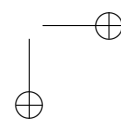
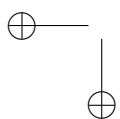
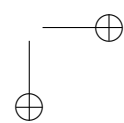
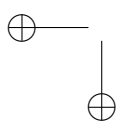
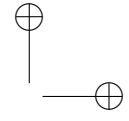
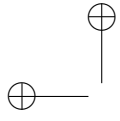


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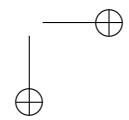
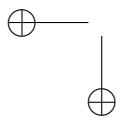


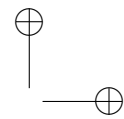
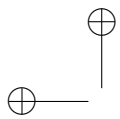


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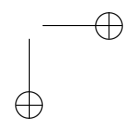
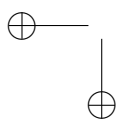
*Desmond MacCarthy*

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First Published, 1931

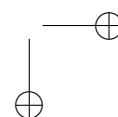




## TO DESMOND MACCARTHY, AET. 22

I dedicate this book to you, young man, and you will not be pleased. You will suspect me of laughing at you: I admit to a certain malice. It was you who prevented me from collecting my contributions to the press during the past thirty years, with the result that when I finally made up my mind to do so, I found I had written more than I could read. If Logan Pearsall Smith, whose friendship, in the beginning, I owe to you, had not undertaken to choose for me, this volume and those which are to follow, would never have been got together. When I tried to do the work myself you were at my elbow, blighting that mild degree of self-complacency which is necessary to an author preparing a book for publication. I was afraid of you, for I knew I had nothing to print which would gratify your enormous self-esteem. Why, I ask, did everything I wrote seem to you, not necessarily worthless, but quite unworthy of you? I respect your high standards, but you have behaved to me like an over-anxious mother who prevents her daughter from making the most of herself at a party because she is not indisputably a queen among the rest.

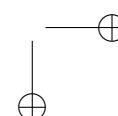
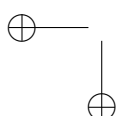
How angry you were in 1900 when I hinted that you would be doing splendidly if you ever wrote nearly as well, say, as Andrew Lang? Your dismay convinced me that you would, in that case, never have touched a pen – and yet you were not conceited. You were only hopeful.





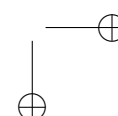
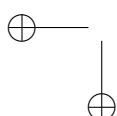
Now, I am not writing this letter for your eyes alone, but for young men of your age who long to write books and have to live by literary journalism. That was our case. It is an agreeable profession – provided you get enough work, or your circumstances do not require you to undertake more than you can do; but it had dangers for such as you: the journalist must ever be cutting his thoughts in the green and serving them up unripe, while his work as a critic teaches him to translate at once every feeling into intellectual discourse. But artists know what a meddling servant the Intellect can be, and in the Kingdom of Criticism the Intellect learns to make itself Mayor of the Palace. Moreover, to frequent newspaper offices, to live always close to the deafening cataract of books is chilling to literary endeavour. So many good books, let alone the others, are seen to be unnecessary.

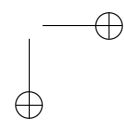
Of course you are disappointed with what I have done, though I admit that of each essay as it was written you were by no means an austere judge. Still, I always felt that your praise was conditional upon there being something much better to come – and I have disappointed you. Why? Partly, I maintain, because your hopes (I do you the justice of not calling them expectations) were excessively high. Parents would not be surprised at the difficulty of dissuading their children from the life of letters, if they remembered that there is hardly a masterpiece which a would-be author of your age would not blush to have written. He admires parts of the masterpiece – qualities in it – adoringly, but he hopes that he will be able to make its merits his own and avoid all its defects. Impossible! as critics know.



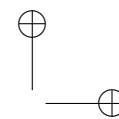
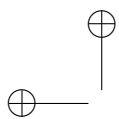


By the bye you never intended me to become a critic, did you? I slipped into it. The readiest way of living by my pen was to comment upon books and plays. At first the remuneration was never more than thirty shillings a week; but the work was easy to me, for I found, whenever I interrogated you (though you continued to insist that there was within you something which ached to find expression), your head was humming with the valuable ideas of others. They were more audible than your own; they were useful to me. Some day, when you came upon a hushed space in life, away from journalism, away from the hubbub of personal emotions, I know you fully intended to listen to yourself; and discovering what you thought about the world to project it into a work of art – a play, a novel, a biography. But confess, you were too careless to prepare that preliminary silence, and too indolent to concentrate. Meanwhile how delightful you found it to imbibe literature at your leisure! And so you read and read. I must say I was grateful to you afterwards, for as a critic I should have run dry long ago if you had not been so lazy.



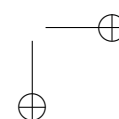
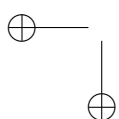


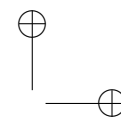
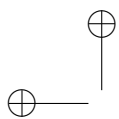




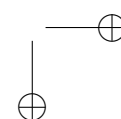
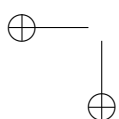
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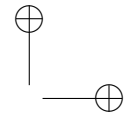
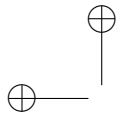
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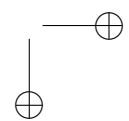
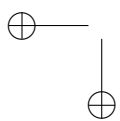


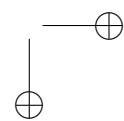
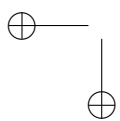
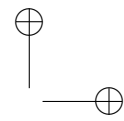
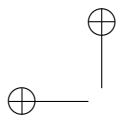
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**PORTRAITS**







## ASQUITH

### I

When I had finished Lord Oxford's *Memoirs and Reflections* I, too, began remembering and reflecting. . . .

I am back in the narrow white dining-room of The Wharf, with its two garden windows. Sunday luncheon is in progress; and, as is often the case in that room, there are more guests than you might think it could accommodate, and more talk in the air than you would expect even so many to produce. The atmospherics are terrific. Neighbour is not necessarily talking to neighbour, nor, except at brief intervals, is the conversation what is called "general," that is to say three or four people talking and the rest listening. The conversation resembles rather a sort of wild game of pool in which everybody is playing his or her stroke at the same time. One is trying to send a remark into the top corner pocket farthest from her, where at the same moment another player is attempting a close-up shot at his own end; while anecdotes and comments whizz backwards and forwards, cannoning and clashing as they cross the table. Sometimes a remark leaps right off it at somebody helping himself at the sideboard, who with back still turned, raises his voice to reply. And not only are half a dozen different discussions taking place simultaneously, but the guests are at different stages of the meal. Some have already reached





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coffee, others are not yet near the sweet; for everyone gets up and helps himself as he finishes a course. Now to get full enjoyment out of these surroundings it was necessary to acquire the knack of carrying on at least two conversations at once while lending an ear to a few others; not so difficult to acquire as perhaps your first visit might have led you to expect. On one such occasion I happened to be shouting about autobiography: “Yes, there are only three motives for writing it, though of course they may be mixed; St. Augustine’s, Casanova’s, Rousseau’s. A man may write his autobiography because he thinks he has found ‘The Way’ and wishes others to follow, or to tell us what a splendid time he has had and enjoy it again by describing it, or to show – well, that he was a much better fellow than the world supposed.” “I’m glad to hear you say that,” said a voice behind me. I turned my head; Mr. Asquith was cutting himself a slice of ham. “That,” he added, before carrying back his plate to his seat, is just what I’m now trying to do.”

I knew that he was at work on this book, *Memoirs and Reflections*, 1852–1927. So it was to be more personal than his *Fifty Years of Parliament*. Would it prove to be anything as unlike him as a piece of intimate self-justification? That it would be in the least like Rousseau’s *Confessions* was out of the question; but he might be going to tell us not only what he had thought, but what he had *felt*, during that long career in the course of which he had borne the heaviest responsibilities and later, without complaint, humiliations and gross misrepresentation. In the garden after luncheon, before the cars came round to whirl us in different directions, I asked myself these questions. I did not put them to him,





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for although he was not formidable, one felt reluctant to push past his reserve. This inhibition did not seem due so much to fear of being snubbed as to a natural unwillingness to drive so sensitive a man to an evasion which might be interpreted as a denial of his friendship. Reticent on any subject about which he had not already made up his mind, he was extremely reserved when it also touched him personally. He loved above all things the comfort of spontaneous communications; and that comfort is, as everybody knows, most easily obtained by keeping to the surface in talk. As a rule he did so.

## II

Now the book is in my hands. It is a remarkable one, for it reflects his mind and character but it is not a piece of self-portraiture. He tells us in it from time to time what he thought of his colleagues. Passages are even "indiscreet," and the book has faults which he deplored in the books of others. It was written hastily when he was tired; it is botched together. Part of it is hardly more than the rough material he would have used. He never saw it through the press. It had to be enlarged at the last moment to meet the exigencies of the market, and he had no time to weld together or mould the material then thrown in. We may however be thankful that financial pressure compelled him to write it; for it is doubtful if he would have written at all without that spur – and it is a remarkable book. Indirectly it is a self-revealing book. One caution, however, to those who are either about to read it, or having read it, have formed hasty impressions: except for very brief and intermittent periods he never kept a diary. The





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extracts embodying his passing comments on events as they occurred during the War, are mostly taken from letters written at the time. This accounts in many cases for their tone. When complete distraction was impossible, he would obtain some relief from anxiety by writing confidentially to someone about the lighter side of events, in a way which would at once amuse his correspondent and refresh the sense of intimacy between them. As is not unusual in the case of men actively engaged in momentous affairs whose habits of thought are markedly independent, that correspondent was always a woman. It was not counsel he sought, but comfort, communication and relief. It is noticeable that there is not a line in this book which expresses perplexity or hesitation; not a page in which we can watch him making up his mind. It has been always made up when he puts pen to paper. He explains his motives and reasons for having acted in such and such a manner, but we are given the results, not the processes of deliberation. This is profoundly characteristic of him; so is the absence from it of all mention of feelings, whether of elation, disappointment, disillusion, resentment or satisfaction. Yet that he was a man of feeling could not escape the notice of anyone who saw him from a short distance. It is chiefly to bring out these characteristics which everyone could perceive at close quarters, that I am now "reviewing" this book. Many who have discussed and described Lord Oxford have not seen his main characteristic.

In all the appreciations written after his death his "impersonal" attitude was made a subject of comment; but amid the praise lavished upon him there was a suggestion that his master faculties were perhaps, after all,







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those of the judge or possibly the historian or scholar. That he was extraordinarily impartial, that he was a scholar and would have made an admirable historian was clear to everyone, but that he was a scholar, or historian, pitchforked into active life is, I believe, an utterly false reading of him. I knew him during twelve years, and for a considerable part of them I was on terms of affectionate familiarity with him, though never on those of intimacy. This was at any rate sufficient to enable me to form a positive opinion about his nature, and my conclusion was that the cast of his intellect and imagination was essentially that of a man of action. Being of a literary turn of mind myself, it was perhaps easier for me to detect the essential difference. Literature also requires "detachment," but the sense of proportion in the man of action is different from that of the man of letters. In the born master of affairs imagination is neither "dreamful nor dramatic." His observation is a process of direct calculation and inference; he has not the habit "of enacting in himself other people's inward experience or dwelling on his own." Lord Oxford enjoyed the kind of talk which consists of drawing picturesque and psychological portraits of people, but when it came to practical affairs he took no interest in imaginative interpretations of character. I remember this being brought home to me when he asked me once to tell him about the Irish leaders. I had been acting as correspondent of *The Manchester Guardian* during part of the struggle between the Irish and the Black and Tans, and I began to describe the Irish leaders in a manner which I am quite sure, during dinner, would have won his attention. But in the middle of adding a deft touch or two to a character-portrait of



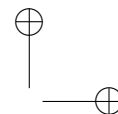
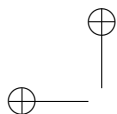


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Arthur Griffith, I looked up and saw on my host's face a look of unmistakable, not to say stern, boredom. He did not want anything of that kind. What he wanted to know was how Griffith, Michael Collins, and De Valera would probably behave if Ireland were offered Dominion Home Rule at once, and my opinion on that point with reasons for it. In action, and in the calculations necessary to concluding rightly with a view to action, personal emotions are mostly irrelevant. Men of action also often surprise us by the dryness and curtness of their comments. Their sayings may (*vide* the Duke of Wellington) often appear humorous in their seeming neglect of all aspects but one. This trait was very marked in Lord Oxford.

To brush aside what was insignificant and only to attend to the residue was an instinct in him. It may be illustrated by a story of his first meeting during his Paisley campaign, though the story also shows still more forcibly his attitude in the face of silly misrepresentation. There was only a very narrow Liberal majority and the election was a touch-and-go one. He had barely got a hearing for his speech; there was a strong Labour element in the audience, and interruptions had been fierce and frequent. When questions were reached one man asked him why he had murdered those working men at Featherstone in 1892. His instant answer was: "It was not in 'ninety-two, but 'ninety-three." A small inaccuracy was the only thing worth correcting in such a charge. And his reply to an American, who, at the end of a somewhat lengthy preamble explaining how interested he was at last to meet him, "after having heard President Wilson, Colonel House and your wife often talk about you" – "What did my wife say?" is





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decidedly in the vein of the Duke of Wellington. But more apposite examples can be found in this book. He wrote on August 2nd, 1914:

“Happily I am quite clear in my mind as to what is right and wrong. 1. We have no obligation of any kind either to France or Russia to give them military or naval help. 2. The dispatch of the Expeditionary Force to help France at this moment is out of the question, and would serve no object. 3. We must not forget the ties created by our long-standing and intimate friendship with France. 4. It is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power. 5. We cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base. 6. We have obligations to Belgium to prevent it being utilized and absorbed by Germany.”

Such an entry is not at first sight impressive, but examined it will be found to contain a complete summary of facts relevant to a possible decision. Note the word “happily” – decision in certain events would be justified.

During the Curragh row just before the war, I happened to be sitting one off him at dinner, and my neighbour was evidently anxious to make the most of her opportunities. She had never met him before. I heard her say, “Do you like being Prime Minister?” This question only elicited a dubious rumble.

“Don’t you enjoy having so much power?”

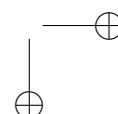
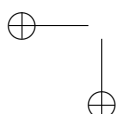
“Power, power? You may think you are going to get it, but you never do.”

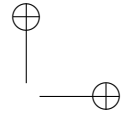
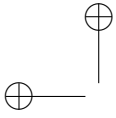
“Oh, then what is it you enjoy most in your work?”

“Well... perhaps – hitting nails on the head.”

### III

The more closely his career is examined in future, the more false the charge of “indecision” is likely to appear.

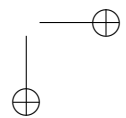
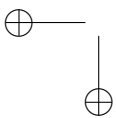




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On the contrary, as when he peremptorily prevented General French from retiring behind the Seine, though the General declared the army to be in hopeless difficulties, or when he dealt with the Curragh complication, he will be seen to have exhibited at critical moments rapidity of resolution; and, still more often, that rare instinct for “timing” a decisive action correctly so that it should occur at the most effective moment. That this involved sometimes delay incomprehensible to the public is of course true; but the art of statesmanship, and this is an important part of it, is incomprehensible to them.

His drawback as a leader during times of frenzied anxiety was a concomitant of his two strongest points: his immunity from the contagion of excitement, and his instinct to think things over by himself. There is a passage in one of his later letters in which he says there are three kinds of men: those who can think when they are by themselves – they are the salt of the earth; those who can only think when they are writing and talking; and those who cannot think at all – they of course are the majority. He was a man who did his thinking alone. To talk while he was still making up his mind was repugnant to him. In war, when the urgency of this or that measure is vividly brought home to those in immediate contact with one aspect of the situation, and everybody is seething with projects and suggestions, self-withdrawn composure is apt to be exasperating, and the habit of postponing discussion is apt to undermine confidence. Mr. Winston Churchill, in his article on Lord Oxford, gave an example of the surprise it was to find, after imagining that Lord Oxford had dismissed some urgent matter from his mind, that he had all the





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time thought it over and reached a conclusion upon it. Conversation did not help him, but when he met others in council they found that he was prepared.

I associate this characteristic in affairs with two others observable in his private life, his strong inclination to sidetrack avoidable emotional complications, and his reluctance to express opinions on any subject upon which he did not know his own mind completely. For instance, in his youth he had been much interested in philosophy, and he still possessed that respect for thought which only those who have drunk a fair draught at the springs of thought retain. Yet because he did not think his opinion on such points instructed, he was unwilling to discuss the Universe or the life of man in its widest aspects. He would show you by a remark or two that he was even more aware than most people who are eager to discuss such problems, of the general philosophical bearings of any particular theory, but he did not want to go into it. He had a great aversion from stuffing the blanks in his convictions with provisional thinking. It was the same in literature. He discussed readily only those aspects of it of which he felt he had a thorough comprehension. And since human beings are endless subjects for discussion, and each one a forest in which it is only too easy to lose one's way, though he would listen with pleasure and amusement to ingenious interpretations, you felt they were far from impressing him deeply. He liked gossip and the quasi-intellectual discussion of character, but he himself rarely contributed to such discussions anything but the most obvious common sense.

His reluctance, in private as well as public, to discuss what was not yet clear to him seems to me to be the





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manifestation of a fundamental characteristic – one which I personally admire more than any other – a perfect integrity of mind. The foundation of his character was the adamant of intellectual integrity. It made magnanimity natural to him for, as he himself might have quoted in this connexion, *Infirmi est animi exiguique voluptas Ultio* (Revenge is the joy of a sick or puny soul). It made it easy for him to put aside personal considerations when the interests either of the nation or his party were concerned. At such junctures the very soul of his honour was at stake, and I do not believe that the historian will discover one instance in his long career in which he risked it. (The shameful jettisoning of Haldane was not his work, but was forced upon him by the then inevitable Coalition.)

#### IV

I have spoken of his mind as, in my judgment, essentially that of a man of action. Such intellectual integrity is necessary to a man of action who can be trusted to be effective not merely once or twice, but continuously. Yet it also prevented him from touching some of those levers which circumstances may compel a man of action to pull. He could not make an unfair appeal. In the War he lost the confidence of the mob. The change from the Asquith to the Lloyd George régime was a change to an appeal to the subconscious and usually the baser side of it, both in the public and in those actively concerned in carrying on the War administratively. Asquith knew all about such appeals, but he could not bring himself to make them. He was out of touch, therefore, with what is instinctive and emotional in human nature, which is so much to





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the fore at such times. In private and in administrative life he shrank from using authority or personal appeal as a weapon to produce conviction, and it was acute pain to himself to speak words which might give pain. After he had indicated the reasonable course he could not bring himself to do more; it seemed to him, I expect, like an insult – a disloyalty – to use irrelevant means of persuasion – something certainly quite impossible in relations where affection or trust already existed. His opinion of human nature struck me as being neither high nor low. Where colleagues were concerned it might seem to have often been too high, in this sense, that he did not see that there was much difference between mediocrities; A was practically as good a man as B, though B was abler.

I was an “Asquith man” long before I knew him; and I remember, on his appointment to the Premiership, when the papers were discussing as his “one defect,” a lack of magnetism, that it was precisely that defect that attracted me. I have no confidence in the steady sagacity of the so-called magnetic. And when I came to know him, the absence of either magnetism or any desire to impress, grew beautiful to me.

As a member of the public, I felt he sought our solid advantage and not our ridiculous patronage; and as a friend, that there was in him that integrity of feeling and thought which is a permanent guarantee of right action.

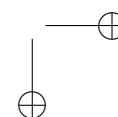
His talk was that of a man who had more faith in facts than theories, more interest in records than conjectures – unless those were fantastic, when he could be amused by the ingenuity and recklessness of other people’s opinions. I soon noticed that though he enjoyed cleverness, he never





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missed it in a companion whom he liked. He seemed to get more and more fond of people he was used to, and to suffer comparatively little from boredom, that common scourge of uncommon men. It did not matter to him if his friends were always the same. In fact, he seemed to like them to be so; just as he never got tired of either the books, or the places, or the jokes, or the anecdotes which had once pleased him. He was even like a child in the pleasure he took in having something "over again." This characteristic and the absolute self-sufficiency of his mind (not his heart) struck one. When he was bored, however, it appeared to be an unusually acute form of discomfort. Over the wine, after dinner, and under the spell of an unduly explanatory or pretentious talker, sounds which at first resembled considerate murmurs of assent, would gradually prolong themselves into unmistakable moans, terminating at last in a flurried gesture of hospitality and a sudden rise from the table. Complacent long-windedness or attempts to draw him out were apt to produce these symptoms. At dinner, when in danger of being thus submerged, he would catch eagerly at any lifebelt of a remark thrown him by one of his children. That he should have enjoyed Society, and frequented it so much during his life may seem incongruous in him, until we realize that he took it as a rest: amiable people, pretty women, bright lights, friendly festivity and remarks flying about which he could catch and reply to by employing an eighth of his intellect, afforded effective distraction. It was a refreshment. Henry James, coming back once from a luncheon party at Downing Street during the War, remarked on "the extraordinary, the admirable, the rigid intellectual economy" which the Prime Minister practised on such occasions.







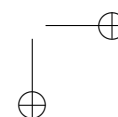
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### v

Lady Oxford, in her preface to *Memoirs and Reflections*, draws attention to an important fact which is not generally understood: he was an emotional man and a very sensitive one. Signs of that sensitiveness were his inability to ask for fairer treatment for himself, or to take any step to further the interests of his children. He could not bring himself to do such things. The strength of the emotional side of his nature is known to those he loved. He covered his humiliations with silence, both in public and private. But after his fall in 1916, though apparently bearing it with the greatest equanimity, the shock produced an attack which, for a few hours, was taken for paralysis: when his own followers did not take him at his word that it was impossible to work any longer with Mr. Lloyd George, the disappointment struck him down physically. Some time afterwards – I noted it, because it was a rare gleam of self-disclosure – he said, in dating some event: “Ah, that was while I was recovering from my wound.” And once I remember, after he lost his seat – the conversation had been about the difference between metaphor and comparisons – he said to me: “I will show you a *comparison* in poetry which moves me.” He took down a Coleridge and pointed to the lines

*Like an Arab old and blind  
Some caravan has left behind,*

and then rather hurriedly left the room. But despair, whether about himself or public affairs, was to him mere weak-mindedness. He never indulged in pessimism, there again showing one of the traits of the man of action.





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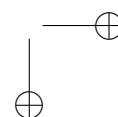
Whether or not he thought of himself as a great man I could never discover. He probably would have said the term was an exceedingly vague one, and he would certainly not have trusted the reports of introspection on such a point.

### VI

Before he had published any books, we knew from his speeches he wrote well. I was amused when the *Times* reviewer referred to aid “from the practised hand of Mr. Gosse,” as though Lord Oxford were not himself a practised and even voluminous writer. Many men’s writing is the spoken word on paper, merely titivated conversation. But he actually spoke the language of the pen. His oratory was a broad continuance of statement, reasoning and reflection, with no hazy, no preparatory interludes. What collected vigour of mind that famous concision required, can be measured best by those who often take ten minutes to knock two sentences into one. He drove a Roman toad through every subject.

I became his admirer many years ago, when I discovered in him a completely intelligible politician whose principles were generous and steadfast, whose judgment never seemed to fail him, who let the calm of the intellect into discussion, and never saw an enemy except the enemies of his country. It is much to claim for any leader; but his speeches bear it out.

His diction is plain yet ornate, very accurate, succinct yet full and rounded. As in all oratorical styles, heed is paid to a simple sonority and easiness of cadence. It is formal and traditional rather than personal. It reflects not passing moods, but habits of thought and feeling.





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The senses have contributed nothing to its vigour, which is intellectual; nor is it at all indebted to random meditations for richness – the laden camels of such dreaming moments have never brought to it their far-fetched consignments of spices and dyes. It aims at definition rather than suggestion. The emotions it expresses best are those of the intellectual or the moral life. Its most obvious merits are those of order, brevity, clearness and good manners. It is a mode of addressing us that takes for granted that we ourselves are not restless, tired, craving for sympathy or distraction; not unbuttoned, but on the contrary, well-pulled together and alert. It leaves the reader nothing to do but to understand, and when so many writers of talent “put deliberate fog on paper” that is refreshing. The pitfall of such a style is the too frequent use of clichés of good pedigree; its advantage that it almost automatically excludes trivial egotism and exterminates misrelated ingenuities.

## VII

Had he been a scholar or historian by profession he would have written books thorough and of trenchant classic economy; works which, like Sir Henry Maine’s, would have tempted even those not really interested in the subject to read on. In a scholar’s life (this is a deduction the reader of his *Occasional Addresses* cannot fail to draw) he would have found great satisfaction and content. When a peculiar fervour spreads through a passage, it is often one in which there a feeling is perceptible akin to homesickness for that world in which questions are not settled by votes or irrelevant adroitness, and where to be impartial is itself the condition of success. Of





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course the other side of the road in life generally looks the most attractive; but even allowing for the undue fascination which the careers of men of thought have for men of action, and vice versa, it would be a mistake, in the light of such passages, to read his references to the atmosphere of contention from which he emerges with relief to address his audiences upon such still-life subjects as Biography and Criticism, as merely the courteous phrases of an eminent man, intended for those who might be feeling, at the moment and in comparison, a little unenviable and dull. It is certain in the light of those passages that they are sincere. His Glasgow and Aberdeen Rectorial addresses are in the main panegyrics, defiant and triumphant, of Ancient Universities; that is to say, of the education which has classical literature for its main foundation, and philosophy as its apex. Here for once his enthusiasm is untempered. He scorns to defend that tradition as a means of training the memory or the taste. It is an end in itself – a life; and much depends upon its being enjoyed and remembered afterwards at its true value.

“For the moment you are here and can concentrate on the things of the mind, installed as you are in the citadel of knowledge. But after these student years are over, the lives of most of us are doomed to be immersed in matter. If the best gift which our University can give us is not to be slowly stifled, we must see to it that we keep the windows of the mind, and of the soul also, open to the light and the air.”

“For the moment,” he says to these young men, “you are here.”





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And he goes on to “compare the noble optimism which in spite of all disappointments and misgivings holds fast to the faith in what man can do for man,” and “the noble pessimism which turns in relief from the apparent futility of all such labour to a keener study and a fuller understanding of the works of God.” The peroration is fervid, idealistic and strong. The Aberdeen address closes upon the same theme. Both are fine specimens of that lofty and formal oratory into which, down the ages from Classic times, so much emotion, natural and histrionic, has poured. Indeed, I doubt if since Gladstone’s day you could find better. Yet quote them I cannot; so distasteful to me has all eloquence of an idealistic strain become since the war. And I cannot but believe that the feeling is shared by those readers to whom it is the critic’s chief pleasure to fancy he is showing what he has found; and that to quote such eloquence here would have the same effect as if I had promised you the sight of a beautiful living man, and then brought you to where he lay on a slab, waxy and yellowing and cold, with that grimace of meaningless energy so often seen upon the masks of the dead.

#### VIII

The sentence I have just written would have been condemned by Lord Oxford, apart from its general significance which would have been repellent to him. There is a comment upon De Quincey in his lecture on Criticism, which might make a good many critics when they write such sentences, uneasy. It runs as follows:

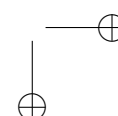
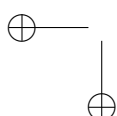




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“De Quincey, with all his powers, has in him more than a little of the literary coxcomb. Whatever may be the work of the author that for the time being occupies his pen, he never ceases to be self-conscious; he rarely fails to remind the reader of his own experiences, tastes, eruditions, accomplishments; and, whether he praises or blames, admires or disparages, you never feel that he has lost himself in the subject, but always that he wishes to interest you in the subject because it interests himself.”

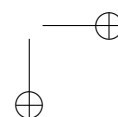
Yes, it is difficult for a critic not to believe sometimes that his own mind and his own feelings are more interesting to the reader than his subject, and on occasion it may even be true; but certainly if that is his constant persuasion he can be no critic, an essayist perhaps, but not a critic. This passage is also interesting, because it illustrates Lord Oxford's preference for the impersonal. I do not suppose he would have assented to the proposition that *le moi est haïssable*; but he would certainly have said that it was very apt to be trivial, and generally an impertinence in literature as well as in politics. I note that in his address on Biography (a lecture as light, by-the-by, as any dilettante could make it, and as solid as an essay by Leslie Stephen), the only writer to whom he is downright unsympathetic, is Rousseau. The qualities of his own style have their counterpart in his scale of values and the range of his interests, which shows that though his style is traditional it is also his very own. It was not a Roman toga put on for the sake of its seemliness and its air of dignified reserve, though the folds of it were arranged with a view to deliberate effect. It was his natural garb, and few other men could have worn it without looking as grotesque as the statue of Canning in Parliament Square.





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Lord Balfour's *Chapters of Autobiography* was begun two years before his death, when he was within a month or two of his eightieth birthday. Soon afterwards the first symptoms of his last illness appeared and he lost strength. He was forced to rest often, and after his resignation in May 1929 he led an invalid's life. His niece, Mrs. Edgar Dugdale, who edits these few chapters of a book planned on a large scale, says that at first he was unwilling to write his memoirs. He mistrusted his memory in personal matters. "In fact," he told her laughing, "I know far more about the history of my country than I do about my own." Also he mistrusted his power to describe what he did remember. He had no gift for description. You may search his writings in vain for a sentence, or even an adjective, which stimulates the ocular imagination. But he possessed what in the long run stands the memoirist in better stead, the power of clear, neat, conclusive statement. He became very much interested in writing his memoirs, and what he has written shows no trace of either the languor of illness or the garrulity of age. It has the finish and flowing ease of all his previous books. He was always extremely fastidious about the written word, giving everything he wrote the double polish: that which removes from the surface of style the roughness and inexactness of improvisation, and that which strives to obliterate traces of laborious care. In speaking he





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avoided rhetoric, for he could not learn by heart, but with his pen he could construct periods which in movement, balance and emphasis will stand comparison with the best rhetoric in the language. It was in moments of reflection, not of emotion, that the telling phrase came to him; thus excitement, though it never confused his argument, never enriched his vocabulary. He was not an orator; nor did he admire orators, who are apt to be men who by themselves are little and only in relation to their audience much. He could conduct on paper a long train of reasoning with elegant eloquence, and in controversy he had at command a deadly ironic urbanity. In fact, it is surprising that the excellence of his prose did not receive in his lifetime more enthusiastic recognition from other men of letters. He was one himself.

It is true that his style excelled in ways somewhat out of fashion. He always wrote considered literary prose, and, in his case, between emotion and its expression a strict standard of reserve invariably intervened. Though far from being detached from his theme he was detached from his readers, and he allowed them to be conscious of it. He made clear what it was that he thought important, and then emphasized and decorated the statement of it with every device at his command, but he never took his readers into his confidence regarding his own feelings. *The Foundations of Belief* and his *Gifford Lectures* convince us that he thought religion all-important to mankind, and religious faith to be the condition upon which all values depended; but there is nowhere in his writings an indication of what religion meant to him emotionally. Contrast him with Ruskin, in this respect, who held much the same views on the vital importance of reli-







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gion and also used eloquence to display the consequences of scepticism.

These opening chapters of autobiography throw no light on his inner life. In that they are characteristic of him. In society he was “an island surrounded by urbanity,” an urbanity with some tricky currents in it. He was certainly not one to invite, in print, the public to land. Even a casual observer could hardly fail to notice that he seemed to dislike and despise particularly two qualities in human nature, intrusiveness and cock-sureness. They alienated his sympathy which was otherwise at the disposal of many sorts and conditions of men. His irony, when unkind, was usually provoked by exhibitions of one of these characteristics. There is a story of a well-known journalist who had intended to astound the table by declaring that “Christianity and Journalism had been the two great curses of humanity,” but heard his effect destroyed by Arthur Balfour’s bland admission, “Christianity, of course, but why Journalism?” However, it is not necessary to use anecdotes to illustrate a trait which pervades that remarkable pamphlet, *Dr. Clifford on Religious Education*. Though this particular controversy is dead, that pamphlet remains a model of intellectual castigation only just below Newman’s reply to Kingsley. Indeed, the disparity between the disputants is so great, not only in intellectual power but in intellectual integrity, that the contest seems unfair to the reader. After presenting lucidly, and with apparent astonishment, the inconsistencies of the eminent Nonconformist divine, Mr. Balfour proceeded to examine his style: “We may easily forgive loose logic and erratic history: strong language about political opponents is too common to excite any-





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thing but a passing regret. . . . But,” he continued, “I have often wondered how a man of Dr. Clifford’s high character and position can sink to methods like these, and I am disposed to find the explanation in the fact that he is the unconscious victim of his own rhetoric. Whatever may have been the case originally, he is now the slave, not the master, of his style: and his style is unfortunately one which admits neither of measure nor of accuracy. Distortion and exaggeration are of its very essence. If he has to speak of our pending differences, acute no doubt, but not unprecedented, he must needs compare them to the great Civil War. If he has to describe a deputation of Nonconformist ministers presenting their case to the leader of the House of Commons, nothing less will serve him as a parallel than Luther’s appearance before the Diet of Worms. If he has to indicate that, as sometimes happens in the case of a deputation, the gentlemen composing it firmly believed in the strength of their own case, this cannot be done at a smaller rhetorical cost than by describing them as earnest men speaking in the austere tones of invincible conviction. . . . It would be unkind to require moderation or accuracy from anyone to whom such modes of expression have evidently become a second nature. Nor do I wish to judge Dr. Clifford harshly. He must surely occasionally find his method embarrassing, even to himself.”

Someone once said of Renan that he was “*le plus doux des hommes cruels*.” This would certainly not describe Lord Balfour; but if we were to turn such a comment round, and modifying it, call him the most merciless (on occasions) of moderate men, we would not, I think, be far out. To many, and also to me, this irreconcilable





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severity towards failings, which shocked his love of the amenities and of intellectual integrity, was, in a man without rancour or resentment, most attractive. It was in the first place a salutary protest against the influence of a faculty which, as things are, has too much power in the world – that of *intentionally* losing one's sense of proportion in order to further a cause. He is once reported to have said: "It is sad that enthusiasm should have more influence than anything else, for few enthusiasts tell the truth." He had the philosopher's respect for truth, but where proof was impossible, he was quite willing to employ sophistry on behalf of his own side. The first time I heard him speak in the House of Commons was in a debate upon a Housing Bill intended to remedy overcrowding. He pointed out that the Scottish crofters brought up large healthy families, a happy result which could not be due to diet or to house-room, for their children lived on porridge and in two-roomed cottages. What made them then healthier and stronger than town-children? Why, good air and an active country life! No Housing Bill could provide these conditions; ergo the proposed changes were of little importance.

What made him so fascinating to watch during his life, and will make him fascinating to posterity, is that he was a rare type of statesman. He was a politician doubled with a philosopher. As his autobiography shows, it was a toss-up whether he would devote himself to a life of thought, or politics. In his account of his Cambridge career he marks as decisive the accidental feature that he happened to be the last undergraduate admitted as a Fellow-Commoner, a position entailing the privilege of dining with the dons at the high table. He thus became





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the close friend of two young Fellows of Trinity, both of them destined to be his brother-in-law and to be eminent, Henry Sidgwick and John Strutt, afterwards Lord Rayleigh. Both the philosopher and the man of science had a strong influence upon his innate dispositions. It would have proved decisive had not there been another powerful factor in his life: he was the nephew of Lord Salisbury, for whom he felt an admiring devotion; and of whom he said in moving the vote of condolence in the House of Commons, “never did any man bring to the service of his country an intellect of greater distinction, and never did any man spend himself in that service with more singleminded and whole-hearted devotion.”

Although Arthur Balfour’s rare abilities were recognized by his elders and friends, and never seriously doubted by himself when he compared them with those of others (he was only modest in relation to the difficulty of the questions which interested him most), those abilities had never received the stamp of impartial recognition. His masters at Eton, his examiners at the University had not thought them remarkable. His choice of politics as a career was decided by his having nothing “to show” in proof of philosophical aptitude, although he had taken the Moral Science Tripos at Cambridge, and by the opportunity offered him of at once entering politics as Parliamentary Secretary to the future leader of the Conservative Party. But the life of thought never lost attraction or importance for him; and there were moments throughout his career when it was apparently with relief that he felt again beneath him the firm ground of abstraction. His speculative interests were, however, keenest at those points where philosophy influences men’s be-





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liefs most directly. In his boyhood the conflict between religion and science was at its height. Nearly all his philosophic writings can be included under three heads: those which defended, not so much particular beliefs, as *the right to believe*; those which applied scepticism to deductions drawn from science contrary to religion, and those which set forth the effects on human culture, in his judgment disastrous, of a mechanistic view of the Universe.

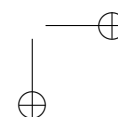
But it is necessary to refine upon the definition of Lord Balfour as a politician doubled with a philosopher, which would not distinguish him from such a politician as the late Lord Morley, for example, a man whom philosophy never ceased to interest. The mingling of philosophy and politics resulted, in Lord Balfour's case, in a different product. A third element intervened, the aristocratic tradition. It is characteristic of that tradition, with its background of personal security, to play the political game with professional concentration. The impression that Arthur Balfour was a political dilettante was created by his manner, his obvious indifference to dramatic effects and to popular, or indeed individual, applause, and by his impersonal calm. It was a false impression. That manner might suggest that he thought the matter before the House or the public was not of vital importance; but no one who watched him could fail to see that the word "academic" really applied more pertinently to such men as Morley, the philosophic publicist, or Bryce, the historian. It did not apply to Arthur Balfour. In politics he was uninfluenced by generalizations. All his manoeuvres, all his energies were directed to an immediately practical end. He threw off the robe of the philosopher, ornamental





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but impeding tatters of which hung about the shoulders of Lord Morley in the political arena, and put on his ruffles and rapier to fight for his side in the matter at issue. In spite of his contemplative outlook in private life and the vistas which opened to his thought, long enough to diminish the importance of present disputes, he had a decided preference for short views in politics. "The future of the race is thus encompassed with darkness," he said in his Rectorial Address on "Progress" at Glasgow. "No faculty of calculation that we possess, no instrument that we are likely to invent, will enable us to map out its course, or penetrate the secret of its destiny. It is easy, no doubt, to find in the clouds which obscure our path what shapes we please: to see in them the promise of some millennial paradise, or the threat of endless and unmeaning travel through waste and perilous places. But in such visions the wise man will put but little confidence: content, in a sober and cautious spirit, with a full consciousness of his feeble powers of foresight, and the narrow limits of his activity, to deal as they arise with the problems of his own generation." . . . "But I do not believe," he went on, "that these opinions are likely, either in reason or in fact, to weaken the springs of human effort. The best efforts of mankind have never been founded upon the belief in an assured progress towards a terrestrial millennium: if for no other reason because the belief itself is quite modern. Patriotism and public zeal have not in the past, and do not now, require any such aliment. True we do not know, as our fathers before us have not known, the hidden laws by which in any State the private virtues of its citizens, their love of knowledge, the energy and disinterestedness of





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their civic life, their reverence for the past, their caution, their capacity for safely working free institutions, may be maintained and fostered. But we *do* know that no State where these qualities have flourished has ever perished from internal decay; and we also know that it is within our power, each of us in his own sphere, to practise them ourselves, and to encourage them in others. As men of action, we want no more than this.” Change was inevitable, and the best safeguard through too rapid change was to preserve the flexibility of our political customs and institutions. This was his constant policy.

It was all the easier for him not to allow his practical decisions to be influenced by deeper reflections, because these, in his case, led him to conclude that the future of civilization depended far more upon science and developments in technology than upon politics – certainly domestic politics. The great sweeping course of change will bring about what it will; meanwhile let us preserve for the moment those elements in the present which seem to us undoubtedly desirable, even though we cannot pretend to be entirely disinterested in our preferences. Some such feeling, or conviction, I surmise, supported his serenity when issues he cared for were lost, and underpinned his Conservatism. This would account too, in a measure, for another contrast between the politician and the philosopher in him. The word “academic” certainly never applied to his interest in politics or to his career; but it was a charge continually brought, with more justice, against his arguments in debate. His skill in dialectics was wonderful, and he seemed to relish the exercise of it more than anything else in public life. One of his favourite devices was to brush aside probabilities





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on which his adversary's case rested as being too vague, and then go on to expose any logical contradictions in his argument. Yet, as a philosopher his procedure was exactly the reverse. He tended to defend an attitude towards experience not very unlike that suggested by Newman's "illative sense" or Pascal's "*esprit de finesse*," that is to say, the kind of probability which is "the guide of life," and to dwell on the limitations of logic.

In private life he exercised a fascination which was famous, and made others extremely anxious to win his affection and regard. Some, no doubt, could be certain they had done so and rejoice in the possession of them; but others who would, where another man was concerned, have been confident that they possessed both, in his case sometimes felt uncertain. What he was to them they knew; what they were to him seemed indefinite. He possessed that graceful and endearing attribute *politesse du coeur* in such perfection that it was hard, for all but a few, to tell where courtesy ended and heart began. His memoirs are those of a man who disliked and distrusted introspection. "I am more or less happy," he once said, "when being praised; not very uncomfortable when being abused, but I have moments of uneasiness when being explained." In the irony of this placidly truthful confession there is something daunting to anyone who would attempt to expound him. It is not the confession of one who fears to be unveiled, but the irony of one who knows what clever misconceptions are likely to be proclaimed as discoveries. As in the case of some other men of subtle intellect, his feelings were probably a great deal simpler than people found it easy to believe.







## WILFRID BLUNT

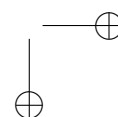
“Time is a feathered thing.” Thus, if I wrote my memoirs, I would begin them; but I shall never write them.

*Whilst we do speak our fire  
Doth into ice expire,  
Flames into frost.*

I prefer to talk them or dream them; and I shall dream them best some night, when the streets are silent and empty, when, with a sack over my shoulders, I am staring into a perforated pail of glowing coke, guarding tools till morning:

*What has my youth been that I love it thus,  
Sad youth, to all but one grown tedious,  
Stale as the news which last week wearied us,  
Or a tired actor’s tale told to an empty house?*

As I murmur that quatrain I shall remember the old man who wrote it; a very handsome vain old man, with a spreading beard and eagle nose, and a voice sinisterly soft, whom I used sometimes to watch when talk had stopped, nid-nodding in Arab robes beside a pile of smouldering branches in the wide fire-place of a small stone-paved panelled hall. It was full of things kept for their associations, with a litter of rare books upon its tables. It seems an ambiguous compliment, but I enjoyed my host’s slumbers as much as his conversation; for then

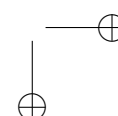
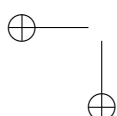




## PORTRAITS

I could look about me. All the objects which surrounded him roused a romantic curiosity: the obsolete long gun above the mantelpiece; the portrait of the poet painted by himself at the age of fourteen (quite a remarkable picture); the beaded camel-charms, ostrich eggs, blazing blue butterflies, bunches of immortelles; the Botticelli tapestry as fresh in colour as when it came off William Morris's looms; that white marble hand, too (From what woman was it modelled? Why was it there?); the freakish and fastidious collection of books; and last, but not least, the magnificent romantic sheikh himself, asleep, beard on breast, in his chair opposite me. He was vain but what is rare in the vain, extremely dignified; theatrical, but with far more taste and discretion than Byron.

Wilfrid Blunt's home, and his improvised surroundings wherever he went, were expressive of himself; the house and every room in it had a fascination for me. I love a dead man's garden; and the little garden at the back, growing more vegetables than flowers pleased me well, with its untrimmed cypresses round the sun-dial, "candle-flames shedding darkness instead of light," its overgrown box-hedges and black mossy paths, down which peacocks trailed. To one side the house looked out over a farmyard such as might have been attached to the palace of the Sleeping Princess: only the pigeons there, strutting and fluttering suggested life, everything else idle as a plough at the furrow's end. In front, beyond the high yew hedges, lay an orchard planted for the eye's delight each spring. Everything indeed about the house was there to please the eye, and through the eye to rouse a pensive wonder. Everything was designed by one who knew that Time is an artist, and knew the secret of creating beauty –





WILFRID BLUNT

choose well, then let alone. But this house and all about it was also clearly the creation of one who felt that Time, though the creator of visible dignity and sweetness, was also the enemy, one so implacable and irresistible that dignity lay in admitting that the past has more meaning than the present, so soon to be devoured.

*I long have had a quarrel set with Time  
Because he robbed me. Every day of life  
Was wrested from me after bitter strife,  
I never yet could see the sun go down  
But I was angry in my heart, nor hear  
The leaves fall in the wind without a tear  
Over the dying summer. I have known  
No truce with Time nor Time's accomplice, Death,  
The fair world is the witness of a crime  
Repeated every hour. For life and breath  
Are sweet to all who live; and bitterly  
The voices of these robbers of the heath  
Sound in each ear and chill the passer-by.  
What have we done to thee, thou monstrous Time?  
What have we done to Death that we must die?*

He doubted if he would be remembered as a poet, for he did not think his work had made enough impression on his contemporaries to last. That is not however a sure sign that a poet will be forgotten, any more than having made an impression on his contemporaries is a sign that he will be remembered. Still, to make such an impression is usually the entrance examination to fame, and I think Blunt may be said to have passed it. His work was more enjoyed than discussed.

In 1898 Henley and George Wyndham selected a volume from his verse. In the preface Henley wrote, "He has put more of himself and his sole experience into his verse





#### PORTRAITS

than any writer of his time. More: he writes throughout as one in and of a certain *monde*, as a man about town, a *viveur* (the term is used in no illiberal sense), a country gentleman who is also a person in society; so that his poetry has a savour and an impulse which make it a thing apart in modern verse. He comes, in fact, through Owen Meredith, straight from the Byron of *Don Juan*, and to my mind he is far and away the strongest, the most personal and the most persuasive of the whole descent. No more than the others – no more than Byron even – does he present a purely literary interest. True it is that his vocabulary – copious, expressive, ever sufficient, charged with enough spirit and colour – is that of one who has read his Shakespeare and his Bible and his *Juan*, and in reading has learned – what some greater poets but worse masters of English have not – that any word is good enough so long as it is the one word wanted. True it is, too, that he writes verse as his mother-tongue: with ease, with power, with a capacity for arresting the attention which, of the whole descent, none since Byron save himself has shown. His poetry, in fact, is poetry in the good sense of the word to me.” Henley himself was a lover of life and an imperfect artist, though a most genuine poet; he was naturally prepossessed in favour of Wilfrid Blunt’s poetry. That poetry is not the kind which those who love most the poetry of Art will ever rate very high; it is easy and diffuse, not tightly knit. It is graceful, vivid, seldom magical; the charm of it lies in its close relation to spontaneous emotion, and the ease with which that moment of emotion finds expression in fluent, dignified English. So it happens that without committing his verses to memory as treasures





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of expression, lines that he has written recur to one as the simplest expression of some thought or sentiment:

*There is no pleasure in the world so sweet  
As, being wise, to fall at folly's feet.*

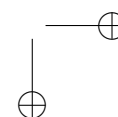
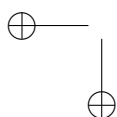
These lines in the poem of Esther are a dramatic climax, but they also express in simplest words a mood not uncommon in lovers. I have forgotten the sonnet "Meeting" in *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, but I remember the end of it:

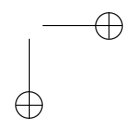
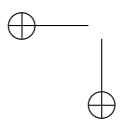
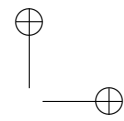
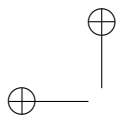
*... stood listening to me thus  
With heaving bosom. There a rose lay curled.  
It was the reddest rose in all the world.*

Then there is the Hunting sonnet: "To-day, all day, I rode upon the down":

*I knew that Spring was come. I knew it even  
Better than all by this, that through my chase  
In bush and stone and hill and sea and heaven  
I seemed to see and follow still your face.  
Your face my quarry was. For it I rode,  
My horse a thing of wings, myself a god.*

Those who value poetry as a medium for the expression of life will not forget the poems of Wilfrid Blunt.







## OSCAR BROWNING

When a man of any mark dies there is not a paper up and down the country which does not sprout an obituary notice. The next day he is not mentioned: henceforth silence. This sudden cessation of comment always strikes me as a little heartless. "To live in Settle's numbers one day more?" Yes, but why only one day? Why not five or six? It would seem more respectful to suppose that it was not only on the day after his death that the world wished to hear of a remarkable man. Thus when I happen to have any memories of my own to add to such little necrologies, eulogies, biographies, I prefer to keep them back awhile till they are decently, or from a journalistic point of view indecently, out of date.

Oscar Browning has been dead a few weeks. It is unlikely that you will see his name in any paper again. This then, for me, is the moment to write about him; and, if I guess right, those who knew him will not be sorry to be reminded of him once more.

On the whole the notices of "O.B." were adequate. They were a trifle patronizing and that was inevitable. In his presence, however, there was no temptation to patronize him; you ran rather some danger, whoever you were, of being patronized yourself. But behind his back people perked up again; for in his florid effusiveness, inaccuracy and unblushing kindly self-importance he was vulnerable to laughter, and to the derogatory criticism





#### PORTRAITS

of those who walk discreetly “like a cat upon a wall.” Indeed, there was something absurd in the self-satisfied roll of his gait through life; the imprudent protuberances, so to speak, of his personality collected stories upon them as naturally as those of a large boulder gather moss. Some of these were of his own sowing, but he got small credit for the jokes he made against himself. It is, by the bye, always dangerous to make jokes about yourself, for the humourless are sure to repeat them as examples of your astonishing lack of self-awareness, while the malicious fling them back at you as stones. Still, no generous-minded man can renounce the temptation, and “O.B.,” in spite of the dense rich egotism which exhaled from him, was a most generous-minded man. Often has his answer, on being asked how he had liked the German Emperor, to whom he had just been presented, “The nicest Emperor I ever met,” been repeated to me as an example of his unconscious snobbery! They forgot “O.B.” was a witty man. Unfortunately I cannot give examples here of his wit at its best, for at its best it was Rabelaisian.

