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THREE
CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

Chesterton, Belloc and Conrad

Portions of whose writings are prescribed for the
B. A. Examination 1926 of Madras University

BY

E. E. SPEIGHT

of the Nizam College and the Osmania University

Hyderabad

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nse ttows are intended to be supplement/y toand .neagre information about these authors given in the xt-book prescribed for the Madras ft.A., George Sampson's Modern Essays.]

The measure of culture is the efficiency of the transformation of raw energies to humanly valuable purposes.

W. Oswald

That the Universe itself is essentially a problem-to-be-solved and that the one supreme concern of man is to discover the secret which gives the solution.
 than this notion I know of nothing more deeply rooted in the soil of modern thought nothing more baneful,

/>. P. Jacks

When you have read these pages you will have done something more than is merely necessary for the moment. And this is a matter of the utmost importance for a student,—to strengthen, by movements of expansion, his return to concentration.

In an examination, as conducted today, it is the movement towards the centre, intense application, which alone can result in what is called scholarship in the narrow sense,—accuracy in perception, understanding and expression.

But there is a higher kind of scholarship, which dreads narrowness of vision as strongly as it resists the tendency to uncontrolled exploring. For its acquisition it is essential to realize that in order to rouse the higher powers of mind there must be constant action and reaction between the individual consciousness and the nearer and remoter environment. In my long experience of the original written work of undergraduates I have always felt that one of the first things necessary for so many of them is to widen their experience of life and of the great things that have been written about life.

There is in the East at present a great deal of shallow criticism of Western civilization, some of it by men of eminence who ought to know very well that beneath the surface of the life of countries like England, France and Germany there are springs of power that have never failed,—springs of a power, too, that makes for goodness in so many ways. It is a fatuous form of self-deception, for any one of us, to overlook the presence of a Vaughan in the days of Rochester, a Berkeley in the days of Shadwell, or of a Barrie, a Francis Jammes or a Paul Claudel in these latter days of Strindberg, Eekhoud, and James Joyce,

It is for these reasons that I have brought together in this brief examination of three contemporary writers of English considerably more than is necessary to the answering of any questions on their work set for the Madras **B.A.** Examination of this year.

They have all of them lived much and written much that might be helpful to a student in higher ordeals than mere book examinations. They are types of English character and mentality which represent the hard, patient, and lasting body of humanity in the West: they have those qualities of perseverance, faith and retrieval which are perhaps the noblest gifts of Europe : they can build out of suffering, they are of the sons of men who can endure through the darkest hours.

The Group in Contrast

i

There are many reasons beyond their accidental grouping in a University Examination syllabus for our being peculiarly interested in a comparison of the writings of Gilbert Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc and Joseph Conrad. Their differences in temperament and outlook are fundamental; in Belloc or Chesterton there is nothing of the deep Slavonic austerity of Conrad, no such power as his of searching the innermost recesses of personality. On the other hand neither Conrad nor Belloc has that priceless gift of bringing us through laughter, and often through incredulity, to such visions of the true and right ways of humanity as Chesterton can in his best moments.

But they have their resemblances, and first and foremost they are all of them surely one in this, that they are men of noble integrity in the realm of letters who know what to praise, and praise royally and without stint, so that our hearts are warmed and our better impulses aroused and confirmed.

Of these three masters of English one is native, of the breed of Dr. Johnson and Charles Dickens, Sir John Falstaff and Father Christmas. One is, by birth and education, more than half French, which may mean we know not how much of Norman or Gaulish ancestry. The third is a Polak, a mystery beyond our ken, a man of the great world-threatening race which throws up types so elemental and yet, in these days of sophistication, so enigmatic as Tolstoi, Tchaikowsky, and shall we say Nicolai Lenin,

II

The very titles of their typical books, Chesterton's *A Shilling for my Thoughts*, Belloc's *Hills and the Sea* and Conrad's *Tales of Unrest* seem to symbolize the men who conferred them. One the jocund journalist, the best of comrades, spinning out of his rotundity an airy network of fancy that holds captive strange gleaming wings of truth. Another a wanderer losing himself in the mystery of wild and lonely places on sea and land, from which he has visions of the march of humanity. The third a potent, almost necromantic revealer of the soul of man unbaffled amid the terrors of the jungle and the ocean beneath the most hostile and tyrannic of skies,—man confronted, as it were, with the greatness and fearfulness of himself over which he rises supreme by faith and by gestures that are as flaming banners to the human race.

In these three men and their books we have the romance, the humour, the high purpose and ardour of our time ; in them, ever, are implied the great things which set apart that other group of

writers of our time most worthy to stand beside them, the authors of *The Woodlanders*, *The Earth Breath*, and *The Crock of Gold*.

They are all of them builders and sustainers, heralds of rare tidings, firm against evil and the apparently sinister league of circumstance in the darkest hours, and they will be remembered when so much of our age and its fever is forgotten.

There are moments when they come very near to each other, these three,—when even behind the rapid change of mask of Chesterton we see in those glowing eyes the signals of a faith that is fostered by a deeper consciousness of the unfathomable relations between the human soul and what we envisage as the outer world and its story. Listen to these words about the ancient thorn tree of Glastonbury, which legend associates with Joseph of Arimathea. "Modern people must make scientifically certain that St. Joseph did or did not go to Glastonbury, despite the fact that it is quite impossible to find out; and that it does not, in a religious sense, very much matter. But it is essential to feel that he may have gone to Glastonbury: all songs, arts, and dedications branching and blossoming like the thorn, are rooted in some such sacred doubt. Taken thus, not heavily like a problem but lightly like an old tale, the thing does lead one along the road of very strange realities and the thorn is found growing in the heart of a very secret maze of the soul." In these writers also we have an utterance of that strong feeling of oneness with the heart of Europe which is so marked in Belloc,—and in them are words which might be set as a seal on so many of the powerful tales that discover to us the rich personality of Conrad.

III

Sometimes it seems as if they are purposely affording us matter for contrast; they have been reading each other: they help each other to discoveries along the common way of life. In one of his stories with an English setting Conrad gives us the following picture.

"From the edge of a copse a waggon with two horses was rolling gently along the ridge. Raised above our heads upon the sky-line, it loomed up against the red sun, triumphantly big, enormous, like a chariot of giants drawn by two slow-stepping steeds of legendary proportions. And the clumsy figure of the man plodding at the head of the leading horse projected itself on the background of the Infinite with a heroic uncouthness."

Similarly Chesterton, recounting some early experience in a motor-car, exalts a humbler wayfarer:

"I saw the old woman and the donkey *passant*, as they might have appeared heraldically on the shield of some heroic family. . . . But seen from behind they looked like one monstrous animal; the dark donkey's ears seemed like dreadful wings, and the tall back of the woman, erect like a tree, seemed to grow taller and taller till one could almost scream."

There we have the child in Chesterton, seeing the wonders of fairy tales in the simplest things. But a little later and he comes nearer the depth and noble austerity of Conrad :

" Thus it fell that we went shattering down that short, sharp hill again before that poor old woman and her donkey had managed to crawl to the top of it, and seeing them under a different light, saw them very differently. Black against the sun, they had seemed comic ; but bright against greenwood and grey cloud, they were not comic but tragic ; for there are not a few things that seem fantastic in the twilight, and in the sunlight are sad. I saw that she had a grand, gaunt mask of ancient honour and endurance, and wide eyes sharpened to two shining points, as if looking for the small hope on the horizon of human life. I also saw that her cart contained carrots."

These two records of visions familiar to those who move about our misty English roads are very similar, and yet in them we find something of the main difference between these two writers. Here the subject matter is practically the same ; also the treatment, the lead from the trivial to the sublime.

But it is in style that they stand apart. Chesterton writes with an easy flow, unlaboured, hardly conscious, it seems. Conrad has obviously worked at the picture, measuring his rhythms, balancing their musical effect, and in all probability thinking it out in French at the same time. The result is that we have something over and above description,—the light and shadow of the writer's soul, which he would never think of dispelling by such a sudden tumble as that by which, in his last line, Chesterton pulls us down to the hard facts of life.

IV

Chesterton stays at home and tells us the strangest things about familiar facts and thoughts. Thus he pleases the great majority.

Like James Stephens' old man in Connaught, " he would tell you a thing you know all your life, and you would think it was a new thing."

He may tour the continent, but it is to get home again. Just as he is leaving his home in that dull suburb Battersca for France and Germany, he says to a friend :

" I am going to wander over the whole world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island which I wish to find : an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea_____ Do you suppose that I go to France to see France ?

The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign lands ; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land."

Belloc is a wanderer through Western Europe : he does not care to be far from the Atlantic. He gives us pictures of himself in strange haunts where few can follow him. His public is select, but not meagre.

" A long way off a man was playing a little stringed instrument, and there was also in the air a noise of insects buzzing in the night heat; when all of a sudden the whole place awoke to the noise of a piercing cry which but for its exquisite tone might have been the cry of pain, so shrill was it and so coercing to the ear. It was maintained, and before it fell was followed by a succession of those quarter-tones which only the Arabs have, and which I had thought were banished from Europe."

Conrad leads us into tropic regions, of sea and land, of the world and of the human heart. We come out of one of his tales as out of the deadly river jungles of Malaya, or after long torment on the wildest of ocean-welter with visions of unearthly beauty in our memory about which the sense of time has passed into that of eternity.

" The bay was waking up. The smoke of morning fires stood in faint spirals higher than the heads of palms ; people moved between the houses ; a herd of buffaloes galloped clumsily across a green slope ; the slender figures of boys brandishing sticks appeared black and leaping in the long grass ; a coloured line of women, with water bamboos on their heads, moved swaying through a thin grove of fruit-trees. Karain stopped in the midst of his men and waved his hand ; then, detaching himself from the splendid group, walked alone to the water's edge and waved his hand again. The schooner passed out to sea between the steep headlands that shut in the bay, and at the same instant Karain passed out of our life for ever."

V

The seven essays in the volume we are studying—of which one only is by Conrad—hardly give us a just idea of the variety of work done by each of the three. But it is possible to find passages which are fully typical of each personality, passages which we can place with confidence. Here we have Chesterton speaking :

" Nearly all the best and most precious things in the Universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing."

The laughter release[^] by such a whimsical remark is of pure joy. You long to listen to such a man talking to children.

This is Belloc :

" When we had done all this, there fell upon us the beneficent and deliberate evening ; so that as we sat a little while together near the rakes, we saw the valley more solemn and dim around us, and all the trees and hedgerows quite still, and held by a complete silence. Then I paid my companion his wage, and bade him a good night, till we should meet in the same place before sunrise."

It is a benediction, a consecration : we are in the presence of devout worship. And the words, especially the last sentence, have the simplicity of exaltation, as if written, like many of Bunyan's sentences, during a transfiguration.

In fact, some of the most affecting passages of Belloc are those in which his speech seems purified of city accent, in which, no doubt by long wandering among simpler peoples, he gets back to the folk-speech, as we have it in old stories. Such speech as the following from an old Russian tale :

" The old man smiled. ' In my time,' he answered, ' no one ever thought of such a sin as buying or selling bread.' "

Belloc shares this gift of moving, almost Biblical speech with George Borrow and John Tyndall, other wanderers among simple and true-hearted mountain folk. There is a sentence by the latter which I have long remembered with delight, and which Belloc himself might have written : "I paid him what I owed him, when he took my hand, and, silently bending down his head, kissed it ; then standing erect, he stretched forth his right hand, which I grasped firmly in mine, and bade him farewell ; and thus I parted from Johann Auer, my brave and truthful chamois-hunter.!"

Lastly Conrad, contrasting the winds of East and West:

" The King of the West never intrudes upon the recognized dominion of his kingly brother. He is a barbarian, of a northern type. Violent without craftiness, and furious without malice, one may imagine him seated masterfully with a double-edged sword on his knees upon the painted and gilt clouds of the sunset, bowing his shock head of golden locks, a flaming beard over his breast, imposing, colossal, mighty-limbed, with a thundering voice, distended cheeks, and fierce blue eyes, urging the speed of his gales.

