives us a summary of the events of each year of Ruskin's life before printing the letters of that year, and we are able thus to read between the lines.

To outsiders, the heaviest blow that fell upon Ruskin was his alienation from his wife. This was in 1854. Mr. Cook briefly notes : ' Ruskin's wife left him in April 1854, and from May to October he was in Switzerland with his parents. The drawings of Thun and Fribourg were probably made during this tour. On his return, he resumed life with them at Denmark Hill, and among other work took drawing classes at the Working Men's College, which was opened in October of this year. Ruskin writes to Furnivall, April 24, 1854 : ' You cannot contradict reports. The world for the present must have its full swing. Do not vex yourself about it as far as you are sorry, lest such powers as I may have should be shortened. Be assured I shall neither be subdued nor materially changed by this matter. The worst of it for me has long been past. If you should hear me spoken ill of, ask people to wait a little. If they will not wait, comfort yourself by thinking that time and tide will not wait either.' On May 2 he writes to Rossetti a business letter full of detail. From Switzerland he writes many letters, apparently in excellent spirits, and ready as usual with advice, with correction, and with help for all who come to him. In November he writes : ' I forgot to say that the pleasantest and most useful reading I know on nearly all religious questions whatsoever are Ryle's *Tracts*. I forget his Christian name,

but you will be sure to find them at Edinburgh. They are not professedly doctrinal, but chiefly exhortations. The doctrine, however, comes in incidentally very pure and clear.'

There can be no question as to the overwhelming weight of sorrow that fell on him when Rose La Touche died in May 1875, but we find him telling on May 31 how he was busy at Oxford with Prince Leopold and his wife, showing them his school and his Turners, and making over some gifts to the University: 'So then we went on all through the room, and at last I had to put the Princess into her little open carriage, and Prince Leopold took the reins, and I think Prince Louis went behind them, and so they said good-bye; and it was all in the brightest summer day I have ever seen in Oxford—almost in England.' In the letter I have quoted to Carlyle announcing Rose's death, he says: 'Since which piece of news I have not had a day but in more or less active business, in which everybody congratulates and felicitates me, and must be met with civil cheerfulness.' To Dr. John Brown he writes on June 18: 'The death numbed me for some days so that I could not work, but am none the worse, so far as I know, only there is no blood in my hands or feet.' On June 26 he writes to Mrs. Arthur Severn: 'Am a good deal better these two or three last days somehow. I enjoyed my Turners last night greatly.'

If I had room I could show how, after the terrible brain fevers of his later years, he refused to be overcome. The moment he recovered, he was at work again as eager as ever. He was invincible.

## XXXII

### GEORGE GISSING

No book of 1912 interested me so profoundly and painfully as *The Private Life of Henry Maitland: a Record Dictated by J. H.* Revised and Edited by Morley Roberts. It is a book which at once attracts and estranges. Whether it should have been published at all may be gravely doubted. It is repellent in many ways, and yet it has an attraction so strong that I have again and again recurred to it, and have felt myself unable to pass it over without comment.

My perplexity is excusable, for the book, so far as I know, is not merely extraordinary: it is unique. The veil is so thin that it does not obscure anything. Rather it emphasises the form, and features, and history of the subject. This is a biography of George Gissing by his most intimate friend, Morley Roberts. There was probably never such a career among literary men as that of George Gissing. The life of Richard Savage was tame in comparison. Mr. Morley Roberts knew everything, and has told everything. He claims, and I believe he is justified in the claim, that Gissing would have desired that his unfortunate life on earth should be fully chronicled by the man who knew it best. If we once admit the legitimacy of Mr. Morley Roberts' action, we shall have no right to dispute the manner in which he has carried it through. I have

long admired the literary power of Mr. Roberts, and it must be acknowledged by all fair-minded critics that in this book he shows at his best. The style is thoroughly fitted to the subject. It is grave, condensed, pitiful, and weighty. No words are wasted. The narrator has sometimes to assume the judicial attitude, and when he does so, there is no fault in his behaviour. Indeed, in parts the history is beautiful and musical, but the author professes all through to be candid, and that profession is amply redeemed.

The question remains: Should the story have been told? It has to be remembered that those most closely associated by nature and by law with George Gissing are still alive. With what feelings will they read a history of apparent failure and shame with which they themselves were firmly linked? Perhaps Mr. Morley Roberts has seen to this. I hope he has, for the living have their rights. It is said, I believe, that you cannot libel the dead. But any libel of the dead is very likely to be a libel of the living. Mr. Morley Roberts needs no defence against the charge of malice. No intelligent reader will ever dream that he has written his book for any end of his own, with any design of making money, with any desire to wound. He has reacted violently, and I do not wonder, from the conventional style of biography. He has thought it well to put on record the true history of a contemporary with whom his relations were exceptionally intimate. That history is more of a warning than anything else. I do not say that Mr. Morley Roberts has written with a specific ethical purpose, but the ethical lessons are apparent. George Gissing erred and strayed exceedingly, and he was punished for his wanderings. In the current cant of the day there



are no penalties, only consequences. But in real life consequences are as hard to bear as penalties, and the change of a word does nothing to soothe the agony.

On one point of supreme importance I am entirely at issue with Mr. Morley Roberts. Gissing underestimated the work of his friend. Mr. Morley Roberts deplorably underestimates the literary value of Gissing's work. He has Gissing on his side. But I think that most competent critics would agree that Gissing's place as a novelist is far higher than Mr. Morley Roberts would allow. In the same way the position of Mr. Morley Roberts is far higher than Gissing would have assigned it. Excellent as this book is, allowing that it should have been written, it would have been much improved if somewhere the note of admiration had been more clearly sounded. Mr. Morley Roberts has a genuine affection for Gissing, and sees in his character, flawed as it was, elements of nobility. But for his main work he has no free and full-hearted praise, acute as are the scattered critical remarks to be found upon the way.

Here I must pause and bethink myself. The first time I ever heard of Gissing is memorable to me as the first time on which I had the privilege of a long conversation with Thomas Hardy. Mr. Hardy's gentle urbanity encourages the novice to put questions, and, greatly daring, I ventured to ask whether there were any young writers whom he admired. He instantly answered 'George Gissing,' and gave me some account of *The Unclassed*. I found the book and read it, and afterwards read everything published by Gissing that I could find. Years after I happened—never mind how—to spend some three days in a country place with Gissing. We had much intimate talk, but he made no reference at all to the peculiar circumstances of

his life, which were then unknown to me. He looked like the very last man to have cultivated an intimacy with the slums. He was well dressed, bland, debonair, and communicative. We first found a point of union in Sir William Ramsay's book on *The Church in the Roman Empire*, which he had been reading with the keenest zest. From that we went on to other things. I could see that Gissing was much less disposed to talk about his own books than most authors are. He spoke of them as pot-boilers produced under necessity. But he had ideas which I very imperfectly recollect of the books he might write. This meeting of ours must have taken place at a time when Gissing's domestic circumstances were maddening, but there was nothing to show this. He entered with interest into all that was passing, and smiled and laughed with the rest. Afterwards I met him on various occasions, but never had the chance of another of those dialogues by which alone men become known to one another.

### I

One of Gissing's capital errors, perhaps singular in its way, was committed at the beginning of his career. He was a student, and a very distinguished classical student, in Owens College, Manchester. Why Mr. Morley Roberts should disparage Professor Wilkins and Professor Greenwood I do not quite know. But Gissing attached himself there to the classical side. He never took any interest in science, and he loathed all forms of speculative thought. But in classics he took every possible prize that was open to him. Sad to say, he formed relations when a boy of less than eighteen with an unfortunate girl. He had to find

money for her, and did so at first out of his scholarships. But in 1876 the students were much disturbed by a series of thefts in the common room and from a locker room in which they kept their books and papers and overcoats. Books disappeared unaccountably, and so did coats. Money was taken from the pockets of coats left in the room. A detective concealed himself in a small room, and caught Gissing in the act of theft. There was naturally a tremendous ferment over the business, and Gissing's academic career was ruined. It was this error more than any other that made Gissing absolutely hopeless. For not a few lapses in other directions men of the world would have accorded him a certain tolerance, but the Christian ethics, or if you like ordinary ethics, have at last asserted their victory in one domain. Men who yield easily to other temptations would never under any circumstances yield to the temptation of theft. Even though they were starving they would not pick pockets for money ; they would not steal overcoats ; they would not steal books. In fact, temptation could not assail them on that side at all. That Gissing gave way on this point is a most calamitous fact. He practically thrust himself outside the pale by these actions, and outside the pale he remained.

Notwithstanding, there were kind persons in the College who tried to save him. He went out to America, where he was very miserable. He got some writing on the *Chicago Tribune* and elsewhere, but he made no headway. However, he had made a beginning. He had written fiction which was thenceforth to be the poor support of his life. He came back to London and married the girl for whose sake he had ruined himself. The poor creature had addicted herself to drink and other things. Gissing did

his best to reclaim her, and they lived together in squalid lodgings somewhere about Mornington Crescent. She was often almost insane with alcohol, and the rooms in which the two lived together were poor, foul, and dirty. This went on for years, and Gissing earned just enough to keep soul and body together by writing. Then he became tutor to Frederic Harrison's sons, where he became acquainted with Edward Clodd and others who were kind to him. It was a terrible time, but Gissing was able to talk about the classics, and to cook such stuff as his few weekly shillings could buy. Mr. Morley Roberts and he were both of them at that time in great extremity, sitting with their overcoats on, and doing their best to be cheerful. Gissing was fond of rich and succulent food, and enjoyed it on the occasions when he got a chance. Morley Roberts and Gissing paid a visit to Eastbourne, which proved a failure save for one thing.

And here I must insert one of the most poignant passages in all literature. 'It was the next night that the great news came. In spite of the dreariest weather we had spent most of the day in the open air. After our dinner, which this time was more of a success, or at any rate less of a tragic failure, we were sitting hugging the fire to keep warm, when a telegram was brought in for him. He read it in silence, and handed it over to me with the very strangest look upon his face that I had ever seen. It was unsigned, and came from London. The message was: "Your wife is dead." There was nothing on earth more desirable for him than that she should die, the poor wretch truly being like a destructive wind, for she had torn his heart, scorched his very soul, and destroyed him in the beginning of his life. All irreparable disasters came from



her, and through her. Had it not been for her he might then have held, or have begun to hope for, a great position at one of the universities. And now a voice out of the unknown cried that she was dead.

‘He said to me with a shaking voice and shaking hands, “I cannot believe it—I cannot believe it.” He was as white as paper; for it meant so much—not only freedom from the disaster and shame and misery that drained his life-blood, but it would mean a cessation of money payments at a time when every shilling was very hard to win. And yet this was when he was comparatively well known, for it was two years after the publication of *The Mob*. And still, though his books ran into many editions, for some inexplicable reason, which I yet hope to explain, he sold them one after another for fifty pounds. And I knew how he worked; how hard, how remorselessly. I knew who the chief character was in *Paternoster Row* before *Paternoster Row* was written. I knew with what inexpressible anguish of soul he laboured, with what dumb rage against destiny. And now here was something like freedom at last, if only it were true.’

She was really dead, and she died in awful surroundings. It was a relief to her husband, but a terrible relief. When he was sure she was gone, he grieved for her, grieved for what she might have been and for what she was. But he was free. He was strangely quiet even in the first hours of his liberation. He went to the slum in the New Cut where she passed away, and said to Roberts: ‘My dear chap, she had kept my photograph, and a very little engraving of the Madonna di San Sisto, all these years of horrible degradation.’



## II

One might have imagined that Gissing would have made some wise use of his freedom. It must be remembered that by this time he had a reputation, and was moving among intellectual people. John Morley, then editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*, offered to use as much matter as he could supply. But Gissing would not do anything practical. He continued to live in the deepest poverty, talking about the classics and about the rottenness of current morality. His work was appreciated by James Payn, then literary adviser to a leading firm, and he found his way on very moderate terms indeed into the *Cornhill Magazine*. He toiled like a slave, writing three of his best books in seven months. His strange nature found unexpected satisfactions. He delighted measurelessly in barrel organs; he loved all things that were redolent of oil and grease and fatness. He was approached and employed by various editors on more or less liberal terms. He was interested in religion, which he thought a curious form of delusion almost ineradicable from the human mind. Like many of his kind he hated the lower orders with whom he had to live, and in so far as he was a politician he was a violent Tory. But on the whole things were better with him until he took the first steps towards his second marriage.

## III

That second marriage was even more disastrous than the first. Gissing had been feeling lonely, and he made the acquaintance of a girl in the Marylebone Road. He said to Roberts: 'I could stand it no longer, so I rushed out

and spoke to the very first woman I came across.' The girl was quite respectable, and Gissing resolved to marry her if she would agree. Roberts pointed out to him that the results would be calamitous, and that he would repent the step most bitterly. His mind recognised the truth of everything, but he meant to have his way. He did not seem to know what love was. There was nothing in common with himself and the bride he had chosen. He might easily have found one who would have been a companion intellectually or spiritually. But in spite of all warnings he carried through his purpose and married the young woman 'who was to be his second wife, to bear his children, to torture him for years, to drive him almost mad, and once more make a financial slave of him.' 'From the very beginning it seemed impossible that she could ever become in any remote degree what he might justifiably have asked for in a wife. Yet she was not wholly disagreeable in appearance. She was of medium height, and somewhat dark. She had not, however, the least pretence to such beauty as one might hope to find even in a slave of the kitchen. She possessed neither face nor figure, nor a sweet voice, nor any charm—she was just a female. And this was she that the most fastidious man in many ways that I knew was about to marry. I went away with a sick heart, for it was nothing less than a frightful catastrophe, and I had to stand by and see it happen. He married her on March 20, 1891, and went to live near Exeter.'

Further I shall not follow the tragical tale. But when all is said and done there was something about Gissing that was not quenched—till it was quenched in death.

## XXXIII

### MR. BALFOUR'S PLEA FOR CHEERFUL BOOKS

'WHAT I ask from literature mainly,' said Mr. Balfour, speaking at a dinner of the Royal Literary Fund, 'is that in a world which is full of sadness and difficulty, in which you go through the day distressed and come back from your work weary, you should find in literature something which represents life indeed, which is true in the highest sense of truth to what is or what is imagined to be, but which does cheer you. Therefore when I ask you, as I now do, to drink the toast of Literature, I shall myself *sotto voce* as I drink say not literature merely, but that literature in particular which serves the great cause of cheering up.' This is a demand which compels attention, and which, stated as it was stated with due limitations, must be pronounced reasonable. Mr. Balfour did not deny that things sad, sorrowful, tragical, even drab, may be and are susceptible of artistic treatment, and that they have been and are admirably treated by great literary artists. He only avowed his own preference for more cheerful weather. He thought literature less cheerful than it was in the days of his youth. That might be because he was growing old. He did not deny that the great picturesque striking storm is a magnificent subject for artistic treatment, and he would not say that the dreary day of steady rain, perpetual and melancholy, was excluded

from the artist's compass. So long, indeed, as any subject was treated sincerely and directly the treatment had a value. But this was not what he asked for individually—not what he demanded of literature.

It was once said that novels should have happy endings because all endings are happy, and to close a book unhappily is to close before the end. If it be true that all journeys end in welcomes to the weary, there is something in that.

## I

We have to admit, I think, that the world is less cheerful, less sanguine, than it was, say, fifty or sixty years ago. Nobody will forget the famous meeting in Boswell between Dr. Johnson and his old class-fellow, Oliver Edwards. They had been separated for forty years, and met by chance in the street. Edwards was living on a little farm of about sixty acres just by Stevenage, and was happy seeing his grass, his corn, and his trees growing. He addressed his illustrious friend: 'You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson. I have tried, too, in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in.' Boswell tells us here that Burke, Reynolds, and others to whom he mentioned this thought it an exquisite trait of character. Dr. Birkbeck Hill quotes the story of Hume who, when he began to be known in the world as a philosopher, was admonished by Mr. White, a decent rich merchant of London. 'I am surprised, Mr. Hume, that a man of your good sense should think of being a philosopher. Why, *I* now took it into my head to be a philosopher for some time, but tired of it most confoundedly, and very

soon gave it up.' 'Pray, sir,' said Mr. Hume, 'in what branch of philosophy did you employ your researches? What books did you read?' 'Books?' said Mr. White; 'nay, sir, I read no books, but I used to sit whole forenoons a-yawning and poking the fire.' Horace Walpole wrote from Paris in 1766: 'The generality of the men, and more than the generality, are dull and empty. They have taken up gravity, thinking it was philosophy and English, and so have acquired nothing in the room of their natural levity and cheerfulness.'

What it is that sensibly abates the good spirits of the younger generation it is not easy to say. Even young men seem to have a frequent oppression of heart. The middle-aged and the old are, to say the least, grave and anxious. Perhaps it is the obvious instability of many institutions that promised to stand which depresses the minds of not a few. I have been reading the *Life* of that amiable and excellent philosopher, Henry Sidgwick, and am struck by his gloomy forebodings. Sidgwick had, as things go, a singularly prosperous and happy life. He kept brooding over the signs of the times, and the longer he thought of them the more he feared. In 1886 he saw the movement of modern society towards Socialism, and, though he approved of it on the whole, he saw before the nation great blunders and great disasters. 'In this way I sometimes feel alarmed—even for my own "much goods laid up for many years"—but not, on the whole, seriously. Considering all the chances of misfortune that life offers, the chance of having one's railway shares confiscated is not prominent, though I should not be surprised at being mulcted of a part of my dividends.' He feared also the abolition of representative government, and when he was



forty-seven he began to have a nervous consciousness that time was short, and that he had hardly sufficient left to do his proper work in. I might take almost any biography ranging over the same period, and give similar quotations.

## II

I draw a sharp distinction between those who merely suffer from the weariness and the anxiety that are inseparable from a diligent life, and those who are for the time being struck down by a heavy blow of fate. For the latter class a cheerful or humorous book has no consolation; in fact, it is repellent. It is all out of tune with the dominant mood of the soul. The mirth is mockery, the laughter and the music are new assaults on the heart. For such sufferers there are books of consolation (I am not speaking now of religious consolation), but these are to be found rather among the books that take full account of life's tragedy. They should not be wholly concerned with the tragedy. There should at least be chinks of light in the gloom, and, if possible, some sober victory of endurance at the end. I have known one afflicted in this manner who found, when the worst came to the worst, that the only novel he could read was *Wilhelm Meister*. It seems an odd choice, but it may be understood. Nothing is easier for the Philistine than to pick holes in *Wilhelm Meister*; all that Jeffrey said against it, all that De Quincey said against it, is true in a way. But Carlyle understood it, and his mother understood it, and it brought to each a measure of strength and light.

I have before me a list of novels which are an anodyne,

to the mind. But the real injuries to the soul are not cured by these remedies, though the symptoms may to some extent be alleviated.

There are those who will tell you that in profound depression it is best to read profoundly depressing books. There are no more depressing books than those of George Gissing. Their merits are very nearly of the first order, but I should doubt whether anybody had ever read the more characteristic, such as *New Grub Street*, without finding that his heart sank. Mr. Hardy appears to think that the day will come when soulful and troubled humanity will demand surroundings like itself—the sombre stretch of rounds and hollows rising and meeting the evening gloom in pure sympathy. Mr. Hardy has never surpassed the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native*, which describes the scenery of Egdon Heath. He speculates on the end of the exclusive reign of orthodox beauty, and the coming of a time when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. He even fancies a time when the commonest tourist will abandon the vineyards of South Europe for Iceland, and prefer the sand dunes of Scheveningen to Heidelberg and Baden.

For those who only suffer from the burdens and responsibilities incidental to the ordinary life, the novel in all its forms may be helpful and remedial. I have even fancied that lists of books might be drawn out for special necessities. One writer—I think it is John William Kaye—says that there are only two books really suitable when you have influenza and a temperature. These books are Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* and *The Last of the Barons*.

For convalescence, when the temperature is normal, *Shirley* and *Rienzi* may be recommended. When I have a temperature I read *Rob Roy*, and when getting better almost any of the others. *Redgauntlet* is much to be recommended, and I know two people at least who always take it with them to the Continent. But there is much to say for *Quentin Durward*, which R. H. Hutton described as the best sensational story ever written, and for *The Fortunes of Nigel*, which is a good deal better. For Continental travel I should myself recommend *Daniel Deronda*. You ought to have a book, and it should be a good book and a long book, and a tolerably dull book. There should be no temptation to turn away from looking at the scenery and resorting to your book, and yet when you wish to turn away there should be something to reward you. There should be no excitement in the narrative to draw you on to the end, but a quiet, steady, easy, unengrossing progress. There are also novels which are adapted only for reading in railway tunnels, but of these I shall not attempt a list.

## III

Mr. Balfour did not specify distinctly the novel of humour, for cheerfulness by no means implies humour. But for the humorist and for his works I should be disposed to put in a strong plea. They were never more wanted than in these days of controversy and upheaval. Matthew Arnold spoke of education as the great leveller. That is true only in a very partial sense. There is still a tendency to talk about Eton as the school of the governing classes. I doubt

whether the man who has studied at Eton and Oxford ever gets over a certain contempt for the graduate of London or Manchester. The superciliousness may be veiled, but it is there, and the tendency to give the preference to those who have received the traditional training is one that has to be very severely and resolutely combated. Shelley said very mischievously that the world would never be reformed till laughter was put down, and the idea crops up every now and then in unexpected places. We are constantly hearing of the necessity for dispensing with gloves and taking the buttons from the foils. There is a desire for savagery in our political combats. The reformers and the resisters of reform are being perpetually advised by misguided people to dispense with courtesy and good humour, and to go into the fighting each with the determination to kill his man. I say that humour is the great leveller, and that a touch of humour makes the whole world kin, and teaches us more in a flash as to the true values and purposes of life than a thousand exhortations.