He liked royalties and important noblemen, and he went out of his way to put himself in theirs. He liked to correspond with a princess. If he were staying in the South of France, he liked to leave a card at the hotel of a roving archduke. It gave him enormous pleasure when one of his old pupils became Viceroy of India and invited him. If he were visiting some foreign city where a famous scholar or historian lived, he would make the most of his own claims in those respects in order to get acquainted. These tastes roused a degree of contemptuous irritation in the breasts of some of his fellow Dons at Cambridge,







OSCAR BROWNING

and in others among his wide acquaintance, which, for my part, I could never understand. A little banter might perhaps have met the case, but why rancour? Why moral indignation? My observation of human nature has led me to the conclusion that people born with this foible had better perhaps let it come out all over them like a rash. It then does little harm to their natural affections or their instinctive judgment of worth in others. For one person I have met spoiled by snobbery, I should think I have met ten damaged by it in an inverted or cryptic form. It did no harm to "O.B."

It was not his books that made him a man of mark, but his rare turn for educating youth. I am not referring to the work he did for the History School at Cambridge; that was important, but I know nothing about it. I shirked his lectures myself, partly because with characteristic candour he allowed me into his back-kitchen where they were concocting. It was soon settled between us over biscuits and a bottle of Chablis that his own lectures were "excused." Yet in common with many I owe him something not unimportant. He gave me the first jog that shook the prejudices of a Public School Boy out of me, and started disintegrating in me the identification of "good" with "good form." Somehow, too, he conveyed to me that the orchard of knowledge need not be explored on tip-toe, but that I, just in virtue of being young, possessed a certain blessed agility which might enable me to scramble up a tree or two and shake down appreciable fruit.

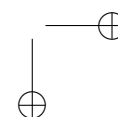
"O.B.'s" at homes (Sunday evenings) were amazing affairs, and the first one I attended, soon after coming up, was something of a shock to me, age seventeen. En-





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tering, I caught straight in the face a blast of native air from off the heights of Intellectual Bohemia, a country of which I was to become a denizen. I sniffed; I did not like it. It made me cough, a cough of bewildered decorum. Imagine two large rooms lined nearly to the ceiling with dusky undusted books (there must have been about ten thousand of them), and with a little bedroom beyond, of which guests were equally free; big tables with a school-feast litter of cups and cake on them, syphons, whisky bottles, glasses, urns, jugs of lemonade; the air blue with tobacco smoke; a great hum of conversation – though quite a number of men were standing about not talking to anyone. Such an aquarium of strange people I had never yet seen. In one corner a man, whom I recognized as a famous metaphysician, was being badgered by a couple of undergraduates, “What did he, what could anyone mean by the Unity of Apperception?” (For a second a look of considerate perplexity would appear on his face; then an answer would spurt, ripple for a second with disconcerting rapidity, and as disconcertingly stop.) In an armchair an elderly peer, who had evidently enjoyed the College wine in the Common Room, was slowly expounding politics, with the help of a cigar, to a circle of squatting young men; by the piano in the further room three or four others were in excited dispute, dashing fingers at an open score and shoving each other away to crash chords in turn; standing by the fire a Tommy in scarlet uniform was shaking into the flames the spittle from the clarinet he had just ceased playing; here and there, seated on the floor, were pairs of friends conversing earnestly in low tones, as oblivious as lovers of their surroundings. If mine bewildered me,



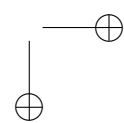
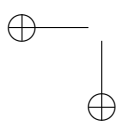
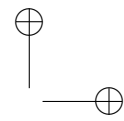
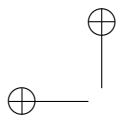


OSCAR BROWNING

my host astounded me: a very short, globular old man with an enormous yellow bald head and a broken coronal of black, unpleasant curls, came rolling towards me as though the cup of his happiness was at last full. I was led with many pats and smiles up to a youth shrinking with shyness, who turned out to be a shorthand writer, a non-Collegiate student, one of "O.B.'s" numerous beneficiaries. With an affectionate hand on the shoulder of each of us, and bringing us almost nose to nose, he seemed to be performing a sort of marriage ceremony; then with the confident assertion that two such charming people must like each other, he rolled off into the next room, throwing as he went a rapid Spanish sentence at a professor from Madrid, who remained for the rest of the evening sadly stunted of conversation. Presently the piano began in the room beyond, and we went in to watch our host trolling out *Voi che sapete* with immense gusto. At the close of his performance the clarinet-player gave him a spanking, which I thought a most undignified incident.

When Henry Sidgwick, who was a very different kind of man, knew that he had to die, "O.B." was one of the first friends he asked for. I do not think that they had seen much of each other, or had got on very well for a good many years; but both had spent much time doing what they could for the young. It was a corroboration of what all felt in intimacy with "O.B.," once they had got over his egotism, that in his slovenly way he had wisdom and understanding, and that he lived for what is, after all, the heart of a University, "learning, laughter, and the love of friends."







## BUNYAN

We can find no better example of the difference between poetry and prose than that which *The Pilgrim's Progress* and its introduction afford. The book itself is written in prose, and yet it is poetry; the introduction is in verse, and yet it is prose. Those words, or words like them, occur in Samuel Butler's *Note Books*. He has expressed there, too, I remember, certain conflicting feelings which resembled my own when, not long ago, I was reading Bunyan: a profound admiration for Bunyan himself as he is revealed in every line he wrote, coupled with aversion from the opinions which he held most sacred.

Take his extraordinary terror of Hell. Apart from the magnificence as a spectacle of such a struggle with frenzied fear in any human being, is there not also something ignoble in it? What a hideous and primitive conception of creation and its Creator forms the dark background for the glorious bonfire of zeal and courage at which I had just been warming myself! How could Bunyan have ever allowed himself to beget children in a world where the chances of eternal damnation were so overwhelming? "Hell would be a kind of Paradise if it were no worse than the worst of this world," he said on his death-bed (and Bunyan knew well the cruel side of the world). "In a word, who knows the power of God's wrath, the weight of sin, the torments of hell, and the length of eternity?" Following this train of reflection I recalled those denuncia-





#### PORTRAITS

tions in *The Pilgrim's Progress* at which Christian might well have cried out with Habakkuk, "When I heard, my belly trembled, rottenness entered my bones"; I recalled, too, how we are reminded by the fate of poor Ignorance, who, of all the characters in the allegory, seemed most to resemble myself, that "there is a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven"; and, finally, I remembered the last words of all, so charged with unconscious irony, "I awoke, and behold it was a Dream."

Yes, a dream; the harps and crowns of gold as well, and the jasper walls, and the shining but very small army of saints who, as judges and victors, were in the end to see to it that the million-million remnant of mankind were to be tortured for ever. Many blasphemies, too, against the natural good this beautiful stirring book contained.

How strangely the mind of Mansoul works! Suddenly, he discovers that what have been to him vivid realities a while before, are after all only "dreams." For instance, towards the end of Bunyan's life Mansoul found it hard to believe any longer in witches. The evidence in favour of witchcraft was as strong as ever, but it now required quite as vigorous an effort on his part to believe in witchcraft as it had needed before to be sceptical about it; so he burnt no more old women in self-protection. About a hundred and fifty years later the same thing happened, somewhere round about the eighteen-'sixties, with regard to Hell. Lord Westbury, when he dismissed Hell with costs, did not, as has been said, "deprive mankind of their hope of eternal damnation," for that judgment of the Privy Council, like Mill's outburst in defiance of a Deity who had invented Hell, was only a symptom of a change which had already taken place in Mansoul.





BUNYAN

Pondering these things (for all criticism with me is the product of a circling, wool-gathering process), and alongside of them the question how far the great works of the past are only beautiful empty shells, once inhabited by live convictions, I fell into an uneasy doze. Did it, or did it not matter, I kept asking myself, that while my aesthetic sense, which is the organ of the spontaneous or divine-natural life in me, responded to the superb poetry of this book, my moral sense and my intellect should so peremptorily reject the spirit which informed and created it? Were they not one, the book and the man who wrote it; the beauty and the intention? Beside the man himself I felt so small. He was one who had understood the heroic life (how right Shaw had been on that point!) far better than Shakespeare. He had trembled under the threat of hanging only for fear lest he might betray trepidation: "this therefore lay with great trouble upon me that I should make a scrabbling shift to climb up the ladder, for methought I was ashamed to die with a pale face and tottering knees for such a cause as this." Was not the force of those words, which also delighted me, inseparable from convictions I rejected? Could I thus skim off the beauty and ignore the substance?

I must have nodded off completely, for it seemed I was suddenly woken by a harsh voice saying: "I wrote not for such as you; a jeweller, when he makes a golden ring, thinks not of the sow's snout." And, as happens in dreams, I found myself in another place.

I was standing in the town of Bedford, in Silver Street, where the cinema is now; only the street was called Gaol Lane; and the building opposite was a one-storied house with iron-barred windows and a massive door. The upper





#### PORTRAITS

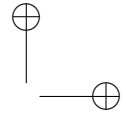
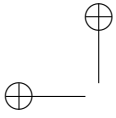
floor was for debtors, the ground floor for felons, and there were two dungeons underground, one of which was totally dark. All this I did not see, but knew, probably from having read John Howard's *State of the Prisons in England and Wales*. Then, without experiencing any transition, I found myself in the backyard of the gaol, where a powerful, large-boned man with a high forehead and greying reddish hair and moustaches sat at a bench absorbed in some kind of cobbling, with an open Bible before him. He did not seem surprised to see me. Perhaps he did not see me, for he had other visitors. One of the chickens pecking about the yard went to a trough to drink, and in doing so, after the manner of birds lifted up her head and eyes. "See," said the man to a small child he was holding with one arm to his side – and though the voice was now tender I knew it for the same that had wakened me – "See, what this little chick doth, and learn of her to acknowledge whence your mercies come, by receiving them with looking up." I noticed then that his face was both full and haggard; well ploughed by time and cast in lines of great resolution, and that his small grey eyes were lit and fixed like those of one who has drunk wine. The moment those eyes gazed into mine we seemed alone together; and I, as happens in a dream, without ceasing to be myself, became also someone whom I was observing.

BUNYAN: So, neighbour Turnback, do you still dwell in the City of Destruction?

THE DREAMER: Nay, I have left it for a place unmarked upon your Pilgrim's chart, and it is upon this and like matters that I wish to speak to you.







#### BUNYAN

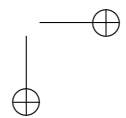
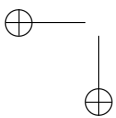
BUNYAN: I once met your brother Pliable in the streets, but he leered away on the other side, as one ashamed of what he had done; so I spake not to him. Do you come unashamed?

THE DREAMER: Yes, and I come to tell you why. Before I even reached the Strait Gate I met with one more dangerous to Pilgrims than all the Wicked Men, Giants, Chained Lions against whom you have prepared them; yes, more dangerous than either the Flatterer, or even Apollyon himself. Christian, at the beginning of his journey, had the good luck to meet only Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, who is the bastard brother of him whom I encountered and is far less formidable.

BUNYAN: And who was this powerful tempter who lured thee from The Way?

THE DREAMER: His name is Mr. Common Sense. He lives at a place not far from the Town of Sincere, whence, as you have candidly told us, came also the pilgrim Little Faith. Now, like the man whom Christian saw set down his name in the book, this Common Sense is also a big fellow of "very stout countenance." But trembling, chilled and muddy as I was from the Slough of Despond, it was not his strength that warmed my confidence towards him, but rather a nourishing calm and cheerfulness which I noted in him. And as we went on our way to his house, he told me he never respected Christian so much as when he refrained from trying to pass the Lions until he heard they were chained; at which recollection he laughed heartily.

I must tell you also, he had with him two very comely daughters.





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BUNYAN: And their names, I warrant, are Wanton and Lightness.

THE DREAMER: No, the prettier of them is called Euphrosyne, and though my delight in the other was not so great, I never grew tired of her company either. She is called Goodnature. When we were arrived at their house, they set me down in a deep chair called Self-possession, while a brisk young manservant named Practical did remove my wet rags and broken boots. Now the hall of the house is warmed by a huge fire over which is carved in stone the word “Laughter,” and in this hall many people come and go, each intent and undisturbed upon his or her own business. The daughters of my Host did then bring me a plain wholesome dish prepared by Good-Taste and flavoured *cum grano salis*. This they set at my elbow together with a flagon of wine labelled Cordial. And when I was refreshed, they led me to a room that none could enter without my leave, where through the window of Health, across the plough lands and orchards, I could gaze upon the blue line of the Delectable Mountains; and these heights, my host told me, were even more beautiful at a distance than near at hand. Now I must tell you that this House is situated near to The City of Good Confidence which is marked on your map; nor is it very far from the Silver Mine down which Christian nearly fell, nor from the Booths of Vanity Fair. The road which leads to both these places is called Experience, and though we never stay long in Vanity Fair, we visit it; for there are many excellent trifles to be purchased of those booths.





BUNYAN

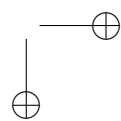
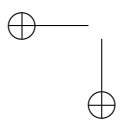
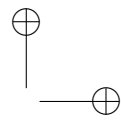
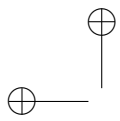
On hearing these words, the man at the bench seemed for a moment to be bowed in thought, then he struck the Book and seizing the Dreamer by the shoulder spun him round, "Where," he roared, "is thy Burden?"

"My Burden?" replied the Dreamer, "Why, I left it at this very House I have described. Mr. Common Sense bade me leave it in my room and sometimes look over its contents in private; for this, he said, would keep me from censoriousness and spiritual pride. But to carry it about with me only made, he said, a hunch-back of me. He showed me also that many sins in it were small and could well be thrown away. Had Christian displayed the contents of his Burden before him, he would have surely found that the use of bad language, dancing on the green, ringing church bells and playing tip-cat no longer weighed him down."

Now I saw in my dream that at these words the countenance of the man at the bench had changed. Rising from his stool, he lifted up a face radiant with an agony I could not understand, and he cried, "No sin against God can be little, because it is against the great God of Heaven and Earth; but if the sinner can find out a little God, it may be easy to find out little sins."

And with the thunder of these words in my ear I awoke.

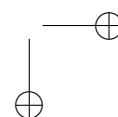






## SIR RICHARD BURTON

The chief authority on the life and works of Sir Richard Burton is Mr. Norman M. Penzer, F.R.G.S., who published in 1923 an annotated bibliography, and a year later selected papers from Burton's contributions to learned societies and other magazines. Burton was one of the remarkable personalities of his time, and Elizabeth, not Victoria, should have been his Queen. But he has been unfortunate in his biographers. His wife wrote a long two-volume account of him in which there was no sense of proportion; it was written from a personal point of view. In a book of 1,200 pages she devoted eleven to his Pilgrimage to Mecca and twenty-six to his journey to Harar, and these were two of the most important of Burton's journeys. His niece, Miss Stisted, wrote to correct what she thought misleading statements in that book, and Mr. Thomas Wright in 1906 published two unsatisfactory volumes in which he devoted much space to showing Burton's great indebtedness to Payne in his translation of the *Arabian Nights*. There was also an earlier biography written in 1887, by Francis Hitcham, of which I know nothing; but it is, according to Mr. Penzer, more adequate, in spite of some inaccuracies. In short, the life of Sir Richard Burton, who combined with such furious energy the pursuits of a scholar, anthropologist and explorer, is an extraordinarily difficult biography to write without making mistakes. It is on Mr. Penzer





## PORTRAITS

himself should devolve the honour of writing *the* life of Sir Richard Burton. It would be a fine lasting book.

In a fragment of autobiography which is one of the few lively pieces of writing from Burton's pen, he says that as a little boy he used to ask himself in front of forbidden fruit, "Do I dare to eat it?" Then, when he had settled the question in the affirmative, he immediately ate it. The attraction that Burton exercised throughout life was the spell that audacity exercises upon others. He was violent, explosive and romantic, but his emotional explosions were not empty detonations; they drove him onwards with the directness of a projectile. He lived for adventure, and he pursued his ends with determination. Nothing could stop him. Fevers, wounds, starvation, disappointments were part of the glory of achievement; slights, slanders, poverty, and neglect made him roar and curse, but never daunted him. He took "Honour not Honours," as his motto. He grabbed at the gear of the world whenever he could, but he never sacrificed a genuine interest for the sake of getting his hands on it. The money he got for his anthropologically-annotated *Arabian Nights*, however, did more than old age to mellow his defiant attitude towards the world. He and his wife had been once reduced to a last £15. He had been always full of schemes for rehabilitating his battered fortunes; at one time it was the colonization of the Gold Coast, where, to use his own words, "he discovered several gold mines"; at another time it was the exploitation of sulphur in Iceland; at another it was the discovery of ancient gold and turquoise mines in Midian, and once it was a patent pick-me-up for the liverish. All these ventures, except the last – and from that, too, doubtless he drew some of





SIR RICHARD BURTON

the stuff of romance, which his own energy breathed into everything he undertook – brought him the excitement and experience his nature craved. The ship of his hopes always started under full canvas; she never brought her treasure home, but the navigator had had his brush with the elements and his gamble with fate. He would return still restless, still unremunerated, but consoled.

At last he found his Eldorado. He found it in the exercise of a peculiar intellectual curiosity. He was an anthropologist by instinct, and ever since his early years in India he had been fascinated by the customs of sexual religion and the various and devious ways in which the sex instinct may manifest itself. This had blackened his reputation with the military authorities. He went on accumulating an enormous mass of curious observations and facts in the course of his subsequent Eastern travels, and during the time he was consul at Trieste these stores of information became a source of considerable profit to him. He poured them out in the notes to his translation of the *Arabian Nights* and to various erotic Eastern books produced by the Kama Shastra Society. These like his *Arabian Nights* sold at high prices to subscribers. Burton himself was convinced that his information was of the highest importance to the study of anthropology.

His conversation at times was garnished with such facts, and he had in younger years, at any rate, quite an abnormal relish for shocking the squeamish and defying the respectable. He would boast, “I’m proud to say I have broken every Commandment in the Decalogue.” You or I, reader, might say such a thing (probably with approximate truth) without producing much effect. But when such statements came from a man (look at his





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portrait by Leighton in the National Portrait Gallery!) in whose dark, savagely-scarred face, truculent jaw, thick chest and smoky-bright eye could be felt the force of a tempestuous vitality, they were believed; especially when followed by a laugh of a peculiar shrill ringing quality, not unlike the chirrup of a pebble skimming and hopping over a frozen pond; a laugh disquietingly incongruous from a huge fort of a man. To women he was courteous, with the kind of elaborate consideration which we describe as old-fashioned, but he could also be ominous. “What are your intentions, Captain Burton?” a match-making mother once asked him; “Entirely dishonourable, Madam, entirely dishonourable.”

Next to the spell which his audacity threw over those who met him, his most fascinating characteristic was the restless activity of his brain. It did not wink and go out like a crazy lighthouse, as is the case with most of us. His translations of Camoens (his favourite poet) and Catullus were the work of odd moments during many years. There is a story of some late guest at a London evening party stumbling across Burton on the stairs, at work upon the Portuguese poet. It is not difficult to realize the fascination which so much mental energy exercised in the person of a man who also appealed to the imagination as the most daring adventurer of his time. What power of attracting others lay behind his ferocious exterior, and a voice and carriage that made the timid feel insignificant, there are many stories to show. Affection often seems more precious when it shows behind violence and brutal outspokenness. Even if there was nothing god-like about Burton it is not difficult to understand







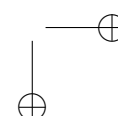
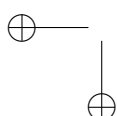
SIR RICHARD BURTON

how Swinburne could have written after the death of his friend,

*He rode life's lists as a god might ride.*

Burton wrote more than fifty volumes; he excelled the sedentary in concentration, but never did so energetic and romantic a personality produce so much heavy reading. The truth is, Burton had a good deal of the pedant in him. The bent of mind, which helped to make him a wonderful linguist and a collector of Eastern dialects, made him also delight in the headlong accumulation of facts. Pedantry, though its results are so prosaic, is often itself the result of a romantic temperament. The energy and interest with which Burton sat down to give an account of a journey was equal to that of an imaginative writer on the scent of a story; only that energy went in the direction of accumulation and rapidity, not of construction and vivid writing. He is at his best in the *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, in a series of lectures published under the title of *Wanderings in Three Continents*, and in the papers edited by Mr. Norman Penzer. As a rule the shorter the space he allowed himself the better he wrote.

One of his books I mean to get, "*Wit and Wisdom from West Africa*: a collection of 2,859 Proverbs, being an attempt to make Africans delineate themselves." His translation of Catullus is not good; the interest of it lies in the notes on the passages which are usually not translated at all. His thoughts were not original and he was no poet:





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*Do what thy manhood bids thee do, from none but self expect  
applause,  
He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes and keeps his  
self-made laws –*

are specimens of the few lines among the many he wrote, which have the ring and vigour of his own personality in them. Those lines were written out of himself. He tried a good many religions; Sufism, Roman Catholicism, Mohammedanism, Agnosticism seemed in turn to him to be the best attitude towards the world. To the last two he was on the whole most constant. He combined scepticism with superstition. He threw out of his pockets the little relics and Catholic charms his wife used to drop perpetually into them, but he liked to keep horse chestnuts in little bags against the evil eye, and he believed in the curative properties of silver, laying florins on his eyes when they were tired or tying silver coins round his gouty foot. His fame as an explorer will endure. He may be also remembered as a linguist and an anthropologist, but the intensity of his fame among those who meet him in the precincts of their own subjects will depend upon the appeal he makes to their imaginations as a man:

*Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea  
Loves to have his sails filled with a lusty wind,  
Even till his sail-yards tremble and his masts crack,  
And his rapt ship, run on her side so low  
That she drinks water and her keel ploughs air.*



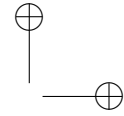
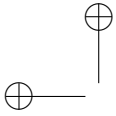


## ROBERT BURTON

Robert Burton was the son of Ralph Burton, of an ancient and genteel Leicestershire family; he was born on 8th February 1576. At the age of seventeen he was sent to Brasenose College, and six years later he was elected a student of Christ Church. Henceforth he lived, he tells us, “a silent, sedentary, solitary, private life. . . saving that sometimes, as Diogenes went into the city, and Democritus into the haven, to see fashions, I did for my recreation now and then walk abroad, looking into the world.” Having little, wanting nothing, all his treasure was, he declared, in Minerva’s tower. But sometimes when in low spirits (for he was subject to scholar’s melancholy) he used to go down to the Thames to listen to the bad language and back-chat of the bargemen, “at which he would set his hands to his sides,” so Bishop Kennett tells us, “and laugh most profusely.”

The story reminds us of the qualities which have made his mighty folio fine reading to this day: a humanity which pedantry cannot smother and a great gusto for words. Later Burton was given the living of St. Thomas, in a suburb of Oxford, and of Seagrave in Leicestershire by his patron, George, Lord Berkeley, to whom he dedicated his famous book. He died in 1640, so close to the date foretold in his own horoscope that foolish rumour asserted that he had taken his own life.



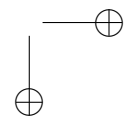
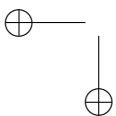


## PORTRAITS

During a half-century after its publication (1621) *The Anatomy of Melancholy* continued to be the admiration of the learned, the delight of the idle, and the resource of the curious. It passed through at least eight editions. But with Time's changes it came to be neglected, and remained so for nearly a hundred years, when plagiarists discovered it as a rich forgotten mine. Sterne stole from it freely. Its reputation was revived more directly by praise from Dr. Johnson. "There is," he said, "great spirit and great power in what Burton says when he writes from his own mind": he added that *The Anatomy* was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise.

The form of commendation is unexpected, for *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is just the book to read in bed; almost every page contains something curious and entertaining, yet it is so much of a scrapbook that it can be put down and begun anywhere without loss. It is a book for dippers. Full of fantastic digressions, fantastic stories, vigorous images, racy, quaint and grand in style, it is the richest curiosity shop in English literature. Though I have read in it many times, I cannot have read more than a quarter of it: I shall never finish it or be finished with it.

One of Burton's recent editors speaks of *The Anatomy* as a seventeenth century equivalent of a modern work on psycho-analysis. It is a comparison at once misleading and true. The intention of the book was similar – to illustrate and explore the causes of extravagant mental distress and irrational behaviour, and to suggest remedies for them. But though it is possible that the case-stories and the analyses of twentieth-century psychologists may





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seem as fantastic to posterity as Burton's instances and discourses often appear to us, it is incredible that their books should remain like his, interesting and readable, when their theories have been abandoned. Burton's fortunate ignorance of what constitutes evidence, and the irresistible irrelevance of his interest in human nature preserve his book from ever being out of date. He is the Prince of all scribaceous authors, men who read and read and read till learning must find vent, and they have to scribble, scribble, scribble. He lived "a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me as from a common theatre scene. . . . Amidst the gallantry and misery of the world; jollity, pride, perplexities, and cares, simplicity and villainy, subtlety, knavery, candour, and integrity, mutually mixed and offering themselves, I rub along *privus privatus*."

There lies the charm of his book! His Minerva's tower is a *camera obscura*, in which, peeping over the shoulder of this "little wearish old man," we observe the fantastic panorama of mankind in agitation. They are so clear and far away, those little pictures. It is like watching people capering and posturing violently to unheard music, a spectacle incomprehensible and comic. And the master of the tower is able to enchant us so completely, just because he has read all about the passions while knowing so very little about them from within. We consequently enjoy with him the kind of detachment which is next best to that of the philosopher, and a much cosier, humbler one; a detachment which allows us the pleasure of an ignorant and secure amazement at the grotesque and extravagant restlessness of life. It is hard sometimes





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to believe, though Burton tells us this was so, that he himself could have been subject to melancholy, his relish for that spectacle is so constant and so great.

He was at any rate born with the most reliable prophylactic against tedium – consuming curiosity. This is the passion after all that the Universe is most obviously fitted to satisfy. His curiosity was not scientific in method; but one trait he had in common with men of science, he could be happy correlating phenomena. He remarks that “the Tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues as this Chaos of Melancholy doth symptoms.” But confusion and babel were his joy. The order to which he attempted to reduce them was entirely formal. He divided *The Anatomy* into three main partitions, with a synopsis introducing each with sections and sub-sections and sub-sub-sections, after the manner of learned seventeenth century writers. The first portion deals with the causes and symptoms of melancholy; the second with its cure, and the third with love-melancholy and religious melancholy. There are digressions, and of these the most important are upon Anatomy, Spirits, the Rectification of Air, and the Misery of Scholars.

The section on love-melancholy is the one to which most readers turn. It contains many extraordinary stories and exhilarating torrents of words. Burton presumes that there will be some “cavillers and counterfeit Catos” who will take exception to this portion of his work; but he sticks to his course. It is an essential part of his subject. Besides, it is time “to refresh his weary readers, to expatiate in this delightful field,” and after all “an old, grave, discrete man is fittest to discourse of love matters.” If objection is taken to some of his stories and





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quotations, what do objectors think about the stories in the Bible? (This has always been an awkward question for censors.) He will therefore continue his subject unembarrassed, “call a spade a spade, and sound all the depths of this inordinate love of ours, which nothing can withstand or stave off.”

It is difficult for the reader to collect any general impression from this famous section, for he is apt to be beguiled into delighted impercipience by the extravagance of its detail, and by an eloquence at once comic and grave. But this comment upon it I think holds good: it is clearly a solitary celibate’s discourse upon love; that of a born bachelor, who, part terrified, part condemnatory and part envious – though he thanks Heaven for his own immunity! – stares with fascinated amazement at the disastrous risks which lovers run, and at the wildness of the things they do and think. The dangers of matrimony, though it is the best cure of love-melancholy, are so many and various that it is better, he concludes, to reply with the philosopher, “*adhuc intempestivum*, ’tis yet unseasonable and ever will be.” In fact, he is so sure that bachelors have much the best of life that they ought in gratitude to build and endow colleges for “old, decayed, deformed, and discontented maids to live together in.”

Admirable, too, is the chapter on Jealousy, that nigh incurable evil. He has not much faith in remedies for this miserable vexation, “if the nails of it be not pared before they grow long.” We detect a certain scepticism in his reference to the virtues of the Diamond and the Beryll in reconciling men and wives and maintaining unity and love; “you may try this when you will and as





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you see cause,” he says. Men still continue to try this, but without giving exclusive preference to those particular precious stones. He ends this chapter with unwonted reticence. “One other sovereign remedy I could repeat, an especial Antidote against Jealousy, an excellent cure; but I am not now disposed to tell it, not that, like a covetous Empirick, I conceal it for any gain, but for some other reasons, I am not willing to publish it; if you be very desirous to know it, when I meet you next, I will peradventure tell you what it is in your ear.”

His discourse upon the blindness of lovers inclines one to think that his greatest talent lay after all in vituperation. Listen to the passage which follows, and wonder for a moment with me why such loathing should merely awake in us exhilaration and laughter:

“Every Lover admires his Mistress, though she be very deformed of her self, ill-favoured, wrinkled, pimpled, pale, red, yellow, tanned, tallow-faced, have a swollen Juggler’s platter-face, or a thin, lean, chitty-face, have clouds in her face, be crooked, dry, bald, goggle-ey’d, blear-ey’d, or with staring eyes, she looks like a squis’d cat, hold her head still awry, heavy, dull, hollow-eyed, black or yellow about the eyes, or squint-eyed sparrow-mouthed, *Persean* hook-nosed, have a sharp Fox nose, a red nose, *China* flat great nose, *nare simo patuloque*, a nose like a promontory, gubber-tushed, rotten teeth, black, uneven, brown teeth, beetle-browed, a Witch’s beard, her breath stink all over the room, her nose drop winter and summer, with a *Bavarian* poke under her chin, . . . *Irus*’ daughter, *Thersites*’ sister, *Grobian*’s scholar, if he love her once, he admires her for all this, he takes no notice of any such errors, or imperfections of body or mind. He had rather have her than any woman in the world. If he were a King, she alone should be his Queen, his Empress.”



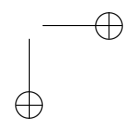
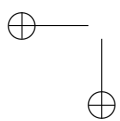
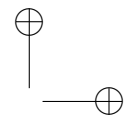
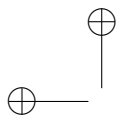




ROBERT BURTON

There was really no hatred at all in Burton, so that even when he almost bursts himself in Herculean effort to express his abhorrence, he merely sends our spirits up. I believe that is the explanation. If there was any hatred in him, it hardly amounted to more than an endearing cantankerousness which was swamped in a love, not of men, but of words. Words. He lived like a king, a despot in the realm of words. Outside it he was a bewildered, innocent-eyed, single-hearted old scholar understanding little of the world, next to nothing of its wickedness, and only something of its miseries. Thus it comes about that his book, though it is an exposure of men's crimes, delusions, and follies, is a sweet-natured book; grand, absurd, profuse, and sweet.







### MR. PATRICK CAMPBELL

*Reviewer:* “Unless you are an expert writer to write about yourself is to anticipate the Day of Judgment.”

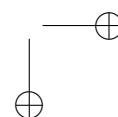
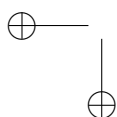
*Autobiographer:* “Well, and who’s afraid?”

*Reviewer:* “Before I admire your intrepidity, I must be sure that you are conscious of how much you are revealing, and of the nature of the scrutiny you defy.”

*Autobiographer:* “I write for money and for my friends. I don’t care what my enemies say, or what the public says, if only it buys my book.”

*Reviewer:* “Ah, I see you think of ‘the public’ as a monster which only purrs or snarls in the Press. Believe me, it’s tongue is not so alarming as its many-faceted and indifferent eyes. The public is not composed of friends and enemies, but of strangers; and the stranger, more just than a friend, is more formidable than an enemy, for he is cold.”

Mrs. Patrick Campbell’s autobiography (*Myself and Some Letters*) is a loose heap of testimonials, compliments, worries and sorrows. She has tilted the shafts of memory’s cart and let the contents fall. There they lie; broken toys, old jam-pots that once held sweet flatteries, faded bouquets once tossed up by roaring seas of glory, old beautiful photographs, bills, programmes, invitations, medicine bottles, news-cuttings, mixed together in the dust of life’s attrition. And on the top of the pile she





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has laid a bundle of letters, inscribed, “Read, you will see I was adored; read, you will see I was a mother; read, you will see I have wept.”

If you go over this rubble with a careful rake, you will find things worth pocketing; a thin-worn wedding-ring for instance that once almost grew to the finger. But Mrs. Campbell has compelled us to be rag-pickers – not that I am averse to that occupation. If the heap is not too high and grey, I can poke and pry with the best of the profession; and in this case I found something to interest me. I discovered, and for this I am grateful, Mr. Patrick Campbell.

Mrs. Campbell does not often find the words which help “the stranger” to feel what she has felt, but she does so once when recalling her quick, ecstatic courtship which ended in a boy-and-girl runaway match. Most imprudent they were, the penniless pair of them; this profoundly spontaneous, dreamy, enigmatic, electric slip of a girl, with her dark unfathomable stare, she, and her huge, gentle, helpless, handsome boy-lover. When she has become the most fascinating woman on the stage, and she says, remembering her ardent admirers, that “having once looked on the face of true love she knew its counterfeits,” we guess at once of whom she is thinking. “Pat,” she says, describing that day of courtship on the Thames, “managed a boat like a magician. He only looked at me; the boat went without effort or sound, quick and straight. In the locks even we seemed alone – we spoke little.” Ah, if only she had told the rest of her story as well as that!

“Pat” was a charming character but quite hopeless as a breadwinner, and circumstances made that essential.





MR. PATRICK CAMPBELL

He went abroad to seek his fortune, to Australia, the Cape, Johannesburg, Rhodesia – everywhere, but had he stumbled upon the richest valley in Eldorado, he would have returned with nothing in his pockets. Too modest to despair, too humble to rail against fate, steadfast and helpless, his letters are those of the born “remittance man,” only with this great difference, that they are those of a man who longs to *send* money. “It will be a blessed day to me what I am able to write and send you the first regular remittance. . . . Fairly good news, my own, own darling. I have got a berth in the B.I. Company’s office, £2 a week and think it will increase soon. It isn’t very much, darling, but any way, it is a start. . . . I have just heard of a billet going with a salary of £500 a year and I am doing my very best to get it. . . . I only get £15 a month and rations. . . . It is awful to be the means of so much misery to you, for I worship you, my darling. . . . Grand reports every day about gold. . . . I have sent a cheque this post for £29 15s. 6d. . . . I try and keep my spirits up, but I am so utterly miserable without you. . . .” These sentences catch my eye as I glance again at his letters, written during seven years of exile.

The young dreamer in London, the young dreamer in Africa had been dreaming the same dream: that a telegram would be sent – next month? – from the Mountains of the Moon, saying, “Come at once, bring children, fortune made.” A telegram was at last sent; but it was one from London to Africa. The little girl, who used to feel that if she could only make the crowds in the streets stand still she had a wonderful secret to tell them, had through hard work and inborn talent, forced them to stop and set them all hurrahing. “When Pat arrived I





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saw in his eyes that youth, with all the faith and belief in his own efforts and his own luck, had gone. . . but the old gentleness and tenderness were there – he still loved me. . . . The abnormal position in which he found himself must have been almost anguish to him; the girl-wife he had left six and a half years before, was now the fashionable actress, surrounded by the rush and excitement of smart friends, smart parties, smart clothes. . . . The curiosity too. . . . He was a great gentleman, Pat, and his position must have been most irksome to him.” I am sure it was. There are few humiliations equal to that of the lover who finds himself occupying the position of the unnecessary or supplementary male. What a subject for a novel! The last of his letters, written after his return to South Africa, only reached her after his death in action during the Boer War; it ends with the postscript, “I really think I have a good chance.”

And so farewell “Pat.”

The treat for the public at the latter end of the book is a selection from Mr. Shaw’s letters to Mrs. Campbell. They are full of dancing gaiety. They show a most exquisite helpful regard for her. They are full of gratitude to her for having inspired such an excitement in him that, to his immense delight, he can fancy himself in love; the impulse to wild silliness is so strong. But they are not the letters of a man who *wants to be loved*, and therefore they are not love letters. Desire to be loved is itself almost a definition of being “in love”; without that desire love is indistinguishable from sympathy. Let us look once more on the face of true love: “I am always being haunted by the idea that you will learn to hate me, because I am so long in helping you out of your great troubles that your patience and your goodness cannot last.”





## CLOUGH

The last occasion when Clough crossed the stage of public attention was in the pages of *Eminent Victorians*. There he cut a sorry figure, that of a halting, timid, over-patient man, carrying in no definite direction a pack of petty scruples and vain regrets, which a man of more spirit (say you or I), would have set down and had done with.

In the life-story of Florence Nightingale we watched him tying up brown-paper parcels, thankful to be of use in that humble way; in the life of Dr. Arnold he appeared as an earnest adolescent with weak ankles and a solemn face, nor in another place in that thrice-delightful, devastating book were his religious troubles treated with more sympathy. He was contrasted with Froude: "James Anthony, together with Arthur Clough, the poet, went through an experience which was more distressing in those days than it has since become: they lost their faith. With this difference, however, that while in Froude's case the loss of his faith turned out to be rather like the loss of a heavy portmanteau, which one afterwards discovers to have been full of old rags and brick-bats. Clough was made so uneasy by the loss of his that he went on looking for it everywhere as long as he lived; but somehow he never could find it." Now much requires correcting in this portrait, and still more needs to be painted in. The "weak ankles" are a misleading detail; they suggest that Clough was a different sort of man from what he was. He





## PORTRAITS

was a rather large ruddy man and no mean athlete. His name was long remembered as one of the two best goal-keepers on record; I doubt if Mr. Lytton Strachey would have got the ball past him. This however is unimportant. If the weak ankles, although a merely temporary defect, corresponded to something spiritual in Clough, an artist might be justified in painting them in. But did they?

Clough was a man of strong will, a steady man with an unusual power of persistence and self-control; he was more like a muscle-bound athlete than a weakling in respect of will power. Yet he has given the impression of a hesitating, drifting character. He was an exceptionally religious man, who got himself known as a dangerously irreligious one. He developed a superiority to pettiness of all kinds which was the admiration and support of everyone near him, and yet "his name has been in danger of becoming a by-word for irresolution." He set up to be a poet, yet he valued literal expression more than beauty. How can we explain these contradictions? The main point is, I think, that Clough belonged to a type rare among imaginative minds, and was therefore particularly interesting. He was a man who could believe the reason to be divine, but not the will. The will was a useful means to clearing life of muddles, avoiding ignoble things, getting other things done, but it had a horrible way of also dictating to a man what he ought to think, putting its case in the most insidiously persuasive form, saying, "If you don't batter yourself into a passion over this, if you don't conclude before you have sufficient evidence, you will end by being a burden to yourself and useless to everybody else." Clough continued firmly nevertheless to warn the will off the course when the race was for truth.







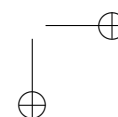
#### CLOUGH

His reply amounted to this: "I may become a burden to myself, but I can bear that. It needs courage of a different sort to the courage you recommend, but it is courage of a real kind. Furthermore, it is not at all clear to me that I shall necessarily be useless to the world; and as for being a nuisance to people near me, I can prevent that by being careful to behave well." Meanwhile, Carlyle was bellowing that a man should keep silent and find Salvation in work, any sort of work so long as he steeped himself in it. "Carlyle led us all out into the wilderness and left us there," said Clough. He did not accept the Gospel of work.

*Action may lead to belief, but will that belief be the true one;  
That is the point, I think.*

So far as he himself was concerned his attitude was justified. He preferred truth to beauty, which spoilt his chance of being a great poet; but he became in consequence a unique poet. We ought to be thankful he did not ride off like his contemporaries on the high horse of some prophetic cause, or even on Pegasus.

The critic who did more than any other to damage Clough's reputation as a poet was Swinburne. He never wrote about him; but from time to time he directed a destructive comment at him. As a critic Swinburne had the gift of praise and a lyric faculty for unbounded despairing admiration. Clough was not a suitable subject for it. His attitude towards life, let alone poetry, in which he was less interested, was violently antipathetic to Swinburne; and Clough's efforts to express in poetry the loss of his faith in the Resurrection seemed to Swinburne an attempt to make the *Pons Asinorum* sing. This will





#### PORTRAITS

explain the malicious schoolboy glee with which Swinburne imbedded in the prose of his Essay on Byron the following limerick: "There was a poor poet called Clough, whom his friends found it useless to puff. The public though dull has not such a skull as belongs to believers in Clough." Clough thought first of his own sincerity when he wrote; he permitted himself no expression which did not render as truthfully as possible an emotion actually felt. He refused to heighten his feelings; he loved reality and therefore he refused either to darken the shadows of life (he could not afford to do that) or exaggerate its glories; when it was grey and flat, he represented it as flat and grey. He seems almost to have held that perfect sincerity is the means to creating aesthetic beauty. Probably he would not have assented to that erroneous proposition; but he would have certainly said it was the only way by which he cared to achieve it, and that the only kind of beauty he really valued had that quality in it. Above all, he dreaded riding off down a stream of vague, excited emotion far away from the object, a danger, by the way, to which Swinburne was singularly liable. If he had had a little of Clough's matter-of-fact sincerity, it would not have added to the beauty of his best poems, but, good heavens! what torrents of unreadable ecstasy about Italy, Victor Hugo and other subjects we would have been spared! When Swinburne writes a poem to a cat, he begins well enough. He starts by thinking of a cat; the cat is there.

*Stately, kindly, lordly friend,  
Condescend  
Here to sit by me, and turn, etc., etc.*





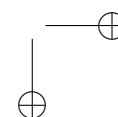
#### CLOUGH

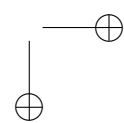
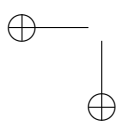
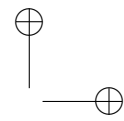
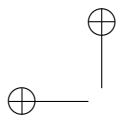
But already, at the second stanza, we begin to have misgivings that the cat is going to be forgotten, “All your wondrous wealth of hair,” does not seem to strike the right note. Presently, we are in the garden, and the cat is asked if it does not feel appropriate aesthetic emotions, and, finally,

*May not you rejoice as I,  
Seeing the sky  
Change to heaven revealed, and bid  
Earth reveal the heaven it hid  
All night long from stars and moon,  
Now the sun sets all in tune?*

Now the public though crass is not such an ass as to put to a cat such a question as that.

Clough is still read; perhaps he will be read, by a few, as long as Swinburne, for the sake of that integrity and his love of the beauty of things as they are.







## CONRAD

### I

I only saw Conrad once. I lunched and spent the afternoon with him one spring day two years before his death. The orchards of Kent were in blossom, the poles of its hop-fields bare when the train took me down to Canterbury. It was a drive of some miles from there to his new home, a large, airy, Georgian rectory, a few strides from its church – one of those short, heavy-towered little country churches which lie like great grey dogs about the fields and among the trees of England. His face was already familiar to me, though he was among the least photographed, least paragraphed of celebrities – for, once seen, his photograph was not easy to forget. The length of his head from chin to crown struck me, and this was accentuated by a pointed greyish beard, which a backward carriage of his head on high shoulders projected forwards. Black eyebrows, hooked nose, hunched shoulders gave him a more hawk-like look than even his photograph had suggested. His eyes were very bright and dark when he opened them wide, but unless lit and expanded by enthusiasm or indignation, they remained half-hidden, and as though filmed in a kind of abstruse slumberous meditation. Very quiet in voice and gesture, somewhat elaborate in courtesies, his manner was easy without being reassuring. He had the kind of manners





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which improve those of a visitor beyond recognition. He was very much the *foreign* gentleman. He evidently expected others not only to respect his dignity (that went without saying) but their own. I surmised that, like his own people, the Poles, and like the Irish, he might be lavish in compliment, but that anyone would be a fool who did not divine that his delicious generosity of praise might hide reserves of caustic severity. Following the sea had not left a trace of bluffness in his manner. His talk was that of a man who cares for what is delicate, extreme, and honourable in human nature – and for the art of prose. Intellectually, he seemed something of a Quietist; he did not enjoy provoking discussion. He praised, I remember, Henry James, and admiration in that direction might have been anticipated. For though the worlds of the two novelists were so different, their literary methods were not unlike, and again and again “the point of honour” provided both with subjects. Moreover they had the same kind of devotion to their calling. His scorn, which in his seafaring days would have withered a slack-twisted officer whose heart was not in his ship, was ready now to strike the counterpart of such a character in the world of letters. Clearly in life and literature *noblesse oblige* was Conrad’s motto, and I doubt if he would have been able to decide which of the two, life or literature, subjected men to the more stringent tests. It was evidently a necessary passport to his literary esteem to be able to write a fine sentence.

## II

Though it would be absurd on the strength of an hour or two of desultory conversation, part of which was in French





#### CONRAD

(a French lady was present), to pronounce upon Conrad's literary preferences; still I did get an impression that originality of mind in an author counted for little with him, if unaccompanied by an aesthetic sense. Perhaps, however, this is really a deduction (and a fairly safe one) from his own writing, which shows so strong a love of the sentence engraved as on a cameo. He would have understood Henry James's pathetic cry, "I have sweated blood to give an amusing surface to my style!" I surmise Conrad "sweated blood" too in the same endeavour, so laudable, yet so often, a waste of pains. And on the top of that he felt himself impelled to attempt an intenser vividness in description. Try, just try, so to describe something that the inattentive reader must see it, and the attentive one can never forget that he has seen it. You will find it an exhausting task; especially if you are also determined your sentences shall run sonorously and gracefully. The easiest half of Conrad's life was that he spent at sea, hard though that had often been.

I remember thinking it characteristic that he should have expressed disgust at an eminent author, remarkable for gay candour, because on his first visit he had described how his father had taken to drink. This appeared to have shocked Conrad both as a sign of insensibility in his visitor, and as a breach of good manners, their relations not warranting such confidences. More obviously characteristic was his remark when, after lunch, he hobbled with me up a paddock avenue of elms. The spring wind was fluttering the daffodils at their roots and blustering in their budding tops; he stopped, lifted his face, and said: "I walk here for the sake of that sound; it reminds me of the sea." This peaceful nook in





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Kent did not seem his natural home; nor in the neat, white, quiet rooms did I perceive the impress of his peculiar personality – a sailor’s tidiness, cleanliness, perhaps, nothing more. Of course, in the case of men who live in the imagination, it is silly to look for something characteristic in their surroundings; still, when I read his account of his leaving that home, on the eve of the war, for a long-delayed journey to Poland, I recognized there something that had dimly struck me about the setting in which I had seen him. “All unconscious of going towards the very scenes of war, I carried off in my eye this tiny fragment of Great Britain; a few fields, a wooded rise, a clump of trees or two, with a short stretch of road, and here and there a gleam of red wall and tiled roof above the darkening hedges wrapped up in soft mist and peace. And I felt that all this had a very strong hold on me as the embodiment of a beneficent and gentle spirit; that it was dear to me not as an inheritance, but as an acquisition, as a conquest in the sense in which a woman is conquered – by love, which is a sort of surrender.” The last words remind me that his profound appreciation of English character was also “a sort of surrender.” He sprang himself of a race which is effusive, touchy, superlative, electric; in early life he had come into close fellowship with English seamen, who, by nature and tradition, are undramatic in speech and gesture, gentle and steady, among whom the highest commendation possible is the signal, “well done.”

The contrast between what their matter-of-fact persistence and corporate loyalty could endure, and the little fuss they made over it, inspired in him an admiration all the deeper since, however completely he had





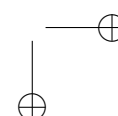
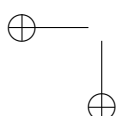


#### CONRAD

identified himself with their traditions, he remained in temperament a fierce, independent, sensitive, magniloquent Pole, with a far-ranging speculative imagination. He loved them so well, partly because he was so different himself. He saw their ordinary characteristics as strange attributes. He drew them, praised them, better than Kipling, because he was more disinterested and unlike Kipling, free from self-conscious national pride. His imaginative outlook was not limited by patriotism; England and that tradition were dear to him “not as an inheritance, but as an acquisition.”

If you read *A Personal Record* and *Notes on Life and Letters*, you will come nearer to understanding Conrad and the relation in which his way of thinking stood to his work, than by reading his critics. Indeed, most of the penetrating things that have been written about his work you will find in those two books – and the authority is better.

It is superficial to class him, in the ordinary sense, among the writers of adventure stories, for though his stories are adventurous, the point of the adventure is ever the same: the spirit of loyalty in men, struggling, sometimes victoriously, sometimes vainly, either against the forces of nature, or the power of mean persons. In all his stories the “immortal ruler” dispenses “honour and shame”; “shame” it may be to the stronger, “honour” perhaps to the frustrated. Conrad is a profoundly ethical writer, though in the written word he always sought, arduously, for the beautiful. But this truth about him has been somewhat obscured by the fact that, unlike most writers whose inspiration is passionately moral, he





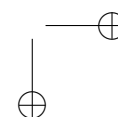
### PORTRAITS

does not postulate that the universe is on the side of good. On the contrary, his universe is utterly indifferent.