" The other, the East King, the King of blood-red sunrises, I represent to myself as upright in sunshine, resting a smoothshaven cheek in the palm of his hand, impenetrable, secret, full of wiles, fine-drawn, keen,—meditating aggressions."

Now there is much in this, more than we are likely to find in any English descriptive prose but that of Ruskin, with whom Conrad may profitably be compared in this field. It has been said that the adjective is the enemy of the noun, but here we find a background, as it were, of epithets, on which are thrown those

monstrous, dream-like projections of humanity. Always in the best of Conrad we have this intensity, this vision of bright or ominous cosmic shadows thrown by common things. But for Conrad there is no escape from this portentous world on the wings of laughter,

VI

They are all men of reticence, and that in spite of the fact that they all tell us so much of their experience. Each in his own way delights us with those experiences,—Chesterton by making fun of himself ; Belloc by allowing us to share his wanderings and his rapture ; Conrad, in his aristocratic manner, by taking us into his confidence and making us feel that we are capable of such insight and exaltation as his own.

But each in his own way conserves his foregrounds, as Nietzsche would say. We hear them talking, we share their meditations, and we meet their friends, but they do not ask us into their breakfast rooms, nor do we catch them in lax moments as so often happens with a writer like Leigh Hunt. Conrad, indeed, has definitely confessed what he calls his constitutional inability to let himself be seen in his slippers and dressing gown. Such reticence is, of course, a part of the artistic temperament, and it is closely connected with the sense of fitness and proportion, the feeling that a work of art is strengthened by its omissions as well as by its inclusions.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton

I

The mere question of style as it affects the work of these three writers is easiest to appraise in Chesterton, for the reason that it has been largely conditioned by circumstances. His inclinations are to the literary life, and he is no mean poet in a serious way. But journalism allured him, and to be a successful journalist one must bear one's share in maintaining or increasing the circulation of the organs one writes for, which is a task beyond even the best poetry in these days. Chesterton's method of circumventing hard facts has been to camouflage, to get the things nearest his heart written under various disguises. Some of these disguises are antithesis, epigram, paradox, the fairy tale, playing the clown, and a serious and delusive childlikeness. The salutary results he reaches by these methods are precisely those of the pulpit, the unwritten laws of public school life, the principles of sound trading and of true sportsmanship. With these disguises he manages to carry over, where of others we might expect no little unction, a good deal of real poetry in everything but form.

Thus like a true artist he has accepted the conventions of his time, worked within its bounds and yet contrived to say what he wanted to say to the huge delight of countless who would have rejected more sober attempts at their suffrage.

This does not mean, however, that he has no inclination to serious and direct expression of thought and feeling we keep sacred from the intrusion of even the laughter that is near to tears. There are things he has written, even in his fantastic stories, as solemn, as deeply romantic, as anything of Belloc or Conrad.

" He took one stride forward as into the heart of a whirlwind ; and they met on the top of that windy hill as if they had come from the ends of the earth."

" He stood there for a moment like a man in heavy armour.... He was one of those to whom it is natural to be ceremonial. Even the music in his mind, too deep and distant for him to catch or echo, was the music of old and ritual dances and not of revelry: and it was not for nothing that he had built gradually about him that garden of the grey stone fountain and the great hedge of yew."

II

In cunning of expression Chesterton has certainly been influenced by the masters of persiflage, those writers who from Congreve to Guedalla represent a type of mind weary of jargon, striving to get away from woolliness to the clear precision of the art of Cellini or the Japanese artisans.

English literature is poorer in such writers than French, which has the great advantage of a language somehow more tractable when a sting or shock is intended.

It was our own Swift who said such things as : " Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse."

Sheridan was capable of: " When a scandalous story is believed against one, there certainly is no comfort like the consciousness of having deserved it."

And the cleverest of all was Oscar Wilde, whose method Chesterton has applied with as startling effect if with less consistent brilliance. It is a youthful pose in most cases, easily learnt and imitated, and it produced such things as the following :

" He (Gladstone) was good in the worst possible sense of the word."

" A teeming, seething, busy mass whose virtue was industry, and whose industry was vice."

" Mr. Bernard Shaw has no enemies, but is intensely disliked by all his friends."

" Though Belgium is not quite strong enough to be a nation, she is quite strong enough to be an empire."

These might well have been conceived by the same whimsical brain, but the first is by A. W. Kinglake, the second is Whistler's branding of American life, the third is a typical saying by Wilde, and the last a piece of Chesterton's satire.

And, of course, simpler forms of antithesis are to be found among the staid writers in frequent use. Ruskin, akin to Chesterton in a number of good qualities, reminds us of him in such passages as these : " Over German religious pictures the inscription *See how Pious I am* can be read at a glance by any clear-sighted person. Over French and English religious pictures the inscription *See how Impious I am* is equally legible."

The danger of adopting such a method is of course that it may come to be done for its own sake, and so lead nowhere: that is the literary vice of Wilde. In the case of Chesterton it is employed for a double purpose. It serves to give the writer a standing of independence of conventional or lazy habits of thought,—and here Chesterton differs from Wilde in that in him there is no arrogance or mere impudence. Secondly, Chesterton always surprises us by giving what appear to be, and often are, perfectly good reasons for such startling statements : like Blake, by whom also he is strongly influenced, he has a moral purpose behind his whimsicality and paradox. There is no doubt that he goes too far at times, as when he says :

" You may remark that the countries where there is no revolution are the countries where there is no law ; where mental chaos has clouded every intelligible legal principle—such countries as Morocco and modern England."

But in such affirmations as the following we can see, without following him further, his possible line of extrication :

" What ruins mankind is the ignorance of the expert."

" Like every great mystic he was also a great rationalist."

" Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason."

" All through life," says one of the later analytic psychologists, " we possess, side by side with the newly recruited, directed and adapted thought, a phantastic thought which corresponds to the thought of the centuries of antiquity and barbarism."

At times we are inclined to believe that something like this is the explanation of Chesterton's stubborn refusal to think as his fellows do. Sometimes we feel that he is trying to reach the truth by a kind of Hegelian dialectic. And there are occasions when he is obviously amusing himself in the manner we are made familiar with in the writing of the late Samuel Butler, and in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, books which are likely to outlive a great deal of the serious literature of their time.

III

If this were only a method of Chesterton and nothing more, the world would have grown weary of his writing long ago : his books would have been merely a collection of problems solved as it were, by the same mathematical or logical process. In an essay on *Humanitarianism and Strength* he lets us into the secret of his continual power to surprise : it is not so much his method as his reaction to the complexity of the world as it is revealed to him. Reading his essays we are looking at life through a very unusual medium of strange but corrective refraction.

" Human history is so rich and complicated that you can make out a case for any course of improvement or retrogression. I could make out that the world has been growing more democratic, for the English franchise has certainly grown more democratic. I could also make out that the world has been growing more aristocratic, for the English Public Schools have certainly grown more aristocratic."

But this does not mean that Chesterton is unable to find his way through the bewildering maze of the world. His is no mere sharpness of the sophisticated or the gamin : all the roots of his happiness and optimism are in morality.

There is no doubt that for the sake of entertaining his readers Chesterton can and does make out a good many things which support ideas others would regard as mere whim or fantasy, for he is strongly on the side of the tellers of fairy tales.

" If you really read the fairy tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other—the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some conditions Bluebeard's wife may open all doors but one. A promise is broken to a cat, and the whole world goes wrong

A girl is given a box on condition that she does not open it; she opens it and all the evils of this world rush out at her. A man and woman are put in a garden on condition that they do not eat one fruit: they eat it, and lose their joy in all the fruits of the earth. . . . It is surely obvious that all ethics ought to be taught to this fairy-tale tune : that if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided. . . . Not only can these fairy tales be enjoyed because they are moral, but morality can be enjoyed because it puts us in fairy-land, in a world at once of wonder and war."

This last alliterative phrase give us very tersely the background of Chesterton's activities, and he himself is full of the wonder of a child and the fighting spirit of a religious reformer. His innocence is not to be disguised by his garrulousness, nor his intense earnestness by the twinkle in his eyes. Moreover, where with lighter minded writers we are often merely startled out of our apathy, with Chesterton we are taught and reprovved. At times his voice is as austere and deeply trusty as that of George Eliot in her moments of vision, as when she says : " Joy and peace are not resignation : resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed—that you don't expect to be allayed."

IV

And there are times when we feel that Chesterton, as Conrad to a certain extent and Algernon Blackwood still further, is attempting in words to express what has been startlingly described as " the increasing pressure on consciousness from a new direction."

The writer who uses these words, Claude Bragdon, in his *Four-Dimensional Vistas*, has also given us a cheery message which should be the motto not only of the scientist, but of the poet in the wider sense of the term : " Let us conceive of space not only as room to move ponderable bodies in, but as room to think, to feel, to strike out in unimaginable directions, to overtake felicities and knowledges unguessed by experience and preposterous to common sense."

This release from space with its corresponding release from time connect the modern thinker with the oldest and noblest of Chinese philosophies, the teaching of Lao Tze, generally known as Taoism. We can imagine Chesterton dilating on such sayings as these :

" If man could only roam empty through life, who would be able to injure him ?"

" The best language is that which is not spoken; the best form of action is that which is without deeds."

" Take no heed of time, nor of right and wrong; but, passing into the realm of the Infinite, take your final rest therein."

Of all writers of his class Chesterton seems to know where he stands and why he is there. From essayists, perhaps more than from other gentlemen of the pen, dogmatism is tolerated : in Chesterton's case it becomes an enjoyable part of his performance. There is nothing vague or tentative about his assertions. He seems to delight in putting himself into positions inviting challenge, and then in forcing his way out—he never wriggles or dodges—by sheer health of heart and brain,—and more often than not he carries conviction, for he nearly always leads us to a conclusion on the humane side of things. Paradox is for him but a prelude to a striking restatement of the good old truths. We can imagine Oscar Wilde making us laugh by his sheer perversity in the elucidation of such propositions as the following, which are taken from various books of Chesterton.

" The most sentimental thing in the world is to hide your feelings."

" A wheel is the sublime paradox ; one part of it is always going forward and the other part always going back."

" Modesty is too fierce and elemental a thing for the modern pedants to understand ; I had almost said too savage a thing. It has in it the joy of escape and the ancient shyness of freedom."

" Playing as children mean playing is the most serious thing in the world. And as soon as we have small duties or small sorrows we have to abandon to some extent so enormous and ambitious a plan of life. We have enough strength for politics and commerce and art and philosophy; we have not enough strength for play."

But it is only Chesterton himself who uses such statements to draw from them helpful constructive teaching and spiritual illumination, and that in a brief and bright way, in contrast to the cumbrous manner of Hazlitt in, say, his essay on *The Ignorance of the Learned*.

VI

Sir James Barrie is said to have propounded the excellent and fertile idea of a world in which people act on their impulses, however contrary to established custom,—for example, if you are riding in a railway carriage and wish to have the window open while the party opposite insist on having it shut, you simply throw that person out on to the line. It is something like the idea of a war to end war, a kind of convention to end conventions of the straitlaced sort, and it would naturally be repugnant to respectable and complacent sections of society. It is this idea which Chesterton appears to have seized on in much of his fiction, his tales of topsy-turvydom, in which he comes very close to the manner of Andersen, Grimm and the nameless tellers of old fairy stories. He says in one of his extravagant stories: " We've

all been a lot too tame." He loves to set his fancy—his fantasy—to work and baffle circumstance : " Clergymen can be policemen ; rugs can rage like wild animals ; tea-cosies can smell of the sea; if only there is at the back of them all one bright and amusing idea." He shares with Andersen and Lewis Carroll and Barrie what Edith Sichel calls " that fascinating and elusive power of mingling matter-of-fact and fancy—the same combination that makes children such enchanting, such alarming companions." And it is so easy for his characters to pass into other worlds, as in *Tales of the Long Bow* :

" This world in which he himself wore garlands of green cabbage and in which his old friend the lawyer got married suddenly like a man going mad—this world was a new world, at once fresh and frightening, in which he could hardly understand the figures that were walking about, even his own."