This is no plea for levity. I am all for earnestness, for the issues at stake are great. But I have lived, and with some measure of joy, under Conservative Governments and under Liberal Governments. I look forward to living not without joy under a Labour Government. We must not attach too little importance to the action of the State, and we must not attach too much. There are those who, like Dr. Johnson, think that legislation has only a very small effect upon human happiness. That is not always true. But our happiness is not suspended, or ought not to be suspended, on the issues of political quarrels, and in the height of these quarrels we are never to forget that those opposed to us are our fellow-creatures, and that they



may be as sincere and unselfish in defending their cause as we are in attacking it.

By humour I do not mean wit. Wit has in it an element of sarcasm. It is not to be denied that we need the satirist just as we need the common hangman. But when the matter is considered it may be doubted whether the number of great satirists exceeds the number of hangmen, and whether it is desirable that it should. Of humour, the true humour which makes us think more kindly of one another, and calls us back to what is elemental in life, and to the true fellowship which exists in spite of our denials, and the immense orthodoxy which lies under our differences, we can never have too much.

Of all the great books of humour there is none, to my mind, at all comparable with *Pickwick*. As Matthew Browne pointed out long ago, the supreme merit of *Pickwick* is that it raises our view of human nature. There never was a character more essentially beautiful than the character of Mr. Pickwick. In his book Dickens attained to the great achievement of giving us a hero who is very generally ridiculous and never for one moment contemptible. Under all circumstances Mr. Pickwick is a perfect gentleman. Even when his plight is most farcically ludicrous, Mr. Pickwick raises our laughter without losing our esteem. In the awful moment when he finds he has made a mistake in choosing his bedroom, when the strings of his nightcap refuse to be untied, when his shoes at the most inopportune moment drop to the ground with an awful crash, Mr. Pickwick commands our esteem for his vehement and reiterated apologies to the legitimate occupier.

The iron entered Dickens's soul early, and never went out of it. Even in his first work, *Sketches by Boz*, and *Pickwick*,



we are brought face to face with human baseness and human suffering. But the presence of Mr. Pickwick, so childlike, so unsuspecting, and so pitiful, alleviates even Dodson and Fogg, Jingle and Job Trotter. There is only one really loathsome figure in *Pickwick*, and that is Lowten. Happily we see little of him. If we had seen more we should doubtless have had softenings and lightenings and laughing capital made out of this poor creature. In *Pickwick* there is no cynicism and no malady. We read the book, and we feel that life and humanity are both good, after all. True laughter, as has been said, has at the bottom of it an element of faith, and something also of love.

Therefore, I say, let us encourage the humorist. Even in this stern time we have writers like Jacobs and George A. Birmingham, and Beith and Clouston. May their kindly race prosper and be increased!

## XXXIV

### THE ART OF THE REVIEWER

#### I. SEVEN WAYS OF REVIEWING

THERE are Seven Ways of Reviewing; yea, there are Eight. But at present it will be enough to stick to the Seven.

##### I. THE OSTENTATIOUS ESSAY

The reviewer in this kind has little or nothing to say about the book which is supposed to be under notice. He takes occasion to display his own knowledge, and is recalled to the fact that he is expected to write, not an essay, but a review at the eleventh hour, when there is but a corner of his space to be filled.

Suppose he has to deal with a new edition of the *Letters of Obscure Men*, edited, and edited carefully, let us say, by Mr. Smith. The Ostentatious Essayist will begin early. He may perhaps trace the first glimmerings of the dawn of the New Learning in Europe, penetrating into the darkness of the scholastic philosophy. The dispute between the Nominalists and Realists will next engage him, and William of Occam presents an inviting theme, especially if the reviewer happens to know Principal Lindsay's essay on that subject. Quotations from Cardinal Nicholas von Cusa and Rudolf Agricola look well.

Next a brief survey of the Italian Renaissance literature

and an estimate of its influence on the Germans may come in. Readers are referred to the works of Geiger, with which the reviewer is apparently on the most intimate terms. A few sagacious though inconclusive observations on the authorship of the letters are now in order, and by this time the critic has wakened up to the fact that two and seven-eighths of the three columns allowed him as a maximum by a grudging editor have now been filled. Suddenly the book before him catches his eye. It occurs to him that he was meant to review it. He will probably feel some compunctions, and end his task with a complimentary sentence, in which that convenient phrase 'on the whole' is pretty certain to occur.

This is not the worst kind of review. It is a kind detested by authors and disliked by publishers, but if it is well done by a competent person the reader may get some good of it.

## II. THE HYPERCRITICAL REVIEW

By this I mean the review of the expert who is intent on finding mistakes. The passion for accuracy is admirable, and in many cases in which books are written with scandalous ignorance and carelessness the expert is doing the public a service when he exposes a fraud. Many shoddy, pseudo-historical books of our time ought to be reviewed much more thoroughly and severely than they are. But the passion for accuracy may mislead a reviewer. It may even carry him unawares into a certain malicious pedantry.

There is perhaps no such field for the hypercritic as accents. Accents are troublesome in French, in Italian, in Greek, and no doubt in many languages not known to

me. In an English book where French is freely used the accents are perhaps hardly ever quite rightly given. But I call it hypercriticism when a reviewer writes: 'Our author is evidently unaware that the word *déjà* has two accents in French.' Or when he writes: 'Mr. ——— fancies that he can read Italian, yet we see him actually putting an acute accent on the word *è*.'

Next to accents the great chance for the hypercritic is to be found in dates. Hardly any writer is immaculate in that respect. Some readers may remember James Rowley's attack on J. R. Green's *Short History of England*, published in *Fraser* many years ago. Rowley was undoubtedly right in many of his criticisms, but S. R. Gardiner gave the proper reply when he said that mistakes in dates did not necessarily prove much, if anything, against the real merits of a book. E. A. Freeman was not a fair critic on the whole, and he made a great deal too much of trivial inaccuracies. Since he died historians have risen who have disputed many of his own statements. Still, I say the hypercritic has a chance, especially if he knows the difference between Old Style and New Style. 'Dr. ——— is under the extraordinary misconception that Calvin died in 1561.' The hypercritic should bear two facts in mind. (1) No historical book was ever written that did not contain some slips. (2) In many cases the slips are due to the printer. It may be said that the author should correct them in proof. So he should, but many authors are bad proof readers. Also it will happen that the printers fail to carry out corrections made in proof. Well, then, I am told, authors should get friends to correct their proofs for them. Do people understand what it means to correct the proofs of a historical book properly? It means that

you must practically go over the whole ground trodden by the author, and that for no reward. The casual glancing at proofs is a good service to a friend, and may help him to avoid obvious blunders, but to expect any friend to revise proofs as they should be revised is to expect too much.

The hypercritic therefore ought to show some modesty and consideration. Unless he can show that his author is really untrustworthy he should make allowance for some mistakes, and accept them as misprints if he can.

Here I may relate a little experience which raises an ethical question. Some years ago I reviewed a little biography by a well-known author, and remarked that the proofs had not been properly read. The author wrote to me saying that he had taken special pains with his proofs, putting them in the hands of some well-known men of letters, whom he named. He asked me to specify the mistakes I had found. I put the letter aside, intending to look up the book again and reply, and unfortunately forgot all about it. Later on in an essay on critics the same writer returned to the charge. He said that generally speaking he had been well treated by reviewers, but that on one occasion a man (meaning me) had said that his proofs had not been well read, etc., etc. On this I looked up the book in question, and found a certain number of errors in the first few pages. Then irritation calmed down, and I simply could not compel myself to go over the book again. There the matter rests, but I may yet read the book and take up the controversy. My conduct in forgetting the letter was inexcusable, but was I bound to read the book a second time and supply the author with a list of corrections? I think not.



## III. THE-MAN-OF-ALL-WORK'S REVIEW

To almost every journal is attached a reviewer who is a man-of-all-work. It is his business to do the short reviews. He is understood to be able and willing to undertake any parcel of volumes that may be sent to him. His parcel may contain—will contain—all sorts and conditions of books, novels, treatises about Christian Science and Anglo-Israelitism, school-books, editions of the classics, medical books, works on ‘The Secret of the Universe,’ and minor poems. He has to get notices of these into a column or two. This man-of-all-work is generally an intelligent person. He can see whether an author is obviously incompetent. He knows all about ‘and which’ and the ‘split infinitive.’ He can tell by looking at the authorities quoted what class each volume belongs to. Above all things he knows where the ice is thin. He is exceedingly cautious in committing himself. As he is not usually well paid, he deals in extracts as much as possible.

This gentleman finds in his parcel one evening a work on that extensive subject, ‘The Stellar Universe.’ He does not know any astronomy; he cannot name a single star in the heavens, but he examines the book, beginning with the preface. The preface, if judiciously written, supplies him with a fair portion of the review. Then he turns to the titles of the chapters, and enumerates them more or less fully. He then looks to see whether there is anything about the inhabitants of Mars, and quotes a racy passage, headed in black type, *Is Mars Inhabited?* Then comes an appetising little extract, also headed, on the *Craters of the Moon*. If he is very young, he will probably

assert his individuality by saying that if the moon is inhabited, the fact that so large a space is occupied by only one individual must press hard on the minds of really serious thinkers. This the reviewing editor will be sure to blue pencil. The last sentence will be something like this : ‘ This volume is well worth consulting by all students of astronomy.’ The publishers are moderately satisfied with this review ; the author is not at all satisfied. But the miscellaneous reviewer is not such a fool as people think him. He knows his way about through snares and pitfalls, and generally has travelled it for many a mile.

#### IV. THE PUFF

This kind of review is ancient and lively. We need not go far to find it ; we shall never need to go far.

Mr. Vaughan Robinson’s very latest work of fiction is to be noticed, and the notice runs thus : ‘ Mr. Vaughan Robinson’s enormous and world-wide public will hail with rapturous delight the appearance of this masterpiece of fiction. In our opinion he touches in this book his high-water mark. As compared with his novel which we reviewed three months ago, this book shows an amazing literary development. There is much in these pages which reminds us of Dickens—the rich humour, the bubbling gaiety, the vivid and graphic sketches of character. But in the quiet and deadly irony of some of his passages, Mr. Vaughan Robinson has no rival, save, perhaps, in the immortal pages of Thackeray. In this instance, however, comparisons are idle. Mr. Vaughan Robinson has the gift of condensation. He wastes no space, introduces no irrelevant episodes, and no otiose reflections. In

100,000 words or fewer he does the work which Thackeray and Dickens barely accomplished in 500,000.'

This kind of review probably pleases authors, but I doubt whether it does them much good. In one of his stories Ian Maclaren satirises the gushing testimonial written by the Rev. Professor MacDuff MacLear, D.D., for a probationer. In this the professor describes the Rev. Hiram Clunas as 'a ripe scholar, a profound divine, an eloquent preacher, a faithful pastor, an experienced Christian, with an attractive and popular manner, and general knowledge of a varied and rich character.' The testimonial that is worth while is that from the great scholar, Dr. Zechariah Carphin, who describes his friend as 'fully competent to expound the Hebrew Scriptures after an accurate and spiritual fashion to any body of intelligent people.'

'Pardon me, it is my foolishness, but you notice "fully"; this extremity of language is, I need not say, undeserved, but that Dr. Carphin should have written it is . . . a compensation for many little disappointments.'

#### V. THE MALIGNANT REVIEW

I wish I could say that the malignant review was extinct. It is happily not so common as it was. Happily also respectable editors are setting their faces against it. Still you come across it pretty often. It is a review in which a book has been judged before it has been read. The author is criticised not for what he has written, but for his particular views, political or religious. The word goes round that no good thing can come out of that camp, and so work of genuine merit is pooh-poohed. The history of

literary criticism in this country—it is not a very long history—has many dark pages recording these iniquities. Far worse is the case of a reviewer who has a personal quarrel with his author, and tries to avenge himself. This also is not rare. No man of honour will ever allow himself to criticise a book by a man who is a personal antagonist. Let him seek refuge if he must in a Salvation Army shelter ; anything rather than run the risk of indulging personal rancour by an apparently honest and candid criticism. The day will come when this kind of attack will be considered so infamous as to debar its perpetrators from all decent society, and exclude them from all respectable newspapers.

#### VI. THE HONESTLY ENTHUSIASTIC REVIEW

There is no such pleasure in a reviewer's life as when he comes across a book of sterling merit by an author previously unknown to him. Then he legitimately enjoys to the full the noble pleasure of praising. It is not a very common experience by the very nature of the case. To find a sovereign where you expected to find at most sixpence is a surprise. But open and appreciative minds do come on this pleasure sometimes, and it is a pleasure which often leads to much. It is no easy matter for a new writer, however gifted, to make his way. If there is stuff in him he will come to his own by degrees, but he may be spared many a heartache by a strong and cordial word of praise at the right time. The happy reviewer who has a chance of speaking this word may occasionally find that his life has been enriched by a precious friendship.

## VII. THE RIGHT KIND OF REVIEW

By the right kind of review I mean the honest and careful criticism of a competent judge. Let me suppose that I have written a sound book on Socialism, giving thereto a careful study of many months and of many books in various languages. It will please me if I find my critic saying that the subject has been carefully studied, and that the results are presented in a clear and impartial way. But something more than that should be found here and there. Let me have a critic who knows more than I do, or at least who has read in directions I have not followed out. Let me be able to see that he has read and pondered and understood all I have written. His praise will then be very sweet. His criticisms will be thankfully received and considered, even when they are not accepted. I shall feel to my critic as Charlotte Brontë felt to Sydney Dobell when she read his review of her sister's *Wuthering Heights*. 'The article in the *Palladium* is one of those notices over which an author rejoices trembling. He rejoices to find his work finely, fully, fervently appreciated, and trembles under the responsibility such appreciation seems to devolve upon him.' There ought to be at least some periodicals and newspapers in this country in which an author who has done his duty may look for just appraisalment.



## XXXV

### THE ART OF THE REVIEWER—(*Continued*)

#### II. ON LITERARY GOSSIP AND THE EIGHTH WAY OF REVIEWING

LITERARY gossip is now fairly prominent in the newspapers as well as in those organs that are more especially devoted to literature. It was perhaps still more prominent say fifteen years ago. By 'literary gossip' I mean paragraphs about authors, about forthcoming books, about new books, and new papers. So far as I know this kind of journalism is comparatively recent. It is impossible to speak with any confidence, for we have no book which deserves to be called a history of English journalism, and the field is so wide and difficult that no one is likely to cultivate it. But I believe that the originator of literary gossip in this country was Mr. Francis Espinasse, who died recently at an advanced age, a brother of the Charterhouse.

#### I

The *Athenæum* had a hard struggle in its early days. It was started as an honest review—that is, a review independent of the publishers. John Sterling and F. D. Maurice were mainly responsible for its early numbers, and their high sense of honour is beyond dispute. The *Literary Gazette* had sunk very low, and did not deserve

to be looked upon as impartial or trustworthy. But the *Athenæum* did not gain ground till it was taken in hand by Dilke, who established it on a firm foundation. Even then it had rivals. The *Literary Gazette* passed from one editor to another till it died at last in the 'sixties under the editorship of John Morley. A more formidable rival was the *Critic*, which was started by Mr. Serjeant Cox, the founder of the *Queen* and the *Field*. The *Queen* and the *Field* won a huge and speedy success, and it looked at one time as if the *Critic* were also to be a success. This favourable prospect was almost wholly due to Mr. Francis Espinasse. Mr. Espinasse was then a young journalist, with a keen interest in books and authors, and a happy turn of telling what he knew.

Mr. Espinasse, who was an intimate friend of the Carlyles, and at home in many London literary circles of his time, contributed at least two articles a week to the *Critic*. One of them was on the sayings and doings of the literary world. The other was on a history of great publishers and great periodicals. One was signed Herodotus Smith, and the other Lucian Paul, but they both came from the same pen. They were extraordinarily good. I possess the old volumes which contain them, and I do not think there is anything in journalism now to be compared with them. They redeemed the promise made by the *Critic*—that its readers in the remotest part of the country should be as well aware of what was going on in London literary circles as the men who belonged to those circles.

So long as Mr. Espinasse was working for the *Critic* it flourished, but misunderstandings took place, and he went to Manchester. No one was found to supply his

place, and after an interval of years he was brought back. But it was too late ; the circulation and advertisements of the *Critic* had diminished so greatly that its death was inevitable.

The work of the literary gossip is by no means easy. He must get his facts at first hand. Only from authors, from publishers, and from editors can paragraphs of value be derived. It is of no use to go to any one, however benevolent he may be, and ask him for information. You can only get the information indirectly in the course of friendly conversation. Even then you must be exceedingly careful. Much that is told you is not meant for publication. Sometimes you are warned of this, but you need in addition to have a kind of instinct. Any breach of confidence or discretion will be punished by the withdrawal of further communications. To close up even one source of communication where there are so few is a serious matter. Sometimes the gossip who has turned out a poor set of paragraphs bemoans himself because he cannot tell all he knows. If he could tell he would be quoted in every newspaper. But he cannot, and so he must do the best he can. So great is the difficulty that some powerful journals are almost always blank in the matter of literary news, though they are quite willing to pay for it, and occasionally take pains to secure it.

No doubt the literary newsmonger is tempted to overestimate the interest of the public in books and in authors. He writes about obscure men, in a friendly or in a satirical way, and the general reader is puzzled. He cannot understand those allusions to nonentities. Some editors feel this so strongly that they make little of literary news, and are content to cut out from one paper or another. But

when all is said and done, I believe there are a good many who are interested in the literary world and like to read about it. One meets very few people who buy books, and yet it is a fact beyond denial that books are bought. Any great bookbinder will tell you that more books are sold every year, and it follows that there are buyers. Those who buy books certainly like to read about them, and so the journalist who has the power to put together a really good literary column is always in request, and likely to remain in request.

## II

So I come to the Eighth way of reviewing, which bids fair to become the most popular of all. By this I mean the review that blends gossip with criticism—the personal review.

Perhaps the most interesting form of the personal review is that in which the critic from his own knowledge can say something about the author. 'I take up this book with peculiar feelings. I sat on the same bench with the author at college. We knew him as Jimmy Thompson. He shone especially in the Greek class; his translations recalled for classical grace and beauty the famous verses of Professor Gilbert Murray. He was always ready, and yet he never seemed to work,' and so on, and so on.

But this is not always possible, and then you must do the best you can. Here is a new book, let us say, by Mr. Charles Garvice. Begin: 'I shall never forget while memory lasts my first introduction to Mr. Garvice's work. I was starting for India one dark, wet autumn evening. My friend—the friend of my boyhood and my manhood,

Harry Blyth—insisted on accompanying me to the gloomy station of Waterloo. (I hope it is Waterloo.) He went to the bookstall, and as the train was starting he pressed a volume into my hand. “There,” he said, “is a book that will delight you. You will not know a moment’s weariness as long as you are reading it. That is by Charles Garvice.” Poor Harry Blyth! We know not what is before us. I went to India, and lived through torrid and adventurous years in a pestilential climate. He went back to his quiet but not unprofitable task. When I had overpast my dangers and come back to London, I heard that my friend had been struck with apoplexy as he was turning over the pages of his ledger. Such is life.’ This is a pretty good beginning, and then may follow some account of the book in hand.

There is a variety of the personal review which may be worth describing. In it you begin with an incident and close with a continuation of the incident. Thus you are reviewing a book, let us say, by Henry Seton Merriman. You start thus: ‘One winter in the discharge of my duties as a special correspondent I was compelled to spend some time in Odessa. Those who know that dreariest of towns (here a fair amount about Odessa, which can be got anywhere, may come in). I lodged with a singular couple. The husband was a gigantic Russian, the most reserved and reticent of men. His wife was a vivacious little Scotswoman. Almost the only book in their little home was *The Sowers*, by Henry Seton Merriman. My landlady was trying to teach her Russian husband English by means of this book. I had never heard of Merriman before, but to read *The Sowers* is to remember it for ever.



'And now we have another book from the same magic pen.' Then comes the review. Well, then, I should finish up with something like this: 'Does the reader wish to know the further story of that strangely matched couple?' The rest can be filled up by any reviewer according to his fancy. I do not mean to mock this kind of criticism. By no means. If it is well done it is more likely to be read and more likely to help a book than any other. And I should not be at all surprised if some popular newspapers that have not yet found the way of making their literary page interesting were to adopt it.

## III

Are reviews as good as they used to be? In other words, supposing an author puts toil and brains into his work, is he as sure of receiving fair, adequate, competent criticism as he would have been say thirty years ago? Many authors and many publishers will answer with an emphatic no. But I venture to differ from them. Some worthy critical tribunals have been scattered. Others have deteriorated, and in some cases most painfully. No one who knows anything about journalism will say that the sixpenny weekly reviews are as good to-day as they were in the sixties or seventies. For that there are many reasons, but in other places things are improving. There is now, I think, a greater desire than ever to recognise a new author, whether his claims be those of genius or those of scholarship. On the whole I see no reason to be discouraged. Will there then be in the journalism of the future any place of importance for the competent reviewer? Certainly, there will always be a place. So long as books

are bought and read, so long the critic will have his chance. Criticism is not, never has been, and never will be a particularly remunerative occupation, but it has its compensations, real and great.