Many passages express directly what his stories exhibit imaginatively: a judgment which is passionately ethical and a conception of nature as indifferent to human values. In a universe, beautiful in an inscrutable way, but without justice and honour, it is man's glory to have put justice and honour. "That is our concern." There is no occasion for despair, for in defeat man also is great, and the spectacle of the struggle is sublime to the contemplating mind. Conrad then has no "message." He has, as these passages show, a philosophy of life, but it is not the kind which drives a man to win converts. He was also singularly free from worldly ambition, and he certainly did not write to amuse an idle hour. We must look, therefore, elsewhere for the impulse which made him a writer. He was born with a love of words, but there was, I think, in his case yet another. The Sibyl's writing is on leaves which the wind scatters, but memory flies after them and catches and collects them. I think it was because he had seen so many things in human nature and the world that he did not wish to be forgotten or to forget, that Conrad, to our great gain, became a writer.

### III

Conrad's relation towards the public was more dignified than that of most of the eminent novelists. He did not volunteer opinions on subjects on which his view was of no value; he was also scrupulous in speaking only about those sides of art which he understood, showing thus a respect for art itself which appears to be rare. Possibly his early training in the merchant service taught him



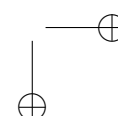
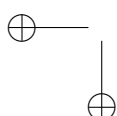


#### CONRAD

the difference in value between, say, the mate's views on navigation and those of the intelligent passenger. He seldom parted with his signature in any cause, and he respected his own craft so sincerely that he did not think it necessary for his manhood publicly to express strong views on the problems of London traffic, diet, or foreign exchanges. He modestly supposed that there were others who, compared with him, might be as well up in these matters as he knew himself to be in regard to story-telling and prose; and he seems to have held that an artist's work is so important that it ought to absorb him. In allowing this conviction to influence his conduct, he missed many opportunities of obtaining cheap advertisement and produced some very remarkable books. He lived for his work; and since hard work of any kind keeps alive in us a sympathetic consciousness of our common destiny, he never became dehumanized. I dwell on the point because his concentration was of rare intensity, and such devoted artists are scarce in England. Though he died at an age far from ripe as modern longevity goes, he had created his world and completed his personal contribution to literature. It is unlikely that his talent would have developed in any new direction; but men of letters have lost by his death that heartening thing – a living example.

#### IV

This achievement, the creation of his own world, places Conrad at once among important imaginative writers. The implications of that useful critical phrase are that the writer's imagination has left so vivid an impress on all he describes, that his reader finds it easy to adopt





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temporarily the same way of feeling and judging, and is aware of an inner emotional consistency, not necessarily logical, in the author's whole response to experience. It may be a bubble world, but it holds together. There is an indefinable congruity between the author's moral values, his sense of beauty, his sense of humour. The reader feels that it is inevitable that the man who sees human nature in that particular way should also see nature and inanimate objects as he does, should grieve or rage over a particular event, or sing a *Nunc dimittis* on such and such occasions. This is the difference between a creatively imaginative work and work which is the product of intelligence. Intelligence is a modest selective faculty: it borrows and envies "this man's skill and that man's scope"; it can achieve wonders, but it cannot do one thing – it cannot create that unity of apprehension which is the life-breath of a work of art.

It was not the exploitation of tropic forests or tropic seas which made Conrad a remarkable novelist, but this power of thus creating a world dyed through and through with his own imagination; his Soho was as much part of this world as the Amazon. Of his contemporaries only Meredith, Henry James, and Hardy have done the same; they, too, have blown great comprehensive, iridescent bubbles, in which the human beings they describe, though they have of course a recognizable resemblance to real people, only attain in that world their full reality.

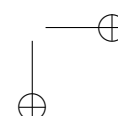
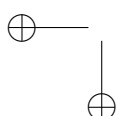
These several worlds may have different values for us; the relation of each to what interests us most in life may be more significant in one case than another; but the point is that such authors have at least qualified for greatness. Afterwards let us by all means measure, if





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we can, or compare the diameters of their minds; but unless we recognize that such imaginative writers are in a class by themselves we shall get the scale of criticism all wrong, and exalt most absurdly in comparison work which appeals to us because it happens to suit the intellectual or aesthetic fashion of the moment, or discourses upon matters much talked about. The same is of course true of history and biography. I am by no means sure that the mind of Gibbon was remarkably wide; but his history is self-subsisting, a marvel of intellectual and moral coherence. The work of Mr. Lytton Strachey is another case in point. Its lasting merit does not lie in its being an expression of that wave of anti-hero-worship irony which is running across minds now rapidly qualifying as "the elder generation," but in the imaginative coherence of the picture he gives of the past; its saturation throughout with the same quality of feeling, so that historic figures, however different in themselves, are presented as inhabitants of the same world. Such work may vary in repute (the appearance of another, and of course different, Carlyle might quickly put the nose of Mr. Strachey out of joint); but it remains as a challenge, an interpretation, to which men may return suspiciously or enthusiastically – that does not matter – and which has henceforth to be reckoned with. I have stressed this point in connection with Conrad, because there is always a trough after a crest in the fame of imposing writers, and in a short time extravagantly denigrating things may be said of him, if it is not remembered that he has taken his place as a writer who has after all recorded an imaginative interpretation of life.





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### v

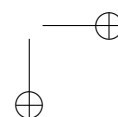
The last novel published in Conrad's lifetime, *The Rover*, was greatly enjoyed and not a little carped at – respectfully of course. I have no doubt that, had *The Rover* appeared not very long ago, reviewers and readers would have been so occupied with its fine imaginative qualities, that they would have hardly stopped to pick holes. Yet holes can in fairness be picked. I enjoyed it immensely myself; yet when a friend said to me casually, “I have just finished listening to a performance on the Conrad,” I saw what he meant, and recognized the justice of the criticism. Artistically, it resembles more a voluntary on a powerful organ to show its compass than a musician's constructed masterpiece. All the famous Conrad stops are pulled out one after another. We are given the familiar scene of passion, almost mystically imaginative and super-sensual, tintured perhaps with melodrama but never with a drop of sentiment, in which Conrad's lovers seem to fall together through the crust of ordinary experience into a shadowy grander world, where men and women grow to the stature of gods. We are given the scene of tempted and exalted honour. We are given the familiar contrast between the curt, mild-spoken English sailor and the turbulent, darker, more imaginative highly-strung man. We meet the enigmatic woman. Above all, we are given those descriptions of scene and place which create in us such a strange expectancy; the clean, large, empty room, or the sun-scorched yard of a lonely farm-house, which seem to wait like a stage for something to happen there; and horizons – changing, beckoning, beautiful horizons. This is his master faculty

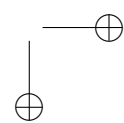
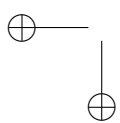
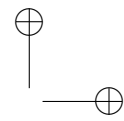
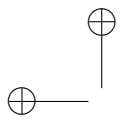




#### CONRAD

as an imaginative writer; this power of evoking a scene, a gesture, or the confrontation of two people, so that the moment seems charged with all the significance of what is to come, just as scenes vividly recalled by memory are apt to seem to us laden with what was to happen. When we remember how, long ago, someone looked up or turned away, or only, it may be, a hat and pair of gloves on the table, suddenly it may seem to us, that, even then, we must have already understood although we did not know it. Our own memories now and then create these magic moments for ourselves; Conrad could create them for others. It seems to me incomparably his rarest gift. I value such moments in his stories far more than his tremendous set pieces of storms and long breathless tropic nights. I become confused while reading *Typhoon* and the hurricane in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*; too much, much too much happens. I forget how badly the ship has been already smashed; I forget how overwhelming the last wave but one was compared with the one I see coming. The little cup of my imagination was full long ago, but the waterfall goes on pounding down into it. Conrad's subject was not adventure as his readers first supposed. It was the idea of loyalty. He said himself, "There is nothing more futile under the sun than adventure. . . . Adventure by itself is but a phantom, a dubious shape without a heart."









## DISRAELI

### I

The statues in Parliament Square are ridiculous; there is no doubt about that. Next time you are passing just look at Lord Palmerston with his coat over his arm, stretching out his hand for his hat to an invisible lavatory attendant; glance at the legs of Sir Robert Peel or turn your eyes to the figure of Mr. Canning habited as a Roman, with, perhaps, a pigeon perched on his black bald head, and you will be amazed and tempted to murmur: "There is no other country that can show anything like this!" The only statesman on that celebrated spot who does not appear a figure of fun is Disraeli. I have thought, as I passed that slightly stooping figure in Garter robes, with head decorously inclined and a long hand laid a trifle coyly on the Order of St. George, "O Dizzy! Dizzy! Your lucky star! You made fools of men when you were alive, and when dead even an official sculptor could not make a fool of you!"

### II

Men love ritual, and modern life starves their appetite for it. They will seize upon the most incongruous opportunities of satisfying their craving. Once every spring the woods and hedgerows are robbed of their little pale flowers in order to lay a heaped tribute at the feet of –





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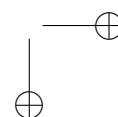
Disraeli. And what absurd inscriptions accompany these tributes! One huge wreath composed of hundreds of packed flowers was labelled: "To a great Englishman!" I recalled Carlyle's indignant query: "How long will John Bull allow this Jew to dance on his belly?" The answer is – many a long year yet.

In Mr. Buckle's last volume of his life of Disraeli we have the full story of the origin of this custom. It was started by Queen Victoria, and we know the tone of Disraeli's response. He regarded primroses as "the gems and jewels of Nature," as "the ambassadors of spring"; and in using these phrases he was bestowing on their beauty the highest praise, the most extravagant praise he knew how to give, for nothing on earth was so beautiful to him as objects possessing a high prestige value, such as gems and ambassadors. My thoughts began to turn in the direction of prestige: how prestige was deserting the holders of high offices of State and public life, and how, after all, it was the faculty of creating "prestige" for himself and for others which had been the master gift of this old comedian, half popular tribune, half courtier, whose bronze effigy seemed now to be bowing discreetly and ironically over the wreaths at his feet.

### III

I do not often wish I was older, but I sometimes regret that I am not old enough to have seen Dizzy making his way very slowly up the celebrated slope of St. James on the arm of Montagu Corry. Happily however he is so picturesque that he is easy to see in imagination.

Once I was present at a discussion between two men, both so famous in their own day and in their own way,





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that it was natural that they should wonder, perhaps a little wistfully sometimes, how long they would be talked about after they were dead. Ingratiating little books, such as pass during a celebrity's lifetime for biographies, had been written about both of them. The man of letters argued that writers were remembered most clearly; the statesman, that the surest fame was linked to important events in history. And as I listened to instances that each in turn brought forward in support of his view, the idea occurred to me that, as far as this kind of personal fame was concerned, it was not *in proportion* to the importance either of a man's deeds or his books that he became the object of it, but rather according to the degree in which he appealed himself to the imaginations of those who live after him. I instanced small authors who were thought about more often than the great ones. And, if it came to men of action, was not Sir Robert Peel probably the greatest Prime Minister of the nineteenth century? Yet how seldom we recalled him. The suggestion had the effect of changing the conversation, for neither of the two candidates for fame present was, as a human being, likely himself to excite much posthumous curiosity. Now, the peculiarity of Disraeli was that he possessed in an unusual degree that qualification for fame.

One of the scenes in which he figures most often before me in the theatre beneath my hat, is a scene very near the drop of the curtain: a carriage is drawn up at the front door of Hughenden; a bent old man, with glistening raven locks, befurred and befrogged, and of a somnolent saturnine countenance, is already seated within it, and already, it seems, asleep; a footman comes running down the steps carrying one of those circular air-cushions on





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which lean invalids delight to sit; a flicker animates for a moment the extinct heavy face; the old man waves gently the back of his hand and murmurs, "Take away that emblem of mortality." All that I like best in Dizzy is in that story. His unconquerable hatred of the ugly prosaic; his readiness to accept anything at the hands of life except humiliation; his quick fantastic imagination which made him recognize instantly in that india-rubber object an emblem of mortality more sinister than a skull.

One more scene. This time the background is the House of Commons, and the principal figure would hardly be recognized as the same. Two traits the young Disraeli has, however, in common with the old – coal-black glossy ringlets, and a face which at this moment also is an immovable mask. Although his dress is altogether different from that of the befrogged old man in the carriage, it, too, has an extravagance which announces to all beholders that "good taste" is a quality which the owner of such clothes either despises, or has failed altogether to understand. The impassive young man who is addressing a simmering House (for this is not his first attack upon his respected leader) is as exotic and noticeable as a flamingo in a farm-yard. He would strike one as rather ridiculous, if his affected coolness did not set off a deadly animosity. A few days before he had been apparently rolled out flat by this same respected and respect-worthy chief on whom all eyes are now turned; he had been crushed, demolished, as might be expected when practical Integrity deigns at last to turn on a venomous Theatricality. Peel had quoted Canning's lines a few days before; Canning, who had once been Peel's own friend and whom, so Peel's enemies delighted to think,



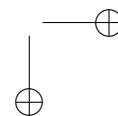
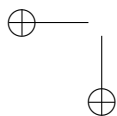


#### DISRAELI

he had afterwards badgered to death. The quotation was apt enough, for Disraeli had kept up hitherto a pretence of being Peel's friendly critic:

*Give me the avowed, erect and manly foe;  
Firm I can meet, perhaps return the blow;  
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,  
Save me, oh, save me from the candid friend.*

One can imagine the effect: the clear, ringing tones with which Peel delivered those lines; the slight emphasis with which such a practised orator would linger on the word "manly"; his smooth triumphant air. Now listen to Disraeli's reply: "If the right honourable gentleman may find it sometimes convenient to reprove a supporter on his right flank, perhaps we deserve it. I, for one, am quite prepared to bow to the rod; but really, if the right honourable gentleman, instead of having recourse to obloquy, would only stick to quotation, he may rely upon it – it would be a safer weapon. It is one he always wields with the hand of a master; and when he does appeal to any authority, in prose or verse, he is sure to be successful, partly because he seldom quotes a passage that has not previously received the meed of Parliamentary approbation, and partly and principally because his quotations are so – happy. The right honourable gentleman knows what the introduction of a great name does in debate – how important is its effect, and occasionally how electrical. He never refers to any author who is not great, and sometimes who is not loved – Canning, for example. That is a name never to be mentioned, I am sure, in the House of Commons without emotion. We all admire his genius; we all – at least most





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of us – deplore his untimely end; and we all sympathize with him in his fierce struggle with supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity with inveterate foes, and with ‘candid’ friends. The right honourable gentleman may be sure that a quotation from such an authority will always tell – some lines, for example, upon friendship, written by Mr. Canning, and quoted by the right honourable gentleman. The theme – the poet – the speaker: what a felicitous combination! Its effect in debate must be overwhelming; and I am sure, were it addressed to me, all that would remain for me would be thus publicly to congratulate the right honourable gentleman, not only on his ready memory, but on his courageous conscience.”

One more peep through the peep-show. This time, let us use Mr. Asquith’s eyes. The scene is now laid in the autumn of 1864. Disraeli, then leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, had attended a clerical meeting at Oxford, where Bishop Wilberforce was in the chair: “The appointed day (it was in the month of November) arrived; the theatre was packed; the Bishop was in the chair. Mr. Disraeli, attired, we are told, in a black velvet jacket and a light-coloured waistcoat, with a billy-cock hat in his hands, sauntered in, as if he were paying a surprise visit to a farmers’ ordinary. At the request of the Chairman, he got to his feet, and proceeded to deliver, with that superb nonchalance in which he was unrivalled among the orators of the day, one of his most carefully prepared and most effective speeches. Indeed, among all his speeches, leaving aside his prolonged duel with Sir Robert Peel in the ’forties, I myself should select it as the one which best displays his characteristic powers, and their equally effective characteristic limita-





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tions: irony, invective, boundless audacity of thought and phrase, the thrill of the shock when least expected, a brooding impression of something which is neither exactly sentiment nor exactly imagination, but has a touch of both, a glittering rhetoric, constantly hovering over the thin boundary line which divides eloquence and bombast. First he pulverized, to the complete satisfaction of the supporters of better endowed small livings, the Broad Church party of the day and its leaders – Stanley, Jowett, Maurice, and the rest. Then came the magniloquent epigram: ‘Man, my lord, is a being born to believe.’ And, finally, he proceeded to dispose of Darwin and his school. ‘What,’ he asked, ‘is the question now being placed before society with glib assurance the most astounding? The question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? My lord, I am on the side of the angels.’ There was nothing more to be said. The meeting broke up, their faith reassured, their enthusiasm unrestrained. There had been no victory so complete since ‘Coxcombs vanquished Berkeley with a grin.’”

#### IV

“A brooding impression of something which is neither exactly sentiment nor exactly imagination, but has a touch of both, a glittering rhetoric, constantly hovering over the thin boundary line which divides eloquence and bombast” – how admirably that describes Dizzy’s style at its best! His writing – I am thinking of his novels – is often so grossly lush and vamped that no writing could possibly be worse. Bret Harte’s parody is only a shade more absurd than what it ridicules: “This simple, yet first-class conversation existed in the morning-room of





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Plusham, where the mistress of the palatial mansion sat involved in the sacred privacy of a circle of her married daughters. . . . Beautiful forms leaned over frames glowing with embroidery, and beautiful frames leaned over forms inlaid with mother-of-pearl.”

There was a time when the novels themselves were considered, in spite of being crammed with intellect, gaudy and vulgar. Lush in language, unduly profuse in description, often absurd in sentiment they certainly are; yet though Disraeli wrote of splendours and fashion with the gusto of a Ouida he somehow combined with it something not unlike the detachment of a Diogenes. He loved pyramids of strawberries on golden dishes; he revelled in what he was capable of calling “palatial saloons”; in balustrades, proud profiles, terraces, fountains, marble, tapestries, feasts, and precious stones. (“Good things,” by the bye, “like the wind on the heath, brother.”) His taste was not refined, his sense of beauty deeply committed to prestige values; but how much that is ridiculous and over-rich in his writing is redeemed by the vitality of his preferences and the fearless candour of his romantic buoyancy. “Think of me,” he wrote after the smashing fiasco of his *Revolutionary Epic*, “as of some exotic bird which for a moment lost its way in thy cold heaven, but has now regained its course and wings its flight to a more brilliant earth and a brighter sky.” I am afraid, however, when he soars, whether in prose or verse, the effects attained correspond too closely to that unfortunate definition of poetry itself in *Contarini Fleming*, “The art of poetry is to express natural feelings in unnatural language.” Yet how genuinely romantic he was; and his style even at its worst is a style. The words and sen-







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tences, however gaudy and ludicrous – and they often are both, whenever he rhapsodizes or attempts to convey his sense of beauty or of what is noble – do bear a genuine relation to what the writer has really felt. This is also most certainly true of the stories themselves with all their exaggerations and absurdities. It is most perplexing and intriguing. One moment you find yourself exclaiming – “This is the most impudent paste that ever pretended to be precious,” and the next – “This is the writing of a man singularly direct, no writer could be more free from the disgusting fear-of-giving-himself-away disease which corrupts insidiously so many imaginations.” One moment he seems like a man who apparently does not know that there is such a thing as ridicule in the world; the next, one discovers that he is not only the greatest master of ridicule himself, but is under no delusion whatever respecting the private opinions which people hold about the pretensions even of their friends – in short, that he is the last man to live in a fool’s paradise.

And as a public figure and a politician he perplexes and intrigues us in the same way. Compare him with his great rival Gladstone. At first glance no one can hesitate in deciding which of the two is genuine. Gladstone is in an incandescent state of conviction; whereas Dizzy has charlatan written all over him – “Peace with Honour,” “Our Young Queen and our old institutions,” “I am on the side of the angels,” etc. He makes no concealment of his intention to feed people on phrases; it is the only diet they can digest. Think, too, of the coolness of his retort to Sir Charles Wood, who had made some unanswerable criticisms upon his ridiculous budget. “I am not a born Chancellor of the Exchequer.” And again,





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who, Gladstone or Disraeli, treated Queen Victoria with the more genuine respect – there is no doubt which of the two she imagined did so? Gladstone, with all the force of his natural veneration, pleading, expostulating before her in the politest of long sentences, or Disraeli, who said of his relations with “The Fairy,” as he called her, “I never contradict, but I sometimes forget”; who after the publication of *Leaves from my Journal in the Highlands*, referred to “we authors”; whose dictum on flattery was that it could hardly ever be over-done, and in the case of Royalty must be laid on with a trowel? Do you remember that story of his encounter with a simple, conscientious, high-Tory magnate, whom it was necessary to propitiate? Afterwards the magnate confided to another that though he did not think Mr. Disraeli was a very clever man, he was certainly a very good one! I think it was Browning who told Gladstone the story of Dizzy saying at a private view of the Academy that what struck him most, when he looked round, was the appalling absence of imagination, and declaring that very evening in his speech at the Academy dinner that what had impressed him was the imagination shown in the pictures. The story was not a success. The G.O.M. glared at the teller as though he had been the hero of it himself, “Do you call that funny? I call it *devilish*.” Dizzy was constantly doing “devilish” things – and with relish. It would be ludicrous to describe him as “honest.”

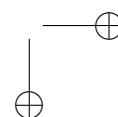
And yet when you look deeper into the two men a doubt creeps over you whether after all Disraeli’s sincerity was not of a finer, purer quality. Sincerity is a vague word; it means different things in different connections. The sincerity in which Disraeli excelled was the kind which





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is all important in an artist and in intimate personal relations. Part of that sincerity consists of a natural incapacity for telling lies to yourself, at any rate gross ones; part of it is courage to refrain, when truth is really essential, from telling lies to other people, and part of it is the power of self-orientation. It is extremely difficult to discover what one really loves and understands best. Human nature is so impressible and imitative. We meet people, read books, and unconsciously propose to ourselves to like what they like, feel as they feel. Many do not discover to their dying day even what gives them pleasure. Dizzy knew himself extremely well. Gladstone's enemies professed to be astounded at his powers of self-deception, and even his admirers were inclined to admit that it was his danger; Labouchere said he did not mind the G.O.M. keeping a card up his sleeve, but he did object to his always believing that the Almighty had put it there. With regard to sincerity in personal relations, Disraeli's marriage is at once proof of its supreme importance and the fact that he possessed that virtue. When Mrs. Disraeli was an old lady she once triumphantly exclaimed, "My Dizzy married me for my money, but I am certain that he would marry me now without it." His marriage had in the course of years turned at last into a perfect relation. It would have been a shabby enough marriage had he told lies to himself and to her. And again, Dizzy never scrupled to admit either to himself or the world that he was actuated by intense personal ambition. In his early books, *Vivian Grey* and *Contarini Fleming*, ambition is the one passion which finds really passionate expression. When he wants to convey a young man's love he instantly compares it with





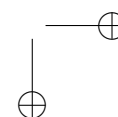
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ambition: “We feel,” he exclaims, “our flaunty ambition fade away like a shrivelled gourd before her vision.” He cannot conceive any stronger way of asserting the power of love than to say that it triumphed for a moment over ambition. His early books are full of genuine groans and ecstasies, but these do not spring from love. The groans and cries in *Henrietta Temple*, his only love story, are hollow and falsetto. On the other hand, Vivian’s exclamation “Curse my lot! that the want of a few rascal counters, and the possession of a little rascal blood, should mar my fortunes,” rings true. So does this: “View the obscure Napoleon starving in the streets of Paris! What was St. Helena to the bitterness of such existence? The visions of past glory might illumine even that dark imprisonment; but to be conscious that his supernatural energies might die away without creating their miracles: can the wheel or the rack rival the torture of such a suspicion?”

#### V

Personal ambition is not the noblest motive which can actuate a public man, but it is usually one of them, and it is a source of strength to recognize it in oneself and others. I always enjoy, when I think of it, the picture of Dizzy helping Bright on with his coat in the lobby after one of the latter’s lofty orations, and whispering as he did so, “We both know that what brings us here is – ambition.”

Lastly, with regard to that power of self-orientation, which is the power of instantly recognizing how things subtend towards what we value most; in that faculty (it is a part of sincerity) I am inclined to think he was





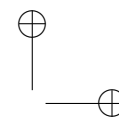
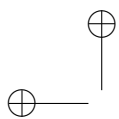
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Gladstone's superior. It was often as hard for Gladstone himself as it was for others to discover whether his sympathies were with the old order or not. Disraeli knew with the certainty of an artist what kind of a world he was fighting for. It was one in which the imaginative adventurers would be at home. There must be inequality or there would be no joy – man being a competitive, admiring animal. There must be variety and colour, institutions and customs linking the present with the past, and prizes for youth to struggle for. It must be a world with heaps of luck in it (never mind the injustice, think of the fun), and one which would stimulate dreams and dreamers. A vague ideal for a statesman? Yes, certainly – and much too vague. It was streaked, too, with a fantastic, materialistic, not over-refined, Solomon-in-all-his-glory, messianic mysticism. Certainly it was much too vague a faith for a statesman. But it is almost impossible for a reader of political history to think Disraeli a great practical statesman. He was an imaginative man, an artist. He thought imagination was the greatest power in the world, and he believed that it was only through their imaginations that men could be ruled and guided – and, for matter of that, made happy. It is not the whole truth; but his own career shows how much truth there is in it. “Even Mormon counts more votaries than Bentham” – that reflection did not fill him with misgivings; on the contrary, it was his supreme consolation.

## VI

And it is the old Disraeli who fascinates the imagination most. We have plenty of disillusioned romantics, and we are sick of listening to their wailings. Give us a still

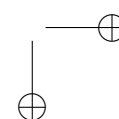
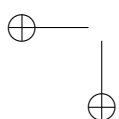




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blazing fire, though the wind is howling dismally in the chimney!

He despised those who had no sense of the romance of their own lives. No wonder he detested the Whig noblemen, apart from their exclusiveness, who merely used their position as a practical asset; no wonder he adored the young who, having the adventure of an uncommitted life before them, are apt to be most conscious of that romance.





## ANATOLE FRANCE

When at the age of eighty Anatole France died in October, 1924, he was buried with the pomp of a king. His funeral was a great procession, and, like the crowd which followed Voltaire to the grave, it was defiantly political and anticlerical in spirit. His literary admirers regretted, at a distance, this truculent appropriation of an artist who had recommended in a thousand pages an aloof and tolerant scepticism; while his detractors, a rapidly increasing number, distributed abusive pamphlets among the crowd.

I possess one of them. It is called "How to clout a corpse." It is a rather hideous little work. We, for I count myself among his admirers, sighed. But we had to admit that it had all been largely his own doing; as it is his fault, too, that his statue now stands in Leningrad, a city where he would certainly have never known a moment's happiness, and would probably have been shot. Towards the end of his life he had committed himself publicly to political dogmas which in others he would have ridiculed with malicious pleasure as without rational foundations, and to which, moreover, privately and as an artist, he continued to be disloyal. His relation to militant Communism reminded one of that of Byron to a mistress: protestations of devotion accompanied by devastating asides. We can hardly respect the revolutionary ardour of an author who, on leaving the platform, sits down





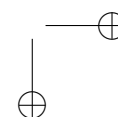
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to write *Les Dieux ont Soif* and *L'Ile des Pingouins*. Anatole France was no more true to himself when he declared that he was heart and soul with the proletarian revolution than when he requested to be enlisted on the outbreak of war in August 1914. In a born pacifist and sceptic both were gestures of a play-actor, such as he had often mocked in soldiers, priests and politicians.

All this has been bad for his fame. What is more serious, it goes some way to support the contention of his intellectual opponents that there was nothing helpful, nothing human beings could live by, in his earlier attitude of detachment. If this were true I should be sorry, having still some faith myself in doubt, and in the sense of proportion doubt engenders. Let us by all means soften the temerity of propositions. Has not the world come round to the view that to burn a man alive for disagreeing with us is to set too high a value on our convictions? But a scepticism which is not evenly applied all round becomes malicious, and a tolerance which does not tolerate what may be odious to oneself is a sham. After rejecting every religion and every system of thought as impostures held together by sophistry, it was inexcusable in Anatole France to swallow Karl Marx.

It has been the object of his recent biographers to explain how he reached that point of view from which it seemed that Irony and Pity were the best counsellors of men, and why he afterwards changed from a benevolent sceptic into a violent partisan.

A good many years before his death Anatole France had begun to lose his hold upon the young generation, who, detesting his philosophy, went so far as to deny his talent. They wanted something more sustaining than







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Irony and Pity. They began to disparage him not only as an underminer of discipline and morals, but as an artist. They began to say that he lacked creative imagination – and it is true that he is essentially a critic, a commentator – and to point out that he drew his inspiration from books rather than from life. No doubt everything he wrote was coloured by what he read. But what does it matter where inspiration comes from? Swinburne found his best poems between the leaves of books, while I believe Sir Edwin Arnold travelled to India for his *Light of Asia*.

But if during these years his reputation was losing in depth among his countrymen, it was gaining in width abroad. Three years before he died he was awarded the Nobel Prize, and the next year all his works were placed upon the Index by the Papal Curia. To-day he is considered a great French writer in every country but his own. Such a fate is by no means without precedent in literary history. Did not the Continent continue to couple Shakespeare and Byron together long after we had relegated Byron to an inferior rank in our own literature? And are we not to-day still surprised at and irritated by the magnitude of Oscar Wilde's reputation abroad, whose measure we took years ago? Something of the same impatience is excited now in young literary Frenchmen, with less justification, by our admiration of Anatole France. It hurries some of them into extreme statements. They even assert that he did not write well. They tell us that in point of style alone M. André Gide, and not a few others, are greatly superior to him.

Such criticism on the face of it reflects unfavourably on the young generation; it is not intelligent. On the other hand, it suggests that Anatole France must have been





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a writer of the first importance, for only writers of first importance provoke unbalanced criticism in those whose views are incompatible with theirs. Lesser men can be left to die; slowly but surely they become unreadable. But the few whose work carries with it a strong infection must be destroyed, if the young are to be free to develop along their own lines. This explains the injustice, so perturbing to their seniors, of the young towards the eminent in a preceding generation. Much of what passes for criticism from them is equivalent to that showman's device at fairs in bygone days of swinging round a rope with a knotted end to clear a space. Anatole France is in the way. *A bas le clair génie français.*

Now it is never safe for a foreigner to dispute with a native over questions of style. There is no French critic, however clearly I might recognize his superiority in taste and acumen, to whose judgment I should defer on this point in the case of an English author. We can only know one language completely – our own. When therefore the style of Anatole France is abused by Frenchmen, we should be content to appeal to other French critics. Having the enthusiastic support in this case of Jules Lemaitre and Lanson, and of Barrès, who regarded him as a corrupter of morals (“*mais d'abord Anatole France a maintenu la langue française*”), and of Charles Maurras, who was a violent political opponent, and of such men as Verlaine and Jules Renard, we can, when informed to-day that his style is bad, “simply shake our great, long, furry ears.” Especially as we also know that in Paris at the present moment, as in some quarters at home, there is a strange tendency to admire unduly a prose which conveys no meaning or only the duskiest hints of one.





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His style was always lucid. Whether it can also be described as simple, and therefore as a classic style, is more doubtful. It has the air of being extremely simple, but is it? Classic simplicity results from directness of expression, and depends as much upon structure as economy in phrasing. It is easy to confuse simplicity and lucidity, but the latter is only a condition of the former. Some French critics are of the opinion that rich picturesqueness and sensuous reverie are the dominant qualities of his prose; that it is, therefore, nearer to that of the Romanticists than that of the French seventeenth century or of the Greeks. "A good style," Anatole France himself wrote, "is like the beam which is shining in at my window as I write, and which owes its pure brilliancy to the intimate combination of the seven colours of which it is made up. A simple style is like white light. It is complex, but it does not seem so. . . . In language, true simplicity, the simplicity that is good and desirable, is merely apparent, and results only from the fine coordination and sovereign economy of the several parts of the whole." Anatole France is defining here his own complex simplicity, and one critic quotes as an example of his typical sophisticated simplicity this passage from *Thais*:

*Il s'en allait donc par les chemins solitaires. Quand venait le soir le murmure des tamaris, caressés par la brise, lui donnait le frisson, et il abattait son capuchon sur ses yeux pour ne plus voir la beauté des choses.*

Its sensuous cadence, the preference for an artificial order in the opening words (why not *Quand le soir venait?*), the self-conscious reticence of the phrase *la*





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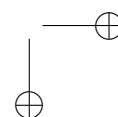
*beauté des choses*, and the languid and subtle suggestion in *tamaris caressés par la brise*, distinguish it from the direct vigour and apparent spontaneity characteristic of the true classic manner. It is perfectly lucid, but its merits are those of another kind of prose.

Still what, after all, do these distinctions matter when an author can write such a page as this from the opening of *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*?

*J'allais au-devant du silence, de la solitude et des douces épouvantes qui grandissaient en moi. Insensiblement la marée de la nuit recouvrait la campagne. Le regard infini des étoiles clignait au ciel. Et, dans l'ombre, les mouches de feu faisaient palpiter sur les buissons leur lumière amoureuse.*

*Ces étincelles animées couvrent par les nuits de mai toute la campagne de Rome, de l'Imbrie et de la Toscane. Je les avais vues jadis sur la voie Appienne, autour du tombeau de Caecilia Metella, où elles viennent danser depuis deux mille ans. . . . Tout le long de mon chemin, elles vibraient dans les arbres et dans les arbustes, se cherchant, et, parfois, à Vappel du désir, tragant au-dessus de la route Parc enflammé de leur vol.*

How characteristic is that touch of imaginative reflection in the midst of description, *où elles viennent danser depuis deux mille ans!* "It is the business of literature to turn facts into ideas." Like Montaigne, France is discursive, like Sterne, he proceeds by digressions. The short story was his favourite form. He was a miniaturist, not a broad painter, and he followed his genius when he turned the novel into a series of episodes, reflections and conversations. Ideas were his inspiration; for him to describe was to expound. Every one of his stories suggested a thought, and when he failed as an artist it was because the idea was too trivial. He was an observer;





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and much of the charm of his writing springs from his looking at life from the library window. He instantly associates what he sees with what he has read about the past, and (sometimes with grotesque effects) with what philosophers or men of science have declared to be the nature of things. Thus he makes M. Bergeret reflect that his dictionary and Mme. Bergeret, both *formes défectueuses et parfois imparfaites*, the one full of errors, the other full of spite, had once floated, indistinguishable for countless ages, as scattered particles of oxygen and carbon in the chaos which produced them both. He possessed one of the nimblest fancies that ever ran on the errands of reason.

But more important even than that trait is another – his profound sensuality. “*Je puis dire,*” he wrote, “*que mon existence ne fut qu’un long désir.*” One critic detects this characteristic in his style at its best, which then exhales an ardent contagious languor. Hence his love of voluptuous scenes and the subtle perfection with which he describes them; hence, too, his hatred of the Church, which preaches asceticism, and his love of the eighteenth century which encouraged freedom from restraint. This deep love of pleasure probably also prompted his tendency towards theoretic anarchy, for it made him also desire to see pleasure “in widest commonalty spread.” In one essay in *La Vie Littéraire* he describes his feelings while looking upon the statue of Venus in the Natural History Museum in Paris, “placed there as the symbol of the sweet invincible power through which all living things multiply themselves. . . . How sincerely I believed that I had grasped the plan divine!” Moreover that deep voluptuousness was undoubtedly the source of his de-





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spair, and of the peculiar form it took – a self-delighting mockery of man and all his efforts.

How was it then that one who started by being tranquilly indifferent to everything but pleasure, and was among those who, believing nothing, are not even compelled to deny, became as a citizen a violent partisan, and shouldered a huge bundle of uncriticized convictions? The first stage of these changes occurred in 1889, when his friend Bourget's book, *Le Disciple*, came out, dividing that generation into two camps, the rationalists and the believers. The discussion which Bourget's book aroused accentuated all the eighteenth century (the century which believed in pleasure and in reason) in France's nature. Hitherto he had been a *retarius*, throwing a silken net and leaving his readers to turn down their thumbs; but from that time onwards he also used the sword. Later came the Dreyfus case, and again he was forced to take a side, this time in a struggle so prolonged and bitter that he emerged from it a partisan for life. Yet the victory of his party left him disgusted with it. One man, however, he had met during the fight whom he respected, whose unquestioning faith in his own ideas impressed him. The influence of Jaurès, whose nature was far more ardent, masculine and simple than his own, was lasting upon him. Henceforth he carried on his shoulders, with, it is true, many a shrug, a pack of opinions which, as a sceptic, he had no right to possess.





## GOETHE

It is odd that Carlyle should have been the first exponent of Goethe in England, Carlyle, who lived by the light of passion, who made hatred of the Devil first test of intelligence, and, while shouting for deeds not words, treated every contemporary reformer as a contented imbecile. It was indeed strange that he should have devoted arduous admiration to a sage whose fascination lay in self-possession, who made poetry the connecting link between faith and science, and attained through that means a rarefied serenity without definite beliefs, who lived moreover on particularly good terms with the Devil – indignation and fear of evil seeming to him childish emotions.

Yet it was due to Carlyle that younger men, such as George Lewes, Matthew Arnold and Edward Hutton afterwards expounded Goethe to us, and it is perhaps still mainly due to Carlyle that the sound of Goethe's name carries to English ears suggestions of grandeur and mastery. Few of us read German, and even literary England mostly takes Faust on trust. "Close your Byron, open your Goethe," was good advice in its day; and although my own acquaintance with Goethe's works does not warrant the assertion, Ludwig's life of Goethe has suggested to me that it might possibly repay some to close, for a while, even their Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Shaw, Wells, Proust, Gide and D. H. Lawrence to study





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this great poet-sage. Doubtless we shall not do so, for we leave German to scientists and researchers, and, with the exception of Carlyle's masterly *Wilhelm Meister* and Shelley's fragment from the prologue of *Faust*, there are few English translations of Goethe which do not hopelessly blur the original.

Moreover, Goethe cannot reach many; he is too interested in truth to be afraid of being dull. Even when, in spite of his having sympathized more with Napoleon than with his fellow-countrymen during the struggle, liberated Germany turned him into a national idol, he had no illusions on that point: "When they applauded me I was not so vain as to take it as a tribute; no, they expected some modest phrase of self-depreciation. But as I was strong-minded enough to show exactly what I felt, they called me arrogant. . . . And of my lyrics which survive? One or another may be sung now and again by a pretty girl at her piano, but for the real public, they are as dead as mutton. . . . I'll tell you a secret – my things could never be popular. . . . they are only for the few who desire and look out for that kind of thing, and are doing something like it themselves."

Who, then, are those who are "on the look-out for that kind of thing"? The poets and writers who have found it impossible to reconcile intellectual scepticism with a creative emotional attitude towards life, and to maintain the detachment of an artist while living in touch with modern life round them. They are not uncommon. The extravagant subjectivism of much modern art, its avoidance of the simple and its pursuit of the idiosyncratic, its distrust of big common themes and its interest in small subtleties, are solutions by flight of the very predicament



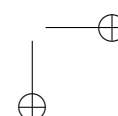
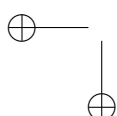




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from which Goethe extracted himself in a life-long struggle. Only the truths which a man finds on his own path can be of much service to him, but he may get hints from following the footsteps of another; especially of an artist whose work, poetry and prose, was a search for spiritual liberation; one for whom that search itself was a frequent theme, whose nature comprised a mass of contradictory sympathies, interests and impulses, and to whom the lopping or starving of even one of them seemed a confession of failure.

No one ever found himself more difficult to deal with than Goethe found himself, and no one could have found his own times more perplexing; yet the fascination which he exercised was that of one who has attained a mysterious self-mastery and clarity. He was born a lyrical and passionate amorist, yet the peace and finality of domesticity appealed intimately to his sense of beauty; the urge within him to live by impulse was tremendous, yet to catch the joy as it flies was not more essential to him than to make a pattern of his life and to subordinate experience to an end. He could not be happy unless he was practical, acting on others and the world, yet he was driven to contemplation; he expanded naturally in society, yet solitude was an absolute necessity to him (that was one of the easiest of his contradictions to solve, for he soon learnt how to carry with him into company a little bit of solitude); he could never tell whether in pursuing knowledge or poetry he was really following his deepest impulse. He was emotionally romantic, and he adored the simplifications of classic form. Anatomy, painting, botany, physics, drama, poetry, politics, love (miscellaneous and perpetual), geology, business, farm-





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ing, family life, philosophy, archaeology, connoisseurship, worldly success, retirement, history – he felt passionately certain that he was fitted for them all; and not merely felt it as an average man, who is also a miscellany of fickle tastes and leanings, but with the ardour of the poet who understands the charm of each pursuit or condition of being, and with the confidence of the man of thought who has justified them severally to himself. His longing for universal knowledge was only equalled by his passion for thoroughness. Both the artist and the practical self in him kept calling out, “In limitation alone lies mastery”; and yet those voices were not louder within him than another which was ever urging him to refuse nothing, to experience all.

What a difficult team of horses to drive – at a time, too, when the highways were broken and the waters were out! In childhood his native city was invaded; twice Napoleon’s soldiers were quartered on him; the little Dukedom he had helped to govern was turned into a battlefield, and on one occasion he was within an ace of being murdered by Alsatian soldiers in his bed. Nor does the metaphor apply less to the world of changing ideas and violent emotions into which he was born. The times were not more propitious then than now for a man set upon calmly “building the pyramid of his own existence.” Yet that pyramid got itself built.

How it was done it is for the biographer of Goethe to show. It is the test of his success, and a very big undertaking. Herr Ludwig’s book is not the one we wanted. It is a contribution and one of considerable interest, yet it cannot supersede the tedious but thorough work of Bielschowsky, or compare in various important respects





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with Lewes's *Life of Goethe*. It is impossible to follow satisfactorily the life of a great representative man apart from the history of his times. Herr Ludwig shirks this, as he did in the case of Napoleon; he dwells exclusively upon those psychological aspects of his subject which interest him.

Unfortunately, what interests him even in psychology is what is popular rather than what is permanent in biography. Everybody is immediately interested in love affairs, fewer in the intellectual development of a great man's mind or his art – yet those aspects alone make such a biography worth while. The reader of Herr Ludwig's *Goethe* might be almost excused for concluding that the determining influence upon Goethe's art at every turn in his career was invariably love for a woman. I cannot suggest more quickly his lack of proportion than by saying that Spinoza, whose thought had such an enormous influence upon Goethe's view of life, is never once mentioned by Herr Ludwig; while every woman, except (I think) a little French dancing-mistress at Strasburg, is recorded as bringing her stone to the pyramid. There would be no distortion of truth in mentioning their contributions, if the biographer had not ignored the great procession of tugging camels and straining horses, the huge fragments of old temples and blocks of philosophy and science which also contributed to the making of it.

It would be a mistake to conclude that all Goethe had had to do to become himself was to fall constantly in love on that limited liability system at which he became early adept; yet against such a howler the critic is bound to caution Herr Ludwig's reader. The effects of Goethe's emotional life on his work are excellently traced in these





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pages; the effects of his intellect upon his emotions (in his case supremely important) most inadequately. Heaven forbid that we should underrate the power and stimulus upon a poet of the *mater saeva cupidinum* or even of lighter loves; but though it is important that the biographer of Goethe should do justice to the influence of Kätchen, Fredericka, Lili, Lotte, Charlotte, Christiane, Minna, Ulrike, etc., etc., Goethe's relation to his thinking contemporaries and the great men of the past, his indebtedness to Germany, England, France, Italy, Greece, Rome, also demand attention, if we are to measure the diameter of his mind or understand the quality of his work. Much fuel chokes a little fire, but makes a big one blaze. It was not only the mass of experience which Goethe's art consumed that was so astonishing, but the mass of learning and reflection; and what makes him almost unique among artists is that at the same time he made a good work of art of life itself.

His practical plastic power Herr Ludwig does succeed in bringing out, especially in the second volume; but from his first volume no one could guess that the influence upon Goethe of Oesler and Lessing (Herr Ludwig does mention Herder), of Wieland, of Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare*, of Sterne and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, of Strasburg Cathedral and German ballads, even of the Lisbon earthquake, were as great in their several ways as that of Kätchen or Lili. However, let us take the book as what it is – suggestive, but incomplete; a study of entertaining acuteness, chiefly concerned with Goethe's love-life, and here and there showing original insight.

The book does convey what it is conceivable some may have forgotten – that a man cannot be a world-poet





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without possessing a temperament of extreme sensibility, not to say a violent one. Herr Ludwig does that most effectively. His account, too, of the years of bourgeois placidity which followed Goethe's open adoption of Christiane as his mistress is new and convincing. His championship of his subsequent marriage to her, which more idealistic and staid biographers have treated as a sad affair, and his explanation of the failure in comparison of Goethe's lofty relation with Frau von Stein, which they have exalted, are also real contributions to the subject. For an inquisitive psychologist, however, he fails in making as clear to us as we might hope what peculiar quality it was in Goethe himself that made him in his love-affairs invariably save himself in time. Herr Ludwig calls it his "genius"; and Goethe's contrary impulse to fling himself again and again into life, to adore, to yield, to lose himself, he calls his "daemon."

This really does not get us much further. Goethe himself was fond of the word "daemonic." He endeavoured at different times to explain what he meant by it; but it seems that since this divine or diabolical factor cannot be grasped by the reason or understanding, he could not express clearly what he meant by it. He felt it too in inanimate things. This much however is certain, that he held it to be, in the case of man, a mysterious power which fills him with boundless confidence in himself and makes him capable of enormous and successful undertakings, but also betrays him to disaster. He says it was not part of his own nature, and that he had been under its sway.

"His love affairs," says Mr. Santayana, "were means to fuller realization of himself. They were not sensual,





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nor were his infidelities callous – far from it – they stirred him deeply and loosened the springs of poetry in his heart. That was precisely their function. But he must press on. The claims of his own spiritual growth compelled him to sacrifice the object of his passion and his own lacerated feelings on the altar of duty to himself.” This is much better put than Herr Ludwig succeeds in putting it. Goethe was far from being ruthless, far from being a Don Juan. On the contrary, he was often an unsuccessful lover, nearly always a prostrate one – till the moment of escape. He suffered agonies of sympathetic pain in departing, and never forgot his loves. His old loves remained till death in his memory on the tenderest terms; he never tried to keep, but he never lost, one really dear to him. He did not abandon Fredericka or Lili, as Herr Ludwig once suggests, because he wanted a wife and they would not do. It was something subtler and more general than that.

In the story *Die Neue Melusine* a man falls in love with a lovely creature of the dwarf kingdom; he can only remain with her by becoming as small as she, and when she puts a ring on his finger he too becomes a dwarf. At first he is blissfully happy, but soon he remembers his former condition. “Now I understood for the first time what the philosophers meant by their ideals, by which men are said to be tormented. I possessed an ideal self, and often in my dreams seemed to myself like a giant.” In his misery he files the ring in two and regains his natural stature. This is what happened time after time in these love stories which Herr Ludwig tells, and that allegory is the plot of them all. True, in the end, Goethe married a little dwarf, but not one who





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belonged to the magic kingdom. There was something deep down in his nature which enabled him to lend himself unreservedly in imagination, not only to his loves, but to philosophies, religions and ideas, and yet to attain peace of heart without espousing one of them. He could combine Christianity, Paganism, Sensuality, without becoming a Christian, Pagan, or a Sensualist; thus many conflicting currents of the times met and mingled in him. The gift which saved him was poetry.

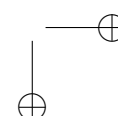
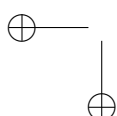
As I have said, it is surprising that Carlyle should have chosen Goethe as a favourite hero. One would have expected that the grand, bland, Olympian calm of the sage of Weimar would have exasperated the flaming sage of Chelsea, who spent some time trying to inspire Emerson with an agitated horror of the Devil. (It is said that he took him to a House of Commons debate with that purpose, turning on him fiercely with “Will ye believe, mon, in the Deil *noo*?”) The serenity of Goethe seems to me to lie in his temperament rather than in his philosophy, and therefore, alas, cannot be transferable. His contemporaries were amazed, and many of them shocked by his indifference during those years when his country was being broken up and overrun by the French. While patriots were in despair, he wrote poetry; nor did the confusion round him reflect itself in a word he wrote. On the day of the battle of Leipsig he wrote an epilogue to his tragedy of *Essex* for his favourite actress. He followed everything with his mind, but he let nothing upset him emotionally. He allowed his love affairs to go further than most things in that direction, but he always just managed to extricate himself – intact. It is this mixture of extreme sensibility with detachment which





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makes him unique. His sensibility was great enough to make it almost impossible to tell him bad news, and he put off to the last moment facing anything disagreeable; yet his detachment was so complete that men thought him unfeeling. His constant effort was to keep himself always in a frame of mind to make the most of the alleviating occupations of the present. Of all the stories told of him, the one which seems to illustrate best this temperament is the account of an incident which occurred on his voyage from Sicily to Naples. The ship was in great danger of being driven on the rocks and the deck was crowded with terrified Italian peasants. To Goethe the ignoble uproar was more detestable than death; he delivered a little speech and told them to trust in the Mother of God. It had a calming effect. "They were so near the rocks that some sailors had seized beams to stave the ship off"; Goethe then went down to the cabin, lay on his back, and called up before his mind's eye a picture in Merian's illustrated Bible.