In these tales all his characteristic devices appear and he comes out with fragments of his wide fund of knowledge much as he does in his essays. He will startle us with the suggestion of people going about in watercress, and at once he brings forward a reasonable explanation when he makes a girl say :

" They might well wear watercress : they are water-creatures : they go with the stream."

He gets off his socialism with a joke :

" ' It's land-owners like that,' he said, ° who have made England. It's all very well for Radicals to talk ; but where should we be without the land-owners ?'

' Oh, I'm all for land-owners,' said Hood rather wearily, ' I like them so much that I should like more of them. More, more land-owners. Hundreds and thousands of them.' "

VII

He has bright moments when his powers of description seem heightened and his figurative language is as sharp as that of the best of our modern Irish writers. It is James Stephens who says :

" While he sat a young woman came along the road and stood gazing earnestly at this house. Her hair was as black as night and as smooth as still water, but her face came so stormily forward that her quiet attitude had no quietness in it."

Chesterton has the same humorous freshness :

" It was opened tremulously by an old man with a face so wrinkled that the wrinkles seemed more distinctly graven than the features themselves, which seemed lost in the labyrinth of them. He might have crawled out of the hole in a gnarled tree, and he might have been a thousand years old."

Another secret of the charm of Chesterton as an essayist is a device practised by the best writers of short stories who are not content to give us what Tchekoff gives us—vivid cross-sections of life strongly illuminated, as some one has pointed out, much as moving pictures. This more complicated method involves the addition of some secondary motive or idea, which sets off the main subject in unusual lights. Thus when he writes on rain he does not merely point out such things as the effect of rain : "It gives the roads something of the beauty of Venice. Shallow lakes reiterate every detail of earth and sky ; we dwell in a double universe." He leaves description to Shelley and brings in two other ideas, those of bathing and drinking :

" Our philanthropists are eager to establish public baths everywhere. Rain surely is a public bath ; it might almost be called mixed bathing."

" All around me as I write is a noise of Nature drinking, and Nature makes a noise when she is drinking, being by no means refined. If I count it a Christian mercy to give a cup of cold water to a sufferer, shall I complain of these multitudinous cups of cold water handed round to all living things ; a cup of water for every shrub ; a cup of water for every weed ? I would be ashamed to grumble at it. As Sir Philip Sidney said, their need is greater than mine—especially for water."

VIII

G. K. Chesterton's application of his own humane sympathy and his wide reading of history to burning questions of modern life may be illustrated by quotations from his ephemeral writings, which like those of Lamb, Hazlitt, are likely to live longer than many more ambitious productions.

In *Tremendous Trifles* he says :

" The French Revolution ended in defeat: the kings came back across a carpet of dead at Waterloo. The Revolution had lost its last battle : but it had gained its first object. It had cut a chasm. The world has never been the same since. No one after that has ever been able to treat the poor merely as a pavement.

" These jewels of God, the poor, are still treated as mere stones of the street; but as stones that may sometimes fly. If it please God, you and I may see some of the stones flying again before we see death. But here I only remark the interesting fact that the conquered almost always conquer. Sparta killed Athens with a final blow, and she was born again. Sparta went away victorious, and died slowly of her wounds."

Since this was written, the half hope of the last sentence has been fulfilled in terrible earnest, and it will be interesting to see whether Chesterton will react as Wordsworth reacted to the

French Revolution, in view of the sinister turn which things have been taking in so many cases where the poor have risen to power.

The other quotation is from *Alarms and Discursions*, and summarises what he calls the only two sane attitudes of a European statesman towards Eastern peoples, in contrast to the sentimental attitude of the Imperialist of the Roosevelt School:

" There is much to be said for letting that calm immemorial life of slave and sultan, temple and palm tree flow on as it has always flowed. The best reason of all, the reason that affects me most finally, is that if we left the rest of the world alone we might have some time for attending to our own affairs, which are urgent to the point of excruciation. All history points to this : that intensive cultivation in the long run triumphs over the widest extensive cultivation ____
A great nation ought not to be a hammer, but a magnet

" That is my political theory : that we should make England worth copying instead of telling everybody to copy her. But it is not the only possible theory.... It may be said:

" We Europeans are the heirs of the Roman Empire ; when all is said we have the largest freedom, the most exact science, the most solid romance. We have a deep though undefined obligation to give as we have received from God ; because the tribes of men are truly thirsting for these things as for water. All men really want clear laws : we can give clear laws. All men really want hygiene : we can give hygiene. We are not merely imposing Western ideas. We are simply fulfilling human ideas—for the first time. On this line... we must go much further. If it is our duty to give our best, there can be no doubt about what is our best. The greatest thing our Europe has made is the CITIZEN : the idea of the average man, free and full of honour, voluntarily invoking on his own sin the just vengeance of his city ... Democracy, the idea of the people fighting and governing—this is the only thing we have to give."

IX

From what has been written it will be understood that Chesterton, even in his creative moods, like Swift or George Eliot or James Stephens of our own time, is at heart a critic. As a judge of literature he employs the same characteristic method and has the same sanity in his outlook." In these days of complexity, when our knowledge of literature is becoming encyclopaedic, we are naturally grateful to any critic who discovers a happy and convincing power of generalization. This Chesterton has, whether he is dealing with the functions or the progress or the individual manifestations of literary activity.

" The whole meaning of literature is simply to cut a long story -Jhort."

" Science boasts of the distance of its stars ; of the terrific remoteness of the things of which it has to speak. But poetry and religion always insist upon the proximity, the almost menacing closeness of the things with which they are concerned."

" Before Christianity existed there was a European school of optimist mystics ; among whom the great name is Plato. And ever since there have been movements and appearances in Europe of this healthier heathen mysticism, which did not shrink from the shapes of things or the emphatic colours of existence. Something of the sort was in the Nature worship of Renaissance philosophers. . . . This solid and joyful occultism appears at its best in Swedenborg ; but perhaps at its boldest and most brilliant in William Blake."

This last quotation has a special interest. Of course it needs some such enlargement as is given in Dr. Caroline Spurgeon's excellent little book *Mysticism in English Literature*. But here it stands as a confession of personal inclination, for there is much in common between Chesterton and the fascinating blending of strength and refinement in the personality of the man who wrote the *Songs of Innocence* and conceived those wonderful designs of *Space* and *The Eagle*. In an essay entitled *The Nightmare*,—and by the way the titles of Chesterton's essays are often no guide to the subjects introduced—he explains the work of the artist almost in terms of Blake's designs :

" All really imaginative literature is only the contrast between the weird curves of Nature and the straightness of the soul. Man the central pillar of the world, must be upright and straight ; around him all the trees and beasts and elements and devils may crook and curl like smoke if they choose. . . . It is not always wrong even to go, like Dante, to the brink of the lowest promontory and look clown at hell. It is when you look up at hell that a serious miscalculation has probably been made."

X

There is a danger to which all writers with mannerism expose themselves : they make their impression by this mannerism, whether it be a subterfuge or a native turn of mind, and in these lack-leisure days the matter behind is likely to be forgotten first. There are people who feel that Chesterton has overdone the paradox, that he has his specious and even meretricious moments. But to think like this is to do ourselves an injustice. Chesterton is full of marrow. In this matter of literary criticism alone he often gives us, by his depth and insight, his well-supported common sense, and his luminous asides, just the help we are needing. And he shows us the writer and his work not isolated but partaking of the life around in its local and temporary, its radical and universal relations, with the result that we are always stirred to thought and often made to revise our own conclusions.

Of the poets who wrote before Wordsworth he says :

" They preferred writing about great men to writing about great hills ; but they sat on the great hills to write it. They gave out much less about Nature, but they drank in, perhaps, much more. . . . The greenness of a thousand green leaves clustered into the live green figure of Robin Hood. . . . The inspiration went in like sunbeams and came out like Apollo."

Of mysticism he has refreshing things to say :

" A verbal accident has confused the mystical with the mysterious. . . . No true mystic ever loved darkness rather than light. No pure mystic ever loved mere mystery. The mystic does not bring doubts or riddles : the doubts and riddles exist already. We all feel the riddle of the earth without anyone to point it out. The mystery of life is the plainest part of it. . . . Whatever else we have grown accustomed to, we have grown accustomed to the unaccountable . . . The mystic is not the man who makes mysteries but the man who destroys them."

His characterisation of the literature of the later nineteenth century,—as a matter of fact only one portion of a long period of eccentricity when compared with the best of French literature or with our own literature of the eighteenth century—is none the less true because he masks himself to continue the vogue :

" Every literary man began consciously to consider himself as a character in a piny. He exaggerated his own oddities because he had to conflict with other and opposite oddities In all the most striking writers of our own time one can feel this picturesque and partisan quality. . . . One can feel it, for instance, in Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. Bernard Shaw ; one can feel the footlights at their feet. Nothing could be more different from this than the old, especially the mediaeval conception of the function of a man. The mediaevals believed that one man should have in his head the balance of the whole Universe. . . . Every man should have the equipoise of everything. . . . The last of the mediaevals in England was Herbert Spencer."

Rarely, it must be, has a writer of such appearance of omniscience ever been dealt with so concisely, and yet so tellingly, as in those ten last words.

All Chesterton's better qualities are strongly evident in his critical studies of great authors. His broadmindedness, breezy independence and sense of responsibility are vivified by piquant and humorous modes of expression which make his writing a constant refreshment. His *Browning* is one of the best volumes in the English Men of Letters Series, worthy in various ways to stand beside that crowning triumph of modern criticism, Raleigh's tribute to Shakespeare. Both volumes are remarkable for insight of a rare kind, appearing in Chesterton's book, as in his memorable

and enthusiastic study of Dickens, from which I also quote, in luminous creative utterance, of manifold implication, linking philosophy with poetry, experience with understanding, wide and wise study with sanative common sense.

" Browning is still writing about himself, a subject of which he, like all good and brave men, was profoundly ignorant."

" Like everyone else, he had to discover first the universe, then humanity, and at last himself."

" He has grasped the great but now neglected truth, that a man may actually be great, yet not in the least able."

" Dickens is like life in the truer sense, in the sense that he is akin to the living principle in us and in the universe ; he is like life, at least in this detail, that he is alive.... Dickens' art is like life because, like life, it is irresponsible, because, like life, it is incredible ."

" The fierce poet of the Middle Ages wrote *Abandon hope, all ye who enter here* over the gates of the lower world. The emancipated poets of today have written it over the gates of the world. But if we are to understand the story of Dickens and his work we must erase that apocalyptic writing, if only for an hour. . . . Surrender the very flower of your culture ; give up the very jewel of your pride ; abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here."

" Dickens' idea of a desolate place is a place where anything can happen, he has no idea of that desolate place where nothing can happen. This is a good thing for his soul, for the place where nothing can happen is hell."

" Thackeray's creation was observation: Dickens' was poetry and is therefore permanent."

" Mr. Samuel Pickwick is the fairy prince ; that is to say, he is the abstract wanderer and wonderer, the Ulysses of comedy; the half-human and half-elfin creature—human enough to wander, human enough to wonder, but still sustained with that merry fatalism that is natural to immortal beings—sustained by that hint of divinity which tells him in the darkest hour that he is doomed to live happily ever afterwards. He has set out walking to the end of the world, but he knows he will find an inn there."

Of the moderns, such men as Maeterlinck, Whitman, Meredith and Bernard Shaw he has pregnant things to say :

" Significance is to them a wild thing that may leap upon them from any hiding place... Their difference from the old epic poets is the whole difference between an age that fought with dragons and an age that fights with microbes."

What a striking figure of speech this is of an age whose men of science are discovering in things far less than microbes the structure of the world systems themselves ?

No writings would better repay a close sifting than those of Chesterton. They are strewn with golden sayings and precious thoughts, for Chesterton is a preacher who has chosen the pen with its retirement in place of the personal publicity of the pulpit. He is also that rarer being, of the kin of Joubert, Novalis and Emerson, men who by virtue of their sympathies and imaginative power may be classed as poet-teachers. Such things as the following Chesterton throws off everywhere : you never know when he is going to lay aside his mask of the moment and look you straight in the face as he speaks to you with the voice of a prophet or an angel of annunciation.