## IV

If I might say one thing to the young reviewer it would be this: Leave the bitter word unspoken. As a great man said, it is so easy to be sarcastic. There are occasions which justify stern and severe criticism, but reviewers should stand up to men who can hit back. They should not strike the defenceless. One has to live a long time among authors and know their ways before he understands how much their books often mean to them. Here is a little book of minor poetry. The authoress has paid for its publication, and is waiting with tense anxiety for the reviews. It is a poor little book, and there are one or two ridiculous lines in it which if quoted would raise a laugh. The true critic ought to be above that temptation. If he cannot possibly say anything good about the little book, let him leave it alone. When a novelist who in honest ways can attract no attention takes to coarse or obscene subjects, it is a sorry and pitiful business. But to attack these books is, generally speaking, to advertise them. So silence is best. In the case of a new writer it is well to search for any signs of genuine promise, and to dwell on these. The kind of review that I most detest is the attack on old writers who have done good work, and are beginning to fail. There is a peculiar brutality in some of these. It is charitable to suppose that they are written in ignorance. One such review I specially re-

member. It was a clever and biting criticism of a book by an aged lady, who had done great things in her time, and was then close upon the end. She was dying of cancer, but she had time before she died to read that review.

## XXXVI

### ROBERT BUCHANAN

MR. BIRRELL discussed some time ago the question, Is it possible to distinguish between a good book and a bad book? He came to the conclusion that it was very difficult to draw the line. Is it possible to distinguish a good man from a bad man? It is by no means easy. The question is rarely raised by a biographer. As a rule, one lays down a biography feeling that he has learned something, that the man of whom he has been reading has some quality of nobleness or of patience which may well be admired and followed. But the *Life of Robert Buchanan* written by Miss Harriet Jay in 1902 almost forces a moral judgment on Buchanan. I hope to resist the compulsion, and to content myself with drawing attention to some materials for the solution of the problem. I do not think there will be any difference of opinion as to Buchanan's intellectual gifts and literary achievements. He had an unquestionable touch of genius, and has done some fine things. But by far the larger part of his work is quite dead, and only the merest fragments can survive.

I hasten to say that Miss Jay has done her work admirably, with true affection and lenity, and yet with a frank and serious candour. The great literary power manifested in her early book, *The Queen of Connaught*, has not failed her. Her style is simple and unambitious, but it has a

touch of distinction, and alike in what she says and in what she does not say one cannot but mark her understanding of the issues, and her determination to be at once just and merciful. It weighs heavily on Buchanan's side that he retained through life the warm affection of three such women as his mother, his wife, and his sister-in-law. They were by no means blind to his failings, but they loved him in spite of all. Let that be remembered whenever he comes up for judgment. Buchanan's life was in many respects extraordinary and abnormal. Miss Jay says that he was from first to last a lonely man, that he had few friends and many enemies, and that he received from the world many cruel blows. No man, she says, has been oftener abused, though no man needed kindness so much and received so little. How do the facts bear this out? Buchanan's parents were prosperous in his childhood. He had comforts and even luxuries, and he had a fair education at the High School and University of Glasgow. When he was only eighteen he went off to London, and for a short time he had a pretty hard struggle. In 1861, when he was only twenty, he married a lovely girl in her 'teens, and by that time he was doing fairly well. He had been accepted as a contributor to the *Athenæum*, and he worked also for other periodicals of importance in their day, such as *All the Year Round* and *Temple Bar*. He was employed by the *Morning Star* as a foreign correspondent. He obtained admission to the inner circle of literary people. Among others he was welcomed by George Henry Lewes and George Eliot, by Barry Cornwall, by Miss Mulock, by Thomas Love Peacock, by Edmund Yates, and by Robert Browning. He was also on very intimate terms with Charles Gibbon and William Black. In 1863, when he was



twenty-two, his first volume of poems, *Undertones*, appeared, and was followed not long after by *Idylls and Legends of Inverburn*. He came into connection with the most generous of all publishers, Alexander Strahan. His work for Strahan is not adequately recorded in this biography. There was a time when Buchanan wrote most of the *St. Paul's Magazine*. One of his first contributions to a London magazine was a poem in *Good Words*, which, by the way, was signed Williams Buchanan, and though Miss Jay does not say so, I believe the poet's name was Robert Williams Buchanan. More than that, R. H. Hutton, of the *Spectator*, took him up with vehement enthusiasm, as much later he took up William Watson. The result was that, before he was twenty-five, Buchanan was offered £400 for a volume of poems, and was able to take a house near Oban. We are told that he lived there the life of a regulation country gentleman. His tastes were expensive, and he gratified them. He had his shooting and his fishing, while his yacht was riding at anchor in Oban Bay. Now I should like to know what right Buchanan had to complain of the world? Is there any case of a young author making so prosperous a start? He had hardly arrived in London as a mere boy when the most exclusive houses and the most jealously guarded periodicals were open to him, when the chief critics of the day—George Henry Lewes and Hutton and Hepworth Dixon—were loudly chanting his praises; when publishers were competing for his poems as they would compete for hardly any poet nowadays; and when he was able to live like a country gentleman, with his shooting, his fishing, and his yachting. True, the country life came after a few years, but it is perfectly evident that from the date of his

marriage Buchanan must have been making an income of very comfortable proportions. So far as I know, and so far as this biography shows, he had no enemies then. He never had to run the gauntlet of criticism. He was accepted from the first, and all things opened fair for him. The truth is, not that Buchanan did not make friends, but that he could not keep friends. I remember well the manner in which he wrote of Hutton towards the end of his life, and it raised the question whether Buchanan knew what gratitude meant.

Clouds came over the bright opening of his life. Was this because friends played him false? I do not think so. It was because he played himself false. Miss Jay virtually acknowledges that he had no conscience about his literary work—that is, he did not feel bound to do his best. He was always recklessly extravagant, and we are told in this volume that his wife had no faculty for saving any more than he had. In consequence, he was always impoverished. No matter how much his income was, he always contrived to spend more. Money had to be found, and he got it somehow by writing incessantly. But how badly he could write! It is melancholy to read the list of his books. After *God and the Man*, nearly all might be struck out with great advantage to his reputation; in fact, some volumes which preceded *God and the Man*, especially *Napoleon Fallen* and the *Fleshly School of Poetry*, might very well be spared. I will not raise questions as to the authorship of some books published under Buchanan's name, a subject on which I do not profess to know more than other people.

But this is a small part of the indictment. The gravest charge against Buchanan is not that he wrote quantities

of disgraceful rubbish, but that he introduced a truly diabolical spirit of malignity into literary controversy. As to literary controversies, there is a distinction. Many of them are merely theatrical. They give amusement to both sides, and to the public. Even these, perhaps, do harm to literary men. They do not show them in their best light. But there are literary controversies that blight lives and poison minds, and of such were Buchanan's. I do not wish to take up again the excessively disagreeable story of Buchanan's attack on Rossetti. On this, as on almost every point, Miss Jay has written with admirable sense and good feeling. Rossetti was quite open to criticism, and even severe criticism. No less a man than Lowell wrote adversely and severely of his poems in the *North American Review*. But what cannot be excused to any critic is that he should write to avenge real or fancied insults. Mr. Swinburne, it seems, made a contemptuous allusion to the poems of Buchanan's early friend, David Gray. Buchanan thought that Swinburne was retaliating on himself for his review of *Poems and Ballads* in the *Athenæum*. That article, which lies before me, was offensive in the highest degree, and there is hardly any provocation that could have justified it. Buchanan resolved to strike at Rossetti, and did so. Miss Jay says: 'His motive was, I know, primarily revenge.' It is too well known that the attack, contemptible as it was in form and spirit, grievously injured Rossetti, and was, in fact, the primary cause of his decline and death. Buchanan repented and retracted, but the mischief was done. He did not learn wisdom or charity from the quarrel. He went on to denounce other writers, great and small, with equal unscrupulousness, and from the same motive, that of

revenge. I hope it is not necessary to argue that criticism inspired in this fashion is evil, and that it brands the name of the perpetrator. In conducting his warfare Buchanan stuck at nothing. For example, he wrote afterwards that Tennyson and Browning were with him, and that Tennyson told him that he considered a certain sonnet of Rossetti's the 'filthiest thing he had ever read.' I say that under no circumstances is it justifiable to hold such language. When Buchanan published this statement Tennyson was dead, and unable to contradict it. It rests entirely on Buchanan's word; and, frankly, I believe that the statement was not true, for in the reminiscences contributed by Mr. Palgrave to Lord Tennyson's memoir, there is a eulogium by Tennyson on this very sonnet. Nobody will suppose that Palgrave lied, nor do I say that Buchanan lied. There were innumerable misstatements in the later papers of reminiscences published by him in the *Sunday Special* and elsewhere. He imagined that he was speaking the truth, no doubt. It is very disagreeable to write in this strain, but it is necessary in the interests of justice. Buchanan is a warning to all critics. If they are unfortunate enough to cherish personal animosity towards any author, it is perfectly plain that they have no right under any circumstances to review his books. If they use their power as critics to avenge real or imagined personal wrongs, they are vermin who ought to be, as soon as possible, caught, cracked, and extirpated. It must also be pointed out that there is a peculiar baseness in attacking, not the man who has done you wrong, but another man who has done you no wrong, and is simply the friend of your enemy. Every one concerned for the reputation of literature ought to denounce without mercy all such



practices. I wish I could think they were quite given over now.

In the latter part of his life Buchanan took to play-writing, and received very large sums of money. Miss Jay tells us that he squandered them all. Whatever his income was, he always managed to be a little in arrear. 'He could no more help being prodigal with his great gains than the sun can help shining.' In 1894 he was standing in the bankruptcy court a practically ruined man. Mr. Henry Murray tells us that he was a born gambler, and though he was fully fifty years of age before he ever saw a racecourse, he took to the sport of racing with the same youthful ardour which characterised his pursuit of all that attracted his attention. He was a persistent loser, though we are told that he never regretted the money which the turf cost him. Buchanan had a right to be poor. He had a right to spend his income; but had he the right to become bankrupt? If he had become bankrupt through an unavoidable misfortune, was it not his duty to strain every nerve in order to repay his creditors? That was the view taken by Sir Walter Scott, and it is well to read Scott's journal after this biography in order to recover one's faith in human nature. We are told nothing here of the sum for which Buchanan failed, or of the money he provided for his creditors, and it is not my business to give the particulars. There is no doubt that Buchanan could be generous, that he was often very lavish in his gifts. But justice comes before generosity, and it has to be asked whether Buchanan was just.

Let it be remembered that he was a man of fine gifts, of much humanity, and that by those who knew him best he was most dearly beloved. There is a great deal in this



book, too much, I think, about Buchanan's notions on Christianity. We are told that when he was preparing an article on the subject, he went down with a friend to the Sandown Races. His friend found him in the middle of the ring serenely unconscious of the carnival, reading his Greek Testament. When the bell rang he slipped the volume into his pocket, marked the place with a tip telegram, and plunged into the fray apparently greatly refreshed by his studies.

## XXXVII

### LAFCADIO HEARN : AN UNCONVENTIONAL LIFE

MESSRS. CONSTABLE in 1906 issued the English edition of the *Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, by Elizabeth Bisland. The work makes two considerable volumes. I may say at once that if anybody expects to find in it a collection of letters to rank with the best—with those of, say, Stevenson or of Edward FitzGerald—he will be disappointed. No such claim can rightly be urged for Hearn. In spite of this, the book is alive with interest. It is indeed one of the most fascinating and holding among recent biographies, and I should be puzzled to think of any one quite its equal in a certain strange impressiveness.

Many of us in this country knew Hearn as a writer on Japan. His contributions appeared in some of the best of the American magazines, notably the *Atlantic Monthly*. They were always worth reading, but did not leave behind them any definite impression. To me it seemed as if Hearn were striving in vain to handle the brush of Loti. Loti is of all living writers the most difficult to imitate successfully, and Hearn was not successful. Also there was in Hearn's writing a curious aloofness and impersonality. He was apt to comment as if he did not belong to the world of human beings on which he passed his judgment—as if he had come from another planet, and had the

means of return ready. Still he was well above the average, and the paragraphs which appeared from time to time about his experiences stimulated curiosity. When he died, there were some interesting obituary notices, one quite remarkably interesting from the pen of his physician. This, if I remember rightly, appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*. Then this biography was published in America, and the letters which make the bulk of it were praised in what I must think extravagant terms. What the letters do for us is to show that Lafcadio Hearn was very human indeed, very modest, very sensitive, and full of desire to learn. He would no doubt have made a much greater mark in literature if he had been content to use his own weapons of expression, if he had not been imbued from the first with the desire to handle the swords of others. When every abatement is made, Lafcadio Hearn will remain a striking figure in the firmament of American letters.

## I

The biographer, Mrs. Wetmore, who uses her maiden name, Elizabeth Bisland, has confined herself to a very brief summary of Lafcadio's life. She uses only about 160 pages, and large parts of these are borrowed. Then come the letters, occupying more than 300 pages in the first volume, and the whole of the second. Hearn's life may be summarised very briefly. He was born in the Ionian Isles, the son of an Irish soldier and a beautiful Greek girl. His boyhood was a troubled time, and during the year 1869 Lafcadio Hearn, nineteen years old, penniless, delicate, half blind, and without a friend, found himself in the streets of New York.

His time in New York was one of peculiar misery, but not much is known of it. It was not till he obtained a position in New Orleans in 1881 that he had any happiness or any appreciation. Hearn was about five feet three in height, with broad and powerful shoulders, and an almost feminine grace and lightness in his movements. He made friends in New Orleans, and travelled in the tropics, being particularly attracted by the Island of Martinique. Ultimately he went to Japan, and remained there fourteen years as a teacher. During this time he married a Japanese lady, became naturalised, and wrote his principal books. He was never very happy, and he had great anxieties, but he managed somehow to live, and gradually he gained so much reputation that he had a chance of lecturing at London and Oxford. It was not to be. A sudden violent illness, attended by bleeding from the lungs, and induced by strain and anxiety, brought him quite suddenly to the end, and he was buried in an ancient Buddhist graveyard in the country of his adoption. His students presented a laurel wreath with the inscription, 'In memory of Lafcadio Hearn, whose pen was mightier than the sword of the victorious nation which he loved and lived among, and whose highest honour it is to have given him citizenship and, alas, a grave!' That was the end of it so far as this world is concerned. How far his contribution to English letters will endure has yet to be seen.

## II

To me the most interesting part of the volumes is that associated with New Orleans. There is no more memorable city in the world than New Orleans is, or was, when I saw

it in 1896. It was so utterly unlike the rest of the American cities. Who can forget that great central road which divided the two parts of the town, the one part embracing the Creoles and the French? We were assured that many ancient people had never crossed the Broadway, and I could believe it. Who can forget the general moistness and warmth of the atmosphere, the curious suggestion of the tropics, marred only by the indefinable fear of sudden fever? At that time the drains ran open in the streets. Who can forget all the extraordinary cemeteries—those huge masses of granite slowly sinking in the sand? The mere sight of the Mississippi was in itself enough to stir the imagination. The city at that time was full of intellectual activity. Mr. Cable had made it alive for us, especially by his book *Dr. Sevier*, the scene of which was laid in the St. Charles Hotel, where we lived. Multitudes of the New Orleans people, and especially the Creoles, vehemently denied the correctness of Mr. Cable's representations; but who can deny their charm? Miss Grace King still lives, and is universally honoured for what she has done in her striking fiction and otherwise for New Orleans and Louisiana. At that time the daily papers were conspicuous for their literary interest and excellence. Were there ever such long streets? In one case I remember the numbers ran to over two thousand. The fires of the Civil War had by no means died down into grey ashes, as I remember to my cost, having rashly engaged in a discussion with a very brilliant old lady, the widow of a planter.

Hearn went to New Orleans about 1877, but he remained till 1889, so that I am able to understand many allusions in the narrative. The city at the time was in decadence,



but Hearn delighted in the melancholy grey houses where he lodged—in abandoned, crumbling apartments, and where he was served by timid, unhappy gentlewomen or their ex-servants. All the colourful, polyglot, half-tropical life of the town was a constant appeal to the romantic side of the young man's nature. Happily, in 1881, he came into contact with the newly consolidated *Times-Democrat* and its editor-in-chief, Page M. Baker, whom I well remember. Of Baker he said: 'He is a man of immense force—it takes such a one to rule in that community, but as a gentleman I never saw his superior in grace or consideration. I always loved him—but, like all whom I like, never could get quite enough of his company for myself.' Hearn was allowed to contribute to the paper a weekly translation from some French writer—Théophile Gautier, Guy de Maupassant, or Pierre Loti, and he was encouraged to add original papers. He made other friends, who had a strong influence over him, and he spent much money upon books. Among the English writers to whom he was specially drawn was Le Fanu. By the way, he refers with strong praise to a gipsy novel in the *Cornhill* entitled *Zelda's Fortune*. New Orleans he defined as a Latin city. 'I seldom,' he said, 'hear the English tongue except when I enter the English office for a brief hour. I see beauty here all around me, a strange, tropical, intoxicating beauty.' But he grew weary of everything, and by and by he longed to leave New Orleans. He had by this time made acquaintance with Mr. Cable, who was then working in the town. 'I was a little disappointed, though I was also much delighted with parts of Cable's *Grandissimes*.' 'He did not follow out his first plan—as he told me he was going to do—viz.,

to scatter about fifty Creole songs through the work, with the music in the shape of notes at the end. There are only a few ditties published; and as the Creole music deals in fractions of tones, Mr. Cable failed to write it properly. He is not enough of a musician, I fancy, for that.' Elsewhere, writing in 1883, he says: 'I am afraid you have read the poorest of Cable's short stories. *Jean-ah Poquelin*, *Belles-Demoiselles* are much better than *Tite Poulette*. There is something very singular to me in Cable's power. It is not a superior style; it is not a minutely finished description—for it will often endure no close examination at all; nevertheless, his stories have a puissant charm which is hard to analyse. His serial novel, *The Grandissimes*, is not equal to the others; but I think the latter portion of *Dr. Sevier* will surprise many. He did me the honour to read nearly the whole book to me. Cultivate him, if you get a chance.' A more powerful influence than Cable's was that of Herbert Spencer. To him Hearn completely succumbed. He remained under that dominance to the last day of his life in spite of Japan, and Shintoism, and Buddhism. 'A friend disciplined me to read Herbert Spencer. I suddenly discovered what a waste of time all my Oriental metaphysics have been.'

## III

But the life of Hearn was his Japanese life, and it is by his connection with Japan that he will be remembered. It is a strange and in many respects a pathetic story. Hearn went to Japan in 1890, and received an appointment as a schoolmaster. In 1891 he married Setsu Koizumi, a lady of high Samurai rank. She and her

family had sunk into poverty. Under ordinary circumstances a Japanese woman of rank would consider an alliance with a foreigner a disgrace. But whatever may have been the secret feelings of Setsu, it is certain she immediately became passionately attached to her husband, and the marriage continued to the end a happy one. In order to make her marriage legal, Hearn had to become a subject of the Mikado, and be adopted into his wife's family. This signified that he had to support a number of her relations. From the beginning he had heavy responsibilities, but his wife in her broken English gives us to understand that he loved Japanese ways. At first the couple could not talk. He knew little Japanese, and she knew no English. They had sometimes to refer to the dictionary. In course of time, however, they were able to talk freely. Hearn began to perceive the fierceness and sternness of the Japanese character. Much as he wrote about Japan, he himself was the frankest in confessing that he never understood the people, and that the barrier between the East and the West was insuperable. 'He grew aware in time that even he, with his amazing capacity for entering into the spirit of other races, must for ever remain alien to the Oriental. He resented what is called the civilisation of Japan, but he never hesitated about the iron core which underlies the silken courtesy of the Japanese character.' Considering Hearn's impracticable temper, he got on fairly well with the Japanese, though towards the end of his life he was most anxious to find work either in America or in England.