## THE G.O.M.

### I

The G.O.M.! What emotion will these initials, I wonder, convey to one of the youngest generation, should such a person find himself reading this page? What once they conveyed to me has been revived by reading some of Gladstone's speeches, selected by Lord Morley and now reprinted, together with a most valuable bibliography by Mr. Bassett. Reading them, I recovered my reverence, my astonishment, which the last twenty years, with their new types and subversive standards, had somewhat overlaid. Not a few of my contemporaries, I fancy, have also half-forgotten or misremembered that dauntless old man, at once so aloof and so passionate. It is chiefly for them I write. As for the youngest generation of all, if they ever do think of Gladstone, I am sure they think of him only as a typical Victorian, pompous, prolix, and "pi"; as a public character, with nothing in him but platform emotions and a remarkably infectious power of self-deception; as a man with marvellous aptitudes and energy no doubt, but who, considered as a personality or a political thinker, was little better than a yawning emptiness. Is that an exaggeration? Hardly, I think. When once he had vanished from hearing and sight, then the portraits of him which Disraeli and other opponents had laboured in vain – while he lived – to paint upon the general imagination





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began to gather plausibility – the portraits of him as one “intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity,” as “an unconscious hypocrite,” or simply as “an old man in a hurry.” And they succeeded not because these were his true lineaments, but because when he himself was no longer there, that something which was like a fire in his breast, which kept so many copy-plate virtues from being in him insipid, so many of his lofty denunciations from sounding like stage-thunder, and excused, moreover, so many of his dodgy expedients, was no longer imaginable to the limp comprehensions of men. After his death the ironic, commonsense, negative spirits began to have it all their own way. Once the flame was out they could hold up the empty lantern, and lo! it seemed, sure enough, to have been only exceptionally pretentious in design. And they have unfortunately been since abetted in their work by some scribes and biographers, unconscious of what they were doing, who thought that the way to render Gladstone’s incandescence was to bleach him white. What follows are mere hints towards remembering him correctly, first-aids to the imagination.

## II

It is important to picture him as a formidable, not to say daemonic old man, with a glance that was a weight and a terror, possessed by a perpetual enthusiasm that abashed luke-warm human nature. Parnell was a dominating character, precipitous to approach when once his mind was made up; yet it has been put on record, through his own confession, that the only man with whom in personal interview he did not feel sure of himself was “the old spider,” as he called him. This characteristic





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might he illustrated by many anecdotes; one more will serve. Professor Blackie, another grand old man, was fond of narrating how, in the course of an argument with Mr. Gladstone, he was about to deliver a final and crushing rejoinder when he found, to his astonishment, that the words were frozen on his lips: Gladstone had opened his eyes a shade wider and looked at him. The professor, on whom this experience had apparently made a great impression, repeated the story so often that it acquired a title among his acquaintances, and was always referred to as “Blackie’s peep into hell.”

When one is reading these speeches it is easy to supply in imagination the sonorous voice, the threatening rumble of it, as over a sounding-board within the chest, and the beautiful stirring cry of appeal and indignation in certain passages. It is not recollection of the voice itself – it was husky and like the dashing of a cascade at the end of a cavern, when I heard it – that makes it clearly audible to me in these speeches. The sentences, unlike most published oratory, are spoken sentences, not written ones composed with a pen by a man imagining himself in the act of speaking. They contain in themselves all the delays and circumlocutions of elaborate improvization. The charm of these speeches is that they are so spontaneous and yet have so much dignity of form. The attitude of mind of the speaker towards his theme is felt in the gravity of their rhythm; and no one, however sceptical, can fail, as he reads, to credit the tradition that when Gladstone intervened the tone of the debate was raised to a different level. But if it is easy to supply the voice, it is hard to supply an image of that formidable personality. Yet, to gauge the effect of these orations, we must make

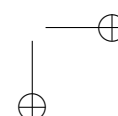
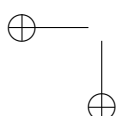




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that effort. When, for instance, he is reported as turning upon interrupters with the question “Am I permitted to proceed?” unless we supply also something of the awfulness which we read into the story of Chatham quelling laughter by repeating the word sugar, “Sugar, sugar, sugar. Who laughs at sugar now?” we shall not enjoy the privilege of being, even in imagination on the spot. Nothing is more astonishing to a modern than the courtesy of Gladstone’s invective. Such excessive caution to keep within the bounds of courtesy will seem to lessen the effectiveness of the rebuke, if we forget the formidable pressure of the personality behind it. As Cromwell, when Lord Protector of England, could throw snowballs with scullions in the Palace yard of St. James’s without fear of jeopardizing his dignity, so Gladstone could hedge about his invective with the circumlocutions of politeness without detracting in the least from its weight. So remarkable was he for courtesy of speech, even among his contemporaries, who in such matters lived under a tradition stricter than ours, that when by chance at some moment of irritation he let fall an expression of contempt, a general outcry was sure to follow. The smallest suggestion of rudeness on the part of Gladstone, and all his opponents were howling as though he had committed an atrocity. Some may remember the shindy created by his reference to Jesse Collings as “a certain Mr. Collings,” an expression which would surely escape notice falling from the lips of Mr. Lloyd George.

As an example of his method of invective I will quote a passage from his speech in the Reform Bill of 1866, a passage where he is also defending himself for having said, with regard to some opponents of that Bill – “we





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know with whom we have to deal” – an expression which, by the innuendo conveyed, had given what seems to us incomprehensible offence. “I had in my mind very different persons” (*i.e.* not the Opposition as a whole or Mr. Spencer Walpole, who had complained in particular). “Does my right hon. friend the Member for Calne (Mr. Robert Lowe) recollect how, in one of his plays, that prince of comedians, Aristophanes, conveys, through the medium of some character or other, a rebuke to some prevailing tendency or sentiment of the time – I cannot recollect now what it was – too many are the years that have slipped away since I read it – but that character, addressing the audience, says, ‘But now, my good Athenians, pray recollect I am not speaking of the public, I am only speaking of certain depraved and crooked little men’? And if I may be permitted to make a metaphorical application of these epithets – confining myself most strictly to the metaphorical use, speaking only in a political sense, and with exclusive reference to the question of Reform, I would say it was not of the House of Commons, but of ‘certain depraved and crooked little men’ that I used these words, and I frankly own now in candour my right hon. friend is, according to my judgment and intention, first and foremost among them.”

How distinctly audible beneath the delays and qualifications, which only seem to load the denunciation more heavily, is that personal formidableness. Lowe, it may be remembered, though he had made a speech opposing any extension of the franchise in any form, was not prepared to vote against the Bill, preferring to support an amendment which said, in effect, we think that a bad Bill which





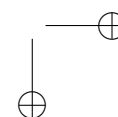
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is on the table, but you must lay another bad Bill on the table, and then we will consider it. "I think, therefore, that I am justified in using these words," Gladstone goes on, "significant as I admit them to be" (imagine here the stare of the smoky, glowing eyes and the menacing inclination of his body towards those opposite), "that we know with whom we have to deal."

## II

Since I am merely supplying first aid to the comprehension of Gladstone (not needlessly as far as many are concerned, I believe), it is worth saying that, next to his passionate nature, the most important thing to realize about him is that he is most easily to be understood by the present generation under the figure of a great Conservative; Liberalism, and the priceless things that attitude towards life denotes, having unfortunately become incomprehensible to many.

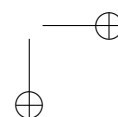
In the few autobiographical notes he has left behind, admirably clear, unpretentious to the point of being commonplace, he says that while at Oxford he read Rousseau's *Social Contract*, which made no impression on him, and Burke, who made a great one. At the age of eighty-two he said in conversation with Lord Morley: "I think I can truly put up all the change that has come into my politics into a sentence: I was brought up to distrust and dislike liberty, I learned to believe in it. That is the key to all my changes." Rousseau gradually getting the better of Burke in his mind; that is the history of his political development. What amazes the reader of the speeches, apart from the sweep and power of the exposition, is the prodigious reverence betrayed at every





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turn for the framework of society, the hierarchy of office, the prestige of tradition, and the august institutions of Throne and Parliament. Why, it extends to the very buildings inhabited by those prodigies, *sans peur et sans reproche* (however incomprehensibly blind in their policy and behaviour he may judge them at the moment to be), whom men now call politicians and officials! I confess I smiled when in his speech at Blackheath, considered at the time to be demagogic in appeal, I came across references in it to “the noble hospital at Greenwich and the views with which Her Majesty’s Government would approach the consideration of questions connected with that truly national building.” I pictured the scene: the damp autumn afternoon, the crowd, some five or six thousand, round the platform on the heath, mostly working men, furious at an economizing Government which had discharged some thousands of them from Woolwich Dockyards. And such elaborate talk to them! Yet after the first half-hour the small frock-coated figure, with the eager and melodious voice, discoursing as though he were addressing Privy Councillors, completely dominates them. The interruptions stop; the phrases and periphrases flow on. There is something dauntless and electrical about him to be felt at a radius unexpectedly wide; and in the ceremonious consideration of his address there is a genuine democratic sentiment, which makes him abate not a jot of the formality and elaboration due to an audience of princes and plenipotentiaries, Plenipotentiaries they are indeed to him, though they stand about in heavy boots, smoking their dottles and turning their pipes askew when the wind blows, plenipotentiaries of a great vague power called The People, to whose dumb





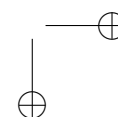
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hevings that ancient order, with its accretions of sentiment he loves so well, must slowly but inevitably give room. And it is to this process that his imagination more and more fervently assents, with rebates and qualifications, it is true, but more and more faithfully as time goes on, though with revulsions from the idea of change for its own sake, and a devotion to such formulas as that every member of the House of Commons is, of course, fundamentally disinterested, and with a poetic devotion to the decencies of public life and the romance of ancient institutions. That there was an English people who felt right, a Parliament that meant right, and a Throne that was worthy of a life's devotion – that was his political creed. Bless me, who, without considerable glosses, would assent to that creed now? We are too cynical and have learnt too much, and our statesmen have been too cynical. *Sartor Resartus* and its clothes philosophy has ceased to be even pointful enough to amuse. The crowns and wigs and robes are off.

#### IV

Yet reading these speeches I found myself continually exclaiming: “Gladstone, would thou wert living at this hour!” We should then have someone in whose mouth high, disinterested sentiments and expressions of respect for small nationalities would sound impressive.\* Nothing is more striking in these speeches than the passages in which he calls the foreign policy of his own country to account; turns on those who give as a reason for thwarting Russia her oppression of Poland with a list of our own

\*Written in 1915.







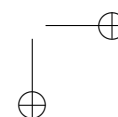
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tyrannical acts towards other nationalities, or proves that if British interests (since they cover the world like a web) are to be the only criteria of foreign policy, we shall never be without an excuse for annexation or war.

“This England of ours” (he is speaking upon the Treaty of Berlin) “is not so poor and so weak a thing as to depend upon the reputation of this or that Administration; and the world knows pretty well of what stuff she is made. I am not quite sure, however, that the world has the same clear strong conviction with respect to the standard of our moral action as it has with respect to the standard of our material strength. Now, I am desirous that the standard of our material strength shall be highly and justly estimated by the other nations of Christendom: but I believe it to be of still more vital consequence that we should stand high in their estimation as the lovers of truth, of honour and of openness in all our proceedings, as those who know how to cast aside the motives of a narrow selfishness, and give scope to considerations of broad and lofty principle.”

Only a statesman who has dared to rebuke his own country can express indignation at another with genuine energy.

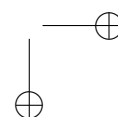
Listen to him addressing imaginary Ottomans, holding them with his glittering eye on Blackheath: “You shall receive your regular tribute, you shall retain your titular sovereignty, your empire shall not be invaded, but never again as the years roll in their course, so far as it is in our power to determine, never again shall the hand of violence be raised by you, never again shall the flood-gates of lust be open to you, never again shall the dire refinements of cruelty be devised by you for the sake of





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making mankind miserable.” We may wish such a voice could speak for us now; but it must not be forgotten that what lent it an ominous grandeur was a moral indignation so genuine as not to spare his own country on occasion: “That is the case of India in particular. We go to the other end of the world as a company of merchants; we develop the arts and arms of conquerors; we rule over a vast territory containing 200,000,000 people, and what do we say next? We lay a virtual claim to a veto upon all the political arrangements of all the countries and seas which can possibly constitute any one of the routes between England and the East, between two extremes, or nearly such, of the World. We say to one state – You must do nothing in the Black Sea at Batoum, because Batoum and Erzeroum may one day become a route to the East. We say: You must do nothing in Syria or Bagdad, because we may finally discover the Valley of the Euphrates to be the best route to the East. The Suez Canal was made for the benefit of the World; but it is thought by some of these pretenders, that we, who almost furiously opposed the digging of it, have rights there which are quite distinct in kind from those of the rest of the World, and that we are entitled to assert our mastery without regard to the interests of other portions of mankind. Then there is the route by the Cape of Good Hope. It happens, however, that at the Cape no one annexes but ourselves. Nay, it appears from news no older than to-day (7th May 1877), that we are so stinted in our possessions that it is expedient to make large additions to our territory there; and to make them exactly by those menaces of force which Ministers think so intolerable in the case of Turkey. And





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then you know, Mr. Speaker, that any additions to our territory are always perfectly innocent. Sometimes they are made not without bloodshed: sometimes they are made not without a threat of bloodshed. But that is not our fault; it is only due to the stupidity of those people who cannot perceive the wisdom of coming under our sceptre. We are endowed with a superiority of character, a noble unselfishness, an inflexible integrity which the other nations of the world are slow to recognize; and they are stupid enough to think that we – superior beings that we are – are to be bound by the same vulgar rules that might be justly applicable to the ordinary sons of Adam.”

The irony of this passage was not, and can never be agreeable to patriots of an Imperialistic tinge, but only a statesman who could thus measure the degree of delusion that enters into every form of national complacency, could have adequately exposed now the domineering pretensions of German “Kultur.” “A nation is rarely just to other nations,” Gladstone wrote. “Perhaps it is never truly just, though sometimes (like individuals) what may be called more than just. There can be no difficulty in any country in finding foreign ministers able and willing to assert the fair and reasonable claims of their countrymen with courage and with firmness. The difficulty is quite of another kind. It is to find the foreign minister first, who will himself view those claims in the daylight both of reason and prudence; secondly, and a far harder task, who will have the courage to hazard, and if need be to sacrifice himself, in keeping the mind of his countrymen down to such claims as are strictly fair and reasonable.”





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### v

Gladstone's genius was a moral passion. His power over men, apart from his immense abilities, lay in the faculty of rousing in them a sense of responsibility. Men will readily take a lead from anyone who can make them feel that the work they are engaged upon is of urgent importance. They suffer from their own indifference. There is a narcotic in all experience, grateful and comforting on occasion, but entailing dullness in the end. Things go wrong, but the world rolls on; it does not seem to matter much after all. Work is scamped, decisions are postponed; yet the sky does not fall. Yes, it is a relief! But how boring it becomes for that very reason to shoulder day after day recurring botherations. Then a man comes along who attributes an enormous importance to the next step to be taken, however trivial. Again what a relief! "This is a vital matter; I am important because the issue, in part at any rate, rests with me; I count; I am alive." So cries the heart. "This is the man I will believe in and follow; when I feel things through him they become interesting." Such was "the Gladstone touch" in Parliament, in the Civil Service, and in private life. He was praised for raising the level of discussion in debates, and at the same time laughed at for urging or refusing some petty amendment to some subordinate clause of some minor Bill, as though the destiny of mankind hung on the issue. The temper of mind involved, however, was the same. He had no humour, and to this generation, which ridiculously overrates that quality, this has appeared a grave blemish. But humour was inconsistent with his master faculty of making men feel the urgency





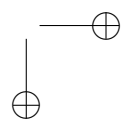
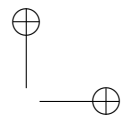
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of the matter in hand. It is at bottom an easy way of coming to terms with pain and pettiness. If we cannot get the better of life, at any rate we can be so free as to laugh at it; if we cannot help being insignificant we can at any rate acknowledge the fact gracefully with a joke, thereby keeping in touch with a larger sense of things than our preoccupations and passions viewed alone might appear to justify. But of those whose souls are on fire it is unintelligent to demand humour. Disraeli without it would have been hideous; Gladstone with it would have been what his enemies delighted to think him – a hypocrite, conscious or unconscious, it matters little.

#### VI

When he lay dying, the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford sent him a message from the Council, expressing the sorrow and sympathy of the University. “He listened,” says his biographer, “most attentively and over it he brooded long, then he dictated to his youngest daughter sentence by sentence his reply: ‘There is no expression of Christian sympathy that I value more than that of the ancient university of Oxford, the God-fearing, God-sustaining university of Oxford. I served her, perhaps mistakenly, but to the best of my ability. My most earnest prayers are hers to the uttermost and the last.’” There is a grandeur, pathos and rightness in that valediction which should enable us to excuse in this old man of eighty-nine a lack of irony towards human struggles and the incongruities of experience.







## SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT

Mr. Gardiner's life of Sir William Harcourt is a conventional biography. Critical compliments, thoroughly deserved in this case, are inevitably conventional; the book is well-written, well-arranged, judicious. There is not a dull page in it for those who delight to fight again old party battles; there are many which will interest little those who do not. Sir William Harcourt, however, though he was the reverse of a mystifying or perplexing man, was very far from being a dull one. His intellect and character had no recesses; there are no hidden chambers for the biographer to explore; biography can only amplify what the world already knows about him. His letters are a very free expression of his likes and dislikes, his hopes and disappointments, but so were his admirable public utterances. There is no development, no growth of convictions, for the biographer to trace:

*You never will teach the oak or the beech  
To be aught but a greenwood tree.*

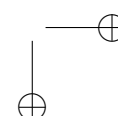
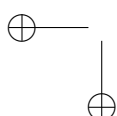
He was an exceedingly vigorous younger son of an aristocratic English family; he had the temperament and sympathies of the born magnate, streaked with the combative radical common-sense of the younger son who has to make his way in the world – a task he enjoyed thoroughly. He had, like most energetic men, a great capacity for enjoyment; and a constant zest in his work as





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a journalist, lawyer and Parliamentarian, kept him from being a humbug. With his enjoying temperament he had no need to regard the rapid accumulation of a fortune at the Bar merely as a stepping stone to higher ambitions. His energetic advocacy in party struggles was not the mere expedient of the statesman who cannot see over the heads of his contemporaries into the future. He had a modest but extremely sturdy idea of the kind of part a public-man ought to play in the world. He obeyed to the letter Sydney Smith's injunction, "Take short views," though his political views were considerably longer, as his biographer shows, than his own class were inclined to take. The reader of his life lays it down with the feeling that Sir William Harcourt was one of the most effective radical statesmen of the latter end of the nineteenth century, though in matters of personal taste and everyday life he was the most conservative of men. He had nearly all the faculties of a political leader, except that of understanding half-truths uttered in a confused form. This is almost equivalent to saying that he did not understand the opinions of other people, and above all, not those of the public. He certainly took no pains to understand his adversaries. What he did understand (this made him the most formidable of controversialists) was the case they put forward, and how to smash it. Nature had not endowed him liberally with artistic sensibility, but a narrow, though arduous classical education, working upon eighteenth-century preferences, made him heedful of form. In the quotations scattered through these two volumes we are as much delighted by the grace as by the vigour of his periods and phrases. Whether the reader agrees with him or not, he enjoys a wit rare in political







SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT

controversy, the spectacle of a powerful mind applying principles and habits of thought, formed once and for all, to circumstances as they arose, and the play of a temperament which rejoices not in merely refuting but in rolling an adversary in the dust. Harcourt had the gift of effective assertion, and his assertions of principle were never more effective than when he had every reason to think that they were unpalatable, as they were during the Boer War. In retrospect nothing is more endearing in him than his cheerful readiness to make any number of enemies. It is clear enough from his witty, hectoring, outspoken letters that he must have been an impossible colleague. Arrogantly benevolent, he shoulders alone past hedgers and trimmers and idealists, rasping sensibilities, treading on toes with a sturdy path-clearing gait. He knew himself better than he understood others. Writing to Lady Ponsonby he says:

“You and Dizzy are mistaken. It is not true I have no principles, nor is it the principles which are second-rate – though possibly the man may be. Dizzy is by no means my prophet, though I think him a profoundly interesting character, and should like, if it were possible, to penetrate the secret of his life. Mine is a far more simple and commonplace one. I don’t pretend to originality, because I don’t possess it. I think I have pretty fairly and honestly gauged myself and know what I can and what I can’t do. I have fair, not extraordinary, intellectual powers, rather above the average logical faculty, a power of illustration rather than of imagination, a faculty of acquiring knowledge of particular things rather than much store of knowledge itself, a passion for politics as a practical pursuit, which has been cultivated by a good deal of study (a thing rare nowadays), so that I appear less ignorant of them than ordinary politicians. A tendency to believe in general principles rather than in small expedients. A natural disposition towards vanity, wilfulness and





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exaggeration, which I have tried a good deal to correct. An ambition not of an ignoble order which cares little for place or pelf, but a good deal for honour. A nature not ungenerous in its impulses, but strong in its passions and its prejudices.

With all this a good deal of courage, obstinacy and determination, not discouraged by mistakes or deterred by disparagement. Too careless of the feelings and too little respectful of the power of others. Positive, confident, I fear I must add overbearing. With a profound belief in myself. A queer jumble of good and bad. A good deal that is high, still more that is weak, not much I think that is mean. That is what nature has made me, and which I have done too little to alter. A character which may end by being a great failure but which will never be a small success. I was not made to be a philosopher or a discoverer. I should never have found out steam, but I can make a steam engine – and drive it. I am a thoroughgoing Englishman, and perhaps may one day govern Englishmen, not (as you suppose) by practising upon their weaknesses but by really sharing them. I forgot to claim for myself a certain power of discourse which in a debating country is valuable, as it seems to me, principally because it is rare. Why do I tell you all this? Because I want your good opinion; because I want you to see that I don't deceive myself and don't wish to deceive others."

Is there anything left out of this self-portrait? I spoke of him just now as a man without recesses or veiled vistas in his nature; nevertheless, there is something omitted, though it could certainly not be described as an element withdrawn from the general eye; his exceptional warmth of heart. He was more attached to some of his political adversaries than most men are to brothers in arms. His personal affections constantly cut across his convictions, notably in the case of Disraeli and Chamberlain. He refused, however, to allow this to complicate in any way either his private or his public life; in public he hit out at them mercilessly, receiving blows in return which made





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him flush with instant but temporary indignation, and he continued to rejoice in them enthusiastically in private. Like many combative, even quarrelsome men, in his home he was indulgent and ardently affectionate. All through his life there runs the story of a relation in which the side of his character which he turned to the world loses all its competitive truculence and over-bearing self-confidence – his relation to his eldest son. Between those two there was only a competition in unselfishness, nor did he hide from the world that “Loulou” was to him the dearest object in it. From the days when his son was four, he being a widower, issued invitations in the name of “Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Lewis Harcourt,” so that everyone was compelled to recognize that however physically and mentally incongruous, these two were in fact a pair of inseparable brothers. It was a far harder blow to the son than to the father when, on the retirement of Gladstone, the Liberal Party chose, not their most effective and honest gladiator, but “the dark horse in the loose box” as their leader. Or shall we say when Lord Morley chose Lord Rosebery? The friendship between Lord Morley and Sir William Harcourt was long, apparently close and confiding at least on the latter’s side; but Lord Morley winced at and remembered clashes which Sir William easily and cheerfully forgot. Whatever his merits, Lord Morley was too vain and envious to be a good friend.

When we read in turn the official biographies of our statesmen, even though there is no obvious special pleading on the part of their biographers, it is remarkable that the hero in each case appears to be indubitably in the right. When I read Mr. Buckle’s account of Disraeli’s Reform Bill, it seems that from the intelligent Conservative





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point of view Disraeli was right; when I read an account of the same events in Lord Salisbury's life, the latter's attitude alone seems honestly Conservative and tenable. It is impossible, however, in spite of this experience, to believe that the lives of either Lord Rosebery or Lord Morley will efface in Liberals the impression which Mr. Gardiner's biography of Harcourt leaves, that it was a disaster to Liberalism that the party preferred at this juncture a vaguely imperialistic figure-head. Harcourt was a monolith; Rosebery a mist. A mist is a widely enveloping phenomenon, but then it is apt to thin away again; a puff of wind and it relaxes its hold. Not only must the Liberal have a certain magnanimous trust in change, tolerance and self-government both in the case of individuals, groups and nations, but he must be a thorough disbeliever in force, and therefore a passionate anti-imperialist, anti-war man; on the other hand in domestic policy he must care for retrenchment as much as for reform. Harcourt was the embodiment of these two convictions. If the Conservatives wanted battleships and expansion, both noxious things, he would, at any rate, see that the rich paid for them. Until this life appeared, I, for one, certainly believed that Campbell-Bannerman was the most out-and-out champion of these ideas during their eclipse; but it is clear that Harcourt was an even more uncompromising opponent of that Liberal Imperialism which blurred the edges of the party creed.

He had a powerful personality; you could never forget that he was in the room. The most vivid description of him is to be found in *The Secret Agent*, where he appears as Sir Ethelred:



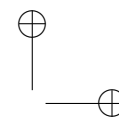
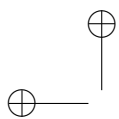


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“Vast in bulk and stature, with a long white face, which, broadened at the base by a big double chin, appeared egg-shaped in the fringe of their greyish whisker, the Great Personage appeared an expanding man. Unfortunately from a tailoring point of view, the crossfolds in the middle of a buttoned black coat added to the impression, as if the fastenings were tried to the utmost. From the head, set upward on a thick neck, the eyes, with puffy lower lids, stared with a haughty droop on each side of a hooked aggressive nose, nobly salient in the vast pale circumference of the face. A shining silk hat and a pair of worn gloves lying ready on the end of a long table looked expanded too, enormous.”

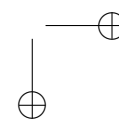
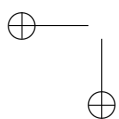
Conrad has also suggested the inflections of his deep, smooth voice and his laconic interruptions of anyone conveying information (“Be lucid. . . . Spare me details”); and his habit of relapsing into a sort of absent-minded loftiness. The only detail in the above description to which my memory demurs is the word “pale,” for towards the end of his life his complexion was a very deep pink. His wit had always something characteristic about it, as when he dismissed interest in a society scandal of considerable reverberations by saying, “Naturally where there are Souls there will be slips”; or replied to a whispered warning that his dress required adjusting, “Does it? Thank ye, though it’s not much use bolting the stable door after the horse has been stolen.” His attitude to the young was one of truculent benevolence: “You no doubt think me an antediluvian monster; I may possibly discover that you are a young fool. You may not envy me my past, but I certainly don’t envy you your future.” The first time I met him he impressed upon me that “the good times” were over, and that for his part, he was thankful he had not to live into the twentieth century.





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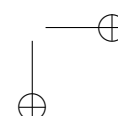
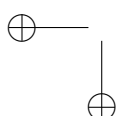
He grumbled furiously, when on inheriting Newnham, he had to pay the death-duties he had imposed himself. He was a pronounced Erastian in Church matters, and detested "Romish practices." The disappearance of the Lion and the Unicorn from church after church must have depressed him. His comments on The Prayer Book Bill would have been tremendous and scathing. He could be most beautifully courteous and exceedingly rude. Like all unflaging fighters, he had a warm heart. After all it is the bitter and envious who wear themselves down soonest to weary passivity.





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How little I got from my classical education may be guessed by my friends, but is only known to myself, for my tutor and masters have certainly forgotten. I went through a public school without being aware that the books I read (if reading it could be called) “in school,” had any of the qualities which delighted me in those that I read “out of school.” The classics appeared to me to be more or less literal translations of our worst English cribs. But occasionally, with a mild surprise, I noted that a passage or a phrase seemed rather good. This happened most frequently when Horace was the subject of the lesson; so when at the age of fourteen (later no master would have dreamt of putting such a question to me) I was asked by my tutor which Latin author I liked best, I replied promptly but without interest, Horace. It was not the patriotic odes which pleased me, but those which made pictures with a very few words, or conveyed, as briefly, a little sage advice. This advice, usually of the *carpe diem* description and accompanied by counsel to take things calmly when they went wrong, I hardly stood in need of myself; but because, I suppose, they were consonant with my spontaneous practice, such passages gave me a certain pleasure. It never occurred to me, though in retrospect the contrast appears glaring, that the morals advocated by these authors, so wise and important that they had to be read, though the boredom



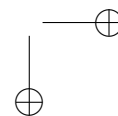
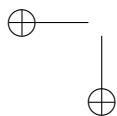


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involved often approximated to torture, contradicted violently the morals which were at other times most earnestly impressed upon us. What a muddle I should have been in had I taken both seriously! Whenever I look into a hook on education, I find the author has forgotten one thing – that a boy’s mind is backed like a duck; pour water over him, the next moment with a shake of the tail he swims away as dry as that bird. And how fortunate it is, after all, that we cannot inculcate the young with our ideas! What disastrous places schools would be, were that possible! Remember how often you change your elderly mind about the relative importance of things, or only keep it fixed by shutting your eyes.

*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere, et  
quem fors dierum cumque dabit, lucro  
appone, nec dulcis amores  
sperne puer necque tu choreas,  
donec virenti canities abest  
morosa.*

“Puer!” So the poet’s advice which m’tutor was reading aloud to us with reverential appreciation, was actually addressed to us! Yet how shocking it would have been had one of us stood up in form and construed it with a little genuine conviction: “Avoid thinking of your future” (the other mouth of the Janus educating us was on the contrary exhorting us to think of little else); “take each day as a gift from chance to be treasured, and while you are still vigorous and peevish old age keeps away, don’t, my boy, despise delightful love affairs or chorus girls.” The rendering of *choreas* might be objected to as a trifle free, but it is clear from the context and the







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verses which follow that the substitution of “dancing girls” for “dances” only brings out the weight and nature of the poet’s advice to youth. Such would, indeed, have been its drift had we been able to read and judge the poem like one written in our own language. But we never did read the classics as though they were written by men who meant what they said, or expressed ideas worth considering. The conflict between the utterances of the pagan mouth and the conventional mouth of Janus would have then been too bewildering. The classics were dead; it made them uninteresting, but it was just as well that to us they were only

*Dead flies – such as litter the library south-window  
That buzzed at the panes until they fell stiff-baked on the sill,  
Or are roll’d up asleep i’ the blinds at sunrise,  
Or wafer’d flat in a shrunken folio.*

I like thinking about Horace. He was a true Epicurean and gave to friendship the prominent place it ought to occupy in a life regulated by that philosophy. I never could regard Lucretius as an Epicurean, though his work is an exposition in verse of that doctrine; partly because among the good things of life which the philosophy of Epicurus leaves intact – perhaps indeed throws into brighter relief – and which Lucretius dilates upon, he does not celebrate friendship; and partly because the spirit of his work is too tragic, cosmic, momentous, and filled also with a proselytizing ardour almost as sombre as the fears which it is the poet’s object to destroy. Cosmic vision is not for the Epicurean. He knows it is better to sit in sunshine than reason about the sun. He should neither love nor hate Nature, nor trouble much





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to understand her; but like Horace himself enjoy her when he can, and supplement her pleasures or run away from her when they fail him. He cannot run away from death and old age, of course; and the butt-end of the Epicurean life may be seedy and even rather ridiculous – if its heyday has been over-buoyant and chirpy.

Horace was never unduly self-satisfied in his wisdom or aggressively eueptic. He was always aware of the modesty of the happiness he had aimed at attaining, and that to be more satisfying it must needs be secure, which the nature of things forbade. But he and his dear friend and patron, Maecenas, both found it hard to grow old. Maecenas made a mess of it. That favourite of the Emperor, and prince of good taste, whom all the world envied for his fortune, and who had taken the most careful precautions to be happy, avoiding responsibility but keeping influence, surrounding himself with the choicest of aristocrats, the best of beaux esprits and all beautiful amusing things, became most miserable towards the end of his life – partly, which made it worse, through his own fault. Though so prudent, he had married late a lovely coquette and allowed himself to become devoted to her. Among his rivals was the Emperor himself of whom he did not dare to be jealous. His declining years were spent in sending Terentia packing and in taking her back again. “He has been married a hundred times,” said Seneca, “although he only has one wife.” He began to suffer from diseases; he bore pain badly, so he wailed about it to his friends. To Horace he talked perpetually of his approaching death, who answered him with that beautifully temperate and tender poem, which begins:



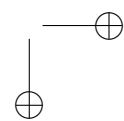
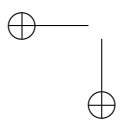
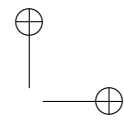
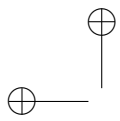


HORACE

*Cur me querelis exanimas tuis?  
Nec Dis amicum est, nec mihi te prius  
Obire, Maecenas.*

“Why do you take all heart out of me with your complaining? Not to the gods or to me is it welcome that you should die first, Maecenas.” Horace did not like growing old either. His hair turned white early and he grew paunchy, but he took it philosophically; and when Neaera told her footman to say “not at home” to him, he consoled himself by reflecting that the evening would have probably been rowdy, and by remembering the ridiculous fury such a refusal would have provoked in him in the days when Plancus – as who should say Lord Rosebery – was Prime Minister. *Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cinarae*: “I am not the man I was when kind Cinara was my queen,” he reminds himself in another poem, in which he wisely bids his last love to listen to prayers of younger men: having first, however, implored Venus to spare himself, invoking the goddess suddenly in a beautiful violent phrase, which almost makes one jump in Horace’s quiet pages, as *mater saeva Cupidinum*. As a poet he knew well how to make the most of winter and yet be truthful about its disadvantages; like a true Epicurean, in his old age, his counsel was not to run from the thought of death, but by calling it to mind to add a graver quality to the enjoyment of what dwindling pleasures were left.







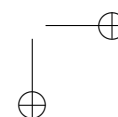
### FATHER IGNATIUS\*

“This work,” says the intrepid chronicler, “has been compiled at the very gates of the Abbey and within reach of no other sounds than the voices of Nature and the Monastery Bell”; where apparently neither a whisper of criticism nor the roar of contemporary opinion reached her ears, to disturb her mind with misgivings concerning the impression her book might make on those beyond that radius.

The public is now richer for 600 pages, compactly printed, upon “Father Ignatius.”

Who would have believed such a book could be readable? Who could have made it so but a chronicler whose good faith was imperturbable, whose mind on this subject was closed to discriminations? The black-robed theatrical figure of the revivalist recluse to be worth looking at, had to be seen against this background of enthusiasm kindled by himself. In such a book as this we can catch the very breath of the Ignatian inspiration, as if a masterly writer had handled the theme. After all, for students of human nature there are only three kinds of biography: books written by the clear-sighted, whose knowledge of the world and history enables them to estimate what was useful and remarkable in a particular life, those written by men who care more for truth than for their hero, and those which are works of infatuation.

\* *The Life of Father Ignatius* (1904). By the Baroness de Bertouch.





## PORTRAITS

The first kind of biographer speaks with an authority of his own; the last two are the only biographers who are not tempted to conceal or alter facts. If we cannot have impartiality, so rarely combined with imaginative sympathy, then give us the blind enthusiasm which tells us everything; since it cannot conceive anything being interpreted in a manner unfavourable to its intentions. If the piety of the chronicler had in this case been blended with discretion the picture would have been toned down for the benefit of unsympathetic eyes, and the result would have been unprofitable. The biography of a man whose widest and most permanent appeal to his fellow-men lies in his never having hedged to avoid the charge of folly, would have been worthless if written by one, who feeling the pertinence of such a charge, had hedged in consequence. But a biography of "The Monk of Llanthony" written under his own eye, in a style which, as the author would express it, comes "straight from the shoulder," bearing in every line the whiff and wind of missionary oratory, is well worth examination.

The book is also interesting as a chapter in the history of the Anglican Church during a critical period. Father Ignatius acted as a lightning rod on the rising edifice of Ritualism during the "No Popery" storms of the 'sixties. At first, his vagaries only intensified Protestant animosity; but later on the contrast between his ell and the inch which the majority of High Churchmen wanted to take, worked in their favour. The extravagant extremist tends to make mere reformers seem mild reasonable persons, and once the cries of "thin end of the wedge," "half-way house," have died down the extremist becomes a protection to his party. When Protestants had become





#### FATHER IGNATIUS

familiar with such a horrid portent as a self-dedicated Benedictine Monk in Anglican orders, purple stoles and unlighted, or even lighted, altar candles ceased to seem so outrageous.

There is also another feature of greater general interest in the story, the miraculous element.

The career of “Father Ignatius” has been as full of miracles, wonders, and divine interpositions as the life of any medieval saint. He has raised one man and one woman from the dead; he has revived a dying woman and a dying horse to normal vigour; he has taken poison himself with impunity; many who have mocked and opposed him have been visited by swift supernatural retributions; the figure on a crucifix has turned its head to regard him; he has extinguished flames of hell by sprinkling holy water; he has been comforted by the visits of angels, and vexed by those of demons; the crucial moments of his career have been marked by apparitions, visions and signs; the Virgin has visited his monastery in person, and has turned by her presence a bush into a source of miraculous healing power, so that a leaf from it has been known to heal in a few minutes a case of chronic hip-disease. These wonders and miracles are apparently as well attested, in most cases, as any recorded in the lives of the Saints or of the Apostles; but – and here is the significant fact – nobody now heeds them. Such stories of living people are even repugnant to those who wish to believe similar stories true in the case of men and women who died long ago. Modern miracles are more often a source of embarrassment to believers than of rejoicing; the only difference between this life of a modern miracle-worker and a medieval chronicle (allowing for the fact

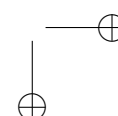
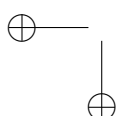




#### PORTRAITS

that one is told in glaring journalese) is that many of the friends and admirers of Father Ignatius clearly did not welcome these supernatural manifestations. Under cover of warning him against the danger of spiritual pride they urged him to keep them as dark as possible, while at an earlier date such sympathizers would have triumphantly pointed to them as evidences of a genuine mission. This is a significant contrast. But now to the story itself, which even abridgment cannot rob of its power to astound and entertain, nor the scepticism of a reviewer of its appeal to sympathies of one kind or another.

In London, on 23rd November, 1837, Joseph Leycester Lyne was born to a well-to-do couple of good family. The chronicler is anxious to persuade us that although his bearing was such as to earn him the name of "Saintly Lyne" at school, he was not without some of the failings of small boys. He certainly stole on one occasion a fourpenny-bit to buy sweets; a fact which his extraordinary father attempted in after years to use as a weapon with which to blast his reputation publicly. A portrait of the elder Mr. Lyne tempts the pen; but he must be constructed from this incident. Three facts connected with the future monk's boyhood are of sufficient significance to be mentioned. He saw a ghost; he became strangely enthusiastic about the Jews as the sacred race, baring his head whenever he met one, asking everybody when they thought they would return to Palestine, and invariably praying for them; and when about fourteen years old he suffered a very serious nervous breakdown. Incidentally, the illness was brought on through this very enthusiasm. He received at the hands of a master exasperated by it, a







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severe flogging, which he bore pluckily until he fell down unconscious. Recovery was slow and uncertain; from this time forward for many years his dreams and solitary reflections were often made terrible to him by the dread of hell. While under the care of a clergyman at Spalding he received the first of those mysterious communications which were in future to decide his course of conduct. He was fond of music, and therefore of attending choir practices; while sitting on the altar steps one afternoon listening to the organ, the strange sensation crept over him of another Presence, and he heard a soft persistent whisper say, "Why do you turn your back upon My altar, where I am so often present in the sacrament of My Blood and Body?" Thenceforward he held the doctrine these words imply with the confidence of one who has received a revelation. During the time of Confirmation he suffered much from a sense of unworthiness, for to him this was a period of final dedication. He was prepared (against parental wishes) for ordination at Glenalmond Seminary, where as a student he was remarkable for surprising aptitudes in some directions and for a complete inability to understand mathematics or to follow a train of reasoning.

One evening, as the students were making their way in straggling procession across the quadrangle to the College Chapel, one of them chanced to remark that they looked like monks on their way to vespers. The words struck his imagination. As a sudden shake may precipitate a crystal from a fluid, so his vague dreams changed to resolve; henceforth he knew what life it was that he longed for. He was then working hard under rather Spartan conditions, and perseverance ended in





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a second nervous collapse, which was accompanied this time by blindness and paralysis. He recovered rapidly and quarrelled with his father over doctrine, who turned him out on the world. As a catechist in Inverness he got into the hottest of water for teaching in the Free Kirk schools the Eucharistic Presence and the veneration of the Virgin; and being afterwards given charge of a deserted mountain church in Glen Urquart, he at once made its services symbolize his own beliefs. The Presbyterians did not stand this long; his licence was withdrawn, but not before he had made a permanent impression on some parishioners, and proved that opposition was not likely in future to stop him. After his ordination he took a curacy under a High Church vicar in Plymouth, a step which, as the chronicler expresses it, "was destined to be a marble pillar in the Colosseum of ecclesiastical phenomena."

At this time he became the friend of Dr. Pusey, who remained till death his adviser and administrator of the Sacrament of Penance. In Plymouth, according to the chronicler he gave the first proof of his power of healing. In his parish one woman had persistently refused his ministrations; after having literally shaken off the dust from his feet in consequence, "her daughter, a fourteen-year-old girl, was suddenly stricken with abject idiocy, and her whole body broke out from head to foot with loathsome sores." But on the mother's appeal he went straight to the bedside, and in answer to his prayer "intelligence flashed back, not in a glimmer but a flood; and in the sight of all present, the disfigured flesh resumed its natural childish fairness and purity."





#### FATHER IGNATIUS

At the end of nine months he instituted a Community of Brothers. There were but two others beside himself, and their first night in their house was marked by a strange occurrence. One Brother, woken by a sensation of light, got out of bed and, peeping over the banisters, saw "standing erect, without candlestick, one of the large altar tapers in full blaze." He called his fellow-Brother, and after an interval of amazement, one of them clasped it in trembling hands and bore it back to the chapel. "Dr. Pusey interpreted the manifestation as a Heavensent sign of Divine approval, and the lighted taper as an emblem of the illuminating influence which monasticism was to shed upon the Church. At the same time, he urged the Brothers and their Superior to treasure those marks of power in the silence of their own spirits, as things too sacred to be desecrated by the touch of public curiosity."

This first attempt to form a monastic brotherhood was frustrated by a severe fever, and during delirium he suffered the excruciating torments of imaginary damnation. A breath of comfort came to him at last on a message from Dr. Pusey, and he rallied into sufficient composure to continue an active life. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that during the years of ecstatic preaching which followed, ceaseless activity and consistent severity of life, these were but a hollow vaulting above a flaming frenzy of terror within him.

After a journey in Belgium, where the going to and fro of processions and the sight of monks and nuns in streets made a deep impression on his mind, he became an East End missionary and worked among the population of the Docks with zeal and surprising effect. He penetrated





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into disreputable haunts, and exhibited a composure in front of threatening circumstances which, aided by a dramatic instinct, allayed animosity and conquered contempt. Through the agency of a Relic of the Cross he raised a girl, Lizzie Meek, from death in the presence of her mother, three neighbours, and two young children. He persuaded the resuscitated girl to accept dedication to the religious life; but on the return of an old lover she married, and, both dying within a month of marriage, he regarded this event as a retribution which fulfilled a last warning he had given her.

At this time he consecrated himself as “Brother Ignatius” of the Benedictine rule of the Pre-Reformation Church, and put on the black robe with which he was henceforth associated in the popular imagination. In consequence of this step he was obliged to leave the mission; and at Clayton, in the Diocese of Norwich, he established his first monastic community in a wing of the compliant rector’s house. His services in the church and the sight of the black robes excited the neighbourhood into a condition of chronic riot. He was pelted and abused, and both the curious and the converted who attended his services had to run a gauntlet hardly less severe. Stones were thrown through his window at night, so that on retiring he always took the precaution of putting a candle between himself and the blind, for fear his shadow on it might offer a mark. His life was constantly threatened, and on one occasion a bonfire was prepared for him in the fields, from the flames of which he was hardly rescued by the efforts of an old woman armed with a pewter tea-pot. His health began to fail, and with it his confidence in his mission. But





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all hesitation vanished on seeing, one night, the elevated Host turn to a globe of fire in the hands of the officiating rector, from which a single ray “flashed like a meteor across the silent sanctuary” and struck his heart.

He now started on his first preaching itinerary; and returning with £300, the fruit of offertories, he took an old dilapidated building near Norwich. The Community moved in solemn procession to their new abode, and the Father set to work with such energy that the windowless windy old house became quickly habitable, while all the time the observances of the Rule were carried out with absolute strictness. Midnight and early dawn services were never omitted, and at their first recital of Matins the bell tolled without the aid of human hands. It was during the singing of the Credo in this church that the Rev. Mr. Moultrie observed the figure on the crucifix turn and look at Father Ignatius.

There were still some funds in hand, but the monks were largely dependent on offerings in kind and money for their support. The opposition and hatred they aroused almost equalled the scenes at Clayton; but they seem here to have had a stronger backing. “Father Ignatius” showed that he could face and even manage angry crowds. On one of his returns the chronicler describes a triumphant entry into Norwich, during which men and women laid their coats and cloaks in front of his feet. She records also that a woman was struck dead in her own doorway on uttering “an abominable malediction” against him, and another instance of a slighter offence being visited with a curious retribution. A woman had screamed, “Curse your bald head” after him: the same day her little boy became bald. “By miraculous dispensation and





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before her own eyes, the entire mass of the child's hair literally fell from his head at her feet, leaving his skull a bald counterpart of the Monk's tonsure." His power over those he attracted was so great at this time, that when some members of his congregation transgressed a solemn prohibition to attend a dance held in a building which had long ago been consecrated the majority of the men chose the penance of being flogged publicly by him in church, and the women of lying on ashes during the service, rather than have the doors closed against them in consequence of their disobedience. No wonder the feeling against him ran to dangerous heights! On one occasion a crowd set out to break into the church and these were only prevented from succeeding, says the chronicler, by a storm which broke over them in a terrific rattle of thunder and a downpour of threshing rain. Once during his absence some of the monks mutinied, partly owing to an imposed penance for a breach of silence, by which each offender had been compelled to trace twelve crosses in the dust with his tongue. These incidents, however, coming close together in an abridgment give no doubt an exaggerated impression of his domineering force. In physique he was exceptionally frail in those days, and he seems to have appealed to feminine interest by rousing an emotion of protecting pity. Though the boys in the school called him "The Blazer," the impression he seems more often to have created was one of mildness, at least when not on the platform or in the pulpit. He often, too, appeared worked out and almost lifeless.

While absent on a missionary journey, the news reached him of a scandal connected with one of the Brothers, which was to prove a whip in the hands of his enemies.





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The offence was of that kind which detesters of the monkish life have sometimes used unscrupulously as a general accusation. In describing his bearing during the storm of execration which followed, the chronicler is surest of meeting with wider sympathy. Father Ignatius did not lie low till the storm blew over, nor did he cease to urge the claims of the monastic life before audiences ready to mob him. The next blow was the discovery that he had, under a misapprehension, signed a legal document which gave away his right to the priory buildings. The Brothers, always a few, were now finally disbanded, and after spending his small private fortune in vain litigation, he was obliged to accept money from his friends to recruit his broken health abroad.

The second crisis of his life occurred about this time. Left alone while staying in the Isle of Wight, he experienced the strange emotion of conversion. Walking on the beach after days of deep despondency and "a prey to that morbid horror which had haunted his soul from childhood," he began to recall past scenes. "My own physical sensation was one of complete obliteration, a sudden cessation of all outer sight and sound." He felt himself to be standing in the court of the Temple of Jerusalem. In the vision which followed, the Virgin placed for a moment her Child in his arms. "I dare not dwell," he says, "on the rapture of the Divine contact." Henceforward he was possessed by a constant happy confidence in his religion, and an Evangelical note of "salvation" became dominant in his appeals. He drew large audiences in London; the contributions of the converted enabled him to build the Abbey of Llanthony among the Welsh mountains. The spot was lonely and remote; the roads were steep and

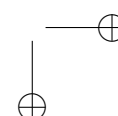
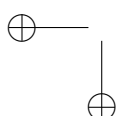




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bad, and the six monks and their Abbot were first housed in a barn and a single room. If the reader would take away a penultimate picture of this enterprise, let him imagine the coming on of winter and the monks round a stick fire shivering in their cowls, the blankets hung across the gaping windows waving in the draught, the broken slates above admitting sparks of moonshine or drips of rain; while one monk reads out, in reverential monotone, some homily or the life of a bygone saint. Two monks absconded, one fell ill; but the Abbot, with the clink of the mason's chisel upon the stones of the rising monastery in his ears, showed more than his usual resolution of heart. After many difficulties had been overcome, the aim of his years was completed.

There is no space to tell of the restoration to life, through the aspersion of Lourdes water, of a builder crushed to "a distorted mass of pulp" by a falling crate of stones; nor of the miraculous passing of the reserved Sacrament through an iron door; nor of "the highest note in this biography," the apparition of the Virgin on two occasions, accompanied by celestial lights and music. In corroboration of all these events are mustered a number of witnesses. The chronicler after the manner of chroniclers leaves us with these marvels on our hands. It is strange to read of them in a book illustrated with rather theatrical photographs of the principal actor, who in some cases presents a rather pathetic spectacle, as of one playing the part of an Abbot with too small a cast. The good faith of all concerned is convincing; the testimony seems as sound as that on which our ancestors accepted such stories. Thus we get from the book an odd sensation of living in two different periods of the world's







#### FATHER IGNATIUS

history at the same time. In ages very different from our own it is no doubt easier to believe that anything may have happened; the remoteness of events tends to prevent many of us from applying to them the same tests of credibility. The degree of involuntary scepticism, therefore, with which those who accept ancient miracles now follow the story of "Father Ignatius," is some sign of the extent to which they are under the influence of historical illusion.