" The really great man is the man who makes every man feel great."

" I deny most energetically that anything is, or can be, uninteresting."

" Nothing ought to be too big for a brave man to attack : but there are some things too big for a man to patronise."

" In the end it will not matter to us whether we wrote well or ill; whether we fought with flails or reeds. It will matter to us greatly on which side we fought."

" Right is right, even if nobody does it,"

" Everyone on this earth should believe, amid whatever madness or moral failure, that his life and temperament have some object on the earth. Everyone on the earth should believe that he has something to give to the world which cannot otherwise be given."

Hilaire Belloc

I

Years ago, when I boy, I came near to Hilaire Belloc, listening to him in the hall of the Oxford Union, and admiring him as we admire those young men in whom we see a manliness and understanding beyond their years, power untainted by precocity, and under perfect self-command. One day in a second-hand bookshop we found ourselves in the same tight corner between two fascinating shelves, and moved apart with courteous bearing to let each other pass. Neither of us spoke, but such was the influence of his personality that I have never forgotten that incident, which remains one of the clearest of my memories. Years later I recalled it when I happened to be passing a class room in a Japanese college and heard a voice I knew well, the deep bassoon-like intonation of a sturdy student who made the walls quiver as he spoke. He was reading a passage from that wonderful anthology of Belloc's prose,—*Hills and the Sea*—and I wished that the author had been there to hear his enthusiastic words fired out as by a machine-gun. It is a great thing to have become a classic to an alien people before attaining middle age.

II

To learn the secret of that personality in its manysidedness there is no such book as *The Path to Rome*, one of the great travel-diaries of English Literature, the result of a vow made by Belloc in his youth to tramp from Toul in France to Rome, the city of his heart he calls the capital of all our fortunes.

"I will walk all the way, take advantage of no wheeled thing, and will sleep rough and cover thirty miles a day, and I will hear mass in St. Peter's."

Travelling with him along the Moselle, over the wintry mountains of German Switzerland, and through the fierce heat of Lombardy and the scorched Apennine hillsides, we share his pilgrim joys and pains, and learn much that no guide books mention. It is written in the easy colloquial style of a man of much culture redeemed by a passion for the primitive delights of life and especially of human intercourse, in describing which there is often a touch of solemnity, a reminder of Bunyan rather than of that traveller of other days, Sterne.

"The peasants sat outside their houses in the twilight accepting the cool air; everyone spoke to me as I marched through, and I answered them all, nor was there in any of their salutations the omission of good fellowship or of the name of God."

Of the people of the remoter parts of North Italy he says :

" Certainly these people have a benediction upon them, granted them for their simple lives and their justice. Their eyes are fearless and kindly. They are courteous, straight, and all have in them laughter and sadness. They are full of songs, of memories, of the stories of their native place; and their worship is conformable to the world that God made.*

He reveals himself in many lights as he moves along in his loneliness. When he tells us of himself he tells us much in little, with the utmost frankness.

" ' What do men mean by the desire to be dissolved and to enjoy the spirit free and without attachments ? ' That many men have so desired there can be no doubt, and the best men, whose holiness one recognises at once, tell us that the joys of the soul are incomparably higher than those of the living man. In India moreover, there are great numbers of men who do the most fantastic things with the object of thus unprisoning the soul, and Milton talks of the same thing with evident conviction, and the Saints all praise it in chorus. But what is it ? For my part I cannot understand so much as the meaning of the words, for every pleasure I know comes from an intimate union between my body and my very human mind, which last receives, confirms, revives, and can summon up again what my body has experienced. Of pleasures, however, in which my senses have had no part I know nothing, so I have determined to take them upon trust and see whether they could make the matter clearer in Rome."

Moving southward through the Alps, at the first caress of a soothing breeze he had not felt before, he bursts out in an ecstasy :

" I know what it is ! It is the South and a great part of my blood."

Yet for him the four rivers of Paradise are all in the north, which he names the place for men : the Seine, the Oise, the Thames and the Arun.

He walks during the nights, to avoid the heat, and the coming of dawn rouses that energy of hope which is such a strong part of all he writes :

" The road before me, the pass on my left, the mass of the great hills, had become mixed into the increasing light, that is, into the familiar and invigorating present which I have always found capable of opening the doors of the future with a gesture of victory."

He comes into danger at times, when his beggarly boots and raiment form too good a disguise, and he is mistaken by excitable Italian countryman for some reprobate. Then his anger overmasters his fear, and he remembers, his ruggedness leaving his Christianity behind, an old rule of guidance :

" God disposes of victory, but, as the world is made, when men smile, smile ; when men laugh, laugh ; when men hit, hit ; when men shout, shout ; and when men curse, curse you also, my son, and in doubt let them always take the first move."

He conquers boorishness by a politeness that is French rather than English, as with the proud Italian stationer of Bellinzona, who churlishly let him study a map hanging in his shop. As he left Belloc said : " Sir, I shall always hold in remembrance the day on which you did me this signal kindness ; nor shall I forget your courtesy and goodwill." Whereat the man melted, and bade him remain.

His little superstitions make him all the more human. Before the old woman of the dark inn he makes the sign of the evil eye. He passes a priest, and notes that " it was lucky I did not see him first. Anyhow, I touched iron at once, to wit, a key in my pocket." And when he sees an acolyte with half his head shaven he wishes he had an Omen-book to tell what it might mean.

He has touches of humour, though he can hardly be said to bubble over with merriment.

" Through her politeness ran a sense of what Teutons call Duty, which would once have repelled me ; but I have wandered over a great part of the world, and I know it now to be a distorted kind of virtue."

" It is our duty to pity all men. It is our duty to pity those who are in prison. It is our duty to pity those who are not in prison. How much more is it the duty of a Christian man to pity the rich who cannot ever get into prison ?"

His lighter humour is best illustrated by his nonsense verse, a class of writing which has proved the creative solace of some of our brightest English minds from Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll to Belloc and Chesterton themselves. As the article by the latter on Little Birds Who Won't Sing contains specimens of such verses, it is only fair that Belloc should be represented too. I have not heard that Conrad was ever guilty of such innocent practices.

THE FROG

Be kind and tender to the Frog,
 And do not call him names,
 Slimy-skin, or Polly-wog,
 Or likewise Uncle James ;
 Or Gape-a-grin, or Toad-gone-wrong
 Or Billy Bandy-knees ;
 The Frog is justly sensitive
 To epithets like these.

No animal will more repay,
 A treatment kind and fair,
 At least, so lonely people say
 Who keep a frog (and, by the way,
 They are extremely rare).

But it is rather to satire that his more serious genius turn for effect, as when, after proving to his heart's content that the fundamental characteristic about the Germans is that they are of necessity histrionic, he goes on, in words which would have endangered his liberty in Germany of those days :

" If T were Lord of Germany, and desired to lead my nation and to be loved by them, I should put great golden, feathers on my helmet, I should use rhetorical expressions Spout monologues, in public organise wide cavalry charges at reviews, and move through life generally to the crashing of an orchestra. For by doing this even a vulgar, short and diseased man, who dabbled in stocks and shares and was led by financiers, could become a hero and do his nation good."

III

A book of travel should of course have two distinctions, one of experience and the other of style. In a tramp of seven hundred miles, much of it over mountains, there is ample opportunity of adventure. And with a traveller of Belloc's simple needs and fine enthusiasm, these experiences are sure to be memorable for their spiritual quality. There is moreover that in his style which reveals this quality in subtle ways,—the eiviveness of a simplicity which defies imitation.

" Near by, one saw that it was not a huge castle, but the wall of a city, for at a corner it went sharp round to contain the town, and through one uneven place I saw houses. Many men were walking in the roads alongside these walls, and there were gates pierced in them whereby the citizens went in and out of the city as bees go in and out of the little opening in a hive."

" For my part I sat silent, crippled with fatigue, trying to forget my wounded feet, drinking stoup after stoup of beer and watching the Phocæan. He was of the old race you see on vases in red and black ; slight, very wiry, with a sharp, eager, but well-set face, a small, black, pointed beard, brilliant eyes like those of lizards, rapid gestures, and a vivacity that played all over his features as sheet lightning does over the glow of midnight in June."

There is in these sentences something of the refreshing power of seizing and fixing bright impressions which we find in early Italian art, in certain poets of the Greek anthology, and in those
 of vivid imagination scattered through the

best of Elizabethan literature. Yet the latter paragraph is but the description of a commercial traveller from Marseilles.

IV

His susceptibility to natural scenes is one of the most pleasing sources of delight in this book. He has moments of fervour in which he comes near to Richard Jefferies, though he never bursts out into such passionate or continued ecstasy of utterance as we find in that extraordinary book *The Story of my Heart*. Writing of dawn up the valley of the Moselle he says :

" At this wonderful sight I gazed for quite half an hour without moving, and took in vigour from it as a man takes in food and wine."

He is at one with that noble soul Giordano Bruno, who thrills us when he speaks of " that inward sense by which I reason from the beauty before my eyes to the light and eminence of more excellent spiritual beauty, which is light, majesty and divinity."

And there are two larger passages which relate the crowning hours of ecstasy of his pilgrimage, passages of worship which reveals the religion of his soul, deeper than attachment to ritual of any church.

" There, on this upper meadow, where so far I had felt nothing but the ordinary gladness of the summit, I had a vision. What was it I saw ? If you think I saw this or that, and if you think I am inventing the words, you know nothing of men.

" I saw between the branches of the trees in front of me a sight in the sky that made me stop breathing, just as great deliverance will make a man stop breathing. I saw something I had known in the West as a boy, something I had never seen so gradually discovered as was this. In between the branches of the trees was a great promise of unexpected lights beyond.

" I pushed left and right along that edge of the forest and along the fence that bound it, until I found a place where the pine-trees stopped, leaving a gap, and where on the right, beyond the gap, was a tree whose leaves had failed ; there the ground broke away steeply below me, and the beeches fell, one below the other, like a vast cascade, towards the limestone cliffs that dipped down still further, beyond my sight. I looked through this framing hollow and praised God. For there below me, thousands of feet below me, was what seemed an illimitable plain ; at the end of that world was an horizon, and the dim bluish sky that overhangs an horizon.

" There was brume in it and thickness. One saw the sky beyond the edge of the world getting purer as the vault rose. But right up—a belt in that empyrean—ran peak and field and needle of intense ice, remote, remote from the world.

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" There was brume in it and thickness. One saw the sky beyond the edge of the world getting purer as the vault rose. But right up—a belt in that empyrean—ran peak and field and needle of intense ice, remote, remote from the world.

Sky beneath them and sky above them, a steadfast legion, they glittered as though with the armour of the immovable armies of Heaven. Two days' march, three days' march away, they stood up like the walls of Eden. I say it again, they stopped my breath. I had seen them,

" So little are we, we men; so much are we immersed in our muddy and immediate interests that we think, by numbers and recitals, to comprehend distance or time, or any of our limiting infinities. Here were these magnificent creatures of God, I mean the Alps, which now for the first time I saw from the height of the Jura ; and because they were fifty or sixty miles away, and because they were a mile or two high, they were become something different from us others, and could strike one motionless with the awe of supernatural things. Up there in the sky, to which only clouds belong and birds and the last trembling colours of pure light, they stood fast and hard ; not moving as do the things of the sky. They were as distant as the little upper clouds of summer, as fine and tenuous ; but in their reflection and in their quality as it were of weapons (like spears and shields of an unknown array) they occupied the sky with a sublime invasion : and the things proper to the sky were forgotten by me in their presence as I gazed.

" To what emotion shall I compare this astonishment ? So in first love one finds that *this* can belong to *me*.

" Their sharp steadfastness and their clean uplifted lines compelled my adoration. Up there, the sky above and below them, part of the sky, but part of us, the great peaks made communion between that homing creeping part of me which loves vineyards and dances and a slow movement among pastures, and that other part which is only properly at home in heaven. I say that this kind of description is useless, and that it is better to address prayers to such things than to attempt to interpret them for others."