## IV

But it was in Japan that the crowning event of his life happened to him, that event in comparison with which all the rest were as nothing. This was not his marriage; it was not his rise into a modest literary fame. It was the birth of his eldest son. Hearn had four children, and he seems to have loved them all, but it was the eldest who had an immortal grasp of his spirit. I know few things more touching than the constant references to the little lad. Hearn had himself been anything but a Puritan. He had mocked at much that is obligatory as well as much that is conventional. But as his son grew up, he saw the wisdom of the old rules. He perceived the force of moral law. He could not bear the thought that the boy should go wrong as he had gone wrong. The burden and the joy of life increased for him immeasurably. At first he thought that the little man would become a good little Buddhist and have natural physical freedom, but this did not long content him. He writes to Baker: 'I did not tell you I had a son, who is, of course, dearer than my own life to me. . . . He is going, if he lives, to be a remarkable and powerful man, and I hope a more sensible man than his foolish dad.' Again: 'No man can possibly know what life means, what the world means, what anything means until he has a child and loves it.' The boy must have a scientific education abroad. 'I must get rich for his sake if I have any brains to make money. Should I succeed I can travel everywhere, and Kazuo's education abroad would not be a cause for anxiety.' As the end drew near his care increased. 'He is not very strong, and I must give the rest of my life to looking after him.' When he



wanted to go to America, he said he could not bear to be parted from this boy even for twenty-four hours. The rest he could leave behind for the time. 'I must bring my boy with me : it is chiefly for his sake. Once that he learns to speak English well, the rest of his education will not disturb me. I am his only teacher, and want to continue to teach him for a few years more. South or West I should prefer to East—"where only a swordfish can swim."' He sometimes chides, and recalls himself: 'Every year there are born some millions of boys, cleverer, stronger, handsomer than mine. I may be quite a fool in my estimate of him. I do not find him very clever, quick, or anything of that sort. Perhaps there will prove to be "nothing in him." I cannot tell. All that I am quite sure of is that he naturally likes what is delicate, clean, refined, and kindly, and that he naturally shrinks from whatever is coarse and selfish. So that he might learn easily "the things that are most excellent"—and most useless—in the schooling of civilisation. Anyhow, I must do all I can to feed the tiny light, and give it a chance to prove what it is worth. It is me in another birth—with renewed forces given by a strange and charming blood from the Period of the Gods. I must not risk the blowing out of the little lamp.' Once more: 'Very true what you say—no one can save him but himself, and unfortunately, though he is the eldest, he is my Benjamin. . . . I taught him to swim, and made him practise gymnastics every day, but the spirit of him is altogether too gentle a being, entirely innocent of evil. What chance for him in such a world as Japan?' To my mind these references, a few out of many, to his little son, are the most human and winning things in the *Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*.



## XXXVIII

### A NEW CRITIC—MR. JOHN BAILEY

ONE of the most accomplished of living critics is Mr. John Bailey. In 1911 he published a little book, *Poets and Poetry*. The contents are articles reprinted from the Literary Supplement of the *Times*.

#### I

Mr. Bailey's essays have distinguished for some time the front page of the *Times* Literary Supplement. Few things are more perplexing than the failure of *Literature*, the independent critical journal brought out by the *Times* under the editorship of the late H. D. Traill. Traill was the most industrious and one of the most gifted journalists of his time. He had behind him the whole resources of the *Times*, and he engaged a very competent staff. *Literature* published a good many articles of worth, but somehow from the first number it was hopeless. On the contrary, the Literary Supplement of the *Times* was an immediate success, and has continued to be so. It has published much of the finest contemporary criticism, and what is more it has been marked by a certain unity and individuality. The tone of the paper is urbane; specialism is not wanting, and yet not too prominent. Much of the reviewing is of a really thoughtful kind, and very little is cheap. I have no doubt that one great source of strength is the anonymity

of the articles. Not that I like anonymous criticisms, but it must be admitted that unity disappears when names are signed, and unity is of high importance. Also the editor of the *Times* Literary Supplement has not taken all his cabs from the rank. He has made certain discoveries, and has thus freshened his pages. The *Times* Literary Supplement is so good that it would succeed as a separate publication, and this is a great thing to say, for in this country it is very hard to keep a thoroughly literary journal alive.

The *Times* has always been a literary power. Those who know the letters of the Victorian period know how anxiously its verdict was looked for and how efficacious its phrases were. Turning over the *Letters of Charles Lever* the other day I found some touching evidence of this. There were three papers that mattered to authors in the high Victorian noon, and these were the *Times*, the *Athenæum*, and the *Saturday Review*. Thackeray was one of the *Times* reviewers, and on occasion specialists were employed. But the three men chiefly responsible for the criticisms in the leading journal were Samuel Phillips, Samuel Lucas, and Æneas Dallas. I have two little volumes, *Essays from the Times*, by Samuel Phillips, published by Mr. Murray in 1851. They were reprinted in 1871. They are very good, but not very profound. Dallas wrote books, *The Gay Science* and *Poetics*, which are full of thought, but I do not remember that he ever republished his *Times* articles. Nor did Lucas, who was probably the busiest of them all. There have been reprints from *Literature*, but I think this is the first volume of reprints from the *Times* Literary Supplement.

No doubt Mr. Bailey's work suffers from being put into

book form. The essays were written for a newspaper, and adapted thereto. They are necessarily brief, and as we read them here suggest meagreness. But they are very good essays on the whole, sane, lucid, well-informed, and occasionally penetrating. Mr. Bailey is a critic of rank and authority. He has the intellectual and the ethical qualifications for sound critical work.

Mr. Bailey's principles of criticism are expounded in a preface full of compressed and considered thought. Mr. Bailey points out that genius is inexhaustible. Every generation reads the works of genius afresh and interprets them afresh, so that the new are necessary to the old. But the new cannot stand alone. Even original and active work must root itself in something already accepted. There are fixed stars in the literary firmament by which we have still to sail. Now and then a new star is discovered, but the old keep their places in the poetic heaven. We, however, may have got round to a new side of the old star, and it is worth while to contemplate the most ancient heavens of literature, and try to see again where they and we stand.

Later on Mr. Bailey illustrates his meaning. In his essay on Wordsworth's Creed he says that if the philosophy of the 'subliminal self' and 'suggestion' and 'possession' pass beyond the stage of hypothesis, it may well be that new light may be shed on Wordsworth. Mr. Bailey, I suppose, would admit that the capacities and powers of the human mind may be enlarged. If that comes to pass, then much of our criticism will have to be revised. It is in this spirit he has written.

## II

Two of the best essays in this book are those on Crabbe and on Wordsworth's Creed, but before discussing them I have a word to say on some smaller points. In the article on Collins and Gray, Mr. Bailey rejects Mr. Swinburne's exaggerated praise of Collins, and takes side with Matthew Arnold. What he says about the defects of Collins is incontrovertible, and Mr. Bailey acknowledges that there is a music in Collins at his best which is never to be found in Gray. But to Gray he assigns, along with less original poetic faculty, the glory of the greater achievement. This is excellent, but is Mr. Bailey right in practically resting the whole of Collins's claims on the 'Ode to Evening'? Mr. Bailey gives us a paper called *Johnson Without Boswell*, and points out that his paper appeared in 1907, and that Sir Walter Raleigh's *Johnson Without Boswell* was published in 1910. But the title was used long ago. It was used in the *Contemporary Review* some thirty years ago at least by Mr. William Cyples, one of those clever wayward writers whom Mr. Strahan gathered round about him. I cannot help thinking that Mr. Bailey like so many others misses the mark in handling this theme. The main question is: If we had known Johnson only by his works and the reminiscences of his contemporaries, would we have judged him as we do now with Boswell in our hands? The answer is: (1) We should have greatly underrated his intellectual powers. (2) We should have understood very imperfectly the rugged grandeur of his character; and (3) we should never have known his real opinions on one of the most difficult and urgent of ethical problems, the relation of the sexes. Johnson's views on that as given by Boswell have



not a word to support them in his own published writings. I know that Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has suggested some want of good faith in Boswell's record at this point, some desire to excuse his own frailties, but I cannot accept this judgment. An article on Johnson without Boswell is a failure unless this problem is faced.

Mr. Bailey, writing on Edward FitzGerald, says that people of the æsthetic-hedonist persuasion have claimed him as a kind of patron saint. 'His name ought to be cleared of all that. No one was ever less of the luxurious hedonist than Edward FitzGerald. All his life he lived simply, almost barely, not laborious days certainly, but at any rate days that utterly scorned the delights that are dear to the hedonist. . . . If anybody is inclined to confuse the life of leisure with that of luxury, let him read FitzGerald's letters. Let him see a way of living that reduces necessities to the minimum, and gives the time and money gained by their suppression to friendship and affection, to nature and books, to quiet and solitude and meditation.' This is admirable, but Mr. Bailey knows that a man may be a hedonist without living luxuriously. A hedonist is a man who lives for pleasure, and FitzGerald found his pleasure in drinking tea with his Woodbridge friends, in hearing the Waverley novels read aloud, in walking home with a lantern to the little house at Boulge, which of all his dwelling-places seems to me the one which best fitted him.

### III

The article on Wordsworth's Creed is very sympathetic, but very incomplete. Mr. Bailey claims Wordsworth as a prophet, a mystic, a seer, of whom cleverness can make



nothing. He agrees with Sir Walter Raleigh that the faith in the mystery of life around us, in the voices that the spirit may hear if it will but listen, is of the essence of Wordsworth. Wordsworth proclaimed that poetry was in possession of but half her kingdom, and that it was good to put her in possession of the whole. He would give her the peasant as well as the hero, the daisy as well as the rose. Mr. Bailey comments on the meek sensitiveness to Nature which enabled Wordsworth to do what was in him. He took up Rousseau's rhetorical gospel of the life according to Nature, and gave it body and truth. He refused to recognise the arbitrary boundary set between Nature and man, and sought for correspondences everywhere. All this is true, but it is not the whole truth. Wordsworth chose, as he tells us himself, to deal with low and rustic life, because in that condition the essential passions of the art are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language. It is true, of course, that he chose his themes, 'because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature.' But the other side should not be overlooked. From this springs Wordsworth's doctrine of poetic diction, 'that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.' This will stand if Coleridge's masterly addition is admitted, 'The sole difference in style is that poetry demands a severe keeping—it admits nothing that prose may not often admit, but it oftener rejects. In other words, it presupposes a more continuous state of passion.' What is weak in Wordsworth is that he did not oftener reject, and that in many places he kept on writing when passion had grown cold.

The estimate of Crabbe is sound so far as it goes. Mr. Bailey might have mentioned that Jane Austen was his great admirer. From a letter in the *Life of Albany Fonblanque* it appears that Crabbe was Macaulay's favourite poet, and every one knows that Jane Austen was his favourite novelist. A severe critic of Jeffrey declared that the only true poet ever admired by that critic was Crabbe. Mr. Bailey urges Crabbe's claims to our admiration. He was (1) a master of English landscape; (2) a master of the everlasting human comedy. Truth and poetry are both in Crabbe. He was besides a great novelist in verse, and deserves all the admiration he ever received.

This is very well, but Mr. Bailey might, I think, have referred to Crabbe's work outside the rhymed couplets which he manufactured so assiduously. 'Sir Eustace Grey' should have a word. I do not lay stress upon his little-known experiment in blank verse, though that too suggests that an escape from his metre would have bettered Crabbe's position. But it should never be forgotten that one of the greatest of English critics rejected Crabbe's claim to be considered a high poet. Hazlitt agreed in his *London Magazine* essay (May 1821) that Crabbe had strong elements of greatness, but he objected to Crabbe's almost steady blindness to the higher and nobler elements of life. I am wholly at one with the Nestor of our critics when he says that Crabbe 'has an eye only for the follies, the frailties and vices, the afflictions, the mischances and disappointments of the human family.' 'We live by admiration, love, and hope,' sings Wordsworth; 'and it is to the presence and the quickening virtue of these highest convictions of the soul that his verse owes its vitality and

savour.' Crabbe was like Wordsworth in his desire to divert men's ways of thinking to the simplicities of life, and to teach them the essential oneness of human nature. When asked, 'Why labour to describe so minutely the ways of the poor?' Crabbe replied that he had to show to 'the Great' their close kinship with 'the Lowest' in Nature and passions, and, again, to convince the poor that the rich, equally with themselves, are subject to the infirmities of humanity, and to the vicissitudes of life. But it is Wordsworth's view of the peasant and not Crabbe's that makes the highest poetry, and commends itself most to the permanent sympathy of mankind. It is, I believe, because Hazlitt was essentially right that Crabbe has ceased to be a general favourite.

## XXXIX

### THE NOVELIST'S LIFE

MY subject is suggested by a paragraph which I find in an American newspaper. It runs thus: 'The late Marion Crawford's personal estate, according to the New York State appraiser's report, is only 48,000 dollars. This, of course, does not include his handsome old villa at Sorrento, Italy, but it does include all the future rights to his books, which the Macmillan Company published. The total value of these rights is given as 30,934 dollars, the figures being based on the income produced by the books during the last three years before the author's death. The fact that the whole list is expected to create post-mortem earnings of only 30,000 dollars is an indication of the ephemeral nature of even the best popular novelist's income.' This raises sharply the problem which every successful novelist must at all times encounter.

#### I

We are not all novelists, but most of us have tried to be. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that everybody can write at least one good novel. In an old-fashioned story there is an anecdote which had long pleased me. It is about a delightful and wealthy young lady who commenced novel-writing, and found very soon that she required the aid of a secretary. There was no fault to find with the

young authoress. 'Large light blue eyes shone out steadily, fearlessly, from under a white brow and masses of golden, fair hair, which were evidently too much for the skill even of a skilled lady's-maid. The soft, creamy white skin, the peach bloom of the cheek made up a splendid specimen of a Saxon beauty; and as she leant back in her chair there was an indefinable, haughty, carelessness grace in every attitude and emotion.' This is all right, and it must be said, in addition, that Miss Grantham's demeanour to her secretary was gracious and kind. In fact, Maggie, the secretary, fell in love with her at once. 'Your cheek is so fair and smooth; your mouth so soft; your expression so tender—why, you must be quite young, perhaps not older than myself.' Miss Grantham replies: 'You show no mean powers of observation. Come, I see we shall accomplish a great deal of work together. Intelligence and legible writing—what a treasure!' When they commence work, it is in a charming but old-fashioned apartment, adorned with rose brocaded silk panels and chairs in green velvet. 'I must show you,' said Miss Grantham, 'what I have done.' She opens a large portfolio, and takes out numerous loose sheets. 'Here is my novel. I will read you a little, and then tell you the plot.' Miss Grantham leans back in her chair, reading rapidly and somewhat monotonously. 'It was a dreary, rainy morning, and the purlieus of St. Paul's were darker than ever when the head waiter at the Crown and Anchor, in Paternoster Row, coming into the bar, which was lit with gas, said to the blooming young lady who presided over the bottles and preserves, "This is a rum go."' What could be more promising? And yet blind and inexorable publishers would have nothing to do with fiction opening so auspiciously.



## II

Even if the novel is got into print by the aid of cheques, things do not always go as they might. Miss Rhoda Broughton, in *A Beginner*, tells of a young author, Miss Jocelyn, who receives a heavy parcel in brown paper, whips a pair of scissors out of a case, and, with two or three vigorous cuts, releases her imprisoned treasure. It is a treasure indeed. The tale is of the days when novels were published in three volumes. She counts eighteen volumes, amounting to six sets, and gazes at the neat and rather coquettish cover with complete satisfaction. She turns to the title-page and reads :

‘ MICHING MALLECHO,’

By

A Beginner.

But the glory fades when her aunt appears and perceives the eighteen volumes. ‘What has the man sent? Has he gone mad? “Miching Mallecho!” and *again!* and yet AGAIN! My dear child, have you gone mad, and sent for eighteen “Miching Mallechos”?’ Still more trying is the aunt’s inhumanity in at once settling to tackle the work of genius so unexpectedly sprung on her. ‘You are not going to have the inhumanity to read it *here—now—*under my nose?’ cried the girl in most unvarnished dismay, as the certainty of having at least one reader breaks upon her. ‘I undoubtedly am!’ replies her aunt firmly; ‘you meant it to be read, did not you?—and you will be able—to begin with—to judge of the effect that the—I believe you had rather I would not repeat the expression—has upon me.’

## III

But enough of these terrors. We have to deal with what is happily, or unhappily, a very common case. A novel is accepted and published. It finds its way into the hands of critics and readers. The first critics and the first readers of a novel have much to do with its fate. Which of the two has most to do is a question I cannot answer. But if a critic is pleased, and says so emphatically, it is a help ; and if a few others join with him, it is a great help. Similarly, if a reader is taken with the book and talks about it where books are read, a foundation has been laid for success. It is perhaps after the first two thousand are sold that one can tell whether a book is to be really popular or not. Once five thousand are reached, and the book goes up and up, all is well. What, then, is the author to do ? There are very keen eyes watching the fate of his volume, and he will soon have flattering letters inviting him to submit his next book to certain publishers, and perhaps offering terms. He will also be urged to write stories for magazines. He may even be invited to sell the serial rights of his next tale. A sudden glory has fallen upon him, and a prospect of large and certain remuneration.

Now, if his popularity is maintained, these incitements to work will be more and more frequent.

What is the author to do ? Is he to say yes to every offer, or is he to write only what fully satisfied him ? Is he to take up novel-writing as a profession, and produce with the certainty of a machine two or three novels every year as long as publishers ask for them ? Or is he to say to himself : ' I have seen many and many a promising

novelist succeed in writing his reputation away. I shall write only when I have something to say. I propose to treat the public with respect and give of my best, and of nothing but my best. I know my resources are limited, and there shall be no twice-told tales when the number of my books is summed up ?'

## IV

The answer to this question is not so easy as it looks. In the first place some novelists are much richer in material than others. Those who write mainly from their own observation and experience are necessarily restricted. Even if Charlotte Brontë had lived, I doubt whether she could have written anything on the level of her previous work. If we are to insist on what is called truth to life on the part of a novelist, he cannot cover satisfactorily a great tract of ground, unless indeed his adventures have led him far.

But if he trusts largely to his imagination, and sets his scenes in regions where anything may happen, he has unquestionably a wider scope. We now place on novelists of our own time a check almost as severe as that exercised on writers of travel. But as Steele said: 'There are no books which I more delight in than travels, especially those that describe remote countries, and give the writer an opportunity of showing his parts without incurring any danger of being examined and contradicted.' The novelist may, like Charles Lever, take possession of an unknown country. Charles Lever's *terra incognita* was Galway; and in his early books at least we never think of subjecting him to any test, but delightedly accept the life painted in *Harry Lorrequer*, who, in his great difficulty,

meets an old uncle in a picture gallery, who gives him on the spot £7000 a year and a mansion. The hero immediately jumps twenty feet into the garden where his lady love is walking, and makes certain of her affections. In fact, he marries her in the following week. Even Lever, however, uncommonly adroit as he was in the handling of anecdote, became much less happy when he left Galway. I doubt whether his later novels, clever as they are, will continue to be read. They describe excellently the trivialities of minor continental society, but the raciness and the zest, the spirit and the fun are gone. It has been computed that no man living can possess more than two hundred anecdotes, and it takes at least eight anecdotes, properly handled, to make a good story.

The historical romance writer seems to have a better chance. He possesses the art of transmuting the innumerable pages of history into fiction, and if he is skilful there is no reason why he should ever stop. Bulwer got up his periods with amazing cleverness. I think it was Sir Laurence Gomme who edited a school edition of *Harold*, and pronounced it a piece of true history. But somehow even the historical romancers give out. They cannot, it would seem, write more than a certain number of books effectually. The novelist finds himself obliged to depend upon his books. Supposing he writes two every year for twenty years. He is generally at the end of his popularity, but by no means at the end of his life and his needs. Of course, he can go on writing, but he cannot command the old price. The public have grown weary of his name and his books and his ways. Even the vainest are made to know it by their literary agents, and by the returns of their sales.



## v

Mrs. Oliphant knew very well that she was continually charged with overwriting herself, and I am afraid the prices she could command in the end were small as compared with those of her prime. She wrote a most spirited and plausible defence of her fertility. Every literary workman knows that after a holiday he has difficulty in resuming his task. In most cases those who work constantly are those who find work easiest. When working half-time, or when hindered by interruption, one is hampered. The strain of feeling and faculty cannot be turned off and on like the supplies of a water company. The natural and continuous flow of narrative is a current that must not be stopped arbitrarily. Rather it should be followed with the ardour and rapidity of artistic interest and impulse. The workman who is in full tide of work is he who works the best. Therefore, says Mrs. Oliphant, let the man work. Let him go on to fresh woods and pastures new. Let him exercise his gifts, and snatch his stories from the storehouse ever full of active genius and thought. On the other hand, Mrs. Oliphant sternly condemned the practice of collecting volumes of short stories. She thought it a law of honour upon novelists that they should not do this till the tide of force grew fainter, and she denounced R. L. Stevenson for publishing so early in his career *The Merry Men*. It was, she thought, when the end was nearing that an author might be justified in gathering up his basket of fragments, in picking up what he had dropped by the highways and hedges in the gust of his early career. This is advice which is naturally palatable to the sanguine and flattered and successful novelist, and I am not prepared to



deny that there is sense behind it. It applies to the lower as well as to the higher forms of fiction. Once I found L. F. Austin writing in a club, as was his wont. He held out to me, with an expression of scorn, a book by the author of *Mr. Barnes of New York*. He was engaged in holding up the book to derision. I said to him, 'The author is a better man than you think.' He would not believe it, but I said, 'Wait and hear me,' and told him this true story. A fussy individual meeting Gunter complained that he wrote so fast. 'Why do you not give time for your genius to settle and brood and shape?' 'And how long,' said Gunter, looking at him sternly, 'will the public continue to buy my muck?'

But, after all, the best course for the novelist is the best course for every workman. He should do his best. So long as he is certain that he is not scamping his work, that he is not writing without vocation, that his craft is not a mere mechanical operation, let him go on as long as the public will have him. The true critic will not ask when a book was written, or how long it took in the composition. He will judge the thing as it stands, and say whether it is good or bad. But there are no faults which will provoke him so much as the manifest carelessness and heedlessness of a man capable of doing good work, but unwilling to give to that work the necessary time and pains.