I saw Father Ignatius once. One afternoon when I was walking along the Brighton Front I noticed a door-poster announcing that he would hold a Mission Meeting within, at three, in support of Llanthony Abbey

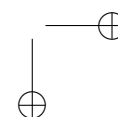
I found myself in a gay and gilded oblong room with a stage at the end of it. On this stood a grand-piano, a palm in a pot, a conjurer's table and a chair. The body of the room was full of empty chairs and there was a row of red velvet sofas nearer but still some distance from the stage. A few people were scattered about, most of whom had seated themselves near the door, perhaps with a view to easy escape. The hour had struck but the Abbot had not appeared. Presently he sailed on to the stage from a side door, sat down, fixed a pair of gold pince-nez on his fine large nose and became absorbed in his Bible. He was decidedly stout. His black robes were unusually voluminous and unconfined by a rope, so that he was almost the shape of a haystack. His entrance had reminded me of that of a large bland dowager who is used to having things carried for her wherever she goes, and whose face suggests that no door has ever been closed to her. He seemed oblivious of our presence and continued to read, giving every now and then a





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little shrug or fidget like a man well-pleased with his book. His face was that of an actor, but it betrayed no consciousness of being stared at. I had a curious sensation of uncertainty as to what he would do next. Presently he shut his Bible, laid it gently on the table, took off his pince-nez, polished them on a fold of his robe, looked at us and said: "Come nearer, dear good people." His voice was comfortable and imperious. Those at the back of the hall began to move towards the centre of the room: the rest remained where they were. "Nearer, nearer, you dear good people," he continued, making beckoning gestures: I found myself helping others to bring forward the red sofas, sufficient to accommodate his small audience. Then he clasped his hands, cast up his eyes sideways at the ceiling and exclaimed in loud tones of dramatic unction, "We thank Thee, O Lord, for the telephone of prayer." The address which followed was not in the least vehement. He reminded us of what "we had been taught at our mothers' knees." It was the utterance of a man who seemed concentrated on something, but whether it was upon what he was saying was impossible to tell. The only remarkable thing about the address was that when he said casually, "I have been talking to you for an hour, but to you it has seemed only ten minutes," I took out my watch and discovered to my amazement that it was perfectly true. "And now," he went on, "I must take up my position as a beggar at the Lord's Gate," which he proceeded to do, producing from somewhere among the black folds of his robe a pewter plate, into which all dropped something as they went out. There he sat, reading his Bible again; quite unconscious of the ringing of the coins as they fell into the plate – even of my half-crown.





## HENRY JAMES

In Henry James's later letters his voice is audible; nor is this surprising, for his letters were often dictated, and his conversation, in its search for the right word, its amplifications, hesitations and interpolated afterthoughts, resembled dictation. This sounds portentous, not to say boring; indeed, it was at times embarrassing. But – and this made all the difference – he was fascinating. The spell he exercised by his style was exercised in his conversation. Phrases of abstruse exaggerated drollery or of the last intellectual elegance flowered in it profusely. At first you might feel rather conscience-stricken for having set in motion, perhaps by a casual question, such tremendous mental machinery. It seemed really too bad to have put him to such trouble, made him work and weigh his words like that; and if, through the detestable habit of talking about anything rather than be silent, you had started a topic in which you were not interested, you might be well punished. There was something at once so painstaking, serious and majestic in the procedure of his mind that shrank from diverting it, and thus the whole of your little precious time with him might be wasted. This often happened in my case during our fifteen years' acquaintance, and I still regret those bungled opportunities.

In conversation he could not help giving his best, the stereotyped and perfunctory being abhorrent to him. Each talk was thus a fresh adventure, an opportunity





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of discovering for himself what he thought about books and human beings. His respect for his subject was only equalled, one noticed, by his respect for that delicate instrument for recording and comparing impressions, his own mind. He absolutely refused to hustle it, and his conversational manner was largely composed of reassuring and soothing gestures intended to allay, or anticipate, signs of impatience. The sensation of his hand on my shoulder in our pausing rambles together was, I felt, precisely an exhortation to patience. “Wait,” that reassuring pressure seemed to be humorously saying, “wait, I know, my dear fellow, you are getting fidgety; but wait – and we shall enjoy together the wild pleasure of discovering what ‘Henry James’ thinks of this matter. For my part, I dare not hurry him!” His possession of this kind of double consciousness was one of the first characteristics one noticed; and sure enough we would often seem both to be waiting, palpitating with the same curiosity, for an ultimate verdict. At such moments the working of his mind fascinated me, as though I were watching through a window some hydraulic engine, its great smooth wheel and shining piston moving with ponderous ease through a vitreous dusk. The confounding thing was that the great machine could be set in motion by a penny in the slot!

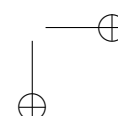
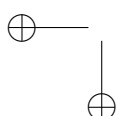
I remember the first time I met him (the occasion was an evening party) I asked him if he thought London “beautiful” – an idiotic question; worse than that, a question to which I did not really want an answer, though there were hundreds of others (some no doubt also idiotic) which I was longing to ask. But it worked. To my dismay it worked only too well. “London? Beautiful?”





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he began, with that considering slant of his massive head I was to come to know so well, his lips a little ironically compressed, as though he wished to keep from smiling too obviously. “No: hardly beautiful. It is too chaotic, too –” then followed a discourse upon London and the kind of appeal it made to the historic sense, even when it starved the aesthetic, which I failed to follow; so dismayed was I at having, by my idiot’s question, set his mind working at such a pitch of concentration on a topic indifferent to me. I was distracted, too, by anxiety to prove myself on the spot intelligent; and the opportunity of interjecting a comment which might conceivably attain that object seemed to grow fainter and fainter while he hummed and havered and rolled along. How should I feel afterwards if I let slip this chance, perhaps the last, of expressing my admiration and my gratitude! At the end of a sentence, the drift of which had escaped me, but which closed, I think, with the words “find oneself craving for a whiff of London’s carboniferous damp,” I did however interrupt him. Enthusiasm and questions (the latter regarding *The Awkward Age*, just out) poured from my lips. A look of bewilderment, almost of shock, floated for a moment over his fine, large, watchful, shaven face, on which the lines were so lightly etched. For a second he opened his rather prominent hazel eyes a shade wider, an expansion of the eyelids that to my imagination seemed like the adjustment at me of the lens of a microscope; then the great engine was slowly reversed, and, a trifle grimly, yet ever so kindly, and with many reassuring pats upon the arm, he said: “I understand, my dear boy, what you mean – and I thank you.” (Ouf! What a relief!)





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He went on to speak of *The Awkward Age*. “Flat” was, it appeared, too mild an expression to describe its reception, “My books make no more sound or ripple now than if I dropped them one after the other into mud.” And he had, I learnt to my astonishment, in writing that searching diagnosis of sophisticated relations, conceived himself to be following in the footsteps, “of course, with a difference,” of the sprightly Gyp! Hastily and emphatically I assured him that where I came from, at Cambridge, his books were very far from making no ripple in people’s minds. At this he showed some pleasure; but I noticed then, as often afterwards, that he was on his guard against being gratified by appreciation from any quarter. He liked it – everybody does, but he was exceedingly sceptical about its value. I doubt if he believed that anybody thoroughly understood what, as an artist, he was after, or how skilfully he had manipulated his themes; and speaking with some confidence for the majority of his enthusiastic readers at that time. I may say he was right.

He was fully aware of his idiosyncrasy in magnifying the minute. I remember a conversation in a four-wheeler (“the philosopher’s preference,” he called it) about the married life of the Carlyles. He had been re-reading Froude’s *Life of Carlyle*, and after remarking that he thought Carlyle perhaps the best of English letter-writers, he went on to commiserate Mrs. Carlyle on her dull, drudging life. I protested against “dull,” and suggested she had at least acquired from her husband one source of permanent consolation and entertainment, namely the art of mountaining mole-hills. A look of droll sagacity came over his face, and turning sideways to fix me better





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and to make sure I grasped the implication, he said: "Ah! but for that, where would *any of us* be?"

Once or twice I went a round of calls with him. I remember being struck on these occasions by how much woman there seemed to be in him; at least it was thus I explained the concentration of his sympathy upon social worries (the wrong people meeting each other, etc., etc.) or small misfortunes such as missing a train, and also the length of time he was able to expatiate upon them with interest. It struck me that women ran on in talk with him with a more unguarded volubility than they do with most men, as though they were sure of his complete understanding. I was amazed, too, by his standard of decent comfort; and his remark on our leaving what appeared to me a thoroughly well-appointed, prosperous house, "Poor S., poor S. – the stamp of unmistakable poverty upon everything!" has remained in my memory. I never ventured to ask him to my own house; not because I was ashamed of it, but because I did not wish to excite quite unnecessary commiseration. He would have imputed himself; there were so many little things in life he minded intensely which I did not mind at all. I do not think he could have sat without pain in a chair, the stuffing of which was visible in places. His dislike of squalor was so great that surroundings to be tolerable to him had positively to proclaim its utter impossibility. "I can stand," he once said to me, while we were waiting for our hostess in an exceptionally gilt and splendid drawing-room, "a great deal of gold." The effects of wealth upon character and behaviour attracted him as a novelist, but no array of terms can do justice to his lack of interest in the making of money. He was at home in describing





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elderly Americans who had acquired it by means of some invisible flair, and on whom its acquisition had left no mark beyond perhaps a light refined fatigue (His interest in wealth was therefore the reverse of Balzacian); or in portraying people who had inherited it. Evidence of ancient riches gave him far more pleasure than lavishness, and there we sympathized; but above all the signs of tradition and of loving discrimination exercised over many years in conditions of security soothed and delighted him. "Lamb House," his home at Rye, was a perfect shell for his sensibility. He was in the habit of speaking of its "inconspicuous little charm," but its charm could hardly escape anyone; so quiet, dignified and *gemütlich* it was, within, without.

But an incident comes back to me which struck me as revealing something much deeper in him than this characteristic. It occurred after a luncheon party of which he had been, as they say, "the life." We happened to be drinking our coffee together while the rest of the party had moved on to the verandah. "What a charming picture they make," he said, with his great head aslant, "the women there with their embroidery, the..." There was nothing in his words, anybody might have spoken them; but in his attitude, in his voice, in his whole being at that moment, I divined such complete detachment, that I was startled into speaking out of myself: "I can't bear to look at life like that," I blurted out, "I want to be in everything. Perhaps that is why I cannot *write*, it makes me feel absolutely alone..." The effect of this confession upon him was instantaneous and surprising. He leant forward and grasped my arm excitedly: "Yes, it is solitude. If it runs after you and catches you, well and good.







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But for heaven's sake don't run after *it*. It is absolute solitude." And he got up hurriedly and joined the others. On the walk home it occurred to me that I had for a moment caught a glimpse of his intensely private life, and, rightly or wrongly, I thought that this glimpse explained much: his apprehensively tender clutch upon others, his immense pre-occupation with the surface of things and his exclusive devotion to his art. His confidence in himself in relation to that art, I thought I discerned one brilliant summer night, as we were sauntering along a dusty road which crosses the Romney marshes. He had been describing to me the spiral of depression which a recent nervous illness had compelled him step after step, night after night, day after day, to descend. He would, he thought, never have found his way up again, had it not been for a life-line thrown to him by his brother William; perhaps the only man in whom he admired equally both heart and intellect. What stages of arid rejection of life and meaningless yet frantic agitation he had been compelled to traverse! "But," and he suddenly stood still, "but it has been good" – and here he took off his hat, baring his great head in the moonlight – "for my genius." Then, putting on his hat again, he added, "Never cease to watch whatever happens to you."

Such was Henry James the man. For Henry James the writer I shall attempt to find a formula.

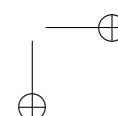
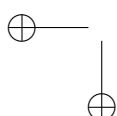
He was a conscious artist, who knew more clearly than most English novelists what he wished to do and how he must set about it. That fiction need not be formless, and that a novelist's mastery is shown in unfolding a situation to which every incident contributes, was the lesson that his books could teach a generation, persuaded to the





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contrary by dazzling achievements in an opposite manner. To Henry James the novel was not a hold-all into which any valuable observations and reflections could be stuffed: nor was it merely peptonized experience. He was an artist and a creator. Of course the world he created bore a vital relation to experience, as all fiction must if it is to bewitch and move us; but the characters in that world, in whose fate and emotions he interested us, existed in a medium which was not the atmosphere we ordinarily breathe. That medium was his own mind. Just as there is a world called "Dickens," another called "Balzac," so there is a world called "Henry James." When we speak of the "reality" of such worlds, we only mean that we have been successfully beguiled. We are really paying homage to the shaping imagination of a creator. How independent of the actual world are characters in fiction, and how dependent for their vitality upon the world in which they are set, becomes clear the moment we imagine a character moved from one imaginary world into another. If Pecksniff were transplanted into *The Golden Bowl*, he would become extinct; and how incredible would "the Dove" be in the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit*! The same holds good of characters constructed piecemeal from observation, when introduced into a world created by an overflow of imagination. They become solecisms, either they kill the book or the book kills them. The unforgivable artistic fault in a novelist is failure to maintain consistency of tone. In this respect Henry James never failed. His characters always belonged to his own world, and his world was always congruous with his characters. What sort of a world was it? And what were its relations to our common experience which made it interesting? There is





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no need to separate the answers to these two questions, which the work of every creative artist prompts. The answer to the one will suggest the answer to the other.

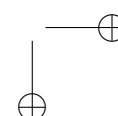
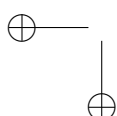
It is important to emphasize at once Henry James's power of creating his own world because, in every novelist who possesses that power, it is the most important faculty. Yet in his case it has often been overlooked. Critics have found in his work so much else to interest them: his style, his methods, his subtlety. From their comments it might be supposed that his main distinction lay in being a psychologist, or an observer, or an inventor of a fascinating, but – so some thought – an indefensible style. Yet to regard him primarily as an observer or psychologist or as a maker of phrases, is not only to belittle him, but to make the mistake we made when first Ibsen came into our ken. It seems hardly credible that we should have taken Ibsen for a realist, but we did. Despite his rat-wife, wild-duck, his towers and ice-churches; despite the strange intensity of his characters, which alone might have put us on the right track; despite the deep-sea pressure of the element in which they had their being; despite the perverse commonness of the objects which surrounded them – as of things perceived in some uncomfortable dream – it was under the banner of realism that Ibsen's battle was fought for him. Because his characters threw such a vivid light on human nature and our predicaments, we mistook them for photographs. And yet we meant by "an Ibsen character" was as clear to us as what "a Dickens character" meant. The fact that we understand each other, when we speak of a "Henry-James character," is the proof that his imagination, too, was essentially creative.





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Most great novelists have given to their creations an excess of some faculty predominant in themselves. Thus Meredith's characters are filled to an unnatural degree with the beauty and courage of life, while Balzac gives to his a treble dose of will and appetite. The men and women in Henry James's novels, the stupid as well as the intelligent, show far subtler powers of perception than such men and women actually have. It was only by exaggerating, consciously or unconsciously, that quality in them, that he could create a world that satisfied his imagination. With this exception his work is full of delicately observed actualities. His men and women are neither more heroic, nor single-hearted, nor more base than real people; and, if allowance be made for their superior thought-reading faculties and the concentration of their curiosity upon each other, events follow one another in his stories as they would in real life. The reader may sometimes find himself saying: "Would anyone, without corroborative evidence act on such a far-fetched guess as that?" But he will never find himself saying (granted of course the super-subtlety of these people), "That is not the way things happen." Whether his characters are children of leisure and pleasure, jaded journalists, apathetic or wily disreputables, hard-working or dilatory artists, they are all incorrigibly pre-occupied with human nature; with watching their own emotions, and the complex shifting relations and intimate dramas around them. There is a kind of collected self-consciousness and clairvoyance about them all. They watch, they feel, they compare notes. There is hardly a minor character in his later books, not a butler or a telegraph clerk, who, if he opens his lips twice, does not promptly show the makings





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of a gossip of genius. There are other equally important generalizations to be made about the people of Henry James's world, but this is the most comprehensive. For the critic this peculiarity has a claim to priority, not on aesthetic grounds, but because it leads to the centre of his subject: what was the determining impulse which made Henry James create the particular world he did?

In that astonishing record of imaginative adventure, *The American Scene*, he continually refers to himself as the "restless analyst," speaking of himself as a man "hag-ridden by the twin demons of observation and imagination." The master-faculty of Henry James was this power of analysing his impressions, of going into them not only far but, as they say in Norse fairy-tales "far and farther than far." Indeed, there are only three other novelists whom a passion for finality in research and statement has so beset, for whom the sole condition of a Sabbath's rest was the assurance that everything that there was to be said had been at any rate attempted: — Proust, Balzac (with whom the later Henry James had more sympathy than with any other fellow-craftsman) and Dostoevsky. The last two were very different men from himself, labouring in other continents. Dostoevsky's subject is always the soul of man, and ultimately its relation to God; his deepest study is man as he is when he is alone with his soul. In Henry James, on the contrary, the same passion of research is directed to the social side of man's nature, his relations to his fellow-men. The universe and religion are as completely excluded from his hooks as if he had been an eighteenth-century writer. The sky above his people, the earth beneath them, contains no mysteries for them. He is careful never to permit





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them to interrogate these. Mr. Chesterton has called Henry James a mystic; the truth is that he is perhaps the least mystical of all writers who have ever concerned themselves with the inner life. Mysticism would have shattered his world; it is not the mystical which attracts him, but a very different thing, the mysterious, that is to say, whatever in life fascinates by being hidden, ambiguous, illusive and hard to understand. And this brings us again straight up to the question of his directing impulse as an artist.

It was to conceive the world in a light which (a religious interpretation of man's nature being excluded) would give most play to his master faculties of investigation. It was an impulse, or rather a necessity, to see people in such a way as made them, their emotions and their relations to each other, inexhaustible subjects for the exploring mind. A single formula for a writer is justly suspect; but entertain this one for a moment on approval. It may prove to be "the pattern in the carpet."

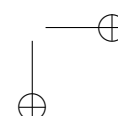
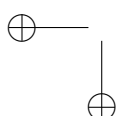
In the first place, it explains his choice of themes. His long career was a continual search for more and more recondite and delicate ones. He begins with cases of conscience, and in these already the shades seemed fine to his contemporaries, and the verdicts to depend upon evidence not always visible to "twelve good men and true." Then the formula explains his early fondness – long before he had found a method of constructing a world of recondite possibilities – for ending with that substitute for mystery, the note of interrogation. It explains also his excitement in discovering Europe, especially those secluded corners of European society where dark deposits of experience might be postulated without

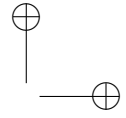
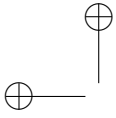




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extravagance. (In his America everything was depressingly obvious.) It explains his passionate interest in the naive consciousness of his Americans when confronted with Europeans who possessed more complex standards and traditions. Did they or did they not understand? It explains his later interest in children, in whom it is so puzzling to fix the moment of dawning comprehension. It explains his marked preference for faithful failure as a subject over the soon exhausted interest of success. It explains in a measure his comparative lack of interest in the life of the senses (there is no mystery in the senses compared with the mind); also his efforts to keep in the background, so that they might gather an impenetrable portentousness, crude facts, such as professional careers, adulteries, swindles and even murders, which nevertheless, for the sake of the story, had sometimes to go through the empty form of occurring in his books. It explains the attraction a magnificently privileged class had for his art, his "Olympians," whose surroundings allowed latitude to the supposition of a wonderfully richer consciousness. It explains the almost total exclusion from his world of specimens of labouring humanity, to whom no such complexity can be with any plausibility attributed – a dustman in the world of Henry James is an inconceivable monster. It accounts, too, for the blemishes in his books; for his refusal to admit that such a thing as a molehill can exist for a man with eyes in his head, and (how it seems to fit!) for his reluctance, even when occasion demanded it, to call a spade anything so dull and unqualified as a spade. It explains the fascination of his style, which conveyed amazingly the excitement of a quest, the thrill of approaching some final

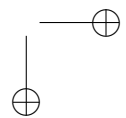
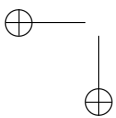




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precision of statement. And above all, it explains why he came to endow his men and women with more and more of his own penetration, tenderness and scrupulousness, till at last he created a world worthy of his own master faculty, in which human beings, when confronted, saw mysteries in one another's gestures, and profundities in their words, and took joy in each other's insight, like brave antagonists in each other's strength; a world in which they could exclaim about one another that they were "wonderful" and "beautiful," where they belonged to, or fought with each other, on levels of intimacy which had never been described before.

The words, which he found to describe the characters in this world that he loved, are unrivalled for revealing delicacy. His method is to present them to us through some other character dowered with his own power of appreciation. Mrs. Stringham in *The Wings of the Dove* is, for instance, the medium through which we first catch a glimpse of Milly. She is first conscious of the immense rich extravagant background of New York from which Milly springs, and of which "the rare creature was the final flowering"; next of "a high, dim, charming ambiguous oddity which was even better" in Milly herself, who seemed, on top of all that, to enjoy boundless freedom, the freedom of the wind in the desert. "It was unspeakably touching to be so equipped and yet to have been reduced by fortune to little humble-minded mistakes. . . . She had arts and idiosyncrasies of which no great account could have been given, but which were a daily grace if you lived with them; such as the art of being almost tragically impatient and yet making it light as air; of being inexplicably sad and yet making it clear as noon;







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of being unmistakably gay and yet making it as soft as dusk.”

Although this world is peopled with subtler men and women than that of any other novelist, the crown does not go to the clever. It is tempting to describe him as an inveterate moralist, who, finding ordinary scales too clumsy to weigh finer human qualities, employs instead aesthetic weights and measures. The consequent reversal of the verdict was one of his favourite themes. “There are no short cuts,” he seemed to say, “to being beautiful; to be beautiful you must be really good.” He made us understand better the meaning of intimacy and the beauty of goodness.

If one were to attempt to suggest the morality or philosophy behind his books in a sentence, “There are no short cuts to a good end” would serve the purpose. What are Maggie Verver and “Milly” but beautiful examples of “the long road,” or Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant but instances of the disastrous “short cut”? Where does the failure and vulgarity of the set in *The Awkward Age*, Mrs. Brookenham and her friends, lie? Surely, in their attempt to take by storm the charms of refinement and the refinements of intimacy. In many short stories, recent and early, we find the same drama; the contrast between the charms and superiorities (even the physical beauties) which have been won, paid for, as it were, by suffering, thought and sympathy, and those which have been appropriated by money, sheer brute brain, or self-assertion. Whether the contrast is between houses or manners or faces or minds, the same law is insisted on that *there is no short cut to beauty*. It is curious that just as no other author has noted so subtly the





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liberating power of wealth, those aspects of it in which it may be even symbolized by “the wings of a dove,” bringing the inaccessible within reach, enabling a noble imagination to gratify itself, lending sometimes to a character, through the consciousness of its possession, an intensified charm, making some virtues just what they ought to be by making them easy; so no other author has insisted more subtly upon the beauty which wealth cannot buy, cannot add to, cannot diminish. How often in his books the failures are the successes, and the man or woman “who gets there” is, to the artist’s eye, the one who fails!

Up to the age of seventeen, like most boys, I read not only without discrimination, but without any clear idea that anybody ever discriminated in such matters. I had only one classification for novels, the “good” and the “rotten.” The latter were a very small class; nearly all were “good.” Dickens was, of course, superbly good; but Wilkie Collins was also good, and so were Miss Corelli, Stanley Weyman, Scott, Miss Braddon, and a host of others whose names are forgotten, *Vanity Fair* was good, but so was *The Deemster* and *She*. It never entered my head that people did not say and do what in books authors made them, or that the writer ever left out anything which would have made the situation or characters more interesting. My attitude (except where Dean Farrar’s school stories were concerned) was one of boundless acceptance. It never struck me that the explanation why life, as reflected in novels, was sometimes dull, could be that it was not reflected in them properly. I was very fond, however, of “good expressions,” a phrase which in my private vocabulary covered indifferently any





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words which pleased me, wherever I found them – in Milton, Dickens, Keats, or Sir William M. Harcourt’s public speeches. I often missed them in books which I otherwise thoroughly enjoyed. One day I had to make a slow long cross-country journey from Eton, and m’tutor lent me two small volumes called *The American*, just the right size for the side pocket. These, I found, were full of “good expressions.” The book (but not for this reason) had, I see now, a profound effect on me. At the time I thought I had merely enjoyed it very much, but something else had happened – I had discovered the art and the resource of the observer. Henceforward life was to be not merely a matter of doing things and wanting things, or of things happening to oneself; there was another resource of inexhaustible interest always to hand – one could stand still and take things in.

Nevertheless my own generation, when we discovered Henry James, read him on the whole for his substance, for precisely that side of his work which appears now to be wearing thin. Our generation, at least that part of it with which I was best acquainted and most at home, was interested in those parts of experience which could be regarded as ends in themselves. Morality was either a means to attaining these goods of the soul, or it was nothing – just as the railway system existed to bring people together and to feed them, or the social order that as many “ends” as possible should be achieved. These ends naturally fined themselves down to personal relations, aesthetic emotions and the pursuit of truth. We were perpetually in search of distinctions; our most ardent discussions were attempts to fix some sort of a scale of values for experience. The tendency was for





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the stress to fall on feeling rightly rather than upon action. It would be an exaggeration to say we cared not a sprat either for causes or for our own careers (appetite in both directions comes with eating, and we had barely begun to nibble); but those interests were subordinate. Henry James was above all a novelist of distinctions; he was, indeed, the master in fiction of the art of distinguishing. His philosophy amounted to this: to appreciate exquisitely was to live intensely. We suspected, I remember, that he over-valued subtlety as an ingredient in character, and was perhaps too “social” in his standards, employing, for instance, “charm” too often as the last test of character. But whether or not we always agreed with his estimate of values, he was pre-eminently interested in what interested us; that is to say, in disentangling emotions, in describing their appropriate objects and in showing in what subtle ways friendships might be exquisite, base, exciting, dull or droll. That his characters were detached from the big common struggling world, that its vague murmur floated in so faintly through their windows, that they moved and had their being in an environment entirely composed of personal relations, aesthetic emotions, and historic associations, seemed to us unimportant limitations to his art. Nor were we particularly interested in the instincts or the will compared with the play of the intelligence. What was the will but a means, a servant? Or what were the instincts but the raw stuff out of which the imagination moulded a life worth contemplating?

It still seems to me, on the whole, a sound philosophy; only the fiction which reflects these things to exclusion of all else now appears to me to shut out much which is





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both more absorbing and more important than I once supposed – even also to falsify the flavour of those very experiences on which it exclusively dwells.

I have described Henry James's youthful audience during those years when his books in his later manner were appearing, because such a description indicates the angle from which his work must always appear important. He cared immensely for spiritual decency; nothing in life beguiled him into putting anything before that. He had a tender heart, an even more compassionate imagination, but a merciless eye.

I knew him for over fifteen years, but I only saw him at long intervals. In spite of admiration and curiosity, I left our meetings entirely to chance, for I soon discovered two daunting facts about him. Firstly, that he was easily bored (not merely in an ordinary but in an excruciating sense of the word), and secondly, that he minded intensely the dislocations and disappointments which are inevitable in all human relations. They made him groan and writhe and worry. The measure of how much he minded them could be read in the frequency, extravagance and emphasis of his signals that all was really well, across even those small rifts (to him they had the horror of gulfs) which absence and accident open up between people. Many have not understood the elaborate considerateness which is so marked in his correspondence. As I read Henry James, it was his sense both of the gulf between human beings and the difficulty of bridging it which made him abound in such reassurances. Like many remarkable men, while drawn towards others, he was conscious also of his own aloofness. There is a kind of detachment (it is to be felt in the deeply religious, in





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some artists, in some imaginative men of action), which seems to bring the possessor of it at once nearer to his fellow beings than others get, and at the same time to remove him into a kind of solitude. I think Henry James was aware of that solitude to an extraordinary degree.

His manner of receiving you expressed an anxiety (sometimes comic in desperate thoroughness of intention) to show you that whatever might have happened in the interval, on his side, at least, the splinters had kept new and fine; so that if your half of the tally was in a similar condition, the two would dovetail at touch. I have seen him keep a lady in a paralysed condition for five minutes while he slowly recalled everything about her. And if your talk with him had been something of a failure, his farewell expressed that what you had wanted, yet failed to get, he had also wanted, and that nothing must blind you to his recognition of any affection or admiration you might be so generous as to feel for “your old Henry James.”

I imagine being interrupted here by a pointed question, “But did not this agitated anxiety to signal, defeat its own end and make complications?” It often did so, just as some of his letters, long as they are, were sometimes almost entirely composed of signals and gestures. But to many sensitive natures who find the world only too full of callous, off-hand people, this exquisite and agitated recognition of their own identity and of their relation to himself was a delightful refreshment. To say that he was a magnet to muffs would be a grievous injustice to his friends, but certainly those who were most easily attracted to him were the sort who are excoriated by the rough contacts of life. He himself was clearly one of

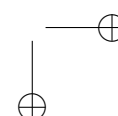
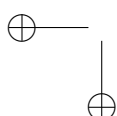




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the most sensitive of men. The importance to him of urbanity, money, privacy, lay in the fact that they were salves. His art was a refuge to him as well as the purpose of his life. He was horrified by the brutality and rushing confusion of the world, where the dead are forgotten, old ties cynically snapped, old associations disregarded, where one generation tramples down the other, where the passions are blind, and men and women are satisfied with loves and friendships which are short, common and empty. I picture him as flying with frightened eyes and stopped ears from that City of Destruction, till the terrified bang of his sanctuary door leaves him palpitating but safe; free to create a world which he could people with beings who had leisure and the finest faculties for comprehending and appreciating each other, where the reward of goodness was the recognition of its beauty, and where the past was not forgotten. His sense of the past – of the social world's, of his own – which he recorded with a subtlety and piety never excelled in autobiography, was almost the deepest sense in him. Such reverence for human emotions is usually associated with the religious sense; yet that, as I have said, is singularly absent from his work. While we read his books, only the great dome of civilization is above our heads – never the sky; and under our feet is its parti-colored mosaic – never the earth. All that those two words “sky” and “earth” stand for in metaphor is absent.

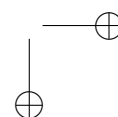
One word on the style and method of Henry James's stories. He is the most metaphorical of writers and “metaphysical” in the sense in which that term was applied to Cowley and Donne. He abounds in “conceits,” that is to say, he often follows a metaphor or verbal association to



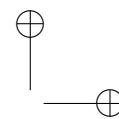
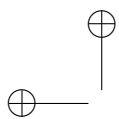


## PORTRAITS

its furthest ramifications, and ingeniously forces them to help him carry on his thought, which in this way takes many turns and twists in approaching a particular point. The characteristic of his later style is a spontaneous complexity. The sentences are often cumbrous and difficult, struggling through a press of hints and ideas which gather round every word and are carried on to help elucidating the situation; this end, however, they only achieve for those who take the trouble to see their bearing; and this requires close attention. But apart from the frequency of happy and beautiful phrases, both his style and his method of telling a story have often a charm usually associated with a very different kind of imaginative work. The charm of all writing which has the quality of improvisation is that, in such writing, the reader catches the author's own excitement in the development of his idea, shares his delight in dallying with it, in turning it round and round, or if it is a simple story, he feels it growing at the same time as he enjoys the tale. It is a quality which cannot be illustrated by extracts; but that much of Henry James's writing has this charm and merit, which usually accompanies simplicity of thought, is clear to anyone who analyses the pleasure he gets from reading him. He does not clip his ideas or cut his coat according to his cloth, but he weaves it as he goes along. As he follows this idea wherever it leads him, his readers are sometimes landed in strange places, and those who are capable of a psychological glow, experience again something like the thrill with which they used in their childhood to read such phrases as "as soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness..." what on earth is he going to see next!

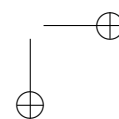
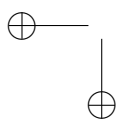






HENRY JAMES

When I look up and see the long line of his books, the thought that it will grow no longer is not so distressing (he has expressed himself) as the thought that so many rare things in the world must now go without an appreciator, so many fine vibrations of life lose themselves in vacancy.







## GEORGE MEREDITH

### I

Turning over the Meredith letters, and reading here and there in them, brings back in pictures a December afternoon, still vivid to me across a considerable gap of years. I had long been promised a visit to the man whom of all living English writers I then revered the most, and at last the day had come.

Hero-worship some say is the duffer's virtue, though by no means all heroes are of that opinion. Is not Victor Hugo reported to have said of some young poet, "He will never write well; he did not turn pale on meeting me." Certainly the heroes would resent the imputation that the ardour of their worshippers had its root in incompetence. No: the saying evidently originates from those formidable people of whom the first thing to be said, and often the last, is that they are not duffers. But if they are right, it certainly needed someone with a touch of the duffer about him to share my excitement on seeing the smoke from the roof of Flint Cottage, that late December afternoon, as my friend and I ran up the rise of ground which brings the small five-windowed house in view. Well worth envying that moment was.

One who is young and a hero-worshipper approaches the home of a writer who has fired his imagination with feelings very like a lover's. Trees look as though they





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were expecting him, and to pull the bell is a momentous action. On the doorstep the lover's incredulity comes over him. Can the person he will see the next minute really be inside? Savages have a word we might adopt for this significance which clings about certain places; they say that a place or person has *mana*. For me the high box hedges, the damp gravel drive, the quiet house with its black speckless windows, all had *mana*. The next moment we were in a narrow passage-hall, hanging up our caps and coats, and through a thin door on the right I heard the resonant rumble of a voice. The great man was talking to his dog.

He was sitting to one side of the fire, dressed in a soft, quilted jacket, with a rug upon his knees. On a little rickety table by his side stood two candles and one of those old-fashioned eye-screens which flirt out green wings at a touch; a pile of lemon-coloured volumes lay beside it. His face beneath a tousled thatch of grey hair, soft as the finest wood-ash, and combed down into a fringe upon a high round forehead, had a noble, ravaged handsomeness. The vanity and delicacy, as of a too aesthetic *petit maitre*, which marks Watts's portrait of him was not discernible; rather a noteworthy boldness. I guessed him to be one of those men who seem bigger seated than when on their legs. At this time he could not rise from his chair. That keen look in profile, as of an upward-pointing arrow, had gone. Old age had blurred his eyelids, and his eyes, once blue, were faded and full of "the empty untragic sadness of old age"; but that vitality which had inspired many a packed page still vibrated in his powerful voice, and told in the impetuosity of his greeting. His talk was full of





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flourishes and his enunciation grandiose, as though he loved the sound of his own words. This characteristic at first, I remember, somewhat disconcerted me. It struck me that he talked with a kind of swagger, and I was not prepared for that. Copy-book biographies always insist upon modesty as a sign of true greatness. I had certainly found out that humility was not the invariable accompaniment of power and insight, but I still clung to the idea that great men were always as biographers say, "simple." Now "simple" Meredith was not, nor was he "natural," "unaffected"; in fact none of the adjectives of obituary respect would apply to him. He was almost stone-deaf, which accounted for the exaggerated loudness of his voice, and the continuity of his discourse, which rolled elaborately along; but the eagerness with which he would now and again curve a hand round his ear and stoop forward to catch an interjection, showed that he was not a born monologist, and that he missed the give and take; though he was, I expect, one likely in any company to follow the sequence of his own thoughts.

My Irish name set him off upon the theme of Celt and Saxon. The English were not in favour with him just then; the Boer War (he detested it) was dragging lamely on, and he belaboured the English with the vigour and bitterness of a disillusioned patriot: few men thought more often of their country, or felt more need of pride in her than Meredith. He accused the English of lack of imagination in statecraft, and abused their manners and their unsociability, their oafish contempt of friendly liveliness and wit, the sluggish casual rudeness that passed among the wealthy for good form; mouthing out sentences he had used, I felt, before, and throwing himself





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back, before a burst of laughter, with the air of one saying, “There, what do you think of *that*?” to watch upon our faces the effect of some fantastic, hammered phrase.

Then came the question of refreshments. What would we drink? Tea? Beer? – a list of wines ending with champagne (pronounced in French fashion, with a gusto that brought foam and sparkle before the eyes). I forget the beverage we drank, for, shouting like a boatswain in a gale, I was directing the chasing waters of his discourse to irrigate fresh subjects. I wanted to hear him talk of his famous contemporaries. Had he met Disraeli? No, he wished he had, “he would have amused me very much.” Then followed an account of the most remarkable Jew he had ever met, a scholar of prodigious erudition and dirtiness, who had begun by tending goats upon the mountains of Roumania.

By this time I had come to feel rather the zest behind his elaborate phraseology than its artificiality, and to marvel at and enjoy his determination to strike a spark from every topic, astounding in a paralysed old man, and in one to whom physical decay must have been the most depressing of all humiliations. Scraps of his talk I still remember. Speaking of Gladstone, he said he was “a man of most marvellous aptitudes but no greatness of mind”; of Swinburne and his emotional mobility, that “he was a sea blown to a storm by a sigh”; of Dickens’s face, when he laughed, that the surprise of it was like the change in a white-beam “when a gust of wind shivers it to silver” – this spoken with rapid gesticulation, which suggested the vehemence of his talk in youth.



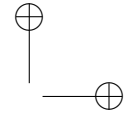
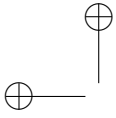


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Indeed, there was still such a fund of invincible vitality in him, that it was incongruous to hear him bemoaning himself as one already dead and better buried: "Nature cares not a pin for the individual; I am content to be shovelled into the ditch." I remember how in the midst of such discourse, solemn as the wind in the pines, with a humorous growl in it, for an undertone, he looked towards the black uncurtained window, past which a few large snowflakes came wavering down, and that the animation of sudden interest was like a child's. It was a momentary interruption, on he went: yes, the angel Azrael was standing behind him, and he hoped he would touch him on the shoulder. It was, however, a nurse who appeared and stood over him, with a graduated glass containing some dismal fluid in her hand; and we, who had forgotten we had been listening for two hours to an old invalid, took our leave. I looked from the door. He had sunk back in his chair; and with a wave of his hand he sketched an Oriental salaam. Had we tired him unconscionably, we asked ourselves anxiously outside the door? As I was hoisting on my coat, I heard again that resonant rumble. He was talking to his dog.

I saw him several times after that, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with others. I thought I recognized the origin of that loud ostentatious enunciation which had startled me on my first visit; it was an echo, an imitation of the haw-haw drawl of the swell of the 'sixties. His small sitting-room when I first entered it was full of women's photographs; later one photograph reigned alone. He was a born amorist, and his most characteristic utterance that I remember, was a propos of the most intimate relation between man and woman;





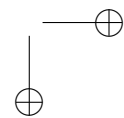
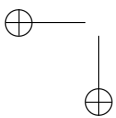
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“It cannot be,” he said, “too spiritual or too sensual for me.”

### II

The middle-aged usually suppose that to be “young” means to have the same tastes and enthusiasms they had once themselves. This is rash, as anyone may discover by confiding his own youthful admirations to his juniors. To be young in one generation is not the same thing as being young in another. Yet youth has certain tendencies in common, its peculiar predicaments and susceptibilities; and to these the poetry of Meredith must appeal, so long as his ideas have not fallen too far behind the times.

This has already happened, but twenty, twenty-five years ago, Meredith’s poems meant much to the young generation; his thought was inspiring. The young are preoccupied with two subjects, love and philosophy. It is necessary for them to get some conception of their relation to the universe; also, some idea of what can be made of their own passions. Questioning, no doubt, becomes muted into a more or less passive process of getting used to life, and passions and desires are accommodated or snuffed out; but as long as any condition worthy to be called “Youth” persists, so long is hope alive, rebellious or wistful, that there are stakes to be played for, and that something admirable, not to say astonishing, can be made out of the mixed stuff each young man feels himself to be. Therefore the didactic poet who can invest his judgments with beauty appeals especially to the young. His interpretations and the values he affixes to emotions, must of course suit the times; but granted they do, by combining thinker and artist in himself, he will kindle







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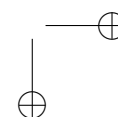
the young. (Witness D. H. Lawrence to-day.) What matter if he is difficult! To get at his meaning they will read and re-read poems which to less ardent curiosity are indigestible. They will bring a jemmy and dark-lantern to his obscurest passages; nor will the swiftest allusion seem too elusive to the young reader who has caught the gleam of a revelation on a page. A hint will suffice:

*Show him a mouse's tail, and he will guess,  
With metaphysic swiftness at the mouse.*

Meredith found such readers among my generation. And in their ears the assertion that "he was not of the centre," that reading his poems was as tedious to the mind as oakum-picking to the fingers; that they were composed in shorthand if not cipher, sounded like the mumblings of Struldbruggs, or the peevish petitions of the Mr. Woodhouses of literature, for a smoother and warmer gruel.

Meredith's themes were matters most urgent to them: how to make the most of that extraordinary agglomeration of feelings called being in love; how some kind of reconciliation between Nature's beauty and her laws could be reached and maintained; how, penned in by practical circumstances, room could be found for youth's herd of passions, hopes and desires – a problem which soon presses, raising dismay only paralleled, perhaps, by Noah's feelings while he watched the procession of beasts wind slowly towards the limited accommodation of the Ark; and finally how to learn to face the fact that the best things do not last, without losing faith either in them or in life itself.

This theme was one upon which Meredith was never tired of enlarging. He loved his own poem, "The Day





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of the Daughter of Hades,” because it taught in picture and story that even one day upon earth was good, and the beauty of earth satisfying even to one like Skiageonia herself, who must return to darkness. Death and destruction, the Scriptures say, have heard the sound of wisdom with their ears; it was Meredith’s theme that only he who has been close up to them could catch the music of energy and joy that rolls through all creation. He was essentially a religious poet, and a religious poet who appealed especially to those who felt embarrassed when pressed to affirm anything about the nature of the universe or the soul, but remained by instinct loyal to life. “God is not in his heaven (indeed, that is the last place where a God whom I could worship would be); but all is right with the world. . . . No; perhaps not all – but it is right enough.” Some such words would express the creed or no-creed of those to whom Meredith was a satisfying poet. How sustaining he was in great calamities I do not know. I suspect he might fail one then, because it was, above all, the mood of triumph that he was born to express. Only when you had struggled up out of the dark defile would he meet you again; then, there is hardly a poet whose greeting would be more radiant and inspiriting. He is the poet of courage; but of the kind of courage which is inseparable from hope.

### III

When one comes to think of his work as a whole, prose as well as poetry, courage seems his favourite virtue. It is the quality he relishes so immensely in his amazing and often preposterous aristocrats; it is what he praised, to the astonishment of the Victorian world, above ten-





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derness and self-sacrifice in women. His laughter even is rather the shout of a victor over squeamishness and vanity than the laughter of a humorist. Vanity, which he often calls egotism, he detested, because he thought it incompatible with any passion worthy of the Muse. Love had to be noble strength on fire, or he tore it to pieces. As an amonist, he detested those elements which most commonly and insidiously corrupt the passion he believed in – vanity and sentimentality. It is against sentimental egotism in relation to Nature and the order of the world as science reveals it, that most of his didactic verse is directed. His attitude towards Nature is one of acceptance and so far, it is religious. But in his case, acceptance is not founded upon belief that *if* man understood, he would see that Nature satisfies his desires. On the contrary –

*He may entreat, aspire,  
He may despair, and she will never heed.  
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,  
Not his desire.*

Meredith was the first Victorian poet to assimilate into his poetic conception of the world the idea that death and battle is the law under which all living things exist and come to their proper perfection: and by poetic assimilation, one means that the beauty which he understood and expressed implied that this was true. Other poets, Tennyson for example, glanced at the conclusions of biologists; but, for their inspiration, they turned always away to pre-Darwinian conceptions of the order of Nature. Meredith was the first poet whose sense of beauty sprang directly from the contemplation of Nature





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as “red in tooth and claw,” and from an acceptance, not only of man’s mortality, but of the passing of all good things. His poetry is a paean of affirmation in the face of these facts. In one of his letters, when he was near upon eighty, he wrote: “I can imagine that I shall retain my laugh in Death’s ear, for that is what our Maker prizes in men.” And once Meredith had embraced this faith, vague enough in form, he kept his ear alert for every message or clue to practical conduct that his interpreting imagination might divine in Nature. It is this part of his work which is perishable stuff. In those poems he becomes too much the schoolmaster abroad, tagging instruction and exhortation on to every scene and incident. A thrush tapping a snail, a night of frost in May, a cutting wind, everything he perceives turns to homily. We may welcome this when we are young enough to be prodigiously interested in the improvement of our own characters: but it is the response of the poet rather than the hearty confidence of the moralist which, in the long run, affects us most. The moralist in Meredith cramped his receptivity; he was often insufficiently passive towards what he described to write his best. There is a monotony of strenuous zeal in his work. His aim is too often to strike some spark out of objects which might kindle a useful fire of enthusiasm, rather than to exhibit them in their beauty. But it is not for those on whom such sparks have fallen, even though they did no more than light a blaze of straw, to gird at him for that. And setting aside this didactic element in his work, he has written memorable things which we can quote,

*For proof that there, among earth’s dumb  
A soul has passed and said our best.*





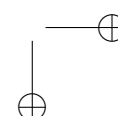
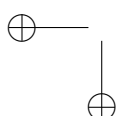
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His delight in physical vigour, his laughter which is “a sudden glory,” his pre-occupation with the question – how fine characters are made? – his praise of courage, his abounding hope, his respect for thought, his delight in the passion of love, made him youth’s poet. His very difficulty made his verse companionable to us; his hard sayings were good to ruminare, and as satisfying as a crust of good bread on a long day’s walk. Meredith made a welcome third when two friends travelled on foot together. His thought bred discussion; they could unpack his phrases together; his words brought Nature nearer and companions closer, when –

*To either, then an untold tale  
Was Life, and author, hero, we;  
The chapters holding peaks to scale,  
Or depths to fathom, made our glee;  
For we were armed of inner fires,  
Unbled in us the ripe desires;  
And Passion rolled a quiet sea,  
Whereon was Love the phantom sail.*

#### IV

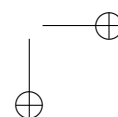
Meredith’s poems attracted little notice, but brought him the acquaintance of Swinburne and Rossetti. Possessing the instincts of a novelist as well as the enthusiasm of a poet, it was natural that he should care more than either Rossetti or Swinburne for the contacts of Society, its elegancies, amenities and chicaneries so dear to the museful eye of the comic spirit; while as a poet, too, he felt far more than they the romance and interest of the big common world. He belongs to that small class of novelists (when we have mentioned his name, Emily





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Brontë, d'Annunzio, and perhaps, George Sand, we seem to have almost exhausted it) who may be described as poet-novelists; writers who strike one as being poets first and novelists afterwards. Meredith's most noticeable, his most distinctive characteristic as a novelist, is lyrical emotion. As a story-teller he is impatient of all episodes and incidents which do not lend themselves to transfiguration. As Henry James has said, "He harnesses winged horses to the heavy car of fiction." No better metaphor for him as a novelist can be found than that of a charioteer driving at the mercy of such a team; rejoicing in the sparks they strike from the high-road of narrative, wheeling round sharp corners with a masterful grasp on the reins; and gloriously confident and at ease only when at last he feels himself rising on the lift of wings. He is at his best when he attempts what only a poet can do. In giving us the sense of time and change, in the composition of a story, in allowing his characters freedom to show themselves, in producing the confidence that the events narrated, and no others, were inevitable, he is far from being a master; but at moments of tragic significance, of exultation, of profound happiness, he is supreme. Hardly any fine novelist has been so little of an *observer*. In conversation, he used to disparage characters in fiction constructed from the hoardings of observation. He took hints from the real world and created from them another which was a fit stage for men and women filled with the courage and beauty of life. He drew the children of leisure and pleasure not as they are, but as it delighted him to contemplate them, keeping in reserve a ray of derision to illuminate their capricious activities and fantastic dilemmas.





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v

After his early poems followed the longest silence in his career as a writer; an interval which there is reason to think was the period of his "ordeal." At the end of five years, *The Shaving of Shagpat* appeared (written at Weybridge with duns at the door). As a boy, he had been devoted to *The Arabian Nights*, and the book is a fantasia on an Arabian theme. It is utterly un-Oriental, though "perfumed with gums of Paradise and Eastern air." It is not one of his fine books, but in Meredith's life it has the significance of *Sartor Resartus* in Carlyle's. Henceforward he too has his philosophy, the product of his imaginative reason. *Shagpat*, with its towerings of gaiety, its rollicking praise of thwacks, its confidence that salutary and saving grace is to be found in fortune's blows, marks the birth of his faith. Like *Sartor*, it records a conversion. He has got his courage, the ground of his optimism, the justification of his delight in life, the conviction that, to the brave life must be *good*, which he expresses again and again in verse and prose. Whatever else the world was to him, it was emphatically a place where courage was the most necessary virtue. "The more I know of the world," he said, "the more clearly I perceive that its top and bottom sin is cowardice, physically and morally." Henceforth he is free. What price he had paid for that freedom no one, of course, can know; but henceforward, pain, evil, and grief never appear in his work as utterly useless and meaningless. They have not a Boig-like quality. (You remember that ghastly and profound invention of Ibsen's in *Peer Gynt*, that shapeless, overwhelming, nightmarish *something* which





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confronts Peer and bids him “go round” – and he can’t?) Tragedy in Meredith never has that quality. The absence of it, as much as the keen auroral light in which his fortunate figures stand, gives to his work the colours of an indomitable optimism, of a victorious happiness which owes nothing to radiance borrowed from another world. It is noticeable that *Modern Love*, which was quarried out of the experience of those years before he had found his philosophy, is the saddest of his works. In *Modern Love* there is a sense of nothing having come from what once was much – of beauty destroyed. It is significant that it should be the poem, perhaps the only one of his poems, which finds favour with the young generation to-day. It is certainly free from that optimism, which they cannot help interpreting as an offensively artificial robustness. Meredith himself had no great liking for *Modern Love*, though it is certainly one of the finest things he wrote. He thought the poem morbid; he missed in it his own philosophy. He put “The Day of the Daughter of Hades” at the head of all his poems, a judgment of his old age, only explicable when one remembers that this poem expresses directly his conception of the right attitude towards the brevity and tragedy of life.

## VI

Meredith has more fault-finders among his critics than he ever had before. His drawing of character and his style can best be defended, it seems to me, on some such lines as these.