V

The other passage is even more moving, for it is the record of one of those rare and timeless moments of mystic revelation which are the best things of our life.

^a When I had slept out the heat, I followed the woods through the afternoon. They stood tangled and huge, and the mosses under them were thick and silent, because in this last belt of the mountains height and coolness reproduced the north. A charcoal burner was making his furnace ; after that for the last miles there was no sound. Even the floor of the vale was a depth of grass, and no torrent ran in it but only a little hidden stream, leafy like our streams at home.

" At last the steep bank, a wall at the end of the valley, rose immediately above me. It was very steep and bare,

desolate with the many stumps of trees that had been cut down ; but all its edge and fringe against the sky was the line of a deep forest."

" After its laborious hundreds of feet, when the forest that crowned it evenly was reached, the Apennines were conquered, the last great range was passed, and there stood no barrier between this high crest and Rome.

" The higher side of that bank, I say, had been denuded of its trees ; the roots of secular chestnuts stood like graves above the dry steep, and had marked my last arduous climb. Now, at the summit, the highest part was a line of cool forest, and the late afternoon mingled with the sanctity of trees. A genial dampness pervaded the earth beneath ; grasses grew, and there were living creatures in the shade.

" Nor was this tenanted wood all the welcome I received on my entry into Tuscany. Already I heard the noise of falling waters upon every side, where the Serchio sprang from twenty sources on the southern slope, and leapt down between mosses, and quarrelled, and overcame great smooth dark rocks in busy falls. Indeed, it was like my own country in the north, and a man might say to himself—'After so much journeying, perhaps I am in the Enchanted Wood, and may find at last the fairy Melisaunde.'

" A glade opened, and, the trees no longer hiding it, I looked down the vale, which was the gate of Tuscany. There—high, jagged, rapt into the sky—stood such a group of mountains as men dream of in good dreams, or see in the works of painters when old age permits them revelations. Their height was evident from the faint mist and grey of their hues ; their outline was tumultuous, yet balanced : full of accident and poise. It was as though these high walls of Carrara, the western boundary of the valley, had been shaped expressly for man, in order to exalt him with unexpected and fantastic shapes, and to expand his dull life with a permanent surprise. For a long time I gazed at these great hills.

" Then, more silent in the mind through their influence, I went down past the speech and companionship of the springs of the Serchio, and the chestnut trees were redolent of evening all around. Down the bank to where the streams met in one, down the river, across its gaping, ruinous bridge (which someone, generations ago, had built for the rare travellers—there were then no main roads across the Apennine, and perhaps this rude pass was in favour); down still more gently through the narrow upper valley I went between the chestnut trees, and calm went with me for a companion : and the love of men and the expectation of good seemed natural to all that had been made in this blessed place. Of Borda, where the peasants directed me, there is

no need to speak, till crossing the Serchio once more, this time on a trestle bridge of wood, I passed by a wider path through the groves, and entered the dear village of Sillano, which looks right into the pure west. And the peaks are guardians all about it: the elder brothers of this remote and secluded valley.

" An inn received me : a great kitchen full of men and women talking, a supper preparing, a great fire, meat smoking and drying in the ingle-nook, a vast timbered roof going up into darkness : there I was courteously received, but no one understood my language.

' I went out on to the balcony, where men and women were talking in subdued tones. There, alone, I sat and watched the night coming up into these Tuscan hills. The first moon since that waning in Lorraine—(how many nights ago, how many marches !)—hung in the sky a full crescent, growing into brightness and glory as she assumed her reign. The one star of the west called out his silent companions in their order ; the mountains merged into a fainter confusion; heaven and the infinite air became the natural seat of any spirit that watched this spell. The fire-flies darted in the depths of vineyards and of trees ; below them the noise of the grasshoppers brought back suddenly the gardens of home, and whatever benediction surrounds our childhood. Some promise of eternal pleasures and of rest deserved haunted the village of Sillano."

In these two passages we have Belloc at his highest and best, in some of the noblest pages of modern prose. It was such writing that drew to him the attention of the world during his youth, and even now leads men to say that he has never fulfilled the promise of that youth. With that judgment I do not agree, for it is clear to me that Belloc is of that company whose gift to the world takes the form of rare and fragrant distillations of experience rather than imposing literary structures. It is but seldom that a man is remembered with affection for such greater works, and we do not regret that Charles Lamb did not blossom into an epic poet. The treasures of the heart for the vast majority of humanity are of moments that have slipped away like the falling of tears, leaving their memory enshrined in words or visible form or music we cannot let die.

Of such kind is the transfiguration of Hilaire Belloc : it is from the high mountains that he speaks with the voice of revelation. Whatever be the quality of the work he has made his own through life, it will be in these essays of a wanderer that he will live, and these he has continued to write during his later years. His book *Hills and the Sea*, which contains a selection of such essays, is to my mind the best companion of all the English prose of our time. It is full of natural writing, all of it the truest kind of corrective to much in life and literature that is depressing or worse.

Belloc is European, continental: he gets beneath and beyond the common emotions in ways unusual to Englishmen. It is apparently not very difficult for a Jew, a Norwegian, or even a Russian to adopt the English mode superficially. But as there are deeper moods impossible to one who has not inherited the traditions of centuries, so there are with the stranger from over the sundering seas powers of cognizance and depths of emotional reaction no longer the inheritance of the island Englishman. This may be simply expressed by saying that the sense of home is different. Belloc has written verse and prose in praise of his adopted homeland, if anything a little more fervently than we expect from an Englishman :

" I will gather and carefully make my friends
Of the men of the Sussex weald,
They watch the stars from silent folds,
They stiffly plough the field.
By them and the God of the South Country
My poor soul shall be healed."

" There is in that part of England which is very properly called her Eden (that centre of all good things and home of happy men, The country of Sussex), there is, I say, in that exalted country a valley which I shall praise for your greater pleasure. . . . the valley of the River Rother ; the sacred and fruitful river between the downs and the weald."

In such passages as these we almost feel the sun-kindled enthusiasm of Theocritus burning still, not in the brain of some bookish imitator, but in the heart of a strong and very companionable man of Mediterranean ancestry. But their very ardour is hardly as convincing as the constant and often subconscious touches which show that his heart is set further east. Such as he have many and far wanderings to make before they can, to use own his words, satisfy the memories in their blood. Speaking of the old French town of Carcassonne he says :

" A little tower there, jutting out perilously from the wall, shows three courses of a *small red brick* set in a mortar-like stone. When I saw this kind of building I went close up and touched it with my hand. It was Roman. I knew the signal well. I had seen that brick, and picked it loose from an Arab stable on the edge of the Sahara, and I had seen it jutting through moss on the high moors of Northumberland. I know a man who reverently brought home to Sussex such another, which he had found unbroken far beyond Damascus upon the Syrian sand."

Of this ancestry and inheritance of his he is keenly and proudly aware. Thus he writes of the old Norman soldiers :

" The little bullet-headed men, vivacious and splendidly brave, we know that they awoke all Europe, that they first

provided settled financial systems and settled governments of land, and that everywhere, from the Grampians to Mesopotamia, they were like steel when all other Christians were like wood or lead. We know that they were the spear-head, as it were, of the Gallic spirit : the vanguard of that one of the Gallic expansions which we associate with the opening of the Middle Ages and with the Crusades. We know all this and write about it; nevertheless, we do not make enough of the Normans in England."

Writing of an inn of the Margeride, a mountain district separating the region of the Loire from that of the Gironde he says :

" Though I was here on the very roof and centre of the western land, I heard the surge of the inner and the roll of the outer sea; the foam broke against the Hebrides, and made a white margin to the cliffs of Holy Ireland. The tide poured up beyond our islands to the darkness in the north. I saw the German towns, and Lombardy, and the light on Rome. And the great landscape I saw from the summit to which I was exalted was not of to-day only, but also of yesterday, and perhaps of to-morrow.

" Our Europe cannot perish. Her religion—which is also mine—has in it those victorious energies of defence which neither merchants nor philosophers can understand, and which are yet the prime conditions of establishment. Europe, though she must always repel attacks from within and from without, is always secure ; the soul of her is a certain spirit, at once reasonable and chivalric. And the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

Since these lines were written they have been stormed, those very gates of Hell, and yet we hear that steady serious voice over the echoes of the tumult:

" She will not dissolve by expansion, nor be broken by internal strains. She will not suffer that loss of unity which would be for all her members death, and for her history and meaning and self an utter oblivion. She will certainly remain."

This consciousness of one's past is one of the characteristics Belloc shares with many modern writers, as the result of the labours of men like Huxley, Darwin and all the later generations of remarkably able biologists, archaeologists and psychologists. Chesterton, in his valuable little book on William Blake, has expressed the whole thing pregnantly and in such a way as seems to carry direct allusion to men like Belloc :

" Every man of us today is three men. There are in every modern European three powers so distinct as to be almost personal, the trinity of our earthly destiny. First and nearest to us is the Christian, the man of the historic church, of the creed that must have coloured our minds

incurably whether we regard it (as I do) as the crown and combination of the other two, or whether we regard it as an accidental superstition which has remained for two thousand years....

" Behind him comes the Roman, the citizen of that great cosmopolitan realm of reason and order in the level and equality of which Christianity arose.

" He is the stoic who is so much sterner than the anchorites. He is the republican who is so much prouder than kings. He it is that makes straight roads and clear laws, and for whom good sense is good enough.

" And the third man—he is harder to speak of. He has no name, and all true tales of him are blotted out. Yet he walks behind us in every forest path and wakes within us when the wind wakes at night. He is the origin—he is the man in the forest."

VII

Belloc's belief in the value of history is organic : he is constantly referring to the need in life of a knowledge of the past which still lives in all our thoughts and actions. " Every man," he says " hears within him not only his own direct experience, but all the past of his blood : the things his own race has done are part of himself, and in him also is what his race will do when he is dead."

Again, speaking of an old sea town of East Anglia, he says :

" These ancient places do not change, they permit themselves to stand apart and to repose and—by paying that price—almost alone of all things in England they preserve some historic continuity, and satisfy the memories in one's blood."

This conviction of his tinges most of his writing, and his consciousness of European, rather than French or English ancestry (in strong contrast to the old Greek belief in autochthonous origin) enables him to make fascinating romance of topography. Read, for example, his little essay on Aries, the old city in the south of France which for him reveals the passage and changes of the centuries even more clearly than Rome itself. There he says, a man may find " the best single collection of all the forms which European energy has created, and of all the outward symbols in which its soul has been made manifest."

It is a small and packed city, and so he has closely packed his essay with strong phrases containing concentrated history, just as the stones of the city speak of long periods of the past,—" huge stones which appeal to you with the Roman weight and perpetuate in their arrangement an order that has modelled the world."

" Rome slowly fell asleep."

" It is a dungeon ; a ponderous menace above the main street of the city, blind and enormous. It is the very time it comes from."

" When all that feat and anarchy of the mind has passed."

" The mystery of the fifteenth century ; none of its wickedness but all its final vitality is there."

Such are some of his packed sentences,—nothing florid about them, relying for their force and glamour only on their vision and truth, and springing from the faith which he has enunciated in the beginning of this essay :

" History, therefore, once a man has begun to know it, becomes a necessary food for the mind, without which it cannot sustain its new dimension. It is an aggregate of universal experience, nor, other things being equal, is any man's judgment so thin and weak as the judgment of a man who knows nothing of the past. But history, if it is to be kept just and true and not to become a set of airy scenes, fantastically coloured by our later time, must be continually corrected and moderated by the seeing and handling of things."

VIII

Belloc's conception of the function of history has been very simply presented by himself in his essay on Carlyle's *French Revolution*. There he speaks of :—

" The great question which must be asked of all historians : Did he make dead men live again ? There are many who call up phantoms, and many who can present the corpse of the past ; there are few who can cause it to rise and act before you with its own body and its own soul."