I suppose we may say, taking a broad view of the field of literature, that even the highest genius is hardly capable of turning out more than about a dozen works representative of his powers. But the secondary work may have elements of strength and beauty. The very finest work of Dickens was done when he finished *David Copperfield*, but we should miss much the novels of the later period. When

Sir Walter Scott wrote *Woodstock* he had said farewell to his great creative time. But how much there is to linger over in the work that followed. Thackeray, I venture to think, was more completely written out when he died than any of our great novelists. There are beauties in the very last unfinished work, but who can say much for *Lovel the Widower*? There is weariness in every line of it. Nay, there is the last weariness, the weariness of a hand that has come close on its work's end.

## VI

We may pity, but we must condemn the writers who, conscious of flagging power and popularity, venture into forbidden fields. I would not limit too narrowly the rights of great novelists and serious thinkers to deal with the mighty and painful problems of life. I would excuse much from young writers, even from lady novelists. But I cannot find a word to say for the mature and the aging when they transgress. Forgive the faults of youth by all means, but let our lady novelists at least strive to merit the cautious commendation on a tombstone in Bath reared in honour of an old lady who died at the age of 112. The tombstone certifies that 'during the *later* years of her life she was distinguished by both virtue and propriety.'

## XL

### AN IDYLL OF OLD DEVONSHIRE

THERE are few men whose record is so nearly unblemished as that of Sir Joshua Reynolds. He was very great as a painter, and in the opinion of his chief contemporaries he was no less great as a man. Never was there a more felicitous tribute than Goldsmith's epitaph of Reynolds.

'Here Reynolds is laid, and, to tell you my mind,  
He has not left a wiser or better behind ;  
His pencil was striking, resistless, and grand,  
His manners were gentle, complying, and bland ;  
Still born to improve us in every part,  
His pencil our faces, his manners our heart ;  
To coxcombs averse, yet most civilly steering ;  
When they judged without skill, he was still hard of hearing ;  
When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,  
He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff.'

When Reynolds was dangerously ill, in 1764, Dr. Johnson wrote to him : ' If I should lose you I should lose almost the only man whom I call a friend.' Later on he characterised Reynolds as ' the most invulnerable man I know, the man with whom if you should quarrel you would find the most difficulty how to abuse.' Angelica Kauffmann confessed that she was dying for Sir Joshua. Burke paid homage to his memory in a masterly estimate. His charm in society was felt by every one, although he suffered so much from deafness that he had to carry an ear-trumpet.

This deafness he attributed to the cold of the Vatican in the months when he was copying Raphael.

But there was one dissentient, and that was Reynolds's own sister Frances. Frances Reynolds kept house in London for Sir Joshua during a long period, and was herself by no means a contemptible painter. She was liked by Reynolds's friends, and especially by Johnson, who thought her 'very near to purity itself.' She wrote a privately printed essay on Taste, of which Johnson said: 'There are in these few pages or remarks such a depth of penetration, such nicety of observation as Locke or Pascal might be proud of.' But unfortunately there came a severance between her and the illustrious brother, whom she survived for fifteen years. It is supposed that they parted about 1778. She left her brother's house, and she never returned. We may have some clue to the misunderstanding in Fanny Burney's remark that Miss Reynolds never knew her own mind about anything, and had a tiresome, fidgety way, which made her very difficult to live with. However this may be, Miss Reynolds's judgment of Sir Joshua's character was in striking contrast to that of the rest. She thought him a gloomy tyrant, and he spoke contemptuously of the copies which she made of her pictures. But there is little doubt that she was a woman of considerable gifts, and when she died unmarried on November 1, 1807, there were not a few to mourn for her. Her brother left her £2500; to Edmund Burke he left £2000, besides cancelling a bond to the same amount.

The bulk of his fortune was left to his niece, Miss Palmer, who inherited in all nearly £100,000, and was married in 1792 to the Earl of Inchiquin, afterwards Marquis of Thomond. I take these particulars from the masterly

biography of Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Sir Joshua's eldest sister was Mary, the wife of John Palmer, Attorney of Torrington. There was another sister called Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Palmer and Mrs. Johnson helped their brother to spend two years in Leghorn, Florence, and Rome 'with measureless content.' Mrs. Palmer had two daughters, one Offy, who lived with him from 1770 till 1781, when she married Robert Lovell Gwatkin. Mary Palmer, Offy's elder sister, lived with her uncle till his death, and, as we have seen, inherited his fortune.

## I

I have mentioned these particulars in order to introduce a book which I know only by extracts. It is called *A Devonshire Dialogue*, in four parts, and it was written by Mrs. Palmer, of Great Torrington, Devon, the sister who has been mentioned. It seems that the book was circulated at first in manuscript, and that Mrs. Palmer declined to permit publication. But after she died an unauthorised and imperfect edition of the diary was published. In 1839 one of her daughters—I do not know which—published the whole of the original work, and a glossary of terms was added by a Devonshire clergyman named Phillips.

From the description and the extracts which I am now going to quote it seems as if this book were particularly worth republishing. It seems to go along with the poetry of William Barnes and the prose idylls of later years. To this I may add that we have here a new proof of the fact that in families where one member is highly distinguished there is generally more than average talent in the other members. The Newmans, the Trollopes, the



Kingsleys, the Tennysons, the Taylors of Ongar, and the Thackerays are illustrations. Sir Joshua Reynolds defined genius as 'great natural ability turned by accident into a particular direction.' This is not very helpful. 'Great natural ability' is a vague phrase. As for accident, was it an accident that in the grammar school at Plympton young Reynolds, who was thought an idle and inattentive schoolboy, drew pen and ink sketches, mastered the principles of perspective, drew portraits of his friends and relatives, and studied Jacob Cats ?

## II

The plot of the dialogue, so far as it has any plot at all, is of the simplest kind. Five rustic characters play a part in it. The first of these is Farmer Hogg, 'a man o' eight an' twenty pounds a year, and every foot his own land.' He is a perfect specimen of the very small freehold farmer still to be found in the remote parts of Devon, purse-proud on the strength of his very small holding, and a heetering, tippling bully to boot. Dame, the farmer's wife, has been married to him against her instinctive feelings of repulsion, and at the peremptory command of a father who was led captive by the eight-and-twenty freehold. She lives, an ill-used, disappointed, but uncomplaining and hard-working woman. 'Farmer Hogg's wife,' says the Parson, 'is a pattern. Her and her houze be always in order.' But though the house is in order, the poor woman's heart is fast failing her, as Bet, her faithful maid, declares in this charming little passage, which is exactly what Shakespeare might have put into such a speaker's mouth : 'Ah me ! Before her married, her was as peart as a bard [bird] and as cherry as a crop o' fresh apple-blooth ; but now,

poor soul, her 's like a daver'd rose-sweet in the midst o'te.' Bet is a delightful picture of a true-hearted Devon girl, full of imagination, reading books by stealth at night that fill her head with a world of pretty terrors, but a thorough hand at work, and what would be called in her tongue a 'vitty, *stewardly* body.' She is over head and ears in love with Rab, a thrifty lad of the village, who has long been courting her, but who is kept at arm's length, chiefly through Bet's doubts as to the possibility of her mistress weathering 'Hogg's tantrums' without her help. To Hogg himself she is fearlessly outspoken, though never rude; and towards Bat, the last character in the piece—a little forlorn orphan apprentice on the farm—she displays a tenderness which must have done much to convince Rab that his heart had chosen rightly.

The following humorous passage introduces the two lovers conversing, and describes a scene between Bat and his master :

BET.—I've made a shurt to larn en his letters, and his prayers; and wan day a' was kneeling to my knees, zaying arter me, 'Give es this day our daily bread,' a' *ream'd up his neck*, way his sweet begging eyes, and zaid, zart in my ear, 'Mayn't es ax vor a crume o' butter 'pon't?' I hugg'd en in, and zaid, 'Be a good boy, and you wan't lack butter 'pon your bread.'

RAB.—Pretty zoul! a' made rare gammet vor es at the Pigeons, last neart, when a' brought his Measter's great coat. Hogg *was then dwelling and palavering away about religion, as a' always dith when a' is half ago*: 'Come,' zis a' to Bat, 'stand vore, put your hands behind your back and zay the chief end o' man.'

BET.—A pretty time in an alehouse. Good now, a'

wager'd with Dame, that he'd teach en 'The chief end o' man' zooner than her shou'd his catechise.

RAB.—Zo a' went on: 'Who made thee?' 'God' (zaid Bat, and nodded his head). 'What did God make thee vor?' The boy was at a stann. 'Speak, mumchance, what dost stand digging the head, and shuckening, as if thee was louzy. Speak, mooncalf. 'Ot did God make thee vor?' Bat look'd up zo harmless, and zaid, 'To carry dung to Crowbear.' Bless es, what a hallaballoo was zet up; es cried a' was right, his Measter look'd brinded, and the poor boy bost out a crying, when Hogg said, 'You dunderheaded stunpole, you drumble drone, I wish I'de a good smart switch, I'de lerrick thee, till I made thee twine like an angle-twitch.'

Rab is, of course, not behindhand in urging Bet to remember his own sorrows, as well as those of her mistress, and he is at last able to tell her that he has secured 'the prittest houze in the parish, for the bigness o' en,' which was once the home of an old dame, from whom both the lovers received their schooling. This puts Bet on a long and really charming story of the old dame's last days and death, and of how she gave her, as a parting present, her Bible; 'and when her had deliver'd en' to me, "This," quoth her, "is the most precious thing I own. Take en', as my legacy. In it you'll vind the title to a glorious estate, and how to make the estate your own." Which made the neighbours whisper, 'Poor zoul, her's out o' her parts; her's telling dwale.'

These reminiscences at length bring the tears to the good soul's eyes, and oblige Rab to remind her that 'thee mert now be owner of the houze, the garden, the cat, and the great tree, which, es hopes, want be cut down in our time.' To all which Bet answers charmingly:

BET.—I hope zo, too, vor I shu'd like to bring out my knitting work, or my spinning turn, and zit there; and then I mert happen to zee thee, when you be to work. Dear heart! what strange things come to pass. When I used to think how happy anybody mert live in such a sweet place, I could ne'er ha' thort it wid come to my take, everything zo handy; a pretty cloming oven, big enew to bake a batch o' bread, water at the shet just by, the thorn hedge and garden, and the great tree. Poor zoul, her used to zit there summer yevlings, to zee the volks come fro' market, and take in her arrants, her had a'zent by 'em. *Whan I used to rede a story-book of a pritty place, I thort it must be like this.*

The pair then fall to reckoning up their possessions, and after Rab has told of 'a pritty plat o' taty ground, and household goods enow,' Bet runs over her little store:

BET.—My modicum is but forty shillings, coming to me vor wages, two silver 'postle spoons, my mother's amber necklace and toadstone ring. What clothing I ha' es come honestly by. I ha'n't a screed to my back that isn't paid vor. I ne'er go to tick, and 'ot I ha' will sarve for years, way a leet patching. Then Aunt Madge hath a' promis'd me a butt o' bees whan I married, vor house-warming.

## XLI

### MEMORIES OF MARK RUTHERFORD

#### I. THE MAN AND HIS BOOKS

‘MARK RUTHERFORD’ (Mr. William Hale White) died in March 1913 at the pretty cottage in Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells, where he had lived for a good many years. He had attained the advanced age of eighty-two, having been born in 1831. Some years ago he underwent a severe operation, but he had apparently made a good recovery, and a new happiness came into his life during its closing period.

In 1881 I picked up *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, Dissenting Minister*. It was in an Edinburgh bookseller’s shop, and I was attracted by the appearance of the volume, which was bound in grey paper with a white label, and published by the then famous firm of Trübner and Co. Trübner’s business was mainly in Oriental books; but when they did anything in English, it was commonly well worth looking at. On getting into the train, I opened the book, and was immediately fascinated by the preliminary poem, in which the writer anticipates death, and sums up his history thus :

‘ For I was ever commonplace,  
Of genius never had a trace,  
My thoughts the world have never fed,  
Mere echoes of the book last read.’



Passing on to the prose, I at once experienced the irresistible charm of the style. If there are any books of this generation better written than those, I do not know them. Mark Rutherford's style had not much colour, and no apparent elaboration; but his words perfectly fitted his thought. His manner may seem austere and simple, but it is so close to the facts that it is always adequate. The figures are drawn in line, but the pencil never swerves, and the effect is unmistakable. The occasional hints and glints of flame, the result of an intense and simple feeling, strangely light up the pages. I had seen no style quite like this—a style translucent in its simplicity, and yet incapable of any amendment. Nor was the matter less noteworthy. Many have written of Dissent, some foolishly, some ignorantly, some spitefully; but this writer wrote not only with knowledge, but with insight, and he dealt with life, laying bare its secret places, and especially rendering with consummate skill the miseries of its dark hours. If there is anywhere a more wonderful study of melancholia than the first part of *Mark Rutherford*, I have not seen it. The book attracted a little attention, but not very much, and I found it impossible to get any clue to the authorship.

By and by the second part of the story, *The Deliverance of Mark Rutherford*, was published, and though many consider it inferior to its predecessor, I read it with even greater wonder and delight. I still think it the highest achievement of the author. Although it may not be so powerful as its predecessor, it is much rosier and more hopeful, more believing, and it is full of a noble faith in a woman's pure affection as the recompense and solace of a career otherwise sordid and insignificant. The thought

that runs through it—and indeed through all the author's books—like a thread of fire, is the glory of a woman's love for a man who is of no account as revealing the very heart of God. I wrote many reviews of the book in different periodicals; other and more powerful critics took it up to some extent, and gradually it made a little headway, though when the second part was published the first had not run through its first thousand. Among its earliest and most admiring readers was Lord Randolph Churchill. By and by I had a clue to the authorship. I came across a translation of Spinoza's *Ethic*, also published by Messrs. Trübner, with a preface by W. Hale White. Reading this I felt that very certainly W. Hale White was 'Mark Rutherford,' and unexpected corroboration arrived. About this time Mr. W. D. Howells wrote a notice of the books in *Harper's Monthly*, in which he said that they marked a new era in fiction.

At this point I have to mention a strange fact. For long I was firmly persuaded that I had been the first to pierce the thin veil which shrouded Mark Rutherford's personality. He was of the same opinion, and was by no means pleased when the announcement was made. But not long ago I had occasion to turn up the *Westminster Review* for July 1883. The periodical was published by Trübner, and Hale White, in his youth, had some connection with it. In the philosophical reviews published at the end, the authorship of which I do not know, I find the following sentence: 'Not long ago Mr. Hale White published a remarkable little book, which attracted very much less attention than it deserved, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, Dissenting Minister*. He now comes before the public with a translation of

Spinoza's *Ethic*. In Mark Rutherford Mr. White discloses not only a power of treatment of a singularly sincere and sympathetic character, but a very good style.' So the mystery almost from the first was no mystery, only there were very few who cared in the least to solve it.

## I

By 1886 the Mark Rutherford books had a tolerably large circle of warm admirers, and it became possible to get a few facts about the author. This was made easier by the publication of his third book, *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*. It is perhaps the closest to his own history of any among the three, and in scattered passages it is the best of all. The fault is that it consists of two parts which are not well put together. It may be described as a study of the sorrows of incompatibility. The author is persuaded that in marriage lies either the glory or the misery of the individual life. He makes out, as perhaps no other writer has ever made out, that misery may come from marriages where there is true affection and strict morality, but where there is no genuine communion of spirit.

This book gives a convenient opportunity of summarising the author's externally uneventful life. It should be noted, however, that, like all novelists, Mark Rutherford disclaimed the portraiture of individual characters. It is quite credible that he intentionally added or removed characteristics of originals in the renderings he gave to the public, but it is no less true that his early work was very largely autobiographical.

Mr. Hale White's father was Mr. William White, the

original of Isaac Allen in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*. He was a printer and bookseller in Bedford, where he commenced business about 1829. He was a man of great ability and force of character; for many years he was one of the most earnest workers of Bunyan Meeting, then called the Old Meeting; was a superintendent of the Sunday school, a village preacher, and one of the trustees. Bunyan Meeting was founded by the illustrious author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, who was its first pastor, and it was, till lately, ministered to by Dr. John Brown, one of the leaders of English Nonconformity, and the author of the best biography of Bunyan. Tanner's Lane stands for Bunyan Meeting. In political life Mr. White was a great power in the town. He had a strong voice, a ringing oratory, and intense Liberal convictions, and was the *bête noire* of all Tories and Protectionists. When an attempt was made by some Churchmen to introduce the Church Catechism into the public schools, and to make them denominational, he carried the question against them. In February 1848 his son, William Hale White, joined the Church at Bunyan Meeting, and in July 1848 was unanimously approved as a candidate for the ministry, and recommended to Cheshunt College. On the establishment of New College, in 1850, he appears to have migrated thither. New College is still a leading theological seminary in connection with the Congregationalists, and has buildings situated in St. John's Wood. All seems to have gone well till the close of 1851, when he and two other students fell under the suspicion of the college authorities on account of their views on inspiration. Not much would be thought of these views at this time, but then orthodoxy was very strict and absolutely predominant.



The pupils were stubborn, and all three were expelled. In the course of the proceedings Mr. White, senior, wished that the minister of Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, the Rev. John Jukes, the original of the Rev. John Broad in *Tanner's Lane*, and the church should stand by his son, and formally protest against the action of the college authorities. Mr. Jukes, however, belonged to the old school of theologians, and his sympathies were against the lad. From that time, and after that refusal, the Whites cherished a strong feeling of resentment against Mr. Jukes. Mr. Jukes, of course, had a perfect title to his own convictions, and he was technically within his rights. But a bitter feeling against him is expressed in *Tanner's Lane*, perhaps too bitter. Mr. Jukes, I have been told, was by no means a strong man intellectually, and his sympathies theologically were far from broad; but he was a worthy minister, and thoroughly upright. John Broad, by the way, was the name of a dissenting minister in Hitchin, a town not far from Bedford. To this I should add that Mark Rutherford wrote me: 'The type which Broad represents was so common at the time when the events in *Tanner's Lane* are supposed to have taken place, that half a dozen persons whom my friend knew resembled it more or less, and Mr. Allen, if he ever had a bodily existence, was never in all his life within fifty miles of the Ouse.'

## II

After Mr. White's expulsion from New College, the Whites at Bedford broke off all connection with Bunyan Meeting, and ultimately gave up going to any place of worship at all. Mr. White, who had been a printer,



founded a tannery, which did not succeed. Fortunately for him he obtained the position of doorkeeper to the House of Commons, where he remained till he was pensioned off, about 1880. He died on February 26, 1882, aged eighty-five. During the time he was doorkeeper to the House he was widely known and much respected by the members. John Bright had a great affection for him, and Mr. Disraeli used often to go to White's private room on the ground floor, and there stand at ease and talk with his back to the fire. White admired Disraeli, but was wont to speak of him as the 'Asian mystery.' For many years Mr. White wrote a weekly paper for the *Illustrated Times*, entitled, 'The Inner Life of the House of Commons'—a pungent, trenchant criticism of men and things. A selection from these articles was edited by his old friend, Mr. Justin M'Carthy, and published by Mr. Fisher Unwin, and a very good book it is—fresh, racy, illuminating, and broad-minded, with something of Mark Rutherford's power.

### III

Not very much is known of the struggle in which the future author of *Mark Rutherford* engaged after leaving New College; but after his death the *Westminster Gazette* published a little article by Mr. R. M. Theobald, one of the two students expelled along with Hale White. Mr. Theobald says that at the time of his expulsion Hale White was certainly very unorthodox. 'His favourite authors were Carlyle, Emerson, Goethe, and some other German authors. I well remember the sermons which he read in class, the texts being prescribed by the theological professor, Dr. Harris. There was a holy tremor in his voice, which is

characteristic of some men of genius ; Frederick Denison Maurice read the Church services with the same kind of tremor.' Mr. Hale White was very reluctant to speak of those years ; but it is known, and Mr. Theobald confirms it, that he continued to preach. In particular, he frequently occupied the pulpit of Mr. Chignell, at Portsmouth. It was in this way that he became acquainted with Alexander M'Laren, who was then preaching in Southampton. Mark Rutherford sometimes spoke to me about M'Laren, whom he described as one of the handsomest of men, extremely brilliant, and at that time somewhat daring. Dr. M'Laren, when I asked him about this connection, said that of the three—himself, Hale White, and Chignell—Chignell was by far the best man. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Chignell became a Unitarian minister in Exeter, and M'Laren had not seen him or heard of him for many years. At variance as he was with the current orthodoxy, Mark Rutherford's sympathies were always with Christianity and with Nonconformity.

His struggle was probably not so severe as many have supposed.