Every sentence he wrote, whether you like it or not, shows a love of his craft you must respect. How can one describe the general characteristics of this very personal



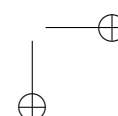
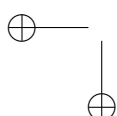




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style, in which many touches are there not so much to help you to realize the object as to put power into the form, a style in which “reflection on a statement is its lightening in advance?” Firstly, it is the style of a poet, metaphorical, fearless and allusive. Nothing in Meredith is more remarkable than his power of swift allusion. To that gift he also owes his power of suggesting beauty and intensity of feeling in his characters. When we come to examine *how* we have been brought to realize so unforgettably his men and women, the impression they have made upon us seems due, not, as in the case of the creations of other novelists to our having known them intimately, but chiefly to this poetic gift of allusion. In describing them he “shoots at nature” and at what is most beautiful in nature. To him (for Nature to him is alive and divine) these allusions are no mere metaphors, they are almost revelations of the one truth. If I did not believe that a man’s philosophy sprung from his feelings and not his feelings from his philosophy, I would say that his philosophy was the origin of his power of convincing us of the beauty of which human nature is capable. Here is an instance of his power of describing human emotion in terms of nature, which will recall many others: “Rapidly she underwent her transformation from doubtfully-minded woman to woman awakening clear-eyed, with new sweet shivers in her temperate blood, like the tremulous light seen running to the morn upon a quiet sea.”

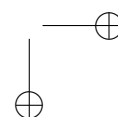
And if our sense of the beauty of character, and the impressiveness of his men and women are due to his drawing upon what is beautiful in nature to express what he feels about them, how much too is our retention





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of the most moving scenes in his stories due to his having created a romantic harmony between the passions described and surrounding nature; a harmony so complete that in memory both rise up together. We remember Clara Middleton, because, besides being an extremely sensible, quick-witted young lady, she has reminded us of so many beautiful things, of summer beech-woods with brown leaves underfoot, of mountain echoes and torrents with their ravishing gleams of emerald at the fall; and how closely involved, also, are such scenes as Diana's early morning walk on the slopes above Lugano with her character. Through the description of the scene we understand her feelings, so that, like her lover Dacier, we also know her best when we remember the rolling grass meadows and pale purple crocuses, the rocky pool beneath the icy cascade. Sandra herself, waiting, with the patience of passion under the cedars in the yellowish hazy moonlight, is indistinguishable from that scene, and our comprehension of Beauchamp's eagerness, travelling to obey the sudden summons of Renée, is one with the sight of the Normandy coast, "dashed in rain-lines across a weed-strewn sea." How distinctly too Richard's desolate convalescence is stamped upon the country the train passes as it carries him away from his love, the pine hills, and the last rosy streak in the sky! But most wonderful of all for harmony between nature without and emotion within, is the chapter in *Richard Feverel* called "Nature Speaks." The chapter in which, after hearing that Lucy has borne him a son, he walks rapidly into the woods, and a storm breaks over him. Every detail of the storm, the oppressive slumber of the air, the crash and quiver of the heavens, the cool steady drench of rain, seem in





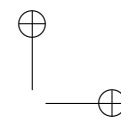
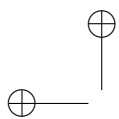
GEORGE MEREDITH

turn to express better than direct description the feelings which take him back to her at last.

It is this poetic power, *not* Meredith's power of analysis, which makes us feel afterwards that we have lived in his characters. In tracing a train of internal reflection, in following the thoughts which were those of that particular person and no other, he is not an equal of such writers as Tolstoy or Henry James. He may surprise in a flash sentiment at its source, but it is much truer to say of him than of them, that when he is no longer writing as a poet, he *dissects* his characters. He does not, like Henry James, turn and return with intricate delay, till by almost abstaining from touching the subtle thing he conveys it at last to you living and complete. In *Sandra Belloni* he says of the Pole family that they all had a kind of dim faculty of imagination. One sees how true that might be of them; but when he handles the three sisters ("the three fine shades and the nicer feelings," as he calls them), it vanishes. He knows the quality is there; he tells us it is there. But in their talk – for their thoughts he makes no attempt to follow – it does not appear. He is no artist in psychology.

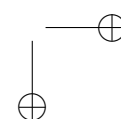
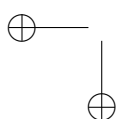
Again, what lapses of credibility occur in his plots! No novelist who was a thorough artist in his craft would have ever left unexplained, or so little explained, such a number of important occurrences. How did Diana come to marry Mr. Warwick? Meredith makes some casual attempts long afterwards to make it credible, but he avoided the scene. Why did Nesta engage herself to Sowerby? It is not explained. Then there is the case of Richard Feverel. After he had yielded to the "enchantress" and rushed abroad, he destroyed unread





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letter after letter from his wife. Accept the fact that he did so. Would not the first time that he handled an envelope with Lucy's writing on it have been a moment in his "ordeal" worthy of the novelist's art? We are only told that he had gone on destroying unread letter after letter. There are instances of this kind in almost every novel. Meredith's admirers must admit that, when he is not writing as a poet, he often fails to handle the novel like an artist; that he often does not go thoroughly into his theme, nor treat it with an artist's respect. But he was a poet, and he did the best things in his novels best.





## JOHN MITCHEL AND O'CONNELL

John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* is a book many Irishmen, but few Englishmen read. If Englishmen did read it, they would not only have the pleasure of reading a very considerable masterpiece in the journal line, but they might understand a little better the quality of the hatred towards themselves which is always liable to flare up in Irish hearts. They would also make acquaintance with a most remarkable character.

I had often heard of the book, but I had felt no impulse to get it, till one night, when we were talking of O'Connell, Æ, drawing on that effortless memory of his (it would seem by the simple process of gazing abstractedly at a corner of the ceiling for a moment) reproduced the following sentence from the journal: "Poor old Dan! – wonderful, mighty, jovial, and mean old man! with silver tongue and smile of witchery, and heart of melting ruth! – lying tongue! smile of treachery! heart of unfathomable fraud! What a royal, yet vulgar soul! Think of his speech for John Magee, the most powerful forensic the 'gorgeous and gossamer' theory of moral and peaceful agitation, the most astounding *organon* of public swindling since first man bethought him of obtaining money under false pretences." I decided to buy the diary of the man who wrote thus; for I recognized in that sentence a vehement spirit and the hand of one who could write.





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Ulster, the last stronghold a century ago of Irish independence, which gave to Ireland some of her greatest leaders, produced Mitchel. His career before penal servitude is so mixed with the Young Ireland movement that it is impossible to disentangle them. The movement corresponded to Sinn Fein, both in that it had its literary and imaginative side, and in drawing strength from men prepared to die. It stood precisely in the same relation to O'Connell as Sinn Fein stood to the Nationalist Party. O'Connell trusted to the good faith of England. By his giant mass meetings, by his own plangent, appealing eloquence, by the strength of Ireland's case, he thought he could induce England to repeal the Union. But after Catholic Emancipation he got nothing more. When the great meeting at Clontarf melted away at his order because he feared conflict with the military, when he gave utterance to the sentiment that "the liberty of the world is not worth the shedding of one drop of blood," the cause was lost. If four or five hundred had died at Clontarf it might have saved prolonged horrors to come; for the only thing which shakes in the least England's extraordinary self-complacency and belief in her own spotless rectitude is finding herself suddenly bespattered with blood of her own shedding.

The Irishmen such as Mitchel whom she had to deal with next were of tougher stuff; but the Irish nation was drained to apathy by the famine of 1846, and they were beaten. O'Connell went abroad to die in 1847, broken-hearted not because he had lost his influence — he was too large a nature for that, but because he saw his country sinking into ever deeper misery. He ordered that broken heart to be taken from his body after death





JOHN MITCHEL AND O'CONNELL

and buried in Rome, which shows – well, many things! – chiefly perhaps immense self-pity.

I sometimes indulge in a little historical crystal-gazing; and when the misty film thins away from the orb, I can see in it a bright small picture. Then, such is my excitement that I cease to be conscious that it is minute, but feel as though I were myself upon the spot. Here is such a picture: a postillioned cabriolet draws up with a clatter in the yard of a hotel in Genoa. In it is seated a listless old man, huge in girth and height, heavily caped; his peaked cap does not hide his prominent eyes, black bushy brows, or his curls. His face is large and yellow, rounded with heavy rolls about the neck like a pug's. It seems the mask of a mute, till a smile slowly ripples across that vast countenance, as he heaves himself wearily up to greet landlord and attendants, who stand bowing and washing their hands with invisible soap on the steps. I recognize instantly that good-natured combative Irish face with its turned-up nose, that deep chest which could send out a voice like thunder and earthquake, or musical and soft, at will. Yes, this huge, inhibited, slow old man is Daniel O'Connell – “the man with a genius and fancy” (I am again quoting Mitchel), “tempestuous, playful, cloudy, fiery, mournful, merry, lofty and mean by turns, as the mood was on him – a humour broad, bacchant, riant, genial and jovial – with profound and spontaneous natural feeling, superhuman and subterhuman passions, yet, withal, a boundless fund of masterly affectation and consummate histrionism – hating and loving heartily, outrageous in his merriment and passionate in his lamentation,” who had the power to make other men hate or love, laugh or weep, at his good pleasure





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– “insomuch that Daniel O’Connell, by virtue of being more intensely Irish, carrying to more extravagant pitch all Irish strength and passion and weakness, than other Irishmen, led and swayed his people by a kind of divine, or else diabolic, right.”

“Intensely Irish” – but it is that you may become acquainted with another type, equally Irish, whose passion is concentrated like a blow-pipe flame, that I urge you to read Mitchel’s *Jail Journal*. If I looked again in my crystal, I could see him standing in the dock, while sentence of fourteen years’ penal servitude is being pronounced upon him, pale, unconcerned, (“the fires are banked, but still they burn”); or else chatting about Peru to the captain of the “Dragon,” the steam frigate which is to take him away to the convict settlement of the Bermudas.

“But God knoweth the heart. There was a huge lump in my throat all the time of this bald chat, and my thoughts were far enough away from both Peru and Loo-Choo. At Charlemont Bridge in Dublin, this evening, there is a desolate house – my mother and sisters, who came up to town to see me (for the last time in case of the worst), five little children, very dear to me; none of them old enough to understand the cruel blow that has fallen on them this day, and above all – above all – my wife. . . . Dublin City, with its bay and pleasant villas – city of bellowing slaves – villas of genteel dastards – lies now behind us, and the sun has set behind the blue peaks of Wicklow, where the Vale of Shanganagh, sloping softly from the Golden Spears, sends its bright river murmuring to the sea. And I am on the first stage of my way, faring to what regions of unknown horror? And may never, never – never more, O, Ireland! – my mother and queen – see vale, or hill, or murmuring stream of thine. And *Why?* What is gained?”

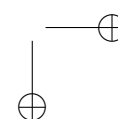
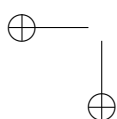


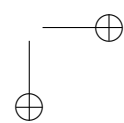
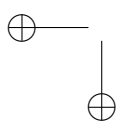




JOHN MITCHEL AND O'CONNELL

The answer satisfies him; they had not dared to give him a fair trial. "By demonstrating that there is no law or Constitution for us, I have put an end, one may hope, to constitution agitation, and shamed the country out of moral force." From Bermuda he was shipped to Van Diemen's Land. His bitter homesickness and the rage that trembled within him made the beauty of that country hateful to him. "The tinkle or murmur, or deep resounding roll, or raving of running water is of all sounds my ears ever hear now, the most homely. The birds have a foreign tongue; the very trees whispering to the wind whisper in accents unknown to me." It is characteristic of him that before escaping to America he formally withdrew his parole.







## GEORGE MOORE

### I

In Ebury Street, that long lack-lustre street, as Mr. Moore calls it, there is nevertheless one point illustrious, the bow window of number 121.

To those plodding upon that pilgrimage, the Life of Letters, it is half inn, half shrine. There he dwells himself, and there, not for the first time, I stopped one evening and rang the bell.

“Please ask Mr. Moore if he will see Mr. Desmond MacCarthy; but add that I don’t wish to disturb him. I’ve only matters of such permanent importance to discuss with him that any time will do.”

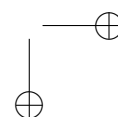
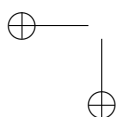
The parlourmaid’s perplexity was relieved by the appearance of Mr. Moore himself in the doorway of the dining-room. He bade me come in. “Are you sure,” I asked, feeling now secure in my chair, “that I am not interrupting you?”

MOORE: No; I cannot work after five o’clock. The hours pass only too slowly, for I have lost the power of reading. I like few things more than talk.

MACCARTHY: But, Mr. Moore, when you say you have lost the power of reading, you amaze me!

MOORE: Why?

MACCARTHY: Because I find it impossible to believe that you ever possessed it.





#### PORTRAITS

A beaming, childlike smile of mingled innocence and slyness removed all trace of age from my host's countenance.

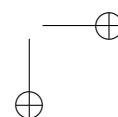
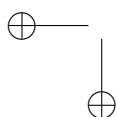
"Yes, I remember now, when you discussed my praise of Landor in *Avowals*, you wrote that I was not a reader, but "a dipper." How did you guess I "dipped"?

MACCARTHY: It was not difficult to infer from your comments upon books and authors. They are marked by extraordinary perspicacity but often, if I may say so, also by a rashness quite impossible in any one who had *read* the author in question.

MOORE: A man need not drink a bottle of wine to judge a vintage.

MACCARTHY: And a man cannot value a house by peeping into one room. But analogies are misleading. What struck me about your estimate of Landor was that it was essentially that of the "dipper." Landor never set down a sentence incapable of giving pleasure to a lover of prose, and many a page of unrivalled beauty. There is consequently no author into whom it is more delightful to "dip"; yet there are few more difficult to "read." A reader soon discovers that magnificent prose to be forbiddingly monotonous. There is no change of tempo in it and little progression of thought, though the subject may change frequently and abruptly. I have been reading *Peronnik the Fool*, and my one fear for your later works. . . .

MOORE: A trifle, a fairy story. I should be flattered indeed, and incredulous, if you compared the merits of my prose with those of Landor's; but something so entirely different as this story cannot well have the defect you speak of. I wrote it originally for *Héloïse and Abélard*, where it is related that Héloïse wrote a story in French





GEORGE MOORE

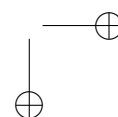
prose called *Peronnik the Fool* in order to teach her son French: he had been away in Brittany so long that he had come back to her speaking Breton. I did not include it as it would have interrupted the reader's interest in Héloïse's own story. It was first published separately in the Carra edition of my collected works, in which edition it was bound up with my translation of *Daphnis and Chloe*. When the Hours Press wished to issue a special edition, I took the opportunity of revising it.

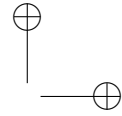
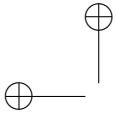
MACCARTHY: It is a charming fairy story, but I think it was wise to remove it from the pages of the greater book. I compared it with the Carra edition; to do so was an object-lesson in proof correcting – I was astonished at the minuteness of attention which had removed tiny blemishes. Yet...

MOORE: Yet others, you were going to say, still remain. There is indeed no end to weeding. Our flower beds are never free of weeds, though our backs may be stiff with pulling them up. But show me any you have found. You know that where my work is concerned I am not touchy.

MACCARTHY: Indeed I do. I remember my astonishment on receiving once a letter of thanks from you after I had dangled, with a smile, a few weeds from your garden in the face of the public. That I should be forgiven, I expected; but enthusiastic thanks taught me a lesson in craftsman's detachment I shall not forget.

MOORE: I never could understand anyone being annoyed at serious criticism, or objecting to take a hint about his work from another – if he can get one. If I were making a table and it turned out not to be quite steady, I should be grateful to anyone who showed me which leg was too short. I remember while I was writing *The Brook*





## PORTRAITS

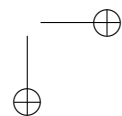
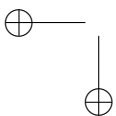
*Kerith* I confided to you my difficulty in choosing things for Jesus to say, and you replied: “Don’t make him walk through the book dispensing wisdom, let him talk about rams.” The suggestion was a great help to me.

MACCARTHY: I remember that talk and that afternoon. But it was not I, Mr. Moore, but you yourself who said that.

For an instant Mr. Moore stared at me; then, brushing aside impatiently the notion that it mattered which of two people discussing literature seriously, had said the pointful thing, he asked me again what weeds I had found in *Peronnik*.

MACCARTHY: I am afraid I was interested chiefly in your own corrections; they were instructive. Afterwards I surrendered myself to the quiet current of the story. But there is the book on your table. Please read me a passage, and let us see if you have not left some blemish in it. Look, this one on page seven will do. I liked that description of the drought.

MOORE (reading): “From that Peronnik minded the farmer’s cows, the white and the brown and the black, keeping them together in the pasture the farmer had told him they were to feed in, forgetful at first of the Diamond Spear and the Golden Bow; stories did not stay long in Peronnik’s head, *and of all at the time he was in*, for he had the weather to think of, and very bad weather it was, the country withering under a blue sky with never a cloud in it except the one that appeared about three o’clock every day and fled away southward, breaking Peronnik’s heart. If the clouds do not gather and no more rain falls, whither shall I drive my cows to pasture? he said again and again, for there’s little grass





GEORGE MOORE

anywhere, and what there is is dry and crisped, with no diet in it. And whither shall I drive them for water? The pools that were are but baked mud, and the river that was is but heaps of hot shingle, with only a trickle round the middle rocks.”

Well?

MACCARTHY: Since you bid me crawl like an insect across the page, shadowing a word at a time, I confess that I hitch at the sentence “stories did not stay long in Peronnik’s head, *and of all at the time he was in.*” It is unnatural English. True, a moment’s reflection shows me that you mean “above all at this time, for he had the weather to think of”; but that moment of reflection also shows me that “and of all at the time he was in” is not only obscure but ungraceful. And if you wish me to strain even at a gnat, I confess also that the phrase about the pasture, “and what there is is dry and crisped, with no diet in it,” seems to me over-precious. And what about the double “is”? “And crisped” is unnecessary: scratch the words out and you would get rid of one “and” – of which there are apt to be too many in your prose – and at the same time bring closer together the two “d’s” of “dry” and “diet” to the improvement of the rhythm. . . . But it is not about such things I want to talk.

In *Conversations in Ebury Street* you did me the honour of introducing me as an interlocutor. I did not cut a good figure, but I was not displeased at finding myself embalmed, even as a rather fatuous person “anxious about your literary taste,” who had “put a joke on you” by bringing you *A Group of Noble Dames*. In your article on Hardy you made use of one story in it. I had chosen that book, unfortunately as it turned out, in the hope





#### PORTRAITS

that, as a story-teller *par excellence* yourself, you would detect in Hardy's leisurely, fire-side method of narration something pleasing to you. But you only noticed in one story its melodramatic crudities, without taking into account that even they were consonant with the legend-weaving garrulity of cronies, remembering over the fire the county ladies who had died before they were born. Your examples of ineptitudes in expression could have been increased by others taken from every novel Hardy ever wrote. He will speak of "atmospheric cutlery" instead of a sharp wind, and in *Tess*, when he wishes to say that the girl blushed, he declares that "every point in the milkmaid became a deep rose-colour." But these specks in his pears lessen their sweetness no more than the far rarer specks in your own. Had you been in search of felicities instead of defects, you would have found many more of them: "The shearers reclined against each other, as at suppers in the early stages of the world," for instance. Of this art in suggesting whatever is perennial in a scene of rustic life, Hardy was a master. And who could better the finality of such a phrase as "the sad science of renunciation"? To the dipper no doubt Hardy's prose appears as faulty as Landor's seems faultless; but for the reader of his work there emerges a high simplicity which is one of the marks of fine literature. Here and there he sinks to flat naivety, and his tragic sense sags into a too-easy and passive melancholy; but in his novels – would that I could convince you! – one feels the turning of the wheel of fate and the relation of the characters to the solemnity of earth. How rare that is! Conrad. . . .

MOORE: Nothing will persuade me to retire from what I wrote in *Conversations in Ebury Street* – that Conrad's







## GEORGE MOORE

prose is that of a foreigner. And what, after all, is Conrad? The English must always have a writer of adventure stories to make a fuss about; Stevenson is dead. What is Conrad but the wreck of Stevenson floating about on the slip-slop of Henry James?

MACCARTHY (in agitation): There you are again! Why “slip-slop”? Henry James has written pages and pages, which you, a lover of prose. . . .

MOORE: I have no patience with a novelist who takes out a pack of hounds to hunt a rat. The climax of a Henry James story is that one of the characters offers another a cigarette.

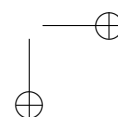
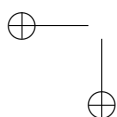
MACCARTHY (feeling a critic’s despair when confronted with the bias of a creator): By the bye, have you looked at Proust?

MOORE: My dear fellow, when I hear that a man has ploughed a field with a pair of knitting-needles, I am content to wonder without wanting to watch him do it.

(I have a confession to make about the above dialogue. I did *not* ring the bell of number 121 that evening; it took place under my hat as I walked westwards past the bow-window.)

## II

Mr. George Moore has a rare gift for confession. He has never been afraid of being silly, nor of being unjust; he has never been afraid of exhibiting himself as selfish, complacent, limited. He does not mind giving himself away, he enjoys it; and if at the same time he gives away a few friends, he does so with a spontaneous serenity which should go far to placate their wrath. Tennyson would,





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no doubt, have been inexpressibly indignant had any one treated him as Mr. Moore has treated Mr. Edward Martyn and Mr. Yeats; but then he was a stickler for privacy. The very idea of gossip roused Tennyson to almost inexplicable fury; naturally in printed matter his standard of loyalty, silence and discretion was little short of exorbitant. What those who think like Tennyson will make of Mr. Moore's easy Pepysian frankness, it is not hard to imagine; they will be so indignant that they will hardly be able to enjoy *Ave atque Vale* at all. Those with a laxer standard of reticence and decorum will discover that there is no spite deeper than Puck's in Mr. Moore's detached presentment of his friends, and not a touch of that superiority of tone which almost always creeps into an author's account of other people, however little it may really correspond to his comparative estimate of himself. There is something ineradicably naive in Mr. Moore which saves him from being patronising. He records and describes with astonished simplicity and joy.

### III

He is also a born story-teller. When I so describe him, I mean to suggest something different from what the word *raconteur* suggests. A *raconteur* is a man intensely conscious of his audience; his methods are determined by his awareness that he is addressing a group of people. Maupassant was the prince of raconteurs; his method was that of an artist who is also a man of the world. If punctuality is the politeness of monarchs, concision is the politeness of *raconteurs*. Maupassant's methods are based on the great social commandment that a man must never be a bore. But it had an unfortunate influence





GEORGE MOORE

on his choice of subjects, making him often prefer the spicy subject to the significant one. His own attitude towards life was however so definite, stable and charged with emotion, that he remained an artist, even when he pollarded his subjects; even when he confined himself to the trivially stimulating theme. Note how often it comes natural to him to tell a story through the mouth of a man talking after dinner, or of a sportsman thawing into intimacy after a long day in the open air with his friends. Even when Maupassant dispenses with a narrator he still observes this social law; his economy in description and brevity in comment, imply a keen and possibly impatient circle of listeners. Mr. Moore is a story-teller of a very different kind; one who tells stories to himself for his own delight. He is therefore leisurely. We are eavesdroppers rather than an audience. We do not hear, but overhear him.

“I love my own thoughts,” he wrote in *Vale*, “and the past is a wonderful mirror in which I spend hours watching people and places I have known; dim, shadowy and far-away they seem, and pathetic are the faces, and still more pathetic is the way everybody follows his little prejudices; however unreasonable they may be we must follow them.” I think it is in the same book, or it may be in another volume of the Irish trilogy, that he stops to say that a picture of himself in front of his fire would be a much better emblem of “Reverie” than that of the young girl upon a garden bench so dear to Academicians. His genius is a genius for reverie; phase after phase in his own life or in the life of some man or woman he has known, reflection after reflection, image after image, rise, turn and evaporate like wreaths of smoke. The mood of





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reverie is a quiet, patient one; poignancy of emotion is foreign to it. Though a man thus egotistically absorbed may respond with tenderness towards some images which rise in his mind, he may often surprise us also by a lack of emotional resonance, a dullness to implications just beyond the focus of his immediate attention. You remember how the child David Copperfield, when he first heard Mrs. Gummidge bewailing that she was a burden to everyone and better dead, could bear it no longer, but in an agony of sympathy suddenly roared out: "It isn't true, Mrs. Gummidge, it isn't true." That note of vehement response to actuality is entirely absent from Mr. Moore's work. He feels, and we too feel, not that things painful, delightful, or comic are happening, but that they have happened. They lie still now, all is over; and consequently the quality of our own response to them is composed, and saturated in detachment.

The artistic tranquillity of recollection comes easy to Mr. Moore; his difficulty has perhaps been to find sufficiently strong feelings to remember. He has all his life, it seems, been more interested in examining the wrinkles in the sand left by the tide than in bathing in the sea. It is the slenderness of his stock of carefully hoarded experience which, as much as his passion for his craft, has led him to re-write so much of his work.

It is indeed difficult for Mr. Moore to reprint anything without re-writing it. No writer has ever shown himself more interested, not even Flaubert, in the technical process of approximating to perfection. I believe that if every few months a new edition of some already often-reprinted book of Mr. Moore's were called for, each fresh opportunity of polishing would give him far greater





#### GEORGE MOORE

pleasure than the steady increase in the number of his readers which such a demand would indicate. But such weeding is an endless task; and although a man may have spent the whole of yesterday removing small noxious plants, when glancing from his bedroom window next morning, his eyes are likely to be caught by a dandelion on the lawn.

#### IV

As an imaginative writer Mr. George Moore did not get his due at first. He was not admired enough. The reason for this was that it is impossible for men who have not a strong dash of the artist in them to *respect* him. They cannot respect him because he appears to have no character – no character at all, but to be boneless, rudderless, strengthless, passive; he seems to be all temperament – just a mobile impressible surface, exposed to random experience; they feel there is something temporary in his enthusiasm and unsteady in his adherence.

Now character is a vague term, but it implies a consciously approved and defended attitude towards life. A man of character is always encountering confirmations of his views. His eye has grown quick to notice the recurrent aspects of things; but he pays for his perspicacity by narrowing his field of sensibility. It is one of the problems of a writer's career – if that can be called a problem which is usually settled for him – at what point he shall cease to remain passively open to new influences, shut the door, and make instead the most of what he has stored and understood. This process of self-construction is usually as gradual as the hardening and closing of the skull upon the growing brain; yet there are moments at





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which a writer may well say to himself, "I have pulled the world together in my head as completely as I am ever likely to succeed in doing; now I am going to make the most of what I understand. It is time to conclude." There are therefore two kinds of literary sincerity; one which springs from this adherence to a line dotted out by countless previous experiences, and another which consists in the writer allowing each experience to impinge with all its force upon him, as though it were the only impression he had ever received. This is sincerity of mood, and it is Mr. Moore's great merit as a literary artist. Now the first kind of sincerity and consistency is understood by everyone, but the second is only sympathetic to those who have hated the necessity of restricting their response to life, and know that it needs courage of a kind to remain perpetually at the mercy of new experiences; and that this course too may mean the achievement of a kind of consistency. What is interesting about Mr. George Moore's imagination is that, although apparently as ductile and as responsive to the lie of the ground as water itself, it does achieve consistency of direction.

The critic of his work will find himself continually returning to that simile of water. His style is the most fluid imaginable; the drift of his thought is deflected by chance associations. The surprise is that it ever twists back again into the main channel; yet it does. Like water, his imagination takes the shape of every vessel into which it is poured – it is square in one vessel and round in another – yet the more it changes the more it is the same. His successful strokes often look like flukes, and his happy phrases have often such an easy casual air about them that for many years he hardly got credit



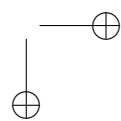
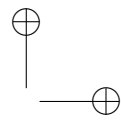


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for them. In the case of most authors we know in a moment when they have hit the mark they aimed at, if only by a ring of triumphant confidence in the sentence itself; Mr. Moore never seems quite certain that he has succeeded, even when there is no doubt about it. No one will have the slightest difficulty in believing him when he confesses to being the most diffident of authors. If someone told him quietly, "your writing is loose, thin spun stuff," I can imagine him accepting the verdict with a kind of enthusiastic despair, and then some weeks later arriving radiant with the news that he had just read *Esther Waters*, and that there were things in it every bit as good as Turgenev.

Whistler once frightened Mr. Moore by suddenly saying: "You care about nothing except your writing." No wonder he was alarmed; it implies an inhuman degree of detachment. But many kinds of sanctity are inhuman, and Mr. Moore is a saint of the Life of Letters.









## OOM PAUL AND CECIL RHODES

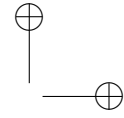
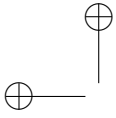
### TWO HOUSES

One is an unlovely little bungalow near Pretoria, with a tin roof and a dark veranda, standing beside a rough road down which a puff of wind sends clouds of tawny dust. The stony ground is cracked and weedy. The landscape has a littered, slovenly look as though it were not virgin soil, but an enormous tract of uncomfortable building land. Near the house lie many years' accumulations of tins; meat tins, sardine tins, fruit tins, biscuit tins, oil cans and broken pots. They have mostly rusted down to kinship with the soil, but here and there the sun, blazing like a white combustion in the sky, strikes out a flash among the shards and weeds.

Four strides take one to the veranda, the steps of which are guarded by two small couchant lions of heraldic type with rueful countenances. Where did they come from? Witnessing to man's power of conventionalising natural forms, to that freedom of conception and submissiveness to tradition upon which imaginative art depends, they seem on this spot singularly impressive. Amid so much aridity, material and spiritual, they seem unique, beyond criticism, relics of a former world.

Under this veranda old Paul Kruger used to sit, with his pipe, his Bible and his spittoon, gazing across the road at the large proportionless reach-me-down building,

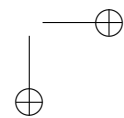
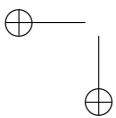




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half church and half conventicle, where he would preach on Sundays. It was the site, this tin “stoop,” of historic and cautious colloquies, and of many slow sly meditations and religious resolves. Looking back it seems to me as though he must have been there himself when I visited it, so strong at the time was the sense of his presence. I seem to *remember* a black ungainly figure – a drayman dressed as an undertaker – with brown, black-nailed hands slackly joined across the creases of an ancient frock-coat, sitting there, hunched and motionless; a heavy yellow mask of a face in the shadow, with low forehead, thick eyebrows, neck-beard and saurian eyes preoccupied and drowsily watchful. Every now and again the wind would lift a cloud of grit from the road and blow it tinkling against the corrugated roof and dry shivering bushes. The loneliness and publicity of the place, its solitude and lack of privacy are appalling to one sensitive to “ordered permanence and to that tranquillizing stamp of man’s affections upon the things around him which gives a sense of home.”

Like many a great man, Kruger was an epitome of the characteristics of his race, the flower of its most conservative instincts. The Boer, though physically an immovable sort of man and reluctant to uproot himself, has a trekker’s indifference to his immediate surroundings. He is as content to live for years in his own litter as though he were moving on next month. He loves not possessions, but money and independence, and not money as one who knows its value, its immediate possibilities, but as one who has known the importance of hoarding necessitous resources. Here lived one who, it is said, was very rich. What an effort of imagination to supply here





#### OOM PAUL AND CECIL RHODES

a background of ghostly money-bags! What a contrast between this house and Groote-Schuur where his enemy lived, who also bothered little about luxury, ceremony or show, but liked to have things about him fine, solid and elegant!

To one who arrives at his own sense of rival political ideals in a country more through impressions than through statistics and statements, the contrast between the homes of Cecil Rhodes and Paul Kruger has much to say. Groote-Schuur is built in a fold of the spurs of Table Mountain, one of the most beautiful sites in the world, among bright, green pines and chestnut trees. Its garden is laid out in careless masses of flowers, which mix with the woods and slopes beyond. The house is not what we should consider a large one. It is built in a kind of Italianate Dutch style, with thick white walls and wide veranda supported by slender columns. Its decorations are akin to the sober, solid exuberance of old Dutch wardrobes and heavy brass-bound chests. It is cool, spacious yet compact, and superbly comfortable; and it is haunted by a very different presence. A heavy-shouldered, restless man with reddish hair, who talks and talks in a reedy head-voice, and whose prominent formidable eyes are lit with the glare of dreams, visions of vast empty territories, gigantic material possibilities. The Hero as Financier! It was a long time before I could envisage such a character; and I am not sure that I like his fervid followers now. But I realize that he gave them imaginative "openings" such as no one else could give: and threw upon their projects and activities the light of larger issues and impersonal aims, just as for his people "Oom Paul" expressed a biblical ideal. The smoke of our





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inglorious war has cleared away, but the struggle between those two ideals is still going on, the one with all the faults and virtues of old Scottish Calvinism, the other with all those of a pioneering, commercial civilization.

In the dining-room of the tin bungalow outside Pretoria stands the black coffin case of Kruger. It was strewn when I saw it with withering wreaths; every foot, too, of the walls was covered with laurel trophies, and at the end of the small dark wall hung one of the few genuine specimens I have seen of modern primitive art. The head of the last President of the Republic (life-size) was represented as bursting through a hard blue sky, the colour of a sparrow's egg. The collar-stud and tie were carefully painted, and then abruptly cut off by more blue sky. On either side of his head a miniature angel hovered; one, propping a large book against a cloud, was presumably writing in it the deeds of the hero, the other was about to crown him with a little wreath the size of a bracelet; and underneath, far below, was a sea of human hats, diminishing to the horizon; straw hats, felt hats, bowlers, sun hats, caps and waving sticks. The artist had evidently felt uncertain of his power of inventing human faces, and he had relied upon hats to produce the effect of a gigantic acclamation. It was the best his own people could do for Kruger in the way of art, which is not in their line. To the memory of Rhodes his countrymen set up the great bronze horse of Watts, which champs and paws beneath a rider who looks eagerly out under his hand across fertile land to the sea beyond; a monument reminiscent of the long inheritance of civilization.

What a subject for an imaginative historian – the struggle between these two and the ideals each repre-



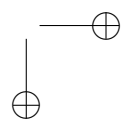
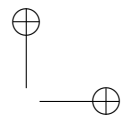


#### OOM PAUL AND CECIL RHODES

sented! Not for an historian most interested in weighing immediate rights and wrongs in a quarrel between two nations, but for an historian with a sense of the drama of the everlasting clash of new things with old.

Kruger is one of the most tragic figures; all the more tragic for his narrownesses and crookednesses. For me the dusty, dark room and tin “stoop” was full of echoes of those Cromwellian speeches of his, with their dry references to Peter v, verses 7 and 8, or Revelation XIV, 9, 10, 12 and 13, as the case might be, and of their closings, “I have spoken,” “I have done.” I remembered his flight that night in September, 1900, when his country was swarming with the enemy, and the fighting Boers were making their way north through an uninhabitable country to reorganize there and begin the struggle again. I remembered the opening words of his final Proclamation, “Whereas the great age of His Honour the State President renders it impossible for His Honour to continue to accompany the Commandoes,” and imagined his parting from his gray-haired wife, that evening; the woman to see whom, as a boy of sixteen he had once swam a river in spate, which a ferry-man had refused to cross.







## WALTER RALEIGH

### I

Walter Raleigh died at the age of sixty-one. The list of his books is not a long one for a man so remarkably vigorous in intellect and so ardent: – *The English Novel*, 1894; *Robert Louis Stevenson* (a short essay), 1895; *Style*, 1897; *Milton*, 1900; *Wordsworth*, 1903; *The English Voyages of the Sixteenth Century*, 1904; *Shakespeare*, 1907; *Six Essays on Johnson*, 1910; *Romance*, 1917 (a lecture); *The War in the Air*, 1922 (unfinished).\* He was an artist in scholarship, but he had not the scholar's bias, and this, I think, accounts for the shortness of this list. He loved the art of letters passionately, but criticism he felt was twice removed from vital expression. If he could not be said to despise it, he certainly had outbursts of impatience with it. There were moments when he felt anything but content to be a purveyor of what he called "parasitic literature." (By the bye, that phrase of Tennyson's, "a louse in the locks of literature," disquiets all critics at times.) Action, creation – "the word should be cousin to the deed," were great; books about books were small matters. At the same time this low estimate of the value of criticism made him put an enormous amount of work into it. Criticism was not even a respectable

\*Posthumously published: *Some Authors*, 1923; *Laughter from a Cloud*, 1923; *On Writing and Writers*, 1926.





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profession otherwise, only slipshod trifling; and certainly discoursing about books and authors can be a very soft job. (“It all comes out of the books they read, and it all goes into the books they write.”) On the other hand, it can be extremely hard work, and good criticism is perhaps rarer than any other form of good literature. It has not often attracted first-rate minds, and it demands a cluster of qualities seldom found together. It is not enough to be original, sensitive and imaginative; not enough to speak out of yourself. The critic need not possess these qualities in the same degree as the creator, but possess them he must, and in addition, the faculty of comparing. The creative writer must know his own mind; the critic must also know the minds of other people. He must be able to harmonise personal sensibility with an exposition of case-made law: tradition is also evidence.

Raleigh was the most spirited of professorial critics: we shall not soon look upon his like again. He was a book-minded man with the enthusiasms of an active one. A fine phrase intoxicated him like a fine deed; he was a born expounder and praiser of authors. One thing, however, he was set upon: that his comments should be backed by knowledge, and each of his own essays literature. His temperament fitted him to deal with the human side of works of art. In aesthetic sensibility he was far from original, but his sense of the value of the content of literature, when translated back into terms of life, was wide and penetrating. He would have preferred himself to have worn literature, like his namesake, as a ring on his finger; but born in a different age, he was compelled to wear it as a ring through his nose.

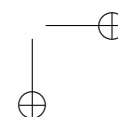


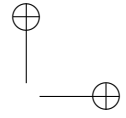
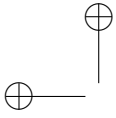




#### WALTER RALEIGH

The witty, original, clever, personal comments, which Raleigh's determination to judge with the general eye as well as through his own temperament kept out of his criticism, would have filled a row of brilliant volumes. But he aimed first at being sound. He staked his self-respect on what he wrote being balanced and thorough. Yet it was no pleasure to him to be thus sober in judgment, for he was romantic and exaggerative by temperament. He had a genius for exultant mockery and a surprising gift for weaving arabesques round a theme. He would have loved to have taken sides violently in criticism. The itch of the craftsman in words to combine them surprisingly, the contempt for tame plain statement, the instinct "to play," which was the strongest impulse which he shared with the artist, were constant temptations to him as a critic. To most men thus gifted they would have been, on the contrary, their stock in trade; but Raleigh conceived his function as an expounder of literature in a more rigorous fashion. The tissue of his books is alive, thanks to these gifts, but except in his essay on *Style* they are under restraint. His arabesques are cut on solid substance; he is witty only to instruct, only eloquent to expound. He is witty about stupid readers who do not enjoy Jane Austen's comedy, when he says they "ought to be in her books instead of outside them." There are imaginative phrases on almost every one of his pages, as when he says of Drake that "he made precautions foolish by rising from height to height of daring, until the very wind of his name cleared the seas before him" (*The English Voyages*); and he is splendidly eloquent in his summary of *Paradise Lost*.



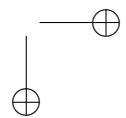
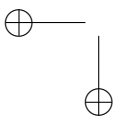


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Raleigh's *Milton* is a magnificent tribute of the romantic imagination to its opposite; it is one of the best books on a great poet in English literature. It is far above his *Shakespeare* in *The English Men of Letters Series*, which won him more fame than all his other books together. There he wrote to length. He tried to remind us of too much in a limited space, and too much of what he stated required expansion. He lacked too, in treating this subject, the ballast which slight temperamental antagonism often supplies on the critical adventure; Shakespeare's victory over him was in every direction too easy.

### II

Raleigh's talk was vehement and subtle, full of quips, cranks and candid exaggerations. It raced and tossed and sparkled, but you could hear the stones of thought knocking against each other under the surface of that wasteful river. He could talk equally well to one, to three, to ten. He loved an audience so much that it was a surprise to discover that he loved a companion more. No one's high spirits could be less daunting. There was nothing dismaying in his exuberance or his wit; you never left his company sighing, "How slow, how tame am I." His aversions were disinterested and his indulgence wide. His delight in his own wit and energy of expression was so infectious that it was a more sociable attribute than modesty. It was not, "Look, *I've* hit it," that he seemed to be saying when he stepped back to watch for appreciation on your face, or, stooping from his spectral height, he clutched you in his eagerness; such gestures were rather equivalent to a shout of joy — "You've got it! Yes? No? You *have!* That's it; *that's*





WALTER RALEIGH

the point.” Prodigiously tall, bony, shambling, stooping, loose-limbed, as though nature had hung his enormous skeleton together with an inch to spare between every joint, his appearance was the very kind to have made most men self-conscious; but the fervour of life in him destroyed self-consciousness, not only in himself but in others while they were with him. He loved a phrase; at a fine one he would stare in amazement for a moment, then rock and crow with joy. It would have been an exaggeration to say that he admired men of action more than writers, but to his admiration of the former – of the men at the front during the war, for instance – there was added a kind of tremulous humility. He was a book-minded man who loved life better than books.

When he died he was at work on a history of the Air Force, and one of the officers, who was his companion in this work, has left a vivid description of his manner:

“His gestures, the moods which passed across his face as he spoke, the play with his enormous pipe – all these are essential to the true appreciation of his talk. He would be talking. His pipe is out. Out comes a box of matches. He strikes one and applies it to his pipe. As the flame touches the bowl, a thought strikes him. The thought will not keep. Off he goes into conversation, holding the match until he is reminded of its presence when it burns down to his fingers. He strikes another and the same thing happens again. After he had sat smoking and talking in the office for a morning, the grate would be full of charred match-ends, silent, derelict victims of his bubbling thoughts.”





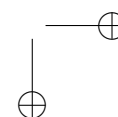
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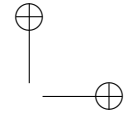
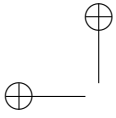
### III

Walter Raleigh's letters\* are exceptionally good letters, exuberant, shrewd and witty. They are full of fun, nonsense, violent opinions, delight in life and good phrases about books, authors, soldiers, places, parties, war and human nature. Some of his most extravagant judgments were quoted in reviews, such as his comment on Tolstoy: "Egotistic old beast with his 'What to do.' He is just a sensualist gone sour. 'The silence and the decency of death' – Henley's phrase – is the right thing for him. He never loved anything except the commotion in his own nerves." It will not do to take such explosions too seriously. Raleigh disliked Tolstoy's point of view, just as he disliked Ibsen's; but had he been writing critically about him, we would have found he understood Tolstoy much better than that; he was merely blowing off steam to his sister; and because in his letters he lets himself go, they make good reading.

He lectured on English Literature all his life, and he found the restraint this imposed very trying; for he enjoyed his opinions most, as we all do, when they were most unreasonable. He hated the pedantry of study. Literature was meant to be enjoyed, and he found himself forced to expound it in a way which would help the young to answer questions in examinations. His letters are full of groans over his profession, and as a lecturer and teacher he reduced this side of it to a minimum. He delighted to amaze his classes by discussing books in a spirit the reverse of professorial or reverential. Writing to his sister he says:

\* *Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 2 vols., Methuen.





WALTER RALEIGH

“I lecture in a very picaroon, jolly-beggar kind of way. I think it wakes them up. On Crabbe I say: ‘Why should we abuse Crabbe? He has never done us any harm: we have none of us read him.’ On Keats I am tempted to say: ‘We now come to John Keats. It does not matter when or where he lived. You have come prepared to put down on paper, for committal to memory, any facts I may give you concerning his life – and you, none of you, I know, have sufficient leisure to read his works. I must ask you to alter this. The facts, it is true, tell in Examination. But you will none of you be any nearer Heaven ten years hence for having taken a B.A. degree, while for a love and understanding of Keats you may raise yourselves several inches. In any case, you cannot expect me to give you any facts about his life in one short hour. If you waste your time, I am determined not to waste mine.’ This sort of thing will obtain for me the rich, the enviable sack. I think I will stoop to, say, three facts.”

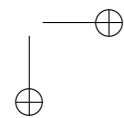
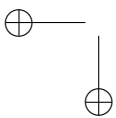
His methods did wake his pupils up, and so far from getting the sack, he went from chair to chair until he ended at Oxford.

Here is a characteristic letter:

“The College opened with an Introductory Lecture by a Professor of Physics on the Relation of Geology to our Social Duties, so far as I can remember. The students made a noise with their feet all the time, and the lecture was certainly dull. I began to wish I was lecturing myself – you have noticed this tendency in me?

The chairman, a fat old man of business, got up and said that it was plain that the lecturer was a thorough gentleman and the telephone had been invented some time, so we ought all to be very glad. And then we expressed our satisfaction and dispersed.

I only met my classes this week without formally lecturing to them – one is a junior class in History about sixty strong which gives some signs of disorder.





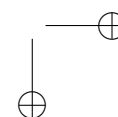
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Some people have called on Ada, she says it is as bad as being married. Among the callers were two Miss -'s; we never hear them at the door and they all rush into the room with extended hand saying, 'I'm this,' or 'I'm that,' as the case may be. This warmth is gratifying, and the Miss -'s seem justified in deeming themselves well known – we divide our acquaintance into friends and patrons, they are the last, I think. Culture is what they are after and there is an element of barbarity in my instincts that makes me ill contented in such company. I can talk the lingo, too, in an idle half-hour. But I really believe, not in refinement and scholarly elegance, those are only a game; but in blood feuds, and the chase of wild beasts, and marriage by capture. In carrying this last savage habit into effect there would be an irresistible dramatic temptation to select the bluest lady of them all.

... I have moments when all the show around me of shops and streets and conditions generally seems to fade away and life is seen for what it is, and the main thing to play one's part creditably and haughtily – even with gaiety. At such times to let lack of money or even separation really influence or subdue one seems incredible pusillanimity, and the only possible attitude is 'Let the days do what they will.' Christian philosophers call this wicked pride, but I could respect no one, not even God, if I did not respect myself first."

In his criticism he expressed his love of literature; in his letters his distrust of culture and his impatience with it.

His life was spent in expounding authors for the benefit of those who wanted to feel and know at secondhand, while his own approach to books was that of a lover. No amorist wants his loves chosen for him; what moves him, excites him, satisfies him in women, he discovers for himself. He may listen to comments from other people, but he sticks to his preferences. Respectful docility, eagerness to acquire knowledge are poor substitutes for passionate, partial, personal appreciation, and this is





WALTER RALEIGH

what Raleigh seems to have missed so often in his pupils. From his letters one gathers that the “cultivation” of taste, indeed the whole business of making a cult of literature, seemed silly to him. What should have been one of the extra joys of life was being treated as a business, or worse, as a pursuit which gave the initiated a right to feel superior. He often turned, with a boisterous welcome, romantically excessive, towards people the reverse of literary, but had he been compelled to live among them we may be quite certain that he would have spouted his contempt to the skies.

His philosophy of life is not very clear to me. The letter I have just quoted suggests what it was as well as any other in his correspondence. I think that what he detested most was the spiritual pride that exhibits itself in contempt and aloofness. In a delightful volume, *Laughter from a Cloud*, in which his brilliant verses (mostly comic), his plays and his skits were collected after his death, you will find a paper which he wrote while he was at Cambridge for “The Apostles.” He writes in praise of the humorist, and the foil to the humorist in that paper is the man who strives after personal perfection. Raleigh’s bugbear was the prig. I attempted to sum him up as a book-minded man who loved life better than books, but I am not over-pleased with that definition, though his letters support it. “I like,” he says in one of them, “being an insufferable coxcomb, and dancing on a tight-rope, and standing on my head. Indeed I will undertake to use all these three images in praise of any great writer – so my hopes run high.”

This hopeful mood, however, was evanescent in him. Raleigh was a man of erratic imaginative energy who





## PORTRAITS

schooled himself into a scholar. Why? Because (so I read him) a scholar need only take the piece of work in hand seriously, while the imaginative artist must also take himself seriously. This Raleigh would not, or could not, do. It shocked his sense of proportion. On his work he lavished the patience of learning and the care of a craftsman; that part he could play, “creditably and haughtily – even with gaiety.” But in a world swarming with men, who achieve important and often heroic tasks while expecting no special reverence, he could not bear to make the artist’s claim to profound consideration. Unfortunately, the writer who is afraid of being a prig kills the artist in himself. If he is endowed with a glorious creative exuberance, well and good; he can afford the magnanimity which diminishes his vocation. But not otherwise. A protective if narrow arrogance is generally the condition of creating anything at all worth having. The artist must regard himself as a dedicated being with a right to despise the world’s sense of proportion, and on such terms Raleigh refused to be one. The artistic impulse in him only found vent in play and in talk.

Among those described from personal observation in this hook are several who were reputed brilliant talkers. The talk of none of them, not of Meredith, not of Henry James, deserved the adjective “brilliant” so well as the talk of Walter Raleigh. It was a fountain of intellectual high-spirits tossing and glittering, playful and surprising. Those refreshed by it found it hard to regret that in him the artist had diced into the Improvisatore.