But we must not assume from these words that Belloc would find his ideal history in some facile novel in which characters from the past play, however vividly, their prominent parts. In a recent paper in the *London Mercury*, on Certain Diseases Affecting Academic History, he sums up his experience as a historian whose conscience calls upon him to verify the statements of predecessors whose word has too often been taken as law. And he comes to the conclusion that there are what he calls three forms of trouble with historians :

" *First*, the over-emphasis of the material element in evidence ; *e. g.*, the document as against tradition, the measurable as against the unmeasurable ; the material relic of stone or bronze or wood as against our general literary knowledge of a period ; a particular reference as against our general knowledge of the behaviour of men.

" *Second* : a tendency to a priori reasoning : and that in the very dangerous form of reasoning deductively from first principles which are taken for granted by the reasoner, yet not clearly defined in his own mind ; this, like exaggeration of the

material elements of evidence, I believe to be due to the influence of Physical Science, whose prodigious conquests in our time have led to an extension of its principles into fields where those principles do not apply.

" *Third* : The assumption of false authority.

To this element of weakness belong (1) the perpetual citation of certain writers and the adoption of their conclusions without the presentation of the argument on which those conclusions are based ; (2) the habit of copying, whereby, an insufficiently proved statement having been made under some name, the statement is repeated over and over again until it acquires a sort of traditional form, and its original establishment is forgotten."

He is the champion of two spirits so different from each other and from himself as Carlyle and Froude. Both he defends against the charge of inaccuracy and Froude against that of straining after effect.

" There is not one of his contemporaries who less forced himself in description than Froude. Often in Green, very often in Freeman and always in Carlyle you feel that your author is deliberately exciting his mind and your own. Violent colours are chosen and peculiar emphasis—from this Froude was free. He was an historian."

" It cannot be too often repeated by those who have the honour of English historical science at heart that we have in Carlyle, not only in his *Frederick* . . . but here in the *Revolution* an admirable instance of care and correction. Michelet is perhaps a greater man, and certainly a greater historian, but in accuracy Carlyle is his superior. Mignet's little book alone perhaps of the early authorities falls into less errors, while in the midst of modern research Aulard is perhaps the only worker who would have a right to contrast his painstaking with that of the English writer. Taine is nowhere ; but then Taine was not even trying to tell the truth."

IX

As the students for whom I am writing these notes are specially studying sections of Carlyle's *French Revolution*, it will be of interest to summarise Belloc's passages of praise. Replying to the charge that Carlyle, being a peasant and a Calvinist, could not be expected to sympathise with the Revolution, he says

" If that be so, his book upon the French Revolution must be the very best test which we could apply to his powers, for the French Revolution was essentially the work of leisured men, of highly trained intelligences, and of men whom the process of academic education had removed as far as possible from the peasant life of Europe. Again, it was distinctly the product of a Catholic nation—of a nation, that

is with a contempt of fatalism, an adherence to abstract dogmas, and a military hatred of mere force and of the religions of fear."

(To this judgment of the characteristics of the Catholic spirit we may add that other where he surprises us by speaking of "that note of interest, of wonder, and of intellectual freedom which is the note of Catholicism.")

It is not astonishing that he should have written the *Frederick*, it is astonishing that he should have written the *Revolution*; and our admiration for the effort and for its result increases with every new thing we learn about Carlyle, and with every new difficulty which we discover to have lain in his way. . . . The very fact that he cannot work in some material enhances the extraordinary power with which he moulded all other material that fell to his hand."

Belloc speaks of the miracle by which Carlyle was able to transcend his imperfect acquaintance with the French language and his want of acquaintance with the French character.

"Carlyle comprehended one chief factor of the Revolution: the mob. Alone of all European peoples, the French are able to organize themselves from below in large masses, and Paris, which wrought the Revolution, can do it better than the rest of France. . . . Now of all writers of his time Carlyle was, one would have thought, the least able to understand this. . . . It was the whole of his philosophy that men cannot so organize themselves, that they need leaders and strong men, and all the rest of it. Yet so thoroughly has he got inside his subject, so vitally has he raised it up and made it move of its own life, that in his book you see the French mob doing precisely what would have told you, had you asked him, no mob could do. . . ."

"But there is another point where his ignorance of the French people and his peculiar ignorance of their religion might have led him far more astray, and where he is triumphantly successful; and that is in his portraiture of French violence, and of French ferocity. He had not in his life seen anything violent or ferocious. It was sheer creative power which enabled him to project upon his screen the actualities of which he had read; there is perhaps no other English writer who has done it; so alien is it to our national character and so utterly removed is it from our national experience."

And Belloc explains the miracle thus :

"The energy of the Revolution, one might conclude, found in the depths of this man who had never been near the sound of arms or the vision of an insurgent populace, something congenial: some ancient strength in the Scotch inherited from mediaeval freedom arose in him and answered the French appeal."

It has always seemed to me that Carlyle was a reincarnation of some Viking of the ninth century, some Berserker of the nobler type, with this difference, that while the viking was a man of prowess in deeds and often taciturn, Carlyle found vent for his repressed action in language of unparalleled fire and force.

Anyone who is desirous of seeing how Mr. Belloc is not content to survey and interpret the past, but finds it his duty to make his knowledge and experience yield constructive results when applied to modern problems, should consult his recent book *The House of Commons and Monarchy*. In this book he maintains that:

"The aristocratic character of the state has broken down because the aristocratic temper has departed both from those who are governed and from those who govern. . . . The aristocratic spirit, which has quite disappeared from the House of Commons, is disappearing also in the governing class as a whole."

The remedy he proposes is that responsibility for the conduct and preservation of the Commonwealth should be transferred to the Monarch. For "in the great mass of executive acts Monarchy works properly in a society of great numbers because it is responsible."

For what Belloc actually means by Monarchy, the book itself must be read. His last words on the subject are: "But come Monarchy must, if the greatness and the homogeneity of the nation are to be maintained; and these the English will not readily or easily abandon."

X

Were I called upon to give a supreme example of the noble, chivalric-religious spirit which is Belloc's great bequest to his fellows, I should unhesitatingly choose the little essay entitled *The Good Woman*, written in remembrance of a dear friend, and surely one of the finest pieces of contemporary prose:

"It was in September, during a silence of the air, that I first saw her as she moved among her possessions; she was smiling to herself as though at a memory, but her smile was so slight and so dignified, so genial and yet so restrained, that you would have thought it part of everything around and married (as she was) to the land which was now her own. She wandered down the garden paths ruling the flowers upon either side, and receiving as she went autumn and the fruition of her fields; plenitude and completion surrounded her; the benediction of Almighty God must have been upon her, for she was the fulfilment of her world. . . ."

"As I came near I saw her plainly. Her face was young although she was so wise, but its youth had the aspect of a divine survival. . . . She was serene. The posture of her head was high, and her body, which was visibly informed by an immortal spirit, had in its carriage a large, a regal, an

up lifted bearing which even now as I write of it, after so many years, turns common every other sight that has encountered me. This was the way in which I first saw her upon her own hillside at evening

" She was able to conjure all evil. Those desperate enemies of mankind which lie in siege of us all around grew feeble and were silent when she came... There is a vessel of copper, enamelled in green and gilded, which she gave with her own hands to a friend overseas. I have twice touched it in an evil hour.

" She did not fail in any human conversation, nor was she ever for a moment less than herself ; but always and throughout her moods her laughter was unexpected and full, her fear natural, her indignation glorious. . . . She drew the objects of her friendship into something new ; they breathed an air from another country, so that those whom she deigned to regard were, compared with other men, like the living compared with the dead ; or, better still, they were like men awake while the rest were tortured by dreams and haunted of the unreal. Indeed, she had a word given to her which saved all the souls of her acquaintance."

When Belloc wrote this he was one with that lovable spirit Charles Lamb, who too could write of one he had lost:

" She seemed one whom care could not come near ; a privileged being, sent to teach mankind what it most wants, joyousness".

Joseph Conrad

I

"There are things you find nothing about in books." These words, spoken by one of Conrad's many indomitable sea-characters, sum up a good deal of his writing. Not only that his matter is of a nature which so few men are gifted enough to describe,—life on board the trading vessels of a generation ago, and in remote regions visited by such vessels.

There is a rare quality in Conrad himself, which is generally vaguely expressed by calling him a master of psychology. It is a fuller gift of sympathy than is usual, a greater range of sensitiveness combined with a power of expression which amounts to genius. Long years at sea, working his way up until he commanded his own ships, have thrown him into all kinds of company we landsfolk never meet, from the dregs of humanity to the bravest souls that ever fought the fury of the elements. By nature he was a stern man, silent unless angered, when he was liable to relapse into a torrent of speech in his own tongue, unknown at sea. He often held himself aloof: but no man with keener eyes and quicker perception of character has ever turned author and allowed the world to share his memories. Writers of voyages and sea-stories we have in abundance, from the men in the pages of Haklyut and Purchas to Dana and Buller and Masefield, and of some of them, as Marryat and Melville, Conrad was a great admirer. But he was of a different calibre. As tough as Dana, as human, though not as sensitive, as Masefield, as deep and introspective as Melville, he has other qualities which set him apart. For he is an aristocrat in the realm of letters; like Landor he towered above his contemporaries by virtue of his austere command of whatever knowledge he had gained.

II

He read and stored in his memory such books as we may be sure no English seafaring man ever read.

He could quote whole pages, treasuring them as a connoisseur treasures ivories and etchings and statuettes. And his mind was the richer since he was trilingual. His own language, of his much-harassed homeland, formed the deepest, most tender and sadly echoing instrument on which he played; but few there were, in that vast outer world in which he laboured, to listen to the music.

In the poignantly sad little story called *Amy Foster* Conrad tells of a boy, also of a Slav race, who reached England after the wreck of an emigrant ship, and settled there as a farm servant. And I cannot help feeling that Conrad has put a good deal of his

own youth into this story, his own difficulty with English, his own pain at the treatment his sensitive spirit had to suffer.

" He told me this story of his adventure with many flashes of white teeth and lively glances of black eyes, at first in a sort of anxious baby-talk, then, as he acquired the language, with great fluency, but always with that singing, soft, and at the same time vibrating intonation that instilled a strangely penetrating power into the sound of the most familiar English words, as if they had been the words of an unearthly language."

" Many times have I heard his high-pitched voice from behind the ridge of some sloping sheep-walk, a voice light and soaring, like a lark's, but with a melancholy human note, over our fields that hear only the song of birds."

Such lack of song in the East Anglian countryside Conrad has himself felt, and the sense of exile from such song and speech but deepened the tenderness with which they were treasured in his heart.

As an intellectual instrument, as his second language, he used French, and at times was in doubt, we are told, whether to write in French or English. He himself maintained that his own English prose rhythm derived from Flaubert's French.

Many of his sentences owe their strange quality to their being really too literal translations from French thought:

" Conceive you the kind of an existence over-shadowed, oppressed, by the everyday material appearances, as if by the visions of a nightmare."

Ford Madox Ford, who worked with Conrad for years, states that he had a great contempt for English as a medium of expression. We know too that both Goethe and Heine regretted that they had to write in German instead of French. " Conrad," says Ford, " used to declare that English was a language in which it was impossible to write a direct statement."

And he goes on to say :

" Conrad's indictment of the English language was this, that no English word is a word : that all English words are instruments for exciting blurred emotions. ' Oaken ' in French means ' made of oak wood '—nothing more. ' Oaken ' in English connotes innumerable moral attributes : it will connote stolidity, resolution, honesty, blond features, relative unbreakableness, absolute unbendableness—also, made of oak The consequence is, that no English word has clean edges : a reader is always, for a fraction of a second, uncertain as to which meaning of the word the writer may intend. Thus, all English prose is blurred. Conrad desired to write a prose of extreme limpidity."