He obtained a post in the Admiralty which was ultimately well remunerated, and from it, after his full term of service, he retired with a pension. He increased his income by London Letters to various papers, and he was pretty constant in his attendance in the Parliamentary Gallery. He did not like to be asked any questions as to his journalistic work, and talked of it as of no account. But some things I discovered almost in spite of himself. He was London correspondent for the *Norfolk News* and the *Rochdale Observer*. The latter paper on its jubilee published an article by him and some account

of his work. He was also a contributor to the *Birmingham Post*. He worked, like so many literary drudges of the time, on that large compilation, the *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*. His most important contribution is a *Life of Franklin*, which is well done, and with much sympathy. He was also connected with that strange being, John Chapman, the editor of the *Westminster Review*. If ever Chapman's history is written fully and accurately, it would form a romance of the most extraordinary kind. In these days he knew George Eliot, who boarded for a time in Chapman's house, and assisted him in the *Westminster*. For George Eliot's personality he had the warmest admiration and affection. He said to me once that he thought he could refute everything that had ever been said against George Eliot from his own knowledge of her. She must have been very kind to the shy youth, and she often played Beethoven to him—a sure passport to his heart. Another warm friend of these days was George Jacob Holyoake. Holyoake, though an Agnostic, had strong sympathies with certain sides of Christianity, and I remember him speaking to me of the attractive mixture of boldness and reverence in the young journalist. The only thing he published separately till *Mark Rutherford* appeared was a letter to George Jacob Holyoake on Parliamentary Reform. This was a most vigorous and trenchant piece of writing. Besides these things Mark Rutherford wrote much that was unacknowledged. He contributed to the *Morning Star*, a journal with which John Bright was connected, a series of papers, entitled 'Below the Gangway.' Occasionally letters appeared from him in the *Spectator*, and to a certain extent he reviewed for the *Athenæum*.

As his position in the Admiralty improved, he was gradually able to leave off journalistic work, which he never seems to have thoroughly liked.

## IV

I came to know him, though never intimately, and we had occasional personal intercourse and correspondence for some twenty years. He was very reserved and dignified in appearance, but essentially kind and modest. His great interest was in books—books as makers and helpers of life. He was a singularly exact student, mainly of the English classics. I could see in him no trace of literary ambition, though he showed some irritation when *Clara Hopgood* was characterised as an immoral book. He gave his particular study to Shakespeare and to Wordsworth. In these he might fairly be described as an expert. But he had taught himself many languages, and he studied the best in each. One of his projects was an annotated edition of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, for which he had made not a few discoveries. He was familiar with the commentaries of H. H. Furness on Shakespeare. He would talk sometimes of the great men whom he had heard—very much in the strain of his London correspondence. John Bright was his supreme favourite among politicians, and I have heard him refer with special admiration to the uprightness of John Stuart Mill in his Parliamentary career. Gladstone he admired, but with the reserves natural to a Dissenter. He put Spurgeon and Bright among the first of English orators. He was extraordinarily fastidious about the correctness of text, and complained bitterly of Professor Knight's edition of



Wordsworth for its inaccuracy in this respect. He kept no rubbish in his library, and all his personal appointments were of characteristic simplicity. On the walls of his study at Ashted, at Hastings, and, later on, in Groombridge, were portraits of his favourite heroes. He tells us in *Tanner's Lane* about Zechariah's little front room. 'There were portraits on the walls—nothing else but portraits—and the collection at first sight was inconsistent. Major Cartwright was still there; there were also Byron, Bunyan, Scott, Paine, Burns, Mr. Bradshaw, and Rousseau. It was closely expressive of its owner.' He continued to take a keen interest in Nonconformity, and watched with special attention Mr. Balfour's Education Bill and the litigation in the House of Lords for the United Free Church of Scotland. To the South African War he was bitterly opposed. He wrote many articles in the *British Weekly*, some of which were not signed. He was also a frequent contributor to the *Bookman*, and latterly to the *Nation*, in which his last papers appeared. He was rather noticeably slow in taking up new authors, preferring to read old books over again, as a rule. There were exceptions, of course.

I do not think myself entitled to repeat private conversations with this distinguished man, but one story is so characteristic that I may be allowed to tell it. Hale White admired Swinburne very much, and in particular his criticisms of Shakespeare. Swinburne read Hale White's little book on the Alleged Apostasy of Wordsworth, and liked it. On this, my friend, Mr. Watts-Dunton, proposed that I should bring Mark Rutherford to The Pines in order that he and Swinburne might meet. Hale White was willing, and we lunched at the well-known



house. Swinburne was not in his best mood, but Mark Rutherford was quite satisfied in serenely contemplating him. At one point, our kind host asked Mark Rutherford if he had read Kipling. 'No,' was the reply. 'I am getting to be an old man now, and I read my Bible.' 'Oh,' said Mr. Watts-Dunton, 'that's what I do.' Swinburne was brought into the conversation, but he knew Kipling only as the author of music-hall ditties. The 'Recessional' was mentioned, whereupon Swinburne said very unjustly, 'Yes, very good; like the "Psalm of Life," but not so good.'

## XLII

### MEMORIES OF MARK RUTHERFORD—(*Continued*)

#### II. THE EARLY LIFE OF MARK RUTHERFORD

MR. HUMPHREY MILFORD has published a little book, *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford* (W. Hale White), by Himself. This enables me to supplement the previous article. It runs to fewer than 20,000 words, and was written by the author when he was seventy-eight for those members of his family who were too young to remember his beginnings. It was not to be expected that Mark Rutherford should write a full history of his own life. When he was asked to do so, he replied that he had to decide that it was impossible. 'I am not sorry. I am base enough to acknowledge that one reason for my indifference is that I should get nothing out of it, for, of course, it must be posthumous, and as to the world I am not so vain as to suppose its course would be changed by my self-revelation as a warning or example. It has Moses and the prophets.' But while the record is brief, and contains little that is new, it is marked by the luminous and severe beauty and the perfect precision of diction for which the author was famous. I content myself with a few notes on the additional information it supplies, and these notes I supplement with others gathered from his own contributions to journalism.

## I

He was born in Bedford High Street on December 22, 1831. He had two sisters and a brother. This brother promised to be a painter of distinction, and was valued by Ruskin and Rossetti, but he died young. His grandmother lived in Queen Street, Colchester, in a house dated 1619 over the doorway. He had also an aunt in Colchester, a woman of singular originality, who married a baker, a good kind of man, but tame. It is easy to see that this lady supplied one of the most striking characters in the Autobiography. But young White fell in love with Bedford, and remained in love to the last. He had a peculiar interest in Bunyan, about whom he wrote a book, which, though unsatisfactory, cost him more labour than any other of his works. He wrote in 1881: 'Mr. Brown, of Bedford, is a man of much ability, who has devoted a great deal of time to the history of Bunyan, and collected a number of most precious facts about Bunyan, all first hand. The minutest details relating to Bunyan are of larger magnitude than most historical events which are signalised with cannon or the largest type in the *Daily Telegraph* placards.' Froude's treatment of Bunyan exasperated him. 'Mr. Froude was most unfitted to write the *Life of Bunyan*. Anybody reading his Bunyan and knowing nothing about the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, save what Mr. Froude tells him, would imagine that Bunyan was a spiritually dyspeptic person, overhung all his days with the gloomy shadow of insoluble Calvinism. That is what Mr. Froude would have been had he, to use an Irishism, been Bunyan. But Bunyan was really nothing of the kind. He was one of the sunniest of souls.

He had his conflicts and his troubles, but, as Richter says, the blue sky above him was bigger than all the clouds therein.'

Mark Rutherford was very fortunate in his early home and associates. Of his father we already know much, and we are told some fresh things about his aunt and her husband Samuel Lovell. Mr. Lovell 'always wore, even in his counting-house and on his wharf, a spotless shirt—seven a week—elaborately frilled in front. He was clean-shaven, and his face was refined and gentle.' He was a man of great benignity, kind to children, and very patient with his creditors. I have some touching evidence of this. Mark Rutherford wrote in 1892 to his cousin: 'I went past your house, the house in which the kindest of aunts and uncles lived: I looked down the yard, so familiar and so changed, and I passed through Sharnbrook, the village to which I have so often been with uncle when he went out to see his customers.' But it is natural that we should hear most of Mark Rutherford's remarkable and stout-minded father. There is not much that is actually new in this little book, but there is significance in the stress laid on the purity of Mr. White's English. 'He used to say he owed it to Cobbett, whose style he certainly admired, but this is but partly true. It was rather a natural consequence of the clearness of his own mind and of his desire to make himself wholly understood, both demanding the simplest and most forcible expression. If the truth is of serious importance to us we dare not obstruct it by phrase-making: we are compelled to be as direct as our inherited feebleness will permit. The cannon-ball's path is near to a straight line in proportion to its velocity. "My boy," my father once said to me, "if you

write anything you consider particularly fine, strike it out." ' This maxim was laid to heart. What was true of the father is still more true of the son. Neither perhaps fully recognised that there are some kinds of truth, in their essence mystical, which cannot be seen clearly or angularly, and cannot be translated into phrases which every reader can understand at once.

Mr. White, as we know, was a leading Liberal at Bedford, and undoubtedly the best speaker in the town. The political conflicts of the time were fierce, but Mr. White never flinched. I have one anecdote which is not recorded here. Referring about 1875 to Lord Russell, Mark Rutherford wrote :

' In 1830 he was a candidate for the Borough of Bedford. The poll lasted for eight days, and electors came up from all parts of the country at an enormous cost. One voter, greatly indebted, by the way, to the house of Russell, posted direct from Liverpool, and charged all his expenses to the Whig Committee. In the end his lordship was defeated by a majority of one, and that one vote was given by a Wesleyan minister, who was brought from Yorkshire by the Tories and travelled the whole of Sunday. He arrived at the polling booth just as the clock was striking four. In these days there was an assessor, whose business it was to hear objections against votes, and decide their validity. Objection was immediately taken to the vote of this Wesleyan minister. Bedford was a borough in which household suffrage was law. Even the almshouse people had votes. The minister claimed on the ground that he was an occupier, although he had left the town for some time, and had gone to another circuit. His successor at Bedford was not yet appointed, and upon that ground



the vote was admitted, though no doubt it was bad. The minister, with a very elastic conscience, swore to the occupancy, and the assessor, who was a rascal, was cursed with an easier conscience. Bedford was a Tory mob, and the father of the writer of this column protected Lord John in his retreat across a farmyard, when the drunken brutes threatened his life.'

It is mentioned that Mr. White was appointed Assistant Doorkeeper of the House of Commons by Lord Charles Russell, and soon became Doorkeeper, holding office for twenty-one years, and winning in a very marked degree the admiration and friendship of the members. Here I may quote Mark Rutherford's own words about Lord Charles Russell in 1875. 'Lord Charles Russell's retirement is much to be regretted. There was a grand style about him combined with perfect simplicity and courteousness which we shall miss for a long time to come. He was, in truth, the type of all that is best in an English aristocrat.' Of his own father he wrote:—'The Doorkeeper of the House of Commons is retiring. For twenty years and more he has had to be at the House from its meeting to its rising on every day of its sitting, and his main duties have been to see that no unauthorised person enters the House. The present Doorkeeper leaves the House regretted, I should say, by every member in it, regardless of party, and as he is the last of a class his departure is an epoch.'

## II

As might be expected, the book runs largely on the unhappy theological controversy which engrossed his youth. There is nothing very novel in what he tells

us, and there are one or two traces of acerbity which are not characteristic of the man. Speaking of his time at Cheshunt he says: 'I learnt nothing at Cheshunt, and did not make a single friend.' He tells us that at first after abandoning orthodoxy, he thought nothing in the old religion worth retaining, but this temper did not last long. He was for a short time a schoolmaster in Stoke Newington, and 'there fell upon me what was the beginning of a trouble which has lasted all my life.' When he left the school he 'called on several publishers and asked for employment, but could get none till I came to John Chapman, editor and proprietor of the *Westminster Review*.' His occupation was to write Chapman's letters, to keep his accounts, and, most disagreeable, to 'subscribe' his publications—that is to say, to call on the booksellers and ask how many copies they would take. He says nothing about his preaching at this time, but we know that he preached—mostly in Unitarian chapels. I believe that he frequently filled the pulpit at the quaint little Unitarian chapel at Billingshurst, in Sussex. The cause was founded in the eighteenth century by two ministers, Mr. Evershed and Mr. Turner. They preached in the tiniest of chapels—I imagine forty people would crowd it. The chapel yard is unusually large, and the tombstones are mostly marked with the names of Evershed and Turner. Their descendants have remained faithful to this day. Mark Rutherford often seemed to do injustice to the essential religiousness which never left him. Though he had been badly treated by the Dissenters he remained a fervent Dissenter, and his talk about his early troubles was magnanimous to a degree. He thought that the older Dissenters

were of a finer quality than the newer. He was a constant student of the Bible, and came to fear that among Dissenters there was far too little of the Bible and too much of the preacher. He thought the Dissenting laity would be greatly improved if thorough, systematic instruction in the Bible were substituted a little more frequently for flights of oratory dependent upon an isolated text. He had small patience with those who complained about the introduction of politics into preaching. The political dissenters, he would say, were far more political than their descendants and more pious. Many of them were almost Republican. 'An ancestor of the present writer, a godly elder of his church, had his windows smashed because of his ardour in the cause of reform before the Reform Act of 1832 was passed, and his father refused to illuminate for the victories over the French because he considered that we ought to let the French people manage their own affairs, and that if we had not interfered with them they would not have interfered with us. Cromwell and Milton were political, and are supposed to have had a few religious convictions. It is surely impossible now for a man to have imperious and ardent beliefs on religion without having beliefs equally imperious and ardent on a subject so important as politics.' His freedom from acerbity is shown by a reference he made to Samuel Morley, a leading Nonconformist of his time. When Samuel Morley was abused for his opposition to Mr. Bradlaugh, Mark Rutherford came forward to say that Mr. Morley was an apostle of toleration when the world was ignorant of Mr. Bradlaugh's existence. 'It is thirty years ago and more since a young student, just entering upon the ministry in a dissenting Church, found himself

unable any longer to preach by the Trust Deed, and went over to Unitarianism. I know for a fact that, though Mr. Morley totally disapproved of the young man's opinions, he made him a handsome present, enough to support him for a whole year, because he believed him to be honest.'

Mark Rutherford could do justice to the Church of England, especially in his later years, and when he was a young man he made a pilgrimage to Hursley to hear Mr. Keble preach. The day was never forgotten. 'Everybody was at church who could go, from Mr. Heathcote down to the humblest labourer, and the sermon preached was one that went to everybody's heart. It was harvest time, and the preacher seized the opportunity of enlarging upon the relationship between master and servant, that, of course, being the season of the year when the farmers had to make the greatest demand upon their men. There was no flinching from the truth, no feigning of it through platitudes and generalities. The precise deficiencies both on the side of the masters as well as of the men which had been observed through the week were exposed and denounced, and then we were told of a higher Master whose dealings with us were for ever just and merciful. Altogether it was noble Christian doctrine such as I have not often heard since.'

He could not, however, be anything but a Dissenter, and he had small patience with Dissenting ministers who went over to the Church. When Mr. Courtauld, the hero of the Church Rate controversy, died at eighty-six he wrote: 'I just remember the great Braintree case and the rejoicing over it. I can still see the place, the very pool near which I was standing when the news of the decision



of the House of Lords arrived.' He could wax warm in this debate. 'A person calling herself a Churchwoman writes to one of the Church newspapers protesting against the reception of dissenting ministers into the Church. They are so uncultivated, so intolerable in polite society, and she tells a story of a dissenting minister converted to the Establishment who, when he appeared in a drawing-room one evening, produced a pair of worked slippers and proceeded to change his boots there and then. When the boots were taken off they were stowed under a chair, and the owner resisted attempts on the part of the servant to remove them. All this is perfectly credible. A dissenting minister who is good enough to pervert himself to the Establishment would be likely to take off his boots, and for aught I know his coat or his shirt.'

### III

He writes once again, and very warmly, about Caleb Morris, through whom the Bible became to him what it was. But there is no reference to another hero of his youth—the late Thomas Binney. Of Binney he wrote: 'His reputation certainly is not upheld, or at any rate has not been created, by books, but there are many reputations, and those, too, of teachers of mankind, which have not been made by books. Mr. Binney was emphatically not a writer but a preacher, and one of the strongest preachers ever possessed by the Independents. He was unequal, and when he felt that perhaps he had gone too far, and endeavoured to retract, he was uninteresting, but when he left himself full liberty, and had a subject such as an Old Testament patriarch or the Apostle Paul,



he rose to heights of grandeur. His style of speaking was perfect. I have heard many orators in my time, but I do not think I ever heard oratory which was so attractive to thinking men as Binney's. It was something like Cobden's in its plainness and something like Roebuck's in its incisive, rhetorical force, but had a depth and a pathos in it of which Cobden and Roebuck were not capable. Mr. Carlyle knew and appreciated Mr. Binney. I recollect a kindly note from Chelsea asking Mr. Binney to pay a visit there, and assuring him that he would find a friendly kettle on the hob and a pipe in the corner.'

It would not be easy to define Mark Rutherford's ultimate theological position. He writes here: 'The great doctrines of Puritanism are also much nearer to the facts of actual experience than we suppose.' He was a whole-hearted lover of liberty, but he could not endure anything in the nature of mockery. Once on a time a correspondent wrote to the editor of a religious paper asking whether he believed that Balaam's ass really spoke. The editor replied: 'The Bible says so, and therefore we believe it, and we would say further that if every one who undertakes to throw discredit on the Bible story would, whenever he opened his mouth, speak only half as wisely or half as well as the ass did, we should not have so much nonsense uttered as we have now to listen to.' On this Mark Rutherford comments: 'This is a very fair retort and deserves record.' He wrote also, late in life: 'Any fool can buy a Bible and grin at it, and apparently get his folly printed. We cannot put down, and nobody would attempt to put down, Gibbon or a translation of Strauss; but somehow there is an instinctive desire to call out for a policeman when one sees the guilty daub which is supposed to contra-

dict the Book of Genesis by depicting an old man making a human being out of mud.'

## IV

He expresses his regret that he did not continue his acquaintance with George Eliot, whose 'tenderness and defiance' he never tired of praising. He urges the young religiously to grasp their chances of making acquaintance with great persons, and looks upon his single interview with Carlyle as one of the most important events in his life. Strange to say, he does not refer here to his meeting with Emerson, of whom he wrote in 1881: 'It seems but yesterday since the present writer of this column spent a morning with Emerson in England. I do not know how many years ago, but he was then comparatively young, strong as a boy, and projecting a new edition of his work. Nothing struck me more than his sunny serenity and peace, a serenity and peace resting on convictions which were the chief basis of his character.'

## XLIII

### MEMORIES OF MARK RUTHERFORD—(*Continued*)

#### III. MARK RUTHERFORD AS A POLITICIAN

MUCH of Mark Rutherford's time was spent in the House of Commons. His father's position as Doorkeeper made entrance easy, and he contrived as early as 1861, or shortly after, to increase his income by writing London letters for provincial papers. He also contributed to some of the London journals, but it is not easy now to identify his work, and much of it is irretrievably lost. But I have examined five years of his work in the *Rochdale Observer*, from 1867-1872; ten years of his work in the *Norfolk News*, from 1873-1883; and some in other papers like the *Nonconformist* and the *Birmingham Post*. He regarded his performances in this way with very little respect, and confessed that he was often sorely perplexed with the difficulty of filling his columns. The work was very poorly remunerated, but it was impossible for him to write without at least occasional touches of his own quality, and many of his character sketches are penetrating and memorable. His standpoint from first to last was that of a Radical Dissenter of the most uncompromising type. Much of his correspondence is taken up with stories about the Ritualists and comments thereon. His own position is sufficiently expressed in the following words. Describing

a debate on Disestablishment, he says: 'Another with much felicity compared the union between Church and State to that which existed between the Siamese twins, Mr. Gladstone being the cruel doctor to cut the bond. A more singularly felicitous description of the connection between Church and State could not well be coined. It is a monstrous union, and fetters both.'

He was throughout a very impatient listener, and he detested those who committed the crime of loquacity.

Writing in the early 'seventies, he tells us that he found members in the House of Commons were watching their opportunity as a habitual tippler watches the bottle, or as a cat watches a piece of meat dangling over its head. The thing that struck an outsider was the madness which seemed to possess members to catch the Speaker's eye. It is commonly supposed that animal passions alone are compatible with blindness and ferocity. But Mark Rutherford found that the passion for talk could be as ferocious and furious as that for prey. In one place he describes the speech of a worthy, good-hearted, complacent bore. 'Nature,' he says, 'deals very kindly with us, and is full of wonderful adaptations and compensations. To the creature which needs protection she sends a tough hide. It would be of no use to clothe with self-ignorance, self-complacency, and a pachydermatous moral tissue the wise men who never need fear contempt. But her weaker children, who, if they were really to understand how they are appraised by the rest, and who would die of disgust if they could feel the arrows of scorn continually let fly at them, these she wraps all over in impenetrable mail, behind which the *ego* sits serenely, never aware even of the intent of the weapons

used against it, or of the force with which they are hurled. Nature has a mind that the foolish shall live as well as the not-foolish, and how could this design of hers be accomplished if the skin of the foolish were not properly thickened ?’