## RENAN

No writer perhaps ever delighted and disquieted his contemporaries more than Renan; no other man conquered and bewildered them so completely by his charm. But renown which rests on charm is never secure. Charm in literature is rather like a kiss in life; potent, even wonderful at times, at others a trifle or even a nuisance. Renan, however, is no mere charmer. He is a sage, and above all a learned, imaginative historian. But since in this short space it is impossible to expound his life's work, and my cue is one of his more personal books, it will be best to define his work as a historian in a sentence or two and then pass on to Renan himself. His main life-work was a history of the Christian religion: *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme* (in many volumes under different titles, among which his *Vie de Jésus* is the most famous, but far from the best), and his *Histoire du peuple d'Israël*. His approach to history is that of a philologist in the widest sense, and that of an ironic philosopher; one who has lost his faith, but owes to it all his discriminations. Renan was not a dilettante (the compiler of the *Corpus Semicarum Inscriptionum* could hardly be so described); but he never missed an opportunity of entertaining us, and often exhibited, notably in the first volume of his History of the People of Israel, a staggering indifference to the distinction between records and legends.



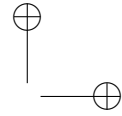
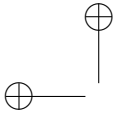


## PORTRAITS

Still, the probity of his imaginative approach to his subjects has never been seriously impugned. Taken as a whole, the effect of his writings is to destroy faith and to increase respect for it. Although his works are sceptical, they are written by one whose soul is still that of a priest. Therefore, a certain libertinism, becoming enough in other writers holding the same views, is slightly disagreeable in him; he could never rid himself of an unction inconsistent with an intelligent levity. And I think, though I cannot defend the thought, that there is also something slightly repellent in the combination of such subtly complete religious sympathies with such suave detachment from them. Though I can well understand myself a gentle inflexibility in such matters, Renan strikes me as revelling too much in the curious satisfactions and perhaps, after all, delusive superiorities of a twi-minded man. Granted an equable temperament – and good luck – to live by the exercise of a nimble and exquisite intelligence is neither unwise nor useless to others; but to recommend such a course as the highest behest of Wisdom is itself a failure of intelligence. Yet Renan came very near to doing this as the following passage shows.

“There are many chances that the world may be nothing but a fairy pantomime of which no God has care. We must therefore arrange ourselves so that on neither hypothesis we shall be completely wrong. We must listen to the superior voices, but in such a way that if the second hypothesis were true, we should not have been too completely duped. If in effect the world be not a serious thing, it is the dogmatic people who will be the shallow ones, and the worldly-minded whom the theologians now call frivolous will be those who are really wise.

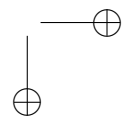
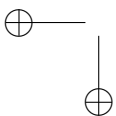




## RENAN

*In utrumque paratus*, then. Be ready for anything – that perhaps is wisdom. Give ourselves up, according to the hour, to confidence, to scepticism, to optimism, to irony, and we may be sure that at certain moments at least we shall be with the truth. . . . Good humour is a Philosophical state of mind; it seems to say to Nature that we take her no more seriously than she takes us. I maintain that one should always talk philosophy with a smile. We owe it to the Eternal to be virtuous; but we have the right to add to this tribute our irony as a sort of personal reprisal. In this way we return to the right quarter jest for jest; we play the trick that has been played on us. St. Augustine's phrase, *Lord, if we are deceived, it is by Thee!* remains a firm one, well suited to our modern feeling. Only we wish the Eternal to know that if we accept the fraud, we accept it knowingly and willingly. We are resigned in advance to losing the interest on our investments of virtue, but we wish not to appear ridiculous by having counted on them too securely."

Thus, though far from being a dilettante in learning, he was an eclectic (and that is first cousin to it) in morals and philosophy. If, however, a man is born with an intelligence and sensibility which reveal to him the many-sidedness of things, if he never denies that he has felt what he has felt or understood what he has once understood, and preserves, like Renan, complete intellectual integrity, he can hardly escape eclecticism; unless, indeed, he possesses, which Renan did not, such a mind as only appears two or three times in a century; or unless stern fate keeps constantly before him one overwhelming aspect of experience. And this never happened to Renan. As he admitted, he was singularly fortunate in life. After some hardships which, it is true, might have been too much for many, but were light to his benign and patient spirit, circumstances allowed him, as they did Gibbon, to devote himself to work for which he was superbly fitted.





#### PORTRAITS

Once he had survived the loss of his faith, no sorrows, misfortunes or crises ever disturbed for long that grave equability, which left his discursive intelligence free to inquire into and comment upon all things.

It is a dangerous undertaking to adopt in Renan's case an air of understanding him completely. If one tries to creep round behind him and to take him off his guard, one is apt to find him still facing one, smiling and prepared also for *that* attack. Jules Lemaître in a famous essay once reproached him for being gay; but the sage was not disconcerted. If he had contrived to retain the serenity of optimism while dispensing with fallacious grounds for it, and if he could in any slight degree communicate it to others, was that a serious indictment? I do not think we need reproach him for being happy, especially with a happiness so tinged with resignation as his. But just as Sheridan once said of a Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack, "no man could be as wise as Thurlow *looks*," so there is something almost too good to be genuine about Renan's imperturbable and delicate sagacity. I think, in the last analysis, this uneasiness about him is due to a suspicion that his serenity was won on too easy terms to be of the highest value to his fellow-men. He was not completely aware of this. Such a diagnosis can be supported by pointing to two pervasive defects in his work. Firstly, there is apt to be a shade of patronage in his most fervent admirations (it is the fatal blemish in his *Vie de Jésus*, and it is present in a lesser degree in his essay on Spinoza, whom, at moments, he admired hardly less); and secondly, when he admires most, he tends to paint into a portrait those traits which he loves most in himself. This is a sign of incomplete self-awareness; and





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self-awareness is a quality which, in a critical as opposed to a creative mind, is of primary importance.

Renan's *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse* was universally recognized as a rare delightful work when it was first published, and for many years afterwards. I do not suppose it is much read now. Renan is too bland, too sweet, perhaps too wise, to please to-day. His peculiar intellectual and sentimental poise is one that youth now regards with impatience, if not contempt. The "old pioneer" may be a pathetic figure, but not so pathetic as the "old charmer," whose gracious wiles and ultimate serenities are met by an icy, I-see-through-you stare, followed by a quick turn upon the heel. The tomb, even the tomb of the charmer, is full of thorns. And yet this book is one of the most delightful of autobiographies. In literary grace it ranks with Ruskin's *Praeterita*; and although it is not the reflection of a nature so ardent or generously impulsive or so instantaneously truthful, it is the work of a clearer intellect. *Praeterita* is a broken arc, Renan's *Souvenirs* a perfect round. Since savant and artist were in Renan completely blended (he was born an artist and made himself one of the learned men of Europe), any comment he wrote on his own temperament helps also to define his work as a scholar.

This autobiography has been compared with Gibbon's. The books are poles apart at many points, but when they do recall each other the resemblance is illuminating. They were both written by men looking back upon the past with complacency and gratitude, who were content with what they had achieved and considered themselves to have been singularly fortunate. In Renan's retrospections there is a wistfulness and a religious emotion that Gibbon





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never knew, a wistfulness that is not entirely though very nearly, poetic truth. When youth has passed, he was well content to feel and understand through the imagination alone all that had once made each hour of the day beautiful and momentous to him; and his temperament and imagination, trained from the earliest years for the priesthood, were so perfectly attuned to Catholic faith, that, with a delicacy and completeness granted to few believers, he continued to understand as a sceptic emotions inspired by doctrines in which he no longer believed.

Here we reach the fundamental contradiction in this exceedingly complex man, who finally accepted his own complexity, not merely as something unalterable in himself, which, thanks to the suppleness of his feelings and intelligence, he himself could manipulate, but as the essence of wisdom. After he lost his religious faith, he first attempted to transfer the glow of that faith to science. For science as a means to invention, he felt that indifference natural in those who have tasted the spiritual life or lived in the things of the mind. Technology goes on developing independently of the needs of man; it is itself like a machine that once started, goes by itself, heedless of man's happiness. What are the recurrent works of "back to nature" prophets, to whom we often listen with fascinated attention, but the cries of poor humanity conscious of being run away with by science against its will? "*La science ne vaut qu'autant qu'elle peut remplacer la religion,*" Renan wrote. "*Je ne connais qu'un seul résultat à la science, c'est de résoudre l'enigme, c'est de dire définitivement à l'homme le mot*





## RENAN

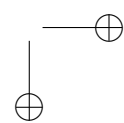
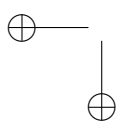
*des choses, c'est de lui donner le symbole que les religions lui donnaient tout fait et qu'il ne peut plus accepter."*

What Renan tried to do as a philosopher has been well suggested in Mme. Darmesteter's life of him:

"Seven hundred years ago the Celtic poets invented a new way of loving. They discovered a sentiment more vague, more tender, than any the Latins or the Germans knew, penetrating to the very source of tears, and at once an infinite aspiration – a mystery, an enigma, a caress. They discovered '*L'amour courtois*.' Yesterday their descendant, Ernest Renan, would fain have invented a new way of believing. . . . The "amour fine" of Launcelot has passed from our books into our hearts; we feel with a finer shade to-day, because those Celtic harpers lived and sang. I dare not say that Renan has done as much for Faith; that he has transported it far from the perishable worlds of creeds and dogmas into the undying domains of a pure feeling. But, at least, the attempt was worthy of a Celt and an idealist."

We must admit that there he failed. But in failing he achieved something so valuable that his place among sages is high. The infection which men caught from his work was a new kind of tolerance; not that cut-and-dry, rule-of-thumb tolerance which commands them to admit that others have a right to differ from them and to hold their own opinions; but a tolerance which is also an act of "*bonne volonté*," springing from a kind of temporary metempsychosis, an imaginative transference of thought and emotion into another's point of view. And that perhaps is the greatest service that a writer whose mind had so many facets as Renan's could have rendered to mankind.









## ROSSETTI AND HALL CAINE

Not long ago I had occasion to say that Fate was sometimes ironical in coupling together a great man and his biographer. Irony is visible again in its choice of Sir Hall Caine as Rossetti's devoted and ultimate disciple. If for a moment I stress that irony, I do so only to bring out the drama latent in this little book, which certainly contains two chapters no literary man, however fastidious, could fail to respect. I refer to Sir Hall Caine's account of his first night in Rossetti's house in Cheyne Walk – and of the next morning. But, as we know, the novelist's vigorous imagination is essentially a popular one. His writing is that of a man who speaks, and knows he speaks, to the great heart of the people, not to the few; and of one who is constantly stimulated by feeling himself in affectionate contact with that palpitating but fickle organ. Sir Hall Caine has never shown dislike of publicity. It is significant that it was a "personal par" about Rossetti which in early manhood first drew him to that Ivory Tower, so ominously dark within, where dwelt the unknowable hierophant of extreme aestheticism, the esoteric unexhibited painter, the poet of whom it has been so well said:

*The moon of cloud discoloured was his Muse,  
His pipe the reed of the old moaning waste.  
Love was to him with anguish fast enlaced,  
And Beauty where she walked blood-shot the dews.*





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It was to the Ivory, or shall we call it the Dark, Tower of this “later Alexandrian” that a crude, ardent young Roland, most inexpert in things aesthetic, came. And lo! at the first blast upon his horn (a lecture delivered at a local Free Library) its door, which had been closed to all the world, opened to him.

In the last article which Sir Edmund Gosse wrote for *The Sunday Times* he gave us a vivid picture of Rossetti’s renowned isolation:

“No praise was too violent for his deserts. Yet, in spite of his celebrity, the prophet continued to be veiled. He persisted in the same obstinacy of seclusion tempered by the visits of a few friends, and he took no part whatever in public life, political, academic, or literary. Indeed, if possible, the isolation became deeper. Rossetti, who had never been social, grew to be an anchorite; the fact was concealed that he had become an invalid. No particulars might be gleaned from a jealous bodyguard as to his habits, movements, or tastes. There were no “interviewers” in those days: but if there had been, they must have dressed up to look like wombats to penetrate the garden at Cheyne Walk.”

(How delightfully that last touch reminds us of the critic we have lost!) He went on to show that Rossetti’s reputation suffered afterwards from both a mysteriously apologetic reserve in some quarters and indiscriminate babble in others. I am unacquainted with the *Complete Works*, published in 1911, which Sir Edmund considered had done so much to kill interest in Rossetti by including worthless matter; but Sir Hall Caine’s new book of *Recollections* will not do any damage. It contains little we did not know before, but it is straightforward and brief, and if read as a queer drama in juxtaposition, it is fascinating. Let me attempt to bring out its salient points.





#### ROSSETTI AND HALL CAINE

Somewhere in the Isle of Man a youth, apprenticed to an architect in Liverpool, is staying in a cottage on one of the bleakest of the Manx headlands. He has been suffering from a nervous disorder, and has gone there to recover. He comes across few books, but he is a youth with an excitable imagination, destined afterwards to pour itself into fiction; and one day in 1870 he hears, presumably through the papers, that a poet of Italian name, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, has published a volume of poems. But what interests him most is the accompanying anecdote that the manuscript had been buried in the coffin of the poet's wife, and then exhumed after lying seven years in the grave. "I remember," Sir Hall Caine writes, "that a thrill came to me with that story, and then, close behind it, a sense of outrage, as if the grace of a great renunciation had been finally thrown away."

The thrill persisted. The story had stimulated his melodramatic instinct, and the shock of it his ultra-idealistic sense of values. During the years which followed he asked eagerly for information about this strange poet, and chance threw in his way from time to time people who could give it him. He learnt that Rossetti had lived in complete seclusion since his wife's death, and that rumour said that he was gnawed with remorse at having allowed himself to violate her grave. He read the poems, and was deeply moved.

Moreover he observed that, though Rossetti was accepted by the literary press as a leader of contemporary poetry, there was a hue and cry after him. The smut-hounds were out. Rossetti was being hunted down as a sensualist, a poisoner of the wells of innocence and love. Rumour also implied that the poet was deeply distressed





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by such attacks. Hall Caine rushed into the fray, and in the Free Library at Liverpool covered the poet with the shield of the Nonconformist Conscience. Rossetti was really, he insisted on that occasion – with a fervour one can imagine – unconsciously making for moral ends; he was not the most sensual but, on the contrary, the most spiritual of love-poets. A year afterwards the lecture was published, and Sir Hall Caine adds: “I sent a copy of it to the poet, hardly expecting more than a word of response.” A word of response!

For nearly three years afterwards the solitary Rossetti wrote constantly to this unknown young man letters sometimes twelve or even sixteen pages long; “perhaps a larger body of writing than all his published compositions put together.” Why was it that an effusion, which showed (Sir Hall Caine admits) no deep understanding of Rossetti’s genius, should have been such a comfort to the poet? To answer this question we must consider the nature of Rossetti’s love poetry, and also turn our eyes to London. In London the first figure that catches them in this connection is the burly Robert Buchanan, huntsman-in-chief to the smut-hounds. It was an answer to Buchanan’s *The Fleshly School of Poetry*, on its own intellectual level, that Rossetti had received from Liverpool by post.

Robert Buchanan wrote ballads, plays, romances, articles, lyrics and stories in verse which were not so good as Mr. Masfield’s, but as widely read; stories which made people cry and think they were enjoying poetry. He was what is called an “honest fighter”; that is to say, he was a critic who could not think, but loved to feel – especially moral indignation. True to type, he had a remarkably





#### ROSSETTI AND HALL CAINE

good opinion of himself, and believed himself to possess a heart of gold and the soundest moral instincts in the world. He thought that the only reason why he was not recognized as an artist was that he had been ashamed to be a prig. In a phrase he made famous he “lifted his hat to the Magdalen,” but he was a terrible stickler for chastity. He bashed many of his betters in the face, and later held out his manly hand to them for the clasp of reconciliation. Sir Hall Caine is too kind to his memory, too indulgent to his gesture of reconciliation towards Rossetti, after *The Fleshly School of Poetry*. We have some little Buchanans with us now: they are a nuisance.

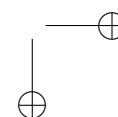
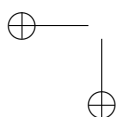
He wrote, and the self-complacency is characteristic:

*I've popped at vultures circling skyward,  
I've made the carrion hawks a byword,  
But never caused a sigh or sob in  
The breast of mavis or cock-robin.*

Unfortunately, Rossetti was not a cock-robin. Buchanan's methods as a controversialist were naturally not scrupulous; he was too sure that he was right and that those he attacked were base, to bother about being fair. For instance, to reinforce his contention that Rossetti's love-poetry was disgusting and absurd he quoted the lines:

*And as I stooped, her own lips rising there  
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth,*

without mentioning that they came from a sonnet describing a dream or trance of divided love, in which the poet is bending over a stream and fancies he sees in it the face of the beloved.





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But why, it may be asked, did Rossetti care so much what this forth-right garbler wrote about him? In the first place, Rossetti was a solitary, and a lonely man is like a well: if you drop a stone into it you cannot get it out again. He was now a sick man, too, sleepless and a slave to narcotics. But, above all, this raucous and deforming echo which reached him from the outside world made him think that his work was doomed to be never understood; at least that part of it most precious to him which revealed his most intimate sense of beauty – all he had written as a lover.

His love-mysticism is not that of to-day. It was most un-English, but it linked on to an old European tradition, one probably representative of a recurrent love-mood in humanity, though apt to be from time to time out of fashion to the point of seeming nonsensical. This generation is no longer under its strange charm, and is therefore sensitive to the technical failure, the lack of masterly ease, which mars his work. They do not wish to penetrate the obscurities, or to surmount mannerisms, and reach beyond to those experiences which have been most deeply and characteristically felt by the poet. Rossetti's love is not that of steady affection in which passion is only an occasional eddy. It is a love of ardent and ever-recurring crises, and these are interpreted by the poet as experiences which have revealed to him the depths of life; while in these crises the sensations of the body are as significant as the aspirations of the soul. Inadequate as such a definition is, it will suggest why the attacks which struck at his work just at that point – its sensuality – wounded and distressed him profoundly.





#### ROSSETTI AND HALL CAINE

I recommend confidently as an interpretation of Rossetti's mysticism Mr. Franklin Baum's commentary on *The House of Life*, that sonnet sequence which, as he says, might more properly be called *The House of Love*. In Mr. Baum's introduction the mystical passion which runs through the sequence is explained as clearly as it can be to readers who lack the psychological clue. He quotes a passage from an essay by Watts-Dunton on Rossetti's painting which sums the matter up:

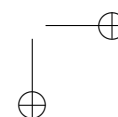
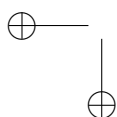
"To eliminate asceticism from romantic art, and yet to remain romantic, to retain that mysticism which alone can give life to romantic art, and yet to be as sensuous as the Titians, who revived sensuousness at the sacrifice of mysticism, was the quest, more or less conscious, of Rossetti's genius."

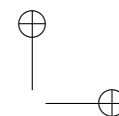
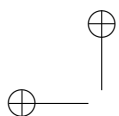
Consequently, to defend a lover whose inspiration was,

*Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor  
Thee from myself, neither our love from God,*

from the charge of sensuousness was mistaken on the part of the young Hall Caine, who at last, after three years' correspondence, walked up the weedy path of the poet's house in Chelsea one autumn evening in the year 1880.

Shall I leave him there, staring up with beating heart at the dead-looking house, smothered in the "wildest ivy that ever grew untouched by shears"? I will refer the reader to the book, written in old age – the story of his bewilderments, of his grateful joy, of the eager clutch upon his young devotion of a man of genius foundering now in seas of delusion, drugs and depression. I will only





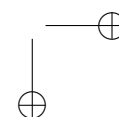
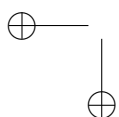
## PORTRAITS

quote one passage to show that Sir Hall Caine writes well when he is content to remember and does not reflect:

“Then I saw that on the table were two small bottles, sealed and labelled, and beside them was a little measuring glass. Without looking further, but with a painful suspicion coming over me, I asked if that was his medicine.

‘They say there’s a skeleton in every cupboard,’ he said, in a low voice. ‘That’s mine; it’s chloral.’

When I reached the room I was to occupy for the rest of the night, I found it, like Rossetti’s bedroom, heavy with hangings, and black with antique picture panels; having a ceiling so high as to be out of all reach and sight, and being so dark from various causes that the candle seemed only to glitter in it.”







## RUSKIN

### I

Ruskin's failure was as great as his lasting influence. What he accomplished he could not see himself; what he failed to do broke his heart – and ruined his brain. This is the tragedy which his biographers have found in his life. They present him as a faithful failure, as an ineffectual scolding, sweet-tempered, childish angel, who preached hopelessly and earnestly the weightiest things.

The effectiveness of that angel, the germinating, agitating influence of him are not always sufficiently emphasized. Mrs. Clough-Ellis' biography of Ruskin opens with one of those reconstructed scenes so common now; a dutiful little boy is reading the Bible with his mother verse by verse, and distracted by the pictures on the wall. It is a good note to strike at the beginning, for one peculiarity of Ruskin was that he was ever home-sick for the tutelage of childhood, its "sweet security," the blessedness of being "told" what to do. Though he succeeded in making himself one of the most independent-minded of men, independence was not happiness but torture to him. He wanted to obey, and he was forced to teach; his nature craved bonds, and his intellect cursed him with the responsibilities of freedom. No wonder, then, that whenever his insight seemed to justify it, he was dogmatic as a teacher. He knew what he owed for better





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and for worse to his strange, oppressive education, so oppressive in its love, its asceticism and constant watchfulness. In *Praeterita*, that most beautiful of English autobiographies, he says of childhood: “The little creature should be very early put for periods of practice in complete command of itself; set on the bare-backed horse of its own will. . . but my education at that time. . . was at once too formal and too luxurious; leaving my character. . . cramped indeed, but not disciplined; and only by protection innocent, instead of by practice virtuous.” . . . “The bridle and blinkers were never taken off me.”

The genius of this solitary child outstripped the expectations of his proud parents; but even when the world was echoing with Ruskin’s name, and his own generation were turning to him as to one who had opened their eyes to art and nature, he still instinctively looked to his father and mother for approval, long after he knew that they could not understand, and that their approval and blessing were meaningless. When they grew old and died, what could be more inevitable than that he should seek everywhere for that authority which he had known and lost? To this desperate search of an exquisitely sensitive nature for a spiritual home, where that instinct to love and enjoy, which in his case was genius, could be practised in peace of heart, we owe the criticism of Ruskin; also the fact that his criticism touched life at so many points: art, politics, economics, religion, science, nature-worship. It is perhaps truer to say of Ruskin than of any of his great contemporaries that he was the epitome of his age and the prophet of changes to come.

He caught the evangelical fervour of his times, and, outgrowing that narrowness, sought refuge (without faith)





#### RUSKIN

in a Medievalism, Catholic and comforting, which was later to revive with greater force and is with us now. He responded to the scientific spirit, often imitating its methods in the treatment of subjects incapable of exact measurements, so passionately did he believe in the preciousness of *fact* and the value of exact observation. Mineralogy, ornithology, botany, geology, archaeology attracted him. He delighted in the methods of science but on curiosity alone he could not live. When the results of science were served up to him, he cried, like St. Augustine, "And these were the dishes in which they brought to me, being hungry, the Sun and Moon, instead of Thee." The influence of the scientific spirit of his age drove him to the minute observation of nature, and often to declare, in his haste, that only what was accurate in art could be valuable; though it is easy to find as many passages in which he proclaimed as emphatically that the secret of beauty lay elsewhere.

The same spirit drove him to hunt continually for reasons why pictures or buildings should delight or disgust us, to search for causes; turning himself, sometimes into a Columbus of mare's-nests, sometimes into a discoverer of connections between life and art which his predecessors had never dreamt of and his successors have ignored. It sent him up ladders and scaffolds, tirelessly sketching and making notes; it set him rummaging among archives and documents. Then he would stand back and simply *look*, forgetting the urgent enquiry, forgetting his theories in his pleasure, and, in a prose which has never been matched for its power to convey the thrill of delight, he would describe what he saw – till, suddenly again, in front of the lovely sensuousness of Titian or the sump-





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tuous beauty of Veronese, he would passionately ask himself, “Am I, then, bewitched? What does it mean? Until I have answered that question all the painters and poets in the world cannot give me rest. I must discover the significance and place of this wonder in the life of man.”

## II

It is perhaps one of the most self-indulgent (but pardonable) characteristics of our times that it should appear to the intelligent unintelligent to ask fundamental questions – and to expect an answer. We are tired of questions; a slightly mocking scepticism is the most restful attitude in the world, and we want a little rest. And to the patronizing the spectacle of Ruskin scolding, wailing, and dogmatizing eloquently, in his frantic desire to prove that “the Beautiful” is the same as “the Good,” “the True” the same as “the Beautiful,” is no doubt more than a little ridiculous. It would have been in anyone who did not respond to the aesthetic side of life as intensely as he. For most aesthetes it is doubtless easy to regard their experiences as merely inexplicable and intermittent pleasures; but Ruskin loved beauty too passionately to do so. To him the beauty of nature was so overwhelming that the destruction of it by Industrialism was something so horrible that he could not turn his eyes to the beauty of engines and the splendours of furnaces. He only saw that where rivers had once run clear, they were stagnant with foulness; that green hills were now bare and treeless; that nightfall in some quiet lovable town he had once known had become terrible and squalid, with half-drunken men and women standing about, wrangling and disputing in





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the dull window-light of hideous houses; that dawn, in such places, was heralded now by the yell of the steam “hooter.”

And out of such distresses sprang his fundamental intuition, which seemed to his contemporaries the most extravagant of assertions, running counter, as it did, to every approved and well-argued dogma of the Industrial Age – that prosperity was not to be measured in terms of money but of human life, and that unmitigated competition was not the road to happiness but hell. In that intuition lay the seeds of the social revolution through which we are now living. The failure of his St. George’s Guild, of *Unto this Last*, the apparent futility of his *Fors Clavigera* pamphlets, were agonizingly obvious to him; what he did not live, mentally at least, to see, was the effect upon those who continued to read his hooks, of that central intuition that “value” is immeasurable in any other terms than life itself.

In social and industrial matters we still stumble after him. It was Ruskin who taught the modern world at large to think, or at any rate to pretend to think, that it is a matter of some consequence whether the houses they live in, the things they use, the buildings they erect, the country they spoil, are beautiful or not. However incomplete and fallacious his analysis of the connection in certain cases between aesthetic and moral values may be, by identifying them (and that they are often connected only a one-sided theorist can deny) he drove home to the obstinately insensitive the importance of beauty.





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### III

The *Saint Crumpet*, Kate Greenaway, *Sesame and Lilies* side of Ruskin excites to-day an undue impatience. To judge it fairly it must be remembered that he was a man of excessive and tender susceptibility, to whom ugliness and hardness were tortures. He needed a *hortus inclusus* where he could rest and employ that exquisite genius for sympathetic play which found no outlet in the battle of his life. He did not want to go on trying to reform the world. There are few more moving pages in English prose than the closing chapter of *Praeterita*; or those in *Fors Clavigera* in which he speaks of his isolation, his madness, his despair of effecting anything, and yet takes up again the burden illness has temporarily compelled him to lay down.

Then a final brainstorm swept away that brilliant intelligence, leaving behind a sad opaque indifference to all that had ever delighted or distressed him. It is terrible to think of Ruskin, stripped naked, a maniac, pacing that charming study of his at Brantwood, waiting all night for a tussle with an imaginary demon, the projection of all the evil he had encountered when in his senses. But after that last terrible symbolic frenzy, he suffered no more. I remember him as an old man with vacant eyes and a river-god's beard sitting very still in a chair. If some object he had loved, a coin, a polished pebble, a flower were put into his hand, he would look at it for a moment and smile; if the Severne children petted him, he would smile a charming smile. But like a very young, very tired child himself, he had to be coaxed into noticing anything, outside his endless dream.





#### RUSKIN

There have been writers who were alive with a severer glory of intellect and emotion than Ruskin, but none more exquisitely and vitally generous in impulse. Capacity for feeling ecstasy, the power of expressing joy, were his master-gifts. They are exceedingly rare in prose literature. His dazzling eloquence captivated; he had to endure no obloquy, but, as Mr. Mackail says in the best essay yet written about him (*Ruskin Centenary Addresses*, Oxford Press), he had to bear what he felt more keenly than insult – “a sort of good-natured and superior indulgence.” Eloquence such as his is out of fashion for a while, and Ruskin himself thought his early gorgeous passages overcharged. But he never, in cuttlefish fashion, discharged a cloud of ink to *get away* from his meaning, a habit not unknown to soberer writers. The volatility of his associative faculty is the chief defect of his prose. But what magnificence, what things “extreme and scattering bright” are found in it!

#### IV

There is a great difference between Ruskin’s early and later style. It is the later which has the rarer quality; the earlier is often too rich, too consciously eloquent, too oratorical. Exalted moral and aesthetic feeling is present in both, but, as he said himself the art of his earlier writing, is of “an impudently visible kind.” In his later books he allowed his thought, however discursive and fantastic, to crystallize directly into words. *Fors Clavigera* and *Praeterita* (the most beautiful of all his books) retain the richness of texture and delicacy of observation of *Modern Painters*, but he has gained a new art. He has flung away impressive but expected cadences; his power of mental





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concentration is sadly shaken, but his expression of single thoughts and emotions has become more perfect because more spontaneous. He accomplishes what only masters of the art succeed in doing – to write so that nothing is hidden, nothing accidentally obtruded.

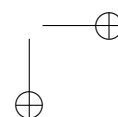
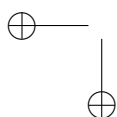
Clouds, mountains, great spaces, fertile plains – no writer has made words recall them better; and not only in their totality but in details.

Of his childhood he wrote:

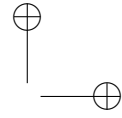
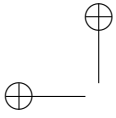
“I enjoyed a lawn, a garden, a daisied field, a quiet pond as other children do; but by the side of Wandel, or on the downs of Sandgate, or by a Yorkshire stream under a cliff, I was different from other children, that I ever noticed: but that feeling cannot be described by any of us that have it. Wordsworth’s ‘haunted me like a passion’ is no description of it, for it is not *like*, but *is*, a passion; the point is to define how it *differs* from other passions – what sort of human, pre-eminently human, feeling it is that loves a stone for a stone’s sake, and a cloud for a cloud’s. A monkey loves a monkey for a monkey’s sake, and a nut for the kernel’s, but not a stone for a stone’s. I took stones for bread, but not certainly at the Devil’s bidding.”

It is this love which fills his descriptions of nature with unmatched energy and passionate exactness. It helped to spoil him as a critic of pictures, for it made him often look through one at what it represented, and respond to that, rather than to the picture itself.

The possessors of a small, sprucely-brushed, well-worn vocabulary may not envy him his fine robes to-day, but they had better not challenge too loudly a comparison.





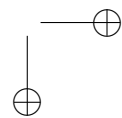
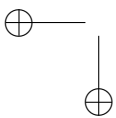


## HERBERT SPENCER

Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography* is one of the most transparently honest books ever written.

Men have often tried to describe themselves, but vanity or desire for sympathy, or the penitent instinct are the strongest motives which usually prompt them, and these are insidiously distorting influences. To achieve truthful self-portraiture a man must be both self-complacent and detached. Self-complacency by itself may produce a memorable but not a truthful book. *The Life of Lord Herbert of Cherbury* and Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography* are excellent reading, but pinches of salt must be taken with every paragraph. Such excessively self-satisfied men are out to make a definite impression. Again, complete detachment probably prevents a man from writing about himself at all. Those, therefore, who have written about themselves most truthfully are men who have taken their work so seriously that it seemed natural that the world should want to know about them, and yet at the same time have been so satisfied with what they have done, so convinced of its importance, that they do not care a rap what others think about them. Of such was Herbert Spencer.

A happy blend in him of self-complacency and detachment has produced a book of unrivalled honesty and tepidity. Gibbon, it has been said, wrote about himself in the same tone as he wrote about the Roman Empire;





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Herbert Spencer wrote about himself in exactly the same tone as he wrote about the Universe. He was not afraid of making the Universe dull, and he was quite indifferent to our opinion if we thought him uninteresting. His aim in both cases was to generalize and correlate phenomena.

Many men have screwed themselves up to confessing humbly that they were wicked or did mean things; but then, as in Rousseau's case, pride usually peeps out in an assertion that other men conceal what they confess. They turn out after all to be proud when they compare themselves with others. Many have written themselves down as rascals, or as asses of the gay and freely kicking kind; but very few men have carefully depicted themselves, full length, as dull. Such an achievement is beyond the reach of humility. It can only be accomplished by one who, like Herbert Spencer, is self-satisfied and only interested in facts.

The result is fascinating. Perhaps when the *Synthetic Philosophy* is never read – that row of stout volumes bound in the philosopher's favourite colour, "an impure purple" – its author may be still remembered as a perfect specimen of a human type. There is no name for this type, but we have a name for his opposite, whom we call the Humorist. Not that Herbert Spencer was an antigelast; so far from looking forward to the day of the last joke, he was pathetically appreciative of jokes, seeking them himself with care and hope. But his mind was precisely the kind in which humour does not flourish. The jokes he made, or appreciated, were small; he never saw a big one. He tells us how a brief access of good health once enabled him to make a joke in the Isle of Wight. He was on holiday there with G. H. Lewes, George Eliot's



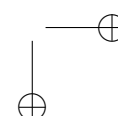
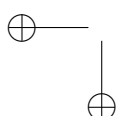


#### HERBERT SPENCER

husband, and at lunch he remarked that the chops were very big for so small an island.

Now, Herbert Spencer had a deep and hearty laugh, and his chuckles when this jest occurred to him must have been extremely funny. We can reconstruct the scene: Lewes, after gazing for a moment at the delighted countenance of the philosopher, would start laughing himself, and his laughter would be echoed by still deeper guffaws from the begetter of the joke, which, in their turn, would provoke redoubled peals from Lewes, till between them a climax would be reached memorable after forty years. Then, as he himself has told us, the philosopher recovered his balance and gravely commented on the causal connection between humour and improved health.

Describing his descent from the summit of Ben Nevis, he says in the *Autobiography*: "I found myself possessed of a quite unusual amount of agility; being able to leap from rock to rock with rapidity, ease and safety; so that I quite astonished myself. There was evidently an exaltation of the perceptive and motor powers. . . . Long continued exertion having caused an unusually great action of the lungs, the exaltation produced by the stimulation of the brain was not cancelled by the diminished oxygenation of the blood. The oxygenation had been so much in excess, that deduction from it did not appreciably diminish the vital activities." What on earth, you ask, is all this about? Well, on the summit of the mountain the philosopher had taken a pull of whisky on the top of wine, and this is Herbert Spencer's description of descending Ben Nevis charioted by Bacchus and his pards.





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His attention habitually dwelt on the causes of things to the exclusion of all other aspects of them. At the Athenaeum complaints of the toughness of the meat came before the kitchen committee, of which he was a member. It was agreed that the butcher should be interviewed. But Herbert Spencer would not hear of his being admitted until the nature of the complaint had been better defined; it was unfair, he said, to assert vaguely that his meat was tough. After a discussion, the butcher was sent for and the philosopher informed him that his joints “had too much connective tissue in them.”

Now this habit of mind, though it occasions humour in others, is unfavourable to the production of it; and this is shown by the specimens of Spencer’s humour, given in *Home Life with Herbert Spencer*. It is an amusing book, written by two young ladies who kept house for him for eight years. One example will suffice. The ladies were dissatisfied with a photograph which had been taken of him: “It gives,” they said, “neither your serious nor your frivolous expression! We don’t like it at all. . . .” “About ten minutes or a quarter of an an hour afterwards, we were astounded to see the philosopher in his shirt-sleeves standing at the dining-room door tying his neck-tie. The intensely amused expression on his face showed he was quite alive to the surprise he would occasion. Without any apology for his deshabelle he laughingly remarked: ‘I have come down to fire off a joke before I forget it! Your criticisms of my photograph – which you expect to be grave and gay at the same time – remind me of the farmers, who are never contented unless simultaneously it is raining on the turnips while the sun shines on the corn.’ And with an audible chuckle he hurried back to complete his toilet.”





HERBERT SPENCER

But it is a severe test to be described in intimacy by two superficially reverential, but unconsciously frivolous young women. Herbert Spencer with his foibles, his ear-stoppers, his valetudinarianism, his habit of giving to everything – potatoes, religion, salt-cellars, the same quality of attention, was at the mercy of such observers; while the enormously wide sweep of his intellectual curiosity was only paralleled by the narrowness of his emotional responses.

He was a man who could not attend to anything he did not think of the utmost importance, and he was driven by his temperament to attending to trifles. He thought that complete rejection of tradition was as important in deciding how a bed should be made, or how thick socks should be (it was illogical that the foot should be less clad than the rest of the body), as in setting out to investigate the problems of physics; and while he was making an heroic life-long effort to cram every branch of experience into a world-formula, he was agitated by a smut on a potato. What a victim for the feminine eye!

The authoresses say that on finding them ignorant of some fact, he was in the habit of exclaiming, “Dear me, how innocent you are!” But the reader is much more inclined to apply that adjective to him. Indeed, it is Herbert Spencer’s innocence which after all saves his dignity. When they suggested that the next time a rather over-talkative visitor came, they should *all* wear “ear-stoppers,” he entered into the project without a notion that it contained any reflection upon his favourite method of guarding against too much conversation; and he proceeded to superintend enthusiastically the melting





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off the rims of old saucepan lids, to make the curved springs, which held the pads tightly over both ears.

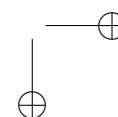
He was unable to believe that the application of reason to any matter could ever lead to ludicrous results. That is why he is the opposite type to the humorist, who is ever conscious of the double aspects of things. The contradiction observed may lie between feeling and thought, or reason and convention, or the contrast may be between the seriousness with which something is felt and its trifling nature, or between its importance and the lightness with which men take it. If the unreasonableness of convention strikes one humorist, another laughs from the point of view of use and wont at the absurdity of results reached by reason; if one finds jokes in the ease with which tragedies are born, another will find them in the seriousness with which trifles are taken. Humorists take sides on all sorts of questions, but they are essentially men who feel, whatever they may think, that there are two or even more sides to them.





### J. K. STEPHEN

I made “a howler” last month. I quoted what purported to be a verse from Frederick Myers’ *St. Paul*; it was from a parody of that poem by J. K. Stephen. One’s friends don’t mind one’s howlers, one’s enemies love them; they are only regretted by oneself. No, that is not a complete statement: “howlers” are detestable in works of research, and odious when the setting in which they occur is an ostentatious omniscience. The man who apes the light allusive manner of the scholar without his accuracy, rightly meets with little sympathy when he is found out. It is a matter of tone. Was it merely an error of memory, or was he pretending to know more than he did? The acerbity of scholars, however, in pointing out the errors of gay slap-dashers had often astonished me, till I had occasion myself to do a little research. Then I understood. An inaccurate footnote, the object of which was to display knowledge, made me lose a whole day’s work. At four in the afternoon the impulse to squeeze as much acidity as possible into a terse contradiction was restrained only by misgiving that others might find similar lapses in me. Had I been, as a true scholar is, certain of myself, I should have sharpened the edge of my comment into a sneer. Ever since I have ceased to be surprised at their polished malignity. When they treat a slap-dasher like a pick-pocket, I say to myself, the fellow





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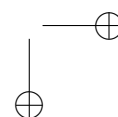
was a pick-pocket in a very real sense; he stole their golden time.

Now I have mentioned J. K. Stephen, I cannot relinquish him. At the beginning of the century he was still a very solid Cambridge and Eton shade. Schools have long memories; I can hardly believe that the tradition of the prowess of that powerful, wild-looking man with rolling but abstracted eye and path-clearing gait, whom I can just remember, hatless and slovenly, mouching round the Playing Fields, has quite faded from the minds of Etonians. *Lapsus Calami* and *Quo Musa Tendis?* contained ditties we delighted in, for wit and sentiment lie a shorter stride from boyhood's moods than pure poetry. Surely J. K. S. cannot be forgotten in his own school? He was our bard in the sense that Bowen was Harrow's; in a far truer sense than Gray ever was, he was our bard. If we had been offered as an alternative "leaving book" to Gray's poems the works of J. K. S., there is no doubt of which the Head Master would have had to lay in the larger stock.

The *Ode on the Distant Prospect of Eton College* was for our taste much too like the kind of poetry we wrote unwillingly ourselves in dead languages. Latin Verse was not poetry; it was a craft or mystery, and very much of a mystery to most. Gray's questions to the Thames:

*Who foremost now delight to cleave,  
With pliant arm, thy glassy wave?  
The captive linnet which enthral?*

left us cold. Swimmers we never thought much of, and what Etonian spent his afternoons enthralling linnets? True, a friend of mine succeeded in keeping an owl under







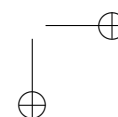
J. K. STEPHEN

his bed for nearly ten days, and the bird was only discovered through his being observed to secrete slices of cold beef in an envelope at supper. But such incidents were exceptional; and if, on the strength of it, I proceeded to ask in a retrospective poem on my old school,

*Who feeds Minerva's bird beneath the tented bed?*

I should not be surprised if the question fell upon indifferent ears. "Tented bed" might pass, after a moment's perplexity. As in the case of Gray's periphrases for football and cricket, "chase the rolling circle's speed," and "urge the flying ball," the boys would, with that charming docility which is as marked in them as obstreperousness, suppose it to be all very proper – the sort of tag you found in the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. But they would not like "tented bed"; they do not sleep at school in four-posters. And neither did we like being told by Gray that we were playing "regardless of our doom"; while "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," was already so familiar to us that we gave Gray no credit for it, supposing he had cribbed it (I still believe he did). True, our official Laureate had the propriety to indicate that he was only writing about the school from "a distance"; his poem showed very little esoteric knowledge.

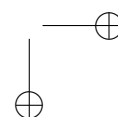
In the ripeness of years I came to admire Gray. The *Elegy*, and the *Ode on the death of a Favourite Cat* (one of the very few English poems we dare to set beside La Fontaine) are now two of my favourite poems. Indeed, there comes a time when the poetry which is pure art and not dependent upon awakening acute emotion, may seem almost as valuable to us as profound and exalted





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expressions of imaginative feeling. And this kind of poetry has even one advantage over the latter; its merits – I express myself by suggestion – seem to keep more stationary. Once you have seen those merits you can find them again, whatever the mood of your approach. It is not a question of glimpsing sudden glories, but of standing a little while beside the poet. Genuine emotion there must be in this poetry also (such is the reflective melancholy in Gray's *Elegy*); but the poet's achievement has not depended in the same degree upon the vehemence of his feelings. It may be the result of imagined, or faintly recollected, grief and pleasure. And perhaps because such poetry does not require so quick and vivid a response in us, our admiration of it becomes stronger after the age when the recognition of emotions in their exaltation is the most thrilling and easy of joys; for if the range of our emotions does not contract, years certainly diminish their mobility and the generosity of our attention. People are apt to say of this poetry, which is sometimes called "the poetry of reason," that it is more "real" – rather stupidly, because it is just as magical, and as dependent upon words. The spell alone is different. True, it can better absorb objects as they appear to pedestrian reflection; and this is why its beauty once discovered, is afterwards more easy to approach. In it also not only fact, but rhetoric, is more at home. The contrast between the inspired passages in Milton and his complicated sonorous rhetoric never jars; all thoughts and objects are sustained in "one sea-like element, the grandeur and clarity of the poet's mind." But it is a pity that custom has decided that boys should begin Latin poetry with Horace and





J. K. STEPHEN

French with La Fontaine, two poets who cannot be fully appreciated before forty. This, however, is digression.

J. K. Stephen was our real laureate because, when he wrote about the school, he recalled the scenes and places which already rose in our minds in absence, places we knew would be some day remembered more poignantly. He did not write about “spires that crown the wat’ry glade,” but

*There’s a long low wall with trees behind it,  
And an old grey chapel behind the trees.*

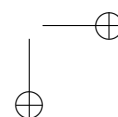
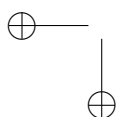
Each of the first five stanzas of that poem began with “There’s a,” and each was a topographical description of a familiar spot, with that easy lilt to it which brings memories back. It was the poem we wanted; not a good poem, but one which met our needs. No: it is impossible that J. K. S. should be forgotten at his school.

Even Fleet Street still remembers two or three scraps of his verse; the beginning of his Browning parody –

*Birthdays? Yes, in a general way;*

his parody of Wordsworth’s *Two Voices* (excellent criticism); and that brilliant outburst of exaggerated irritation, when *Barrack Room Ballads* and *She* were having the season of Proust and Miss Dell rolled into one, the fervent wish that the day might soon come –

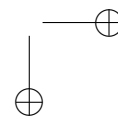
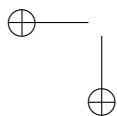
*When there stands a muzzled stripling,  
Mute, beside a muzzled bore;  
When the Rudyards cease from kipling  
And the Haggards ride no more.*





#### PORTRAITS

When I went up to Cambridge J. K. S. had been dead some years, but his bulky shade still stalked about the colleges and gardens that he loved; still hovered in tobacco smoke when late discussion guttered into reminiscence, and wicker chairs creaked drowsily. Laughter still followed the echoes of his ingenious raillery, of his crashing common sense and anecdotes of his wild eccentricities. Ubiquitous too, he would accompany across the silent courts afterwards, retreating pairs of friends, who wondered what they would have thought themselves (seniors cannot be trusted) of this legendary figure. Brilliant? Each brief generation has its limited and very stiff notions of “brilliancy”; but there was an imposing largeness – was it partly physical? – about this dominant shade, which suggested that J. K. S. would have spanned an octave of changing notes in taste and intellectual distinction. It is a sign of something eminent in a man when there seems to be a striking congruity between his aspect and his mind. *A priori*, it might seem that Oscar Wilde could well have been a natty man. But think again – the grand, bland manner, the smooth sonorous delivery, are not these characteristics implicit in his style? Of course, he ought to have been what he was, slow, deliberate, soft, enormous. Both these men loved to tumble about the convictions of others, while remaining very sentimental about anything they took seriously themselves; yet no two wits could have been more different. J. K. S. was Philistine to the back-bone; in laughter, strength, impulse, he was violently masculine, a lover of law and abstract argument. Yet how well it suited both men to be giants with a surplus of raw vitality.





J. K. STEPHEN

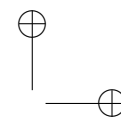
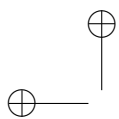
What would J. K. S. have done, what kind of fame would he have had, if he had lived? When he went to the Bar his friends thought the qualifying age for judges would have to be lowered. He took to journalism; started a weekly called *The Reflector*, which soon died, though he would not admit it – he said it was “reflecting.” He scribbled impromptus and talked gloriously. He never thought himself a poet, but he was proud that his rhymes jingled and rang so well. Almost the last verses he wrote was a farewell to verse; henceforth he declared he would court the Muse of prose:

*But when you're writing prose as pure  
As Jourdain talked, but didn't know it,  
You'll have to make, you may be sure,  
Some efforts easier for a poet.*

*I mean to re-appear as one  
Whose prose is better than his verse:  
Farewell, my friend through days of fun!  
Farewell, deft liner of my purse!  
We've lived right gaily you and I:  
We've had some sport, and made some money:  
And, if we could not make folks cry,  
We were occasionally funny.*

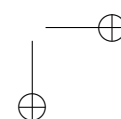
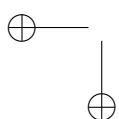
Whatever fame he might have won, he had had the sweetest half of it before he died. Renown is a cold loud empty thing compared with the warm admiration of friends in youth, and those who have tasted that are apt to show early a sage's indifference to reputation. The world thinks them unlaurelled; it does not see their brows are still crowned in the eyes of their own contemporaries. It is curious how nearly every group of young men, some of whom afterwards became famous, has had its incon-





#### PORTRAITS

spicuous hero to whom, while the world was looking up at them, they looked up to. The Byron group had their Matthews, whose equal in wit and intellect Byron and Hobhouse declared they never met again; the Tennyson group, their Hallam; the “Young England” group, their George Smythe. J. K. S. belongs to those dim, romantic figures, who have loomed much greater in intimacy than in performance – only he was not so lucky in his generation.





## R. L. STEVENSON

I often read Stevenson. One reason why I turn to him is that he writes to give me pleasure. How few modern authors do! They write to do us good, to expose us, to scold us, to teach us, to express their contempt for us, to exhibit their own indomitable minds; few write to entertain and delight us. (I am not thinking, of course, of the tripe-sellers.) Stevenson is bent on giving us pleasure all the time, by his phrases, his characters, his stories. It is a much humbler aim, but more rarely attained. Each of his books is an independent effort to that end. *Treasure Island*, *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The New Arabian Nights*, *A Child's Garden of Verse*, *Prince Otto*, *The Ebb Tide*, *Weir of Hermiston* – are all different, but they have one thing in common: they were written to delight us. Enormous pains have gone to the writing of them, and the end is the reader's pleasure. It is this pre-occupation which has endeared him to so many – that, and his intense love of life. At that bonfire we warm ourselves, and it is cheering to hear – this is what his “message” comes to – that, with a modicum of courage, generosity and humility, we might light such a fire of our own.

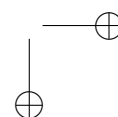
The Samoan natives found the right name for him, Tusitala, the story-teller. His love of youth, which every critic has commented on, is, I think, only a symptom of his love of life. Henry James, writing about him in 1887,





#### PORTRAITS

that is to say before such books as *The Ebb Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston* had been written, declares, and it is an exaggeration with sense in it, that “everything he has written is a direct rhapsody on the age of heterogeneous pockets”; and Henry James goes on in that admirable essay to say, “the general freshness in which this is a part of the gloss seems to him the divinest thing in life; considerably more divine, for instance, than the passion usually regarded as the supremely tender one. The idea of making believe appeals to him much more than the idea of making love.” That is a true word. The two storytellers at the close of the nineteenth century who were recognized masters of their craft, and at the same time popular favourites, Kipling and Stevenson, are neither of them amorists. Kipling revealed, to the delighted surprise of the general reader, that the relation of a man to his work, say, that of an engineer to his machine or to the bridge he is making, could be as “romantic” as any love affair. Stevenson worked the old shaft of adventure. He gave us the romance of childhood, boyhood, youth and gallantry; loving daring all the better if it carried itself with a flourish, but doing it fine justice also when it was plain and unconscious. It is natural that one who could write of life as “a honeymoon with us all through, and none of the longest” (“Small blame to us,” he adds, “if we give our whole hearts to this glowing bride of ours”), should find in the experiences of youth, when impressions are freshest and spirits buoyant, his favourite subjects; caring next for old strugglers who have kept some brave illusion flying, even though it hangs about them at last with an air of tawdry finery.