III

The study of Conrad's style in English is peculiarly interesting. It is indeed the man himself, the index to all we need or have the right to know of him. We see him experimenting all the time. Not that he is trying to accommodate himself to any English standard. What he is striving for is the most perfect self-expression, balance of phrasing in the most delicate accordance with his own intimate personality as it was formed and coloured and permeated by his unique experience. His predilection towards all finer things is tempered by the hard self-discipline he underwent for such long years—one of the hardest a man could have chosen. There is no better piece of Conrad's writing as an index to his individuality of style than the passage from *the Mirror of the Sea* entitled Rulers of East and West. Here you will find much that will give you a feeling of strangeness : you have read nothing like it in the rhythmic prose of Milton, Burke, or Carlyle, each of them a writer who dealt with tempestuous things, if not of ocean storms. You will feel something foreign which is too elusive to formulate. It is very rarely you get such an alliteration as " a man robbed of half his force, of half his efficiency," which is characteristic of Ruskin. The choice of words is as precise as that of the best French writers : no one can read the piece carefully without feeling his power in English prose stimulated and enhanced. The phrasing is original; very rarely do we get verbal echoes of earlier writers, except in passages where he is paying tribute to the greatest by direct quotation, as in the lines where he introduces words from the translation of the prophet Hosea : " The endless vista of future ages where the work of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind shall go on and on till his realm of living waters becomes a frozen and motionless ocean."

There are times when his sentences form possible verse rhythms which an English writer as scrupulous as Conrad would avoid. One passage might be written thus :

We had just gone down below
 For a moment to commune,
 In a battered-down cabin,
 With a large white chart
 Lying limp and damp
 Upon a cold and clammy table
 Under the light
 Of a smoky lamp.

Many another curiosity will be found in this particular piece. But the value of such a study of style is to enable us to see how far a man has been able to fuse matter and manner. And when a man is dealing with such a subject as the action of winds on an ocean, it is clear that he has in hand such a task as few writers

have attempted. This is one reason for the length of the piece. All the ever-changing phases of sea and storm have to be suggested and maintained until we are completely borne over into the atmosphere he is trying to conjure up. At times he is really wonderful in the tone effects he obtains by variation of vowel sounds:

"Heralded by the increasing fierceness of the squalls, sometimes by a faint flash of lightning like the signal of a lighted torch waved far away behind the clouds, the shift of wind comes at last, the crucial moment of the change from the brooding and veiled violence of the south-west gale to the sparkling, flashing, cutting, deer-eyed anger of the King's north-westerly mood."

And the remainder of that page-long paragraph is built up of similar transitions as sudden as those of the wind-harassed sea itself. Against all this prolonged elemental commotion how subdued and trivial seem the few words of the human characters implicated. A mere rhetorician, a man of words without the sanction of deeds, would have made his characters rave in a frenzy of fury or abandonment. But just here comes in the saving value of Conrad's arduous life: it keeps him true to fact and therefore true to the best art. It keeps his nouns and verbs largely English, that is largely monosyllabic and gives them frequent predominance.

IV

Leaving entirely out of account those elaborate studies of personality which attract or repel according to the bent of mind of the reader, it is for his cameos, perhaps, as much as for his continuous narratives—always excepting his few short stories of tremendous intensity—that Conrad is likely to be remembered. They are visions at sea and on land of lovely daybreak in remoter regions, of storm and the peace of night, and human encounters that are like fragments of primitive sagas. Many of the wilder manifestations of nature he has described as no one before, though he rarely takes our breath away as Hermann Melville can do with his pictures of ocean life and the apparitions set in that immensity. Then he has given us pen pictures of such people as it is rarely our fortune to meet, just and kindly appreciations of many a human type of East and West moving and having their being far beyond the circle of modern city life. Such is the portrait, in *An Outcast of the Islands*, of Abdulla, son of the rich Syed Selim bin Sali, the great Mohammedan trader of the Straits. When his father died, Abdulla entered upon his inheritance.

"He was very handsome, and carried his small head high with meek gravity. His lofty brow, straight nose, narrow, dark face with the chiselled delicacy of feature, gave him an aristocratic appearance which proclaimed his pure descent....

"Very soon his ability, his will—strong to obstinacy—his wisdom beyond his years, caused him to be recognised as the

head of a family whose members and connections were found in every part of those seas. An uncle here—a brother there ; a father-in-law in Batavia, another in Palembang ; husbands of numerous sisters ; cousins innumerable scattered north, south, east, and west—in every place where there was trade : the great family lay like a network over the islands. They lent money to princes, influenced the council-rooms, faced—if need be—with peaceful intrepidity the white rulers who held the land and the sea under the edge of sharp swords ; and they all paid a great deference to Abdulla, listened to his advice, entered into his plans—because he was wise, pious, and fortunate.

" He bore himself with the humility becoming a Believer, who never forgets, even for one mornont of his waking life, that he is the servant of the Most High."

V

In his easy and masterly sunrrning up of typos, individual and social, he resembles the b2st critical writers of Eijfliih, nrun like William James, the psychologist, and in this matter ii2 will stau as a man of his time. Instances of this power may be found in any of his books, wherever we turn.

"It is an extremely charming sphere, the abode of all the virtues, where nothing is realised and where all joys and sorrows are continuously toned down into pleasures and annoyances."

" His clear pale face has under its commonplace refinement that slight tinge of overbear ng brutality which is given by the possession of only partly difficult accomplishments ; by excelling in games, or in the art of making money: by the easy mastery over animals and over needy men."

" Few men realise that their life, the very essence of the character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence ; the emotions and principles ; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd : to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion."

There is a good deal of this kind of writing in Conrad. It is ably done and it is illuminative. But to the ordinary reader asking for a story it may easily become a stumbling block. It has kept Conrad back, as a simpler form of it kept Hawthorne back, from the larger public.

But while Conrad is not, as Francis Thompson says of De Quincey, " wiredrawn, diffuse, ostentatious in many words of distinctions which might more summarily be put; tantalizing,

exasperating,"—he has those other qualities the same fine critic assigns to De Quincey:

"Also, if you will suffer him with patience, he is never obvious : (he is) a challenger of routine views, a perspicuous, if minute and word logician, subtle in balanced appraisal."

VI

Modern criticism has exercised itself greatly about Conrad's indebtedness to certain contemporary French and English modes of highly self-conscious prose. Ford Madox Ford in a rich piece of egotism he has made into a book about Conrad leaves us with the impression that Conrad as a writer was largely a product of such influences. He speaks of his reverence for Flaubert and De Maupassant. But he also hints at Conrad's omnivorousness in books when he adds Mrs. Henry Wood and Captain Marryat to the list. The strange thing is that the critics do not seem to have realized how great Conrad's debt was to that extraordinarily gifted sailor writer Herman Melville, the author of *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *The Whale* (or *Moby Dick*) 1851 and other exotic books inspired by wild life and the American transcendental movement of which Thoreau and Emerson were quieter and less encyclopaedic mouthpieces. It is this last book, a tremendous performance, sometimes called *The White Whale*, which has been almost secretly used and ransacked by later writers. In it I have found the origins of some of Kipling's most realistic short stories as well as ideas turned to good use by Stevenson and Henley. And I am sure that it had a deep influence on Conrad, for it is a gold mine of vigorous thoughts and of the most picturesquely astounding modes of expression. The hero of the book, the one-legged Captain Ahab, who relentlessly pursued his foe the white King of the Whales until the monster finally destroyed the ship and its brave crew, seems to me the prototype of Conrad's milder and less voluble shipmasters. A study of the book alongside Conrad's sea-stories would certainly throw light on many things on each side, and it is probable too that Henry James himself, another favourite author of Conrad, is partly an attenuation of Herman Melville in the matter of style.

As few Indian students are likely to have read *Moby Dick*, though it is the greatest book of adventure in any language, I will content myself here with giving an interesting parallel from the two writers. The smallest of the 134 chapters of Melville's book is a lyrical one in praise of the Pacific: the shortest of the 49 sections of Conrad's *Mirror of the Sea* is a lyrical chant in honour of the Mediterranean. Here they are, with only the final paragraph omitted from each chapter.

The Pacific.

"When gliding by the Bashee Isles we emerged at last upon the great South Sea; were it not for other things, I could have greeted my dear Pacific with uncounted thanks,

for now the long supplication of my youth was answered ; that serene ocean rolled eastwards from me a thousand leagues of blue.

" There is one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath ; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried evangelist, St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling, watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly ; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries,—all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still ; tossing like slumberers in their beds ; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.

" To any meditative Magian rover this serene Pacific once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian Ocean and Atlantic being its arms. The same waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men, and lave the faded but still gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham ; while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about ; makes all coasts one bay to it ; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. Lifted by those eternal swells, you needs must own the seductive god, bowing your head to Pan."

TheMediterranean.

" Happy he who, like Ulysses, has made an adventurous voyage ; and there is no such sea for adventurous voyages as the Mediterranean—the inland sea which the ancients looked upon as so vast and so full of wonders. And, indeed, it was terrible and wonderful ; for it is we alone who, swayed by the audacity of our minds and the tremors of our hearts, are the sole artisans of all the wonder and romance of the world.

" It was for the Mediterranean sailors that fairhaired sirens sang among the black rocks seething in white foam, and mysterious voices spoke in the darkness above the moving wave—voices menacing, seductive, or prophetic, like that voice heard at the beginning of the Christian era by the master of an African vessel in the Gulf of Syrta, whose calm nights are full of strange murmurs and flitting shadows. It called him by name, bidding him go and tell all men that the great god Pan was dead. But the great legend of the Mediterranean, the legend of traditional song and grave history, lives, fascinating and immortal, in our minds

" The dark and fearful sea of the subtle Ulysses' wanderings, agitated by the wrath of Olympian gods, harbouring on its isles the fury of strange monsters and the wiles of

strange women ; the highway of heroes and sages, of warriors, pirates, and saints ; the workaday sea of Carthaginian merchants and the pleasure lake of the Roman Caesars, claims the veneration of every seaman as the historical home of that spirit of open defiance against the great waters of the earth which is the very soul of his calling. Issuing thence to the west and south as a youth leaves the shelter of his parental house, this spirit found the way to the Indies, discovered the coasts of a new continent, and traversed at last the immensity of the great Pacific, rich in groups of islands remote and mysterious like the constellations of the sky."

There is a piece of plagiarism fully justified, for all through it stirs the implication of gratitude and something deeper than admiration for the spirit of a man greater than the world has comprehended. As you should never forget the name of George Berkeley even if you forget that of Pope, so should you give up much of nineteenth century prose for that of Herman Melville in his saga of the whale.

VII

There is no better means of penetrating below the surface of a writer, than a study of his figures of speech.

This is especially true of a prose writer. Poets we naturally expect to speak to us in metaphor. A prose writer of an austere character may succeed in keeping revelations of his personality out of his writing everywhere except in his imagery. This very often brings to light the dearest memories, the most lasting impressions, and even quite unexpected tendencies in an author. Very often they give us the only human or romantic touches in a man's work.

Conrad is full of humanity, full of poetry. He transforms his experience into memorable records by his power of metaphoric visualization, as in his catalogue of the various kinds of gales at sea:

" Some cling to you in woebegone misery ; others come back fiercely and weirdly like ghouls bent upon sucking your strength away ; others, again, have a catastrophic splendour ; some are unvenerated recollections, as of spiteful wild-cats clawing at your agonised vitals ; others are severe, like a visitation ; and one or two rise up draped and mysterious, with an aspect of ominous menace."

In this paragraph, by the way, he concealed verse rhythms and in the last words a double assonance of a kind we should have expected such a careful writer to charge to some such phrase as *imminent omen*. What we get in his similes and metaphors is the reflection of something that seems deeper than an individual mind, as it were lurid lights and ominous shadows and trepidations from ancestral memory, from a spirit burdened with the consciousness of cosmic, transcendental intimations.

" He lost himself in thought as though he had fallen out of the world."

" The stars too seemed to look at the ship intently, as if for the last time, and the cluster of their splendour sat like a diadem on a lowering brow."

" At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end."

" The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movement in the world seemed to come to an end."

" The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree-tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face."

" For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma."

" The girl ascended facing him. Behind her the shadow of a colossal woman danced lightly on the wall And on her track the flowing tide of a tenebrous sea filled the house, seeming to swirl about his feet, and rising unchecked, closed silently above his head."