## MR. BRIGHT

Mr. Bright, whom he knew well, was his supreme favourite among politicians, for he steadfastly maintained that wonderful as Bright’s eloquence was, his political sagacity and statesmanship were far more remarkable. In the House of Commons he seldom or never made a political blunder, and every measure which he advocated became law. ‘ During the passage of the Irish Land Bill through the House of Commons many of its clauses were called Bright’s clauses, and I remember the constant complaints of the Tory squires that they were called to the House mainly to register Mr. Bright’s decrees. There is no living statesman who can say that so much of his thought has been transformed into the accepted legislation of the country as Mr. Bright.’ He admitted that Bright seldom quoted from first-rate authors, and that his citations from poetry were generally commonplace. But he held him to be a supreme master of eloquence, and delighted in quoting his perfect phrases. “ On one occasion,” said Mr. Bright, referring to the cause of Louis Philippe’s exile, “ it was thought to be perilous to hold a certain pinnacle, but because they did not hold it the peril came.” The form of that sentence is so perfect that, to use language slightly superphilosophical, it almost becomes part of its essence, or, in other words, the meaning gains so much from the form that we cannot separate the power of the



one from that of the other.' He pointed out that in Bright's grandest speeches he talked a language almost purely Biblical. Take, for example, this sentence: 'The nation is now in power, and if in wisdom abideth power, the generation to follow may behold the glorious day of which we in our time with our best endeavours can only hope to see the earliest dawn.'

Mr. Bright, the chief of the democracy, kept alive in England a reverence not merely for Christian morality, but for the very terms and tones of the Scriptures in which that morality is taught. Mark Rutherford was happy and secure when Bright took the helm. 'What a relief was Mr. Bright's open, manly speech! It seemed to clear the very air. There, at least, was a man who knew his own mind and had always avowed it, who amid universal dissembling had always been straightforward and declared what he meant to do. "Better," says Emerson, "is a little integrity than a career."' But with all his admiration for Bright he was long enough in the House of Commons to see that by 1883 Bright's great life-work was over. 'Gentle as the light breeze, mellow as wine of an ancient vintage, did the great tribune's words steal on the troubled ear. Mr. Bright is no longer unsatisfied; the work of his hand is established. Mr. Bright belongs to the masterful past, not to the restless, striving future.'

#### MR. GLADSTONE

While admiring to enthusiasm Mr. Gladstone's prodigious powers, Mark Rutherford never trusted him entirely. It may be that Lord Morley in his great biography has laid too little stress on the calamitous effects

of Mr. Gladstone's dealings with the Dissenters. They brought about his downfall in 1874, and ensured the failure of his attempts to pass a Home Rule measure. But the truth is that Mr. Gladstone was never in sympathy with Nonconformist principles. His disestablishment of the Irish Church won for him the passionate and united support of Nonconformists. But they expected him to advance in the same path, and this he was most reluctant to do. It was clear to Mark Rutherford, as to some others, that Mr. Gladstone's line on the education question would bring about the downfall of his Government, and the defeat of 1874 came as no surprise. In one of his letters Mark Rutherford speculates on Mr. Gladstone's proceedings. 'What is the cause of this curious failure to recognise his duty? Why, with the straight road before him which he sees he ought to tread, does he prefer divergence into strange bye-paths? Partly, I believe, it is because of an original defect in his nature. He is keen, sharp, brilliant beyond almost any man I know; and it is just that very virtue of his mind which leads him wrong. He is so much a lover of reasons—a creator of reasons for everything he does—that he makes mistakes where simpler people, trusting to their instinct, would succeed. . . . Another reason for Mr. Gladstone's failure is his ecclesiastical education. We must never forget what he was thirty years ago, and that he has never passed through that purifying fire which cleansed two or three, at least, of his friends who were with him in the gall of bitterness. He took to politics and not to thinking, and though a good deal of his Puseyite frippery not having been renewed has rotted off in course of time, a good deal still remains. There has been no complete renovation, no conversion of

the whole man. He may still be haunted by that secret terror which makes even

“The loftiest fear  
All that they would disdain to think were true,”

and he may shrink from a State which does not in some way recognise a Church. One thing at least we know, that what a man has once thoroughly believed when he is young, hangs about him more or less definitely all his life, unless he undergoes spiritual revolution, of which Mr. Gladstone has never shown a trace.’

He thought that Mr. Gladstone failed in rhetorical passages. ‘As soon as he begins rhetoric and “launches in the winds of heaven” members get uneasy. The door begins to swing backwards and forwards, and the power fades out of him as if he were paralysed. He did a good deal of this tempting the heavenly wind on Monday, and it would have been well for him and those of us who listened to him if it had been otherwise. He is often seduced into long perorations and windy eloquence totally unsuitable to him.’ But he considered that for debating power Mr. Gladstone never had his equal. All his colleagues together could not supply his place. Mr. Gladstone was a man of sufficient resource for the most sudden emergencies, and capable of instant reply and comprehensive summing up. He refers to Gladstone in April 1873 making a speech about brewers’ licences. ‘He wanted no notes and no prompting. He could draw the Giotto’s O like a master with one swift motion of his hand with no assistance. All the mysteries of finance were clear enough to him, and his marvellous memory wanted no refreshing. His is an organisation which to me is

perfectly miraculous, the existence of which it would be as difficult for me to credit as a story in the *Arabian Nights*, did I not know that it existed by the testimony of my senses. He understands the whole question of malt better than any farmer, and of brewers' licences better than any brewer, though he also knows more about the Khiva and Central Asia than Lord Granville. Mr. Gladstone is emphatically a Minister, and a First Minister, making use of all his instruments as tools, and never showing the slightest sign of being overmastered by them. I have been told that he can do the work of everybody in the Treasury from the messengers upward, and I incline to believe it.'

#### MR. DISRAELI

All his life Mark Rutherford was fascinated with the mystery of Disraeli. He had plenty to say in criticism of Disraeli's ambitions and measures, but he thoroughly recognised Disraeli's astonishing powers. He writes on May 18, 1867: 'He has managed in the face of defection in his Cabinet, and among the rank and file of the House, to do more with a minority of sixty or seventy than any other Minister has yet done with a majority of sixty or seventy, and he will now most probably carry his Bill. His one ambition he has now nearly achieved. The one object of his life has been to make himself a name. His dream may come true, for it may now go down to posterity that the Jew Minister, the man who never went to Eton or Oxford, who had no territorial influence, and was hated by those whom he had to lead, managed to reconstruct the constitution of the country when all efforts had failed, and that he did it too under the greatest disadvantages.'



Disraeli he considered 'a far more stimulating and amusing speaker than his greatest opponent.' When Disraeli left the House of Commons, Mark Rutherford quoted an old Radical as saying: "I find myself always looking to the Front Conservative Bench when I enter the House in order that I may see if Dizzy is there. If he is not there, I am disappointed." That expresses precisely what many even of his foes have thought about him, no matter how diverse their politics have been from his. They have never been able to cherish any personal hostility to him, and they have always considered that somehow or other his absence was a loss. Partly this was due to his personal qualifications. He was kind-hearted, his sympathies were generous. His speech, when it was proposed to erect a monument to Lord Byron, touched a chord in the hearts of a good many, and showed that privately he must have had thoughts which he was not in the habit of confessing.'

But he admitted that Disraeli was a riddle hard to read. His soul had a cave in it into which none was allowed to look. 'Nobody has ever seen him without his wig and gown. He is always counsel for the Tories, and whether he is a Tory himself nobody can tell. Perhaps when he is dead we shall be enlightened, and his biographers may come upon a volume of private meditations upon the squires, their politics, and their religion which will astonish the world.'

#### MR. CHAMBERLAIN

I have before me a volume of the *Nonconformist* for 1872. Edward Miall was editor, Mark Rutherford was the Parliamentary correspondent, and early in the year



Mr. Joseph Chamberlain appeared upon the scene. All three were then Nonconformists of the most positive and aggressive type, eager for disestablishment. In reading Mr. Chamberlain's papers and speeches one marks with amazement the tardiness with which his unrivalled powers of clear and forcible expression were recognised. He had to write a letter explaining that he was not a Churchman. On January 31, 1872, there is the following brief epistle to the editor of the *Nonconformist*:

'I see that in your "Summary" of the 24th inst. I am alluded to as a Churchman.

'As I am proud of my Nonconformity, and have no desire to be "comprehended" in any established sect, permit me to correct the misstatement, and to say that I am a Unitarian.'

The Nonconformists and the Liberals in general did not at first recognise the great reinforcement of their cause. Mark Rutherford, however, was not so blind as some others. We find him saying quite early: 'The leadership of Mr. Chamberlain or of Sir Charles Dilke, either in Opposition or in power, can only be a matter of time, though at present no journal but *Truth* dare mention the possibility save under its breath.' A little later he writes: 'It is urged that Chamberlain's speeches never rise much above commonplace, that they are merely the utterance of a shrewd business man, with none of the striking phrases of Lord Beaconsfield, none of the subtle thoughts of Mr. Gladstone. It may be so, but it must be remembered that our last two Premiers have been men of singularly powerful personality. Lord Beaconsfield was not only a statesman, but also a successful novelist. His great rival will probably live in history as the greatest

Prime Minister this country has ever seen. But Mr. Chamberlain compares favourably with the Prime Ministers of the past.'

He writes later: 'It is useless to abuse or slight Mr. Chamberlain. No statesman can catch the prevailing tone so alertly, and none can give it more forcible expression. His speeches, like Luther's words, are becoming to sound like half battles. "The House of Lords must clear out of the way," he cries, and when he speaks thus we know that though wind and tide be ever so much against him, that is precisely what he will bring about. Without him politics would sink into a dead jangle of words.' He acknowledges that Mr. Chamberlain is not a favourite in the House, particularly among those whom one might be inclined to consider his own following. 'Some are jealous of his sudden rise to power and influence; others think that he has compromised his principles on the Egyptian and Irish questions. But in the constituencies no Minister is more popular, always excepting Mr. Gladstone.'

I quote in conclusion a significant paragraph of September 30, 1882, referring to Henry George's book on *Progress and Poverty*. 'The rights of man are once more to the front, and the basis of one of the ablest books on political economy which has been written for many a day. A man must be blind who does not see that ahead of us are questions which in due time will be put by Mr. Speaker from the chair which will shake these islands to their very centre.'

Figures long faded float over these pages, and I do not attempt to revive them; but two or three aphoristic judgments may be set down.

‘Independence is usually the vengeance of little minds.’

‘The most perfect gentleman we ever had in the House of Commons was Mr. Cobden.’

‘My experience of working men is that a preacher who should seek to enmesh them by an allusion to their “honest, horny hands,” would most likely be greeted by the spectacle of an honest, horny finger elevated to the tip of the nose.’

He writes in 1883: ‘I shall be very much surprised if John Morley does not take a very high place in the next Liberal Government, for he has all the breadth of view, eloquence, and insight of the statesman whose biography he has so ably written—Edmund Burke. Mr. Gladstone has stated privately that he anticipates for him a great political future.’

## XLIV

### MEMORIES OF MARK RUTHERFORD—(*Continued*)

#### IV. MARK RUTHERFORD AS A CRITIC

MARK RUTHERFORD was long on very intimate terms with Mr. Francis, the publisher of the *Athenæum*, and his son, my friend Mr. John C. Francis. Through the kindness of the latter I have been able to trace his contributions to the leading literary journal, but first I quote the tribute paid to Mr. Francis on his death in April, 1882 :

‘ I desire to offer my humble testimony to the work of Mr. Francis, publisher of the *Athenæum*, who was buried this week. The newspapers, which have all of them benefited by his successful attempts to repeal the paper and advertising duties, have recorded his public worth, but many persons in London, myself included, can testify to something much better—to his blameless life, to the faithfulness of his friendships, and to the generosity of his services on behalf of those who needed them. Many a man has he helped when help was necessary, and his right hand knew not what his left did. His devotion to his master, the *Athenæum*, was unlimited, and up to a very short time before his death, when he could no longer get out of doors, and scarcely moved from his room, he persisted in doing work for the paper as much as lay within his powers.’

## I

To the *Athenæum* Mark Rutherford contributed a few signed articles, but the only reviews he wrote relate to Wordsworth. They are exceedingly careful and scholarly. He was indeed a scholar, exact, unwearied, and constant in the study of books he loved. But he very seldom committed himself to critical judgments, and about second-rate books he had nothing to say. The *Athenæum* series is as follows:—*Wordsworth*, edited by William Knight, May 2, 1896, December 26, 1896, September 25, 1897; and Hutchinson's Edition of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, July 16, 1898. The criticism of Professor Knight is by no means favourable. The critic objects to the substitution of a chronological arrangement for Wordsworth's own, and points out many blunders. The notes are characterised as sometimes inaccurate and often superfluous, and he is advised to submit his work to somebody who knows what are the duties and responsibilities of editing. He is severely blamed for omitting to tell the source of his unpublished work. Mark Rutherford refuses to assign a supreme position to the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality.' 'The "Ode" is popular because it hits the taste of a number of people to whom it is a pleasure to repose in dreams of pre-existence, and to strengthen their faith thereby in a life after death; but it is desultory, will not stand examination (as Coleridge pointed out) by the reason, and lacks the simplicity of such masterpieces as "The Ruined Cottage," or "Laodamia." "The winds," which "come to me from the fields of sleep" are, according to him, "the morning breeze blowing from the fields that were dark during the



hours of sleep.”’ This Mark Rutherford styles ‘a poor, loose explanation.’ He points out that the time (line 44) is supposed to be morning, and that Wordsworth meant the west wind, that is to say, the wind blowing from the fields on which the sun had not risen. This seems plausible.

He lays stress on the obligation of Wordsworth to Coleridge. ‘Whatever Coleridge’s faults may have been, he never overvalued his merits or his powers, and his influence over Wordsworth, as the elder man himself acknowledged, was redemption. Of Wordsworth’s struggle between 1793 and 1798 we have but scanty record. In the *Lyrical Ballads* he emerges without controversy into peace. . . . We believe,’ he says, ‘Wordsworth was in a way converted between 1793 and 1797; but no coloured map of his life with distinctly dividing lines can be drawn. No temper, no way of looking at the world, which has once been ours, is ever completely abolished. It may be dominated by new tempers and new ways, but will reappear to the end.’

In a letter to the *Athenæum*, ‘Edward FitzGerald on Carlyle’s and Tennyson’s *Astronomy*,’ Mark Rutherford, all his life keenly interested in astronomy, makes a note on Tennyson’s lines :

‘Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to rest,  
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the west.’

‘The time, judging from what follows, may be spring. At ten o’clock P.M. at the end of February Orion would be precisely in the position described by Tennyson. He is, I think, never incorrect in his reference to any natural object.’

## II

I note some of the references to books and authors in Mark Rutherford's fugitive writings.

'In my humble opinion, Mr. Whitman is one of the very greatest of living poets, but he is peculiar, and his peculiarities are certainly not after the manner of Mr. Newman Hall.'

'*The Life of Wordsworth* by the Bishop of Lincoln is surely the most exquisitely disappointing biography of an eminent man which ever saw the light. It is, moreover, written by an ecclesiastic whose grand object seems to be to make out that Wordsworth was little better than a High Churchman with a gift for poetry. Few people know what a matchless writer of prose Wordsworth could be when he had a subject congenial to him, such as the poet Burns, for instance.'

'I believe,' he wrote in 1882, 'notwithstanding the enormous present popularity of Dickens, that we are only beginning to appreciate him at his proper price, and when half a century has passed, and we find that no repetition has been vouchsafed to us of that inimitable story-telling power, that perfect pathos, that sympathy with unrecognised forms of human worth, we shall then, and only then, begin to place the master on his proper pedestal.'

'Mr. Burton's portrait of George Eliot is not entirely satisfactory. It is good as far as it goes, but it misses, to me at least, the strength of the face. It is a little too soft, a little too made-up for the purpose of pleasing. George Eliot was certainly not handsome, and the artist in depicting her ought to have seized the moment when her

countenance was lighted up by some sudden inspiration, by the stimulus of something said with which she entirely agreed or disagreed.'

'My admiration for *Paradise Regained* rises to the unspeakable point.'

'Bonamy Price says that he was once prompted to ask Wordsworth what was the meaning of the famous but mystical line in the "Ode to Immortality" about the "fallings from us—vanishings." Wordsworth explained to him with great simplicity, but much earnestness, that "there was a time in my life when I had to push against something which resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside of me. I was sure of my own mind; everything else fell away and vanished into thought."'

He takes a more favourable opinion than most of Owen Meredith's attempt to write the life of his father.

'The two volumes of the late Lord Lytton's life that have yet seen the light are packed with interesting matter. The most interesting chapter is on Disraeli. Lord Lytton, whose love of the mysterious was as great as Scott's, drew a wonderful horoscope of his friend, in which by some strange freak of fate nearly every one of the predictions was fulfilled. Their characters, too, were alike. Disraeli's works smelt of hair oil, says Anthony Trollope, and they got much of their savour from Lytton. But then the original compound was at least the very finest Macassar. Lytton's versatility, invention, and ingenuity were prodigious, and his *Memories* are full of a simple charm that readers of his works might be inclined to deny him.'

'The reader who cares to know Swedenborg in his beauties without his defects will find him in Emerson's essay on him, in Dr. Garth Wilkinson's writings, and also

in the charming but thoughtful little series beginning with "The Evening and the Morning."'

'S. R. Gardiner is altogether our most satisfactory historian. One must modify or change many views in reading Mr. Gardiner, but one feels persuaded that here, at least, we have a final judgment. The analysis of authorities is quite unlike any brother historian—so simple, calm, and unprejudiced.'

'Lord Beaconsfield, charmed I suppose by the mystery of the line "A fool is bent upon a twig, but wise men dread a bandit," pensioned its author, Mr. Martin Tupper.'

'It cannot be wrong to say that Swinburne excels all his contemporaries in spontaneity, a quality which he shares with Shelley and Heine. Like theirs, his work sometimes seems rather the result of magic than of earthly power. He has more force than Tennyson and finer form than Browning, but one is rarely captivated by the thought as in the case of the older poets.'

'Miss Blind's *Life of George Eliot* cannot fail to heighten the enthusiasm, love, and admiration which is already felt for the author of *Romola*. A comparison of such letters of George Eliot as we already possess with those of Mrs. Carlyle tends to show the difference between the intellectual seriousness of a truly great woman and the mere cleverness and Scotch shrewdness of the wife of our humorous moralist.'

'The best translations of Faust—Hayward and Bayard Taylor.'

'Many many years ago a novel was published called *A Lost Love*. The authoress never wrote but that one book. Two editions were sold, and it became very scarce. Its merits were remembered by a few, and I recollect that one

of the greatest of living poets counselled me to read it. I searched all London through for a copy, and at last found one, which I bought eagerly, and never regretted buying. This very week I see in the *Athenæum*, to my great surprise and delight, that it is to be reprinted.'

The reference here is to the book *A Lost Love*, by Ashford Owen. The authoress was Miss Ogle.



## XLV

### MEMORIES OF MARK RUTHERFORD—(*Continued*)

#### V. THE SPIRITUAL HISTORY OF MARK RUTHERFORD

THE fascinating writer and, notwithstanding his retired-ness, the fascinating man whom we have lost was occupied all his life with spiritual problems. Is it possible to trace his spiritual history—the rise and progress of religion in his soul? I believe I am justified in making the attempt, using only the testimony of his own writings.

It was by his style, first of all, that Mark Rutherford impressed his readers. That style was full throughout of the simplicity which is the first step of nature and the last of art. The free and graceful movement, like that of an Arab steed, the swift ease and unerring precision of the expression, stirred one to admiration and despair. The impression was deepened by the utter absence of effort, by the apparent carelessness with which the most surprising triumphs of speech were achieved. Robin Hood, splitting the wand with his arrow, could not have been more superbly free from flurry and self-consciousness. But very soon the student was attracted by the manner in which Mark Rutherford handled the deepest problems of life. To the end he returned to them, and he spoke so frankly that we may indicate with some confidence his ultimate attitude to Christianity. We must not indeed

claim a uniform consistency in his utterances. His teaching is conveyed largely in dramatic form, and he was a man of moods. Sometimes he seems to say that the wise will leave all those problems alone, and content themselves with a temperate enjoyment of the earthly life. But this attitude is only occasional. He was to the end a seeker and, in no mean degree, a finder.

A most revealing light on his spiritual history is given in his paper on the great Welsh preacher, Caleb Morris, published in the *British Weekly* on March 6, 1902. From this we learn that Hale White attended Caleb Morris's ministry in Fetter Lane Chapel when he first became a student of divinity. He was cast out of college on account of that kind of heresy which is merely the ferment of a young mind stirred by such authors as Carlyle and Emerson. After his expulsion the student continued to be a worshipper and a preacher. He attended constantly the services conducted by Caleb Morris in Eccleston Square Chapel and at his own house in Mecklenburgh Square. From 1850 to 1863, when Caleb Morris left London to spend the remainder of his days in his native land, Morris was his friend and guide. 'Having heard continuously all the most noteworthy speakers of my day—Roebuck, Cobden, Bright, Gladstone, Binney—I affirm unhesitatingly that Caleb Morris was more eloquent than any of them.' He gives quotations from the sermons of his master, and these are very significant to those who know Mark Rutherford's writings. For they make it clear that Caleb Morris was the spiritual father and leader of Mark Rutherford. It is, of course, clear that in many ways he was not in sympathy with the organised Churches of his time. In the notable preface which he contributed to the first edition of his

translation of Spinoza's *Ethic*—a very different thing from the second preface—he deplored (this was in 1883) the decay of ethics and religion. He said :

‘ The decay of religion, amongst other innumerable evils, has also brought upon us this evil, that the purely intellectual, with no reference whatever to the ethical, is the sole object of research, and a man devotes all his life to the anatomy of lepidoptera, and never gives an hour to a solution of the problem how he may best bring insurgent and tyrannous desires under subjection or face misfortune. No doubt the anatomy of lepidoptera does contribute ethical results, but ethical science, strictly so-called, is non-existent. No preacher preaches it; the orthodox churches are given over to a philosophy of rags, and “ free ” pulpits do nothing but mince and mash up for popular ears commonplaces upon books and passing events.’