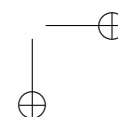


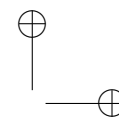
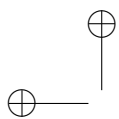




R. L. STEVENSON

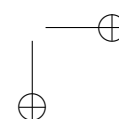
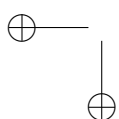
But what marks him as a rarity in literature, and distinguishes him from, say, his favourite Dumas, is that he had as ecstatic a relish for words as for action. His faults as a writer, as well as his superb merits, sprang from this passion for words. How unusual it is for a writer who wins the ear of those whose interests are the reverse of artistic or literary, to declare, "One thing you can never make philistine natures understand, one thing which yet lies on the surface, remains as unseizable to their wit as a high flight of metaphysics – namely, that the business of life is mainly carried on by the difficult art of literature, and according to a man's proficiency in that art shall be the freedom and the fullness of his intercourse with other men." Here he is carrying out an offensive-defensive movement against those who slight his ruling passion, and think style a parlour game; the passage is, of course, no adequate expression of his own delight in words and the handling of words. Every page of Stevenson is like a Christmas tree. True, he sometimes lights too many candles, but I commiserate those who are not delighted with the glitter. Sometimes his love of his medium gets between him and the object he describes; then, I admit, he fails as an artist, for his reader finds himself noticing the manner more than the matter. But with what delicious and agile gaiety his pages twinkle! Turn over the pages of his books, they shine and flash with the happiest phrases: Mrs. Weir's "loose, weary, dowdy gait," or that metaphor which adds the last touch to the portrait of her Rhadamanthine husband, "If he failed to gain his son's friendship, or even his son's toleration, on he went up the great, bare staircase of his duty, uncheered and undepressed. There





#### PORTRAITS

might have been more pleasure in his relations with Archie, so much he may have recognized at moments; but pleasure was a byproduct of the singular chemistry of life which only fools expected." Stevenson was not one of those men of genius who reveal a new aspect of life and change our ways of feeling and thinking, but he belongs to the aristocracy of letters. The beauty of the world and the fun of life are revealed to us in his books; and to read him is to be reminded of two deep sources of exhilaration, adventure and good prose.





## STRINDBERG

At eight o'clock on a May morning in 1912 a black procession of nearly 30,000 people moved down the streets of Stockholm towards the cemetery of the New Church where the poor are buried. The majority were students and workers, but among them walked also the Cabinet Ministers, artists, musicians, actors and authors of Sweden, foreign delegates, and a royal prince. They were following a hearse in which lay the body of a man who, at some period or other of his career had reviled, either personally or as a member of a class, every one of those who were now walking behind it.

With a description of this procession Mr. McGill opens his life of Strindberg. He has done well to do so, for English readers need to be reminded that Strindberg in Scandinavia and mid-Europe was, and remains, a prodigious figure. During his lifetime no man of letters had roused more resentment by his writings or with more cause. He had attacked marriage, family-life, education, revolution, tradition, science, religion, art, business, society, each in turn, with exasperated violence. He had repeatedly slandered in print not only his enemies but everyone who had befriended him. Gratitude indeed was an emotion he could not support. He had bitten the hand that helped him, and stopped with mud mouths that had praised him. As a thinker he had been the most shameless shifter of his point of view, and each





## PORTRAITS

of his pronouncements on social questions and morality, science and religion had been made with the intolerance of blazing conviction. Every time he had changed his mind he had declared he alone was right, he alone was honest.

Whenever he had annexed the allegiance and admiration of a new public he had proceeded to champion with ferocity what his latest admirers most detested. He had been a complete example of the literary Ishmael. He had been a weathercock prophet, though it was the winds within him, not those without, that blew him round and round and round. He seems to have been possessed by an itch to destroy confidence and affection not only in his private but in his literary life, and to have resolved to live in enmity with everyone far and near, while cursing perpetually the hideous injustice of such a fate. Yet as soon as he was dead his dying words came true: "Now everything personal has been cancelled." Something for which men honour men, and honour them above their steady benefactors, remained. What was it that made the wild hate-directed career of this misery-scattering self-torturer worth while?

That is the question for his critic. The obvious answer, "Strindberg was a genius," though comprehensive, is too vague. Undoubtedly Strindberg was what we call a "genius," and a prodigiously prolific one. He wrote fifty-six plays, nine novels, numerous autobiographical works, lyrical poems, newspaper articles, historical and scientific treatises (the latter were apparently worthless); and although his work was often slapdash and sometimes crazy, however poor he might have been at the time of writing, there had never been a "pot-boiler" among them.





#### STRINDBERG

He could only write out of himself. As a young man, though he had the intellectual energy of ten, he was repeatedly ploughed in examinations, for he could not master, even in an elementary fashion, a subject not vitally exciting to him at the moment. And he could not write at all unless his passions were engaged. Strindberg's intellect only functioned at the command of his emotions. This is a characteristic common in writers, in whom "genius" predominates over all their other faculties. He possessed amazing insight without the power of weighing evidence; an astoundingly vivid imagination without being a great artist.

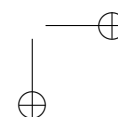
It is now commonly agreed that literary inspiration, at any rate of the first order, draws upon the Subconscious; and the faculty of tapping this source, combined with power, is what we usually mean when we use the word "genius." But it is a writer's gift for selecting from the contents of that "backward and abyss" of thought and passion in himself that makes him an "artist." The images, intuitions and ideas, which at the waving of his mysterious wand peer from those depths, are by no means necessarily of equal or indeed of any value. The spectacle of a poet emerging from a header into his subconsciousness, glistening and triumphant with an old boot or fruit-can in his hand is not infrequent to-day. Such objects come no doubt from the right place, but they are of small consequence. Strindberg's drama (his fiction is nearly all autobiography) is divers spoil. But if we compare the attitude of his conscious judgment towards such strange treasure to Ibsen's attitude (he also was an explorer of the Subconscious), we see the difference between a "genius" who is an "artist" and a "genius" who is not.





## PORTRAITS

The Norwegian and the Swede were antagonists. Ibsen had often given woman the *beau rôle* in his plays, divining in her more friendliness to “the natural good”; women were not, he thought, quite so liable as men to be led from it by their idealistic noses. *The Doll’s House* had moreover been hailed as a manifesto in favour of Woman’s Emancipation, and given impetus to a movement which of all contemporary movements was to Strindberg the most permanently detestable, the most exasperating, the most riddled with lies. Incidentally, suspicion-mania drove him also to the absurd conclusion that *The Doll’s House* was a satire upon his own marriage. But even apart from that insult Ibsen remained for him the arch-betrayer of his sex who had glorified those witless vampires – women. He flew at Ibsen’s literary throat, and he was formidable enough to make the older dramatist feel some uneasiness, which is expressed in the Master Builder’s dread of “the younger generation knocking at the door.” But oddly enough Ibsen himself used to keep Strindberg’s photograph together with a small viper on his writing-table. He explained that he did not keep it there because he knew Strindberg or sympathized with him, but because “he found he worked better under that madman’s eyes.” So Ibsen too felt that “something” to which Strindberg’s funeral was a vague testimony: an impetuous, selfless, never-flagging courage in the pursuit of the adventures of the brain and heart. Those mad eyes were a challenge to Ibsen’s own exploring curiosity and resolve to face all things and speak out. Strindberg possessed in perfection that sincerity which lies in being loyal to every mood; but in the sincerity which allows for moods changing and seeks a stable point of view, and





#### STRINDBERG

leads a literary craftsman to allow for changing moods and to temper them to artistic ends, he was abnormally deficient. His conceptions had the vigour of those of a man who flings himself whole into every emotion, every intuition, as though each was his first and each would be his last.

Imagine a man of profound excitability, violent passions, blazing temper, uncontrollable fastidiousness, seeing only one thing at a time as the emotional storm within him permitted, in whom a craving to enjoy a chivalrous worship of women, and an adoration of woman as a mother, struggled with an intense susceptibility to her as a mistress; imagine him planted in a society where many women were on strike against maternity, jealous of men, eager to emulate them, sick of being idealized yet perpetually on the defensive against criticism; remember, too, that this man is an imaginative creator and more than a little mad, perpetually overworked, frequently hallucinated by absinthe, and physically as nervous as a shying horse; and there you have the conditions out of which Strindberg's work springs. They are not those likely to produce perfect works of art, or even truthful pictures of life. Strindberg's works have not those virtues. But what he can give us are his torments, his madness, his struggles, shattered gleams of his ideals, guesses at the motives of others, half insane and half amazingly acute. It is not a *pleasant* experience thus to suffer with Strindberg, for he has the power to make his reader feel as though he himself were fighting for his own honour and his own sanity. But one can learn a good deal from him if one keeps judgment cool; and one has, at least, while thrusting at Hell's phantoms in the dark, the glow





#### PORTRAITS

of identifying oneself for the time being with a man of undefeated courage.

The two most important psychological facts about him, apart from his genius, were his liability to violent attacks of suspicion-mania, and his inability to get on with or without women. He married wife after wife. He did not know how to live with women or how to quarrel with them, how to make it up or how to break with them. They threw him into a state of agonized bewilderment, shot with flashes of piercing hate-directed insight. Much of his work may be described as the torments of a henpecked Bluebeard. Possessing the lucidity of genius, he could also suddenly collect himself and see himself as mad or as impossibly exacting. He rightly named his longest account of such an intimacy *The Confessions of a Fool*, or to translate its title more accurately, *The Self-Justification of a Lunatic*. Being a poet, he could sometimes invest scenes with the tatters of a lurid beauty, making you feel, "O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown." But he could never keep the personal aspects of his subjects far enough off from his emotions; nor ever rid himself of resentment towards the creatures of his imagination on account of their resemblance to people who had made him suffer and served him as models. His intensely vivid recollection of all he had felt enabled him to fill his characters with vitality, but once on their feet, he could not allow them, as an artist should, liberty to live, however balefully, as independent beings.

This is discernible in even his best plays, and it degrades them from the category of the great to that of the remarkable. (I have not read or seen his historical dramas; perhaps they and his dream-dramas are differ-





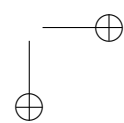
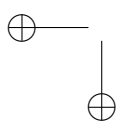


#### STRINDBERG

ent.) His art judged as a whole is of that kind which is euphemistically called “cathartic,” and which tends to be unduly exalted in periods of literary experiment, like our own, when the most blatant literary egotism is admired, and a sense of the importance in art of qualities of intellect and feeling which we call by ethical names, magnanimity, nobility, disinterestedness, has become dim or confused.

Mr. McGill’s biography, which is largely a paraphrase in American English of Strindberg’s autobiographical novels, insufficiently supported by information from other sources, leaves nevertheless a real impression of the tempestuous career of a man of genius; of one who, if he was merciless to others, also never spared himself – except in one respect: Strindberg never could bear to see himself as absurd. Mr. McGill disentangles his complexes (“mother-complex” and “inferiority complex”), not a difficult task since Strindberg treated himself as a subject for psycho-analysis long before such processes were even dreamt of. Mr. McGill shows how in childhood his passions were tied into knots which were wrenched tighter afterwards. He declares that his “absolutism” is the key to his character and writings, that is to say, his furious refusal ever to compromise or excuse. “To have sought God, and found the Devil,” thus Strindberg summed up the result for him of this absolutism. He was a never-resting struggler; but a man who is all struggle, though he may be gigantic cannot be great.



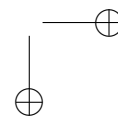
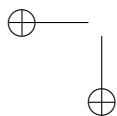




## TETRAZZINI

I had read *My Life of Song*, by Madame Tetrizzini, just before London welcomed her back at the Albert Hall. She sang three times as many songs as she was billed to sing, and the pyramid of bouquets behind the piano grew higher and higher. During the intervals she signed photographs till her fingers ached, and after it was all over her car could not move through the press of people, until like a Siberian mother, she began to throw “her pledges of affection” (her bouquets), to the wolves. Amiable woman, how grateful, delighted and delightful she was! Such receptions only fall to those who are themselves reflectors of emotion, flashing it back in becks and bows and smiles and tears, and who, if they were not the recipients, would be the bestowers of enthusiasm.

Great singers, like Royalties, collect round them lords and ladies-in-waiting, and in the background there is usually a rushed and devoted secretary. Everyone who has seen both Royal personages and great singers close must have been struck by the resemblance between them. The grand, bland, kind, slow way in which Patti and Albani used to enter a drawing-room was – there is only one word for it – reginal. Madame Tetrizzini’s autobiography kept reminding me of the printed confidences with which, from time to time, Royalty has favoured us. I am sure that if Queen Alexandra had written her memoirs





#### PORTRAITS

they would have been like Tetrizzini's. In Queens of Song and Queens who wear Crowns you find the same unblushing emotional simplicity. With the same enveloping gesture they take us all to their hearts; that the one talks of "my people" and the other of "my audiences" makes no difference. They have the same relation towards a huge, composite entity; that dear, dear monster, adorably faithful and warm-hearted, which cheers with a million mouths, smiles and twinkles with a million eyes and waves with a million hands. It must be, as Henry James would say, "exceedingly rum" to have in one's life so gigantic a lover, whose affection and approbation remain, if the most expected, still the most thrilling of joys; towards whom in return one would feel (if one were a good woman) a devoted sense of duty. "If I could have done, I would have written this life in the language of song," says Queen Tetrizzini. What, after all, were Queen Victoria's messages to her people but "a few simple chords touched upon the piano?" I am sure when Jubilee Day was over, she too longed to burst into song.

Men and women who live in public are akin to each other. I am told that to meet Carpentier is exactly like meeting a young prince. Actresses however, when they reach the top of the European tree, and live under the stare of "the wide-open eye of the solitary sky," seldom develop that considerate, reginal manner. Their work is too wearing. The apprenticeship of a singer is very hard, but once she has risen she swims leisurely in serener air. Though famous actresses can plead Mrs. Gamp's excuse, "fiddle-strings is nothing to expredge my nerves," they are apt to be downright naughty to everyone all round, while the Queen of Song, though she may in her





#### TETRAZZINI

career trample on four or five impresarios, is socially extremely kind.

She has another characteristic in common with a queen. Both feel that they owe their sway to something as separate from themselves as a magic rose or ring; in the one case it is a voice, in the other a crown. The thought seems to nourish in them a benign humility. I do not know why a wonderful pair of vocal chords should seem to a woman less part of herself than a wonderful pair of eyes, but I have seldom observed in the possessors of the latter this almost apologetic gratitude. Queen Tetrizzini says that up to the time of writing her voice had earned her over a million pounds, and I can see she is very grateful to Heaven and to "her people." Of course, every year this sum, or at least the use and advantages of it, is won without any work at all by a beauty or two; yet never in my experience, and I am getting on in years, while walking through the splendid park or spacious rooms of one of those fortunate ones, has she turned to me and exclaimed, "All this is due to the delicious tilt of my nose."

Prima donnas are more humble. When they tell the fairy-story of their lives, they say: "It was my voice, my magic ring."

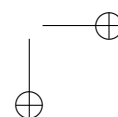
"Little Tetrizzini," said her old *maestro*, "you have something very wonderful in your throat." "Have I? Please tell me what is there." "You have palaces and castles and horses and coaches, beautiful lands and lovely jewels, a great name and thousands of admirers." The little Tetrizzini opened her mouth wide. "If I have horses down my throat, *maestro*, take two of them out and let's have a gallop over the hills instead of staying in this





#### PORTRAITS

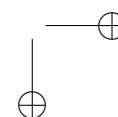
stuffy school.” “Ah! you are pleased to be funny, but one day you will know I was serious.” “When vast audiences in world capitals,” she continues, “have risen in their seats, waved their hands and cheered and cheered my singing till I was overwhelmed by the joyous tumult, I have thought of my old *maestro* and his words, and thought, ‘Would that he were here to-night to share with me the success of his old pupil!’” Her artless pen reveals her: it writes “to share with me” as though she too were watching, detached but deeply moved, the triumph of a little Betsinda to whom a fairy ring was given.





## TROLLOPE

Johnson said that no man could be written down except by himself: he meant that no man can destroy his literary reputation except by writing badly. But a man can also, though it seldom happens, injure his fame by being exceptionally honest and unpretentious about his own work. There is no doubt that Trollope's *Autobiography*, which people have lately had the sense to recognize as a very good book and far more truthful after its kind than many an intimate "confession," did injure the esteem in which Trollope's work was held. It killed interest in Trollope himself, though it ought to have quickened it. When it appeared, the small literary public, who do so much to make and unmake temporarily the reputations of writers, were beginning to be interested in "the artist." When they read in Trollope's *Autobiography* that he wrote every day so many pages an hour and so many hours a day, that he was always prepared to write to length and to finish by a certain date, when they noticed that he spoke of novel-writing as merely one of the educated professions, and dwelt upon its commercial side, they concluded he was lacking in imagination. Ah, said the critics, so Trollope was only a tradesman of letters. They overlooked the passages in his *Autobiography* where he insists on the vital importance for a novelist of living in company with his imaginary characters, if they are to be real to the imagination of others. "I have wandered alone," he says





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on another page, “among rocks and woods, crying at their grief, laughing at their absurdities, and thoroughly enjoying their joy. I have been impregnated with my own creations till it has been my only excitement to sit with the pen in my hand, and drive my team before me at as quick a pace as I could make them travel.” This is the heart of the matter. He feels with his characters; he believes in them so completely that we believe in them too. His extraordinary faculty of concentration he seems to have inherited from his mother, who, beginning at the age of fifty, poured out volume after volume till when she was seventy-six. She had completed her 114th before she allowed herself to rest for the last seven years of her life. Some of her best stories were written while she was nursing her bankrupt husband during his last illness, with two of their children dying of consumption, in a big house outside Bruges.

Trollope mocked at the idea that a writer must wait for inspiration; he made no claim to be more nobly or importantly employed than others who earn a livelihood by their brains. In short, his attitude towards his work resembled that of the unselfconscious old masters, rather than that of the school in France and England, who were gaining a hearing among the select public, and claimed to be “artists” in a sense which implied that their occupation was of almost mystical importance to mankind. Trollope struck them as a Philistine; he was.

It is tenable, however, that one of the mistakes of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century criticism has been to regard the novel as “a work of art” in the same sense that a sonata, a picture, or a poem is a work of art. It is extremely doubtful whether the aim of the







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novel is to make an aesthetic appeal. Passages in it may do so; but it aims also at satisfying our curiosity about life and engaging our sympathies quite as much as at satisfying the aesthetic sense. For Trollope's view of the novel there is a good deal to be said. I am inclined myself to regard it as a bastard form of art, rightly concerned with many human interests which the maker of beautiful things must eschew; nor need a good novel reveal the heights and depths of life. (*Vide* Jane Austen.) At any rate only that view of the novel leaves us free to do justice to the work of Trollope.

His present position in the world of letters is instructive. His reputation has had up and downs, but it is safe to say that he stands higher now than he did in the estimation of his discriminating contemporaries. This is interesting for several reasons. In the first place, it shows that the discriminating can be bad prophets. Secondly, it throws some light on the nature of the qualities which secure permanence for a novelist. Important as it may be to take yourself seriously as an artist, it seems not to be essential. Trollope did not know what the word artist meant. Thirdly, the very qualities, honesty and unpretentiousness, which contributed to his losing caste in his day, have proved to be the best preservatives of his reputation. I say without hesitation that he is held in higher estimation than George Eliot, and that not a few consider him a greater *novelist* than Thackeray (against this Trollope himself would loudly protest), though they would admit him to be very inferior to Thackeray as a writer.

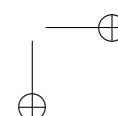
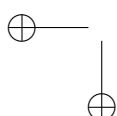
Trollope's English is undistinguished. His style never reflects sensitiveness to beauty; it never thrills and sel-





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dom amuses. There are no over-tones in it. It is untouched by aesthetic curiosity, and no words he uses ever put the reader in relation with a view of life wider or profounder than that of current morality and common-sense. But is not that enough in all conscience, when it is thoroughly done? And does not such a customary social horizon seem boundless compared with the confines of some of the stuffy aesthetic or psychological dog-hutches to which many novelists confine us? Of course, there are larger, finer, and more interesting worlds than the one in which Trollope moves. But this can be claimed for him, that, within his own world, no novelist was ever a surer guide. I know none to whom, once embarked on his story, one yields oneself with more restful confidence that one will agree with his values; or in whom we can trust more completely that what he is going to tell us happened next would, in reality, have happened. Indeed, he knows so well what his characters will do and say that, most inartistically, he will sometimes interrupt the illusion and proceed to tease his reader by suggesting that he might, if he liked, make his characters do or say something else. He can afford to do this. Few other novelists have a sufficiently complete grasp of character and circumstance to take such abominable liberties with impunity. As a matter of fact, although Trollope never pretends to be doing anything more than spinning a story, he never really juggles with the reader's sympathy and credulity. All is solid and serious. He relies as little on mystification and the unusual as Jane Austen, and as little as Defoe on holding the reader by adventitious ornament. His work lives because his characters stand





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so firmly on their feet, and because his own interest in them is so genuine, warm-hearted and shrewd.

Mr. Michael Sadleir has tried to distinguish Trollope's achievement from the work of other regional novelists. He quotes Hawthorne's famous impression that it was "as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business and not suspecting that they were being made a show of." The distinction, however, to my mind is not a clear one, since it leads him to the conclusion that "Hardy and Balzac" alone remain to share with Trollope "the rank of world-creating novelists." The phrase "world-creating," like most words in our critical vocabulary, is vague. In a sense, most novelists of the first order create "world." The peculiarity of Trollope's novels is that the same characters often recur in them, and that in the Barchester group all the events take place in an imagined county, of which both the topography and the social professional hierarchies are solidly and consistently imagined. We know Barset as well as a county we have lived in all our lives.

In Hardy's novels characters do not recur, or only minor ones; and although the topography of his "Wessex" is consistent, we are far from getting a bird's-eye view of all the different sorts of people and of their avocations which go to make up the life of a county. Hardy's notions of the inhabitants of the great houses are, for instance, exceedingly dim and queer, nor is there any close understanding in his Wessex novels of either the sporting, legal, political, or clerical "worlds." Hardy's merits are of a very different kind. Hardy is a poet-novelist, not a social chronicler like Trollope. In the latter respect





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however, there is a resemblance between Trollope and Balzac; though, as far as I know, there is no evidence that Trollope ever took a hint from the *Comédie Humaine*, or had even read Balzac. (By the bye, how he would have disliked him!) The panoramic view of society, and the device of reintroducing the same characters at different ages and in different connections, were apparently Trollope's own inventions, and the genuine products of his nature, like every other characteristic of his work, such as his straightforward, insensitive style, his warm-hearted championing of particular characters, his good-natured commonsense, and his playful, if sometimes slightly tiresome, asides. Trollope was, in one sense of the word, exceptionally "original"; though of all novelists he was also perhaps the most average-minded. And that is his charm. Every detail he put into his picture of life was his own discovery, and tallied exactly with the experiences of normal, but not deeply inquiring people.

There are recurrent times in a sensible reader's life when he may prefer Trollope's novels to almost any fiction. If you want to become interested again in everyday life, then read Trollope. Henry James has described well his fundamental quality: "His great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual. This gift is not rare in the annals of English fiction; it would naturally be found in a walk of literature in which the feminine mind has laboured so fruitfully. Women are delicate and patient observers; they hold their noses close, as it were, to the texture of life. They feel and perceive the real with a kind of personal tact, and their observations are recorded in a thousand delightful volumes. Trollope, therefore, with his eyes comfortably fixed on the familiar,





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the actual, was far from having invented a new category; his great distinction is that in resting there his vision took in so much of the field. And then he *felt* all daily and immediate things as well as saw them; felt them in a simple, direct, salubrious way, with their sadness, their gladness, their charm, their comicality, all their obvious and measurable meanings. He never wearied of the pre-established round of English customs – never needed respite nor change – was content to go on watching life that surrounded him and holding up his mirror to it. Into this mirror the public, at first especially, grew very fond of looking – for it saw itself reflected in all the most creditable and supposable ways – with that curiosity that people feel, to know how they look when they are presented ‘just as they are’ by a painter who does not desire to put them into an attitude, to drape them for an effect, to arrange his light and his accessories. This exact, on the whole becoming, image, projected upon a surface without a strong intrinsic tone, constitutes mainly the entertainment that Trollope offered his readers.”

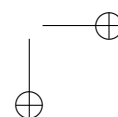
In addition, that entertainment is predominantly moral. A strong moral bent is a great asset to a novelist. The backbone of the fiction which deals with reality and offers us the pleasures of recognition rather than those of surprise, is and must always be the moral interest. Is this man or woman good or bad? If bad, in what way bad? if good, in what respect? Will he or she behave well when it comes to the pinch? Was he or she beautiful or ignoble at such and such a juncture? The story or plot of a novel is chiefly admirable in so far as it posits these questions in an interesting or searching way, and supplies ample matter for answering them satisfactorily. The place of





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psychology in fiction is subordinate. It provides extra data for moral judgments, and it can also strengthen the reader's belief in the reality of a character, just as description of outside objects strengthens his faith in the credibility of events. The psychological novelist may, of course, draw the reader's attention to certain facts about human nature of which he was not aware; but, once his surprise has subsided, the interest of these will depend upon their moral significance. Many modern novelists do not understand this. They have found out that it is a great deal easier to pour forth what may pass as a plausible stream of ideas going through an imaginary person's head than to make that person behave in a convincing and interesting manner, and they have jumped eagerly at the notion that it is a sign of high artistic breeding if this stream of thoughts and sensations is without bearing upon moral values. It is true that a vivid transcription of sensation may be worth reading in itself. A really good description of lying in a hot bath, or having a tooth out, may be almost a substitute for experience; but a book composed of such sensations makes a flaccid book, only worthy to be dipped into. Thus there is no other steady source of interest which the novel can supply comparable to the moral interest. Needless to say, though a novelist may have a requisite degree of moral concern with his characters to enable him to write a novel, his sense of moral values may be trivial or wrong-headed. In the case of Trollope, it was invariably generous and sensible.





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### A HERMIT'S DAY

Blue damask curtains were drawn across the windows, but one long slit of daylight made every shadowy object in the large, high bedroom discernible: a cold white pyramidal stove opposite the empty marble fireplace some portraits and magnificent mirror, five writing-tables with neat papers on them; and under its canopy of blue silk the low, narrow bed, with a deep cleft in the swelling pillow. Absolute stillness reigned.

Outside, a dazzling sun had long ago drunk up the freshness of morning. The balustrade of the Château steps was warm to the touch, and a surprising number of men were moving about watering newly-planted trees. In the near distance a busy little village hummed and clanked and smoked, while far off, across fields of corn and vines, higher in the sky than the eye expected, above a scarf of cloud, the snow mountains shone mildly.

Presently a quietly dressed man entered, followed by a lackey in a gorgeous livery carrying before him a satin suit with long lace cuffs, white stockings, and a pair of red-heeled shoes. At the rattle of drawn curtains a hollow groan came from the bed, and the being in it rolled round to the light. Part of a turban with wisps of grey hair hanging from it, part of a high yellow forehead, and one large, uncommonly bright eye became visible





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between the peaks of the pillow. The eye watched the movements of the two men with the suspicious intensity of a jackdaw fixing some shining object. Suddenly a voice of startling resonance – could it proceed from the old creature in the bed? – broke the silence.

“I am dying,” it said.

The valet continued methodically to lay out the clothes. More groans followed.

Then the voice spoke again, this time with a more peremptory ring:

“I am dying, my poor Wagnière, I am dying. Fetch Madame Denis.”

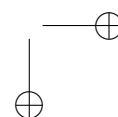
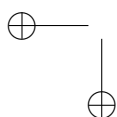
“Certainly, monsieur.”

The turbaned figure in the bed sat up suddenly.

“What!! Ten thousand panniers full of devils! I tell the man I’m dying, and he says, ‘Certainly, monsieur’! Fly, idiot!”

The valet and the footman vanished, and the emaciated old head sank back upon the pillows with a gasp.

In a long room, beyond the antechamber, a man and two women were standing in the recess of a sunny window, waiting. The first was a priest of singularly simple, self-indulgent aspect, with a brown smear of snuff under his nose and the stains of many meals upon his cassock: and of the two women, one was middle-aged, plump, and self-important, and dressed in a manner which exhibited at once an absence of youthful charms and a desire to possess them; while the younger, who held an ape in her arms, though not at all pretty, had a sweet, round, good-tempered face. The sound of voices, exaggerated by the well of the hall, penetrated through the open door. A tall man, whose fine physique and flawless health







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were emphasized by the severe neatness of his dress, was seen mounting the stairs, laughing as he listened to the vivacious chatter of a Swiss servant-girl.

“I assure Monsieur,” she was saying, “it was because he couldn’t wait for his coffee to cool. He burnt his mouth, and so he poured the rose-water into his cup. I told him he was more stupid than any one of his own turkeys, in spite of all his cleverness. Oh, he *was* sick! He kept on making himself sick all day, and he swallowed all the medicines in the house – though he said he didn’t believe in them.”

“Hold your tongue, Barbara!” exclaimed the plump lady, moving majestically towards them. “How dare you speak like that of my Lord? – Doctor Tronchin.” She made a low curtsy.

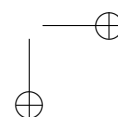
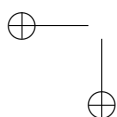
“Madame, your servant,” he replied, with his hand on his chest. “The servant also of Mademoiselle Belle et Bonne,” he added, with another bow and a smile to the younger. “And how is the illustrious old baby this morning, Mademoiselle?”

At that moment the other door opened and the secretary appeared.

“Mesdames, M. de Voltaire bids me tell you he is dying. Will you come at once?”

“Order breakfast and the clyster to be brought up immediately,” said Madame Denis, leading the way.

The sage lay still with his withered arms outside the coverlet: at the sound of steps he began to moan softly. “Belle et Bonne” went up to the bed and kissed him. His eyes opened, and he looked at her intently for a moment. “It is life kissing death,” he said presently, raising his hand and letting it drop gently on the counterpane. The





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next moment he was twisting in a spasm of colic and uttering imprecations.

“Oh, my poor Calas, what must you have suffered! Scoundrels, fiends, devils! Ou-oo! Ou-oo! *Ecrasez l’infâme!* Quick, Tronchin! My friend! how I suffer!”

After the physician’s deft injection he was propped up with pillows, and, exhausted but smiling, he began to enjoy the sunshine and to feel hungry. A table with coffee was pushed near the bed. The day had begun; the phoenix had risen once more from its ashes.

“Ah! my Tronchin, a grain of opium and a little water can do more for men than all the systems of philosophy.”

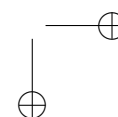
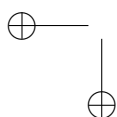
Madame Denis began to pour out coffee, the Hermit of Ferney to mumble his crust, Luc, the ape, to play with the curtains of the bed, and “Belle et Bonne” and Doctor Tronchin to take their breakfast beside it.

“Adam, where art thou!” called the sage, in sombre and majestic tones; the fat priest sidled awkwardly into view.

“Sit down, Adam. You have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge; so perhaps while I breakfast you will explain to me some of the contradictions which are so necessary to the salvation of the soul. . . .”

“Monsieur, if Monsieur will forgive. . . .”

“Adam, the Tree of Knowledge is a little worm-eaten now; its roots are the works of rabbis, of Pope Gregory the Great, of Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventura, of Saint Garasse, of Bellarmine, Suarez, and of the doctors Tournelli and Tamponet. Its bark is wrinkled; its leaves sting like nettles; its fruit is bitter as gall, and the juice of it flies to the head like opium. It produces sleep – indeed, it makes everyone go to sleep. But as soon as





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they wake up they carry their heads very high and look down on humanity; they proceed to speak unintelligible words which often bring them considerable wealth. How was it, Adam, to begin at the beginning, since it was said that the day you eat of this fruit you would ‘surely die,’ that you managed nevertheless to live another nine hundred and thirty years?”

“Monsieur. . . .”

“Don’t tease the poor Father, uncle,” said “Belle et Bonne.”

“The poor Father, indeed! The poor Calas! Ah, my child, as long as people continue to believe absurdities they will continue to commit atrocities. No, Adam, you must travel. We will play chess when you come back. You must penetrate into the land of Nod, where Cain built the city of Enoch, and there investigate carefully the number of masons, carpenters, ironworkers, locksmiths, weavers, shepherds, farmers, labourers, and overseers he employed – when there were still only four or five people on the face of the earth. Remember to tell me about the giants the angels begot upon the daughters of men. Only be careful, above all things, to address them civilly, for they are deficient in humour. I rely upon you to climb Mount Ararat, to examine the remains of the ark which was built of gopher wood, and to verify the calculations which the illustrious M. Le Pelletier made on the spot. Measure the height of the mountain itself, and afterwards the altitude of Chimborazo in Peru, and of our Mont Saint-Gothard; then calculate how many inches of rainfall were required to cover them. Greet Father Noah, too, who first planted the vine. We all deplore his having got drunk. Do not imitate him in this





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respect. And don't fail to visit the tower of Babel, or to find out if Saint Gregory of Tours has estimated its dimensions correctly. From Babel, you must go to Ur, in Chaldea. Try to discover from Abraham's descendants why he left that beautiful country to buy a tomb in Hebron and corn in Memphis; why he told everybody his wife was his sister; and above all, what face-wash she used which made her still beautiful at ninety."

At this moment, Wagnière entered with letters, and announced that the courier had arrived from Geneva and also several gentlemen.

"Save me," exclaimed the sage, holding up his hands devoutly, "save me from my friends, O God, and I will deal with my enemies myself!

"Who have come to see the rhinoceros this morning? What, that fellow! I wrote to him last week saying that, since I was dead, I should no more have the honour of corresponding with him. He prints every word I say. Show him up. I'll finish him, and then I'll see the Englishman."

A solemn man in a cherry-coloured coat was ushered in.

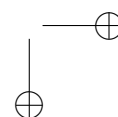
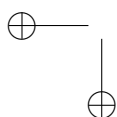
"Monsieur, I know absolutely nothing about any single question you are going to ask me."

The visitor, as though fascinated by the eyes of the extraordinary old mummy, advanced bowing:

"M. de Voltaire, you are the candle which lights the world. . . ."

A piercing voice cut him short: "Quick, Babette, the extinguisher!"

"Has he gone?" inquired the old gentleman presently from under the blankets. "Then I am ready to receive my Englishman. They are a wonderful people," he said, rearranging his turban. "When I was in London they buried a mathematician with the pomp of a king."





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A young man was graciously received.

“Sir,” said the sage, in answer to some compliments on French literature, “an Englishman who knows France well and a Frenchman who knows England well are both the better for it. The English know how to think; the French know how to please. We are the whipped cream of Europe. There are not twenty Frenchmen who understand Newton.” Going on to talk of science, he indulged in rather a pompous eulogy of the Swiss savant, Haller.

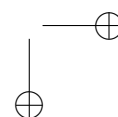
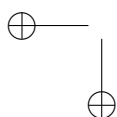
“I am surprised, monsieur, that you should praise him so much,” said the young man, “for he does nothing but abuse you.”

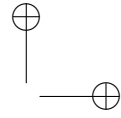
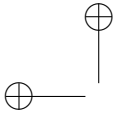
“Perhaps,” replied the sage sweetly, “we are *both* mistaken. You have been amiable enough to say I have done a great work for posterity. It is true – I have planted four thousand feet of timber. I will rejoin you in the garden. Now for my letters.”

The first one to be opened was the weekly budget of gossip from Paris. To his enormous delight, it reported that M. de Pompignan could not now appear in his carriage without the boys in the street singing one of the songs the hermit of Ferney had written in his honour; and sitting up in bed, he began to sing in a nasal and spectral voice:

*Oui, ce Le Franc de Pompignan  
Est un terrible personnage,  
Oui, ses psaumes sont un ouvrage  
Qui nous fait bailler longuement.*

*Oui, de province un président,  
Plein d'orgueil et de verbiage,  
Nous paraît un pauvre pédant,  
Malgré son riche mariage.*





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“Ah, Tronchin, you never gave me a better prescription than when you ordered me to hunt Pompignan for two hours every morning!” And, turning to Father Adam, his eyes glowing like carbuncles, he went on, with great show of solemnity, stretching out a bony finger, and ending in a whisper of horror:

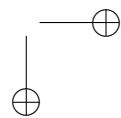
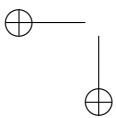
*Savez-vous pourquoi Jérémie  
A tant pleuré pendant sa vie?  
C'est qu'en prophete il prévoyait  
Qu'un jour Le Franc le traduirait.*

“Go on, go on, read me more. So they sing it in the streets!”

But when the letter went on to report that someone had written to say that Voltaire, gentleman-in-waiting to the King, was the nephew of a pastry-cook, he became extremely excited. “I’ll have him Bastilled! Slander must be suppressed. I shall write to the Pompadour. He is not fit to live with human beings”; and the concluding passage produced a still more violent effect. It reported that a young man, M. Arnaud, being in Berlin, had addressed a letter in verse to Frederick II, who had himself replied in verse, saying that the sun of young Arnaud was rising, while the sun of Voltaire was going to bed.

“The dawn of Arnaud!” he screamed, throwing off the clothes. “Voltaire setting! It’s Frederick’s business to govern, not to criticize. I’ll teach this King with his *œuvres de poéshe* that Voltaire is not in bed”; and, tearing on his stockings, he dismissed the company.

All the morning more and more visitors kept arriving. Indeed, they sat down more than thirty to a dinner, at





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which the host made only a brief appearance – still in his dressing-gown. He laughed till the tears came into his eyes at a young man’s answer to a question about his beliefs, that he had been born a Catholic: “You see he does not say he is one *now*. What a splendid answer! My friend,” he added, when he he had recovered, “he only half lives who half thinks. The consolation of life is to say what one thinks.” He received compliments on his adopted daughter, Mademoiselle Corneille, now happily married, saying that nothing had given him more satisfaction at the time; but that now, alas! he could not be happy till he had married Mademoiselle Calas to two counsellors of the Parliament of Toulouse.

A dramatic performance of *Zaïre* was decided on as the evening’s entertainment. The bustle of preparations, the cries, the laughter, the embraces, seemed to put the old man in a fever. He sang, he talked, he shouted down the others; he seemed to be everywhere at once, hauling out costumes, reciting verses, acting, gesticulating – and then he vanished like a ghost for two hours. At the performance he sat in the wings, but in view of the audience, leading the applause; when the actors went wrong lifting eyes and hands to heaven, when they spoke or acted well breaking out into exclamations: “Clarion could not have done it better!” “It’s Lekain, pure Lekain! Incomparable!” When Madame Denis appeared herself on the scene, acting, indeed, with great spirit, despite her solid proportions, he was moved to tears. His forty-two diseases were forgotten. Then his face suddenly contracted with rage: the President de Brosses had fallen into a gentle sleep – he was actually snoring. “Do you imagine you’re on the bench?” he screamed, flinging his





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hat in the face of the sleeping man. There was a shout of laughter, and the tragedy went on again.

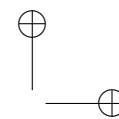
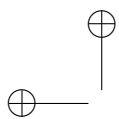
In the dining-room a gorgeous supper had been prepared. M. Voltaire sat at the head of his table, telling stories and mimicing actors, till a breath of cool air from the garden suddenly reminded him of his seventy years. He got up and addressed the company: "Love like fools when you are young; work like devils when you are old. It is the only way to live. Good night, my children!" The question where they were all to sleep – for it was too late for them to get back to Geneva – was left for Madame Denis to decide; and with a parting and perhaps too lively joke the hermit of Ferney disappeared.

Long after the candles of the supper-table had guttered down, the old man, once more in his turban and Persian robe, his wig and satin suit upon a chair, was writing, now at this table and now at that; now dictating to Wagnière from his bed, now drawing up a pamphlet which purported to be written by someone else, now making notes for that clear moving document *The History of the Calas*, now bombarding Villars and Richelieu with amusing letters, now tickling the vanity of Madame de Pompadour ("always one of us") and Madame la duchesse de Choiseul – letters in which every line, however airy and discursive, had an end in view. Last, having twice dismissed Wagnière and twice recalled him by thumping on the wall, he took a four-sided sheet of quarto paper, and, inscribing neatly in one corner "*écras: l'inf:*" he began a letter to Comte d'Argental and his wife.

"My angels," it ran, "it is now fifty years since you were good enough to love me a little. I regard myself already as a dead man, although I enliven my last agonies as

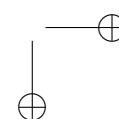
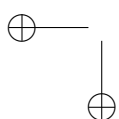






VOLTAIRE

best I can. I know that wherever you are you are making others happy, and that is the best way of being happy oneself. As for me, poor shivery old mortal, I am waging war till the last moment with priests, persecutors, Jesuits, Jansenists, Molinists, Frérons, Pompignancs, right and left, preachers of all sorts – and J. J. Rousseau. I receive a hundred thrusts. I return two hundred. I can still laugh; and thank God! I can still see this life as a farce which sometimes turns to tragedy. . . .” And so on, and so on, till the paper was covered, and the sky had begun to turn a golden pink above the mountains of Savoy, when the turbaned head rested again in the cleft of the pillow.

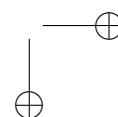






## IZAACK WALTON

It was upon the death of his friend and fellow-fisherman, Sir Henry Wotton in 1639, that Izaak Walton discovered his talents as biographer, for Wotton was to have written the life of Donne. “When I heard that sad news, and heard also that these Sermons were to be printed, and want the ‘Author’s Life,’ which I thought very remarkable; indignation or grief (indeed, I know not which) transported me so far, that I reviewed my forsaken collections, and resolved the World should see the best plain picture of the ‘Author’s Life’ that my artless Pencil, guided by the hand of truth, could present to it.” He then went on to compare himself to that poor slave of Pompey’s who had the honour of burning his great master’s body, with drift-wood for a pyre, because he alone was there to do it. Though he fears his incapacity may be to the disadvantage of the person represented, he says he is sure it will be to “the advantage of the beholder, who shall see the Author’s picture in a natural dress” . . . “And if the Author’s glorious spirit, which now is in Heaven, can have the leisure to look down and see me, the poorest, the meanest of all his friends, in the midst of this officious duty, confident I am, that he will not disdain this well-meant sacrifice to his memory; for, whilst his Conversation made me and many others happy below, I know his Humility and Gentleness was then eminent; and, I have heard Divines say, those Vertues that





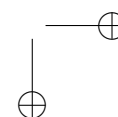
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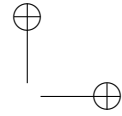
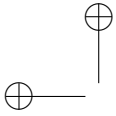
were but sparks upon Earth, become great and glorious flames in Heaven.”

There are affinities between Walton’s art as a biographer and this preface. Of all biographers Walton has the best natural manners. To say he forgets himself in his subject would be to pay him, true a seldom deserved, but still an inadequate compliment; nor would it be accurate. He never forgets himself; he esteems himself as a lover and admirer of good men. Thus there is no cringe or excess in his humility, and no patronage in his judgment; and in his own penetration there is less self-satisfaction than joy in what it discovers. In this preface he shows himself confident only in one respect; though he fears that he cannot do justice to a good man, it will be, he thinks “to the advantage of the beholder” to be shown such a man in “natural dress.”

His skill in showing men in “natural dress,” in introducing gossip, anecdotes, personal touches, has made his *Lives* famous; and when one considers that four out of five of these little biographies are lives of scholars and ecclesiastics holding much the same views, it is remarkable that his unemphatic methods should have differentiated them so clearly. Walton’s figures are far indeed from being “characters”; he never thinks of Donne or of Hooker as a type, his method of portraiture is more intimate, and his skill very far from being artless.

Recall the manner in which Walton tells the story of the two pupils who found “the judicious Hooker” reading Horace while looking after the sheep, his wife having commandeered the out-door man for housework; and how in the house, when “their best entertainment was his quiet company,” they were robbed of that, because





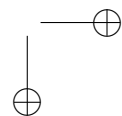
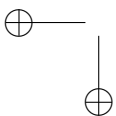
#### IZAACK WALTON

“Richard was called to rock the cradle.” Recall, too, that touch which brings out the humility of the author of *The Ecclesiastical Polity*: “this poor parish clerk and he did never talk but with both their hats on, or both off, at the same time”; a scene which, as Lionel Johnson pointed out, would have delighted Hardy. And what is it that makes Walton’s description of his chance meeting with Dr. Sanderson a “value” in his portrait of Sanderson?

About the time of his printing this excellent Preface I met him accidentally in London in sad-coloured clothes, and, God knows, far from being costly. The place of our meeting was near to Little Britain, where he had been to buy a book which he then had in his hand. We had no inclination to part presently, and, therefore, turned to stand in a corner under a pent-house, for it began to rain, and immediately the wind rose and the rain increased so much that both became so inconvenient as to force us into a cleanly house, where we had bread, cheese, ale, and a fire for our money. This rain and wind were so obliging to me as to force our stay there for at least an hour, to my great content and advantage. . . . And I gladly remember and mention it as an argument of my happiness and his great humility and condescension.”

There is no doubt what it is: it is the same appreciation of human goodness which adds quaint beauty to the comedy of the henpecked Hooker.

Some of Walton’s readers have asked themselves whether he ever shows a sense of humour. That he “loved such mirth as did not make friends ashamed to look upon one another next morning” we know; also, that he could be ready and sly in retort, as in his reported conversation with Fuller about the latter’s style; and certainly when he advises us to put a frog upon the





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fish-hook as though we loved him, he is making a little joke. Yet neither merriness nor readiness imply humour, and the answer is, I think, that he had as much humour as a man can have who is perfectly content, never questions the order of things, and is only interested in the best in everybody. He could not see the comic aspect of Hooker's injudicious marriage; of his being first persuaded by a woman that he wanted a wife, then induced to commission her to find him one, and, lastly, to accept from her hands as though he were already committed, her harridan of a daughter. Walton was too enamoured of that learned man's humility and gentleness to see the comic aspect of this story; indeed admiration of those qualities almost hid from him even its painful side.

It is this happy reverence for goodness, especially of those forms of it, patience, affection, humility, Christian devoutness and religious gratitude, which lends, not only peculiar fragrance to his work, but that air of artlessness and simplicity which disguises his artist's cunning, so that we are apt to think that "simple truth" might after all have been his "utmost skill."

Yet the following passage of gentle Arcadian devoutness from *Compleat Angler* is certainly far from "artless":

"But the nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He that at midnight, when the very laborer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might well be lifted above earth and say: 'Lord, what music has Thou provided for the saints in Heaven, when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth?'"





#### IZAACK WALTON

This passage is as elaborate in its simplicity as the cadenced meditations of Jeremy Taylor; nor could anyone who has ever held a pen believe that the passage in *The Life of Donne* which describes the Dean's sorrow, was not written by one who obeyed in his writing his ear as much as his heart: "Thus, as the Israelites sat mourning by the rivers of Babylon when they remembered Zion, so he gave some ease to his oppressed heart by the venting of his sorrows; thus, he began the day and ended the night; ended the restless night and began the weary day in lamentations." Homely, spontaneous old Izaak! we note your repetition in the final clause; how "night" and "day" are cunningly reversed in repetition, and strengthened by simple adjectives; and we wonder where in all the works of self-conscious craftsmen, we have heard it better done! Far from "artless," too, are even such seeming-casual passages as that in which "Piscator" promises his friends refreshment "at some honest Ale-house, where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck about the walls," or where he stops on his walk to drink milk drawn from "a red cow," and to make a milkmaid sing. Walton was not only a most exact judge of the charm of the contingent interest in narrative; he was clearly most painstaking in detail. His copy of Eusebius has come down to us, and in its inside cover you can still read three of his attempts at one short sentence, which nevertheless, in its place in the *Life of Herbert*, reads as though it had just occurred to him.

Buffon, in that well-known treatise upon style in which he defines it as "the man himself," remarks also that "*le style est comme le bonheur; il vient de la douceur de*





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*l'âme.*" It is, of course, a most incomplete account of the matter. In the case of some authors their "style" may spring from the bitterness of soul. But if an author's manner of writing is to have merits beyond and above clarity and aptness, then the self it reflects must possess a certain unity and coherence. It is the unresolved and conflicting interests, judgments, desires, emotions in the author himself which pull his words and sentences about, and (I am supposing, of course, that he can write in the elementary sense) wrench him towards inharmonious thoughts and inconsistent associations.

From this common condition of internal discord Izaak Walton was born free; he was of one piece. What he loved and enjoyed he did so completely, and they were always the same things, and always in harmony with each other. He had only one ambition, to be the friend of good men. In his long life, which stretched from the Elizabethan age to close upon the revolution of 1688, he saw much that he revered most and that made him happy destroyed and overturned. He was not a man of Olympian calm, neither was he detached; yet thanks to this wholeness, this perpetual agreement of himself with himself, he enjoyed to the last that cheerful and kindly serenity which we catch from him while we read him. Of Izaak Walton at any rate, it is true to say that his style came from "*la douceur de l'âme.*" We need not be fishermen to value his company as a cure for "those splenetic vapours that are called hypochondriacal."