" Dark and impenetrable at night, like the face of a forest, is the London waterside. The narrow lanes coming down to the foreshore resemble the paths of smashed bushes and crumbled earth where big game comes to drink on the banks of tropical streams."

" The peace of that enchanting forenoon was so profound, so untroubled, that it seemed that every word pronounced loudly on our deck would penetrate to the very heart of that infinite mystery born from the conjunction of water and sky."

There are also sardonic and grimly humorous effects :

" When he moved a skeleton seemed to sway loose in his clothes."

" A long individual in a blue flannel coat, as dry as a chip and no stouter than a broomstick."

" Two nomadic old maids, dressed up to kill, worked acrimoniously through the bill of fare, whispering to each other with faded lips, wooden-faced and bizarre, like two sumptuous scarecrows."

There is nothing in all these passages of simile and metaphor that endears their author to us, much as we may be stirred by the appeal to our imagination. And this is true of much of Conrad's writing, which is exotic and throbbing as it were with alien, extra-human obsessions. Where he does strike home and

rouse something like enthusiasm in us is in his slowly developing pictures of men of our kind facing the most fearful odds with hardly a heightening of the pulse, keeping true to themselves and their resolves until the very elements seem to yield in admiration of their imperturbability and endurance. Such a story is his great one called *Typhoon*, probably his greatest. The hero is a captain in the mercantile marine, a mild man and even gentle, as many of them are, but absolutely indomitable, though he is taking a ship through the most terrible storm ever recorded in literature. I know no description of a cataclysm that can compare with it except the younger Pliny's account of the eruption of Vesuvius in A. D. 79. He is carrying a shipload of Chinese coolies, returning home with their earnings, and they have to be shut down in the hold, where the force of the typhoon breaks open the chests in which they have their silver, and men, money and utensils are flung about in a mad confusion which would have killed any but Chinese. When the boatswain, at the risk of his life, managed to get down to their dim-lit place of insecure confinement:

" A gust of hoarse yelling met him : the air was still; and the rushing of water overhead was covered by a tumult of strangled throaty shrieks that produced an effect of desperate confusion—The boatswain glared, the ship lurched to starboard, and a great howl came from that mass that had the slant of fallen earth.

"Pieces of wood whizzed past, Planks, he thought, inexpressibly startled, and flinging back his head. At his feet a man went sliding over, open-eyed, on his back, straining with uplifted arms for nothing; and another came bounding like a detached stone with his head between his legs and his hands clenched. His pigtail whipped in the air; he made a grab at the boatswain's legs, and from his opened hand a bright white disc rolled against the boatswain's foot. He recognized a silver dollar, and yelled at it with astonishment. With a precipitated sound of trampling and shuffling of bare feet, and with guttural cries, the mound of writhing bodies piled up to port detached itself from the ship's side and shifted to starboard, sliding, inert and struggling, to a dull, brutal thump. The cries ceased. The boatswain heard a long moan through the roar and whistling of the wind; he saw an inextricable confusion of heads and shoulders, naked soles kicking upwards, fists raised, tumbling backs, legs, pigtails, faces. ' Good Lord ! ' he cried, horrified, and banged to the iron door upon this vision. "

Later the mate goes down with the boatswain, who warns him to be careful how he opens the door:

" All their rotten chests got burst open. Blamed money skipping all over the place, and they are tumbling after it head over heels—tearing and biting like anything. A regular little hell in there.'

" Jukes convulsively opened the door. The short boatswain peered under his arm.

"One of the lamps had gone out, broken perhaps. Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly on their ears, and a strange panting sound, the working of all these straining breasts. A hard blow hit the side of the ship: water fell above with a stunning shock, and in the forefront of the gloom, where the air was reddish and thick, Jukes saw a head bang the deck violently, two thick calves waving on high, muscular arms twined round a naked body, a yellow-face, open-mouthed and with a set wild stare look up and slide away. An empty chest clattered turning over ; a man fell head first with a jump, as if lifted by a kick ; and farther off, indistinct, others streamed like a mass of rolling stones down a bank, thumping the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. The hatchway ladder was loaded with coolies swarming on it like bees on a branch. They hung on the steps in a crawling, stirring cluster, beating madly with their fists the underside of the battened hatch, and the headlong rush of the water above was heard in the interval of their yelling. The ship heeled over more, and they began to drop off: first one, then two, then all the rest went away together, falling straight off with a great cry.

" Jukes was confounded. The boatswain, with gruff anxiety, begged him, " Don't you go in there, sir."

" The whole place seemed to twist upon itself, jumping incessantly the while; and when the ship rose to a sea Jukes fancied that all these men would be shot upon him in a body. He backed out, swung the door to, and with trembling hands pushed at the bolt"

The typhoon is so fearful that the sailors are cowed, and besides the mate and boatswain only the captain, the helmsman and the men in the engine room are able to keep their heads and carry on. There is a very vivid passage showing us the heroic struggle of the man at the wheel, on whose muscles depend the safety of the whole ship.

" The steam gear clattered, stopped, clattered again ; and the helmsman's eyeballs seemed to project out of a hungry face as if the compass card behind the binnacle glass had been meat. God knows how long he had been left there to steer, as if forgotten by all his shipmates. The bells had not been struck; there had been no reliefs; the ship's routine had gone down wind ; but he was trying to keep her head north-north-east. The rudder might have been gone for all he knew, the fires out, the engines broken down, the ship ready to roll over like a corpse. He was anxious not to get muddled and lose control of her head, because the compass-card swung far both ways, wriggling on the pivot, and sometimes seemed to whirl right round. He

suffered from mental stress. He was horribly afraid, also, of the wheelhouse going. Mountains of water kept on tumbling against it. When the ship took one of her desperate dives the corners of his lips twitched.

"Captain MacWhirr looked up at the wheelhouse clock. Screwed to the bulk-head, it had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still. It was half-past one in the morning.

"Another day," he muttered to himself.

"The second mate heard him, and lifting his head as one grieving amongst ruins, 'You won't see it break,* he exclaimed. His wrists and his knees could be seen to shake violently. 'No, by God! You won't'. . . ."

"He took his face again between his fists.

"The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head did not budge on his neck—like a stone head fixed to one way look from a column. During a roll that all but took his booted legs from under him, and in the very staler to save himself, Captain MacWairr said austere, 'Don't you pay any attention to what that man says.' And then, with an indefinable change of tone, very grave, he added, 'He isn't on duty.'

"The sailor said nothing.

"The hurricane boomed, shaking the little place, which seemed air-tight; and the light of the binnacle flickered all the time.

'You haven't been relieved,' Captain MacWarr went on, looking down. 'I want you to stick to the helm, though, as long as you can. You've got the hang of her. Another man coming here might make a mess of it. Wouldn't do. No child's play. And the hands are probably busy with a job down below.'

"Think you can?"

"The steering gear leaped into an abrupt short clatter, stopped smouldering like an ember: and the still man, with a motionless gaze, burst out, as if all the passion in him had gone into his lips: 'By Heavens, sir! I can steer for ever if nobody talks to me.'"

VIII

All through the story we are brought to share the gloom and horror and deafening tumult of the hurricane as the ship rolls and dives and is lifted out of the water and buffeted by those mountainous seas.

"The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness: she pitched as if taking a header into a void, and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong, and she would

be righted back by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water and keep her up for an instant with only a quiver running through her from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as if dropped back into a boiling cauldron."

"The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas. They made a clean breach over her, as over a deep-swimming log; and the gathered weight of crashes menaced monstrously from afar. The breakers flung out of the night with a ghostly light on their crests—the light of sea-foam that in a ferocious boiling-up pale flash showed upon the slender body of the ship the toppling rush, the downfall, and the seething and scurry of each wave. Never for a moment could she shake herself clear of the water; Jukes, rigid, perceived in her motion the ominous sign of haphazard floundering. She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was the beginning of the end.

"She dipped into the hollow straight down as if going over the edge of the world. The engine-room toppled forward menacingly, like the inside of a tower nodding in an earthquake. An awful racket, of iron things falling, came from the stokehold. She hung on this appalling slant long enough for Beale to drop on on his hands and knees and begin to crawl as if he meant to fly on all fours out of the engine-room, and for Mr. Rout to turn his head slowly, rigid, cavernous, with the lower jaw dropping. Jukes had shut his eyes, and his face in a moment became hopelessly blank and gentle, like the face of a blind man."

And all through those days like nights and nights like the infernal regions the captain was at his post, cool and calm, exasperatingly so at the beginning, and before the end the saviour of a ship-load of lives. When the mate in his agitation struggles up to tell the captain that the boats are being washed away, this is what he hears:

"And again he heard that voice, forced and ringing feebly, but with a penetrating effect of quietness in the enormous discord of noises, as if sent out from some remote spot of peace beyond the black wastes of the gale; again he heard a man's voice—the frail and indomitable sound that can be made to carry an infinity of thought, resolution and purpose, that shall be pronouncing confident words on the last day, when heavens fall, and justice is done—again he heard it, and it was crying to him, as if from very, very far—'All right.'"

It is in passages such as this last that we have Conrad at his most impressive moments, those moments when we think of him in the memorable words of the Mithraic liturgy : "I am a star wandering about with you, and flaming up from the depths."

Among the fascinating figures of speech of Chesterton is one which strikingly suggests one side of the achievement of Conrad :

" It was as if men had been able to preserve a fragment of the sunset."

Not only the sunset and the long nights that ensued for so many of the characters he created to be engulfed in grief and hopelessness,—but the sunrise too, the promise and fulfilment of a glory commensurate with those deeps of gloom and terror, a glory invisible in its fulness save against the darkest memories.

Conclusion

These notes and quotations will have shown that our three authors are all interpreters, Chesterton largely by mother wit, Belloc, less critical, but a constant revealer of the goodness and greatness of life, Conrad, working, with the full self consciousness of an artist, upon the grim material of human effort in tantalizing and tragic surroundings. In the case of all of them their best art has grown out of their experience, and is thus vital. There is all the difference in the world between the living work of Chesterton and the banalities of ethical pontiffs, between the travel pictures of Belloc and the usual run of journalism, between the stories of Conrad and those of say Jules Verne.

It has been said that the modern poet is a man in whose soul a human experience wins an artistic form. This is of course true of the artist at any time, and it is certainly true of the men we are studying ; that is their aim, though i he form and the degree of success vary both with the man and the particular work. Chesterton has his digressions, Conrad his diffusiveness and at times indefiniteness.

They are all true to what Hebbel calls the first law of art, that " the infinite shall be made visible in the concrete and the particular," and each of them explicitly voices his loyalty to this law. They tell us new stories, but more often discover new relations, and so they are unifiers and builders, never disparagers. Their art is of the kind that destroys barriers : it satisfies human needs, and at its greatest it comes near to religious experience. For in it is adoration, and annunciation, and the call to endure whatever the torment may be.

And there is this further quality of greatness in each writer, that he rouses in us a deeper consciousness of ourselves, than which no greater gift can be imagined. In this way, as all true writers and artists, they stand among the mentors of our generation : sharing their strength and assurance we find our own dormant powers, our unrealized sovereignty. What the world means to them, and what they seek in that world of meaning become slowly revealed to us as we consort with their spirits, and become a part of our inheritance. Here is a last word from Chesterton:

" I have found out everything. We have come to the wrong star. That is what makes life at once so splendid and so strange. We are in the wrong world . . . So the false optimism, the modern happiness, tires us because it tells us we fit into this world. The true happiness is that we don't fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way."

How strangely this last sentence accords with the beautiful words of the long-dead Japanese poetess Ono no Komachi, once the loveliest of women : " It is because we are in Paradise that all things in this world wrong us; when we go out from Paradise nothing hurts, for nothing matters." Paradise here, as surely for Chesterton, is that " home-world, which is everywhere and nowhere," of which Novalis says all fairy-tales are but dreams.

Here is a last word from Beloe :

" Everywhere in the world one can look in and in and never find an end to one's delight. "

And here is the great message of Conrad :

" Keep facine it