Nevertheless, he held fast by essential Christianity. It is little to say that he never tried to stamp in the dust the Name that is above every name. Of Christ he never speaks save with the sincerest reverence and love.

## I

Christianity was to him, in the first place, a law. There was nothing he insisted upon with more passion than the vital and eternal difference between right and wrong. From certain of his ethical judgments on his characters one may have occasion to dissent. But on principles he was always firm. He learned from Caleb Morris to put to every book the question, ‘ Wherein can it help me ? ’ In the preface we have referred to he puts the question to Spinoza, ‘ Wherein can you help me ? ’ He thought then

that Spinoza helped him in insisting on the distinction, vital to the last degree, between right and wrong. He said :

‘ It is frightful to think that at the present moment the only ethic known to the great mass of the children of this country is a dim and decaying dread left ever by a departed religion, while to the children of the aristocracy it is nothing more than a blind obligation to be technically honourable. “ In my class, and it is a large one,” said a teacher to me the other day, “ there is not one girl who would not, on the slightest pressure, tell me a lie,” and this was in a school, not certainly for the rich, but certainly not for the very poor. The world is alarmed now at the various portents which threaten it. On every side are signs of danger more terrible by far than that which impended in 1793. But the germinating spot in all the dangers ahead of us is the divorce of the intellect from its chief use, so that it spends itself upon curiosities, trifles, the fine arts, or in science, and never in ethical service. The peril is, of course, the more tremendous because the religions, which, with all their defects, did at least teach duty and invested it with divine authority, are effete.’

I am not claiming that Mark Rutherford was a true interpreter of Spinoza. Indeed, on this very subject he changed his mind and wrote a very different preface. Though his translation was scholarly, and though he read some fine modern ideas into Spinoza, I do not think he was any more successful than Sir Frederick Pollock when he tried to convince us that Spinoza was a kind of Professor Clifford before his time. But he believed in the law, and he took the law from Jesus. He tells us himself that when in difficulty he summoned up before him the



‘pure, calm, heroic image of Jesus.’ He said, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and he was not left perplexed.

## II

Christianity was for him a gospel of consolation. He said once that ‘the help to live that is most wanted is not remedies against great sorrows. The chief obstacle to the enjoyment of life is its dullness and the weariness which invades us when there is nothing to be seen or done of any particular value.’ Therein he was unjust to himself, for the pages of his books are ‘scorched with agony.’ No man felt more sharply the greater ills of life. In particular, we see again and again how the phenomenon of death lies freshly before him in all its naked awfulness. There must be immortality. If not, all is pure loss. The glass is shattered and the wine is spilt. Writing of Caleb Morris, he says: ‘We must hold to the faith that spirit cannot die.’ One of the most beautiful passages in his books describes the death of a poor servant girl. She chose to have read to her neither prophecy, psalm, nor epistle, but the last three chapters of St. Matthew.

‘She perhaps hardly knew the reason why, but she could not have made a better choice. When we come near death, or near something which may be worse, all exhortation, theory, promise, advice, dogma fail. The one staff which, perhaps, may not break under us, is the victory achieved in the like situation by one who has preceded us; and the most desperate private experience cannot go beyond the Garden of Gethsemane. . . . Catharine read through the story of the conflict, and when she came to the resurrection, she felt, and Phœbe



felt, after her fashion, as millions have felt before, that this was the truth of death.'

One has observed how he lingers on Spinoza's unfathomable argument on the eternity of the mind. Says one of his characters: 'Anyhow, wherever and whatever my husband and Sophy are I shall be. This at least is beyond dispute.' He realises, as perhaps no other writer has ever realised, the tragedy of the insignificant, the friendless, the unloved, the disappointed, the baffled, and the broken. There are multitudes whose misery is not made up of grey tragedies, but in the monotonous, hopeless endurance of the days that are passing from grey to dark, with never a glint of light. He can put into a very few words seventy years of pain. What could be more piercing than this? A governess, who heroically renounces an old love, says:

'I remained at the Vicarage for three years. The children grew up, and I was obliged to leave; but I continued to teach in different families till I was about five-and-forty. After five-and-forty I could not obtain another situation, and I have to support myself by letting apartments at Brighton. My strength is now failing; I cannot look after my servant properly nor wait upon my lodgers myself. Those who have to get their living by a lodging-house know what it means, and what the end will be.'

And who will forget the stories of Drury Lane, with its multitudes sunk beyond ray of sun or stars? What Gospel could be preached to these? What Gospel but that the Divine Spirit is a spirit of love, and that there is no human heart so hard that a redeeming spark may not be struck out of it. Here also he preached Jesus:

'Every one who has walked in sadness because his destiny has not fitted his aspirations; every one who, having

no opportunity to lift himself out of his little narrow town or village circle of acquaintances, has thirsted for something beyond what they could give him ; everybody who, with nothing but a dull daily round of mechanical routine before him, would welcome death if it were martyrdom for a cause ; every humblest creature in the obscurity of great cities or remote hamlets who silently does his or her duty without recognition—all these turn to Jesus and find themselves in Him.’

He had a constant fear lest the human race should throw away the one medicine for their ills. Doubt was much too confident when it did not doubt itself.

‘The souls of now two thousand years  
Have laid up here their toils and fears ;  
And all the yearnings of their pain  
Ah, yet consider it again.’

So he said that every great religion incarnate had certain vital doctrines which it has cost centuries of toil and devotion properly to appreciate. ‘Especially is this true of the Catholic faith, and, if it were worth while, it might be shown how it is nothing less than a divine casket of precious remedies, and if it is to be brutally broken it will take ages to discover and restore them. Of one thing I am certain, that their rediscovery and restoration will be necessary.’ I cannot deny that he is often very melancholy. I have seen him as sad as a pine tree, and yet there is something about his melancholy which is soothing and tonic. It has appealed to men of all schools. The late W. E. Henley found comfort in reading him in the hour of his bitterest sorrow, and I know that he used to send his books to friends in great affliction.

## III

I must touch very briefly on his faith in conversion and in prayer. Caleb Morris taught him that 'to be born again is to awake to the reality of spirit and the spiritual world.' If this is true Mark Rutherford was indeed born again. Nor will any reader forget the text which was so precious to him: 'From the horns of the wild oxen Thou hast answered me.' 'When I was almost pinned to the ground, when help seemed too late, one cry brought succour.'

I should have liked also to say something about his love for the Bible. I have known no one who loved and studied the Book of books like himself, saving only Dr. Parker. Mark Rutherford found a new revelation in the two early books of Robertson Smith. He said to me that they had opened up a new world for him, and showed the greatest desire to get a satisfactory portrait of Smith. All through his books are little sermons and reflections on texts, which show what a preacher he would have made.

Is there more than this? There was more. No one knew better than he the world of forlorn hopes, insatiable desires, and restless yearnings. But there were signs that for him the discords were resolved into harmonies of spiritual beatitude—that he found the path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, and attained to the rest of faith. He writes at times as one who has seen the Everlasting Rose, as one who could say to a hostile world, 'He whose name is Legion is at our doors deceiving our intellects with subtlety, and flattering our hearts with beauty; and we have no trust but in Thee.'

## XLVI

ROBERT BURNS

HOW HIS GHOST WAS COMFORTED

IN the dark and ghostly hour when the moaning of the  
dead

Will not let the living rest,

You may hear the poet crying in his mother's sleeping ears,

While a long sob lifts his breast :

'The life of life is gone, and hope has passed beyond my  
ken :

Time has withered my laurel crown,

The morning sun that melts the mists has shone for me in  
vain,

And the star of the dead goes down.

Through the never halting moments as I sped with tentless  
heed,

I was hoping—ever hoping that the ray

Of your love and your praise would fall shining on my head,

Ere the end of the lee-lang day.

Half mad, half fed, I had strung my rhymes for you,

While the tideless-blooded looked their scorn ;

Till the heart became as water that once had glowed like  
flame,

And I sank before the morn.

What avails it that you come with your flatteries and  
smiles

When my head lies deep in dust ?

What avail the crowding peoples and the rattle of the  
drums

To repair the broken trust ?

When ruin's ploughshare keen drove full upon my bloom,  
By the end you coldly stood,

With never a starting tear for the warm heart death had  
stilled,

And the fire that burned my blood.'

## II

To her bard made Scotland answer, ' Will you not forgive  
us yet ?

Through a hundred lingering years,

In the late remorse of love, we have mourned the gift  
misprized,

And atoned in shame and tears.

You that sang like a bird, you are singing here to-day,  
And of all in the heavens blue

The clearest and the dearest of poet strains are yours,

We had never a bard like you.

When the dew is on the grass, when the rose is on the  
briar,

When the shepherd train is blythe o'er the hill,

When the cottage scenes beguile the workers from their  
toil,

All our thoughts are with you still.



When the mavis and the lintwhite are singing in the  
shaw,  
When the upward-mounting lark soars above,  
When the joy of nature wakens, you are part of all the  
mirth  
That you eyed with boundless love.

The sweetest and most sacred hours of all our days are  
yours—  
When our hearts are kind and young,  
Warm-blushing and keen-shivering when our youthful love  
awakes,  
It speaks in the songs you sung.  
When we gather round the ingle in the stormy winter  
nights,  
Joining hearts and bending knees in prayer,  
The wonder of your word helps our hearts to rise above,  
And to trust the Sacred Care.

Strongly waging Honour's war, in the cause of Right  
engaged,  
As we marched to meet our foes  
We knew the dawn was coming, though the midnight still  
was mirk  
As your song of the morning rose.  
When the lads were gathering fast, when the pipes were  
sounding shrill,  
We were brave to play our part :  
We dared the face of death, for our courage was renewed  
In the tide that swept your heart.

## III

You will pardon, for I love you, these many sins of mine,  
And wear this now,' she said.

There was triumph in the poet's heart and peace upon his  
brow

As he raised his laurelled head.

And deep into his mother's eyes he gazed and gazed again,  
His mother found and shriven.

Then the lingering lips disjoined and the poet fled in light,  
And Scotland was forgiven.

*July 1896.*

## XLVII

### HOME FROM THE HILL

'Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.'—R. L. S.

LET the weary body lie  
Where he chose its grave,  
'Neath the wide and starry sky,  
By the Southern wave,  
While the island holds her trust  
And the hill keeps faith,  
Through the watches that divide  
The long night of death.

But the spirit free from thrall,  
Now goes forth of these  
To its birthright, and inherits  
Other lands and seas :  
We shall find him when we seek him  
In an older home,—  
By the hills and streams of childhood  
'Tis his weird to roam.

In the fields and woods we hear him  
Laugh and sing and sigh ;  
Or where by the Northern breakers  
Sea-birds troop and cry ;

Or where over lonely moorlands  
Winter winds fly fleet ;  
Or by sunny graves he hearkens  
Voices low and sweet.

We have lost him, we have found him :  
Mother, he was fain  
Nimbly to retrace his footsteps ;  
Take his life again  
To the breast that first had warmed it,  
To the triéd and true,—  
He has come, our well belovèd,  
Scotland, back to you !

## XLVIII

### THE ACACIAS OF LAUSANNE

I HAVE lately spent two days in the vast building allotted to provincial papers by the British Museum at Hendon. There are but few whose business or pleasure takes them to the spot. Perhaps a dozen persons or twenty in a week may pass through its great catacombs. To a journalist the sight is suggestive of many thoughts, and it is of the vanity rather than of the glory of his profession that he is tempted to think. Looking at these huge and innumerable volumes, he cannot but think of the toil and thought that have been spent on them, and about the apparent end of all. Here in the British Museum there exists perhaps the one copy of the paper of which a hundred thousand have been printed—the very last survivor, in all probability, unless the journal continues to exist, and a file is kept in the office. There are thousands amongst these huge books which no one has ever opened, thousands which no one ever will open again. The writings have withered like the grass of the field as soon as the day or week of their allotted existence was over.

Still more melancholy is the fact that even when the books are opened they tell nothing, or at best very little, about their writers. In old days the anonymous system prevailed so strongly that the authorship of articles was not only concealed, but was even a jealously-guarded



secret. Some names made their way to the knowledge of a few, perhaps even the great public was aware of the existence of Delane, and in Scotland they certainly knew a few journalists—Russel, of the *Scotsman*, being the chief. But the vast majority were nameless. Nor is any one likely to put questions now. If he did, he would often find that there was none to answer. One of the greatest and most brilliant journals of the Victorian period had its records burnt some years ago in a fire, and now it is not possible to obtain accurate and authoritative information as to the authorship of its articles. Frequently the journalist will not undertake to identify his own work. All that Goldwin Smith in his old age could recollect about his famous contributions to the *Saturday Review* was a paper in the first number about Tennyson's 'Maud.' The vast majority of men who were effective and powerful journalists in their day are utterly forgotten. There is not even an obituary notice to be found in the papers they edited. They moved in the spheres of their work seen by their fellow-citizens continually, but wholly unrecognised and unknown. They carried on their controversies with vehemence, and even with ferocity; but they and their contemporaries stand together on these shelves silent.

‘ Their hatred and their love is lost,  
 Their envy buried in the dust;  
 They have no share in all that's done  
 Beneath the circuit of the sun.’

It may be that they furnish the materials for history, but they become so numerous that by and by no one will be able to read them with anything like completeness. As it is, the journalism of the age of Johnson, small as it

was, has not found a really comprehending and masterly historian.

To those who have had a share in the writings of these papers their aspect brings back the past. Here is a volume in which we wrote many columns long ago. Shall we take it down and try to recapture the moods of youth? Better leave it. Better submit with a good grace to our doom of oblivion. Journalists take some pride in their work if they do it conscientiously, but I never yet knew a journalist who kept his own articles. His first contributions to the Poet's Corner may be found in ancient scrap-books, but for the rest it is out of his reach. He has small occasion to triumph when his day's darg is done. He is thankful to have achieved it once again, and that is all.

It may be said that the speaker has no better fate than the journalist. His words are soon forgotten. Some of them may be reported, and thus he has a second day in his life; but that is all of it. And yet this is not quite true, for the speaker cannot be dissevered from his speech, and thus something of his personality as well as of his work comes before the public mind. As I walk through the British Museum room I see not a few papers in which I could identify some of the contributors. There is Thackeray, for example. There is Meredith, there is Barrie, there is Frederick Greenwood, there is Charles Cooper, and there is many another who has since won fame in other fields. But none of these would thank any one who disclosed the work of their obscurer years. And, after all, the speaker, too, even the greatest speaker, has but a short life. Will any one ever go over the speeches of Mr. Gladstone? He was alive when an enterprising publisher proposed an edition of his speeches in twelve volumes,

and issued but one or two. A great success in politics does not mean a permanent reputation. Many a Cabinet Minister has been excluded from the Dictionary of National Biography for the good reason that no one now takes the smallest interest in his career. Great lawyers, wealthy business men, and others prominent in their hour are swept away into forgetfulness even as is a journalist.

## I

It is time for me to justify my title. On going home from Hendon I happened to read an essay on Edward Gibbon. It contained reflections on the ever memorable passage which describes his feelings on the completion of *The Decline and Fall*. 'Between the hours of eleven and twelve at night,' Gibbon says, 'I wrote the last lines of the last page in a small house in my garden. After laying down my pen I took several turns in a berceau or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent.' He goes on to describe the mingled feelings of joy and pain which he experiences—'the joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame, and that whatsoever might be the fate of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.' Gibbon had no doubt as to the fate of his history, and his highest hopes have been realised.

But there are few indeed who have walked under the acacias of Lausanne; I mean, there are few who have planned and lived to finish a great book with the assurance

that they have not failed to win fame for the years they are to live, and for many years beyond that period. There are few indeed who can assure themselves that they will not altogether die, that their high effort has not missed the mark, that their best days have not been wasted, and that they have left behind them something that will last. I am by no means sure that the immortals have generally finished their work in Gibbon's spirit. If we think of the books that live, and of the books that will live, we may see much reason to conclude that the authors were often unaware of their own triumph, of the significance of that which they had accomplished with much toil and pain. Yet it is difficult to suppose that they were altogether without some inward assurance, and even some outward token that they had not lived in vain.

## II

The working journalist can never hope to walk under the acacias of Lausanne. It is just conceivable that he might write a book that will live, but if he does so, it will be by a kind of accident, and it will be a work of the imagination. There was never a more wonderful career than that of Daniel Defoe. He has perplexed all his bibliographers. How he wrote so much and did so much is hardly to be explained. For he meddled with everything. He wrote so many pamphlets that no one can ever hope to produce a complete list. Some of his papers he both edited and wrote. He was interrupted every now and then by the penalties of the law, and was hardly ever out of peril. No publisher will ever dare to produce a complete edition of his work ; in fact, there are some nine



large volumes of his, of which a unique set exists in the British Museum, which have never been reprinted, and in all probability never will be reprinted. Yet when he was nearly sixty, while not ceasing to be an assiduous journalist and pamphleteer, he became a novelist, and continued so for the ten or eleven years that remained to him. He wrote one book at the beginning of this period which will never die—*Robinson Crusoe*. A recent critic has well said that it was he who first discovered the secret of writing such an interesting and well-constructed tale of adventure. 'The form of his story could be imitated, but not its soul. The universal appeal implied in the realistic account of the successful struggle of one man against the pitiless force of nature was something no one else could impart to a book of adventure, something Defoe himself never caught again. It is this that links *Robinson Crusoe* with the great poems of the world, and makes it perhaps the most indisputable classic of modern times, however little of a poet in a true sense its author may have been.'

To write a great book of history or research a certain combination of circumstances must occur. In the first place there must be a measure of literary power. The highest literary power is not needful. It is not to be found in Grote, or Hallam, or Thirlwall, or Merivale, and least of all is it to be found in Milman. And yet all of these have walked under the acacias. But it must be sufficient to raise a writer above the level of the literary journeyman. Allibone's *Dictionary of English Literature* is a useful book in its way, and a malicious critic once described it as the most important contribution to letters ever made by America. But no one would call it a great book. Then there must be a considerable command of time. This



does not mean that the author need be as free as Gibbon from the toils and cares of ordinary existence, but it does mean that his habitual labours, whatever they may be, should not exceed his strength. Gladstone could not write a great book for various reasons, and during the time when Lord Beaconsfield's life was swallowed up in politics, he added nothing to his permanent achievements. There must be leisure, and there must also be access to materials. By this I mean not only the command of books, but the power of using them. It is vain, for example, to attempt history in these days without a knowledge of various languages. Besides a certain power of sustained labour and endurance is essential. The great book is a work of time, and its writer must be content to see many showy popularities arise and disappear while he remains in his obscurity waiting for the day to come. He must be content to take the risks and hazards of mortal men. His labours may be interrupted by death when his work is but a fragment, and a fragment, however brilliant, must fail of the recognition and the life which are assigned to completeness.

## III

While all this is true, yet I count those happy—even those journalists happy—who for many years have before them the vision of something which shall last in literature, and which shall worthily occupy their thoughts, and the scant margin of their days. The outcome may be nothing. It may extend to little more than a mass of notes intelligible only to the compiler. Yet if it has been a happiness to think of it, if it has made the days short and delivered

from *ennui*, if it has led the mind along congenial paths, and if it has given life an undertone of hope, it is well that the plan was in the heart, that the dream assisted and consoled to the end. And if a journalist who has written much, and for many years desires to establish some personal relation with a few readers by writing an occasional book, or even by putting together a very few of his contributions to newspapers, let him not be too severely condemned, at least, by his brother journalists. His is a natural and a pardonable ambition. Let it be granted that reprints from periodicals are very rarely of striking and permanent worth. Let it also be granted that they may reveal partially the writer's tastes, and friendships, and ambitions, and disappointments. If this be so, they will not altogether miss an audience, and they may even find for a time a large audience. At the very worst a few copies will survive marked with the author's name, and who knows whether some investigator of the future may discover one and hold it up to praise? It is a very, very faint hope. Nevertheless, it is a hope.

For the rest, the journalist has his consolations. Unknown as he is, he may plod along under his umbrella with the consciousness that he is doing something to forward beliefs and causes that are dear to him. It is easy to sneer at the glory and pleasure of Mr. Pott of Eatanswill, but without something of Mr. Pott's emotion, a journalist could hardly endure the monotony of his labour. We journalists can never walk under the acacias of Lausanne, but our memory may survive, as Margaret Veley describes its possible survival, though more than that cannot be.

‘ And if, when I am gone,  
Some words of mine live on,

They shall be only, in the world's great day,  
Like a brief echo that from far away  
Comes with familiar sound.

It wavers to and fro between the hills  
Above, around.

The silent air it fills  
With lonely speech that knows no change,  
But wanders, clear and strange,  
And has no help of living lips or eyes.  
A little while the sound may go and come,  
Though he who uttered it be dumb,  
A little while it lingers ere it dies.

‘Thus shall it chance to me  
In ages yet to be,  
There shall remain no trace on land or sea,  
Nor in the memory of any friend,  
But they and it shall surely have an end.’



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